

DON ALDO WAS RIGHT!

by André R. Cirino OFM

Just barely coming to grips with Don Aldo's death a little over two weeks ago, I was reading *The Times* here in England this morning and I could feel Don Aldo tapping me on the shoulder to read the article on page 27 entitled: "The KGB and the Plot to Taint the 'Nazi Pope'" (18/02/07), which opened:

The KGB hatched a plot to smear the late Pope Pius XII as an anti-semitic Hitler supporter and fostered a controversial play that tarnished the pontiff, according to the highest-ranking Soviet bloc intelligence officer to have defected to the West, former Lieutenant-General Ion Mihai Pacepa. . .who broke a silence of nearly half a century to reveal he was involved in the operation. . .a Kremlin scheme launched in 1960 to portray Pius XII "as a cold-hearted Nazi sympathizer (www.timesonline.co.uk).

Whenever I invited Don Aldo during the past twenty years to address our pilgrims about Assisi and its involvement concealing many Jewish people during World War II, he would inevitably begin by recounting an incident that occurred at a clergy gathering in Assisi during the war.

Bishop Giuseppe Niccolini called him out of the meeting to show him a letter that he received from the Vatican from Bishop Montini (the future Paul VI) urging the bishop to offer lodging to all refugees, especially Jewish refugees. Because of that letter Don Aldo always maintained that Pius XII had helped the Jewish people find refuge in many a Catholic institution, especially then and there in Assisi.

Don Aldo always said that it was not safe to keep the letter the Bishop read to him, and he never saw it again. Moreover, Don Aldo claimed that Pius XII worked quietly especially after the fierce reaction of the Nazi government to an open letter from the Dutch bishops which resulted in the seizure of thousands, mostly Jews, to be sent off to concentration camps. Don Aldo believed that Pius XII chose to avoid a larger arrest and imprisonment by acting quietly, behind the scenes. And this morning the *The Times* proved him right!