



Statement about the Vatican Document "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah"

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The Vatican document, entitled "[We Remember. A Reflection on the Shoah](#)", published this week, is a statement of penitence for Roman Catholic failure to respond to Jewish suffering in the Holocaust period. For both Christians and Jews, penitence is more profound than a secular expression of regret or apology. The Vatican document, therefore, is of great significance.

Much attention has focused on the document's defence of Pope Pius XII. Roman Catholic scholars maintain that Pius XII did not speak out explicitly about the Holocaust, because he believed that to do so would jeopardise the thousands of Jews being sheltered in Church institutions, as well as Catholic men and women throughout Germany and occupied Europe, without achieving any good purpose. Many Jews, understandably, have taken a very different view of what they see as Papal silence in the face of their greatest tragedy. The document has not fully addressed the agonising issues involved, which clearly demand more research and discussion as an essential element of Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

However, in his Apostolic Letter of November 1994, referring to the coming of the Millennium, Pope John Paul II insisted in very strong terms that Roman Catholics must confront the sins and transgressions of the past. This is a painful process for any religious community and must proceed slowly and with much care and sensitivity, as there will inevitably be resentments and difference of opinion over the historical interpretation of great events.

The new document must be read in the light of all these considerations. We consider it to be of profound significance for Christian-Jewish relations, and while its focus is, of course, with the Roman Catholic Church, it invites all Christian communities to respond.

