

# Pope, Jewish leaders discuss duty of dialogue, access to archives

VATICAN CITY - Dialogue among those who believe in God is a "sacred duty" for all those committed to building a better world, Pope Benedict XVI told members of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

The pope met Oct. 30 with 23 members of the committee, who represent the main branches of Judaism and the world's largest Jewish organizations.

The members of the committee said they came to the Vatican to discuss "issues of mutual concern and interest," including opening the Vatican archives relating to Pope Pius XII, as well as to finalize plans for the 20th meeting of the official International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee.

That meeting will be held in Budapest, Hungary, Nov. 9-13 and will focus on "The Role of Religion in Secular Society" and "Christian-Jewish Relations in Eastern Europe."

Rabbi David Rosen, chairman of the Jewish committee, told reporters committee members wanted to meet the pope before the Budapest meeting "to reaffirm the relationship, especially as there have been issues over the last year which have been a source of concern," but also to express to the pope their solidarity with suffering Christians, especially in Iraq and India.

The Jewish group, he said, reiterated its call for the complete opening of Vatican archival material from World War II "before any historical judgment can be made credibly" about the papacy of Pope Pius and the action of the church in general.

In addition, he said, the Jewish representatives wanted to confirm Vatican assurances that the text of the Good Friday prayer for the Jews that Pope Benedict rewrote for use in the Tridentine Mass "is no endorsement of proselytizing" the Jews. The Tridentine rite is used only in the liturgy celebrated according to the 1962 Roman Missal.

While at the Vatican, the rabbi said, the committee members met with Bishop Sergio Pagano, prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, who explained in detail the process of cataloguing papers from the pontificate of Pope Pius and said it will take at least five more years before they would be ready for examination by scholars.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, issued a statement saying that, whether or not the archival material could provide important new information about Pope Pius' actions during World War II, "the request in itself is understandable and justified" from a scholarly point of view.

But, he said, there are at least 16 million pieces of paper that must be described, numbered and treated for preservation before the complete catalogue will be ready for consultation.

Rabbi Rosen said that one committee member asked Pope Benedict specifically to make no move toward beatifying Pope Pius until the archives are opened.

The rabbi quoted the pope as responding, "I am looking into it. I am considering it seriously," and added, "I think this clearly reflects that he understands the sensitivities."

Rabbi Rosen said that while he hopes the pope will take the sensibilities of the Jewish community into account he did not specifically mention Pope Pius in his formal address to the pope because "I have said, and I say again, it is not the business of the Jewish people to tell the Catholic Church who its saints are."