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News

Documents show Pius saved Jews from Nazis

By **Ed West**
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Gary Krupp says evidence suggests that Pius was among the few world leaders who did not abandon the Jews (CNS)

Documents discovered in the Vatican Secret Archives prove that Pope Pius XII helped to save thousands of Jews during the Second World War and firmly opposed anti-Semitism before he became pope, it emerged this week.

The 300 pages of documentation, posted online last week, suggest that Pius saved 80,000 lives by persuading the Hungarian regent to prevent deportation of the Jews, and that he saved a further 12,000 by securing visas for them to leave Europe for the Caribbean.

The documents, discovered by Dr Michael Hesemann, a German historian, show that, as Archbishop Eugenio Pacelli, the future pope intervened with the German government to assure that their Turkish allies would not harm the Jews living in the Ottoman province of Palestine.

As nuncio to Bavaria, Pacelli personally helped World Zionist Organisation representative Nachum Sokolov to meet Pope Benedict XV in 1917 to discuss a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And in 1926 Cardinal Pacelli encouraged German Catholics to join the Committee Pro Palestina, which supported Jewish settlements in Palestine.

Other documents include an entry written by a nun detailing Pope Pius XII's order of 1943 to hide the Jews of Rome in religious houses, and listing the names of Jews sheltered.

Furthermore, they show that Pius's anti-Nazi tendencies went back to before the war. A 1939 US Foreign Service document in which the US Consul General to Cologne reports to Washington on the "new Pope", stating that he surprised him by his hatred of Hitler and the Nazi regime, and how Pope Pius supported the German hierarchy's opposition to Nazism, even if it meant losing the support of German Catholics.

A 1938 document, signed by Cardinal Pacelli during his last months as Vatican Secretary of State, declare the Vatican's opposition to a planned Polish law to make Kosher slaughtering illegal. The anti-Semitic bill was defeated. Other documents show that Pius XII convinced the Brazilian government to accept 3,000 Jews and helped to forge baptismal papers to

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allow Jews to pass as "Aryans".

The Pave the Way Foundation, invited by Yad Vashem to carry out research into the conducted of a man vilified as "Hitler's Pope", has also posted several video interviews on its website (www.ptwf.org), including an interview with an elderly priest who describes how Pope Pius helped 12,000 Jews to escape to the Dominican Republic.

Pius XII died in 1958 but his wartime reputation became a source of controversy five years later, when German Communist Rolf Hochhuth wrote The Deputy, a fictional play that indicts Pius for his failure to speak out against the Holocaust.

Pave the Way now has testimony from Lt General Ion Mihai Pacepa, the highest-ranking KGB agent ever to defect to the West, that The Deputy was financed and edited by the Soviets, and sustained by doctored Vatican documents as part of a KGB plot to discredit the Vatican.

Gary Krupp, the president of Pave the Way Foundation said: "Personally, as a Jew, I find that correcting this revision of history according to documented proof has really nothing to do with the Catholic Church. In the interest of Jewish justice we must acknowledge the efforts of one man during a period when as a people we were abandoned by the rest of the world. It's time to recognise Pope Pius XII for what he really did rather than what he didn't say."

Some scholars, including Pinchas Lapide, the Jewish diplomat and historian, estimate that the Catholic Church under Pius saved between 700,000 and 850,000 Jews from the Nazis, mostly by either providing sanctuary or passage to safe countries but also by intervening, when practicable, to stop their round-up in occupied countries.

But John Cornwell, author of Hitler's Pope, a critical biography of Pius, said: "If Pius is to take credit for non-Aryans given safe passage to Brazil via Rome during the war, then he should take responsibility, by the same token, for Nazis given safe passage via Rome after the war. It could well be that he was ultimately responsible for neither."