

Pius XII and the Holocaust
Correspondence of Stephen E. Krason, Esq., Ph.D.,
and Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza

October 26, 1999

Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza
NCCB/USCC
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20017

Your Excellency:

I am writing on behalf of the full Board of Directors of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists (SCSS). You and the other members of the American hierarchy are no doubt aware of the recent attacks on his late Holiness Pope Pius XII with regard to his actions during the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews. We believe that the U.S. bishops need to respond to these attacks on Pope Pius XII, which are more broadly attacks on the papacy itself and, in fact, the Catholic Church.

We appeal to the NCCB to act to restore the truth as to the role of Pope Pius XII during World War II and the Holocaust in the saving of hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives, and to address also the unjust attacks upon his proved, unequalled, and historic efforts in this regard, and upon his good, virtuous character. It is ironic, and should be a source of serious concern, that since the issuance of the Vatican document on the Shoah, these attacks have grown in frequency and vituperation. They have appeared in such major publications as *The New York Times* and *Atlantic Monthly*, and have also been carried on by spokesmen from major organizations.

This matter has taken on a particular urgency, however, with the recent publication of *Hitler's Pope* by John Cornwell, a scandalous book that not only distorts the truth about the immense effort of Pius XII and the Church to save the Jews during World War II, but actually also depicts this saintly pope--whose cause for beatification is underway--as a kind of collaborator of the Nazis. Troublingly, Cornwell's book has received approving reviews in the *Times*, *Time* magazine, the *Washington Post*, and other leading American publications. This is interestingly in contrast to the book's reception in Europe, where perhaps people have a firmer historical sense about the period. It also

strongly underscores the need to set the record straight about the facts in the U.S., where the apparent lack of this historical knowledge is making people prey to deliberate and careless distortions which are likely to warp their view of Pius XII and the Church.

The gravity of this matter indicates the need for the main institutional body of the U.S. bishops, the NCCB, to address it lest it become in the future a source of vile anti-Catholic prejudice and a poisoning of Catholic-Jewish and interfaith relations generally in the U.S. There is a great need for the U.S. bishops to respond to these pernicious attacks with the intention of simply promoting the truth, in the spirit of charity.

For its part, the SCSS as the nation's only interdisciplinary organization of Catholic social scientists (both scholars and professionals) believes this matter is so threatening to the Church that we have commissioned Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F., a noted authority on Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust and an SCSS member, to assemble a committee of noted scholars familiar with this question to work to bring out the truth about Pope Pius XII. We ask that the U.S. bishops similarly respond to these most vituperative and unjust attacks upon a great pope and Holy Mother Church. I should note that the SCSS Board of Directors was urged to make this request of the NCCB by Sister Marchione, who earlier this month was advised by her local bishop, the Most Reverend Frank J. Rodimer of Paterson, to write to you about this matter. Bishop Rodimer thought that the proper procedure to urge NCCB action--specifically that it investigate the attacks on Pius XII, perhaps with an ad hoc committee of its own--was to write to you. He also told her that he supported such a proposal. Sister believes that the best approach is to have a letter with this request written to you on behalf of the entire SCSS, of which she is a part and which she believes is uniquely positioned to play a leading role in this effort to defend the Church. She has assisted me in composing this letter, and she, I, and the entire SCSS wish to stress the importance of the NCCB's not only looking into this matter but, again, to respond to it.

If the bishops need further information about this matter or if the SCSS can help the NCCB in any way in its efforts to address this, please contact me (contact information above), or Sister Marchione directly (Villa Walsh, Morristown, NJ 07960-4928/(973) 538-2886/fax: (973) 539-9327).

I hope you and the NCCB will give attention to this matter at your forthcoming meeting.

Sincerely in Christ,
Stephen M. Krason, Esq., Ph.D.
SCSS President
cc: Sister Margherita Marchione
SCSS Bishops Board Members

Dr. Stephen M. Krason, President,
Society of Catholic Social Scientists
100 Franciscan Way
Steubenville, OH 43925

Dear Dr. Krason:

Thank you for your letter of support and concern regarding what you rightly discern as calumnies directed against the memory of His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, especially in the secular media. Our Conference staff, as you may know, has issued press releases, studies, and letters to the editor as these matters have come up over the years, for example on the Cornwell book and on earlier false accusations of aiding Nazis to escape after World War II. His Eminence, Cardinal William Keeler, our Episcopal Moderator for Catholic-Jewish Relations, has recently used the occasion of presenting the keynote address at the 16th National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations, to set the many complex issues surrounding the Holy See and the Second World War into proper historical perspective.

We are aware also of the very helpful work of Sr. Margherita Marchione, among others. Again, with regard to the Cornwell book, incisive and detailed critiques were published in the form of editorials, book reviews, and interviews with knowledgeable scholars in major Catholic publications such as *America*, *Commonweal*, *Our Sunday Visitor*, *Catholic News Service*, *The Tablet*, and the *National Catholic Register*.

A major initiative which the Conference will fully support has recently been announced by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. This is the establishment, together with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), of a group of six scholars, three Catholic and three Jewish, who have academic repute in both communities to study the history of the period together. They will begin with a close examination of the thousands of documents from the archives of the Vatican's Secretariat of State from the period of 1939-1941. Entitled, *Actes et Documents du Saint Siege relatifs a la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, the twelve volumes cover the years from 1939-1945 and contain a wealth of primary historical data hitherto largely ignored by the media in the debates surrounding Pope Pius XII. As a joint study of Catholic and Jewish scholars working together, the report of this group will have a great measure of credibility. The Holy See has asked a member of our staff, Dr. Eugene Fisher, to serve as the group's "Catholic Coordinator." We are pleased to be working closely with the Holy See on this most significant endeavor.

Thanking you again for your most welcome expression of concern and, in advance, for the results of the work of your own "committee of noted scholars," which you are commissioning, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza
Bishop of Galveston-Houston
President