



# Were the Popes Against the Jews?: Tracking the Myths, Confronting the Ideologues

*Justus George Lawler*

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How many people know that a modern pope publicly referred to Jews as "dogs;" that two other modern popes called the Jewish religion "Satan's synagogue"; that at the beginning of the twentieth century another pope refused to save the life of a Jew accused of ritual murder, even though the pope knew the man was innocent? Lastly, how many people know that only a decade before the rise of Hitler, another pope supported priests who called for the extermination of all the Jews in the world?

The answer has to be "great numbers of people" since those accusations appeared in David I. Kertzer's *The Popes Against the Jews* (2001), a book which had been lauded in major journals and newspapers in the U.S. and the U.K., and which by 2006 had been translated into nine foreign languages, while Kertzer himself according to his Website, had become "America's foremost expert on the modern history of the Vatican's relations with the Jews." It is thus undeniable that very many people in very many countries have heard of the appalling misdeeds and misstatements mentioned above -- even though, in fact, not one of them was ever perpetrated by any pope.

But *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* is not only about the disclosure of these shocking slanders, however fascinating and important such an exposé is. In the broader perspective, it is about the power of ideology to subvert historical judgments, whether the latter concern the origins of anti-Semitism and the papacy, the distortion of documents to indict Pius XII, or the fabrication of Pius XI as "codependent collaborator" with Mussolini (the announced subject of Kertzer's next book). Justus George Lawler's confrontation with ideologues will gratify all who are seeking not triumph over opponents, but peace and justice for all.

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