

MORE ON POPE PIUS XII'S HEROISM

The Catholic News Agency has reported that Pope Francis is considering moving ahead with the canonization of Pope Pius XII. Pope Paul VI had started the beatification and canonization process in 1967. At the time, he also formed a committee to study Pius XII's life, which resulted in "Acts and Documents of the Holy See related to the Second World War," a publication about Pius XII's papacy. Next year, when the remaining documents from his papacy will be released, researchers will have access to some 16 million papers. Historians will be able to give a full account of this pope's courage in saving Jews from the Holocaust. The ongoing work of historians provides mounting evidence to support the Catholic claim that Pius XII was a hero. Two books published last June are valuable additions to the historical record.

Pius XII, the Bridgettine nuns, and the rescue of Jews by Mother Riccarda Hambrough and Mother Katherine Flanagan by Joanna Bogle tells the moving story of how these two nuns protected Jews in their convents during the Nazi occupation of Rome. The pope ordered religious buildings to shelter Jews as part of a massive operation to save them. In Rome, 155 monasteries and convents gave refuge to some 5,000 Jews. The Pope personally took responsibility for the welfare of children of Jews taken out of Italy. About 80 percent of Jews survived in Italy; throughout Europe 80 percent of Jews perished.

Père Marie-Benoît and Jewish Rescue: How a French Priest Together with Jewish Friends Saved Thousands during the Holocaust by Susan Zuccotti focuses on a French Capuchin priest who was honored as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations" by Israel for saving Jews during the Holocaust. His work started in the South of France. The priest was soon

overwhelmed by requests for help: “there were not enough false documents, not enough hiding places, and not enough money.” He was a man of action who took matters into his own hands, working with Jewish rescue groups and holding secret meetings in his monastery. In a private audience with Pope Pius XII in 1943, the priest asked the pope to aid Jews trapped in France, Italy and Spain.

Not only do these must-read books vividly portray the courage of individual Catholics in dark and perilous times, they also give an indication of just how profound and vital Pius XII’s role was in standing up to Nazi tyranny. Indeed, they offer a preview of what’s to come when all of the documents relating to Pope Pius XII’s papacy are released next year.