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Papal Responses to the Holocaust: Contrast between Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II

The New York Times, an American daily newspaper founded and continually published in New York City since 1851, is owned by a Jewish family, the Sulzbergers. Since 1896, four generations of the Sulzbergers have overseen The New York Times through its reporting on the Roman Catholic Church, and the transformations the Church has set in motion by the Second Vatican Council. This paper will examine how The Times portrays the relationship between the papacies of the Church and the events of the Holocaust. In addition to examining The Times, this paper will explore the ways in which Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews by James Carroll, as well as articles from Catholic journals, write from different angles about Pope Pius XII’s actions during the Holocaust and Pope John Paul II’s reconciliatory efforts.

The Church’s relationship with the Jewish people is a controversial topic because of the Church’s role during the Holocaust. The twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council, also known as Vatican II, was concerned with renewing its relation to ecumenism and other religions, specifically Judaism. In an attempt to identify the Church’s meaning in the modern world, the Council’s four sessions, from 1962 to 1965, opened dialogue between Christians and non-Christians. The Times captures the tension between the Church and the Jewish people’s feelings about the history of this relationship by contrasting the different papacies and the differing ways in which popes confronted this issue.

The coverage by The Times prominently focuses on Pope Pius XII, the Pontiff during the Second World War, who many Jews resent for remaining silent during the mass murder of six million Jews. In contrast to this silence, Pope John Paul II publicly apologized to the Jews for the Church’s actions, or rather inaction, during the Holocaust. The Times explores and reports the crux of the tension between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people: whether Pope Pius XII did as much as he could to save the Jews during the Holocaust. The consensus among Jews is that he did not. In contrast, Pope John Paul II dedicated his efforts to enter in the “dawn of a new epoch of reconciliation.” Consequently, The Times portrays these Catholic leaders in different ways, a more positive and admirable tone towards John Paul II than to Pius XII.

Pope Pius XII held the papacy during the years 1939-1958. Since then, The Times has reported about the continued controversy over his leadership of the Catholic Church during World War II. The Times represents Pope Pius XII as the supreme bystander, as one who was aware of the deportation of Jews to concentration camps and of the mass killings, but who never objected. For example, after a month of German Nazi occupation in Rome, home to about four thousand Jews, on October 16, 1943, the German officers arrested more than twelve hundred Jews. The Jews were forced to move from their homes and live in tiny quarters in the Italian Military College, which stood only a few hundred

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yards from Vatican City. However, there was no protest from the Church. The Jews were then transported to Auschwitz, where most were murdered. As The Times explains, “to many Jews [Pius XII] symbolizes the open anti-Semitism of the Roman Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65.” As a result, the general opinion of Jews is that Pope Pius XII “placed the Vatican’s political neutrality above its role as the world’s leading moral spokesman.”

However, defenders of Pope Pius XII assert that he was not indifferent to the fate of the Holocaust victims, but that his perceived silence was “sound diplomacy” in fear of German reprisals. The Catholic community remained silent about the crimes committed against Jews and Judaism in order to preserve the strength of the Church and avoid the threat posed to their own institutions. In the 1930s, during the time of Pius XII’s papacy, when the Nazis took over the government, many German citizens were affiliated with the Church. Hitler’s hatred for Jews did not seem that offensive or extreme to the Catholic masses of Europe because this historical anti-Jewish sentiment was long-standing. This view towards Judaism was not repudiated until Vatican II. Therefore, if Pope Pius XII had resisted Hitler and protested the extermination of Jews, Catholics would have had to choose between a Church-hating government and the Church. Defenders of Pope Pius XII believe that he did not want to bring them into “conflicts of conscience,” as vast numbers of Catholic Germans, as well as other Catholic Europeans, would have preferred Hitler to Pius XII. Thus, “[h]is defenders say the Pope, fearful of Nazi wrath against Catholics, deliberately kept his voice low.” On the other hand, critics of Pius XII resent his failure to challenge Hitler directly. As a result, assertions regarding the leadership of Pope Pius XII still remain in dispute, as historical documents from his papacy have not been released from the Vatican archives, and thus, have yet to be academically scrutinized.

The Times not only covers the actions of the Pope, but also the reactions and deep resentments the Jewish people have towards the Church. Many Jews are unable to “shed their memories of pain and bloodshed” that they associate with the Church. Strong words are used to evoke the oppression experienced by the Jews: “dank and deep,” “full of hatred, fear and ignorance, with a few islands of understanding, of cooperation and of dialogue.” These descriptions demonstrate the extent to which the Jewish people cannot ignore what happened in the past. Extreme and somewhat hyperbolic words, such as “ever” and “most,” are used in these articles, which create a strong impression on the reader. For example, in Diplomatic Pact by Israel and the Vatican, Clyde Haberman states, “The Jews’ pain became more intense than ever with the Nazi Holocaust.”

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5 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 525.
6 Ibid., p. 535.
7 Ibid., p. 534.
10 Ibid.
Moreover, the phrase “residual anger,” used in one article encompasses the long-lasting sentiment of the Jews.\(^\text{11}\) \textit{The Times} evokes this “residual anger” by explaining how troubled and resentful Jews still are today. Therefore, these negative feelings have caused many Jews to believe that the Church, more than half a century later, “should not be forgiven” for their idleness while six millions Jews were murdered.\(^\text{12}\)

Contrary to Pius XII, the papacy of John Paul II represents the change set in motion by Vatican II, as he acknowledged the Church’s past mistakes. Pope John Paul II’s background affected his outlook towards the Jewish people. Born and raised in Southern Poland with more than three million Jews, he witnessed and experienced the impact of the invasion by the Nazis.\(^\text{13}\) During the years of the Nazi occupation, he entered an underground seminary and studied secretly to become a priest. He had many Jewish neighbors and friends who were deported to concentration camps and killed by the Nazis. The infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp was in Poland, a mere thirty-five miles from his hometown, Wadowice. Consequently, Poland’s prewar Jewish population of 3.5 million was reduced to almost nothing by the end of the Holocaust.\(^\text{14}\) Many of the articles in \textit{The Times} regarding Pope John Paul II speak about his childhood in Poland because his passion and openness towards other religions stem from his personal experiences. As a result, Pope John Paul II’s Polish roots influenced him to deeply care about the relations between the Catholic and Jewish peoples and to defend the Jewish people throughout his lifetime.

In fact, during the years of his papal reign, 1978-2005, Pope John Paul II made significant progress in improving relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews.\(^\text{15}\) From the start, John Paul II cultivated personal connections with Jewish leaders and embraced Jews as the “elder brothers” of Christians.\(^\text{16}\) After an “honest” examination of the church’s role during this tragic period, he issued several unprecedented apologies to the Jews in attempt to heal the wounds.\(^\text{17}\) He unambiguously expressed his remorse for the Church’s silence during the Holocaust and for the anti-Semitism that has existed for centuries. As part of his efforts to promote greater understanding between religions, he extended his influence beyond the Church. He accomplished this by embarking on numerous trips abroad and traveling far greater distances than had all other popes. As such, these journeys, both physical and spiritual, demonstrate his combination of religion and politics during his leadership role.

\textit{The Times} recognizes the importance of providing readers with specific instances in which Pope John Paul II makes an effort to reconcile with the Jews. Interestingly, different reporters highlight the same pattern of events in their articles, in order to portray

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{12}{Ibid.}
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his attempts to form interfaith relations. For example, in 1979, The Times reported that Pope John Paul II was the first Pope to visit the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in order to commemorate the Holocaust victims. The placement of his own cross at the death camp wall in Auschwitz is meant to be a symbol of love and desire to stand in solidarity with the Jewish people. In addition to being the first Pope to visit a death camp, in 1986, Pope John Paul II became the first pontiff known to have visited a synagogue, the Great Synagogue of Rome. He met with the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Elio Toaff. At this synagogue, he made a speech addressing the “centuries of pain and mistrust,” in which he referred to Jews as the “beloved elder brothers” of Catholics. In 1994, John Paul honored the memory of the millions of European Jews killed by the Nazis and embraced Rome’s Chief Rabbi as the honored guest at an unprecedented Vatican memorial ceremony.

Then, in 2000, six years after Pope John Paul II had pushed the Vatican to formally recognize the State of Israel and established diplomatic relations with Israel, he visited the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the most sacred site in Judaism. On behalf of the Catholic community, Pope John Paul II, following a Jewish tradition, inserted a printed prayer in the crevice between the stones of the Western Wall. In that prayer, he requested forgiveness from the Jews by stating: “[w]e are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history caused the children of God to suffer, and asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.” During the same trip to Jerusalem in 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak invited Pope John Paul II to Yad Vashem, a museum in Israel that commemorates Jewish victims of the Holocaust as well as righteous gentiles who saved Jews. The Times describes Pope John Paul II’s presence at Yad Vashem as “a visually riveting moment symbolic of…the establishment of healthy relations between Roman Catholics and Jews.” Thus, these powerful displays evidence Pope John Paul II’s generous and sincere spirit of reconciliation, a hallmark of his papacy.

Moreover, throughout his papacy, John Paul II recognized that in order to reach reconciliation with the Jews, the Catholic community must commit itself to combat the anti-Semitism that existed even before the Holocaust, for nearly the past 2,000 years of history. One of the causes for this revolutionary change was the interpretations of Nostra Aetate (“In Our Times”), a significant encyclical issued during Vatican II. Nostra Aetate, also known as the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” represented a new starting point in forming interfaith relations. The purpose of this document was for “the Church [to] examine more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions.” Vatican II was also instrumental in the Church’s decision to formally repudiate the idea that Jews bear collective guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. During his papacy, John Paul II sought to strengthen the central theme of Nostra Aetate

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by encouraging Catholics to treat every person, regardless of their religion, in a “brotherly way,” because all men are created in the image of God. He stressed the common heritage that binds Christians and Jews.\textsuperscript{23} As a result, Pope John Paul II preached the essence of \textit{Nostra Aetate}, specifically the condemnation of all displays of anti-Semitism.

Pope John Paul II’s efforts to reconcile the Church’s past mistakes and repair its relations with the Jewish people are well documented by the reporters of \textit{The New York Times}. \textit{The Times} incorporates direct quotations of John Paul II and his remarks regarding the historic oppression inflicted on Jews by Christians. As one article in \textit{The Times} explains, John Paul II unequivocally criticized anti-Semitism as “totally unjustifiable and absolutely condemnable”\textsuperscript{24} and another article quotes John Paul II’s characterization of anti-Semitism as a “sin against God and humanity.”\textsuperscript{25}

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II recognized that by blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus, Christian teachings helped “fuel” anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{26} Ending Christianity’s anti-Semitic teachings was a relevant task because such hatred contributed to the depth and breadth of the violence perpetrated during the Holocaust. Pope John Paul II urged Catholics to improve their understanding of the Jewish people and of Judaism because certain Christian teachings were based on “wrong and unjust” interpretations of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{27} John Paul II used his influence in efforts to “look toward a more meaningful understanding of Judaism and the Jewish people in God’s design.” \textit{The Times} praised John Paul II for entering into dialogue with the Jews and for his emphasis on “the equal dignity of the two faiths.”\textsuperscript{28} He is also praised for his willingness to raise the dialogue between Catholicism and Judaism to a new level of maturity and seriousness. These gestures of conciliation toward the Jews are described in a favorable light. Thus, the language in \textit{The Times} displays reverence for Pope John Paul II, his acknowledgement of past mistakes, and the long-awaited papal apologies he provided on behalf of the Catholic Church.

This new understanding of the relationship between Catholics and Jews is also reflected in the revised liturgy. For centuries, Holy Week prayers included passages referring to the “perfidious Jews” as the “slayers of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{29} In an attempt to encourage interfaith relations, one reform adopted during Vatican II was to rid Catholic liturgy of strongly pejorative phrases such as “perfidious Jews.” As \textit{The Times} points out, this change coincided with the efforts in 1965 to “condemn references to Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus and deplored anti-Semitism.”\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{The Times} captures the apologies and deep remorse of John Paul II, as well as the appreciative responses of Holocaust survivors and the Jewish people. In 1994, during the Vatican memorial service, Pope John Paul II urged Catholics to “repent for failing in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{24} Bohlen, “Pope Ties ‘Unjust’ Teachings to Anti-Semitism,” \textit{The New York Times} (November 1, 1997).
\bibitem{26} Bohlen, “Pope Ties ‘Unjust’ Teachings to Anti-Semitism,” \textit{The New York Times} (November 1, 1997).
\bibitem{27} \textit{Ibid.}
\bibitem{30} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{thebibliography}
their moral duty to protest the treatment of Jews."³¹ Subsequently, the remarks by the Holocaust survivors who attended the memorial service indicate the Jews’ appreciation for the Pope’s reconciliatory words and actions. For example, Holocaust survivor Erwin Herling, 74, who survived the camps at Auschwitz and Matthaussen, stated, “[w]hen the Pope shook my hand, I had the feeling 2,000 years of Jewish suffering had come to some kind of turning point.”³² Another victim explained, “[a]s a young boy growing up in prewar Warsaw, I feared crossing the sidewalk next to a church. Now, some 50 years later, the unthinkable is happening.”³³ The impossible had become reality; the Pope demonstrated the possibility of a peaceful coexistence. As Chief Rabbi Toaff stated, the “[Pope’s effort] was much appreciated by the Jews.”³⁴ As such, the reporting in The Times illustrates the extent to which Pope John Paul II’s actions and words have had a powerful effect on the Jews in the process of reconciliation.

Pope John Paul II is portrayed in The Times as the Pope who exercised his moral teaching among his congregants by discouraging anti-Jewish sentiment and encouraging dialogue between the two faiths. The Times contrasts John Paul II’s appreciative and positive feedback from the Jewish people with Pius XII and the deep resentment Jews have towards his actions, or more accurately, his lack of actions. The use of comparative terms, such as “more than any other Pope,” indicates this contrast portrayed by The Times between these two leaders. The tone of The Times’ articles place Pope John Paul II in a more honored light than his predecessors. He is revered for being the one who “sought to heal the strife” between Catholics and Jews, and as the sympathizer with the Jews. Conversely, The Times’ negative portrayal of Pope Pius XII reflects the consensual view among Jews that he was a failure by not extending an outreached hand when it was so sorely needed. Moreover, even many of the headlines of the articles insinuate the level of morality of both Popes. Headlines such as “Holocaust Lamentations Echo at Vatican” and “Pope Offers Conciliation to Jews” echo the persona of John Paul II as a sympathizing figure. On the other hand, headlines such as “Once Again, the Pope has Disappointed Jews” and “The Vatican Knew of Nazi Pogroms, Its Records Show” focus on the immorality of Pius XII during his leadership.

The change in the attitude of the Church toward the Jews parallel the transformation in the articles published in the newspaper. In recent years, The Times has captured the significant progress in the reconciliation effort made by the Catholic Church, specifically by John Paul II. The progression of the articles regarding the Jews’ extremity before and after John Paul II became Pope and reached out to the Jewish community is noteworthy. For example, in articles written in 1993, before the Vatican formally recognized Israel or the occurrence of the Holocaust memorial services held at the Vatican by Pope John Paul II, Jews described the Catholic church as “one of the most conservative, oppressive and corrupt organizations in all human history.”³⁵ In contrast, in an article written only seven years later, in 2000, after the Vatican formally recognized Jews’ right to a homeland in Israel and John Paul visited Jerusalem, two leading Rabbis expressed gratitude and

³³ Ibid.
³⁴ Ibid.
appreciation for the Pope’s words and actions. As The Times explains, “Jews of many congregations felt positively about the progress in Catholic-Jewish relations.” Consequently, The Times, throughout the years, has highlighted the important changes that have occurred since the Second Vatican Council and focused on the leadership of Pope John Paul II as an “absolute revolution” and “enormous progress.”

While The Times offers a wealth of information and reporting about the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people, it is not our only source of knowledge on this topic. Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews by James Carroll is a book that upbraids the church for its history of anti-Judaism. Carroll is an American Catholic writer and a former priest, who condemns the Church’s actions when it fails to reach the high moral standards he believes it should. He views the Holocaust as “the dark heart of [Christian] civilization.” Carroll explains that a central reason for the “moral failure of Catholicism” to oppose Nazism was the Vatican’s vision of absolute papacy. Pope Pius XII’s determination to work for papal power, at the expense of the Jews, demonstrates his elevation of Catholic self-interest over Catholic conscience. Thus, Pius XII shared in the anti-Semitism of his culture, as is seen by “his cancellation of his predecessor’s encyclical condemning Nazi anti-Semitism” in 1939, “his refusal to condemn the brutal German invasion of Catholic Poland,” and “his tacit acceptance of anti-Jewish legislation.” As Carroll explains, “[t]he Roman ghetto, from the middle of the sixteenth century to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, stood as a palpable sign not only of the Church’s attitude toward Jews but of the pope’s own claim to absolute authority.” In addition, the defensive claim that Pope Pius XII was limited to discreet and behind-the-scenes diplomacy leads to puzzling questions, such as why he could not respond to the Nazis in the same manner he voiced his condemnation of the Communists during the 1930s? Pope Pius XII’s strong opposition to Communism and his excommunication of Communist members remains a measure of what he could have done during the Holocaust. A Catholic-born Nazi was never excommunicated for being a Nazi, which addresses the importance of religion over politics to Pope Pius XII.

On the other hand, Carroll’s book, similar to The New York Times, is not an anti-Catholic diatribe as there are several instances when Carroll defends the leadership of the Catholic Church. For example, he appreciates the vigor of Pope John Paul II and the efforts which he initiated from the beginning of his papacy. Carroll further emphasizes how “Pope John Paul II has done more to heal the breach between Christians and Jews than any previous pope” by pointing to the Holocaust as a challenge to the “Christian conscience.” Carroll was especially moved by the Pope’s visits to Jerusalem and Auschwitz. Even though Carroll recognized the significance of the Pope’s visit to Yad Vashem, he viewed the Pope’s presence at the Western Wall as even more inspiring. As Carroll explains, “[f]or the pope to stand in devotion before that remnant of the Temple, for him to offer a prayer that did not invoke the name of Jesus, for him to leave a

37 Ibid.
38 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 63.
39 Ibid., p. 535.
40 Ibid., p. 533.
41 Ibid., p. 531
42 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 437.
43 Ibid., p. 23, 27.
sorrowful written prayer in the crevice of the wall, in Jewish custom, was the single most momentous act of his papacy." Although improving the relations between Catholics and Jews was a slow process, Pope John Paul II’s visit to Israel signifies a small, yet very symbolic step towards reconciliation. Carroll describes the Pope’s efforts as “heartfelt gestures of friendship toward Jews, combined with sincere sympathy for Jewish suffering.” As a result, in this instance, the Church honored the Jewish people’s most holy site and affirmed the presence of the Jewish people in their homeland, as well as symbolically created a new future for better relations between the two religions.

An interesting comparison to examine is the extent to which *The New York Times* and James Carroll’s *Constantine’s Sword* address Pope John Paul II’s trips abroad. Though the newspaper articles recognize the significance of the Pope’s visits, the reporters equalize all of his efforts of reconciliation, as they are placed on the same level of importance. However, Carroll viewed John Paul II’s visit to Yad Vashem and his presence and prayers at the Western Wall as momentous acts that “transcended the routine symbolic gestures” of mere words from a papal written declaration. Carroll and *The Times* both recognize that the Pope’s physical presence at Yad Vashem and the Western Wall was more significant and eloquent than an uttered apology in the 1998 reflection on the Holocaust. However, regarding the Pope’s visit to the Western Wall, Carroll explains, “[t]hough the news media issued its significance,” *The Times* did not sufficiently emphasize that “this moment outweighed even the pope’s later, emotional visit to Yad Vashem.”

Yet, Carroll recognizes that John Paul II’s views were evolutionary as much as they were revolutionary. Carroll acknowledges the shortcomings of many of the public apologies made by Pope John Paul II. Carroll views *Nostra Aetate* as a “considerably watered-down document when compared to earlier drafts.” Many statements by Pope John Paul II recognize the faults of the past, but will not hold the Church accountable. As Carroll explains, “Nostra Aetate deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source, but, of course, it seems not to know what the main source of the hatred, persecutions, and displays had been.”

As Carroll further explains, “[t]he impulse to apologize for the Holocaust is properly distrusted, because words are cheap and apology has become an arrow in the well-equipped politician’s quiver.” This shows how politics is a powerful motivating force behind religion as the leadership of the Catholic Church tries to be diplomatic in their public statements. For example, in 1986, during his visit to the Roman synagogue, John Paul II recalled the fate of the Roman Jews in 1943, but he made no references to the Vatican’s silence. Instead, John Paul II praised the various officials of the Catholic Church for rescuing many thousands of Jews during World War II by offering the Roman

44 Ibid., p. 109.
46 Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews*, p. 600.
48 Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews*, p. 600.
49 Ibid., p. 552.
50 Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews*, p. 553.
51 Ibid., p. 599.
Jews refuge and safety. However, in response to John Paul II’s remarks at the synagogue, the president of the Jewish community of Rome recognized the quasi-truth of what the Pope had said, but rebuked him for not admitting the whole truth. As he replied: “What was taking place on one of the banks of the Tiber could not have been unknown on the other side of the river, nor could what was happening elsewhere on the European continent.”

Similar to The New York Times, Carroll’s inclusion of direct quotations was rather selective and helpful in highlighting that the Vatican’s apologies “avoided a direct confrontation with the source of anti-Semitism.”

Despite The Times focus on the Church’s reconciliatory efforts in the past half-century, the word “guilt” is not used to describe the Church’s contribution to the Jews’ oppressive history. As seen from The Times and the emphasis from Carroll, Pope John Paul II does not blame Pope Pius XII or hold the Church fully accountable. As Carroll explains, “there has been the commitment to keep any shadow of moral culpability or accusation of sin away” from the Church. For example, We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah, a document issued in 1998 by the Vatican, specifically by the Catholic Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, under the authority of Pope John Paul II, disappointed the Jewish community and its leaders because though it acknowledged the lack of actions by individual members of the Church, “it contained no explicit apology” from the Vatican itself. Instead, this papal apology places the responsibility on “some of the Church’s children, but not of the Church.” Thus, this illustrates the Vatican’s view that the moral failure of many Catholics during the Holocaust was not the entirety of the church, but rather wrong-headed Christian thinkers who promoted anti-Judaism.

To the dismay of the Jewish people, not only was the Church exonerated for being complicit in the root of racial theories that guided Nazism, Pope Pius XII was also not criticized but was, rather, praised for the “wisdom” of his diplomacy. Carroll’s use of quotations signifies his skepticism, and ultimate disagreement, to this tribute. The inability of Pope John Paul II to criticize directly and personally the failures of Pope Pius XII is what most concerns Carroll and contributes greatly to Carroll’s assessment of the pope’s immorality. Though this is a profound apology by Pope John Paul II, it also shows the unwillingness of the Church to confront its share of guilt for the tragedy of the Holocaust. While many Jews believe Pope Pius XII was “passive in the face of a genocide,” the Catholic Church does not explicitly view itself as being responsible.

To those who offer a defense of Pope Pius XII, Carroll responds that the “[a]cts of rescue performed in secret by the lower clergy and Catholic laity are defined as acts of the pope, although no records directly tying such heroism to Pius XII have ever been uncovered.” Moreover, it is interesting that Carroll refers to the pope’s “We Remember” 1998 document as a “confession” because his use of quotations indicates his

52 Ibid., p. 525.
53 Ibid., p. 553.
54 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 552.
56 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 552.
59 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 524-525.

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cynicism towards the validity of the Vatican’s issued declarations. Therefore, in Carroll’s opinion, Pope Pius XII’s indifference to the murder of millions was apparent when he failed to protest the atrocities of this Holocaust.

More than the writers of The Times, Carroll criticizes the Church for its intellectual dishonesty. He criticizes the leaders of the Catholic Church for not being fully accountable. Carroll does not think the Church behaved responsibly, as it neither defended Judaism from stereotypical anti-Semitism nor protected the Jewish people during the Nazi extermination. Though Pope John Paul II was certainly apologetic and remorseful for the Church’s silence and anti-Jewish sentiment, Carroll raises the question as to whether that response is adequate. As a Rabbi in The Times explains, “[i]t is not so much an apology we are looking for.” Therefore, merely acknowledging and apologizing for the crimes of the past is limited without the Church taking the blame.

In order to further the point, The Times includes an instance when a German lay theologian, who is preparing a document for German and Polish bishops, claims that Roman Catholics share historical responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust. However, shortly after this the Vatican asserted that the draft “did not have the approval of the Holy See.” Though Pope John Paul II is remorseful for the Church’s behavior, the Church states “that [their behavior] was inconsistent with core Church teaching, instead of set in motion by it.” Carroll points out that the Vatican’s apologies fully avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Thus, Carroll condemns the idea that the Catholic Church is always a benign institution, as exemplified by its failure to resist the annihilation of Jews during World War II.

In fact, significant Catholic journals, such as National Catholic Reporter and Inside the Vatican, defend Pope Pius XII and his actions. The criticisms stated in their articles are directed not at the Church, but rather at the Jewish people. For example, in “Vatican Official Criticizes Jews,” a German Jesuit repudiates Jews for their objection to Pope Pius XII’s canonization. He describes these critical Jews as “massive accomplices in the destruction of the Catholic Church.” The Catholic journals are not hesitant to quote Jesuits who think that “Jews have greatly damaged the Catholic Church.” Many articles addressing the controversial issues of the Holocaust think that Jews should admit guilt just as much as Catholics. The articles are focused on the cases in which Catholics had saved Jews by providing them refuge. In addition, many of the clergy they quote use the word “fact” and “truth” in their statements, as if to say that their views hold more leverage and legitimacy than the opinions of the Jews. Articles of this nature discuss how Catholics saved thousands of Jews, but it never speaks about the six million Jews who were murdered during the papacy of Pius XII.

The doctrine of papal infallibility, the idea that the Pope is reserved for even the possibility of error, is portrayed in the Catholic journals. Many of the reporters do not think Pope Pius XII, His Holiness, could make a mistake, and thus do not view him guilty for his actions during the Holocaust. Countering the attacks on Pope Pius XII’s

62 Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, p. 553.
64 Ibid.
reputation, *Inside the Vatican* characterizes him as a leader “of outstanding moral courage” and criticisms as “ill-informed, pseudo-historical.”\(^{65}\) These Catholic journals state that Pius XII did in fact speak out against the Nazi regimes and acted in defense of the Jews. The image of Pius XII as a pope who sits passively at his desk while Jews were being rounded up in Rome in 1943 is seen as a cynical perception. One article refers to the “slanders” against Pope Pius XII as “alleged silence.”\(^{66}\) They speak about the pope in a revered manner. Thus, the *National Catholic Reporter* describes Pope Pius XII as “a great teacher, a strong leader, a holy man.”\(^{67}\)

Unlike the Catholic journals which forcefully defend Pope Pius XII, *The New York Times* and Carroll’s book contend that there is no doubt that Pope Pius XII’s action during the Holocaust were errors in judgment and integrity. However, the extent to which he is guilty is still disputed in recent newspaper articles. As stated in 1997 in *The Times*, “[n]o Catholic leader would deny that the church bears a historical burden of anti-Semitism.”\(^{68}\)

In the mid-1990s, reports from Rome of the Vatican’s consideration to declare the wartime pontiff Pius XII a saint prompted further controversy among Jews and Catholics. After examining three different sources of information regarding the way in which two different popes handled the Holocaust, it is not surprising that Jews are angry over the Vatican's decision to elevate Pope Pius XII to sainthood. Many Jews opposed the possibility of Pope Pius XII’s beatification and canonization, the last two steps on the path to sainthood, after his reticence and inaction during the systematic slaughter of six million Jews. After the evils of the Holocaust, Jews do not view him as a righteous person, nor do they view his conduct as attaining the standard of sainthood.\(^{69}\) However, a Vatican spokesman, Reverend Federico Lombardi, sought to distinguish between the religious and historical aspects of the papacy, and issued a statement saying that the beatification process evaluated the “Christian life” of Pope Pius XII and not “the historical impact of all his operative decisions.”\(^{70}\) Catholic journals emphasize this distinction between the Church’s religious prejudice (associated with anti-Judaism) and the Nazi’s racial prejudice against the Jews (anti-Semitism), which the Church did not follow. *The Times* explains that many Jews would have preferred to “see the Pope concede a more direct link between anti-Judaism and the mentality that shaped the Holocaust.”\(^{71}\)

The Church does not want its desire to move Pope Pius XII toward sainthood to be viewed as a hostile act toward the Jewish people. However, as *The Times* points out, the goal of beatification certainly legitimizes Pope Pius XII’s actions during the Holocaust. As is evident in the Catholic journals, Vatican officials think Pope Pius XII is being unfairly judged. However, to many Jews, Pope Pius XII cannot be elevated to sainthood. Certainly he cannot be compared to Pope John Paul II, who may one day be a saint, and his actions towards the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Therefore, in the eyes of


\(^{67}\) *Ibid.*


many Jews, the beatification of Pope Pius XII represents a step backwards from the reforms of Vatican II and the interfaith reconciliation by Pope John Paul II.

Although the Second Vatican Council lasted only four years, its effects continue to reverberate almost fifty years later, especially when considering the transforming papacy of Pope John Paul II. His leadership and moral inspiration impacted the profound but gradual change in Catholic-Jewish relations. Pope Pius XII’s lack of action during the Holocaust has caused long-standing resentment among the Jews; conversely, John Paul’s direct actions and unambiguous words have had a powerfully positive and uplifting effect on the Jews in the process of reconciliation. Examining this controversial topic from three different angles, *The New York Times*, *Constantine’s Sword*, and Catholic journals, presents the story with both facts and biases. Reporters of *The Times* and James Carroll are the most critical towards the Catholic Church and the leadership of the Pope during World War II; the Catholic journals primarily reflect the views of the Vatican and address this topic in the most favorable light. The articles in *The New York Times* are more similar to Carroll’s views, as they acknowledge that Pope John Paul II dedicated a tremendous amount of effort to improving interfaith relations, especially compared to the silence and inaction of Pope Pius XII. Consequently, while there may be differing reporters, authors, and Catholics writing about the Church’s actions during the Holocaust, the Jewish people, some more willing to forgive than others, seem to hold the notion that what Pope Pius XII did during the Holocaust was irresponsible and what Pope John Paul II did to criticize the Church’s history and reconcile with the Jews was to be praised.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) On a personal note, my grandfather, Mr. William Ungar, a survivor of the Holocaust from Poland, actually met Pope John Paul II in 1987. In a meeting between representatives from the American Jewish community and the Pope, as the Pope walked down the aisle, my grandfather began to speak to him in Polish. The Pope engaged my grandfather in a discussion, asking him where he was from in Poland and what concentration camp he was in. To me, this shows how much this Pope wanted to engage in dialogue and fix the Church’s image in the Holocaust. This illustrates the nature of the man who wanted to mend the broken relationships that resulted between the Church and the Jews as a result of the Holocaust.
Bibliography