

Pope and Devil – The Vatican’s Archives and the Third Reich by Herbert Wolf.
Translated by Kenneth Kronenberg.
The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2010.

The highly controversial papacy of Pius XII, sometimes called Hitler’s Pope, continues to engage scholars, and Pope and Devil by the distinguished Professor of Church History at Munster University, Hubert Wolf, is the latest book on the subject: that it goes much further than its predecessors, however, is due to the access Wolf has had to the Vatican’s own archives on the period and the fresh light on what went on through diplomatic and other channels not just during the Second World War but also during the papacy of Pius XI, pope from 1929-1939.

The book is divided into five sections: Neutralizing Evil? – Vatican Prescriptions for Germany (1917-1929); Perfidious Jews? – The Battle in the Vatican over Anti-Semitism (1928); The Pact with the Devil? – The Reichskonkordat (1933-1939); Molto Delicato? – The Roman Curia and the Persecution of the Jews (1933-1939); Dogma or Diplomacy? – The Catholic Worldview and Nazi Ideology (1933-1939).

Wolf demonstrates the true nature of the events under consideration to be much more nuanced than is commonly believed to be the case, and his drawing on diplomatic material sent to the Vatican by its papal nuncios is particularly illuminating. It is also clear that inherited negativity towards Jews within the Catholic hierarchy made decision-making more complicated than might have been the case,

This is an important book for students of the Second World war period, and especially of the Shoah, and deserves to be widely read.

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