

thousands of Jews, personally or through his representatives. Postwar expressions of gratitude from Jewish leaders are evoked as ostensible proof of his activities.⁵³

Pope John Paul II's more recent statements contain similar gaps. While he referred generally in his Lenten apology to sins against the people of Israel, he did not specifically mention the Holocaust. Nor did he state clearly that leaders of the Church may be included among its children who have committed errors against Jews and others since the birth of Jesus. Then in his speech in Israel, at the museum commemorating the murder of the 6 million, he again refrained from mentioning the responses of Pius XII to that horrendous crime.

The Church has not yet completed the process of dealing honestly with its history during the Holocaust. It has not yet made clear whether popes and high Vatican officials are to be included among its sons and daughters in every age who sometimes committed regrettable errors. It has not yet expressed sorrow and repentance for the failures of Popes Pius XI and Pius XII during the years of the persecution and extermination of European Jews. It seems to have apologized only for the failures of lesser clergymen and their flocks. Ironically, some, though certainly not all, of those men and women were less grievously at fault than their superiors in the Vatican. In Italy, at least, large numbers of priests, nuns, monks, and Catholic laypersons risked their lives to save Jews with little guidance from the pope.

There is an alternative explanation. Don Aldo Brunacci has long claimed that in late September 1943, Bishop Nicolini told him that he had received a letter from the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione asking him to help all refugees, including, the letter specified, political dissenters and Jews. Don Brunacci never said that Nicolini read him the letter, but he maintained that he saw it in Nicolini's hand, and that Nicolini made him aware of its contents. He stressed that he, Don Brunacci, was the only person who knew about the letter, for Nicolini insisted that it remain secret. He also claimed that similar letters went to other bishops in Italy, but it is unclear how he knows this.⁵⁶ As seen, no other bishops or their closest assistants have made similar claims.

Nicolini's letter has never been found, nor has any letter like it to any other bishop ever been discovered. Nicolini might have destroyed such a letter, of course, because of its potential to reveal clandestine activities and embarrass the pope in the event of a German search. But this seems unlikely. Single documents are not difficult to hide. Certainly if many letters had gone out, one would have survived. A number of high-ranking archbishops and bishops throughout Europe had asked the pope to do more for Jews and others in danger, and Nicolini and other prelates in Italy knew that there was some public disapproval of the papal silence. A letter of the kind that Don Brunacci believes he saw would almost certainly have been preserved by someone clever enough to understand that it might someday help the pope's reputation. Bishop Nicolini of Assisi was clever. Graziella Viterbi later recalled that during the German occupation he saved the real identification cards of her family and other Jews in a hiding place behind a sacred image in his office.⁵⁷ If he saved identification cards, risking the detection of himself and those he was hiding, why would he not have saved a papal directive?

Another problem with Don Aldo's claim is the date. Late September 1943

Bishop Giuseppe Placido Nicolini, who saw what was happening within his diocese and understood what to do about it. The initiative did not come from Pius XII.

Refugees, mostly non-Jews, began to drift into Assisi after November

