This helpful book is a highly personal and firsthand account of the exceptional courage of a large number of priests, nuns, and ordinary Italians who risked their lives to rescue Jewish refugees and Allied prisoners of war from Nazi persecution toward the end of World War II. British Major William Simpson found shelter with Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty, a notary in the Holy Office in the Vatican, and helped organize funding and support for Allied prisoners and Jewish refugees in German-occupied Rome through 1944. An estimated 40,000 prisoners of war, along with an almost equal number of Jews in hiding, were successfully rescued. O'Flaherty and his collaborators understood themselves to be following Pius XII's frequent injunctions to do everything possible to rescue and protect displaced war refugees.


Simpson estimates that O'Flaherty's network of rescuers, "a score of younger priests, and almost every close friend he had in Rome," was directly responsible for rescuing some 2,000 Allied soldiers and an equal number of Jewish refugees in and around Rome (pp. 57-58, and 101-102). The most difficult parts of the highly risky project were securing food on the black market for those in hiding, the effective forging of an array of documents and identity cards to protect them, and financing the rescue effort (pp. 111-112). Other major pressures included the need to maintain Vatican neutrality so as not to jeopardize this and similar rescue efforts, and dealing simultaneously with the Marxist and Stalinist threat to the very existence of the Church especially in Eastern Europe, but also in Italy itself, a threat every bit as serious as Hitler's.

For Gestapo Commandant Herbert Kappler, O'Flaherty was the "most wanted man in all of Rome" throughout the duration of the German occupation. After the war, Kappler was among those tried by the Allies for war crimes. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and incarcerated in Gaeta prison between Rome and Naples. O'Flaherty regularly visited him in prison and baptized him in March of 1959. Reflecting on O'Flaherty's unique courage and compassion and that of his collaborators, Simpson quotes the British Ambassador to the Holy See, Sir D'Arcy Osborne:
Italians displayed boundless generosity and kindness over a long and trying period. Not only did they refuse the financial rewards for the denunciation of British prisoners of war which the Germans offered, and which would have been a fortune to them, but they also showed magnificent abnegation and courage in sharing their few clothes and scanty food and, above all in risking their lives and the lives of their families and friends in disregarding the increasingly severe German injunctions against harbouring or helping British prisoners ... We owe a debt in this respect that should not be forgotten and cannot be repaid. (p.221)

In fact, Simpson's account of events is most profitably read against the background of information provided by Osborne's diary and diplomatic correspondence. These are reviewed in Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican in World War II* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1986). Osborne makes it clear that Fascist and German criticism of the Pope was severe. Typically, Roberto Farinacci would write: "For years Pius XII has fully espoused the Jewish cause, . . . The head of the Church is the most influential defender of the Interests of the Jewish people." (P. 307) Osborne's witness clearly coheres with Simpson's admiration and respect for O'Flaherty, Pius XII, and their collaborators. "Papal charity aspires to be universal and supranational. . . . They reckon in centuries and plan for eternity. . . . Pius XII was the most warmly humane, kind, generous, sympathetic, and saintly character that it has been my privilege to meet in the course of a long life. . . . He and his collaborators have been grossly misjudged by Herr Hochhuth’s play and similar critiques."

Osborne also gives a helpful review of how Pius XII actively helped advance a German military conspiracy to overthrow Hitler in the winter of 1939, concluding, "Never in all history had a Pope engaged so delicately in a conspiracy to overthrow a tyrant by force" (pp. 86-100). Additional helpful sources on Pius XII's role in the effort of Germans to arrest and put Hitler on trial include: Harold Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), and and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The Canaris Conspiracy* (New York: David McKay Company, 1969). In the end, Simpson's book is a very helpful addition to the numerous eyewitness accounts already available of Vatican efforts to assist Jews and other displaced peoples, including both Allied and German prisoners of war. It should be part of every serious library on the subject.

-Rev. Edward Krause, Ph.D.
*Gannon University*