

= Mortara case =

The Mortara case ( Italian : caso Mortara ) was an Italian cause célèbre that captured the attention of much of Europe and the United States in the 1850s and 1860s . It concerned the Papal States ' seizure from a Jewish family in Bologna of one of their children , six @-@ year @-@ old Edgardo Mortara , on the basis of a former servant 's testimony that she had administered emergency baptism to the boy when he fell sick as an infant . Mortara grew up as a Catholic under the protection of Pope Pius IX ? who refused his parents ' desperate pleas for his return ? and eventually became a priest . The domestic and international outrage against the pontifical state 's actions may have contributed to its downfall amid the unification of Italy .

In late 1857 , Bologna 's inquisitor Father Pier Feletti heard that Anna Morisi , who had worked in the Mortara house for six years , had secretly baptised Edgardo when she had thought he was about to die as a baby . The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition held that this made the child irrevocably a Catholic and , because the Papal States forbade the raising of Christians by members of other faiths , ordered that he be taken from his family and brought up by the Church . Police came to the Mortara home late on 23 June 1858 and removed Edgardo the following evening .

After the child 's father was allowed to visit him during August and September , two starkly different narratives emerged ? one told of a boy who wanted to return to his family and the faith of his ancestors , while the other described a child who had learned the catechism perfectly and wanted his parents to become Christians as well . International protests mounted , but the Pope would not be moved . After pontifical rule in Bologna ended in 1859 , Father Feletti was prosecuted for his role in Mortara 's seizure , but was acquitted when the court decided he had simply followed orders . With the Pope as a substitute father , Mortara trained for the priesthood in Rome until the Kingdom of Italy captured the city in 1870 , ending the Papal States . Leaving the country , he was ordained in France three years later at the age of 21 . Father Mortara spent most of his life outside Italy and died in Belgium in 1940 , aged 88 .

For many , the Vatican 's actions encapsulated all that was wrong with the Papal States and exposed pontifical rule as an anachronism . Several historians highlight the affair as one of the most significant events of Pius IX 's papacy , and juxtapose his handling of it in 1858 with the loss of most of his territory a year later . The case notably altered the policy of the French Emperor Napoleon III , who shifted from opposing the movement for Italian unification to actively supporting it . The traditional Italian historiography of unification does not give much prominence to the Mortara case , which by the late 20th century was remembered mostly by Jewish scholars , but a 1997 study by the American historian David Kertzer has marked the start of a wider re @-@ examination .

= = Background = =

= = = Political context = = =

For more than a millennium , starting around 754 , the Papal States were territories in Italy under the direct sovereign rule of the Pope . The Catholic Church 's control over Rome and a neighbouring swathe of central Italy was generally seen as a manifestation of the Pope 's secular " temporal " power , as opposed to his ecclesiastical primacy . After the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 , the other main Italian states were the Kingdom of Sardinia ? governed from Piedmont on the mainland by King Victor Emmanuel II ? the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the south , and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the west . The French occupation during the 1790s had led the Pope 's popularity and spiritual authority to greatly increase , but had also severely damaged the geopolitical credibility of the Papal States . The historian David Kertzer suggests that by the 1850s " what had once appeared so solid ? a product of the divine order of things ? now seemed terribly fragile " .

Pope Pius IX , elected in 1846 , was initially widely seen as a great reformer and moderniser who might throw his weight behind the growing movement for Italian unification ? referred to in Italian as

the Risorgimento ( meaning " Resurgence " ) . When the revolutions of 1848 broke out , however , he refused to support a pan @-@ Italian campaign against the Austrian Empire , which controlled Lombardy ? Venetia in the north @-@ east . This prompted a popular uprising in the Papal States , Pope Pius 's flight to the Two Sicilies , and the proclamation in 1849 of the short @-@ lived Roman Republic , which was crushed by Austrian and French intervention in support of the Pope . Rome was thereafter guarded by French troops while Austrians garrisoned the rest of the Papal States , much to the resentment of most of the inhabitants . Pope Pius shared the traditional pontifical view that the Papal States were essential to his independence as head of the Catholic Church . He regained some of his popularity during the 1850s , but the drive for Italian unification spearheaded by the Kingdom of Sardinia continued to unsettle him .

The Jews of the Papal States , numbering 15 @,@ 000 or so in 1858 , were grateful to Pope Pius IX because he had ended the long @-@ standing legal obligation for them to attend sermons in church four times a year , based on that week 's Torah portion and aimed at their conversion to Christianity . He had also torn down the gates of the Roman Ghetto despite the objections of many Christians . However , Jews remained under many restrictions and the vast majority still lived in the ghetto .

= = = Mortara and Morisi = = =

Edgardo Levi Mortara , the sixth of eight children born to Salomone " Momolo " Mortara , a Jewish merchant , and his wife Marianna ( née Padovani ) , was born on 27 August 1851 in Bologna , one of the Papal Legations in the pontifical state 's far north . The family had moved in 1850 from the Duchy of Modena , just west of Bologna . Bologna 's Jewish population of about 900 had been expelled in 1593 by Pope Clement VIII . Some Jews , mostly merchants like Edgardo 's father , had started to settle in Bologna again during the 1790s , and by 1858 there was a Jewish community of about 200 in the city . The Jews of Bologna practised Judaism discreetly , with neither a rabbi nor a synagogue . The Papal States officially forbade them to have Christian servants , but observant Jewish families perceived gentile maids as essential because they were not covered by Jewish laws , and thus provided a way for Jews to have household tasks carried out while still observing their Sabbath . In practice Church authorities turned a blind eye , and almost every Jewish family in Bologna employed at least one Catholic woman .

A few months after Edgardo 's birth , the Mortara family engaged a new servant : Anna " Nina " Morisi , an 18 @-@ year @-@ old Catholic from the nearby village of San Giovanni in Persiceto . Like all her family and friends , Morisi was illiterate . She had come to the city , following her three sisters , to work and save money towards a dowry , so she could eventually marry . In early 1855 , Morisi became pregnant , as was not uncommon for unmarried servants in Bologna at this time . Many employers would simply sack girls in such situations , but the Mortaras did not ; they paid for Morisi to spend the last four months of her pregnancy at a midwife 's home and deliver the child , then had her return to work with them . To protect Morisi and themselves from embarrassment , they told neighbours that their maid was sick and recuperating at home . Morisi gave her newborn baby to an orphanage , as the Papal States required unwed mothers to do , then returned to work with the Mortaras . She remained there until she was hired by another Bologna family in 1857 ; soon after that she married and moved back to San Giovanni in Persiceto .

= = Removal = =

= = = Instigation = = =

In October 1857 the inquisitor of Bologna , a Dominican friar called Father Pier Gaetano Feletti , learned of rumours to the effect that a secret baptism had been administered to one of the city 's Jewish children by a Catholic servant . If true , this would make the child a Catholic in the eyes of the Church ? a fact with secular as well as spiritual ramifications since the Church stance was that

children they considered to be Christians could not be raised by non @-@ Christians , and should be taken from their parents in such circumstances . Cases like this were not uncommon in 19th @-@ century Italy , and often revolved around the baptism of a Jewish child by a Christian servant . The official Church position was that Catholics should not baptise Jewish children without the parents ' consent , except if a child was on the brink of death ? in these cases the Church considered the customary deferment to parental authority to be outweighed by the importance of allowing the child 's soul to be saved and go to Heaven , and permitted baptism without the parents ' assent . Many Jewish families feared clandestine baptisms by their Christian maids ; to counter this perceived threat some households required Christians leaving their employment to sign notarised statements confirming that they had never baptised any of the children .

The servant identified in the rumours was Anna Morisi . After receiving written permission to investigate from the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition ( also called the Holy Office ) , the body of cardinals responsible for overseeing and defending Catholic doctrine , Feletti interrogated her at the Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna . Morisi averred that while she was employed by the Mortaras , their infant son Edgardo had fallen gravely sick while in her care , leading her to fear he might die . She said that she had performed an emergency baptism herself ? sprinkling some water on the boy 's head and saying : " I baptise you in the Name of the Father , and of the Son , and of the Holy Ghost " ? but had never revealed this to the child 's family . Edgardo had since recovered . Feletti had Morisi swear to keep the story quiet and sent a transcript of the meeting to Rome , requesting permission to remove the now six @-@ year @-@ old Edgardo from his family .

It is not known by historians whether Pope Pius IX was involved in any of the early Holy Office discussions over Mortara , or was otherwise aware of Feletti 's initial investigation . He was its official head but he only occasionally attended its meetings , and was not likely to be consulted about what the cardinals saw as routine matters . For the Holy Office , situations such as that reported by Feletti presented a profound quandary ? on the one hand the Church officially disapproved of forced conversions , but on the other it held that the baptismal sacrament was sacrosanct and that if it had been properly administered , the recipient was thereafter a member of the Christian communion . According to the laws of the Papal States it was illegal to take a child from non @-@ Christian parents for baptism , but if such a child was indeed baptised the Church was held to bear responsibility to provide a Christian education . The cardinals considered Morisi 's account and ultimately accepted it as bearing " all the earmarks of the truth without leaving the least doubt about the reality and the validity of the baptism she performed " . Feletti was instructed to arrange Edgardo 's removal and transport to the House of Catechumens in Rome , where instruction was given to those newly converted or in the process of converting to Catholicism .

= = = Seizure = = =

A detail of papal carabinieri ( military police ) led by Marshal Pietro Lucidi and Brigadier Giuseppe Agostini arrived at the Mortara apartment in Bologna soon after sunset on 23 June 1858 . After asking a few questions about the family , Lucidi announced : " Signor Mortara , I am sorry to inform you that you are the victim of a betrayal " , and explained that they were under orders from Father Feletti to take Edgardo as he had been baptised . Marianna screamed hysterically , ran to Edgardo 's bed and shrieked that they would have to kill her before taking him . Lucidi said repeatedly that he was only following Feletti 's orders . He reported afterwards that he " would have a thousand times preferred to be exposed to much more serious dangers in performing my duties than to have to witness such a painful scene . "

Lucidi offered to let Edgardo 's father accompany them to the inquisitor to discuss the matter with him ? Momolo refused ? then allowed Momolo to send his eldest son Riccardo to summon relatives and neighbours . Marianna 's uncle Angelo Padovani , a prominent member of Bologna 's Jewish community , concluded that their only hope was to appeal to Feletti . The inquisitor received Padovani and Marianna 's brother @-@ in @-@ law Angelo Moscato at San Domenico soon after 23 : 00 . Feletti said that he , like Lucidi , was merely following orders . He declined to reveal why it

was thought that Edgardo had been baptised , saying that this was confidential . When the men begged him to at least give the family one last day with Edgardo , the inquisitor acquiesced on the condition that no attempt was made to spirit the child away . He gave Padovani a note to this effect to pass on to the marshal . Lucidi left as ordered , leaving two men to stay in the Mortaras ' bedroom and watch over Edgardo .

The Mortaras spent the morning of 24 June attempting to have Feletti 's order overruled by either the city 's cardinal legate , Giuseppe Milesi Pironi Ferretti , or the Archbishop of Bologna , Michele Viale @-@ Prelà , but they found that neither was in the city . Around noon , the Mortaras decided to take steps to make the separation as painless as possible . Edgardo 's siblings were taken to visit relatives while Marianna reluctantly agreed to spend the evening with the wife of Giuseppe Vitta , a Jewish family friend . Around 17 : 00 Momolo visited San Domenico to make one last plea to Feletti . The inquisitor repeated all he had said to Padovani and Moscato the previous night and told Momolo not to worry as Edgardo would be well cared for , under the protection of the Pope himself . He warned that it would benefit no @-@ one to make a scene when the carabinieri returned that evening .

Momolo came home to find the apartment empty apart from Vitta , Marianna 's brother ( also called Angelo Padovani ) , the two policemen and Edgardo himself . At about 20 : 00 the carabinieri arrived , in two carriages ? one for Lucidi and his men , and another in which Agostini would drive Edgardo . Lucidi entered the apartment and took Edgardo from his father 's arms , prompting the two policemen who had guarded him to shed tears . Momolo followed the police down the stairs to the street , then fainted . Edgardo was passed to Agostini and driven away .

= = Appeal = =

= = = Initial appeal ; Morisi confronted = = =

With no way of knowing where the boy had been taken ? Momolo found out only in early July ? the Mortaras , supported by the Jewish communities in Bologna , Rome and elsewhere in Italy , initially focused on drafting appeals and trying to rally support from Jews abroad . The greatly expanded public voice wielded by Jews in western European countries following recent moves towards freedom of the press , coupled with Jewish political emancipation in the Kingdom of Sardinia , Britain , France and the United States , caused Mortara 's removal to gain press attention far beyond anything previously given to such incidents . The papal government was initially disposed to simply ignore Momolo 's appeals , but reconsidered after newspapers began reporting on the case ; the pontifical state 's many detractors seized on the episode as an example of papal tyranny .

Anxious to protect the Papal States ' precarious diplomatic position , the Cardinal Secretary of State Giacomo Antonelli liaised with Rome 's Jewish community to arrange a meeting with Momolo Mortara , and received him politely in early August 1858 . Antonelli promised that the matter would be referred to the Pope and granted Momolo 's request that he be allowed to visit Edgardo regularly in the House of Catechumens . Kertzer cites Antonelli 's concession of repeated visits , as opposed to the usual single meeting , as the first sign that the Mortara case would take on a special significance .

The attempts of the Mortaras and their allies to identify who was supposed to have baptised Edgardo quickly bore fruit . After their present servant Anna Facchini adamantly denied any involvement , they considered former employees and soon earmarked Morisi as a possible candidate . In late July 1858 the Mortara home was visited by Ginerva Scagliarini , a friend of Morisi 's who had once worked for Marianna 's brother @-@ in @-@ law Cesare De Angelis . Marianna 's brother Angelo Padovani tested Scagliarini by saying falsely that he had heard it was Morisi who had baptised Edgardo . The ruse worked ? Scagliarini said that she had been told the same thing by Morisi 's sister Monica .

The younger Angelo Padovani went with De Angelis to confront Morisi in San Giovanni in Persiceto . Padovani recalled finding her in tears . After the visitors assured her that they meant no harm ,

Morisi recounted what she had told Feletti . She said that a grocer named Cesare Lepori had suggested the baptism when she mentioned Edgardo 's sickness , and shown her how to perform it . She had not mentioned it to anyone , she went on , until soon after Edgardo 's brother Aristide died at the age of one in 1857 ? when a neighbour 's servant called Regina proposed that Morisi should have baptised Aristide , that she had done so to Edgardo " slipped out of my mouth " . According to Padovani , Morisi described crying during her interrogation by the inquisitor , and expressed guilt over Edgardo 's removal : " figuring that it was all my fault , I was very unhappy , and still am . " Morisi agreed to have this formally recorded , but was gone when Padovani and De Angelis returned after three hours with a notary and two witnesses . After searching for her in vain , they went back to Bologna with only their hearsay account of her story , which Padovani thought genuine : " Her words , and her demeanour , and her tears before she could launch into her story , persuaded me that what she told me was all true . "

= = = Two narratives = = =

Edgardo was visited by his father several times under the supervision of the rector of the Catechumens , Enrico Sarra , from mid @-@ August to mid @-@ September 1858 . The wildly divergent accounts of what happened during these encounters grew into two rival narratives of the entire case . Momolo 's version of events , favoured by the Jewish community and other backers , was that a family had been destroyed by the government 's religious fanaticism , that helpless Edgardo had spent the journey to Rome crying for his parents , and that the boy wanted nothing more than to return home . The narrative favoured by the Church and its supporters , and propagated in the Catholic press throughout Europe , was one of divinely ordained , soul @-@ stirring redemption , and a child endowed with spiritual strength far beyond his years ? the neophyte Edgardo had faced a life of error followed by eternal damnation but now stood to share in Christian salvation , and was distraught that his parents would not convert with him .

The central theme in almost all renditions of the narrative favouring the Mortara family was that of Marianna Mortara 's health . From July 1858 onwards it was reported across Europe that as a result of her grief , Edgardo 's mother had practically if not actually gone insane , and might even die . The powerful image of the heartbroken mother was stressed heavily in the family 's appeals both to the public and to Edgardo himself . Momolo and the secretary of Rome 's Jewish community , Sabatino Scazzocchio , told Edgardo that his mother 's life was at risk if he did not come back soon . When Marianna wrote to her son in August , Scazzocchio refused to deliver the letter on the grounds that , being relatively calm and reassuring in tone , it might work against the impression they were trying to give him that she was no longer herself and that only his return could save her . One correspondent reported in January 1859 : " The father shows a great deal of courage , but the mother is having a hard time carrying on . ... If the Holy Father had seen this woman as I saw her , he would not have the courage to keep her son another moment . "

There were many different versions of the Catholic story , but all followed the same basic structure . All had Edgardo quickly and fervently embracing Christianity and trying to learn as much as possible about it . Most described a dramatic scene of Edgardo wondering at a painting of the Virgin Mary in sorrow , either in Rome or during the journey from Bologna . Agostini , the policeman who had escorted him to Rome , reported that the boy had at first stubbornly refused to enter a church with him for mass , but displayed an apparently miraculous transformation when he did . A common theme was that Edgardo had become a kind of prodigy ? according to an eyewitness account published in the Catholic *L 'armonia della religione colla civiltà* , he had learned the catechism perfectly within a few days , " blesse [ d ] the servant who baptised him , " and declared that he wanted to convert all Jews to Christianity . The most influential pro @-@ Church article on Mortara was an account published in the Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* in November 1858 , and subsequently reprinted or quoted in Catholic papers across Europe . This story had the child begging the rector of the Catechumens not to send him back but to let him grow up in a Christian home , and initiated what became a central plank of the pro @-@ Church narrative ? that Edgardo had a new family , namely the Catholic Church itself . The article quoted Edgardo as saying : " I am

baptised ; I am baptised and my father is the Pope . "

According to Kertzer , the proponents of this pro @-@ Church narrative did not seem to realise that to many these accounts sounded " too good to be true " and " absurd . " Kertzer comments : " If Edgardo in fact told his father that he did not want to return with him , that he now regarded the Pope as his true father and wanted to devote his life to converting the Jews , this message seems not to have registered with Momolo . " Liberals , Protestants and Jews across the continent ridiculed the Catholic press reports . A booklet published in Brussels in 1859 outlined the two contrasting narratives , then concluded : " Between the miracle of a six @-@ year @-@ old apostle who wants to convert the Jews and the cry of a child who keeps asking for his mother and his little sisters , we don 't hesitate for a moment . " Mortara 's parents furiously denounced the Catholic accounts as lies , but some of their supporters were less certain about where Edgardo 's loyalties now lay . These included Scazzocchio , who had attended some of the disputed meetings at the Catechumens .

= = = Lepori 's denial ; Morisi discredited = = =

Momolo returned to Bologna in late September 1858 after his two brothers @-@ in @-@ law wrote to him that if he stayed in Rome any longer the family might be ruined . He left Scazzocchio to represent the family 's cause in Rome . Momolo shifted his priority to attempting to undermine Morisi 's credibility , either by disproving aspects of her story or by showing her to be untrustworthy . He also resolved to confront Cesare Lepori , the grocer who Morisi said had both suggested the baptism and shown her how to perform it . Based on Morisi 's story , Lepori had already been identified by many observers as being ultimately to blame for the affair . When Momolo visited his shop in early October , Lepori vehemently denied that he had ever spoken to Morisi about Edgardo or any baptism , and said that he was prepared to testify to this effect before any legal authority . He claimed that he did not himself know how to administer baptism , so had such a conversation occurred it could hardly have gone as Morisi described .

Carlo Maggi , a Catholic acquaintance of Momolo 's who was also a retired judge , sent a report of Lepori 's refutation to Scazzocchio , who asked Antonelli to pass it on to the Pope . A cover letter attached to Maggi 's statement described it as proof that Morisi 's story was false . Scazzocchio also forwarded an affidavit from the Mortara family doctor , Pasquale Saragoni , who acknowledged that Edgardo had fallen sick when he was about a year old , but stated that he had never been in danger of dying , and that in any case Morisi had been herself bedridden at the time she was supposed to have baptised the boy . A further report sent from Bologna in October 1858 , comprising the statements of eight women and one man , all Catholics , corroborated the doctor 's claims about the sicknesses of Edgardo and Morisi respectively , and alleged that the former maid was given to theft and sexual impropriety . Four women , including the servant Anna Facchini and the woman who had employed Morisi after she left the Mortaras , Elena Pignatti , claimed that Morisi had regularly flirted with Austrian officers and invited them into her employers ' homes for sex .

= = = Alatri , then back to Rome = = =

Momolo set out for Rome again on 11 October 1858 , this time bringing Marianna with him in the hope that her presence might make a stronger impression on the Church and Edgardo . Anxious about the possible consequences of a dramatic reunification between mother and son , the rector Enrico Sarra took Edgardo from Rome to Alatri , his own home town about 100 kilometres ( 62 mi ) away . The Mortaras tracked them to a church in Alatri , where from the door Momolo saw a priest saying mass ? and Edgardo by his side assisting him . Momolo waited outside , and afterwards persuaded the rector to let him see his son . Before this meeting could take place , the Mortaras were arrested on the orders of the Mayor of Alatri , himself following a request from the town 's bishop , and despatched back to Rome . Antonelli was not impressed , thinking this an undignified line of action that would give obvious ammunition to the Church 's detractors , and ordered Sarra to bring Edgardo back to the capital to meet his parents .

Edgardo returned to the Catechumens on 22 October , and was visited by his parents often over

the next month . As with Momolo 's first round of visits , two different versions emerged of what happened . According to Edgardo 's parents , the boy was obviously intimidated by the clergymen around him and threw himself into his mother 's arms when he first saw her . Marianna later said : " He had lost weight and had turned pale ; his eyes were filled with terror ... I told him that he was born a Jew like us and like us he must always remain one , and he replied : ' Si , mia cara mamma , I will never forget to say the Shema every day . ' " One report in the Jewish press described the priests telling Edgardo 's parents that God had chosen their son to be " the apostle of Christianity to his family , dedicated to converting his parents and his siblings " , and that they could have him back if they also became Christians . The clerics and nuns then knelt and prayed for the conversion of the Mortara household , prompting Edgardo 's parents to leave in terror .

The pro @-@ Church accounts , by contrast , described a boy very much resolved to stay where he was , and horrified by his mother 's exhortations to return to the Judaism of his ancestors . In this narrative , the main reason for the Mortaras ' grief was not that their son had been taken , but that he now stood to grow up in the Christian faith . According to *La Civiltà Cattolica* , Marianna flew into a rage on seeing a medallion hanging from Edgardo 's neck bearing the image of the Virgin Mary , and ripped it off ; one article went so far as to claim the Jewish mother had done this with the words : " I 'd rather see you dead than a Christian ! " Some of the Church 's critics had charged that by keeping Edgardo , it was violating the commandment that a child should honour his father and mother ? *La Civiltà Cattolica* countered that Edgardo still loved his family despite their religious differences and indeed , after being taught by the priests to read and write , had chosen to write his first letter to his mother , signing it " your most affectionate little son " . Louis Veuillot , the ultramontane editor of the *L 'Univers* newspaper and one of the Pope 's staunchest defenders , reported after meeting Edgardo in Rome that the boy had told him " that he loves his father and his mother , and that he will go to live with them when he is older ... so that he can speak to them of Saint Peter , of God , and of the most Holy Mary . "

= = Outrage = =

= = = International scandal ; political machinations = = =

Having made no progress in Rome , Momolo and Marianna Mortara returned to Bologna in early December 1858 , and soon afterwards moved to Turin , in Piedmont . The case ? an anti @-@ Catholic " publicist 's dream " , to quote Kertzer ? had by now become a massive controversy in both Europe and the United States , with voices across the social spectrum clamouring for the Pope to return Edgardo to his parents . Mortara became a cause célèbre not only for Jews but for Protestant Christians as well , particularly in the United States , where anti @-@ Catholic sentiment abounded ? The *New York Times* published more than 20 articles on the case in December 1858 alone . In Britain , *The Spectator* presented the Mortara case as evidence that the Papal States had " the worst government in the world ? the most insolvent and the most arrogant , the cruelest and the meanest " . The Catholic press both in Italy and abroad steadfastly defended the Pope 's actions . The pro @-@ Church articles often took on an overtly anti @-@ Semitic character , charging for example that if coverage in Britain , France or Germany was critical this was hardly a surprise " since currently the newspapers of Europe are in good part in the hands of the Jews " . Scazzocchio suggested that the press storm attacking the Church was actually counter @-@ productive for the Mortara family 's cause , as it angered the Pope and thereby steeled his resolve not to compromise .

Regardless of whether Pope Pius IX had been personally involved in the decision to remove Mortara from his parents ? whether he had been or not was debated extensively in the press ? what is certain is that he was greatly surprised by the international furore that erupted over the matter , and promptly adopted the position that to return the baptised child to his non @-@ Christian family would be totally incompatible with Church doctrine . As foreign governments and the various branches of the Rothschild family one by one condemned his actions , Pius IX stood firm on what he

saw as a matter of principle . Those angered included Emperor Napoleon III of France , who found the situation particularly vexing as the pontifical government owed its very existence to the French garrison in Rome . Napoleon III had indifferently supported the Pope 's temporal rule because it enjoyed widespread support among French Catholics ; the scandal over Mortara weakened this considerably and , according to the historian Roger Aubert , provided the final straw that changed French policy . In February 1859 Napoleon III concluded a secret pact with the Kingdom of Sardinia pledging French military support for a campaign to drive the Austrians out and unify Italy ? most of the pontifical domain would be absorbed along with the Two Sicilies and other minor states .

It was then an annual custom for the Pope to receive a delegation from Rome 's Jewish community shortly after the New Year . The meeting on 2 February 1859 quickly descended into a heated argument , with Pope Pius berating the Jewish visitors for " stirring up a storm all over Europe about this Mortara case " . When the delegation denied that the Jews of Rome had had any hand in the anti @-@ clerical articles , the Pope dismissed Scazzocchio as inexperienced and foolish , then shouted : " The newspapers can write all they want . I couldn 't care less what the world thinks ! " The Pope then calmed down somewhat : " So strong is the pity I have for you , that I pardon you , indeed , I must pardon you . " One of the delegates proposed that the Church should not give so much credence to Morisi 's testimony , given her spurious morals ? the Pope countered that regardless of her character , so far as he could see the servant had no reason to invent such a story , and in any case Momolo Mortara should not have employed a Catholic in the first place .

Pope Pius IX 's determination to keep Edgardo developed into a strong paternal attachment . According to Edgardo 's memoirs , the pontiff regularly spent time with him and played with him ; the Pope would amuse the child by hiding him under his cassock and calling out : " Where 's the boy ? " At one of their meetings , Pope Pius told Edgardo : " My son , you have cost me dearly , and I have suffered a great deal because of you . " He then said to others present : " Both the powerful and the powerless tried to steal this boy from me , and accused me of being barbarous and pitiless . They cried for his parents , but they failed to recognise that I , too , am his father . "

= = = Montefiore 's petition ; fall of Bologna = = =

The Italian Jewish appeals brought the attention of Sir Moses Montefiore , the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews , whose willingness to travel great distances to help his co @-@ religionists ? as he had over the Damascus blood libel of 1840 , for example ? was already well known . From August to December 1858 he headed a special British committee on Mortara that relayed reports from Piedmont to British newspapers and Catholic clergymen , and happily noted the support expressed by British Protestants , particularly the Evangelical Alliance led by Sir Culling Eardley . After unsuccessfully attempting to have the British government lodge an official protest with the Vatican , Montefiore resolved to personally travel to Rome to present a petition to the Pope calling for Edgardo to be returned to his parents . He arrived in Rome on 5 April 1859 .

Montefiore failed to gain an audience with the Pope , and was received by Cardinal Antonelli only on 28 April . Montefiore gave him the Board of Deputies ' petition to pass on to the Pope , and said that he would wait in the city a week for the pontiff 's reply . Two days later , news reached Rome that fighting had broken out between Austrian and Piedmontese troops in the north ? the War of 1859 had begun . While most foreign dignitaries fled Rome as quickly as possible , Montefiore waited in vain for the Pope 's response ; he finally left on 10 May . On his return to Britain more than 2 @,@ 000 leading citizens ? including 79 mayors and provosts , 27 peers , 22 Anglican bishops and archbishops and 36 Members of Parliament ? signed a protest calling the Pope 's conduct a " dishonour to Christianity " , " repulsive to the instincts of humanity " . Meanwhile , the Church quietly had Edgardo confirmed as a Catholic in a private chapel on 13 May 1859 . Edgardo was by this time no longer in the Catechumens but at San Pietro in Vincoli , a basilica elsewhere in Rome where Pope Pius had personally decided the boy would be educated .

As the war turned against the Austrians , the garrison in Bologna left early in the morning on 12 June 1859 . By the end of the same day the papal colours flying in the squares had been replaced with the Italian green , white and red , the cardinal legate had left the city , and a group styling itself



Bologna 's provisional government had proclaimed its desire to join the Kingdom of Sardinia . Bologna was promptly incorporated as part of the province of Romagna . The Archbishop Michele Viale @-@ Prelà attempted to persuade the citizenry not to co @-@ operate with the new civil authorities , but had little success . One of the new order 's first official acts was to introduce freedom of religion and make all citizens equal before the law . In November 1859 the governor Luigi Carlo Farini issued a proclamation abolishing the inquisition .

= = Retribution = =

= = = Feletti arrested = = =

Momolo Mortara spent late 1859 and January 1860 in Paris and London , trying to rally support . While he was away his father Simon , who lived about 30 kilometres ( 19 mi ) west of Bologna in Reggio Emilia , successfully asked the new authorities in Romagna to launch an inquiry into the Mortara case . On 31 December 1859 Farini ordered his justice minister to pursue the " authors of the kidnapping " . Filippo Curletti , the new director @-@ general of police for Romagna , was put in charge of the investigation . After two officers identified the erstwhile inquisitor Feletti as having given the order to take Edgardo , Curletti and a detachment of police went to San Domenico and arrested him at about 02 : 30 on 2 January 1860 .

The police inspectors questioned Feletti , but each time they asked about anything to do with Mortara or his removal the monk said that a sacred oath precluded his discussing affairs of the Holy Office . When Curletti ordered him to hand over all files relating to the Mortara case , Feletti said that they had been burned ? when asked when or how , he repeated that on Holy Office matters he could say nothing . Pressed further , Feletti said : " As far as the activities that I carried out as Inquisitor of the Holy Office of Bologna , I am obliged to explain myself to one forum only , to the Supreme Sacred Congregation in Rome , whose Prefect is His Holiness Pope Pius IX , and to no @-@ one else . " After the police searched the convent for documents relating to the Mortara case ? they found nothing ? the inquisitor was escorted to prison . The news that Feletti had been arrested caused the press storm surrounding Mortara , which had died down somewhat , to flare up again across Europe .

= = = Investigation = = =

Father Feletti 's trial was the first major criminal case in Bologna under the new authorities . The magistrate Francesco Carboni announced on 18 January 1860 that Feletti and Lieutenant @-@ Colonel Luigi De Dominicis would be prosecuted , but not Lucidi or Agostini . When Carboni interviewed Feletti in prison on 23 January , the friar said that in seizing Edgardo from his family he had only carried out instructions from the Holy Office , " which never promulgates any decree without the consent of the Roman Pontiff " . Feletti then recounted a version of the Church narrative of the case , stating that Edgardo had " always remained firm in his desire to remain a Christian " and was now studying successfully in Rome . He predicted in conclusion that Edgardo would one day be the " support and pride " of the Mortara family .

On 6 February Momolo Mortara gave an account of the case that contradicted the inquisitor 's at almost every turn ; in Rome , he said , Edgardo had been " frightened , and intimidated by the rector 's presence , [ but ] he openly declared his desire to return home with us " . Carboni then travelled to San Giovanni in Persiceto to interrogate Morisi , who gave her age as 23 rather than the actual 26 . Morisi said that Edgardo had fallen sick in the winter of 1851 ? 52 , when he was about four months old . She recounted having seen the Mortaras sitting sadly by Edgardo 's crib and " reading from a book in Hebrew that the Jews read when one of them is about to die " . She repeated her account of giving Edgardo an emergency baptism at the instigation of the grocer Lepori and later telling the story to a neighbour 's servant called Regina , adding that she had also told her sisters about the baptism . As before , Lepori denied any role in the affair whatsoever , indeed saying he could not

even remember Morisi . The " Regina " in Morisi 's story was identified as Regina Bussolari ; though Morisi averred to have told her the whole story , Bussolari professed to know nothing of the case . She said that she had only spoken with Morisi " once or twice , when she was going up to the storage room to get something " , and never about anything to do with the Mortaras ' children .

Elena Pignatti , who had employed Morisi after she left the Mortaras in 1857 ? her words about Morisi 's misconduct had formed part of the Mortaras ' appeal to the Pope ? testified that " seven or eight years ago ... a son of the Mortaras , whose name I don 't know , became sick , and it was said that he was going to die . Around then , one morning ... I ran into Morisi . Among the other things we talked about , she ? without mentioning the child 's illness ? asked me , ' I 've heard that if you baptise a Jewish child who 's about to die he goes to Heaven and gets indulgence ; isn 't that right ? ' I don 't remember what I told her , but when the Mortara boy was kidnapped by order of the Dominican Father , I was sure that he must have been the one who was sick " . Pignatti said that she had herself seen Edgardo during his illness , and Marianna sitting by the crib ? " Since his mother was crying , and despaired for his life , I thought he was dying , also because of his appearance : his eyes were closed , and he was hardly moving . " She added that during the three months when Morisi worked for her in late 1857 , the servant had been summoned to San Domenico four or five times , and had said that the inquisitor had promised her a dowry .

Bussolari 's denial that she had discussed any baptism with Morisi raised the question of who could have reported the rumours to the inquisitor in the first place . On 6 March , Carboni interviewed Morisi again and pointed out the inconsistencies between her story and the testimony of the Mortara family doctor , the Mortaras themselves , and both Lepori and Bussolari . She replied : " It 's the Gospel truth " . Carboni put it to Morisi that she might have invented the whole story out of spite against the Mortara family in the hope that the Church might reward her . When Carboni asked Morisi if she had been to San Domenico apart from for her interrogation , she stated that she had been there on two other occasions to try to secure a dowry from Father Feletti . Carboni suggested that Morisi must have herself prompted the interrogation by recounting Edgardo 's baptism during one of these visits ? Morisi insisted that the interrogation had been first and the other two visits later .

After one last interview with Feletti ? who again said almost nothing , citing a sacred oath ? Carboni informed him that so far as he could see , there was no evidence to support his version of events . Feletti replied : " I commiserate with the Mortara parents for their painful separation from their son , but I hope that the prayers of the innocent soul succeed in having God reunite them all in the Christian religion ... As for my punishment , not only do I place myself in the Lord 's hands , but I would argue that any government would recognise the legitimacy of my action . " The next day Feletti and De Dominicis , the latter of whom had fled to the rump Papal States , were formally charged with the " violent separation of the boy Edgardo Mortara from his own Jewish family " .

= = = Trial ; acquittal = = =

Feletti faced a court trial under the code of laws in effect in Bologna at the time of Edgardo 's removal . Carboni proposed that even under the pontifical laws , the seizure was illegal ? he reported that he had seen no evidence to support the friar 's claim that he had acted following instructions from Rome , and that there was substantial evidence casting doubt on Morisi 's account , but so far as he could see Feletti had done nothing to verify what she had said before ordering the child removed . After Feletti refused to appoint a defence counsel when prompted , saying he was putting his defence in the hands of God and the Virgin Mary , the experienced Bologna lawyer Francesco Jussi was appointed by the state to defend him .

The hearing before a panel of six judges on 16 April 1860 was attended by neither the Mortara family nor Feletti ? the former because they were in Turin and learned of the trial date only two days beforehand , and the latter because he refused to recognise the new authorities ' right to put him on trial . With the evidence gathered by Curletti and Carboni already in hand , the prosecution had no witnesses to call . The prosecutor Radamisto Valentini , a lawyer fighting his first major case , declared that Feletti had ordered the seizure alone and on his own initiative , and then turned his

focus to Carboni 's second point of how the authorities in Rome could have possibly concluded that Morisi 's story was genuine . Valentini went over Morisi 's account in detail , arguing that even if things had happened as she said , the baptism had not been administered properly and was therefore invalid . He then highlighted the inconsistencies between her testimony and the other accounts , condemned Morisi as a silly girl " corrupted by the foul breath and touch of foreign soldiers ... [ who ] rolled over without shame with them " , and finally charged that Feletti had ordered the seizure himself out of megalomania and " an inquisitor 's hatred of Judaism " .

Jussi found himself in the unusual position of attempting to defend a client who refused to defend himself . With no evidence at his disposal to support Feletti 's testimony , he was forced to rely almost entirely on his own oratory . Jussi put forward some aspects of the sequence of events that he said suggested that orders had indeed come from Rome ? for example , that Feletti had sent Edgardo straight off to the capital without seeing him ? and asserted that the Holy Office and the Pope were far better placed to adjudge the validity of the baptism than a secular court . He quoted at length from Angelo Padovani 's account of his meeting with Anna Morisi in July 1858 , then cast doubt on the grocer Lepori 's claim that he did not even know how to baptise a child ? Jussi produced a police report in which Lepori was described as a close friend of a Jesuit priest . Jussi proposed that Lepori and Bussolari might both be lying to protect themselves , and that Morisi 's sexual impropriety did not necessarily mean her story was false . He concluded that since Feletti had been inquisitor at the time , he had merely done what that office required him to do , and no crime had been committed .

The judging panel , headed by Calcedonio Ferrari , ruled following a swift deliberation that Feletti should be released as he had acted under instructions from the government of the time . The interval between the priest 's arrest and his trial , coupled with the swift progress being made towards Italian unification , meant that the Mortara case had lost much of its prominence , so there was little protest against the decision . The Jewish press expressed disappointment ? an editorial in the Italian Jewish paper L 'Educatore israelitico suggested that it had perhaps been unwise to target Feletti rather than someone more senior . In France Archives Israélites took a similar line , positing : " what good does it do to strike at the arm when it is the head that in this case conceived , carried out , and sanctioned the attack ? "

= = = Plans to recapture Edgardo = = =

The Mortaras were not surprised by the verdict in Feletti 's trial . Momolo hoped that his son might be a major topic of discussion at an international conference on the future of Italy , but was disappointed when no such summit materialised . His cause and visit to Paris partly motivated the formation in May 1860 of the Alliance Israélite Universelle , a Paris @-@ based organisation dedicated to the advancement of Jewish civil rights across the world . As the Italian nationalist armies advanced through the peninsula , the fall of Rome seemed imminent . In September 1860 the Alliance Israélite Universelle wrote to Momolo offering him financial and logistical support if he wished to reclaim his son by force , as " getting your child back is the cause of all Israel " . A separate plan was formulated by Carl Blumenthal , an English Jew serving in Giuseppe Garibaldi 's nationalist volunteer corps : Blumenthal and three others would dress up as clergymen , seize Edgardo and spirit him away . Garibaldi approved this plan in 1860 , but it was apparently called off after one of the conspirators died .

= = Conclusion = =

= = = Italian unification ; Edgardo flees = = =

The Pope remained steadfastly determined not to give Edgardo up , declaring : " What I have done for this boy , I had the right and the duty to do . If it happened again , I would do the same thing . " When the delegation from Rome 's Jewish community attended their annual meeting at the Vatican

in January 1861 , they were surprised to find the nine @-@ year @-@ old Edgardo at the pontiff 's side . The new Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed a month later with Victor Emmanuel II as king . A reduced incarnation of the Papal States , comprising Rome and its immediate environs , endured outside the new kingdom because of Napoleon III 's reluctance to offend his Catholic subjects by withdrawing the French garrison . He pulled these troops out following the entrance of a Jewish child from the Roman Ghetto , nine @-@ year @-@ old Giuseppe Coen , to the Catechumens in 1864 . The removal of the French garrison brought the Roman Question to the fore in the Italian parliament . The statesman Marco Minghetti dismissed a proposed compromise whereby Rome would become part of the kingdom with the Pope retaining some special powers , saying : " we cannot go to guard the Mortara boy for the Pope " . The French garrison returned in 1867 , following an unsuccessful attempt by Garibaldi to capture the city .

In early 1865 , at the age of 13 , Edgardo became a novice in the Canons Regular of the Lateran , adding the Pope 's name to his own to become Pio Edgardo Mortara . He wrote repeatedly to his family , he recalled , " dealing with religion and doing what I could to convince them of the truth of the Catholic faith , " but received no reply until May 1867 ? his parents , who were now living in Florence , wrote that they still loved him dearly , but saw nothing of their son in the letters they had received . In July 1870 , just before Edgardo turned 19 , the French garrison in Rome was withdrawn for good after the Franco @-@ Prussian War broke out . Italian troops captured the city on 20 September 1870 .

Momolo Mortara followed the Italian Army into Rome hoping to finally reclaim his son . According to some accounts , he was preceded by his son Riccardo , Edgardo 's elder brother , who had entered the kingdom 's service as an infantry officer . Riccardo Mortara fought his way to San Pietro in Vincoli and found his brother 's convent room . Edgardo covered his eyes , raised his hand in front of him and shouted : " Get back , Satan ! " When Riccardo said that he was his brother , Edgardo replied : " Before you get any closer to me , take off that assassin 's uniform . " Whatever the truth , what is certain is that Edgardo reacted to the capture of Rome with intense panic . He later wrote : " After the Piedmontese troops entered Rome ... they used their force to seize the neophyte Coen from the Collegio degli Scolopi , [ then ] turned toward San Pietro in Vincoli to try to kidnap me as well . " The Roman chief of police asked Edgardo to return to his family to appease public opinion , but he refused . He subsequently met the Italian commander , General Alfonso Ferrero La Marmora , who told him that as he was 19 years old he could do as he wished . Edgardo was smuggled out of Rome by train along with a priest on 22 October 1870 , late at night and in lay clothes . He made his way north and escaped to Austria .

= = = Father Mortara = = =

Edgardo found shelter in a convent of the Canons Regular in Austria , where he lived under an assumed name . In 1872 he moved to a monastery at Poitiers in France , where Pope Pius regularly corresponded with the bishop about the young man . After a year , Pio Edgardo Mortara was ordained as a priest ? with special dispensation as at 21 he was technically too young . He received a personal letter from the Pope to mark the occasion , as well as a lifetime trust fund of 7 @,@ 000 lire to support him .

Father Mortara spent most of the rest of his life outside Italy , travelling throughout Europe and preaching . It was said that he could give sermons in six languages , including Basque , and read three more , including Hebrew . " As a preacher he was in great demand , " Kertzer writes , " not least because of the inspirational way he was able to weave the remarkable story of his own childhood into his sermons . As he recounted it , his saga was the stuff of faith and hope : a story of how God chose a simple , illiterate servant girl to invest a small child with the miraculous powers of divine grace , and in doing so rescued him from his Jewish family ? good people but , as Jews , on a God @-@ forsaken path . "

Momolo Mortara died in 1871 , shortly after spending seven months in prison during his trial over the death of a servant girl who had fallen from the window of his apartment . He had been found guilty of murdering her by the Florentine court of appeal , but then acquitted by the court of assizes .

Pope Pius IX died in 1878 . The same year Marianna travelled to Perpignan in south @-@ western France , where she had heard Edgardo was preaching , and enjoyed an emotional reunion with her son , who was pleased to see her , but disappointed when she refused his pleas to convert to Catholicism . Edgardo thereafter attempted to re @-@ establish connections with his family , but not all of his relatives were as receptive to him as his mother .

Following Marianna 's death in 1890 , it was reported in French newspapers that she had finally , on her deathbed and with Edgardo beside her , become a Christian . Edgardo refuted this : " I have always ardently desired that my mother embrace the Catholic faith , " he wrote in a letter to *Le Temps* , " and I tried many times to get her to do so . However , that never happened " . A year later , Father Pio Edgardo Mortara returned to Italy for the first time in two decades to preach in Modena . A sister and some of his brothers came out to hear his sermon , and for the rest of his life Edgardo called on his relatives whenever he was in Italy . During a 1919 sojourn in Rome he visited the House of Catechumens he had entered 61 years before . By this time he had settled at the abbey of the Canons Regular at Bouhay in Liège , Belgium . Bouhay had a sanctuary to the Virgin of Lourdes , to which Father Mortara felt a special connection , the Lourdes apparitions of 1858 having occurred in the same year as his own conversion to Christianity . Father Pio Edgardo Mortara resided at Bouhay for the rest of his life and died there on 11 March 1940 , at the age of 88 .

= = Appraisal and legacy = =

The Mortara case is given little attention in most Risorgimento histories , if it is mentioned at all . The first book @-@ length scholarly work was Rabbi Bertram Korn 's *The American Reaction to the Mortara Case : 1858 ? 1859 ( 1957 )* , which was devoted entirely to public opinion in the United States and , according to Kertzer , often incorrect about details of the case . The main historical reference until the 1990s was a series of articles written by the Italian scholar Gemma Volli and published around the centenary of the controversy in 1958 ? 60 . When David Kertzer began studying the case he was surprised to find that many of his Italian colleagues were not familiar with it , while specialists in Jewish studies across the world invariably were ? Mortara had , as Kertzer put it , " [ fallen ] from the mainstream of Italian history into the ghetto of Jewish history " . Kertzer explored many sources that had not previously been studied and eventually published *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara ( 1997 )* , which has become the standard reference work for the affair .

The Mortara case was , in the view of Timothy Verhoeven , the greatest controversy to surround the Catholic Church in the mid @-@ 19th century , as it " more than any other single issue ... exposed the divide between supporters and opponents of the Vatican " . Abigail Green writes that " this clash between liberal and Catholic worldviews at a moment of critical international tension ... gave the Mortara affair global significance ? and rendered it a transformative episode in the Jewish world as well " . Mortara himself suggested in 1893 that his abduction had been , for a time , " more famous than that of the Sabine Women " . In the months before Pius IX 's beatification by the Catholic Church in 2000 , Jewish commentators and others in the international media raised the largely forgotten Mortara episode while analysing the Pope 's life and legacy . According to Dov Levitan , the basic facts of the Mortara case are far from unique , but it is nevertheless of particular importance because of its effect on public opinion in Italy , Britain and France , and as an example of " the great sense of Jewish solidarity that emerged in the latter half of the 19th century [ as ] Jews rose to the cause of their brethren in various parts of the world " . The Alliance Israélite Universelle , whose formation had been partly motivated by the Mortara case , grew into one of the most prominent Jewish organisations in the world and endures into the 21st century .

According to Michael Goldfarb , the Mortara controversy provided " an embarrassing example of just how out of touch with modern times the Church was " , and demonstrated that " Pope Pius IX was incapable of bringing the Church into the modern era " . Kertzer takes a similar line : " The refusal to return Edgardo contributed to the growing sense that the Pope 's role as temporal ruler , with his own police force , was an anachronism that could no longer be maintained . " Kertzer goes so far as to suggest that as a primary motivator for the French change of stance that precipitated

Italian unification in 1859 ? 61 , this " story of an illiterate servant girl , a grocer , and a little Jewish child from Bologna " may well have changed the course of both Italian and Church history .