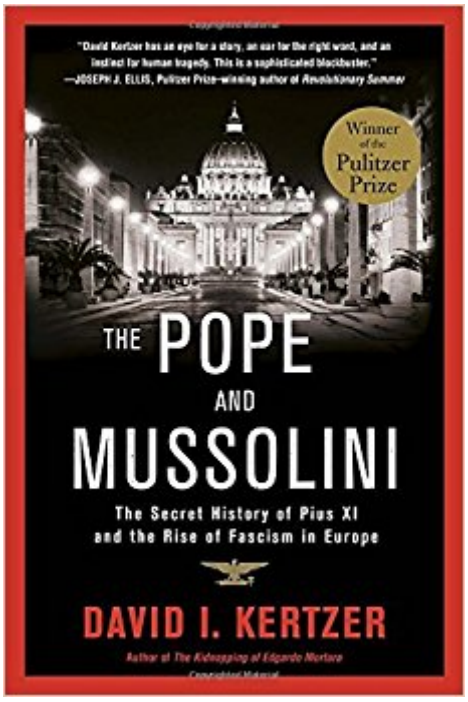
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The Pope And Mussolini: The Secret History Of Pius XI And The Rise Of Fascism In Europe



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Synopsis

PULITZER PRIZE WINNER From National Book Award finalist David I. Kertzer comes the gripping story of Pope Pius XIÃ¢â ¬â„¢s secret relations with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. This groundbreaking work, based on seven years of research in the Vatican and Fascist archives, including reports from MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s spies inside the highest levels of the Church, will forever change our understanding of the VaticanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s role in the rise of Fascism in Europe. Ã Â The Pope and Mussolini tells the story of two men who came to power in 1922, and together changed the course of twentieth-century history. In most respects, they could not have been more different. One was scholarly and devout, the other thuggish and profane. Yet Pius XI and Ã¢â ¬Å“Il DuceÃ¢â ¬Â• had many things in common. They shared a distrust of democracy and a visceral hatred of Communism. Both were prone to sudden fits of temper and were fiercely protective of the prerogatives of their office. (Ã¢â ¬Å“We have many interests to protect,Ã¢â ¬Â• the Pope declared, soon after Mussolini seized control of the government in 1922.) Each relied on the other to consolidate his power and achieve his political goals. Ã Â In a challenge to the conventional history of this period, in which a heroic Church does battle with the Fascist regime, Kertzer shows how Pius XI played a crucial role in making MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s dictatorship possible and keeping him in power. In exchange for Vatican support, Mussolini restored many of the privileges the Church had lost and gave in to the popeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s demands that the police enforce Catholic morality. Yet in the last years of his lifeÃ¢â ¬â •as the Italian dictator grew ever closer to HitlerÃ¢â ¬â •the pontiffÃ¢â ¬â„¢s faith in this treacherous bargain started to waver. With his health failing, he began to lash out at the Duce and threatened to denounce MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s anti-Semitic racial laws before it was too late. Horrified by the threat to the Church-Fascist alliance, the VaticanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s inner circle, including the future Pope Pius XII, struggled to restrain the headstrong pope from destroying a partnership that had served both the Church and the dictator for many years. Ã Â The Pope and Mussolini brims with memorable portraits of the men who helped enable the reign of Fascism in Italy: Father Pietro Tacchi Venturi, PiusÃ¢â ¬â„¢s personal emissary to the dictator, a wily anti-Semite known as MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Rasputin; Victor Emmanuel III, the king of Italy, an object of widespread derision who lacked the statureÃ¢â ¬â •literally and figurativelyÃ¢â ¬â •to stand up to the domineering Duce; and Cardinal Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli, whose political skills and ambition made him MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most powerful ally inside the Vatican, and positioned him to succeed the pontiff as the controversial Pius XII, whose actions during World War II would be subject for debate for decades to come. Ã Â With the recent opening of the Vatican archives covering Pius XIÃ¢â ¬â„¢s papacy, the full story of the PopeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s complex

relationship with his Fascist partner can finally be told. Vivid, dramatic, with surprises at every turn, The Pope and Mussolini is history writ large and with the lightning hand of truth. Ã Â NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BYÃ Â SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE
Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Kertzer has an eye for a story, an ear for the right word, and an instinct for human tragedy. This is a sophisticated blockbuster.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Joseph J. Ellis, Pulitzer PrizeÃ¢â ¬â œwinning author ofÃ Â Revolutionary Summer Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A fascinating and tragic story.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New YorkerÃ¢â ¬Å“Revelatory . . . [a] detailed portrait.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Review of BooksFrom the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

A Conversation between Jon Meacham and David Kertzer, author of The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe When Pope John Paul II first announced the opening of Pius XI’s archives, what made you think there might be an untold story buried inside? Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â The VaticanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s alliance with Mussolini has long been controversial.Ã Â Historians and journalists formed two camps.Ã Â On one side were those who claimed that, far from being an ally, the Vatican was MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s greatest adversary during the twenty years of the Fascist regime.Ã Â On the other side, people charged that the Church offered the regime crucial support.Ã Â Yet until the 2006 opening of the VaticanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s archivesÃ¢â ¬â •and with it a series of other Church archivesÃ¢â ¬â •the controversy remained unsettled.Ã Â The Pope and MussoliniÃ Â is based on more than seven years of archival

research. Ã Â Tell me about one or two documents you uncovered that were breakthroughs in your understanding of these two men and this era. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â There were so many revealing documents, of so many different kinds, that it is hard to identify just one or two.Ã Â Perhaps the most dramaticÃ¢â ¬â •what could even be called a kind of Ã¢â ¬Å“smoking gunÃ¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •was the three-page text of a secret agreement between the Vatican and Mussolini reached two weeks before the racial laws were first announced.Ã Â The trail of documents I unearthed shows the popeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s shadowy, but fascinating, Jesuit personal envoy to Mussolini, Pietro Tacchi Venturi, spending the days before the agreement going back and forth between the pope and the dictator to work out an accord.Ã Â Shockingly, it states the VaticanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s agreement to make no objection to the racial laws as long as they were no more repressive than the popesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ own restrictions on the Jews in the days of the Papal States.Ã Â And in fact the laws that were soon announcedÃ¢â ¬â •expelling all Jewish students from the schools, firing all Jewish teachers, forbidding Jews from holding other positions of influenceÃ¢â ¬â •were similar to those that had been in effect in Rome as long as the popes held power there. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â But not all of the most revealing documents were to be found in the Vatican archives.Ã Â We know more about what was going on behind the scenes in the Vatican in these years than for any other time in history thanks to the dense network of spies the Fascists placed in and around the Vatican.Ã Â These too shed much light on the pope and what he was dealing with. In the final months of his life Pius XI began to realize he had made a poisonous bargain with Mussolini and fascism. Ã Â He tried to change the course of the church's relationship to Mussolini and Hitler, but it proved too late and he died in February, 1939 as the world was sliding into catastrophe. Ã Â How much do you think Pius XI understood about what was coming to Italy, Europe, and the church? Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Pius XI was in many ways a tragic figure.Ã Â His mentality was formed in a certain conservative Church ambience of the late nineteenth century and people should not act according to their own beliefs and conscience, but according to the directives of the Church hierarchy. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â It was only after he had been pope for over a decade that HitlerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s rise to power in Germany and MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s own increasing efforts to portray himself as a demi-god began to challenge the popeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s worldview.Ã Â Something similar might be said about his attitude toward the Jews.Ã Â He came from a Catholic environment in which the Jews were not only demonized as the crucifiers as Christ, cursed by God, but viewed as part of an occult conspiracy aimed at enslaving Christians and achieving world domination.Ã Â Yet in his own city of Milan, he had gotten along with the small Jewish community and indeed even took Hebrew lessons from the local rabbi.Ã Â Watching how his views of Jews percolated in the

years leading to the Holocaust is to see a man struggling with a conflict he does not entirely comprehend. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â As for his understanding of what was coming by the late 1930s, the newly available archives make clear he was convinced that Europe was hurtling toward a cataclysm. Do you think there was a moment where a road or course not taken could have changed things significantly? Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â A huge amount of attention has been paid to the question of the Ã¢â ¬Å“silenceÃ¢â ¬Â• of Pius XIÃ¢â ¬â„¢s successor, Pius XII, during the Holocaust.Ã Â This has turned into a rather heated debate over whether Pius could have affected German behavior by forcefully denouncing the mass murder of EuropeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Jews.Ã Â I donÃ¢â ¬â„¢t want to get involved in that debate here, but what is clear to me is that the popes had much greater influence over Italians than they did over the Germans.Ã Â Of course the popes themselves were all Italians, as were virtually all the members of the Curia.Ã Â And while only a third of Germans were Catholic, Italians were overwhelmingly Catholic.Ã Â So the interesting question for me is could the pope have prevented Italy from allying with Nazi Germanyz/Ã Â Might Italy never have entered the war on GermanyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s side if the Vatican had acted differently?Ã Â This is a huge question and I am not sure if it has ever been posed in quite this way before. Jon Meacham is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of American Lion, Thomas Jefferson, Franklin and Winston, and American Gospel.Ã Â The former editor of Newsweek, he is an Executive Editor and Executive Vice President of Random House. Ã Â --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Two leaders came to power in 1922 in Rome, Achille Ratti was elevated to the papacy as Pius XI, and Benito Mussolini was appointed Italian prime minister. How relations between them developed until the popeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s 1939 demise occupies this original history, which rests on KertzerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s thorough research of available Vatican archives and other sources. His main line of inquiry, the degree of support Pius XI accorded to Mussolini, guides KertzerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s narrative, which begins with MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s opportunistic about-face from anticlerical socialist to Catholic-tolerating nationalist. Papal approval during the 1920s, when MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s regime survived political crises, received its reward in 1929 with the Lateran Accords that reestablished the Vatican as an independent state. Although he finds points of conflict between Pius XI and Mussolini, Kertzer underscores affinities between the Catholic Church and the fascist state, which may arouse controversy. Was the church as acquiescent to MussoliniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s persecutions of Jews as Kertzer portrays? In any event, he adduces evidence that Pius XI seems to have regretted his tacit alliance with Mussolini. An important work of history, KertzerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s adroit profiles of Pius and

Mussolini will broaden its audience. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Could there possibly be a more complicated relationship than that between and authoritarian, absolute monarchy/papacy and the fascists? It is so easy to be critical of the Popes and the Vatican Curia....so easy. But what is the truth? This book goes a long way to explaining the mystery in a fair and reasonable manner. Well written and thoroughly researched.

David I. Kertzer presents a devastating portrait of the Vatican and it’s political machinations during the rise of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. After he comes to power, Mussolini, reversing his former stance as a "priest eater," realizes he needs the support of the church. Many in the Vatican agree, thinking an alliance with Mussolini will strengthened the power of the church. Besides,the Fascists and the Church share a central value. Neither believe in democracy. Both believed in totalitarian authoritarian. True, there are many rough spots between the two, but for the most part they are resolved or smoothed over. However, when Hitler and the Nazi’s rise to power in Germany, and begin to influence Mussolini, Pope Pius XI, becomes increasingly uncomfortable. He despises Hitler, but still hoping to dissuade Mussolini from some of the more extreme forms of Fascism, namely the type of antisemitism practiced in Germany. Unfortunately Pius XI dies in 1939, on the eve of World War II, and he is never able to give voice to those thoughts and feeling. What effect they might have had, if any, is unknown.The portrait that Kertzer creates of Pius IX is complex, balanced and fair. The Pope was in an incredibly difficulty position as he tried to navigate his way through those extremely treacherous times. One can have empathy for Pius XI. However, I felt much less empathy for many of those surrounding him. Many of those were more than willing to crawl into the political bed with a Fascist dictator and support his brutal rise to power, his alliance with Nazi Germany, and entrance into World War II. One thing for certain: David I Kertzer has done a magnificent job in shining a light on the actual role of the Vatican during the rise and fall of the Mussolini and Fascist in Italy. I recommend this book without reservation.

I saw a PBS interview of the mild mannered academic researcher, and read his book which I found to be carefully researched, thorough, and insightful. It took seven years to write. Kertzer, in my opinion, did not do a "hit job" on the pope. If there is a hit job, it was done by the pope to himself, and not incidentally, to the Italian people. But the reasons are revelatory.Pius XI’s withdrawal of support of the center Catholic party, made Mussolini’s reign possible, which the dictator readily acknowledged. In fact he couldn’t believe his good fortune, that his chief opposition would cave.

With this tacit backing, all other political parties were destroyed by the thug black shirts. Pius XI, as enabler, was more comfortable with a dictator, who like himself, demanded absolute obedience. Mussolini was "the man of Providence", to use Pius's words. Pius was happier with a dictator than he ever could be with a democrat, or anyone on the left. If the reader is uncomfortable with this idea, be forewarned, for it is very well documented.Additionally, the author presents a very acute discussion of the difference between German and Italian attitudes towards Jews....both anti-Semetic. One, the Nazi, purely being race based; the other, the Italian, being behavior based. How all this got mixed with with nationalism, politics...and historically, with religion, is an important thread of the book. In fact, it was those same ancient (now renounced) historic sources of anti-Semitism of the RCC, which were part of what gave Mussolini legitimacy, as he used church support for his particular strain of anti-Semitism.Church support was initially in harmony with Mussolini's own cult of the self, and then was expanded into other of his many crimes, including the unprovoked attacks on Ethiopia and Albania, the destruction of Italian democracy, not to mention the disgraceful Italian racial laws.Throughout it all, Pius's protests seem of the trivial sort, for in truth his aim was to reestablish pre 1870 church ascendency, where there was no separation of church and state, all controlled by an all powerful RCC. It seems that this pope, like many popes before him, and Mussolini, and Hitler for that matter, had little tolerance for democracy...and the "rights of man"...which he openly ridiculed.As Pius's doubts grew about Mussolini, we have the perspective of history to see it all blow up in his face. Kertzer follows him, as he lamely tried to undo the results of his own deeply immoral imprudences, only to be suppressed by a coterie of clerics, chief among whom was his own secretary of state, the future Pope Pius XII...the controversial Pacelli.This is a powerful thesis, made most convincing by the thorough research to support it. There are 100 pages of footnotes. Kertzer's sources include the newly opened Vatican archives, the Italian state files of Mussolini, mistresses, family members; and diaries, correspondence, and literally thousands of pages of newspaper articles from all the key media outlets of the day, written and/or approved by the key operators.It's an impressive work, and I think, believable. The reader will have to decide for himself or herself, for this serious attempt at an objective understanding of complex truth paints not a pretty picture of this pope, his era, and his minions. Kertzer writes in his Afterwards, that the usual Catholic conservative reaction will double down, as always, on the myth of a brave Vatican fighting against fascism. It's to be expected.But change is afoot. I hope that Francis, with his exhortation on the poor, is taking the more democratic approach, and is interested to setting the record strait...balancing right and left...which Pius XI and XII, didn't. I hope so.

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