Jewish Scholars on Joint Historical Commission Reply to Cardinal Kasper

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Rome, Sept. 5 (JTA) by Ruth E. Gruber

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The Jewish scholars – Michael Marrus of Toronto, Bernard Suchecky of Brussels and Robert Wistrich of Jerusalem – were responding Tuesday to a communique issued Aug. 24 by Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.Kasper had accused the Jews on the Catholic-Jewish panel of 'indiscretion' and making 'polemical remarks in the press' that fomented 'distrust' and made research 'impossible to continue.'

'We hope you will understand our sense of shock that the Jewish members of the group of scholars have been singled out for blame, both in your own communique and in some extraordinarily harsh and totally unjustified statements emanating from the Holy See in recent weeks,' the historians wrote to Kasper.

'Such intemperate attacks on the integrity and scholarship of members of the commission have little in common with' a 'spirit of dialogue and mutual respect,' the letter continued.

The three Jewish scholars are part of a six-member team of historians appointed in 1999 to review published Vatican documentation on the role of the Holy See and Pope Pius XII.

The team jointly submitted a preliminary report in October 2000 which included 47 questions they said could be answered only by searching unpublished material.

'Almost a year later, the issues raised in that report remain unanswered,' the historians wrote. 'Instead we have had inflammatory and scathing statements' from the Vatican 'directed at all members of the commission but with particular virulence towards the Jews.

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'We have never concealed our conviction that responding to the questions we raised in our Preliminary Report should lead to the opening of the Vatican archives for this period,' they wrote. 'We therefore believe that a positive response to the scholars' Preliminary Report, with its call for additional documentation, would be an appropriate way out of an impasse that has not been of our choosing.'

Kasper said earlier this summer that Vatican archives were accessible only through 1923, and that 'technical reasons' made it impossible to provide material after that time. In response, the commission suspended its work in late July.

The suspension remains in effect.

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