

Frequently Asked Questions about Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust

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The general charge against Pope Pius XII is that he maintained a “continued attitude of silence” in the face of Nazism and the horror of the Holocaust. Was the Pope silent?

Pope Pius XII was not silent in the face of Nazism, either before he was elected pope in 1939 or during the war years. As Golda Meir, future Israeli Prime Minister and then Israeli representative to the United Nations, said on the floor of the General Assembly at the Pope's death in 1958: “During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people went through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and commiserate with the victims.” Some of the Jewish organizations that praised Pope Pius XII at the time of his death for saving Jewish lives during the horror of the Nazi Holocaust were: the World Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, the Synagogue Council of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, the American Jewish Congress, the New York Board of Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the National Council of Jewish Women. Were all these simply lying or playing politics? Would these organizations insult the memory of the millions killed for some ephemeral political gain?

While stationed in Germany in the 1920s, Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, was deeply concerned about the nascent Nazi party in Germany. As early as 1925, Pacelli expressed

fears about the Nazi threat. He reported to Rome that Hitler was a violent man who "will walk over corpses" to achieve his goals. In 1928, with Pacelli's assistance, the Holy office issued a strong condemnation of the anti-Semitism foundational to the Nazis: "(T)he Holy See is obligated to protect the Jewish people against unjust vexations and...particularly condemns unreservedly hatred against the people once chosen by God; the hatred that commonly goes by the name anti-Semitism."

As the Holy See's Secretary of State in the 1930s, Pacelli lodged nearly 60 formal protests with the Nazis over their treatment of the Jews. He wrote most of the 1937 encyclical of Pope Pius XI *Mit Brennender Sorge* that was a strong denunciation of Nazism. The encyclical, written in German, was published and distributed throughout Germany at the risk of life. In 1938, Pacelli had spoken at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris against the Nazi "pagan cult of race," as well as the "vile criminal actions" and "iniquitous violence" of the Nazi leadership. In 1939, immediately after the death of Pius XI, the German government issued a veiled warning to the College of Cardinals not to elect Pacelli as he was known to be an enemy of Nazism. In the very first encyclical of his papacy, issued on October 20, 1939 (*Summi Pontificatus*), Pius XII warned of the dictators of Europe – "an ever-increasing host of Christ's enemies" – and called for St. Paul's vision of world that was neither Gentile or Jew. The Gestapo labeled the encyclical a direct attack, while the French had copies printed and dropped by air over Germany. The New York Times summarized the encyclical as an uncompromising attack on racism and dictators.

During the war, the New York Times called Pius XII "the only ruler left on the Continent of Europe who dares to raise his voice at all...the Pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism...he left no doubt that the Nazi aims are also irreconcilable with his own conception of a Christmas peace." In major Christmas messages in 1941 and 1942 Pope Pius XII

condemned the racial hatred of the Nazis. Vatican Radio and the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, both under the direction of Pope Pius XII, issued numerous statements against the Nazi actions. In written letters to world leaders – even to those leaders in Nazi satellite countries – Pius XII expressed his horror of the persecution of the Jews. He reminded Catholics of Europe that it was their duty to protect victims of Nazism. He begged allied countries to accept Jewish refugees and would fight through his nuncios to prevent forced Jewish deportations to work camps.

The record goes on and on. Pius XII and the Church were neither silent nor complacent in the face of the Nazi horror.

At what point do you think the Pope should have stepped up and said: "Nazism is morally sinful and to be a subscriber to the theories of Hitler is to be anti-Catholic"? What prevented the Vatican from de-legitimizing the Catholicism of practicing Nazis, refusing them communion, and excommunicating them?

First, remember that Pius XII and his predecessor Pius XI, to whom he served as Secretary of State, made it fundamentally clear that cooperation with the Nazi racial agenda and Jewish persecution could not be allowed. One cannot suggest that Catholics did not understand that as papal teaching at the time. Far too many Catholics, however, out of either ideological agreement or pure fear, chose instead to follow the nationalistic goals of their homeland than listen to the entreaties of the Popes.

Second, while formal proclamations of excommunication and interdict would provide stirring reading today, what could they have possibly accomplished at the time? It could hardly be argued that it would have caused Hitler and his Nazi goons to suddenly come to a conversion of heart and to re-think the "Jewish question" or their war aims. It would be even more foolish to think that any kind of "Catholic uprising" in Nazi Germany would have ensued. Catholics who cooperated with the

dictatorships had already chosen to ignore papal statements.

Once the war began and, in 1942, the “Final Solution” began in earnest, the primary goal of Pius XII was to save lives. That could best be accomplished, he believed, through the effective work of the papal nuncios on the scene, public statements challenging Nazi beliefs, quiet negotiations for immigration, and stealth tactics of hiding Jewish refugees, baptizing when necessary, and issuing false papers. This was, after all, occupied Europe with the Vatican existing on a few acres within an Axis state. Preserving Vatican neutrality, and the capability of the Church to continue to function where possible in occupied Europe and Nazi-allied states, was a far better strategy to save lives than Church sanctions on a regime that would have merely laughed at them.

When 60,000 German soldiers and the Gestapo occupied Rome, thousands of Jews were hiding in churches, convents, rectories, the Vatican and the papal summer residence.

Would excommunications and lightening bolts from the Chair of St. Peter have been more effective in saving their lives?

Issuing such thunderbolts would have done nothing to end the “Final Solution” and would have severely limited, if not ended altogether, the Church’s capacity to save Jewish lives.

Pinchas Lipade, Israeli consul in Italy after the war, estimated that the tactics adopted by Pius XII in the face of the Nazis saved over 800,000 Jewish lives during World War II. If that were an exaggeration by half, it would still record more Jewish lives saved by any other entity at the time. It is hard to argue against the effectiveness of the Pope’s strategy.

Why did Pacelli as Secretary of State under Pius XI, sign an agreement – a “concordat” – with the Nazis in 1933? Didn’t this just serve to give legitimacy to the Nazi government?

Despite vocal opposition from the Catholic Church in Germany where National Socialism's racist views were routinely condemned as contrary to Catholic principles and Catholics were ordered not to support the party, by 1933 Hitler had become German chancellor. Pacelli was dismayed with the Nazi assumption of power and by August of 1933 he expressed to the British representative to the Holy See his disgust with "their persecution of the Jews, their proceedings against political opponents, the reign of terror to which the whole nation was subjected." When it was stated that Germany now had a strong leader to deal with the communists, Archbishop Pacelli responded that the Nazis were infinitely worse.

At the same time, however, the Vatican was forced to deal with the reality of Hitler's rise to power. In June 1933 Hitler had signed a peace agreement with the western powers, including France and Great Britain, called the Four-Power Pact. At the same time Hitler expressed a willingness to negotiate a statewide concordat with Rome. The concordat was concluded a month later. In a country where Protestantism dominated, the Catholic Church was finally placed on a legal equal footing with the Protestant churches.

Did the concordat negotiated by Pacelli give legitimacy to the Nazi regime?

No. Forgotten is the fact that it was preceded both by the Four-Power Pact and a similar agreement concluded between Hitler and the Protestant churches. The Church had no choice but to conclude such a concordat, or face draconian restrictions on the lives of the faithful in Germany. Pacelli denied that the concordat meant Church recognition of the regime. Concordats were made with countries, not particular regimes, he stated. Pope Pius XI would explain that it was concluded only to spare persecution that would take place immediately if there was no such agreement. The concordat also gave the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action in the years prior

to the war and after hostilities began. It provided a legal basis for arguing that baptized Jews in Germany were Christian and should be exempt from legal disabilities. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, it did save Jewish lives.

The Vatican began to formally protest Nazi action almost immediately after the concordat was signed. The first formal Catholic protests under the concordat concerned the Nazi government's call for a boycott of Jewish businesses. Numerous protests would follow over treatment of both the Jews and the direct persecution of the Church in Nazi Germany. The German foreign minister would report that his desk was stuffed with protests from Rome, protests rarely passed on to Nazi leadership.

Were there Catholics – including priests and bishops – who cooperated with the Nazis?

Certainly, individual Catholics – including some in leadership positions – cooperated with Nazism and even turned a blind eye toward the Final Solution. The Church has always included sinners whose wrongs create scandal. Yet, they did so not with the support of either Pope Pius XI or Pope Pius XII. For example, on March 12, 1938, Hitler's troops moved into Austria to force the "Anschluss" – "union" – of Austria with Germany. The archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Theodor Innitzer, issued a statement welcoming the Anschluss that was generally popular in Austria at the time. The Austrian bishops also issued a statement in praise of the German government.

The Holy See had strongly opposed the German annexation and was horrified at the local Church's statements of support. Vatican Radio immediately broadcast a strong denunciation of the statement and Pacelli, as Secretary of State, summoned the archbishop of Vienna to Rome. Pacelli met with Cardinal Innitzer and told him that the statement of support had to be withdrawn publicly. A new statement was issued, in the name of

the Austrian bishops: "The solemn declaration of the Austrian bishops on 18 March of this year was clearly not intended to be an approval of something that was not and is not compatible with God's law."

Often times, it should be understood, accusations of cooperation by certain Church leaders are a misreading of the historical record. In the recent Vatican document on the Holocaust, a number of prominent Church leaders are singled out for their brave work at the time. One name mentioned is Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich for his early pastoral statements in 1931 condemning Nazism; and his series of Advent sermons in 1933 that were a theological defense of the Jews and the Old Testament.

Some have taken issue with praise for Cardinal Faulhaber, accusing him of advocating that the German bishops ignore the atrocities of the Nazi leadership. That accusation is based on a quote from the minutes of a meeting between the cardinals of Germany and Pope Pius XII just after his election as pope in March 1939 and before the onslaught of World War II. The meetings specifically concerned the status of the Catholic Church in Germany, where a virtual state of "war" existed between the Church and the Nazis. Pius XII had called the meetings to discuss with the prelates if a new papacy could possibly lead to better relations. Most of the German prelates had been in the middle of these battles with the Nazis, and Cardinal Faulhaber agreed that it might be best if the new Pope take the lead in discussions.

The full quote of Cardinal Faulhaber from the minutes of this first meeting is: "There are times when we doubt that the upper echelons of the party in general desire peace. The (leaders) want to be combatants to such an extent that they would love nothing more than to be given a reason for fighting, especially when it concerns the church. But I likewise believe that *we, the bishops, should act as if we see nothing* (emphasis added). This is why we are respectfully

grateful to your Holiness for the steps which will be taken on behalf of peace.”

Clearly, the “peace” that Cardinal Faulhaber refers to concerns the ongoing battles of the Nazi leadership with the Church in Germany, obviously not to war itself which would not begin until August of that year. And just as clearly, when he is stating that the “bishops should act as if we see nothing,” he is referring to the strategy that the Pope has suggested in dealing with the Nazis over persecution of the Church in Germany. The statement had nothing to do with general policy toward Nazi atrocities past, present or future, but rather a tactic on how to deal with specific Church-related issues at that moment.

Again, individual Catholics did cooperate with the Nazi regime. In the document on the Holocaust cited below, the Church has condemned any such cooperation by its “sons and daughters.” But it is neither logical nor historically accurate to therefore extend a charge of cooperation with Nazism to the Church in general or Pius XII specifically. Rather, certain Catholics acted in such a fashion despite the Church and despite the clearly stated teaching of the Pope.

Would traditional Christian anti-Semitism account for the fact that some Catholics cooperated with the Nazis?

After acknowledging the sad legacy of anti-Jewish bigotry in Christian Western Europe, and the rise in anti-Jewish racial theories that would find its ultimate horror in pagan Nazism, the Vatican statement on the Holocaust addresses this issue:

But it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts. Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive, or even indifferent, to the persecutions launched against the Jews by

National Socialism when it reached power?

Any response to this question must take into account that we are dealing with the history of people's attitudes and ways of thinking, subject to multiple influences. Moreover, many people were altogether unaware of the "final solution" that was being put into effect against a whole people; others were afraid for themselves and those near to them; and still others were moved by envy. A response would need to be given case by case. To do this, however, it is necessary to know what precisely motivated people in a particular situation.

At first, the leaders of the Third Reich sought to expel the Jews. Unfortunately, the governments of some Western countries of Christian tradition, including some in North and South America, were more than hesitant to open their borders to persecuted Jews. Although they could not foresee how far the Nazi hierarchs would go in their criminal intentions, the leaders of these nations were aware of the hardships and dangers to which Jews living in the territories of the Third Reich were exposed. The closing of borders to Jewish emigration in those circumstances, whether due to anti-Jewish hostility or suspicion, political cowardice or shortsightedness, lays a heavy burden of conscience on the authorities in question.

In the lands where the Nazis undertook mass deportations, the brutality which surrounded these forced movements of helpless people should have led to suspect the worst. Did Christians give every possible assistance to those being persecuted, and in particular to the persecuted Jews?

Many did, but others did not. Those who did help to save Jewish lives as much as was in their power, even to the point of placing their own lives in danger, must not be forgotten...Nevertheless, as Pope John Paul II has recognized, alongside such courageous men and women, the spiritual resistance and concrete action of other Christians was not

that which might have been expected from Christ's followers. We cannot know how many Christians in countries occupied or ruled by the Nazi powers or their allies were horrified at the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and yet were not strong enough to raise their voices in protest. For Christians, this heavy burden of conscience of their brothers and sisters during the Second World War must be a call to penitence.

We deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the church...(we) appeal to our Catholic brothers and sisters to renew the awareness of the Hebrew roots of their faith. We ask them to keep in mind that Jesus was a descendant of David; that the Virgin Mary and the Apostles belonged to the Jewish people; that the Church draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree on to which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the gentiles (cf. Rom 11: 17-24); that the Jews are our dearly beloved brothers, indeed in a certain sense they are "our elder brothers..."

The Church canonized Edith Stein, a Jewish convert who became a nun and was killed in the Holocaust. Stein actually was killed because she was Jewish. Isn't this just a means for the Church to try to claim "victimhood" in the Holocaust?

When Pope John Paul II canonized Edith Stein – with the very real intent of seeing her as a unifying individual among Catholics and Jews – he was vilified. Her canonization was subject to strong attack, something that should never be done to the memory of any victim of the Holocaust.

In Holland in 1942, the Catholic archbishop of Utrecht released a forceful letter to all the Catholic churches protesting the deportations of the Jews to "work camps." The Gestapo responded by revoking the exception that had been given to Jews who had been baptized and a round up was

ordered. Caught in the web was Edith Stein, a Jewish convert who had become a nun. As a Christian of Jewish descent in a convent in Holland, Stein had first avoided arrest at the hands of the Nazis. She, her sister, and 600 Catholic Jews were transported to Auschwitz, where she died.

Some have claimed that she did not die a martyr. Stein died, they say, because she was a Jew. Her Catholicity had nothing to do with it. Her canonization was an attempt to claim victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust. But this simply does not square with the facts. Stein died because she was a Jew and a Catholic, the very specific reasons for her arrest. Her arrest was retaliation against Christians of Jewish ancestry because of the outspoken criticisms of the Nazis by the Catholicarchbishop of Utrecht.

Second, the reason for the canonization is not some attempt to claim an equivalent victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly for improved Christian-Jewish relations. The canonization of Stein recognized both her heroic Catholic witness, and her Jewish heritage.

Numerous Catholics were killed in the Holocaust. The Church in Poland suffered tremendously and many priests, religious and laity died in the death camps along with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Certainly, the Nazi "reasons" for slaughtering Catholics may have been different, and not purely genocidal as in the case of the Jews. Priests in Poland, for example, were killed because of their positions of leadership and because of Church opposition to the Nazis they were viewed as "enemies of the Reich." To acknowledge this historical reality is not to claim "victimhood" or an equivalency to what the Jews suffered in the Holocaust. Rather, the intent is to remind Catholics of this brave witness and the constant need to resistance to evil. It also serves to promote Catholic-Jewish solidarity, as no one can ever say again that it could be legitimate to be Catholic and anti-Semitic.

Didn't the Holy See – and Pius XII – believe that a strong Germany under the Nazis could serve as a bulwark for preventing the spread of communism from the Soviet Union?

While there may have been Catholics who held such a belief, particularly in the years prior to the War, there is no evidence that this was ever a policy of Pope Pius XII. All his actions were to the contrary. As noted in an earlier question, when it was suggested to Archbishop Pacelli in August, 1933 that Germany now had a strong leader to deal with the communists, Archbishop Pacelli responded that the Nazis were far worse.

Pius XII was unpopular with certain schools of post World War II historians for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of his later pontificate. That was the primary source for this charge. Particularly in Italy in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the general charge against Pius was that while he was not pro-Nazi during the war, he hated Bolshevism more than he hated Hitler. For the most part, this charge was based solely on the Pope's opposition to the Allied demand for unconditional German surrender. He believed such a condition would only continue the horror of the war and increase the killing. That stand was later interpreted as a desire on the pontiff's part to maintain a strong Germany as a bulwark against communism. The theory was fiction. There was no documentary evidence to even suggest such a papal strategy. But it became popular, particularly among historians with Marxist sympathies in the 1960s. Even this theory, however, did not extend to an accusation that the Pope "collaborated" in the Holocaust, nor to any charge that the Church did anything other than save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. The evidence was simply too clear on that saving work for refutation. However, it did provide a mercenary rationale of "politics over people" in response to the Holocaust and applied such barbarous reasoning to the pope.

There are simply no strategies that the Pope undertook that

would support such a charge. For example, after Hitler ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union in June, the question quickly arose over aiding communists in the war against the Nazis. A 1937 encyclical of Pius XI appeared to ban any such cooperation. The issue became particularly important in the United States where aid was routinely supplied to the Allies and was to be extended to the Soviet Union. A number of bishops raised the issue and, very quickly, Pius XII settled the affair noting that aid to the “people” of the Soviet Union was not aid to communism. Despite later propaganda, it was clear that even an anti-religious Stalinist Soviet Union was viewed by the pontiff as far less an immediate enemy than the German Third Reich.

Why didn't Pope Pius XII join in Allied statements condemning the Axis nations?

In September 1942, Pius XII was approached by the Allies to join in a statement condemning the Nazi atrocities. This was to be an official statement of the Allied governments and, as such, it was impossible for Pius XII to join the effort. However, in his annual Christmas message of 1942, Pius XII would speak out once again forcefully. Pius condemned totalitarian regimes and mourned the victims of the war: “the hundreds of thousands who, through no fault of their own, and solely because of their nation or race, have been condemned to death or progressive extinction.” He called on Catholics to shelter any and all refugees. The statement was loudly praised in the Allied world. In Germany, it was seen as the final repudiation by Pius XII of the “new order” imposed by the Nazis. The Gestapo reported that Pope Pius XII “is virtually accusing the German people of injustice toward the Jews, and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminal.”

Pope Pius XII did not join in with official Allied government statements attacking the Axis nations for obvious reasons. To maintain Vatican neutrality – an absolute necessity if the Holy See was to have any capability to save lives and protest

Nazi action – it could not be viewed as a signature to Allied propaganda statements. As Pulitzer-prize winning historian John Toland, no friend of Pius or the Church, noted: “The Church, under the Pope’s guidance...saved the lives of more Jews than all other churches, religious institutions and rescue organizations combined...the British and Americans, despite lofty pronouncements, had not only avoided taking any meaningful action but gave sanctuary to few persecuted Jews.”

If Jews could be disguised as Catholics, they were more capable of escaping Nazi persecution. Did the Church do enough in this regard? Could the Church have distributed more widely false baptismal certificates and thus save more Jews?

The Holy See never attempted to limit in any way Jewish baptisms or to forbid supplying false papers of Christian identity to Jews wherever possible. Untold numbers of lives were saved in this fashion. In Italy there were Religious orders that worked around the clock providing false documents. Numerous clergy gave brief catechism lessons so that Jews could pass as Catholics. Some were even taught the rudiments of Gregorian Chant. However, it must be remembered that often this simply did not work. In case after case, Nazi authorities – and the Gestapo in occupied countries – paid no attention to such paperwork or any such claims as their antipathy to Jews was racial and their religious “conversion” deemed unimportant.

In addition, Nazi-allied governments were wary of such conversions and, at times, the Church had to be careful in these matters. This became a serious issue, for example, in Romania. Romania was an Axis ally that had introduced anti-Semitic legislation prior to the war. Though Romania was primarily Orthodox in faith, the Vatican had a concordat with the government which allowed the Holy See a formal avenue of protest over treatment of Jews in general, as well as Jewish converts. In March 1941, the Romanian government was planning to forbid Jews to change their religion. Following

instructions from Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State under Pius XII, Archbishop Cassulo, papal nuncio in Romania, told the government's foreign ministry that the Vatican would protest any attempt to tie the Church's hand in this regard. In a May 12 follow-up to the telegram, Archbishop Cassulo told Cardinal Maglione that he had written assurances from the government that freedom of worship would be guaranteed. On May 16, the secretary of the Holy Office sketched out for the nuncio norms to be followed in this regard to avoid a government crack down. He advised that no one sincerely seeking baptism be refused because of Romanian racial laws. Under the circumstances, however, precautions were necessary since there could be those who would be baptized, then simply withdraw from any practice of the faith. This would provide further ammunition to the government. Where reasonable doubt existed, baptism should be delayed.

This was certainly not an effort to limit Jewish baptisms, or a statement of general Church policy in occupied or Axis-allied Europe, or even in Romania itself. Specific to Romania and as noted in Father Pierre Blet's documentation from the Vatican archives in the book "Pius XII and the Second World War" (Paulist Press): "(B)aptizing Jews caused problems. The number of Jews requesting baptism had increased considerably, and it was rumored that the Holy See, 'confronted with the danger in which the Jews were placed, ordered that they were to be baptized en masse after receiving a short preparation, with further instruction being delayed until a later time.' On 18 April 1942 the Romanian minister to the Holy See told Cardinal Maglione that the number of conversions was high, too high and thus was suspect. Consequently the government was suggesting that the pope suspend admission into the Catholic Church for the duration of the war, a proposal that was, of course, rejected."

Didn't Pope Pius XII, shortly after his election, refuse to

release an encyclical drafted under Pius XI that would have forthrightly condemned anti-Semitism? What is the story behind this "hidden encyclical"?

An encyclical was drafted toward the end of the reign of Pope Pius XI that was to have condemned anti-Semitism in general. It is argued that Pope Pius XII killed the encyclical because of that condemnation. However, it is clear that Pius XII killed the encyclical because it was a weak effort with a variety of bad sections that could only have encouraged, rather than discouraged anti-Semitism. It was this weakness of the encyclical draft that was the real reason it was never published not some lurking anti-Semitism. Pius XII, an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism along with his predecessor Pius IX, would never have allowed such a poorly drafted encyclical to be released. If Pius XI had been healthy, he would never have allowed the draft of such a weak encyclical to be issued as well.

To argue that the Holy See was unwilling to condemn anti-Semitism is to fly in the face of an encyclical that already condemned Nazis and their treatment of the Jews (*Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937). There are also all the additional written and public statements that would be issued by Pius XII and the Vatican throughout the war years, including his very first encyclical in 1939, *Summi Pontificatus*, on the unity of human society. That encyclical can rightly be seen as the papal "testament" against anti-Semitism, rather than the flawed "hidden encyclical."

Do Catholics go too far in the defense of a beloved spiritual leader in Pius XII? Isn't further research necessary in this area, particularly in secret Vatican archives?

The assumption is that Catholics defend Pope Pius XII because he was a "beloved spiritual leader." Catholics defend Pope Pius XII because he is unjustly attacked as a "silent collaborator" in the Holocaust. This charge is false and flies in the face of the clear historical record.

That said, no one would oppose honest research and investigation of the papacy of Pope Pius XII. Such is now necessary in light of the campaign of vilification aimed at him. In reporting and editorials on the Holocaust, it is routinely presented as historical fact that Pius XII and the Church were, at best, stonily silent, or, at worst, aided and abetted the Nazi killing machine. Many simply accept these false charges without any real knowledge of the past. The historical reality of the pontificate of Pius XII has nearly been lost in the face of the strident campaign against him. Contemporary Catholics are witnessing the creation of a myth in regard to Pius XII. This campaign, triggered by Rolf Hochhuth's libelous 1963 play *The Deputy*, thrives on false history. Competent, objective historical scholarship will do nothing but lead to a renewed appreciation of his pontificate and what he accomplished in saving lives during the Holocaust.

The question is raised concerning "secret documents" in the Vatican. Under the direction of Pope Paul VI after the controversy caused by Rolf Hochhuth's play, 11 volumes of the documents were sorted and released from the Vatican archives. There is no foundation to any charge that there are "secret" documents that the Vatican is hiding in regard to the Holocaust and the Church's relations with Nazi Germany.

Could Jewish opposition to the beatification of Pope Pius XII lead to an increase in anti-Semitism among Catholics?

There is no way that Jewish opposition to the beatification of Pope Pius XII could lead to any "increase in anti-Semitism" among Catholics. As stated in the document on the Holocaust: "To remember this terrible experience is to become fully conscious of the salutary warning it entails: the spoiled seeds of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to take root in any heart." One cannot be properly Catholic and be anti-Semitic at the same time. As Pius XI boldly proclaimed: "We are all spiritual Semites."

However, this ongoing campaign against Pius XII – and the heated rhetoric it has engendered against the Church – could have a negative impact on Catholic-Jewish relations. Beginning

with the papacies of Pius XI and Pius XII, proceeding through the Vatican Council and Paul VI, great strides had been made in Catholic-Jewish relations. The papacy of John Paul II has seen one historic event after another, celebrating the Church's understanding that all Christians are "spiritual Semites." Yet the myth of the silence of Pius XII has overshadowed these historic developments. It has helped to entrench a persistent anti-Catholicism within elements of the Jewish community, while creating in certain Catholic circles a deep resentment that can only be harmful for all. While nothing can fully destroy the enormous strides taken by Pope John Paul II, leaving this myth unanswered and accepted can only do great damage to what should be a deep and close relationship between Catholics and Jews, generated in part by the heroism of Pope Pius XII in saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

What is the source for the attacks on Pope Pius XII? If he were not guilty of silence, what would be the reason for making such a claim?

The myth of Pius XII began in earnest in 1963 in a drama created for the stage by Rolf Hochhuth, an otherwise obscure German playwright born in 1931. Turgid in length, in 1963's *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Representative* or *The Deputy*) Hochhuth charged through an allegedly "documentary" presentation that Pius XII maintained an icy, cynical and uncaring silence during the Holocaust. More interested in Vatican investments than human lives, Pius was presented as a cigarette-smoking dandy with Nazi leanings.

The Deputy, even to Pius' most strenuous detractors, is readily dismissed. John Cornwell in *Hitler's Pope* describes *Der Stellvertreter* as "historical fiction based on scant documentation...(T)he characterization of Pacelli (Pius XII) as a money-grubbing hypocrite is so wide of the mark as to be ludicrous. Importantly, however, Hochhuth's play offends the most basic criteria of documentary: that such stories and

portrayals are valid only if they are demonstrably true.”

Yet *The Deputy*, despite its evident flaws, prejudices and lack of historicity, laid the foundation for the charges against Pius XII, five years after his death. As noted earlier, Pope Pius XII was unpopular with certain Marxist-leaning schools of post World War II historians for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of his later pontificate. Hochhuth’s charge of papal “silence” fit perfectly with the campaign to destroy the reputation of Pope Pius XII. *The Deputy*, therefore, took on far greater importance than it deserved. Leftists used it as a means to discredit an anti-Communist papacy. Instead of Pius being seen as a careful and concerned pontiff working with every means available to rescue European Jews in the face of complete Nazi entrapment, an image was created of a political schemer who would sacrifice lives to stop the spread of Communism. *The Deputy* was merely the mouthpiece for an ideological interpretation of history that helped create the myth of a “silent” Pius XII doing nothing in the face of Nazi slaughter.

There was also strong resonance within the Jewish community at the time *The Deputy* appeared. The Jewish world had experienced a virtual re-living of the Holocaust in the trial of Adolf Eichmann. A key figure in the Nazi Final Solution, Eichmann had been captured in Argentina in 1960, tried in Israel in 1961 and executed in 1962. For many young Jews, Eichmann’s trial was the first definitive exposure to the horror that the Nazis had implemented. At the same time, Israel was threatened on all sides by the unified Arab states. War would erupt in a very short time. *The Deputy* resonated with an Israel that was surrounded by enemies and would be fighting for its ultimate survival.

It seems ludicrous that a pope praised for his actions by all leading Jewish organizations throughout his life could be discredited based on nothing more than a theatrical invention.

Yet, that is what took place and has taken place since. A combination of political and social events early in the 1960s, biased historical revisionism, and an exercise in theatrical rhetoric, created the myth of the uncaring pontiff in contradiction to the clear historical record.

Today, that myth serves its own ideological purposes as certainly, the campaign against Pope Pius XII is used for anti-Catholic purposes. Like many of the anti-Catholic canards rooted in the culture, the myth of Pius XII is raised to attack a host of Catholic positions on issues and the Church itself. It feeds anti-Catholic rhetoric.

In light of Pope John Paul II's visit to Israel and his statements at Yad Vashem and at the Western Wall, what is foreseen as the future of Catholic-Jewish relations?

The papacy of Pope John Paul II, building on the foundation of his 20th century predecessors and the Second Vatican Council, has taken enormous strides in the development of Catholic-Jewish relations. This is much more than simply dialogue, symbolic acts, or ecumenical gestures. It has promoted a deep Catholic sense and appreciation of our "elder brothers" in faith, as well as – it is hoped – a Jewish understanding of Catholics as people of the Book. The Pope has also called Catholics to a penitential understanding of the sins of the past in regard to the Jews, and the incompatibility of Catholicism with anti-Semitism.

At the same time, the pope's actions have allowed Jews to see not only the terrible sin of certain so-called Christians who cooperated with the Holocaust, but those Christians who heroically saved lives, and lost their own. By the canonization of Edith Stein, he has raised up the example of a Christian and a Jew who died as both in the horror of the Holocaust. She is a living sign – a martyr if you will – for the betterment of Catholic-Jewish relations.

Eventually, this propaganda campaign against Pius XII will collapse. Without any basis in fact, this will vanish from the scene. And as that happens, one can foresee only a deeper growth in understanding between Catholics and Jews.