

## Jewish groups praise Pope Francis on opening of Holocaust archives

By SAM SOKOL, *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 January 2014

**Catholic leader to review actions of predecessor, wartime pontiff prior to canonization of Pius XII.**



*Pope Francis arrives to lead the Easter mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 31, 2013. Photo: REUTERS*

Jewish organizations praised Pope Francis on Sunday, following a report that the Catholic leader would open the Vatican archives to investigate the actions of his predecessor, Pius XII, during the Holocaust.

Jewish groups have criticized Pius – who is currently being considered for canonization – for failing to speak up against the persecution of Jews during the Second World War.

Pius's beatification has been a sore spot in Jewish-Catholic relations. Thus far, Pius has passed two of the four stages necessary to reach sainthood.

The Sunday Times quoted Argentinean Rabbi Abraham Skorka, a close friend of Francis, as saying that the pope would follow through on a prior promise to examine Pius's wartime role. Prior to ascending to the papacy, Francis, then known as Cardinal Bergoglio, expressed his position on the issue in his book, *On Heaven and Earth*, which he co-wrote with Skorka in 2010.

“Opening the archives of the Shoah [Holocaust] seems reasonable,” the future pope wrote. “Let them be opened up and let everything be cleared up. Let it be seen if they could have done something [to help], and until what point they could have helped. If they made a mistake in any aspect of this, we would have to say: ‘We have erred.’ We don't have to be scared of this — the truth has to be the goal.”

Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial institute, praised Francis's intention to open the archives, stating that it “would allow researchers to gain a clearer picture of the Vatican and the pope's behavior during the Holocaust.”

Holocaust survivors also welcomed the news.

“This is something that we have been asking for and hoping for decades,” Menachem Rosensaft, senior vice president of the American gathering of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their descendants, told *The Jerusalem Post*. “It is yet another proof that Pope Francis is an exceptional individual who repeatedly demonstrates great sensitivity and integrity.”

“If the story is correct, it is very encouraging news,” WJC president Ronald S. Lauder told the Post. “It is important to open the archives once and for all to clarify the historical record. It would be yet another sign of Pope Francis’s tremendous personal integrity.

He is a great friend of the Jewish people.”

The opening of the archives would be “a great step forward,” Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt told the Post. “The facts would emerge and lay to rest the concerns of Jews who feel he was guilty of turning a blind eye to the Final Solution, of Catholics who feel he has been unfairly maligned and above all, of the historians who are anxious to know the facts so that the full story can emerge.”

Jerusalem Post staff contributed to this report.