

## E-BULLETIN #70

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

item 132

### the question of Jews in Rome during WW2

#### Jewish Synagogue



The Pallottines' headquarters in Rome is situated near the Tiber Island and Ponte Sisto. And opposite Trastevere. This is known as part of the 'old city' of Rome. It also happens to be only half a kilometer from the Jewish synagogue, and the old ghetto. This fact might have seemed irrelevant to Pallottine history until the early 1940's when the Jewish community was being put to the test in a conflict between Jews and German authorities at the latter end of World War II.

After the dreadful events of Kristallnacht in 1938 the motivation of Hitler towards the Jews became more manifest. He was prepared to use hateful violence towards them. Some of the more well to do Europeans fled to the West, particularly to America.

After the play and film called *'The Deputy'* (written by Rolf Hochhuth), based on the book *'Hitler's Pope'* by John Cornwell which was published in 2000, many came to believe its claim that Pope Pius XII really was guilty of not doing enough to save the Jews in Italy, and particularly

Rome, in 1943-44. Since then the thesis of that book has been demolished, disproved by several others giving answers over the intervening years. After the latest one, called *'Pius XII's Jews'* by Gordon Thomas (2012), surely no one can now seriously question the sincerity and the performance of Pius XII. Having read this, what particularly interests me is the Pallottine contribution in helping the Pope at that time. What I have learned from this book, and others following the footsteps of **Fr Anton Weber sac**, the Pallottine Superior in Rome, is that I have become aware of a neglected Pallottine story. Here it is. But there may be more.

Pius XII had been at Camerlengo when the previous Pope died (Pius XI). He'd prepared the body of the dead Pope for lying-in-state in St Peter's. A quote here is helpful to understand Pacelli's motivation when he became Pope: "On his deathbed Pope Pius XI had spoken of the need for Pacelli to continue his campaign against anti-Semitism. One of the attending doctors would recall that Pacelli was close to tears as the Pope said he must continue to be a defender of the Jewish people."

Another quote: "Pacelli had the satisfaction of knowing that already the visas his bishops had obtained were allowing thousands of Jews to leave Nazi Germany. It would not be until 2001 that the figure of successful visa applicants would be revealed to be two hundred thousand who had left Germany in the weeks following Kristallnacht. None suspected the role Pacelli had played in gaining their freedom." (p 8)

When Italy joined Nazi Germany's war (mid-1940) Mussolini, the 'Il Duce' of Italy, copied wholesale anti-Semitism influenced by Hitler's racial hatred, and introduced racial laws. It was becoming dangerous for Jews to live in Italy, and this remained so when the German Army occupied Italy including Rome. Of interest particularly to me is that the Pallottines in Rome, led by Fr Anton Weber, were in a strategic position to help the Holy Father Pius XII, and his aim of assisting the Jews out of Christian charity and justice. The story of his assistance will become more evident when the Vatican archives are finally opened. But books have been written by journalists in the meantime. Gordon Thomas' book (published October 2012) has as its sub-title '*The Vatican's Secret Plan to Save Jews from the Nazis*'. The dust cover tells us that Thomas "presents a radically different view (meaning from 'Hitler's Pope') of Pius XII by showing us the secret network of approximately fifty priests, nuns, and Roman citizens that he and the Vatican established to help save Jews from the Nazis during the occupation." Fr Weber and the Pallottines figure prominently in the story.

Fr Anton Weber wanted to set up a network initially to bring German Jews to Rome "where they would be safe". He was encouraged by Pope Pius XII to do so just two days before Britain and France declared war on Germany (Sept 1939). Mussolini as an Italian dictator entered that war on Hitler's side in June 1940. But when he and his Fascists failed to follow through with Italy's war, the German army occupied Italy in 1943, and on entering the gates of Rome were warned to regard Vatican City and Church property as neutral and sacred territory.

Weber spoke to Chief Rabbi Zolli, and said that "if ever he needed help he would provide it", and explained he had received 1500 immigration visas from the Brazilian government for Jews to go there, for which Zolli had thanked him, but just then it was not needed. However things got worse.

Here let's quote from Thomas' book:

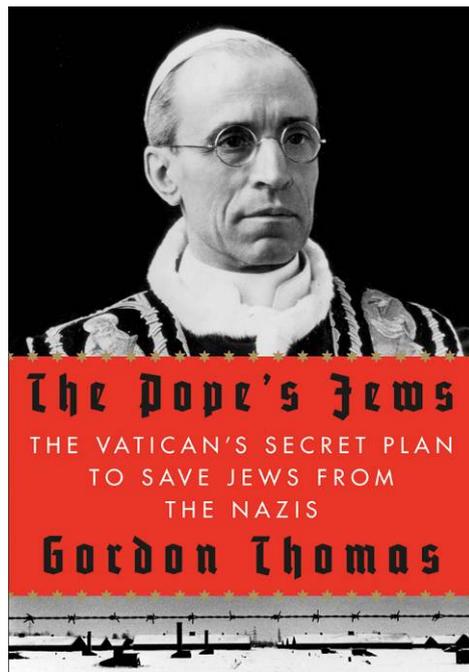
"The Pope turned to Father Weber. He said that during the summer hundreds of Jews had been provided with travel documents and smuggled across the Austrian and Slovenian borders into Italy. But many had been caught by German forces and had been either shot or rounded up for transport to the concentration camps. Survivors were fleeing to Rome." (p 115)

"Settimio Sorani met with Father Anton Weber at the General House of the Pallottine fathers on Pettinari Street. Rome had suddenly become more dangerous. The Germans had looted the Villa Savoy, the deserted palace of King Victor Emmanuel. German crews were working to restore cut telephone lines linking command posts around the city....." (p 191)

"Settimio Sorani was the Chief Executive of Delasem. Delasem was the organization 'to help the emigration of Jews who had arrived in Rome through the Pallottine fathers' network'. His sister Rosina, the ghetto's librarian, kept a diary which "provided a powerful insight into what she called 'Chronicles of Infamy', her day by day account of her life in wartime Rome." (p 292)

"In Rome the number of Jewish families being sheltered had increased since Father Weber had brought those on the Delasem list to convents. Many arrived in the ambulance driven by Monsignor Patrick Carroll-Abbing. The vehicle now bore Vatican license plates to protect it from being stopped by German police." (p 198) He was Irish and an ambulance driver.

"Jewish families – some from the ghetto, others refugees that Father Weber's organization had smuggled into Rome – were also hidden in seminaries. For both the priests and their students the presence of men,



women, and children required adjustment on both sides.” (p 232)

“Father Giancarlo Centioni who, at the age of ninety-seven in 2010, would recall how, as a member of the Pallottine fathers, he had worked alongside Father Anton Weber to help Jews escape from Europe. He revealed that “money and passports were received in the name of and paid for by Pius XII. I had at least twelve German priests working with me.” (p 291)

“In Ireland, Deidre Waldron’s campaign to have Hugh O’Flaherty recognized by Yad Vashem in their list of ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ has continued, for him to join 23,788 from forty-five countries who have received the honorific used by the State of Israel to describe non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews.” (p 291)

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item 133

## there are worse places



Queensland’s Gold Coast, that magnificent stretch of sun-bathed, surf and sand, is often referred to as ‘God’s waiting room’. This is a sad description, based on the fact that so many retirees are regarded as moving there simply to live out their final years.

The word waiting implies that the elderly people exist in some kind of passive mode, with nothing to contribute to one another or society, and with not much to gain either.

Perhaps our Church is also regarded as God’s waiting room, because we create similar expectations for our elderly parishioners. Yet the Christian tradition of waiting is a much more hope-filled dynamic reality as recounted in the Old and New Testaments.

I wonder how our elderly faithful regard their being cared for by “the Church”. What sense of “waiting” are they experiencing?

Psychologists tell us that the last great frontier for human exploration is our inner self. Ericsson, in his work on identity formation, lists eight developmental challenges, the successful achievement of which secures a mature, healthy personal identity. The last two of these challenges are described as the struggle to (a) overcome stagnation and achieve generativity; and (b) to overcome despair and achieve integrity.

These are often represented as the challenges for those in the later years. Both generativity and integrity have about them that same dynamic quality that we find in the best Christian writings on spirituality: from the Desert Mothers and Fathers, through the Mystics, to Merton, Chittister and Rohr of today.

But this gives rise to the question: ‘How many elderly lay people have been introduced to this tradition, and been supported in their exploration of it’? Is it too late to expect that the Church might actually pursue in a serious way, programs that could assist our elderly parishioners to be generative in a Christian sense?

Recently I was involved in a parish’s development of a Pastoral Plan. As part of the data we had collected, were two pieces from a range of demographic statistics provided by the local Council. The first indicated that the fastest-growing age group in the local area (and proportionately therefore in the Parish), was the age

group 80-95 year olds. The second piece of data was on the fastest-growing 'type of dwelling', and this was 'lone dwellers'.

Put together, these two pieces of data came as a shock to the parish! With a rising population of older people living alone, how might the parish respond?

The immediate answer focussed on the social aspects: visiting; taking the elderly to lunch; providing transport. It took quite a number of meetings before the issue of the 'care for their spiritual life' became a matter for pastoral response as well.

We immediately felt out of our depth. What did we know about the needs of elderly people and their spiritual development? What or who might help us? How should we proceed? Answers were few and far between.

The University of the Third Age came into being about 40 years ago in recognition of the fact that older people still have a burning desire to learn new things, and so programs were developed specifically to meet these needs. Since then, the University of The Third Age has morphed into a virtual university of self-help, in which teachers and learners find each other through a learning exchange, and where funding of offerings is negotiated in many flexible ways.

It seems to me that here is an avenue that the Church should explore as one way of offering its rich resources of spiritual development. It would be wonderful if, in this country, our extensive network of spiritual directors could work together to offer a range of programs in the spiritual life, which addressed, specifically, the emerging needs of our older population. As we grow older we need a spirituality that addresses the issue of physical diminishment as counter-balanced by a flourishing of the spirit within. We don't need a stereotypical approach that confines the elderly to a paradigm of total diminishment!

My general impression is that the Church has not yet accepted the challenge of changing its approach to the 'God's waiting room' model of spiritual development in older people.

If the reports from The Australian Productivity Commission are accurate, then this country is facing a huge increase in the proportion of elderly citizens. Some plans are already in place for some provisions to meet this new demographic. However, I do not see any plans among those projected provisions which will address the inner life, the spiritual life of our senior citizens. This is a niche that the Church should fill.

Fr Richard Rohr (*Falling Upwards*, 2012) has recently asked the question: 'How much false self (in the first half of life) are you prepared to shed, in order to find your true self (in the second half of life)?' The answer to that question will require us all, as Church, to shift our focus away from an enervating approach to waiting, towards a more empowering one.

Three stimuli to beginning that shift might be: If not, why not? If not you, then who? And, If not now, then when?



Welcome to another needed change in the Church

**Garry J. Everett**  
**30.05.13**

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Garry Everett is deputy chair of **Mercy Partners** in Queensland and a former Deputy Director of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and previous chair of the Brisbane Archdiocesan Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace [**Mercy Partners** is a recently established group of ministries inspired by the charisma of the Sisters of Mercy, Queensland]

**you commented...**

**on #69**

Having read the write up about the Filipino workers abroad I could not but bring to your attention the many Filipino workers in Taiwan. They are really committed in their faith and express it courageously among the many Buddhists in Taiwan. However recently they are undergoing difficult times due to diplomatic problems between the two countries. Please keep them in your prayers. Thank you.

**LP 26.05.13**

plenty of food for thought, as ever

**JM 27.05.13**