

Wartime Pope 'more concerned about Communism than the Holocaust'

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Jewish allegations that the wartime Pope Pius XII did not raise his voice against the Holocaust because he was more concerned about Communism are supported by documents found in the National Archives at Kew, according to an Italian historian.

In December Pope Benedict XVI put Pius XII on the path to sainthood by recognising his "heroic virtues", a move towards beatification, the last step before canonisation. However, Giuseppe Casarrubea, the author of a series of books on fascism and the Mafia, said that in a telegram dated November 10, 1944, to Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, Francis D'Arcy Osborne, the British Ambassador to the Holy See, reported that he had asked Pius XII if he would support a protest against the murder of more than 400,000 Hungarian Jews. The Pope had replied that he had not yet decided, but that in any case even if he did condemn the atrocity he would do so anonymously, Osborne said.

In another telegram a year earlier, dated October 19, 1943, Harold Tittmann, the US Ambassador to the Holy See, reported to Washington that Pius XII had appeared indifferent to the fate of more than a thousand Jews rounded up in the Rome ghetto and sent by train to Auschwitz.

Instead of showing "indignation" over the deportations, Pius XII had shown more concern over reports of "communist gangs roaming in the environs of Rome", Mr Tittmann said, an apparent reference to anti-Fascist partisans. The Pope had added that the German occupying forces in Rome had "always shown great respect for the Holy See", Mr Tittmann wrote.

Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, a former Vatican Foreign Minister who as a young priest served in Pius's private office, said that the Pope had believed it would be "counterproductive" to speak out in public against Nazi atrocities. He felt it would make matters worse both for Jews and Roman Catholics, as had been the case in the Netherlands in 1942 when a protest by Dutch bishops against the treatment of Jews led to greater persecution.

Instead Pius XII had worked behind the scenes to ensure that Jews were given refuge in Catholic institutions, Cardinal Silvestrini told *La Stampa*. He said that published extracts from Osborne's diaries showed Pius XII had even acted as mediator between the Allies and German officers planning to oust Hitler, twice summoning Osborne to inform him of the plot.

In an address at the Rome synagogue last month Pope Benedict said that many Italian Catholics and the Vatican itself had saved Jews "in a hidden and discreet way".

However, Riccardo Pacifici, President of the Jewish Community in Rome, whose grandparents died at Auschwitz, told the Pope that although Pius XII "perhaps could not have stopped the trains of death, he could have sent a signal, a word of extreme comfort, of human solidarity for those of our brothers who were sent to the ovens of Auschwitz."

In a speech to the Italian Parliament last month marking Holocaust Remembrance Day Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Prize-winning Jewish author and survivor of Nazi death camps, said: "Whether at the lowest level of politics or the highest level of spirituality, silence never helps the victims . . . Silence always helps the aggressor."

Jewish groups have urged the Vatican to open its archives on Pius XII for study to settle the issue. In an interview with the Rome daily *Il Messaggero*, Monsignor Sergio Pagano, Prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, said that this could not occur for another five years because Vatican archivists were still cataloguing 16 million pages produced during Pius XII's pontificate, from 1939 to 1958.

Bishop Pagano insisted there was no "political" motive for the current lack of access to the documents, only "technical" reasons. He said the archives would be ready for inspection in 2014 or 2015, at which time "it will be the Holy Father who makes a decision regarding the opening".

The case for Pius XII's beatification requires proof of a medically inexplicable cure through prayers of intercession to him. According to Andrea Tomielli, the biographer of several modern Popes, one possible miracle being studied at diocesan level before being passed to the Vatican involves a 31-year-old teacher from Castellammare di Stabia near Naples who in 2005 developed cancer while pregnant with her third child.

Her husband at first prayed to Pope John Paul II, who had just died. However, John Paul appeared to him in a dream and told him to pray instead to "a thin, tall, lean priest" whom he did not recognise, but who he later realised was Pius XII after seeing his photograph in a magazine. After he had "bombarded" Pius XII with prayers, his wife's tumour disappeared and she had her child safely, the man told local Church authorities.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article7011646.ece>