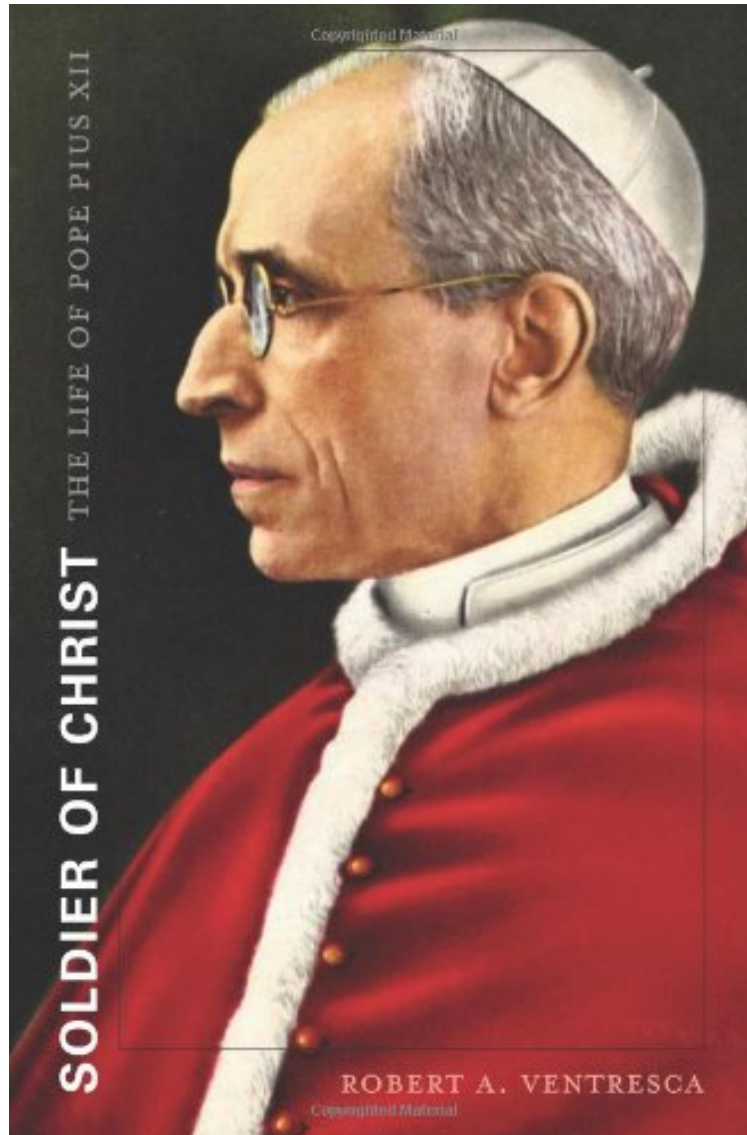


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## Soldier of Christ: The Life of Pope Pius XII

Robert A. Ventresca

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**Robert A. Ventresca : Soldier of Christ: The Life of Pope Pius XII** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Soldier of Christ: The Life of Pope Pius XII:

27 of 32 people found the following review helpful. A controversial pope By Paul Gelman Pius the Twelfth is considered one of the most controversial popes who had ever sat on the Vatican's throne. The main reason is because of the ongoing debate regarding the pope's silence or indifference to the plight of the Jews and other victims during WW2. According to this new book by Robert Ventresca, the pope was not indifferent or silent about the Holocaust. He

did whatever he could and the proof for this is in the many acknowledgements he got after the war by various central Jewish figures, among them the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. Second, this was the way Pius worked and was trained to, while delegating much authority to his many nuncios in the various occupied countries in the war. This very well and deeply researched biography is extremely interesting and it discusses in great detail the pope's education and his views *viv-a-vis* Fascism and Communism—the two evils which concerned Pius. Although Ventresca makes many efforts to present the pope as a benevolent one when discussing at great length the pope's efforts to save many thousands of Jews, one feels that even Ventresca isn't quite convinced about this issue. All in all, this is a fascinating read and highly recommended. 8 of 11 people found the following review helpful. A quality biography that treat Pius XII as a complete person. By Michael B. Lamothe Ventresca has written the best biography of Pius XII yet available. He treats the whole person. Pius is placed within the context of a Catholic Church which was extremely rigid and rife with anti-Judaism as opposed to anti-semitism. Pius was himself anti-Judaism but Ventresca makes a good case that he was not anti-semitic. He gives Pius wide latitude in his approach to the Nazis and Fascists but makes a judgment that Pius carried his silence too far to be considered even handed in his approach to the belligerents of World War II. At the same time he notes the irony of Pius' aggressive approach toward the Stalinist regime but notes the church had little in the way of infrastructure in Russia. This book makes the most complete use of sources now available including the documents and testimony compiled for Pius' cause for sainthood. Until more Vatican archives are opened to the public this will be the source one will turn to if not interested in polemics for or against Pope Pius XII. 6 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Definitive biography of Pius XII. By G. M. Seely The biography is solidly researched, written with good fluency, and does much to put Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) in a proper light. A much maligned Pontiff emerges from this study as a saintly, most able Pope.

Debates over the legacy of Pope Pius XII and his canonization are so heated they are known as the Pius wars. *Soldier of Christ* moves beyond competing caricatures and considers Pius XII as Eugenio Pacelli, a flawed and gifted man. While offering insight into the pope's response to Nazism, Robert A. Ventresca argues that it was the Cold War and Pius XII's manner of engaging with the modern world that defined his pontificate. Laying the groundwork for the pope's controversial, contradictory actions from 1939 to 1958, Ventresca begins with the story of Pacelli's Roman upbringing, his intellectual formation in Rome's seminaries, and his interwar experience as papal diplomat and Vatican secretary of state. Accused of moral equivocation during the Holocaust, Pius XII later fought the spread of Communism in Western Europe, spoke against the persecution of Catholics in Eastern Europe and Asia, and tackled a range of social and political issues. By appointing the first indigenous cardinals from China and India and expanding missions in Africa while expressing solidarity with independence movements, he internationalized the church's membership and moved Catholicism beyond the colonial mentality of previous eras. Drawing from a diversity of international sources, including unexplored documentation from the Vatican, Ventresca reveals a paradoxical figure: a prophetic reformer of limited vision whose leadership both stimulated the emergence of a global Catholicism and sowed doubt and dissension among some of the church's most faithful servants.

This beautifully written biography will become the standard account of Pope Pius XII's life. In Ventresca's hands, this enigmatic Pope is neither lionized nor demonized. Instead, we see Pius XII as a soldier mired in the trenches, neither advancing nor wholly retreating into silence. (Charles R. Gallagher, author of *Vatican Secret Diplomacy: Joseph P. Hurley and Pope Pius XII*) Ventresca does a thorough job sifting through the evidence of the complicated life and papacy of Pius XII, while keeping an open mind to the conclusion... An authoritative study of a deeply flawed and tragic figure of history. (Kirkus s 2012-11-15) Avoiding the extremes of vilification and hagiography, this well-crafted biography examines Pope Pius XII's early life, his service in the Vatican diplomatic corps and as secretary of state to his predecessor, and his papal reign during World War II, including the "so-called silence," as Ventresca puts it, for which the pope has been roundly criticized... A balanced, but not uncritical, examination of the life of a controversial pope, seeking to understand Pius in the context of his times, this study will appeal to anyone interested in Church history, World War II, or general modern world history. (Augustine J. Curley *Library Journal* 2013-01-01) *Soldier of Christ* is immaculately researched, well-written and judicious in its judgments, and it deserves serious consideration in the ongoing debate about the role of the Vatican in the face of the utter immorality of Nazi policies. (Allen Mills *Winnipeg Free Press* 2013-01-19) Eugenio Pacelli, who acceded to the papacy in March 1939, was the first Roman pope since the early 1700s. His tenure, which lasted until his death in 1958, remains highly controversial. Robert Ventresca's book is an intervention in the 'Pius war'—the argument over Pius XII's seeming failure to defend European Jews from persecution by the Nazis. (New Statesman 2013-01-18) The definitive biography of the wartime pontiff... *Soldier of Christ: The Life of Pope Pius XII* is a splendid work. (Michael Coren *Catholic World Report* 2013-01-31) *Soldier of Christ* is immaculately researched, well-written and judicious in its judgments, and it deserves serious consideration in the ongoing debate about the role of the Vatican in the face of the utter immorality of Nazi policies. (Allen Mills *Winnipeg Free Press* 2013-01-22) Ventresca paints a well-crafted portrait of Pacelli's remarkable consistency, deciding early on that pragmatism was his goal in both spiritual and temporal matters. (Megan Moore

Burns Quill Quire 2013-01-01)[An] illuminating work. (Paul Richardson The Church of England Newspaper 2013-03-10)Refreshing...Robert Ventresca...combines meticulous scholarship with an elegant and effective prose style that makes this a very readable and accessible book...The most serious and dispassionate biography so far of this controversial pontiff. (John Pollard Times Higher Education 2013-04-04)Most of the books about Pius [XII] judge him, positively or negatively, based upon his policies during that period. Ventresca sets Pius' decisions within the larger context of his life and achievements, bringing a fresh perspective to what has aptly been described as 'the Pius war.' (Eugene Fisher Catholic Herald 2013-04-12)With *Soldier of Christ*, Robert Ventresca has provided a real service, not only to the historical profession but also to the wider community...Ventresca makes every effort to be objective and balanced in his presentation of the controversial wartime pope. In this, he makes a refreshing and needed contribution to what has become a sometimes rancorous debate, which has more assertion of opinion than serious archival research. (Gerald P. Fogarty National Catholic Reporter 2013-05-22)Ventresca diligently works to establish a perspective on the pope that is not confined to the controversies that continue to swirl around his legacy: his reputed inaction during the Holocaust, the debates around his cause for canonization, his involvement with the shaping of post-World War Two Europe and his alleged reactionary approach to modernity in all its forms. The actual record, of course, is both more complicated and ambiguous, and Ventresca labors admirably to ensure that his portrait of Pacelli eschews the polarizing rhetoric, selective indignation and pious piffle that has defined the work of the pro- and anti-Pacellists over the last three decades...Ventresca's biography, by contrast, is defined by its meticulous reliance on archival materials, its avoidance of polemical fire and its measured assessment of the complex factors that shape a pontificate. (Michael W. Higgins Literary of Canada 2013-05-01)Ventresca has...successfully captured Pacelli in the round, with telling...details of human interest...For those who have no vested interest on either side of the divide, there [is] now [a] reliable...stud[y] of one of the most enigmatic figures of twentieth-century history. (John Cornwell Times Literary Supplement 2013-06-14)Pius XII, more than most popes, was a polarizing figure, and previous studies of his pontificate have, accordingly, tended to be either fiercely polemical, if from his critics, or bordering on the hagiographical, if from his defenders. This latest biography by Robert Ventresca...strives to avoid these extremes. Ventresca builds his case from an impressive marshaling of the available evidence. It is cogently argued, and lucidly, if soberly, written. Pacelli's human qualities are apparent... He was certainly a man who at a time of great moral challenge strove to do his best, for the church and for those who faced dehumanizing imprisonment and death at the hands of a monstrous tyranny. The history of the Holocaust is testimony that his best was not good enough, and he is not the only European leader between 1933 and 1945 about whom that can be said. The question that should haunt his defenders, however, is not whether he could have deterred the Nazis by publicly denouncing their crimes; it is whether his silence actually emboldened them. (Ray Cassin Australian Book 2013-06-01)While refreshingly avoiding the overt polemics of the 'Pius War,' Ventresca gives us a pope deserving of sympathy yet amenable to criticism. This tension is the signal contribution of the newest biography of Pius XII. Future biographies will come closer to 'the life' by providing a more integrated approach to the pope's strengths and weaknesses and a richer account of his papacy after 1945. (Hilmar Pabel The Tablet 2013-07-06)[A] welcome new biograph[y]...The detailed picture that emerges of Pacelli's diplomatic career and years as secretary of state brings a new depth to our understanding of this austere and complicated man. Studies of Pius have too often made cases for the prosecution or the defense, in which Pacelli features as a monster or a saint...[*Soldier of Christ*] provides a rounded and persuasive portrait of flawed greatness. (Eamon Duffy London of Books 2013-09-26)About the AuthorRobert A. Ventresca is Associate Professor of History at King's University College at the University of Western Ontario.