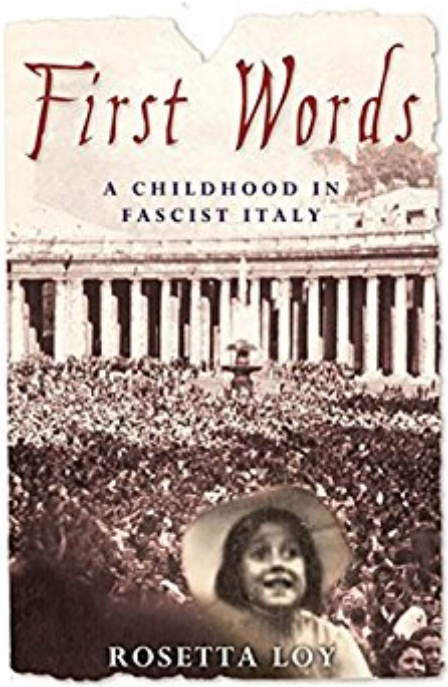
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First Words: A Childhood In Fascist Italy



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Synopsis

An internationally acclaimed novelist and journalist movingly chronicles her childhood in Rome during World War II, providing a rare account by a Catholic of Jewish persecution and Papal responsibility In 1937, Rosetta Loy was a privileged five-year-old growing up in the heart of the well-to-do Catholic intelligentsia of Rome. But her childhood world of velvet and lace, airy apartments, indulgent nannies, and summers in the mountains was also the world of Mussolini's fascist regime and the increasing oppression of Italian Jews. Loy interweaves the two Italys of her early years, shifting with powerful effect from a lyrical evocation of the many comforts of her class to the accumulation of laws stipulating where Jews were forbidden to travel and what they were not allowed to buy, eat, wear, and read. She reveals the willful ignorance of her own family as one by one their neighbors disappeared, and indicts journalists and intellectuals for their blindness and passivity. And with hard-won clarity, she presents a dispassionate record of the role of the Vatican and the Catholic leadership in the devastation of Italy's Jews.Written in crystalline prose, First Words offers an uncommon perspective on the Holocaust. In the process, Loy reveals one writer's struggle to reconcile her memories of a happy childhood with her adult knowledge that, hidden from her young eyes, one of the world's most horrifying tragedies was unfolding.

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Customer Reviews

It’s a truly beautiful personal and researched account of what really happened. It was worth the extra effort required to get it.

Thank you.

What a lot of nonsense has been written about Pope Pius XII and his role in saving or not saving Rome’s Jews. Loy’s book is a sad and lovely memoir written by an eyewitness to the changes brought about by the arrival of Fascism in Italy, but it is not a piece of scholarly research and shouldn’t be used to destroy the reputation of a man reported to have saved at least 700,000 Jews. Who makes this claim? Jewish historian and Israeli government official Pinchas Lapide in his 1967 book, Three Popes and the Jews. For a credible study of the topic, written by an American rabbi and based on documented research, read The Myth of Hitler’s Pope by Rabbi David Dalin, or Pave the Way Foundation’s Examining the Papacy of Pius XII, also written by an American Jew.

Rosetta Loy opens this book with her first memories of childhood as a young girl in Rome in the early 30s. She then paints the picture from that time to 1943.This book actually tells two stories - first the account of Rosetta’s life during that period of time and second the historical facts of the time.The entire book impressed me, but two things about this book absolutely AMAZED me.1. Roessetta Loy’s voice. On the first page she is a young girl tended by a nanny, the reader is treated with the perspective of life at this point in time from the unusual view of a curious and intelligent child. As the book progresses and Rossetta ages the story changes in vocabulary and scope.2. Ms. Loy presents the key points of political and legal changes in her church, city and country with simply clarity. This is the first book that I have read on the subject that didn’t attempt go overboard on explanations, excuses or "what ifs". Ms. Loy states the facts of legal changes and racial politics of Italy at the time without attempting to question `how’, `why’, `to what end’ and `what if’. Instead the reader will hear these questions echo in their own mind.This is a powerful book. It is written in simple style and easy to read. It could be read in a day or two, but if you are like me when you get to the end you will want to read it again.

I could not disagree more with the previous "book critic". This book is not a lambasting of individual Catholics or of the many individual priests that helped to save many Jews. One need only look at Ms. Loy's characterization of Pope Pius XI and his very anti-semetic stance to see that this book in no way sees all Catholics as heartless beasts. What it does show is that with the on-slot of Pope Pius XII's reign, the organized Catholic body-politic did nothing privately or publicly to condemn the atrocities committed against Jews at home or abroad in Nazi Germany. There were over 1200 Jews in Rome alone that could have been "hidden" in the Vatican...but no, the response to that was that Pope Pius XII could have been arrested. Getting arrested seems very tame to Jesus being crucified, does it not? All I can say is that, along with the reading of this very touching book by Ms. Loy, I would also recommend everyone out there supplimenting the reading of this book with Mr. Cornwell's "Hitler's Pope".

Rosetta Loy's memoir of life in Italy during WWII, FIRST WORDS, traces a little girl's awakening to the meaning of blind hate by the fascists.A Catholic nation, Italy should have followed Christ and turned against the hate-filled fascist state. However, Pope Pius XII offered no Christian model to emulate. Instead, this quasi-holy, German-sympathizer avoided confrontation, closed his eyes to atrocities and was still recommended for sainthood after the holocaust.Rosetta Loy watched as Jewish friends disappeared. Afterwards, she researched how Italy reacted to the obvious carnage. After her research, she points an angry finger directly at the Pope and his minions.This book is a warning to Bush-Cheney and other fascists in the USA today. Your unprovoked wars, your stereo-typing of Mexicans as illegals so as to camouflage your wars in Iraq and your neo-con pugnacious attitude around the world are doomed.Even Karl Rove re-writing history won't save your souls after your hate-filled, arrogant, bigotted, fascistic acts.Even a child can see the fascists underneath your fake smiles.

I do not think this is a Catholic bashing book but there are strong arguments on both sides .The book has value in that the situation is seen through the eyes of a child. To define Pius XII is not a simple matter and on both sides of the fence there are telling facts.S.J.Tagliareni author of Hitler's Priest

The media seems to be eating up every book that blasts the Catholic Church and Pope Pius XII...here's another attempt to cover up the heroics of the Church during the Nazi era....

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