

# Popes Move Closer to Sainthood

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ROME — Pope Benedict XVI moved two of his predecessors a step closer to sainthood on Saturday, confirming the “heroic virtues” of John Paul II and, in a surprise move, of Pius XII, the pope during World War II.

After John Paul’s death in April 2005, Benedict bypassed a traditional waiting period to put the much beloved pope on a fast-track to sainthood. At John Paul’s funeral, crowds at Saint Peter’s Square chanted “santo subito,” or “sainthood now.”

Pius XII, however, has been a point of contention between the Vatican and some Jewish groups, who say he did not do enough to stop the Holocaust. They have called on the Vatican to open the sealed archives from Pius’s papacy, from 1939 to 1958, for examination by scholars.

On Saturday, the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants called the decision on Pius “profoundly insensitive and thoughtless” and said it would cause “an inevitable blow” to interfaith relations.

“Pairing the announcement on Pius — who remained publicly silent during the Holocaust — with that on John Paul II, himself a victim of the Nazis, is a particularly disturbing and callous act,” the group added in its statement.

Benedict has said that Pius worked “secretly and silently” to help save Jews. Although a Vatican committee confirmed his “heroic virtues” in 2007, Benedict had asked for time for reflection, which many saw as a diplomatic effort aimed at calming polemics.

On Saturday, the pope confirmed the committee’s findings. Before the two popes can become saints, another Vatican committee must determine that miracles have been attributed to them.

Benedict also confirmed the “heroic virtues” of six other potential saints and miracles for 11. He declared the Rev. Jerzy Popieluszko, the “Solidarity chaplain” murdered by the Polish secret service in 1984, a martyr.

Vatican insiders speculate that John Paul could be beatified as soon as next fall.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/world/europe/20pope.html>