

# Pope accused of "turning the clock back"

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## Italian Jewish leaders will boycott joint Christian-Jewish prayers after Pope's decision to re-introduce prayer for the conversion of the Jews

Richard Owen in Rome

Accusing Pope Benedict XVI of "putting the clock back fifty years" a leading Italian rabbi has said Italian Jewish leaders will boycott joint Christian-Jewish prayers due to be held on Saturday in an annual celebration of Judaism by the Vatican.

Elia Enrico Richetti, the chief rabbi of Venice, said in a hard hitting article in the Jesuit journal "Popoli" that the main reason for the rabbis' decision was the re-introduction by the Pope in March last year of a Good Friday Latin prayer for the conversion of the Jews as part of the revived Tridentine Mass.

In addition the Pope's recent statements "about dialogue being useless because the Christian faith is superior" meant that "we are moving toward the cancellation of fifty years of Church history" the rabbi said.

Rabbi Richetti said the Vatican had treated Jewish leaders in a "patronising" way and had "no respect" for those of other faiths. "The interruption of cooperation between Italian Judaism and the Church is the logical consequence of the position of the Church as expressed by its highest authorities," he said.

Catholic-Jewish relations have also come under strain because of controversy over Vatican plans to beatify Pius XII, the wartime pontiff accused by critics of turning a blind eye to the Nazi Holocaust.

Pope John Paul II, Benedict's predecessor, made Christian dialogue with Jews - whom he described as "our elder brothers" - a priority of his pontificate, and became the first Pope to visit a synagogue. Pope Benedict has also visited a synagogues in Germany and the United States, but is regarded by some as only paying lip service to inter-faith dialogue. His projected trip to Israel in May is in doubt because of a perceived pro Palestinian bias in Vatican policy.

However Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, head of the Italian Bishops' commission on inter-religious dialogue, said the history of Jewish-Catholic relations could not just be "cancelled". "If there are difficulties, which undoubtedly there are in Italy, they should become an occasion to recast the dialogue even more strongly," he said.

He said Jewish-Christian relations should be re-launched "even more profoundly" after a "period of reflection", even if essential differences remained unbridgeable. "I remember Elio Toaff, the former chief rabbi of Rome, saying to me once, if you did not believe Jesus was the son of God you would not be a Catholic, and if I believed he was I would not be a Jew".

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article5515799.ece?print=yes&randnum=1232036301882>