

SLANDERING STEPINAC

Over a chorus of protests, the beatification of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac will take place next month. The protesters want us to believe that the Croatian cardinal was an anti-Semite who worked with the Nazis against Jews in World War II. The evidence shows that it is all a lie.

In the 1930s, Stepinac became bishop of Zagreb. He was known for his outspoken criticism of Serbian terrorism and for his work in aiding Jews escape Nazi Germany. When the war was over, Yugoslavian dictator Marshall Tito plotted against Stepinac, making sure that the archbishop would be tried for collaborating with the Nazis. On October 11, 1946, Stepinac was sentenced to 16 years of hard labor. Even though he was forbidden to resume his duties, Pope Pius XII made him a cardinal in 1953.

Like the pope who made him a cardinal, Stepinac has been the target of scapegoating anti-Catholics determined to brand him an anti-Semite. Most recently, Stepinac has come under criticism from the *Boston Globe*. But given the fact that the newspaper's editors spent most of their summer firing their own journalists for fabricating stories and for plagiarism, the charges levied against Stepinac can be dismissed as prototypical of the *Boston Globe*.

Cardinal Stepinac is also hated by the Simon Wiesenthal Center. In the summer edition of the Center's publication, *Response*, Stepinac was labeled a "war criminal." Registering its objections to his beatification, *Response* said that "Afer [sic] WWII, he was convicted as a collaborator but the Church hails him for his resistance against religious persecution by the post-war Communist regime." The facts are otherwise.

After the war, Marshall Tito demanded that Stepinac break with Rome and establish a new "patriotic church." Stepinac refused.

Hence, he was the subject of trumped up charges of collaborating with the Nazis.

The show trial was so farcical that Louis Brier, president of the American Association of Jews, said at the time that "This great man [Stepinac] was tried as a collaborator of Nazism. We protest this slander. He has always been a sincere friend of Jews and was not hiding this even in times of cruel persecution under the regime of Hitler and his followers. He was the greatest defender of the persecuted Jews."

Further proof that Cardinal Stepinac was not guilty of working with the Nazis came in 1985. That was the year that the man who originally tried him, Jakov Blazevic, admitted publicly that Cardinal Stepinac's trial was framed from beginning to end and that the only reason he was tried was his refusal to break with the Roman Catholic Church.

It is for these reasons that the Catholic League contacted Rabbi Abraham Cooper, editor-in-chief of *Response*, asking him to comment on these facts. We also asked him, "Are you similarly quiescent in accepting the convictions of Jewish dissidents, like Natan Sharansky, by Soviet courts?"

Look for more slanderous attacks in October. The league will respond to as many unfair assaults as possible and is proud to defend a man that the Vatican has rightfully chosen to beatify.