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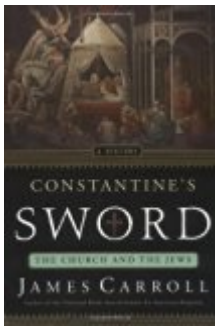
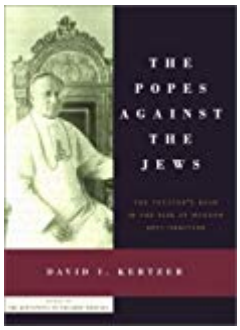



**James Carroll.** *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History.* Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001. xii + 756 pp. $28.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-395-77927-9.




**David I. Kertzer.** *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 355 pp. $27.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-375-40623-2.

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The Catholic Church and Modern Anti-Semitism

I would have liked to be able to recommend these two books as nicely complementary. Both are exercises in persuasion, calling for a re-examination of the issue of the Church's responsibility for modern antisemitism generally and for the Holocaust in particular. James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*, according to the book's subtitle, purports to be a "History" of "The Church and the Jews," while David I. Kertzer's *The Popes Against the Jews* carries the subtitle "The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism." Carroll offers a "narrative arc" (to use his own characterization) that carries the story of Christian bias against Jews from New Testament times to the present, while Kerzter's scope is more limited, focusing on the period from the 1814 restoration of the Papal States following the disruptions of the French Revolution and Napoleon to October 1943, when Jews were deported from Rome to Auschwitz from beneath the very windows of the Vatican. Both authors insist that the Church's highest officials must be more honest in admitting that the institutional failings of the Church "as such," and not merely the personal failings of individual Catholics, played an significant role in the unspeakable tragedy that befell Jews in the twentieth century.

Both authors were offended and stimulated to write by the 1998 statement "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah" produced by the Vatican's

Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews which, while issued in a spirit of "repentance," offered some fine distinctions between traditional anti-Judaic attitudes based on religious considerations and modern racist antisemitism and between the attitudes and actions of individual Catholics and the responsibility of the Church. Carroll found the statement "defensive and self-exonerating" (***Constantine's Sword***, p. 27), while Kertzer "knew that there was something terribly wrong with the history that the Vatican was recounting" (***The Pope Against the Jews***, p. 4). Kertzer was especially upset by what he saw as the statement's attempt to relieve the Church of responsibility for the Holocaust by denying connections between the acknowledged religious hostility to the Jews that had characterized Christian teaching, attitudes, and actions for centuries and the modern antisemitism that reached its dreadful apotheosis in Hitler's "final solution."

Despite the apparent similarity in purpose, however, these are two very different books. The first, a massive 750-page volume by a Catholic novelist and ex-Paulist priest, while clearly a heart-felt and even anguished account, told with the novelist's skill in dramatizing scenes, persons, and events, is nevertheless so seriously flawed that it may unfortunately prove counter-productive to the author's avowed purpose of getting the Church to face more honestly the sad reality of the antisemitism in its tradition and history and to "imagine a different kind of future" (p. 23). The second, by a reputable historian of modern Italy who proudly informs us that his rabbi father was given a medallion by the Vatican for his work in promoting greater understanding between Christians and Jews, is a careful historical study based in good part on the Vatican's own secret archives, recently made available. A generally sober, well-documented, and succinct 350-page account, which avoids Carroll's emotional and personal style, Kertzer's book persuades as much by a dispassionate exposition of the evidence as by its well articulated argument.

Despite its length, the argument of Carroll's book can be briefly summarized. According to Carroll, the history of the Christian Church, from its earliest days to the present, demonstrates that hostility towards the Jews has been a constitutive part of the Church's identity, that this hostility has found expression in every age in anti-Jewish teachings, sentiments, and practices, and that the problem is so deeply rooted that it requires a Third Vatican Council for a radical overhaul of the Church's understanding of and teachings about the New Testament, its structure (a reform of the papacy and the introduction of more democratic forms of governance), its Christology (a shift in emphasis from Christ's death on the cross to his message of love), its acceptance of a stance of "pluralism" that would acknowledge other religions as valid ways to salvation, and its genuine "repentance" for its antisemitic sins. Carroll's harshest critics believe that these changes constitute his real agenda, and that there is a kind of blasphemy in utilizing repugnance at the Church's responsibility (however direct or indirect) for modern antisemitism and the Holocaust to advance these goals.[1] Without attempting to judge Carroll's motivation, it seems evident that he is deeply appalled by what he perceives as the scandalous way the Church, its leaders, intellectuals, and writers have dealt with Judaism and the Jews over the centuries. What is easier to assess are the weaknesses of his book.

In the first place, the book is much too long--judicious editing could probably have cut the length in half and enhanced its effectiveness. Perhaps in an attempt to "personalize" the argument, Carroll devotes interminable pages to recounting his own personal history and his relationships with his mother, his father, his childhood Jewish friend, his brother, his seminary, and the Church. Some events and developments are treated at excessive length, while other relevant developments

are ignored. For example, readers are subjected to a long disquisition on the Spanish Inquisition in which Carroll blames that institution for adding a racist criteria of "purity of blood" to traditional anti-Jewish measures, though this was a move that the papacy and the Church generally opposed and that the most recent historian of the Spanish Inquisition discounts as having any connection to the Holocaust.[2] At the same time, Carroll ignores much of the excellent work on Catholic-Jewish relations and the reform of Catholic education where it concerns Judaism and Jews that has been carried out in recent decades by the Vatican itself, the hierarchy, and Catholic theologians and educators.[3]

Secondly, it is not a particularly good "history" of the Church and the Jews. The classic study by the Catholic priest Edward H. Flannery, ***The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*** (New York: Macmillan, 1965; revised edition, Mahway, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1975), while engaging all the difficulties of the issue, is a much more balanced treatment. A more recent study by Lionel B. Steiman, ***Paths to Genocide: Anti-semitism in Western History*** (New York: Macmillan, 1998), while much shorter, offers much more on the cultural, political, social, and economic contexts in which antisemitism developed, and on the history of the Jewish communities that experienced prejudice, injustice, and violence. Interestingly, with respect to responsibility for the Nazi crime of genocide against the Jews, Steiman, who is a secular historian, puts a major share of the blame, not on Christian antisemitism, but on the German medical establishment, within which an ideology of eugenics facilitated cooperation in a "final solution" that was perceived as a "cure" to the "Jewish problem," and on the habits and state of mind of too many German bureaucrats who tended to view implementation of the final solution as just another administrative task.

Thirdly, Carroll's scholarship is too often open to question. His treatment of the New Testament, for example, seems to rest heavily on the work of people associated with the "Jesus Seminar" (John Dominic Crossan in particular) while generally ignoring their critics and the work of such Catholic biblical scholars as Luke Timothy Johnson and John P. Meier. The problem of excessive reliance on partisan secondary authors is also evident in his uncritical acceptance of the contentions of writers like John Cornwell (***Hitler's Pope***) and Garry Wills (***Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit***). Many would also question the accuracy of some of Carroll's depictions and interpretations of particular historical events and developments. For example, his evidence and his argument for crediting the emperor Constantine for pushing the Church to move from a creedal statement (as in the first version of the Nicene Creed) in which neither the death of Jesus or the crucifixion are mentioned to the version (dating from the Council of Constantinople in 381), that "put the crucifixion at the center of faith and the death of Jesus at the heart of redemption" (p. 191), hardly seems compelling. Carroll largely ignores the letters of Paul, which preached "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), and never mentions contrary evidence such as the ***Apostolic Tradition*** of Hippolytus (c. 215 C.E.), which included the following baptismal profession of faith: "Do you believe in Christ Jesus, who ... was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, and died, and was buried and rose the third day?"[4]

In short, though written in an engaging literary style, enlivened with personal anecdotes, argued with passion, and devoted to a topic of great importance, Carroll's work must be read with caution because of its scholarly weaknesses (keep in mind that the author is a novelist and not a historian), and with awareness of the author's avowed purposes of both challenging the Church's account of its treatment of the Jews and transforming its structure and some of its fundamental teachings. In his favor Carroll provides a useful service by drawing attention to Catholic thinkers such as Abelard, Nicolaus of Cusa, and Johann Ignaz von Dllinger, who over the centuries challenged pre-

vailing orthodoxies with respect to the Church's relations with the Jews.

David Kertzer's book argues the tough and controversial position that the teachings and actions of the Church, including those of the popes themselves, for the better part of a century and a half, from the fall of Napoleon to the rise of Hitler, not only failed to combat antisemitism, but actively and purposely contributed to it, lent it authority, and honored some of its most active purveyors, and thus shares responsibility for making the Holocaust possible. However, in contrast to Carroll, Kertzer's declared agenda is limited to achieving, in his own words, "a clearer understanding of the past" (p. 21). He sees himself as working entirely in line with Pope John Paul's "call for the Catholic world to confront its past with clear eyes" (p. 21), and his stated hope is that by contributing to a better understanding of the past his book will contribute to a brighter future. In the pope's most recent call for honesty about the past, in a message to the participants of an international conference commemorating the fourth centenary of the Matteo Ricci's arrival in Bejing, he repeated a point he has voiced many times in his pontificate: "The Church must not be afraid of historical truth and she is ready--with deeply-felt pain--to admit the responsibility of her children. ... Historical truth must be sought severely, with impartiality and in its entirety" [5]. From what he writes in this book and from what he has subsequently stated in interviews, it seems evident that David Kertzer sees himself as engaged in precisely this kind of search for "historical truth."

Partly because of his reputation as a sound historian of modern Italy and partly because of an appreciative article that he had written for *The New York Times* in February 1998 following Cardinal Ratzinger's announcement that the archives of the Roman Inquisition would now be open to scholars, Kertzer was among the small number of researchers who gained early access to this treasure trove of documents. In addition to the archives of the Inquisition (only opened for materials up to 1900), he also consulted seven other Vatican archives, French archives, a very large sampling of Catholic periodical literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and much of the enormous mass of secondary literature that has been generated around the issue of modern antisemitism. From these materials he has constructed a vigorous case against the distinction that the Vatican and its defenders have been making in recent years between religious antisemitism, which the Church acknowledges to have characterized its past, and social, economic, and racial antisemitism, which it is claimed the Church never advocated.

The first and most persuasive part of Kertzer's study (based on the archives of the Inquisition) examines how nineteenth-century popes, restored as monarchs of the Papal States in 1814, treated Jews resident in their own domains. For Jews, one extremely important consequence of the French Revolution was their emancipation from centuries old restrictions on places of residence (ghettos) and occupation. Conquest by the armies of Revolutionary France and then Napoleon had brought emancipation to the Jews of the Papal States and Rome itself. The language that the Vatican's "We Remember" statement uses to describe these developments is curiously disingenuous, to say the least. The Commission writes: "By the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, Jews generally had achieved an equal standing with other citizens in most States and a certain number of them held influential positions in society" (cited, p. 6). No mention is made of the fact that these developments embodied the political ideas of the Enlightenment and the legislation of the French Revolution. As Kertzer pertinently observes, "If Jews acquired equal rights in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was only over the angry, loud,

and indeed indignant protests of the Vatican and the Church" (p. 6).

In 1814, despite contrary advice from his highly capable secretary of state Cardinal Consalvi, who realized that times had changed and that reintroducing all the old restrictions at a time when both the American and French revolutions had proclaimed the equality of all citizens would give ammunition to those who argued that the papacy was a hopelessly anachronistic medieval relic, Pope Pius VII chose instead to listen to hard line *zelanti* among the college of cardinals, who were adamantly opposed to everything associated with the French Revolution and wanted a complete restoration of the old regime. The gates of Rome's ghettos were again closed in 1814 and most of the old prescriptions with respect to occupation, travel, distinct garb, and employment of Christian servants were reimposed. Except for a relatively brief period during 1848, when Pope Pius IX was chased from the city by temporarily successful revolutionaries, Rome's Jews remained enclosed in their cramped and squalid ghetto until 1870, when invading Italian troops finally brought a permanent end to the papal state.

One of the restored old regime institutions most hated by Rome's Jews was the House of the Catechumens, which operated under the revived Inquisition. It was a place where Jews who sought to escape the ghetto by conversion to Catholicism were housed and instructed in their new faith. What was particularly galling was that as soon as a Jewish male signed up in this institution, Roman police immediately apprehended his wife and children, locked them up, and tried to persuade the wife to follow her husband's example. Swaying her decision was the fact that the children were immediately baptised. Since the law in the Papal States prohibited Jews from raising Christian children, if the wife refused conversion and decided to return to the ghetto (after weeks of indoctrination), she understood that this meant giving up her children. Another consequence of this same law was that in cases where a Jewish infant was baptised by a Christian servant (who thereby hoped to save the immortal soul of a gravely sick infant), such children were forcibly removed from their parents' custody and raised as Catholics. Perhaps the most famous such incident was the kidnapping of six-year old Edgardo Mortara from his parental home in Bologna in 1858 under the direct orders of Pius IX.[6] Despite an international outcry and strong diplomatic pressure from Napoleon III (whose troops were defending Rome against Italian nationalists), Pius IX refused to deviate from what he saw as his duty of raising Edgardo as a Catholic, which the pope believed he was because he had been baptised as a baby by an illiterate teenage servant girl.

The rationale behind the ghetto was that good Christians had to be protected from contaminating contact with Jews, and the rationale behind most of the other restrictive laws was that Jews would thereby be persuaded to convert and thus save their souls. Kerzer's narration and documentation of such incidents demonstrates that though the popes generally from the middle ages on had had a good reputation for defending Europe's Jews from the worst kinds of anti-Jewish rhetoric and violence, the popes of the nineteenth century, in large part in reaction to the perceived evils of the French Revolution and its supposedly dangerous ideas about equal rights for all, endeavored as long as they retained temporal power to "keep the Jews in their place."

Conservative Catholic paranoia about the modern world springing from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution is also the context for Kertzer's next block of evidence, which concerns the witness of the Catholic press from the latter decades of the nineteenth century well into the 1930s. Citing extensively from the periodicals directly under the pope's authority and supervision, the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore romano* and the Jesuit biweekly *Civilt cattolica*, *La Croix* (the daily published by the French Assumptionists that fig-

ured so importantly in the antisemitic campaign against Captain Alfred Dreyfus), other Catholic periodicals, and from the works of authors such as the notorious Eduoard Drumont and the French priest Ernest Jouin, Kertzer shows how the Church played an important role in promulgating the component ideas associated with modern antisemitism. Here is Kertzer's list of these ideas:

"There is a secret Jewish conspiracy; the Jews seek to conquer the world; Jews are an evil sect who seek to do Christians harm; Jews are by nature immoral; Jews care only for money and will do anything to get it; Jews control the press; Jews control banks and are responsible for the economic ruination of untold numbers of Christian families; Jews are responsible for communism, Judaism commands its adherents to murder defenseless Christian children and drink their blood; Jews seek to destroy the Christian religion; Jews are unpatriotic, ever ready to sell their country out to the enemy; for the larger society to be properly protected, Jews must be segregated and their rights limited" (p. 206).

Every one of these ideas, Kertzer charges, "had the support of the highest Church authorities, including the pope," (p. 206) so that even if this list does not include one of the defining ideas of modern antisemitism, the notion that Jews constitute a separate and inferior race, this hardly excuses the Church from responsibility for the flowering of modern antisemitism. In fact, as Kertzer notes, the notion of biological taint was not absent from the history in the Church. He cites the Spanish laws dating from the sixteenth century banning Christians descended from Jews from various offices in the state and the church, and the Jesuit rule forbidding admission of men of Jewish origin, calculating ancestry to the fifth generation, a rule in force from 1592 to 1946. Moreover, Kertzer also finds some evidence of racism in the Catholic antisemitic literature discussed above. In early 1898, for example, *L'Osservatore romano* in a lament about the emancipation of the Jews having brought untold suffering to the Christian world, wrote of the Jew "abandoning himself recklessly and heedlessly to that innate passion of his race, which is essentially usurious and pushy" (cited, p. 212).

Kerzer offers disturbing evidence that not only did the papacy encourage and support antisemitic writings, it also supported antisemitic political movements. The prime example here is covert support for over a decade by Pope Leo XIII and his secretary of state, as revealed in their diplomatic correspondence in the Vatican archives, of the Austrian Christian Social party and its leader Karl Lueger, despite warnings from the Austrian Church hierarchy to distance the Church from Lueger (whom the nuncio in Vienna regarded as a dangerous demagogue) and his antisemitic campaign.

Kertzer finds the record of twentieth-century popes up to Pius XII scarcely more defensible on this issue. In particular, Pius XI, who critics of Pius XII's "silence" often cite for his courage in speaking out against Fascism and Nazism, comes off badly on two grounds. First, from an examination of his record as nuncio to Poland (1918-21), Kertzer concludes that Monsignor Achille Ratti (the future Pius XI) deliberately avoided meeting Jewish delegations hoping to enlist Rome's help in the face of popular pogroms then sweeping the country, and that he in fact "did everything he could to impede any Vatican action on behalf of the Jews and prevent any Vatican intervention that would discourage the violence" (p. 250). In an assessment of the Polish situation in January 1919, Ratti reported to Rome that "One of the most evil and strongest influences that is felt here, perhaps the strongest and most evil, is that of the Jews" (cited, p. 251). Now, as Kertzer candidly describes the situation, it is true that the "Jewish question" posed particularly difficult problems in Poland, which had the largest Jewish population of any country in Europe (perhaps three million) and where patriotism and Catholicism were very

deeply interwoven and the Jews easily perceived as a threat to the nation's integrity. Nevertheless Kertzer has credible evidence for suggesting that the lesson Ratti learned in Poland was that the hordes of Jews in central and eastern Europe were a threat to a healthy Christian society.

Near the very end of his reign Pope Pius XI would finally exclaim through tears to a group of Belgian pilgrims to Rome that "Anti-Semitism is inadmissible. We are all spiritually Semites" (cited, p. 280). However, as Kertzer points out, these famous words followed a comment to the effect that "We recognize everyone's right to defend themselves, to take measures to protect themselves against all who threaten their legitimate interests" (p. 280). In the context of Italian Fascist and German Nazi legislation severely restricting the rights of Jewish citizens, this portion of the pope's statement appears troubling. Kertzer criticizes Pius XI for supporting and honoring people like the French priest Ernest Jouin, who was the prime French champion of the infamous ***Protocols of the Elders of Zion*** (supposed evidence of an evil Jewish plot to take over the world and in fact a forgery by the Tsarist secret police) and for his failure to speak out against the Nuremburg Laws of 1935 (which stripped German Jews of their civic rights), or against the racial laws promulgated in Italy in 1938 (which declared Jews undesirable, threw Jewish children out of school, and fired large number of Jews from their jobs). Kertzer's grim explanation for silence about these actions is that "Mussolini's new laws embodied measures and views long championed by the Church itself" (p. 287). In both Germany and Italy, for whatever reasons, papal protests were limited to objections against legislation adversely affecting Jews who had been baptised as Catholics.

For Kerzter then, the real scandal lies not in the fact that Pius XII remained silent, but in "the role his predecessors played over the previous decades in dehumanizing the Jews, [and] in encouraging large numbers of Europeans to view them as evil and dangerous" (p. 16).

In presenting his evidence and his arguments for his case, Kertzer is generally fair in acknowledging and setting forth in some detail the extenuating circumstances that help explain the choices made by the leadership of the Church in the difficult period following the French Revolution. He does not use the term "fundamentalism" to characterize the Church's reaction during this period to the forces of modernity--political ideas involving civil rights, civic equality, freedom of the press, many developments associated with modern science and industrialization, etc.--but the character of that reaction surely shares many attributes of the kind of religious fundamentalism that Karen Armstrong describes so tellingly in her study, ***Battle for God***.[7] Feeling desperately threatened and besieged by so many aspects of the world that was evolving following the French Revolution, it was all too easy, as Kertzer shows, for many Catholics, up to and including the popes, to blame all these developments on groups hostile to Catholicism, and, in particular, on the Jews, perceived as ancient enemies of the Church unwisely freed from control by the Revolution.

In conclusion, it seems likely that Kertzer's appeal for a more honest acknowledgement of past Catholic failures, failures that had the very unfortunate and unintended consequence of helping to create the circumstances that allowed the Shoah to occur, has a better chance of influencing the Church's leadership and Christian-Jewish dialogue than Carroll's too lengthy, too personal, and too unscholarly book with its too strident demands for changes that too many Catholics from the hierarchy on down will perceive as threatening to the essential character of Catholicism itself.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Robert P. Lockwood, "***Constantine's Sword***: A Review Article," available at http://www.catholicleague.org/research/Constantine.htm. Lockwood is the Director of Re-

search for the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

[2]. See Michael Alpert, ***Crypto-Judaism and the Spanish Inquisition*** (Palgrave, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, 2001), who concludes that "despite the occasional evidence of 'racist' anti-Judaism in Spain, there is no valid analogy between the Spain of the Inquisition and Nazi Germany." (p. 200).

[3]. See, for example, ***A Blessing to Each Other: Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Jewish Catholic Dialogue*** (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publication, Chicago, 1996).

[4]. Cited by David Michael in his review of ***Constantine's Sword***, available at http://www.rcab.org/FrMichaelReview.html.. Michael also accuses Carroll of "outright misstatements concerning what the Church actually teaches," and suggests that he would have done well to study more carefully the documents of Vatican II.

[5]. This statement of 24 October 2001 may be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy*father/john*paul*ii/speeches/2001/October/documen ts/hf*jp-ii*spe*20011024*matteo-ricci*en.html

[6]. For a detailed description of this case, see Kertzer's ***The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*** (New York: Knopf, 1997).

[7]. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2000. Armstrong focuses on Protestant fundamentalism in the United States, Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, and Muslim fundamentalism in Egypt and Iran. A similar analysis of the fundamentalist phenomena, from the perspective of a political scientist, may be found in Benjamin R. Barber's study, ***Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World*** (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

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