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The catholic bishops in Germany plan to examine the actions of the church during the Second World War as part of their commemoration of the 75th anniversary of its end.

The move is unprecedented. The bishops have never before "in detail and systematically commented on the position of their predecessors on the Second World War," the German Bishops' Conference said on April 23.

The president of the conference, Bishop Georg Baetzing, will present the paper "German Bishops in the World War" at a video news conference on Wednesday together with Hildesheim Bishop Heiner Wilmer, chairman of the Justitia et Pax (Justice and Peace) Commission.

The catholic bishops last published a statement on the issue in 1995 on the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. In it, they described the war's end as a "liberation from a criminal regime." They also said there had been "a deep gulf and mutual rejection between the National Socialist system of injustice and the Catholic Church."

Catholics were punished or killed for helping persecuted people, the statement said. But it added that one should not overlook that there had also been "unwise silence and mistaken restraint, fearful reaction and culpable failure" within the Catholic Church.

The 1995 statement went on to say: "There was the church's unequivocal No to the National Socialist racial ideology. But there was no public outcry when it was ruthlessly set in motion."

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