

Scholar: Pope could not help Jews

Hitler unmoved by public opinion

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A public denunciation by Pope Pius XII of Nazi war atrocities against Jews would have sparked more repression, said a background paper by a prominent Catholic scholar.

"Where the Nazi machine was already organized for oppression, the screw would have been turned even more tightly," said the paper.

This position was shared by the Allies and the International Red Cross, it said.

"Those engaged in humanitarian work were agreed that the results in terms of human lives were more important and urgent than the manifestation of public indignation," it said.

Public protest "might quiet consciences but would have no real effect and be positively dangerous to the persons one is trying to help," it added.

The paper was prepared by Jesuit Father Robert Graham, Vatican historian. Copies were made available to participants in a 1992 closed-door Catholic-Jewish meeting in Baltimore, but the paper was not an official part of the meeting.

Father Graham recently gave the unpublished paper to Catholic News Service after excerpts appeared in U.S.

newspaper articles.

The International Committee of the Red Cross shared the Vatican view that a public protest would have been counterproductive, destroying practical action being taken to save Jews, the paper said.

During the war, Carl Burekhardt, International Red Cross official, told a world Jewish leader that his organization's whole activity could be put in jeopardy by a strong protest, it said.

The Allies wanted Pope Pius to issue a strong protest because of its anti-Nazi propaganda value, but the Allied countries did not think such a statement would help Jews, it added.

When the three Allied powers met in October 1943 in Moscow "they did issue a statement on atrocities but did not mention a word about the situation of the Jews," it said.

"The Dutch government had objected to singling out the Jews for special notice: They had already experienced the spiteful reprisals of the Nazis in their own country," it said.

The record showed that German leader Adolf Hitler was unmoved by adverse public opinion, it said.

"Hitler built his power on disregard for world opinion, on intransigence, in the face of fierce political, economic and moral pressure from abroad," it said.

One example of this disregard was the 1942 reprisal roundup of 500 Jews in Berlin after five Jews were suspected of involvement in an anti-government bombing, the paper said. Half of those rounded up were executed and the remainder were sent to concentration camps, it added.

The Vatican also feared that strong criticism would have been turned into political propaganda by the Allies, destroying what little leverage it had with Germany and its satellite countries, it said.

Because of the situation, Pope Pius "declared cryptically" in several public statements his opposition to Nazi actions, it added.

The criticisms were couched "in generic phrases, in allusions, with judgments marked by indirectness, naming no names and no country," but the meaning was understood by the warring sides, it said.

"They were commented on with enthusiasm by the British, and confiscated with equal zeal by the Nazi police," said the paper.

The pope also engaged in numerous private diplomatic efforts to help Jews, said the paper. This included protesting activities to German officials and encouraging Latin American governments to give false passports to Jews threatened with deportation to concentration camps, it said.

The Baltimore meeting was held last May and sponsored by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

It was one of a series of meetings being held to gather information for a Vatican document on anti-Semitism and the extermination of millions of Jews by the Nazis.

Prayer permitted



AP/Wide World Photos
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