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This image depicts Edgardo Mortara when he was young. Completely unknown to his parents, a maid who worked for the family—Ana Moriel—had "baptized" the child when he was ill.

The "legal" source allowing the abduction of non-Christian children dates back to a decision made at the Fourth Council of Toledo (633), in which Canon Law allowed the Church to "take away from non-Christian families Oblate children, offered to the Church in a state of unconsciousness *invitis parentibus*, that is, without the explicit agreement of the parents." For a Jewish child like Edgardo to be removed from his parents, all that had to happen was for a Christian—such as Ana Moriel—to affirm having baptized him.

As Edgardo's parents tried to regain their kidnapped son, they found powerful and influential allies. The international press could not get enough of the story. Leading European Jews, with otherwise-effective international connections, did their best to help.

Napoleon III, whose French troops maintained order in the Papal States by agreement with the Catholic Church, was outraged. Even *he* was unable to persuade the Pope (who by this time had personally taken an active interest in Edgardo) to release the child.

Marianna was finally able to see her son in November, nearly five months after the kidnapping. The meetings in Rome, however, were very controlled. She was never allowed to be alone with her young son.

Trying to combat the rising tide of international protest against the Church's action, the Jesuit journal, *Civiltà Cattolica*, published an account of the Mortaras' efforts to free their son. The journal wanted its readers to believe that Edgardo's parents were motivated more by hostility against the Catholic Church than their desire to regain custody of their child.

One is left to wonder how any Church official could have lacked sensitivity to the plight of the Mortara family.

Even Sir Moses Montefiore (a world-famous Jew who was also a British knight and member of Parliament) traveled to Rome (with his wife Judith) to intercede for Edgardo's family. A wealthy philanthropist, Sir Moses thought he would be successful where others had failed.

He, too, failed to win Edgardo's release.

By this time, more than eight months had passed since Edgardo had been taken from his home. And ... by this time ... the young Jewish boy had completed his religious training at the Catechumens.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/INTERCESSION-FAILS-Kidnapping-of-Edgardo-Mortara>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/INTERCESSION-FAILS-Kidnapping-of-Edgardo-Mortara>

Media Stream



Sir Moses Montefiore

Image online courtesy, Wikimedia Commons.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sir-Moses-Montefiore>



Judith Montefiore

Image online courtesy, the miriamhakedosha blog.

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