



The Scarlet and the Black: The True Story of Monsignor Hugh O Flaherty, Hero of the Vatican Underground

J.P. Gallagher

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It has all the hallmarks of a best-selling fictional thriller: espionage, conspiracy, a struggle against evil powers, undercover work by dark of night... but it's all true. *The Scarlet and the Black* tells the astonishing and heroic true story of Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, the man dubbed "The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican" during World War II.

Born in Killarney, Ireland, Hugh O'Flaherty was an avid athlete-becoming a formidable boxer, handball player, hurler, and golfer. From an early age, however, he knew his calling was to the priesthood. After his ordination, he served first as an Apostolic Delegate in Egypt, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Czechoslovakia, then in Rome at the Holy Office (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). It was here in Rome that his greatest work began.

After the surrender of Italy in 1943, Rome came under the command of Nazi Colonel Herbert Kappler of the dreaded SS, who began the deportation of Italian Jews to Auschwitz. Kappler was a notorious hater of the Jews, persecuting them at every turn. As a top man in the Vatican Holy Office, Msgr. O'Flaherty sprang into action, organizing a sophisticated team that included men and women of many nationalities, religions, and political views. There was one goal-to save Jews and POWs from the Nazi machine. Despite Kappler's numerous attempts to assassinate him, O'Flaherty persisted, and his efforts saved thousands of Jews and POWs.

Using private homes and apartments, churches and monasteries, the effort was all orchestrated by Msgr. O'Flaherty. Each day his familiar figure would stand on the steps of St. Peter's -neutral ground that even the Nazis wouldn't violate - to welcome any fugitives who might be sent his way. All told, of 9,700 Roman Jews, most were saved, with 1,007 shipped to Auschwitz. The rest were hidden, 5,000 of them by the official Church - 3,000 at the Pope's Castel Gandolfo, 200 or 400 (estimates vary) as "members" of the Palatine Guard, and some 1,500 in monasteries, convents and colleges. The remaining 3,700 were hidden in private homes, including Msgr. O'Flaherty's network of apartments. After the war, O'Flaherty was honored by various Allied countries with awards and decorations for his heroic acts to save Jews and POWs.

This classic account by J.P. Gallagher was adapted into the acclaimed television movie, *The Scarlet and the Black*, starring Gregory Peck as Msgr. O'Flaherty and Christopher Plummer as Colonel Kappler.

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