

CATHOLIC-JEWISH COMMISSION CRASHES

Amidst charges and countercharges, the International Catholic-Jewish Commission studying the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust crashed in July after two years of work. No one is satisfied with the outcome.

The panel of three Catholic and three Jewish scholars began examining 11 volumes of Vatican archival documents in 1999 (the Catholic contingent was reduced to two when one of its members, Eva Flieschner, resigned). A preliminary report was released in October 2000 and was inconclusive. Why the process broke down over the summer is a matter of dispute.

The Jewish side, led by panel coordinator Seymour D. Reich, said the work was halted "because the scholars felt they did not get a positive response from the Vatican to their preliminary report, and they felt they had to suspend their activities." Eugene Fisher spoke for the Catholic side saying that the Catholic panelists believed more work had to be done on the 11 volumes. Neither Reich nor Fisher was empanelled to research the archival documents, but both acted as the titular head of their respective groups.

At bottom, much of the disagreement had to do with the desire of the Jewish participants to examine archival documents the Vatican said were not yet open due to the fact that they have never been catalogued. The Catholic participants stressed that this was known from the beginning and was thus part of the initial understanding.

When this story broke, some Jewish organizations and newspapers blamed the Vatican for keeping their archives secret. William Donohue replied to one of these charges made in a *Newsday* editorial. The editorial said, "the Vatican is

skillful at keeping secrets but clumsy at recognizing the public relations impact of its actions—or inactions.”

Donohue reminded the editorial board that everyone knew from the start that the 3 million yet-to-be-catalogued documents in the Vatican archives were off-limits. So to now complain was unfair. He also accused the newspaper of hypocrisy.

Donohue pointed out that in April of 2001, *Newsday* ran a story on how Israel refuses to release documents collected since 1948 on the issue of the forced exodus of Palestinians from their lands during the Israeli quest for statehood. Those documents were to be released after 40 years and are still under seal.

“Now, perhaps Israel has a legitimate reason for this ‘inaction,’” Donohue said, “but it is doubtful that *Newsday* will make such a charge.” He concluded saying, “Even more remote is the possibility that *Newsday* will charge the Israeli government with a penchant for secrecy.”

The final chapter on this contentious issue is a very, very long way from being written. It is also one that the Catholic League will never abandon interest in and hopes will ultimately be resolved with justice to all. For more on this subject, see the splendid piece by Ron Rychlak.