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**Pius XII
and the Holocaust**
Current State of Research

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Edited by
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Pius XII and the Holocaust

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Introduction

DAN MICHMAN AND IAEL NIDAM-ORVIETO

Dilemmas, silence, active rescue, passivity. These are a few of the words often mentioned when dealing with the controversial figure of Pius XII. Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli was born in Rome in 1876, to a well-known family of the “black nobility.”¹ Ordained to priesthood in 1899, by 1901 he had already been selected for a diplomatic career within the Vatican foreign office. In 1917, Pacelli was appointed Apostolic Nuncio in Bavaria, and in 1920, the first Apostolic Nuncio to Germany. In 1930, he was elected by Achille Ratti—Pope Pius XI—to be the Vatican Secretary of State.

Following Ratti’s death in 1939, Pacelli was elected Pope, and took the name Pius XII. His papacy is considered, both in historiography and in the public discourse, to be one of the most contentious, primarily due to his alleged and non-alleged responses to the extermination of the Jews during the Holocaust. This controversy unfolded during the 1960s, particularly after the release of the play *The Deputy* by Rolf Hochhuth and the publication of Saul Friedländer’s book *Pius XII and the Third Reich*,² and continues to split public opinion as well as the academic community.

1 The term refers to those aristocratic families who kept their loyalty to the Pope following the unification of Italy.
2 Saul Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: A Documentation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

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