

Vatican puts historical documents, including some from WWII, online

VATICAN CITY – Historical Vatican documents, including material regarding the role of the church during World War II, are now online and available for consultation on the official Vatican Web site.

Thousands of official Vatican acts recorded between 1865 and 2007 have been scanned and uploaded to the Web site. But the documents likely to arouse the most curiosity are contained in the volumes of World War II-era documents compiled by four Jesuit scholars beginning in the 1960s.

The volumes include material from the Vatican Secret Archives regarding wartime Pope Pius XII, accused by some historians and Jewish groups of not doing enough to save Jews from destruction by the Nazis.

In 1965 Pope Paul VI ordered the scholars to search the archives for evidence to rebut claims about his predecessor's allegedly negligent conduct during the war. The claims were made by Rolf Hochhuth, a German and author of a 1963 play called "The Deputy," in which Pope Pius was depicted as a coward who did not stand up to Adolf Hitler.

The scholars, led by U.S. Jesuit Father Robert Graham, gathered documents through 1981 that were published in 12 volumes under the title "Acts and Documents of the Holy See Relating to the Second World War."

These volumes were digitized recently with the help of the Pave the Way Foundation, whose president, Gary Krupp, seeks to redress what he says are serious misunderstandings about Pope Pius' role during the war. Krupp says the documents show that the pope did much to help Jews, acting often quietly behind the scenes to avoid reprisals by the Nazis against Jews.

The published volumes do not make up the entirety of the Vatican collection of wartime material.

Scholars and Jewish groups have called on the Vatican to open the archives of that period for study. So far, documents dating up to 1939 have been made accessible, but the Vatican has said the wartime documents will not be available until at least 2013 after they are properly catalogued.

Vatican technicians scanned the other documents, noted as Official Acts of the Holy See from 1865 to 2007, a Vatican spokesman said.

They are all available at www.vatican.va under the section Resource Library or on the icon of a stack of books with the Latin words “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” and “Acta Sanctae Sedis.”