Questions about Pope Pius XII’s leadership during World War II continue to color Catholic-Jewish relations. While many scholars have engaged in research on the topic, a growing number argue that no conclusions can be reached until all relevant Vatican archives have been opened and reviewed. This paper argues that currently open Vatican archives, supplemented with eyewitness accounts and documents from other sources, provide a consistent portrait of the wartime pope as a champion of the victims, opponent of the villains, and inspiration to the rescuers. As such, even without opening additional archives, the documentary record supports the Holy See’s determination that Pius XII led a life of “heroic virtue.”

In 1999, John Cornwell’s book Hitler’s Pope was hot off the press, and critics of the Catholic Church needed to do no more than embrace its outrageous charges about Pope Pius XII. Before long, however, that book was discredited to such a point that Cornwell distanced himself from its central allegation.\textsuperscript{1} All along, however, new critics kept trying to defame Pius.

The charges against Pius were often inconsistent with one another. He was too involved with minutiae or completely remote from reality; cared only about financial matters or cared most about a central papacy; was a moral coward or was recklessly brave. On these contradictory charges were piled others: He was almost a recluse, was too persnickety, was a racist, helped war criminals escape justice, was an anti-Semite, and just about everything in between. As each new charge was refuted, the critics shifted to a new one.\textsuperscript{2}

The argument that seems to have finally taken hold—even with many supporters of Pius—is on the surface quite simple: The sainthood process should stop, and scholars should not reach any conclusions until all archives are open. Historians cannot make a reasoned judgment about him, so the argument goes, until all of the Vatican’s archives related to his papacy are open. Like the other arguments set forth by papal critics, this one is flawed. It is, of course, always better to have more evidence rather than less, but in the case of Pius XII, there is more than sufficient evidence to make a reasoned decision about his leadership.

The Holy See, like most governments, keeps records confidential for a period of time to make certain that secret governmental information will
not be revealed and that living people will not be compromised. It also takes time to catalogue and index files before the general public is given access. Ten years ago, most of the documents from Pius XII’s papacy were still sealed, but the Vatican opened new archives in 2003 and 2006. Today, about 65 percent of Pacelli’s documents are available. Still, some scholars think decisions should be withheld until all the documents are available.

One point against this view is that some people have had access to all of the archives. In 1964, Pope Paul VI asked a team of three Jesuit historians to conduct research in closed Vatican archives and publish relevant documents from the war years. A few years later, a fourth priest joined the team. These men had complete access to the wartime archives. Their project was completed in 1981 with the publication of the 11th volume of the Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale. These documents provide great insight into the mind of Pius XII.

Historians at the Vatican’s Congregation for the Causes of Saints have also had access to the archives. Most notable in this group are Peter Gumppel, S.J., and Paul Molinari, S.J. Their work resulted in the completion of the thirty-nine-year study that fills eight volumes, including 1420 pages on Pius XII’s life; almost 1,000 pages of sworn testimony transcripts given by 98 witnesses; a 300-page synthetic exposition of his virtues of faith, hope, charity, and prudence; and a 300-page appendix addressing specific issues in the life of Pius XII, including his work for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This report, known as the positio, sets forth a compelling case that Pius XII lived a life of heroic virtue.³

In 1999, Pope John Paul II appointed a priest/historian to go through the archives and let him know if there was anything to be concerned about. John Paul, of course, called Pius XII “a great pope.” In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI ordered yet another review of the wartime archives. This took place between 2007 and 2008, and the results confirmed what all the others had said: Pius XII worked hard to protect Jews and others from the Nazis. After receiving that report, Benedict signed the decree advancing Pius XII’s sainthood cause.

In 2009, the head of Vatican archives, Bishop Sergio Pagano, said that he and a group of about 20 were working toward having all the documents indexed and getting prepared for opening the archives.⁴ Pagano also said: “He was a great pope, who . . . did many things for Jews and for prisoners of World War Two.” He added that “Pope Pius took great risks, even very great personal risks, to save Jews. I can’t say more now but whoever wants to open their eyes in five or six years will be able to open them.”⁵

The testimony of those who have had access to the complete archives is but one important piece of evidence that argues against postponing the
canonization process. Many relevant documents have also been found in non-Vatican archives. For instance, we know that Pius forwarded information from the German resistance to Allied leaders regarding a proposed coup attempt. This information was found in British archives. Similarly, outside of Vatican archives we have found two letters from the Vatican that were sent along with money from the pope to be used for Jews who were interned in southern Italy. Moreover, we have numerous press accounts from that era.

All of this does not begin to touch the eyewitness accounts of Pius XII’s efforts on behalf of the Jews. In addition to tributes from nearly every major Jewish organization of that era, we have a mountain of testimony from rescuers, victims, Germans, Jews, priests, nuns, rabbis, at least seven cardinals, and two popes. There are also more archives that were recently opened at the Vatican, and another collection of documents related to the Vatican Information Bureau, which was published in 2004 in two volumes numbering 1,511 pages.6

All of this evidence weighs heavily in Pius’s favor, but perhaps the most compelling point to counter the argument for delay is that we already possess adequate data from Vatican archival material that has been made public. What, then, do we know from the documents already released? Staying only with those documents that were published in the Actes et Documents collection, it is easy to see that the Vatican did a great deal to oppose the Nazis and support those who were victimized. They show that Pope Pius XII was strongly anti-Nazi and that he was concerned about all of the victims.

EARLY IN THE WAR (1939–1940)

On the eve of war, the pope sent identical notes to the governments of Germany, Poland, Italy, France, and Great Britain, “beseeching, in the name of God, the German and Polish Governments . . . to avoid any incident.”7 He added: “The Pope is unwilling to abandon hope that pending negotiations may lead to a just pacific solution.”8 Unfortunately, these efforts did not stop the invasion of Poland by Germany and the USSR.

Six weeks later, Pius issued his first encyclical, Summi Pontificatus, which led to this headline in the New York Times: “Pope Condemns Dictators, Treaty Violators, Racism; Urges Restoring of Poland.” Polish Cardinal Hlond wrote to offer his thanks:

This official and solemn statement, together with the unforgettable paternal allocution of September 30, will be greatly treasured by Poles. It will also be, for the rising generation, a source

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of the great strength in the Faith and the traditional attachment to
the Holy See, especially when it is seen in the light of the many
and far-reaching works of relief that Your Holiness has initiated,
and conducts with papal generosity on behalf of the Polish peo-
ple, condemned even in their own country to extermination by
misery, hunger and disease.9

Filippo Cortesi, the nuncio in Warsaw, was forced to flee Poland soon
after the invasion. He escaped to Romania where he received a letter from
Monsignor Domenico Tardini, of the Vatican Secretariat of State, who
communicated the Pope’s desire that he remain in Romania to be of as-
sistance to the Poles fleeing there.10 Most of these Polish refugees were
Jewish. Some stayed in Romania, but many left, with the Church’s help,
for Palestine, and the Actes et Documents collection confirms that the Vati-
can remained in close contact with this process.11 By April 1942, the Ro-
manian minister to the Holy See informed the Vatican that the number of
Jews being baptized into Catholicism was drawing unwelcome attention.12
(Forging baptismal documents was one stratagem that Catholic officials
used to protect Jews from discrimination.)

In May 1940, Yitzhak Isaac Halevy Herzog, Chief Rabbi in the Holy
Land, came to Rome for a meeting on “certain matters of a non-politi-
cal nature which are of most vital importance to Jewry.” The rabbi was
granted an audience with the Cardinal Secretary of State.13 Rabbi Herzog
thanked Pius and the Holy See for “manifold acts of charity” on behalf of
the Jews.14 In July 1943, Herzog wrote to Cardinal Maglione expressing
thanks for the Holy See’s work and asking for assistance for Jews in Pol-
land.15 In November 1943, he wrote:

I well know that His Holiness the Pope is opposed from the
depths of his noble soul to all persecution and especially to the
persecution . . . which the Nazis inflict unremittingly on the Jew-
ish people. . . . I take this opportunity to express . . . my sincere
thanks as well as my deep appreciation . . . of the invaluable
help given by the Catholic Church to the Jewish people in its
affliction.16

In January 1940, Pius told Msgr. Montini, the future Pope Paul VI,
that Vatican Radio must broadcast a report on the conditions of the Catho-
lic Church in German-occupied Poland.17 On October 25, 1940, Vatican
Radio revealed that 115 parishes had been deprived of their clergy, 200
clergy from the Poznan diocese had been placed in concentration camps,
the cathedrals of Poznan and Gniezno had been closed, most larger semi-
naries had been taken over, and the Catholic University of Lublin had been
Vatican Radio regularly prompted vigorous protests from Mussolini and the Germans. The Germans ultimately decided that due to the hostile and anti-German attitude of the Vatican’s press and radio, priests and members of religious orders would be prohibited from leaving Poland. The Nazis filed a protest with the Vatican complaining that recent broadcasts were “against Hitler, against Nazism,” and “in contrast with neutrality.”

Bishops in Poland reported that the broadcasts were causing the Nazis to increase the persecution. As a result, Pius directed that Vatican Radio be perfectly objective (meaning that most broadcasts avoided discussing Germany). The British government, which lost a formidable source of propaganda, issued a protest to the Holy See.

Pope Pius assured the British Minister to the Holy See, Sir D’Arcy Osborne, that there was no agreement between the Vatican and the Germans concerning future broadcasts. The Pope also, however, explained that he could not ignore the persecution of innocent Catholics that these broadcasts always seemed to prompt. Additionally, Pius complained about the British use of his proclamations for propaganda purposes, to the detriment of Catholics in Germany.

There was some concern in the Vatican that the suspension of radio broadcasts might be seen as some sort of alignment with the Nazis. As such, the Secretary of State prepared a long memorandum, which was personally reviewed and corrected by Pius XII, for distribution to the Holy See’s representatives in France, Switzerland, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States. It pointed out that in those areas occupied by the Germans, Catholic schools and churches were closed, religious houses were invaded and searched, priests were arrested, bishops were kept away from the people, and religious teaching and worship were impeded in a thousand ways.

By 1940, the Vatican had an organized effort regarding the clandestine immigration of Jews to Palestine. In fact, volume four of the Actes et Documents contains numerous messages sent immediately following the outbreak of war about efforts to get Jews out of harm’s way, including efforts to obtain travel visas. Most of the other messages sent during this time concerned protecting refugees, without any indication as to race or religion. Several of them contain the mark “Ex Aud. SS.mi.” This abbreviation stands for “Ex Audientia Sanctissimi,” meaning that it was discussed directly with the Pope.

On April 19, 1940, Roosevelt’s envoy, Myron Taylor, was sent from his residence in Florence to Vatican City to discuss ways to keep Mussolini out of the war. Taylor asked about a presidential letter to Mussolini and...
suggested that Pius might also play a role. He gave Maglione two questions. The following day, Taylor cabled the response back to the States: Yes, the President should immediately send a message to Mussolini, and yes, the Pope would undertake a parallel endeavor. The Pope, however, noted that his efforts and those of President Roosevelt should remain independent and not appear to be a coordinated action.29

On April 24, Pius sent a message to Mussolini urging that Italy be kept out of the war.30 Unfortunately, the joint efforts of the President and the Pope could not stop expansion of the war.31 The Allies promised to respect the Vatican’s neutrality but did not promise to avoid Rome altogether.32

On May 3, 1940, Cardinal Maglione sent identical telegrams to the nuncio in Brussels and the internuncio at The Hague warning that an attack by the Germans was imminent.33 The telegrams read: “From a source that can be considered trustworthy, we have learned that, unless something prevents it or happens in the meantime, an offensive will shortly occur on the western front; it will also affect Holland, Belgium, and perhaps Switzerland.”34 On May 6, 1940, Charles-Roux, the French Ambassador to the Vatican, telegraphed his government: “Once again the pope and Msgr. Montini informed me and my counselor that, according to information coming to them from a foreign country, the Germans will unleash an offensive to the western front within a very short time (a week).” He added in a letter of the same date that the offensive would be simultaneously launched against France, Belgium, and Holland.35

After the successful invasions by German troops, Pius sent open telegrams to the leaders of the overrun nations. In the message to King Leopold of Belgium the Pope wrote:

At a time when the Belgian people, for the second time and contrary to its will and its law, see its territory exposed to the war’s cruelties, We, profoundly moved, send to Your Majesty and to your whole beloved country assurances of Our paternal affection; in asking God that this difficult trial come to an end through the reestablishment of Belgium’s full liberty and independence.
From the bottom of our heart We grant Your Majesty and your people Our apostolic blessing.36

Similarly, the telegram to Queen Wilhelmina of Holland asked “the supreme arbiter of the destiny of nations, to hasten with his all-powerful help the reestablishment of liberty and justice.”37

Mussolini’s ambassador, Dino Alfieri, personally filed an official protest on May 13, charging that Pius had taken sides against Italy’s ally, Ger-
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many. The Pope responded that his conscience was at ease, saying: “We are not afraid to go to a concentration camp.” He added:

The Italians are certainly well aware of the terrible things taking place in Poland. We might have an obligation to utter fiery words against such things; yet all that is holding Us back from doing so is the knowledge that if We should speak, We would simply worsen the predicament of these unfortunate people.

On December 2, 1940, Pius wrote to German Bishop Konrad von Preysing, explaining that he wanted the German bishops to see what could be done about the Nazis. As the war went on, Pius frequently wrote to encourage Preysing in his resistance work.

PERSECUTION: 1941

In 1941, Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen of Münster gave a series of strong sermons against the Nazis’ so-called “euthanasia program” (which at that time was focused more on the “unfit” than on Jews). From the Actes et Documents collection, we know that Pius later wrote to Galen that they had brought him “a consolation and a satisfaction which We have not experienced for a long time as We walk down a sorrowful path with the Catholics of Germany.” Pius also noted that letters Galen had mailed to the Holy See had laid the groundwork for his own 1942 Christmas message, which spoke of “hundreds of thousands” who were facing death due solely to their race or descent.

Nazi ideology and German forces were very tough on the Catholic Church. As Pope Pius XII wrote in a letter to the Bishop of Limburg (The Netherlands): “The statements about the ‘new order’ for the Church that have been propagated by a certain party show that it has as its aim the equivalent of a death sentence for the Catholic Church in Germany.”

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Hitler said the attack was necessary to combat the Russian-British threat to Europe. He wanted the Pope’s blessing on the invasion, and some observers expected one. Hitler claimed that it was a “crusade” into the godless Soviet Union. Msgr. Tardini, an outspoken opponent of Hitler, replied: “Nazism has conducted a veritable persecution against the church and continues to do so. Consequently the swastika is not the cross of a crusade.” The British representative to the Vatican later sought and obtained permission from Pius to report on the Pope’s refusal to support Hitler’s “crusade.” That the Pope had maintained neutrality even against atheistic Bolshevism, it was thought, “would make an excellent impression in London.”
As a rule, Pius was sensitive to and sought to prevent the belligerents—whether Axis or Allies—from using the Church’s moral authority for their own aims. For example, French Cardinal Baudrillart traveled to Rome to ask a papal blessing for French volunteer soldiers. Pius, however, demanded an immediate withdrawal of the request for a blessing and ordered Cardinal Baudrillart to make no further public statements on the war whatsoever. Similarly, President Roosevelt wanted Pope Pius to help change the minds of American Catholics about extending the lend-lease program to the Soviet Union. He told the apostolic delegation in Washington, Archbishop Amleto Cicognani, that the United States was only doing what was necessary to fight the Nazis and was not changing in its fundamental distrust of Communism. Roosevelt’s representative to the Pope, Myron Taylor, pleaded with the Pontiff to clarify (if not change) Catholic teaching regarding the propriety of cooperating with the Soviets, especially as that teaching was reflected in Pius XI’s encyclical, Divini Redemptoris.

Cardinal Maglione answered that “The Holy See has condemned and still condemns Communism. It had never uttered a word, and it cannot do so, against the Russian people. It has also condemned Nazism.” Maglione did not think that the Pope needed to further clarify this matter, but he promised to assure Bishop Cicognani that American Catholics did not need to worry about supporting Roosevelt in the war against Hitler.

In a letter dated September 20, 1941, the Vatican Secretariat of State explained to Archbishop Cicognani that in Divini Redemptoris Pius XI had condemned atheistic Communism, but “not the Russian people to whom, in the same document, he sent expressions of good wishes and compassion.” This was eventually used to help change American Catholic minds about the propriety of extending aid to the Soviets.

**FIGHTING BACK: 1942–1943**

On February 2, 1942, Pius XII congratulated Cardinal Faulhaber for his bold sermons in the face of Nazism. In a letter to Bishop Konrad Preysing of Berlin, Pius explained:

The three sermons of the bishop of Münster and the pastoral letter of the joint episcopacy furnish proof of what can still be achieved within the Reich through public and resolute acts. We stress that because the Church in Germany is all the more dependent on your own public actions because the general political situation in its difficult and often contradictory nature imposes on the head of the entire Church in his public statements a neces-
sary restraint. However, that the bishops who with such courage and at the same time in such irreproachable form stand up for the causes of God and the Holy Church, as did Bishop von Galen, will always find Our support, of that We do not specifically need to assure you and your brothers.57

Certain Poles, exiled in London, called for a condemnation of the forces occupying their nation.58 The strongest complaint came from Karol Radonski, Bishop of Wloclawek. When Cardinal Maglione chastised him for “adding an additional cross” for the Pope to carry, Radonski replied that he had heard that the nuncio in France (Valeri) had told Pétain that the pope had condemned the persecution of Jews. “Are we less deserving than the Jews?” he asked.59

In 1942, Pius sent a letter into Poland, to be read to the Catholic faithful. The head of the Church in Poland, Archbishop Sapieha declined to read it, fearing that it would lead to even more persecution. Pius later wrote about this episode to Bishop Preysing of Berlin. It explains much about his thinking:

We leave it to the local bishops to weigh the circumstances in deciding whether or not to exercise restraint, to avoid greater evil. This would be advisable if the danger of retaliatory and coercive measures would be imminent in cases of public statements by the bishop. Here lies one of the reasons We Ourselves restrict Our public statements. The experience We had in 1942 with documents which We released for distribution to the faithful gives justification, as far as We can see, for Our attitude.60

In July 1942, Nuncio Orsenigo reported from Germany that “the situation of the Jews excludes all charitable interventions” and that he had been warned that “the less he talked about the Jews, the better it would be.”61 Throughout the war, Orsenigo made several inquiries related to the Jews.62

Pius was aware that his words had little impact on the Nazis. He wrote in a letter dated March 1, 1942: “Whereas Our Christmas radio message found a strong echo in the world. . . . We learn with sadness that it was almost completely hidden from the hearing of German Catholics.”63 Cardinal Tardino wrote: “everyone knows that the Holy See cannot bring Hitler to heel.”64 Mussolini himself said that appeals to Christianity were meaningless when it came to the Nazis “because they are true pagans.”65

Pius XII’s 1942 Christmas address spoke of “hundreds of thousands who, without any fault on their part, sometimes only because of their nationality or race, have been consigned to death or to a progressive extinction.” The Polish ambassador to the Holy See thanked the pontiff, who
Ronald J. Rychlak

“in his last Christmas address implicitly condemned all the injustices and cruelties suffered by the Polish people at the hands of the Germans. Poland acclaims this condemnation; it thanks the Holy Father for his words.”

In April 1943, Pius wrote to Bishop Preysing of Berlin, explaining that he had received news of the atrocities, which had nothing to do with the necessities of war, and it horrified him. He added that “It was for us a great consolation to learn that Catholics, in particular those of your Berlin diocese, have shown such charity towards the sufferings of the Jews.” He praised the example of Provost Lichtenberg who had been imprisoned for public prayers in support of the Jews. He said: “With the situation such as it is at the moment, We can unfortunately provide them with no effective help except our prayers. We are determined, however, to raise Our voice again on their behalf, according to what the circumstances demand or permit.”

On May 12, 1943, Pius wrote a note encouraging Mussolini to pursue a separate peace with the Allies. Mussolini thanked the Pope, but replied that “under present condition there is no alternative, and Italy will continue to wage war.” On May 29, US Representative Myron Taylor sent a message to the Vatican in which the Holy See was urged to tell “whoever has the means for acting” that Italy now had to separate itself from Germany and form a new government. The only other alternative was utter devastation.

Pius XII’s willingness to negotiate in order to win peace is often portrayed as a willingness to accommodate the aggressive tendencies of Hitler and Mussolini. In a 1942 message to the United States government, however, he expressly stated:

Despite what any propaganda may say to the contrary, We have never thought in terms of a peace by compromise at any cost. On certain principles of right and justice there can be no compromise. In our Christmas allocutions of 1939, 1940, and 1941 the world may read some of these essential principles expressed in unmistakable language, We think they light the path along which We walk and will continue to walk unswervingly. . . . We shall never approve of, much less further a peace, that gives free rein to those who would undermine the foundations of Christianity and persecute Religion and the Church.

On June 2, 1943, in an address to the cardinals which was broadcast on Vatican Radio and clandestinely distributed in printed form within Poland, the Pope, at the request of Polish Archbishop Sapieha, expressed in new and clear terms his compassion and affection for the Polish people. He also predicted the rebirth of Poland “in a Europe based anew on Christian
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foundations.” Sapieha wrote from Krakow that “the Polish people will never forget these noble and holy words, which will call forth a new and ever more loyal love for the Holy Father . . . and at the same time provide a most potent antidote to the poisonous influences of enemy propaganda.”

The Actes et Documents collection shows that in November 1943 the Vatican provided money to help with Jewish rescue efforts. On February 20, 1941, Pius wrote: “When the pope wanted to cry aloud in a strong voice, waiting and silence were unhappily often imposed.” Similarly, on March 3, 1944, he wrote: “frequently it is with pain that a decision is made as to what the situation demands; prudent reserve and silence or, on the contrary, candid speech and vigorous action.”

Ernst Von Weizsäcker, German Ambassador to the Holy See in the latter part of the war, was not a typical Nazi officer. Outwardly he conformed to the requirements of a loyal Nazi diplomat, but inwardly, as his confidants testified, he was determined to sabotage and resist. He was aware of Hitler’s plan to invade the Vatican and kidnap Pius XII, and he told Vatican leaders about it.

On October 16, 1943, the Germans conducted a major roundup of Roman Jews. Pius immediately filed a protest through Cardinal Secretary of State Maglione with German Ambassador Weizsäcker, demanding that the Germans “stop these arrests at once.” Weizsäcker, who said he knew that the Holy See “has had greater faith in the Allies,” said to Maglione: “I always expect you to ask me, ‘So why then are you staying in your position?’“ Maglione, who knew of Weizsäcker’s efforts to help the Jews, replied:

No, I simply tell you: Excellency, you have a soft and good heart. Try to save these innocent ones. It is painful to the Holy Father, painful beyond measure, that in Rome itself and under the eyes of the father of us all so many people are made to suffer for the simple reason that they are members of a particular race.

Weizsäcker assured Cardinal Maglione that “a good number” of Jews had been released, but he cautioned that this information was strictly confidential. At the end of the meeting, Weizsäcker asked Maglione for permission not to report this conversation back to his superiors, lest it lead to retaliation. The Cardinal replied: “Your Excellency has informed me that he is attempting to do something for the unfortunate Jews. I thank him for this. As to the rest, I leave it to his judgment.”

Bishop Alois Hudal (a controversial figure who had contacts with the Germans) reported that on October 17th, he received a phone call from General Stahel who assured him that he had “referred the matter at once
to the local Gestapo and to Himmler. Himmler ordered that in view of the special character of Rome these arrests were to be halted at once.*85

On August 21, 1943, the Allies sent a message to the Holy See. Why, they wondered, had the new Italian government not separated itself from the Germans, and were they being forced to continue the war?86 There was some concern on the part of the Holy See with regard to the propriety of answering, but the Pope decided to reply. A return cable said that Italian cooperation with the Germans was not freely given, but was forced.87 This information helped the Allies with their next major move in the war. On September 3, 1943, British and American forces moved onto the Italian peninsula. On the same day, the Badoglio regime secretly signed an armistice with the Allies. The Italian capitulation was announced on September 8th.88

On June 2, 1943, in an address to the cardinals that was broadcast on Vatican Radio and clandestinely distributed in printed form within Poland, the Pope expressed in clear terms his compassion and affection for the Polish people and predicted the rebirth of Poland.

No one familiar with the history of Christian Europe can ignore or forget the saints and heroes of Poland . . . nor how the faithful people of that land have contributed throughout history to the development and conservation of Christian Europe. For this people so harshly tried, and others, who together have been forced to drink the bitter chalice of war today, may a new future dawn worthy of their legitimate aspirations in the depths of their sufferings, in a Europe based anew on Christian foundations.89

Pius XII assured his listeners that he regarded all people with equal good will. He then, however, provided a bit more insight.

Do not be surprised, Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, if our soul reacts with particular emotion and pressing concern to the prayers of those who turn to us with anxious pleading eyes, in travail because of their nationality or their race, before greater catastrophes and ever more acute and serious sorrows, and destined sometimes, even without fault of their own, to exterminating constraints.

The Pope warned the cardinals to be cautious about what they said: “Every word we address to the competent authority on this subject, and all our public utterances, have to be carefully weighed and measured by us in the interests of the victims themselves, lest, contrary to our intentions, we make their situation worse and harder to bear.”
On August 2, 1943, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) sent a message thanking Pius for his “concern for innocent peoples afflicted by the calamities of war” and asking him to use his influence to help 20,000 refugees in internment camps in Southern Italy. “Our terror-stricken brethren look to Your Holiness as the only hope for saving them from persecution and death.” The following month, a WJC representative reported that approximately 4,000 Jews and Yugoslav nationals who had been in internment camps were removed from immediate danger. The report went on to say:

I feel sure that the efforts of your Grace and the Holy See have brought about this fortunate result, and I should like to express to the Holy See and yourself the warmest thanks of the World Jewish Congress. The Jews concerned will probably not yet know by what agency their removal from danger has been secured, but when they do they will be indeed grateful.

In October, the Israelite Central Committee of Uruguay sent a letter to the papal nuncio, reporting:

We deem it a high honor to make known to Your Excellency our fondness and support of His Holiness, Pius XII, who already directly suffers the consequences of the actual conflict that strikes the world. . . . [T]he Community that we represent has always followed the news . . . of the situation of the Vatican and the August person of His Holiness. . . . And from the depths of their hearts the Israelites of Uruguay pray [for] . . . news that assures the cessation of the danger that threatens His Holiness, Pius XII, ardent defender of the cause of those who are unjustly persecuted.

In November 1943, Rabbi Herzog of Palestine wrote to Pius expressing his “sincere gratitude and deep appreciation for so kind an attitude toward Israel and for such valuable assistance given by the Catholic Church to the endangered Jewish people.” Jewish communities in Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia also sent similar offers of thanks to the Pope.

On December 30, the following message was sent to Pius XII:

With profound gratitude, the Israelite families, fraternally sheltered by the Institute of “Our Lady of Zion,” turn their moved thoughts to Your Holiness, who deigned to show them a new proof of benevolence. And while they express their gratitude for the attentive response to the call for help not in vain directed to Your Christian charity, they wish above all to show their confi-
dence and faith for the spiritual comfort received from the Apostolic Blessing paternally imparted to them.\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{LIBERATION AND THE END OF WAR: 1944–1945}

The Vatican’s efforts to provide food and clothing to people in occupied countries was frequently hindered by Allied or Axis efforts to avoid providing any benefit to the enemy.\textsuperscript{96} In 1944, for instance, Pius asked for assistance from the Allies in feeding the Roman population, but the Allies took the position that this was the responsibility of the Germans.\textsuperscript{97}

In February 1944, a representative of the World Jewish Congress expressed gratitude for “the repeated interventions of the Holy Father on behalf of Jewish communities throughout the world. These acts of courage and consecrated statesmanship on the part of His Holiness will always remain a precious memory in the life of the Jewish people.”\textsuperscript{98}

Even before France’s liberation in August 1944, Charles de Gaulle was named president of the new provisional government (after having served as commander-in-chief of the Free French forces). On May 29, he sent a handwritten note to Pope Pius XII that said:

\begin{quote}
The trial endured by France for many years now, the suffering of each of its children, have been lessened by the witness of your fatherly affection. We foresee an end to the conflict. . . . In accord with what you have taught us, we believe that the most underprivileged deserve our greatest care. . . . We are resolved to save [the French people], and we very much hope to do so while benefiting from the special kindness that Your Holiness indeed wishes to extend to France.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

In June, de Gaulle visited the Pope to discuss the future of Europe, France, Germany, and Italy. De Gaulle was treated as the head of the French government (resulting in a protest from the ambassador from Vichy).\textsuperscript{100}

On June 2, 1944, the Pope spoke about his war-related efforts: “To one sole goal our thoughts are turned, night and day: how it may be possible to abolish such acute suffering, coming to the relief of all, without distinction of nationality or race.”\textsuperscript{101} Two days later, the Allies finally made their way to Rome. It was the first European capital to be liberated from the Nazis. Pius feared a significant battle. He said: “Whoever dares to raise his hand against Rome will be guilty of matricide in the eyes of the civilized world and in the eternal judgment of God.”\textsuperscript{102}

The Committee on Army and Navy Religious Activities of the American Jewish Welfare Board wrote to the Pope after the liberation of Rome:
Word comes to us from our army chaplains in Italy telling of the aid and protection given to so many Italian Jews by the Vatican and by priests and institutions of the Church during the Nazi occupation of the land. We are deeply moved by these stirring stories of Christian love, the more so as we know full well to what dangers many of those exposed themselves who gave shelter and aid to the Jews hunted by the Gestapo. From the bottom of our heart we send to you, Holy Father of the Church, the assurance of our unforgetting gratitude for this noble expression of religious brotherhood and love.\textsuperscript{103}

The American Jewish Committee and the Committee to Save Jews in Europe also sent thanks. They noted the “decided improvement obtained in Hungary” and said that “the aforementioned committees recognize that everything is owed to the Holy Father.”\textsuperscript{104}

**CASE STUDY: SLOVAKIA**

The *Actes et Documents* contain quite a bit of information about the Vatican’s concern for the Jews in Slovakia.\textsuperscript{105} Msgr. Tardini recorded in his notes of October 21 and 23, 1941, that if the pro-Nazi statements attributed to Slovakian priest-politician Jozef Tiso were actually made by him, the Holy Father wanted his name to be removed from a list of prelates designated for special praise.\textsuperscript{106} The following year, Tardini wrote: “It is a great misfortune that the President of Slovakia is a priest. Everyone knows that the Holy See cannot bring Hitler to heel. But who will understand that we can’t even control a priest?”\textsuperscript{107}

When anti-Semitic legislation was put in place, the Holy See sent Slovakia’s representative a written protest saying that these laws were “in open contrast to Catholic principles.”\textsuperscript{108} Under direct orders from Pius, the Slovak Minister to the Holy See was summoned and requested to take immediate action with his government.\textsuperscript{109} The Vatican also instructed the chargé d’affaires in Bratislava once again to contact Tiso and seek relief.\textsuperscript{110} In April 1943, a message went out instructing the Holy See’s representative in Bulgaria to take steps in support of Jewish residents who were facing deportation.\textsuperscript{111}

On May 5, 1943, another message went out from the Vatican’s Secretary of State to the representative in Slovakia condemning “the forcible removal of persons belonging to the Jewish race. . . . The Holy See would fail in its Divine Mandate if it did not deplore these measures, which gravely damage man in his natural right, merely for the reason that these people belong to a certain race.”\textsuperscript{112} Shortly thereafter, the secretary of the
Jewish Agency for Palestine met with Archbishop Roncalli, “to thank the Holy See for the happy outcome of the steps taken on behalf of the Israelites in Slovakia.”

On September 20, 1944, the Vatican again instructed its representative in Bratislava to intervene for the Jews. Jewish communities around the world soon recognized that the Vatican was an advocate in favor of Jews in Slovakia.

A telegram from October 1944 drafted under the name of the acting Secretary of State bears corrections in Pius XII’s handwriting. It directed the chargé d’affaires to:

Go at once to President Tiso and, informing him of His Holiness’s deep sorrow on account of sufferings which very large numbers of persons—contrary to principles of humanity and justice—are undergoing in that nation on account of their nationality or race, in the name of the August Pontiff bring him back to sentiments and resolutions in conformity with his priestly dignity and conscience.

Early in the war, the Grand Rabbi of the British Empire wrote to Cardinal Maglione asking for assistance in protecting Slovakian Jews. In 1945, he wrote a letter of thanks:

All the deeper is our appreciation of the sympathy that His Holiness the Pope, and all those associated in the leadership of the Vatican, have shown in the fate of our doomed brethren. The whole House of Israel will be ever mindful of the many and persistent efforts that have been made by Roman Catholic authorities to rescue Jews threatened with barbarous murder.

CASE STUDY: HUNGARY

Much about the Vatican’s efforts regarding Jews in Hungary can also be found in the Actes et Documents collection. Almost as soon as the Nazis moved into Hungary, organizations began asking the Vatican for help. Early in the occupation, the Vatican sent Nuncio Rotta a letter of encouragement in which the treatment of the Jews was called “unworthy of Hungary, the country of the Holy Virgin and of St. Stephen.”

On May 15, 1944, the papal nuncio wrote to the Hungarian Prime Minister and the Foreign Ministry, arguing:

The very fact of persecuting men merely on account of their racial origin is a violation of the natural law. If God has given them life, no one in the World has the right to take it from them.
or refuse them the means of preserving it, unless they have committed crimes. But to take anti-Semitic measures, not taking into account at all the fact that many Jews have become Christians through reception of baptism, is a serious offense against the church and in contradiction with the character of the Christian state, such as Hungary is proud to profess itself, even today.\textsuperscript{121}

By mid-summer, despite the Church’s efforts, 437,000 Jews had been deported from Hungary. Then, on June 25, Pius XII sent an open telegram to the Regent of Hungary, Admiral Horthy:

\begin{quote}
Supplications have been addressed to Us from different sources that We should exert all Our influence to shorten and mitigate the sufferings that have for so long been peacefully endured on account of their national or racial origin by a great number of unfortunate people belonging to this noble and chivalrous nation. In accordance with our service of love, which embraces every human being, Our fatherly heart could not remain insensible to these urgent demands. For this reason We apply to your Serene Highness appealing to your noble feelings in the full trust that your Serene Highness will do everything in your power to save many unfortunate people from further pain and suffering.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

In addition to the telegram to Admiral Horthy, Pius sent an open telegram to Hungarian Cardinal Serédi, asking for support from the Hungarian bishops:

\begin{quote}
We would forfeit our moral leadership and fail in our duty if we did not demand that our countrymen should not be handled unjustly on account of their origin or religion. We, therefore, beseech the authorities that they, in full knowledge of their responsibility before God and History, will revoke these harmful measures.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

The telegram was read publicly in many churches before all copies were confiscated by the government. Nuncio Rotta informed Serédi of Pius XII’s desire “that the Hungarian episcopate should publicly take a stand . . . on behalf of their compatriots who are unjustly hit by racist decrees.”\textsuperscript{124}

**CONCLUSION**

This paper reviews only a fraction of the evidence in the *Actes et Documents* collection, and it does not use documents from other archives that are available to scholars. Nevertheless, the documentation here shows a great deal about the character of Pope Pius XII and about his actions dur-
ing the Holocaust. In fact, there is enough evidence available to make a very reasoned judgment about his leadership. Courts have decided cases beyond a reasonable doubt on less evidence. What document would one expect to find that could possibly overcome the evidence already produced?

Not all the archives have been opened from the papacy of Pope John Paul II, yet no one suggests that it is too early to reach a judgment about him. The difference between Pius XII and John Paul II is in the starting assumption. There is no lingering doubt about John Paul, but for some there is when it comes to Pius. The evidence already available, however, should be sufficient to overcome that doubt.

Notes

1. In The Pontiff in Winter (2004), Cornwell said: “In the light of the debates and evidence following Hitler’s Pope,” Pope Pius XII “had so little scope of action” that it is impossible to judge his motives “while Rome was under the heel of Mussolini and later occupied by the Germans.” See “Exonerated,” National Catholic Register, January 23–29, 2005, p. 1 (“the author most responsible for spreading the ‘Hitler’s Pope’ myth admits he was wrong”).


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid.


28. In *Under His Very Windows*, author Susan Zuccotti discusses Montini’s note of Oct. 1, 1943 concerning his efforts on behalf of the Jewish family, but she says nothing of Pius XII’s own involvement, which is confirmed by the notation.


34. Ibid. The editors of the *Actes et Documents* collection added a footnote explaining that the information came to the Vatican from “Dr. Joseph Müller, who was the usual agent between the Vatican (Fr. Robert Leiber) and the hostile Nazi regime.”


39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.


nouncements” and telling him that two letters he had mailed to the Holy See laid the groundwork for the 1942 Christmas message).

44. For Pius XII’s February 24, 1943, letter to von Galen, see Actes et Documents, volume 2, p. 306, no. 101.


47. Ibid. Later, Hitler wanted to back off from the “crusade” language, because it might mean that he would have to let Churches into occupied areas, and he did not want to do that. Cornwell (1999) at 261.


49. Notes de Mgr. Montini, September 27, 1941, Actes et Documents, vol. 5, p. 254, no. 105. The British leadership used the Vatican’s refusal to support the “crusade” for propaganda, even to the extent that they acknowledged “causing the Vatican some embarrassment.” The Holy See at this time was only aware of two Catholic churches that were open in all of the Soviet Union. Notes du cardinal Maglione, September 11, 1941, Actes et Documents, vol. 5, p. 199, no. 72.


53. Ibid.

54. Notes du cardinal Maglione, September 11, 1941, Actes et Documents, vol. 5, p. 199, no. 72. See Notes de Mgr. Tardini, September 5, 1941, Actes et Documents, vol. 5, p. 185, no. 63. (Tardini’s notes: “These Americans—who in reality are already in the war against the Axis . . . should comprehend that the Holy See is in a very difficult situation. . . . As for religious liberty in Russia, it is clear that so far it was the most that was trampled upon.”)


58. Le primat de Pologne cardinal Hlond au pape Pie XII, October 7, 1939, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 3*,* p. 88, no. 21 (including a facsimile of the original handwritten letter).

59. For the original correspondence between Radonski and Maglione, see *Actes et Documents*, volume 3, at 633–636; 713–717; 736–739.


62. See *Actes et Documents*, vol. 8, 59–60; id., vol. 8, 687.


81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.


96. See Le cardinal Maglione au ministre de Grande Bretagne Osborne, October 11, 1941, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 8, p. 305, no. 169 (message from
Ronald J. Rychlak

Maglione to Osborne regarding distribution of provisions in Greece); Le nonce à Berlin Orsenigo au cardinal Maglione, November 12, 1941, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 8, p. 347, no. 200 (similar message from Orsenigo to Maglione).


100. Ibid.


102. Ibid.


109. See Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d’affaires à Presbourg Burzio, March 9, 1943, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 9, p. 179, no. 87 (Vatican direction to impede the deportation of 20,000 Jews from Slovakia).

110. See Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d’affaires à Presbourg Burzio, March 9, 1943, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 9, no. 87 (Vatican direction to impede the deportation of 20,000 Jews from Slovakia).


115. Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d’affaires à Washington Cicognani. February 16, 1944, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 10, p. 134, no. 60 (directive regarding requests from the World Jewish Congress); Le cardinal Maglione au chargé
d’affaires à Presbourg Burzio, April 22, 1944, *Actes et Documents*, vol. 10, p. 234, no. 159 (similar).


