Christianity and the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry

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1944
Introduction

The German invasion of Hungary on March 19, 1944, aroused no opposition among the Hungarian populace. Jozsef Darvas describes the situation in the following manner:

The conquest of the country was carried out quietly and aroused no attention. On Sunday morning [March 19] SS units took control of the important government buildings and other key points.... Those Hungarians whose lives were not endangered by the conquest regarded events with complete indifference. As far as they were concerned, the word "conquest" was completely meaningless, for the Germans had been here before as friends and allies. As far as they were concerned, nothing had happened. A few Hungarians even rejoiced: "The end has come of Jewish sedition, of Jewish betrayal of Hungarian interests, of their violation of Hungarian honor and of their provoking of our glorious ally."

Most of the populace of the capital behaved as if nothing has taken place. The masses paraded through the streets, giggling merrily.... Here and there they would stop, watch the military convoy and the steel-helmeted soldiers standing stiffly on the military vehicles, next to their machine guns. Many laughed joyously and waved at the soldiers. Had they had flowers in their hands, they would certainly have tossed them at the soldiers.... The residents of the capital accepted as self-evident the fact that the representatives of a foreign power were entitled to arrest thousands of citizens, concentrate them and thrust them into various prison cells until these quickly filled up to overflowing. The arrests were carried out by a Gestapo unit stationed in Budapest. The unit had no need to overcome organized resistance forces. All it had to do was to arrest those who were not of their supporters. Everything transpired quietly. The only exception was Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinsky [a Hungarian statesman of a liberal persuasion], who drew his pistol in face of the Germans who broke into his home. The Germans shot him and dragged him, bleeding, from his home.

As far as is known, these were the only shots fired that day in Budapest.1

The Hungarian people thus viewed the German invasion as a step taken by a friendly power, aimed at strengthening the vital link between the two nations. As a newspaper put it a few days after the invasion:

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The Hungarian nation has been living for hundreds of years in the Danube Basin, sharing the fate of the Germans. Even after they blocked the waves of aggression approaching us from the east, the two nations were still threatened by common dangers, and both spilled their blood in their struggle for European culture and stood together in the defense of the eastern gates of Europe. This historical tradition is the source of the unreserved spiritual friendship prevailing between the German people and the Hungarian people. The Hungarians view the German soldiers who have come to us through the traditional spectacles of friendship and armed brotherhood. Their arrival grants Hungarians peace of mind.

The forces hostile to the Jews that had existed in the Hungarian population reawakened as the Germans invaded and gave tangible expression to their antisemitism. As Zandberg put it,

In those days various types of fascists sprang up like mushrooms and filled the city streets with their frightening uniforms; they were dressed in a black suit, or black trousers, a dark green shirt and a black tie. A large symbol of their party, the Arrow-Cross symbol, glistened on their shirt collars. These people stood out everywhere and at every opportunity. They organized parades and rallies, and exploited every chance to curse and denigrate the Jews in the streets and other public places. When they realized that the police were not interfering with them, they began to strike at the Jews physically as well.

In the other words, the reins were loosened.

The attitude of the Hungarian people toward the Jews was expressed during the first six weeks following the German takeover of Hungary, when no less than thirty-five thousand denouncements against the Jews were made to the German authorities. In other words, the antisemitic incitement of decades bore fruit, and not only did the Hungarian nation adapt easily to its new situation; it also did its best to assist the new regime in its persecution of the Jews.

After the end of World War II, a Hungarian statesman and writer made an analysis of the attitude of the Hungarian populace toward the Jews. His findings were as follows:

If during the persecutions a Jew was to have knocked randomly on any door, the odds were that he would have been handed over to the authorities; in exceptional cases he could hope the door would be slammed in his face and no denouncement be made to the authorities, but he had just about no chance at all of being offered refuge, even temporary refuge.

Thus, Laszlo Endre, who was appointed director of the interior ministry after the German invasion and was directly responsible for organ-
izing the expulsion of Hungarian Jewry, reflected the approach of the Hungarians toward the Jews. A report of a speech he made on the radio at the end of March 1944 states,

Laszlo Endre rejected the approach which claimed that the Jewish question had once again been placed on the agenda as a result of international events. He drew attention to the fact that the entire Hungarian population, being interested in maintaining its racial purity, has been pressing for a solution to this problem for twenty-five years. Hungarian antisemitism is not a political fad, it is not an imitation of new political ideas. The people have learned the hard way the great harm they have suffered because of the ever-growing Jewish influence. They have not learned this lesson over the past year or two. This people was the first in Europe to learn it from direct experience... We express our unreserved faith that Jewry is an undesirable element for the Hungarian people in every way: morally, spiritually, and physically. With this awareness, we have to seek out the solution which removes Jewry from Hungarian life totally and absolutely.... The spiritual and physical liberation of the state from the Jews is undoubtedly in the interest of the Hungarian nation, and we shall certainly carry this out."

As already noted, this attitude toward the Jews was the natural continuation of the antisemitic atmosphere and relationship that had prevailed in Hungary during the period preceding the German invasion.

We find additional evidence for this continuity in the composition of the new government. With the German invasion of Hungary, Prime Minister Kállay was removed from his position, and the Hungarian ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojay, was appointed in his place. Yet many government members remained in their posts. Over the coming weeks, a number of provincial governors and deputy governors were replaced, but no substantial change took place in the civil service or in local government. The leaders of the new regime and their German overlords relied on the existing civil service to carry out the letter and spirit of the policies of the new regime.

The loyalty of the rulers, the administration, and the people of Hungary to the antisemitic ideas of the invading Germans helps make comprehensible a step that otherwise might be considered unusual. It might have been expected that upon their invasion of Hungary the Germans would entrust the formation of a government to the Arrow-Cross party, as this party had voiced over a period of years its full identification with Hitler and his policies vis-à-vis the Jews, and had often expressed its hope that the day would come when these policies would be carried out in actual practice in Hungary as well. Despite this stand of theirs, the
invading Germans did not enable them to participate in the government in any role at all. However, there was really no need of this. The Germans were fully aware that they could rely on the loyalty of the regime even without the participation of the Arrow-Cross party, and the government for its part knew that the civil service and the local government would carry out the policies that had for many years been the ideological basis of the Arrow-Cross party. The executive level was composed mostly of people of political beliefs that suited the ideas of the Arrow-Cross party, even if formally they were not members of it.

And so, as we shall see, the Germans entrusted the execution of the expulsion to the Hungarians, who did not disappoint them. Moreover, we shall encounter various Hungarian antisemitic initiatives that were more evil and more brutal than even the Germans had expected.

The previous section described the government-people-church/priesthood triangle, the three sides of which came out in support of each other during the period of the anti-Jewish legislation. After the German invasion, too, this triangle continued to exist, and—like the government and the people—the church/priesthood also viewed the new situation thus created as the natural extension of the situation prevalent in Hungary in the past. The bishops, it will be recalled, fought against the depriving of Christian converts of their rights during the period of the anti-Jewish legislation, and they did so while expressing their negative opinions of Jews and of Judaism. Their attitude toward the topic of the expulsion of the Jews was reminiscent of the way they acted during the period of anti-Jewish legislation. The German invasion changed nothing at all in this respect.

It is clear from the discussions held by church leaders with political figures, and from the correspondence between them, that if the expulsion of the Jews was objected to on occasion, this was nothing more than lip service. On the contrary, in studying how they dealt with the topic, one fairly regularly encounters expressions and comments whose nature was such that their very use led the government to harden its position relative to the Jews whose expulsion had been decreed.

**The Expulsion**

One will recall that it was the government that acted to serve the Germans, while the regent, Horthy, who remained in office even after the German invasion, had nothing to do with the Jewish question. At a government session convened on March 29, 1944, the prime minister announced that the regent had “guaranteed the government a free hand concerning the
In the wake of the German invasion, many decrees were imposed upon the Jews. The following are but a few examples. All shops belonging to Jews were closed down, but the shopowners were required to pay their Christian workers salaries even after the shutdown. A moratorium was declared on all debts Christians owed Jews. A Jew who owned real estate and who had rented his property to a Christian had no right to end his lease. Jewish pharmacy owners had their permits canceled and were forbidden to engage in their trade. All publishing licenses in Jewish hands were canceled. The continued existence of Jewish organizations was forbidden. The libraries and archives belonging to such organizations were confiscated in favor of the Hungarian Institute for Jewish Studies. It was forbidden to publish papers compiled by Jews. Jews were forbidden to visit public bathhouses or parks. Jews were required to declare all their property, except for furniture and household utensils whose value was no more than ten thousand pengo. They were required to hand over to the banks their jewelry and any gold coins that were in their possession. The Jews were forbidden to open their safes in the banks, but had to declare their contents. All bank accounts belonging to Jews were frozen, and the amount the Jews could withdraw from their accounts was limited to a thousand pengo per month. Jews were compelled to sell their race-horses. A yellow slip was attached to the bills of sale, thus facilitating identification of the source of these horses.

Jews with telephones were required to disclose special details concerning themselves and their loyalty to the regime. Lawyers' permits were canceled. All the Jews still working in the civil service, for local government, or in any other public institution were dismissed from their posts. Jews were forbidden to engage in any work related to the theater, the cinema, or the press. Jews were forbidden to travel outside their areas of residence.

The Jews were required to return to the authorities the food coupons in their possession, and the authorities then issued them special food coupons—colored yellow. While exchanging the food coupons, the authorities drastically reduced the amount of food allocated to Jews. The monthly sugar quota was fixed at three hundred grams [about ten ounces], no addition being given to children, nursing mothers, or pregnant women—unlike what was customary with the non-Jewish population. In addition, Jews were prevented from acquiring certain foodstuffs at all. Specifically, Jews were forbidden to purchase animal fat and were required to make do with three hundred grams of sesame oil per month.
Incidentally, in this context the director of the interior ministry, Endre, commented piously, "From now on the Jews will be able to live in accordance with the laws of their race and their nation. By us not making it possible for them to use pig fat, we have made it possible for them to cook using sesame oil—thus helping them observe the precepts of their religion."

These and many other decrees were imposed upon the Jews of Hungary within a very short period of time. Hardly a day went by without some new decree being made public, but the significance of all of these dwindles in comparison with the decree of the yellow patch. At its March 19, 1944, session, the government decided upon "an identifying mark for all the Jews." The practical significance of this government decision was that all Jews of either sex above the age of six years were required to bear on the left side of the breast of their outer garment, in prominent fashion, a six-pointed yellow star about four inches square. This requirement was obligatory in the public domain, that is, whenever they left the privacy of their homes.

The formal explanation found in the protocol of the government session was that

for reasons of public security and for improved efficiency in defense of the fatherland, it is desirable that it be possible to identify the Jews—upon whose loyalty one cannot rely. Marking the Jews in the aforesaid fashion will render the supervision of their activities and conduct much simpler. Furthermore, it will be possible to remove them from those areas where their presence may endanger the interests of the defense of the fatherland."

In fact, the official explanation was not identical with the actual aim of thus marking the Jews, which was preparing and facilitating their concentration and expulsion from Hungary.

The semiofficial government newspaper, which appeared in German, evaluated these decrees and their effect in an editorial on April 1, 1944:

If our government takes steps against the Jews, a foreign race in our midst, and shuts the gateway to those positions from which they can cause damage ... it does not do so out of hatred or revenge, and certainly not in order to turn them into martyrs, but rather only in self-defense.

It is thus certain that whatever we have done until now in this field must be considered a courageous step granting the people of our country a sense of security."

Endre's declaration appears in the same issue:

The government has decided to solve the Jewish problem once and for all according to a uniform and comprehensive program. ... The steps taken
until now are only the beginning of the final solution of this problem in Hungary. The special designation of the Jews is merely a necessary step of active self-defense, for the events of the past few months have demonstrated that the inciting Jewish spirit has brought about tangible damage to the opinions of the innocent Hungarian populace.

In order to render more efficient the task of concentrating the Jews and deporting them, the government appointed another director-general of the interior ministry in addition to Endre. This official’s sole function was to deal with the Jews. For this purpose Laszlo Baky was selected. He already had experience in dealing with Jews: he had served under Horthy in the White Terror period of 1919–1920.

On April 7, 1944, Baky sent a secret memorandum to all bodies dealing with the Jewish question. This memorandum contained operative instructions concerning the concentration and deportation of the Jews:

The Royal Hungarian Government will shortly purify the state of the Jews. I order this purification be carried out on a regional basis. To this end the Jews must be concentrated—no distinction on the basis of sex or age is to be made—in concentration camps to be set up for this purpose. The concentration of the Jews is to be carried out by the gendarmerie or the police in charge of the area being purified. The German security police will be present in the regions being purified, and will serve in an advisory capacity. Special attention must be paid to our full cooperation with them.

The Jews will be transported by train, in the manner usual with prisoners. All government agencies will be placed at the disposal of the gendarmerie and the police. Police and gendarmerie units in adjacent regions will coordinate activities among themselves, to ensure the common and simultaneous execution of the purification activities.

In this memorandum there appear further instructions connected with the expulsion of the Jews, such as how to determine concentration areas, how to organize an efficient system of expropriating Jewish property, how to treat this property, and additional technical matters. The memorandum concludes, “This instruction of mine is extremely confidential. The various agencies and the commanding officers of the units are responsible for ensuring that none of the contents of this memorandum become known to anybody before the time fixed for the beginning of the purification.”

Concentrating the Jews in ghettos began in the northeastern districts of Hungary, in Ruthenian Sub-Carpathia, a short time after the dispatch of Baky’s instructions. The concentration and deportation of the Jews moved on from one district to another according to a preplanned sched-
ule, in which Budapest was to be the last district from which the Jews were to be expelled.

A description of the suffering of the Jews in the ghettos and in the camps in which they were concentrated is not within the scope of this work. Yet it should be noted that the physical and mental torture suffered by the candidates for deportation while still in the ghettos accounts for the fact that when the deportation trains arrived to transport the Jews to their final destination, most of the Jews boarded them on the assumption that this new destination would be an improvement over their intolerable conditions in the ghetto.\(^\text{17}\)

The first deportation train left Hungary on May 15, 1944. During the ensuing seven weeks 437,000 Jews were expelled from Hungary.\(^\text{18}\)

The Hungarians were anxious to expel their Jews, and they pressed the Germans to allocate a larger number of trains for this purpose in order to complete the task as quickly as possible:

General of the SS Winckelmann had informed the Hungarian government that he could not supply a sufficient number of wagons to carry out the deportation of the Jews. . . . Eichmann was ready to grant no more than two trains per day. Laszlo Endre, the delegate of the Hungarian government, wanted six trains per day. The Nazi commander-in-chief declared himself unable to spare so many wagons and locomotives for this purpose, but finally, they arrived at a compromise of four trains per day. In order to counterbalance this, Endre, taking into account the number of Jews concerned and wishing to speed up their deportation, ordered each train-load of 45 wagons to consist of 4,000 persons, instead of the normal 1,600—1,800 that were customary on military transports.\(^\text{19}\)

While visiting the sites where the Jews had been concentrated prior to their dispatch, Endre himself intervened in the matter of crowding the Jews into the train coaches. At the town of Paks, for instance, “after there were already sixty Jews in each of the carriages, he gave a personal order that each Jew raise both arms, thus making it possible to crowd into each coach an additional twenty Jews.”\(^\text{20}\)

On June 16, Endre sent the prime minister a memorandum in which he wrote, “the agencies under my authority have received instructions to act humanely and according to the spirit of Christianity both while separating the Jews and while transporting them to work outside the borders of the country.”\(^\text{21}\)

What he concealed in his memorandum Endre revealed when he took part in the government meeting five days later, on June 21. He made a detailed report of his operations and once again referred to “the spirit of Christianity”: “The general principle in connection with the trans-
Portation to camps and the deportations was that everything should be
done in a humane way and in accordance with the Christian spirit.” In
order to explain this concept to his audience, Endre went into some detail:
“Lunatic asylums, sanatoria, hospitals, convalescent homes, and other
places suitable for hiding Jews have also been combed out.”

Endre did not forget the Jews languishing in prison and the young
Jews who had been incarcerated in institutions for young offenders, mak-
ing sure that they, too, boarded the deportation trains: “The situation
as regards public security has been stabilized, and the typically and char-
acteristically Jewish intellectual crimes have ceased.... After the depor-
tation of the Jews, the Christian inhabitants have endeavored to settle
down to a new life.”

On the day the first deportation train set out, Endre delivered a speech
at a ceremony dedicating the Hungarian Institute for Jewish Studies. He
made reference in this speech to respected authorities: “The popes, as
well as our own ancient and saintly kings, legislated draconian laws and
imposed severe decrees upon this parasitic race. Thus, no one can com-
plain that we are not acting in accordance with the spirit of Christianity
when we enact draconian regulations against the Jews so as to protect
our nation.”

Others, too, joined Endre in stressing that his own actions and those
of his government were carried out in the spirit of Christianity, for its
sake and for its benefit.

The induction ceremony of a new provincial governor was graced by
the arrival of the interior minister, Andor Jaross, to the town of Szomb-
bathely. Before the ceremony itself, a ceremonial prayer service was held
in the town cathedral. The local bishop participated in the ceremony as
well as the new governor, who declared that “the struggle in our country
between various outlooks and beliefs has been decided. Only a firm right-
wing policy based on Christian and national morality is the correct
policy.”

In his visit to the town of Nagyvarad, Jaross spoke of St. Laszlo, one
of Hungary’s ancient kings, as an example of fighting for those values
in whose light life is to be lived:

We must learn anew the historic value of the ancient king.... There exists
an historic analogy in that our king, St. Laszlo, too, brandished his sword
against the dangers which threatened from over our eastern border....
Today, too, there exists a threat to Central Europe. Eastern bolshevism is
threatening every square inch of our soil.

There can be neither Hungarian security nor a future for Hungarian
history as long as Stalin’s bolshevik empire is perched on the eastern slopes
of the Carpathian mountains.... We shall also close accounts with our internal enemy, if once again he dares raise up his head. In 1918-1919 and in previous years Nagyvarad was viewed as a fierce fortress of Jewish liberal capitalism. Today I see before me a new Nagyvarad. I see here a nationalistic Nagyvarad whose streets no longer have any Jews.... The city has solved this problem, and it was with a feeling of relief that I realized that its solution suits the demands of our generation. Yet the problem has not yet been solved in its entirety. We must remove from the blood cycle of the nation all toxic material and any possibility of blood poisoning. Taking into consideration the entirety of the problems, the government of Hungary is proceeding step by step.

Imredi, too, claimed that “the separation of the Jews must be carried out in accordance with the requirements of Christian morality.” Together, firmly and decisively, we are carrying out our task in a Christian spirit and with no hatred,” declared Endre at the close of a lightning tour of thirty-four towns in Hungary. He repeated, “The new instructions are not dictated by hatred or a lack of consideration.”

The German Nazis based their doctrine upon their faith in the superiority of their race. The Hungarian Nazis, including Endre, used this idea, yet adjusted it to the situation in Hungary. They stressed the superiority of Christianity to Judaism. Below are excerpts from Endre’s lecture, broadcast over the government radio as part of the lessons from the Academy of Outlooks:

During thousands of years of human history, ever since the founding of Christianity, never has such a confrontation taken place between two contradictory outlooks as the ferocious struggle taking place at present between Judaism and the nations of Europe. This struggle did not originate in this war. It has been going on ever since Judaism appeared on the stage of history. Judaism, in its hatred, removed itself from other peoples.... The books of the Talmud, replete with blind hatred for the non-Jewish nations, have replaced their ancient sacred books... and in accordance with the instructions of the rabbis of the Talmud they live earthy lives full of earthy rejoicing and earthy pleasures. They are busily organizing their world government and achieving unlimited advantages with the aid of their superior economic status.

Endre went on to describe how Jewish capitalists financed the Bolshevik revolution and how they took control of the League of Nations. He also ascribed the French Revolution to the Jews, who were also guilty—in his opinion—of the outbreak of World War I and of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy:
Judaism made special efforts to replace Christianity and to upset the foundations of the central Christian powers, for they were her greatest enemies.

We and the Jews live in two completely separate worlds. The Jew seeks God's land on this earth in hoarding property, in hedonism, and in controlling others. We, on the other hand, seek God's land in the next life. ... Our moral concepts are so different from one another that we are unable to judge their actions according to the scale of the laws we have created for our brethren and our flesh."

On another occasion Endre succeeded in expressing the idea of the inferiority of the Jews and their faith in a more concise fashion, in a single sentence: in the Pecs ghetto five thousand Jews were concentrated prior to their expulsion. They were forced to stand at attention in rows under the summer sun. Endre arrived with gendarmes and reviewed the panic-stricken Jews. In ridicule and scorn he repeatedly asked them, "And why doesn't Jehovah, your famous God, work a miracle now?""

Thus the voice of Christianity reached the ears of the Hungarians from the mouths of such government ministers as Endre and his colleagues. They spoke in the name of Christianity, and no priest voiced other opinions. Even if there were Christians whose opinions differed from those of the government representatives, these opinions never reached their destination: the ears of those who performed the expulsion—the Hungarian population.

**Who Carried Out the Expulsion?**

On a visit to Hungary in 1983 I met with a high-ranking government official. After hearing of my plan to study the subject dealt with herein, he said, "My dear sir, can't you find any other topic to deal with in connection with Hungary? After all is said and done, we Hungarians were not hostile to the Jews, we were not interested in deporting them, and we certainly did not carry out the expulsion—the Germans did so."

With regard to the first part of his statement, we have already seen in this volume the Hungarians' alleged nonhostile attitude toward their Jewish neighbors. We shall now consider the second part of the high-ranking official's statement: the attitude of the Hungarians toward the deportations and the role they played in carrying them out. Hungarians with a conscience feel today that the expulsion of the Jews from their country is not a chapter that glorifies their historical heritage. The attempt of the official to ascribe responsibility for the deportation of the Jews to the Germans is thus understandable. In various Hungarian publications
on this topic that have recently been printed, mention is made of the
"expulsion of the Jews by the Germans."

We shall thus have to examine the facts as they come to light within
the available material dating from the period under consideration. The
following is an excerpt by Levai from his book, *The Black Book*:

Owing to their insignificant numbers, the Nazis were practically unable
even to supervise the deportations, let alone to carry them out. The marking
of the Jews with the Star of David, their "round-up" into ghettos and
concentration camps, were made possible only by the fact that the gen-
darmerie—though well-acquainted with the situation and numbering some
20,000 men—could everywhere be sure of the aid of the local police. Even
then the procedure could not have been carried through if the Christian
population had shown resistance."

The following excerpt is from the Operational Instructions memoran-
dum dictated by Endre:

"In the execution of the action against the Jews in the Gendarmerie District
of Kassa, the Germans will proceed to Munkacs in 10 cars with 8 officers
and 40 soldiers on 10th inst. . . . Hungarian interests will be represented by
Lieut.-Col. Vitez Ferenczy, Attorney Medgyesy, and Detective Inspector
Koltay. . . . Immediately after their arrival the German committees will con-
tact our committee. Members of our committees are requested to display
courtesy and tact, to give information and explanations required, to render
all assistance with regard to accommodation and food, and, where nec-
essary, to place an interpreter at the disposal of their German
counterparts."

The first step was taken, therefore, by the Nazis on May 11, when they
sent eight officers and forty soldiers to Munkacs. With the aid of this force
they carried out the total destruction of Hungarian Jewry from one end
of the state to the other."

After completing its task in a given province—that is, after deporting
the Jews of that province—the German force would move on to the
province next in line for the deportation of its Jews, and so on to ad-
ditional provinces. In this way it was present in each province, where it
advised in the execution of the deportation.

On June 21, 1944, Endre reported to the government:

"In every province, prior to the deportation of the Jews, we met with
the commander of the province, the governor of the province, the rep-
from me. A representative of the German security police regularly took part in these meetings as well."

Carrying out the deportation was the task of the police and the gendarmerie, who acted under the auspices of the interior ministry. Officers of the German S.D. also took part in planning the operation.

According to another description based on contemporary documents,

Eichmann's main office was in Budapest, but within a short period of time he set up ten delegations in other towns. Nevertheless, his unit, from a numerical point of view, remained insignificant. In his Budapest office there were, besides Eichmann himself and six arbitrators, another ten people and twenty guards. Throughout the state the entire team numbered some two hundred persons. . . . The German occupational regime could clearly function only if it could rely absolutely upon the Hungarian civil service. Without the assistance of the various ministries, of the provincial and the municipal administration, as well as that of the police, the gendarmerie, and the army—without all this help the entire Nazi occupation machine would have become incapable of operating within a few days. . . . The gendarmerie happily undertook to organize the deportations with the direct or indirect aid of the civil service.

There are indeed slight differences in the reports as to the number of Germans involved in the deportations and the technical organization of the team that operated under Eichmann, but the sources agree with regard to the small number of the Germans as compared with the enormous operation of deporting hundreds of thousands of people:

The entire police-administrative setup connected with organizing the removal of the Jews from their property, their ghettoization and deportation was local and not German. The situation we behold in Hungary is more than what is customarily termed "collaboration." Here we have local initiative in preparing and totally carrying out the deportation, in many cases with enthusiasm.

The testimony of most survivors and all existing contemporary literature—not just that of Jewish origin—is united in the evaluation that not only did most of the Christian population view calmly the removal of the Jews, but it even participated willingly in the entire process, including the final expulsion. . . . Most of the population viewed the deportation of the Jews calmly or even with joy at the Jewish tragedy.

There exists a document that supports the assumption that the Germans relied upon the Hungarian authorities for the deportation of the Jews, while the Hungarian authorities relied upon the broadest sections of the government apparatus. The document was written on May 26, 1944, by a German described in the document itself as "a special expert"
sent to Budapest to report from there to Berlin on the progress in carrying out the deportation program. The expert, a high-ranking political advisor, Von Thadden, classified the document as "highly confidential." He wrote it in his own handwriting in only seven copies, each of which was numbered.

He described the process of rounding up the Jews and deporting them from the various provinces of Hungary. Regarding Budapest he wrote,

It is believed that it will be possible to begin with the work in Budapest proper toward the middle or end of July. For this, a one-day action on a large scale is planned, which is to be carried through with the aid of strong forces of the provincial Hungarian police, of all special units and police training schools, as well as by making use of all Budapest postmen and chimney sweepers, who are to act as pilots. All autobus and streetcar traffic will be suspended for that day so that all means of transportation can be used for the deportation of the Jews.39

Referring to the expulsion of all the Jews of Hungary, the compiler of the document wrote, about ten days after the beginning of the expulsion, "It may be assumed that the process of deporting all the Jews will end no later than the beginning of September."40 The German special expert could not imagine that the Hungarians would succeed in completing the operation (except for Budapest) by the beginning of July.

We have the testimony of a gendarmerie officer named Bodonyi who took an active part in the deportation of the Jews. He was in command of one of the units engaged in placing the Jews on the deportation trains and crowding them into the wagons. He was captured after the war and interrogated concerning his activities. The following is the interrogation as written down by the intelligence officer of the U.S. Army who interrogated him:

Q: Many attempt to defend themselves saying that while loading the Jews on the trains German officers or SS soldiers were present, and they were the ones giving the gendarmerie their orders. Do you know of any such case and if your answer is positive—where and when was it?
A: I know of no case where Germans were present. Even if there is a possibility that people dressed in civilian clothes whom I did not recognize, who came together with His Excellency Baky or with the Director-General of the Interior Ministry Endre, were Germans—they never interfered in our work arrangements.

Q: Does this mean that the loading of the trains with hundreds of thousands of Jews who were to be murdered, and all the brutality accompanying this act, was the glorious project of the Hungarian gendarmerie?
A: It was our job to carry out the instructions."
On this topic we also have the testimony of the two Germans who headed the German occupation apparatus in Hungary: Veesenmayer, the German ambassador to Hungary and Hitler's personal representative, and Winckelmann, supreme commander of the SS and German security police in Hungary.

At the trial of the Hungarian war criminals, the following dialogue took place between the president of the court and Veesenmayer:

Q: What would have happened if the Hungarian government had decided that it was not prepared to meet the German demand concerning the deportation of the Jews?
A: It would not have taken place. The fact is that nothing happened when Horthy announced that they would not continue with the deportation.41

Q: In other words, you claim that if the Hungarian government had replied negatively from the very beginning, it could have achieved a situation where the Jews would have continued to live after the German invasion just as they had lived before it? Do you claim that in this case Germany would not have taken any steps of a compulsory nature?
A: They would certainly have tried to apply pressure, but they did not have available the forces with which they could have carried out their threats.

Q: How can you make such a claim when the forces they had sufficed to take absolute control of Hungary?
A: The conquest lasted a very short time, and the first divisions were taken out a few days after they had entered Hungary. We must also take into account that the deportation was not a military task, but rather a police one, and such forces, if they were available, were of a very small number.

Q: Were the Germans unable to bring here for this purpose adequate police forces?
A: I think not. Furthermore, these forces would have had to know Hungarian and to be familiar with the country and the people.

Q: And in Poland, for instance, with whose aid did they solve the Jewish problem? Were they able to transfer adequate German police units there?
A: I was never in Poland, but I consider it a completely different type of territory. It was the first country we conquered, and we occupied it absolutely. Poland had no government; it was ruled by a German administration. A German administration operated there with many departments, which extended everywhere.

Q: Nevertheless, under these conditions you were able to solve the Jewish problem thoroughly, as you described its solution to yourselves. Why were you unable to do the very same thing in Hungary as well, with its smaller area?
A: 1944 is considered to have been a year of crisis.
Q: In other words, at that time you did not have unlimited German forces available?
A: No, at that time it was already impossible to bring forces of such size here.43

At the war criminals' trial, when Winckelmann, the supreme commander of the SS forces encamped in Hungary, was asked: "Were the Germans able to carry out the deportation even without the aid of the Hungarians?"—he replied: "I am certain the German authorities would not have applied any compulsory means. When Himmler gave me his instructions he noted that he was not interested in this topic."... Winckelmann even adduced evidence in support of his claim by saying that Germany was interested in avoiding at any cost a clash with the Hungarians. Germany ascribed supreme importance to being able to exploit Hungary as a transit area for her armies.44

Regarding the nature of the Hungarian performance and the dedication of the Hungarians to furthering the deportation of the Jews, we have the testimony of a front-ranking Nazi leader, Goebbels. In an internal memorandum he sent to Nazi party activists on August 2, 1944, in which he reviewed the "Jewish Problem" and its solution in Hungary, he wrote, "The deportations were carried out in the shortest period of time, with amazing perseverance and obstinacy. A vital factor in the success of the operation was the fact that the steps against the Jews were found acceptable by most of the Hungarian nation."45

The dedication of the Hungarians to the idea of expelling the Jews and the belief in that idea did not come about suddenly, on March 19, 1944. This dedication had roots that ran deep, branched out in a complex fashion, and were firmly anchored in the reality of the lives and beliefs of the Hungarian masses. The historian Reitlinger, in referring to this full Hungarian collaboration, has indicated the circumstances supporting their devotion and has estimated that the unreserved cooperation on the part of the gendarmerie would never have been possible had the churches in Hungary raised their voices against antisemitism.46

Yet another reference linking the two matters reads as follows:

Because of the preceding quarter of a century of counterreactionary and antisemitic government, and most of all, because of its poisonous propaganda in which the churches, especially the Catholic church, had played a role of the first importance...the police were saturated with hatred of the Jews; they regarded antisemitism as a natural way of life; they did not feel remorse, pity, pangs of conscience; they regarded themselves as the vanguard of Christendom: so they were taught in the school and in the church.47
A Hungarian priest, too, was of the opinion that the churches could have restrained the gendarmerie and the police from abetting the deportation of the Jews:

The gendarmerie and the police were trained in a religious spirit to view obedience to the church as an obligation. This spirit, in the past, permeated all of Hungarian society. Had all these people who took a direct part in the deportation of the Jews been informed that neither they nor their families would be permitted to partake of any sacred ceremony, their transgressions would not be forgiven them, they would not be eligible to receive the final sacraments in case of death, and their newborn children would not be baptized; furthermore, had they been aware that the churches would be locked in face of their guilt, and even the church bells would cease to ring—all this would have generated a severe crisis in those people engaged in the deportation day by day. Had the churches adopted such a position, they would have caused great embarrassment, both high in governing circles and down among those carrying out their instructions—the officials and the train workers. . . . I am sure that many people who assisted with the Jewish expulsion would have announced that they were unwilling to take upon themselves the dispatch of their neighbors to their deaths, for since the churches would regard such activity negatively, the deed they were being asked to perform by the authorities would be simply an "act of Cain," and they would be unwilling to act on the same moral level as Cain. Their consciences would be sensitive to the horrible aspect of their deeds.48

But the churches did not make their voice heard on behalf of the persecuted. On the contrary, the persecutors were able to understand that their actions were considered desirable by the church. Their government, too, acted in accordance with the requirements and expectations of the churches, as we shall see below.

On May 31, 1944, the Hungarian minister of law sent the interior ministry of his own government a draft of a proposed bill aimed at removing the Jews from all walks of Hungarian public, cultural, and economic life. The bill deals with various defined topics and maps out areas from which it would become obligatory to remove the Jews. The bill, however, does not stop there; it adds,

The ministry is hereby empowered, above and beyond and in addition to the areas defined in this law, to enact regulations and take such steps as will lead to the absolute removal of the Jews from the public, the cultural, and the economic life of the state by means of all the additional steps it finds appropriate for the national good. 49 [The emphasis above and in the following three paragraphs is added.]
The wording of the bill regarding the removal of the Jews from the various walks of life is an almost precise excerpt from the statement made by Cardinal Sereidi on this subject and adduced in the previous chapter. At a session of the Synod of Catholic Bishops reviewed in detail by the press, the cardinal stated that he ascribed "great importance to limiting the activity of the Jews and removing the Jewish spirit from public and economic areas, as well as from additional walks of life."50

During the debate on the second anti-Jewish law in the Upper House the cardinal said, "It would also be important to eliminate the features they have introduced into our public life in economic and social areas and to eliminate the Jewish spirit."51

Further along in the debate on the very same legislation the cardinal stated, "The concept of limiting the activity of the Jews is acceptable to all... It is necessary to reduce the influence of the Jews."52 It will be recalled that the bishops and heads of the Protestant churches expressed themselves in a similar vein.

The cardinal and his colleagues could observe in 1944 that their preaching and the ideas they had voiced as early as 1939 must have fallen on attentive ears.

A village priest interviewed by a newspaper in the summer of 1944 gave accurate expression to the thinking of the average Hungarian Christian at that time:

I state categorically that church history and tradition have always negated Judaism... The Jews—the people and their priests—murdered our Lord, the Messiah, on the cross, in the most despicable and horrible manner. There in Pilatus's court they made their historic declaration: "May his blood be upon our heads and upon the heads of our offspring."... Ever since the Jews crucified Jesus, they have been the foes of Christianity. May the Jews be expelled from Hungary, and then the church, too, will be able to breathe more freely.53

And so in the summer of 1944 the Hungarian people strove to act in the spirit of this village priest and his superiors, and carried out what the historian Cohen defines as follows: "The most rapid rate of deportation in the history of the Holocaust was rendered possible only by the ideological and psychological preparation of the masses for just such a possibility, over a period of a generation."54

Priestly Activity

The three Christian churches took an interest in the plans and activities of the government on the Jewish question. They approached the govern-
ment at various dates during the summer of 1944 and made their opinions known on the steps adopted by the government and their possible ramifications. The leaders of the priesthood were extremely consistent, acting in accordance with the precedent they had set during the debates on the anti-Jewish legislation. They raised their voices on behalf and in defense of their flock of Jewish converts to Christianity, completely or nearly completely ignoring the plight of the Jews. In many instances they even justified the persecution of the Jews, thus assisting in fanning the flames that were consuming Hungarian Jewry. Moreover, I will describe how, in the vast majority of their appeals to the government, the church leaders stressed that their interest was limited to the Jewish converts alone, and in many cases they added, in passing, expressions besmirching the Jews. There are very few cases where their appeals included a general protest against the deportations, without special emphasis that their intervention was on behalf of the converts alone.

It should be noted that a few days after the German invasion of Hungary, the leaders of all the churches knew about Auschwitz and about what was perpetrated there; furthermore, they knew that Hungarian Jewry was to be deported to Auschwitz. In an interview held in the mid-1980s, Jozsef Elias, who in 1944 was a young priest serving as the secretary of the Good Shepherd organization affiliated with the Reformed church, related that four days after the German invasion, on March 23, precise details of the German plans were known in the offices of the Apostolic Nuncio in Budapest. These details included the yellow star decrees, the rounding up of the Jews into ghettos and concentration camps, and their deportation to the gas chambers and the crematoria. According to Elias, the Vatican itself was almost certainly the source of this information. The receipt of such detailed information in the offices of the nuncio preceded all the decrees made public at a later date by the Hungarian authorities; Elias dates it from the day the Sztojay government took office. Elias wrote down whatever he knew and passed the information along to all the bishops of his church.55

From statements made by the priest who served as Cardinal Seredi’s personal secretary in 1944, Dr. Tamás Zakar, it would seem that Seredi, too, informed the bishops of the Catholic church of all he knew on the subject of the deportation of the Jews.56

Moreover, Cardinal Seredi and Bishops Raffay and Ravasz, the heads of the Protestant churches, received on May 15 or immediately thereafter precise information concerning Auschwitz. This information was included in the Vrba Report, known also as the Auschwitz Report.

The report is named after its compiler, a young Jew named Walter
Rosenberg, who had been expelled from Slovakia to Auschwitz and who had escaped from there after a stay of nearly two years. Subsequent to his escape, he began to use the name Rudolf Vrba in order to evade numerous German attempts to recapture him. Vrba was accompanied on his escape from Auschwitz by his friend, Alfred Vetzler, who subsequently went about under the name Josef Lanik. They escaped from Auschwitz on April 10, 1944, and after much suffering, innumerable hazards, and much courageous initiative, they managed to reach the town of Zsolna in Slovakia on April 24. On the following day they informed the stunned leaders of the local Jewish community of happenings at Auschwitz.

Vrba, a young man with a sharp eye and an analytical mind, served in the camp in a minor administrative role. His position enabled him to move about relatively freely throughout the camp, and in this way he succeeded in gathering the data he included in his report at a later date. Vrba calculated that some 1,750,000 Jews had been murdered in Auschwitz since his arrival there in June 1942.

He told of his observations, which had led him to the conclusion that frantic preparations were being made in Auschwitz for the arrival of a large number of new victims, to be absorbed speedily and efficiently even under considerable pressure of time. He related that up until the end of 1943 the victims had arrived at the train’s final station, from where they had been transferred in trucks to the gas chambers and the crematoria. At the beginning of 1944 the Germans began to work feverishly on extending the train tracks to the gas chambers themselves. This extension of the tracks rendered the operation of Auschwitz considerably more efficient. Vrba calculated that since only in Hungary, of the entire German occupation area, did there remain a large Jewish population, the German preparations at Auschwitz were intended for the rapid absorption of Hungarian Jewry. One of the main objects of his escape was, he said, to warn the Jews of Hungary and their leaders of the fate awaiting them.

The Vrba Report consisted of thirty-eight pages typed in German, containing a detailed description of Auschwitz and its operation, written in a cold, dry, and down-to-earth style. He told of the location of the camp, its equipment, how its commanding officers and guards operated, the selection and murder systems, and the operation of the gas chambers and the crematoria. He reported how the victims who were to be exploited in compulsory labor before their murder were processed and tattooed. Vrba told of the extraction of gold-filled teeth from the mouths of the dead and of other commercial uses the Germans found for the corpses of the murdered. To his report he added sketches.57
The report was immediately sent to Hungary to be distributed, and was handed over to an employee of the Protestant church’s Good Shepherd organization for translation and printing. These tasks took a few days, and the report was delivered in Hungarian to the heads of the Christian churches between May 10 and 15, just when the first deportation train left Hungary.\(^5\)

In light of the above information, it may be assumed that the church leaders were well aware of the existence and significance of Auschwitz from the very first days of the German invasion. Even if the initial information lacked precise details of Auschwitz, the Vrba Report filled in whatever was missing, and from mid-May, when the report reached their hands, their knowledge of the subject was extremely detailed.

We must examine the deeds and statements made by the church leaders during this vital period, in light of this fact.

Seredi’s first appeal to Sztojay after the German invasion concerned the yellow Star of David, and was made on March 28, three days prior to the publication of the regulation rendering wearing one obligatory. In his appeal to Sztojay, Seredi expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that Jewish converts to Christianity were also to be obligated to wear the yellow star, but did not discuss the significance of the decree for the Jews and its expected effect upon them. As Levaï puts it,

\begin{quote}
The Prince Primate did not, in this instance, protest against the anti-Jewish regulations, but raised the following objection: “The six-pointed star is not the emblem of the Jewish race, but of the Jewish religion. Consequently the display of it is, in the case of Christians, a contradiction and constitutes a renunciation of faith.”\end{quote}

After the promulgation of the decree, Seredi appealed to Sztojay:

The Roman Catholic priests, monks, and nuns [of Jewish origin] were exempted from the terms of the previous anti-Jewish measures. There are certain individuals whose view it is that the stipulations of the more recent anti-Jewish measures and particularly [of the regulation requiring the wearing of a yellow star] refer to these persons as well. I, for my part, cannot believe that individuals who have done their utmost for their country and who, by virtue of their vocation, are members of the clergy, can be regarded as coming within the scope of these regulations or that they should be subjected to such scorn. May I be permitted to request your Excellency to issue a statement clarifying the position and to state categorically that the persons indicated above are exempt from the terms of the recent anti-Jewish regulation. Should instructions to this effect not be forthcoming, I shall, to my greatest regret, find myself compelled to forbid the representatives of the church to wear the six-pointed star. Were they to do so, this
would have to be regarded as a renunciation of faith and cannot on this account be permitted. I am sure that Your Excellency will appreciate the justness of my request and will take the necessary and wise steps to remedy this untenable state of affairs.  

Seredi's firm stance bore fruit, and a few days later, on April 5, the government published an amendment to the previous regulation, exempting from the obligation of wearing the yellow six-pointed star all those whose exemption had been demanded by Seredi.  

That very day Sztojay replied to Seredi, "Allow me to draw your attention to the decree... published in today's issue of the Official Gazette, modifying the terms of the decree promulgated in respect of Jews wearing a discriminating emblem. Article 1 of the decree includes all those provisions which Your Excellency felt to be necessary."  

This correspondence shows that from Seredi's very first appeal to the government subsequent to the German invasion, he laid his cards on the table and revealed that he was interested in the converts alone. Even more important is the fact that the cardinal's decisive stance produced results and convinced the government to retreat from its earlier public position, despite the fact that it had already been published.  

On April 23 Seredi met Sztojay and presented him with a document containing the stand of the Catholic church regarding the situation that had come about in Hungary as a result of the German invasion. In the introduction to his letter Seredi demanded liberty and justice for all: "We have no right to limit the right of citizens to life, to personal freedom, to freedom of worship, to work, to earning a livelihood, to ownership of their property, and to human dignity, to upright and honorable lives with neither justification nor a court verdict."  

The excerpt cited above can be understood to mean that he intended to defend the rights of the Jews as well. There are, furthermore, additional excerpts from this letter that can apparently be interpreted in this spirit. Yet the rest of the letter and the written summary of Seredi's practical demands persuade the reader that the visit was meant to protect the interests of the converts. He wrote as follows: "I refer to those regulations already promulgated or those which are to be promulgated in the near future which, with no legal basis, cause harm to Hungarian citizens, my Catholic brethren. These regulations expose them to scorn for no reason."  

After the lengthy introduction containing, as noted above, ideas about the importance of the morality of the regime, Seredi summed up his practical demands in five points:
I herewith insistently request the Royal Hungarian Government of Christian Hungary, a government consisting entirely of Christians, to consider the baptized Christians, even though they be of Jewish origin, and distinguish them from the Jews, as they, by the act of their baptism, have already distinguished themselves.

I present five demands:

[1] The regulations concerning those of Jewish faith should not be applied to Christians.

[2] Those of Christian faith should not be represented in the same Council as those of Jewish faith [the Jewish Council was established the day after the German invasion of Hungary]. The whole organization of the Jewish Council is rooted in the Jewish religion and it is not right that Jews should have power over Catholic priests or monks, or over Christians in general. Nor should they enjoy judicial authority over these, with which they might, should they happen to be biased, harm those who, for the greatest part, followed the call of their conscience and renounced their Jewish faith.

[3] Christians should no longer be obliged to wear the Star of David. ... The exhibition of this sign by Christians is tantamount to apostasy, against which the dignitaries of the church protest most solemnly.

[4] I further request that those Catholic priests, the aged and the infirm, and in general those baptized who fall under the stipulations of the regulations concerning Jews, should be allowed to employ non-Jewish domestics [in the decree promulgated by the government on March 29, the employment of non-Jewish servants in Jewish households was prohibited].

[5] I further have to draw attention to the fact that in many cases, when the property of a parent who is considered a Jew is confiscated or the head of the family is forbidden to work, children, to whom the stipulations of the Jewish laws do not even apply, are deprived of their fortune.

Hoping that neither Your Excellency nor the other Christian members of the Royal Hungarian Government will disown their Christian co-religionists.

This presentation of five points dealing explicitly and solely with the demand to interpret leniently the regulations apparently applying to the Jewish converts to Christianity shows that in the cardinal's appeal to the prime minister, the Jewish question remained outside the scope of the cardinal's interests. Sztojay understood the significance of Seredi’s appeal—an indication that the suffering of the Jews did not bother the cardinal.

Sztojay's May 3 reply reflected the understanding that had developed between the two, and dealt solely with the topics involving the converts. Sztojay agreed that the converts need not be represented by the Jews in
their council. He promised that the minister of the interior would prepare appropriate legislation to facilitate the establishment of a special council to be made up entirely of converts. This council, he intimated, would represent the interests of the converts before the authorities. Until such time as the technical and legislative details setting up this council would be completed, the converts were to be represented by a convert serving on the existing Jewish Council and heading a subcommittee to be set up for the converts. The legislation being prepared by the interior minister would even allow the converts to protest in case the Jewish Council acted against them dishonestly or took exaggerated steps against them.

With regard to the converts being required to wear the yellow six-pointed star, Sztojay reiterated his stand—that the emblem did not represent any religious belief. It was merely an administrative device set up by the authorities, which was intended to facilitate the treatment of those to whom the anti-Jewish regulations applied, “and the government will not object to the Jews of Christian persuasion wearing a cross on their clothing in addition to the Star of David.”

Concerning the employment of Christian domestics in the homes of converts, the government would be willing to take into consideration the priests and others employed by the church. The government was even ready to permit the employment of Christian domestics by families whose children were Christian, even if one of the parents was Jewish.

Regarding the expropriation of property belonging to the head of a Jewish family whose children were Christian, Sztojay wrote as follows: “The Royal Hungarian Government would take care that such property would receive due consideration in accordance with the existing legislation when the time came for the future of such property to be decided.”

As for the Jewish problem in general, Sztojay noted, “It is impossible to jeopardize the life and future of 1 1/2 million Hungarians for the sake of one million Jews.” Sztojay did not deem it necessary to explain to Seredi in detail just how the survival of Jews would jeopardize “the life and future” of the Hungarians, and how their destruction would guarantee them. It would seem that he was not worried about the possibility of Seredi asking him that question.

On May 10, Seredi wrote to the prime minister once again:

I must again repeat my demand for discrimination between converted Jews and Jews adhering to the Israelite faith. This applies especially to cases in which Christians of Jewish origin are to be housed with Israelites in the same flats, houses, ghettos, labor camps, etc. . . . This at least we owe our Christian coreligionists. Furthermore, they have to be assured of freedom of religion. It must be made possible for them to leave their
domiciles in order to fulfill their religious obligations and, should the need arise, priests must be permitted to visit them. Care should be taken that their moral life is not endangered. Most of all it must be prevented that they, as a consequence of indiscriminate deportation, suffer loss of life. Therefore I respectfully request the Royal Hungarian Government that, bearing in mind its historical responsibility, it should cause steps to be taken by Hungarian and non-Hungarian authorities alike to prevent such deportations.69

Here Seredi no longer made any pretense of intervening on behalf of the Jews.

Yet the Jews were mentioned in Seredi’s epistle. That is, in his aforementioned letter to Sztojay he referred one by one to the five points he raised in his memorandum of April 23 and to Sztojay’s reply of May 3, and dealt in the main with matters of minor significance and with a repetition of matters dealt with in the past. He even requested that the gendarmes and the police be informed that Christians obliged to wear a yellow star might display a cross on their clothing, in addition to the Star of David, “in order to avoid unnecessary bother.” When Seredi came to the Jewish question, however, he displayed considerable decisiveness and adopted an uncompromising attitude. He wanted to be given substantial guarantees that Christians would under no circumstances be rendered subordinate to any Jewish authority in the framework of the Jewish Council. He stressed his request that if any problems should arise in this regard, they be dealt with efficiently by the authorities.70

As we have noted, nowhere in the letter is there any sign that the fate of the Jews occupied the cardinal to any degree. The letter is dated May 10. Five days later the trains began to set out for Auschwitz, and even then, when the deportations were under way, Seredi was interested mainly in his personal prestige and his church’s status in his contacts with government leaders. The following is an excerpt from the letter he wrote and distributed among the Catholic bishops on May 17:

Previous Royal Hungarian Governments used to inform me in advance of proposed legislation and regulations of interest to the church, to its institutions, to its rights, to its faith, and to its moral laws, or to church personages, so that I would be able to make my comments. . . However, in the present situation preliminary notices are no longer given to me. . . . In the vast majority of cases I am able to make comments only after the promulgation of the regulations. . . . I must state that it is neither my fault nor that of the Synod of Bishops, that in my exhausting and difficult talks with the appropriate authorities, and mainly with the prime minister, I did not succeed any better when I rose to defend righteousness and, in particular, the rights of our Catholic brethren.71
Seredi thus concludes this stage of his treatment of the subject by professing innocence of any guilt.

The Protestant churches were active at the same time, and they, too, gave preference in their dealings with the government to the status of converts to Christianity and the violations of that status. Their appeals resembled those of the Catholic church, and on occasion the wording of the appeals made by the various churches was completely identical.

From a document of the Evangelical church dated the second half of July, which summed up the steps taken by the Protestant churches on this issue, we learn of the following relevant steps: on April 4, at the same time as the appeals of the heads of the Reformed church and its various provincial centers were lodged, the leadership of the Evangelical church appealed in identical letters to Prime Minister Sztojay, to Interior Minister Jaross, and to the minister of culture and religion, Dr. Istvan Antal. In these letters three demands were made “regarding Jews of the Christian faith”:

1. They should be exempted from the requirement of wearing the discriminating emblem.
2. They should be permitted to employ in their homes Christian domestics.
3. They should not be subject to the authority of the Jewish Council.

The church requests that a separate council be established for the converts.71

According to yet another source, at the same time as the step just described was taken, on April 6, Bishop Ravasz presented the prime minister with a memorandum containing requests for consideration of Christians who were partners in mixed marriages.73

The prime minister’s reply was sent on May 10. In it he turned down the request contained in paragraph 1 of the church memorandum, yet added that “the government has no objection to the converts wearing on their clothing a cross, in addition to the yellow six-pointed star.” Regarding the employment of Christian domestics in the households of mixed couples, “the government is prepared to permit such employment if one of the couple is a Christian, even if he is of Jewish origin, on condition that the children of that family are Christian.”74

Even before the prime minister’s reply had been received, the Evangelical church made yet another appeal, on May 5, in an additional memorandum to the head of the Royal Hungarian Government, in which it requested that the Jews of the Christian religion not be housed in the ghettos together with the Jews of the Jewish faith. Since this memorandum remained unanswered, the church presidency sent yet another memoran-
dum, on May 26, to the head of the Royal Hungarian Government, in which it adopted the following position:

1. The appointment of a convert to membership in the Jewish Council is not an acceptable solution to this problem.
2. All those who, together with their children, converted before their children were seven years of age, should be considered non-Jews.
3. The presidency protests against the transfer of these people to the ghettos.
4. If, nevertheless, the government should insist on the converts moving into the ghettos, the church presidency requests that Christian priests be permitted to visit members of their flock in the ghettos.
5. The presidency warns the government against expelling the Jews beyond the borders of the state.

The first four paragraphs in this Evangelical church appeal deal with requests for consideration of converts. The fifth paragraph refers to the Jews as well.

On May 19 a representative of the Jewish communities informed Bishop Ravasz, the head of the Reformed church, that the deportations had begun and that according to the most reliable information available “there was no return from such a journey.” It should be recalled that the Vrba Report was at this time in Ravasz’s possession. Ravasz turned to the Evangelical bishop, Kapi, and the two Protestant churches prepared a joint memorandum to the government. The memorandum reached its destination on June 21, over a month after the Jewish appeal to Ravasz, owing to the fact that the nine bishops resided at different places and their signatures had to be obtained individually.

The Protestant bishops were in no hurry. Hungary is not a large country, and a journey of a number of hours suffices to reach every corner. The movements of the bishops and their messengers were not restricted, and they could move freely. The telephone and mail services functioned normally. Nevertheless, the collection of the nine signatures took a month. It should be noted that throughout the month of signatures the deportation trains from Hungary fed the Auschwitz ovens over ten thousand Jews every day.

Reading the memorandum raises the question whether it would have been preferable had the memorandum never been written and delivered to its destination. The encouragement of government activities contained in the memorandum far exceeds its defense of the Jews—in a document intended to serve as a defense of the Jews. It contained the following:

The solution of the Jewish question is a political task. We are not dealing with politics now. The execution of this solution is a great work of admin-
istration. We are not experts on that... We do not wish to aggravate Your Excellency's political position; we even wish to promote the solution of the great task you took upon yourself.

As bishops of the two Protestant churches we protest against devout members of our congregations being punished only for being considered Jews from a racial point of view. They are being punished for a Jewish mentality from which they, and in many cases their ancestors, have solemnly disconnected themselves. Their lives, as regards Christian spirit and morality, are not considered in the least."

With such defense the Jews were in no need of prosecution. The deportations went on until the last of the Jews, except for the Jews of Budapest, had been deported.

In the summer of 1944 there appeared yet another official Christian factor which took an interest in the ways in which the Jewish question was being solved: the pope's personal representative in Budapest, Nuncio Angelo Rotta. Like his colleagues, the heads of the Hungarian Christian churches, he, too, took a special interest in the fate and the safety of the converts, expressing himself accordingly on various occasions before various government agencies.

Rotta met Sztojay on March 23 and March 30. On April 18, he held yet another discussion with the prime minister, while, on April 27, he visited the deputy foreign minister, Anthony-Jungerth. In a memorandum he delivered to the Hungarian government on May 15, he summed up his discussions with the government leaders. Like his colleagues, Rotta, too, spoke in general terms of the lack of justice characterizing the solution of the Jewish question; like them he focused his attention upon the special injustice done to the converts in being treated no differently from the Jews. He wrote:

On many previous occasions the Apostolic Nunciature has brought to the notice of the Hungarian government those provisions of the new anti-Jewish decrees which it considers unjust, especially the failure to discriminate between baptized and Israelite Jews... The Apostolic Nunciature considers it to be its duty to protest against such measures. It once again appeals to the Hungarian government not to continue this war against the Jews beyond the limits prescribed by the laws of nature."

In the covering letter attached to Rotta's protest, the following, appeared:

I regard it as my duty to present this note of protest and again to demand that the rights of the church and its flock be respected. The fact that persons are persecuted because of their racial origin is in itself a breach of the laws
of nature... but to pass anti-Jewish laws without taking into consideration that many Jews have, through baptism, become Christians, is a serious offense against the church."

In its reply the government stressed its explanation of the question of the converts, relying on the anti-Jewish legislation that had been in force for the past few years.

This reply did not satisfy the nuncio, so, on June 5, he once again addressed the government in a memorandum in which he refuted the government's arguments concerning the application of the anti-Jewish legislation to the converts. He expressed his anxiety for the spiritual well-being of the converts in concentration camps, and wrote, "In some places the authorities have gone as far as to hinder the priests in giving these unfortunate children of the church the consolations of religion." In the conclusion of his memorandum he made three concrete demands:

[2] Baptized Jews are to be exempted from anti-Jewish legislation, at least those Jews who, with regard to the date of their conversion, are above all reasonable suspicion [i.e., those converts who converted long before, and so could not be suspected of doing so merely to try to escape the treatment given the Jews].
[3] The Royal Hungarian Government is asked to take urgent steps to put a stop to the deportation of Jews and to permit the spiritual care of the unfortunate Christians.80

On June 30, the government replied to the nuncio, claiming to have considered his appeal seriously:

The Royal Hungarian Government... does not reject out of hand the arguments advanced by the Apostolic Nuncio, especially insofar as these refer to the baptized Jews. Taking this line, the Royal Hungarian Government has examined the recent note submitted by the Apostolic Nuncio and would herewith like to give a résumé of its point of view:

A special branch of the Jewish Council will in future represent the interests of the converted Jews in Hungary. Until the articles of this council have been approved, Mr. Sandor Torok [a converted Jewish journalist] will represent the converted Jews in the Provisional Executive Committee. All steps have been taken to ensure that the activities of this representative are suitably supported.

The memorandum repeats the government's claim that Hungarian Jewry was not being deported:

A large number of Jewish laborers has been placed at the disposal of the German government. The fact that these laborers took their families with
them to Germany was due to the consideration that it would be better not
to part these families, as these Jews can be expected to get through a great
amount of work. . . . Instructions have been issued to ensure that converted
Jews and their families are accorded precedence among the workers, whose
retention in the country is made imperative by economic and industrial
considerations.81

The nuncio visited Sztojay once again on July 6, and told the prime
minister, "You yourself see what the theory of racism leads to. People
born as Christians and those who have been living Christian lives for the
past thirty to forty years are now being subjected to the same unfair
treatment accorded the other Jews."82

According to the nuncio, the failure of racism, as put into effect by
the Hungarian government, was that it overran its boundaries and af-
fected Christian believers negatively. This would seem to indicate that
had the government seen fit to limit its racist activity to people of the
Jewish religion only, he would have reacted differently.

Sztojay took notes of his meeting with the nuncio. His notes show
that the nuncio's major topic of interest was the fate of the Jewish con-
verts. It should be noted that the nuncio did protest in general terms
against the brutality evinced toward all those suffering from racial per-
secution, both Jews and converts alike, yet most of the conversation
between the two concerned the converts. Sztojay illuminates an inter-
esting angle of the nuncio's attitude toward the entire Jewish population:

Concerning the separation of the Jews from the rest of the populace, I
commented that this matter is important, for in a life-and-death struggle
such as the one the Hungarian nation is currently engaged in with Bolshe-
vism, the Jews exude a negative influence. They are defeatists and favor
our enemies, in spite of its being clear that were Bolshevism to be trium-
phant, Hungary would be inundated.

The nuncio agreed that there is indeed a Jewish danger, and that it is
vital to eradicate this danger, but stressed that this must be carried out
while taking into consideration Christian morality and church rights. . . .
The nuncio repeatedly stressed that nothing should be done to limit the
church’s freedom of movement, for then he would be obliged to inform
the Holy Father of it, a step which would undoubtedly leave an undesirable
impression.83

In mentioning “Christian morality” the nuncio put himself into the
same camp as Laszlo Endre, the man responsible for the deportations,
who had repeatedly stressed in his reports to the government and on
various other occasions that he was carrying out the deportation while
guided by the "spirit of Christianity."
As already noted, the nuncio was especially interested in the fate of the converts. The nuncio’s attitude did not escape the prime minister, who was shrewd enough to understand that if he made concessions in connection with the converts, the nuncio would no longer be an obstacle to his disposal of the Jewish question. At the government session held on July 13, a week after his meeting with the nuncio, Sztojay delivered personally a semiofficial letter to his interior minister, Jaross, in which he included a request:

As you know, the Apostolic Nuncio paid me a visit on the 6th of this month and made several requests. . . . One of these requests was that the government exempt various converts from the obligations of the anti-Jewish regulations. At that meeting I informed him that there is a good chance I will be prepared to treat his request most cordially, and if he gives me a list of the people involved, I will take the steps necessary to exempt from the application of the anti-Jewish laws.

Enclosed please find the list, together with my request that you urgently examine these cases and give instructions to exempt from the application of the anti-Jewish laws those whose names are included in the list.

It would seem to be unnecessary to emphasize that our speedy and positive response to this modest request of the nuncio will have a desirable effect upon his attitude toward us, a result which will indirectly improve the position adopted by the Holy See toward us—an apparently desirable development in the present situation. I will appreciate your informing me of the results of your consideration of the matter."

From these meeting with the leaders of the churches and with the nuncio, the government succeeded in clarifying the stand of the important Christian factors in Hungary—strong opposition to any harm done to the converts and to the church, and agreement with the government regarding the necessity to “remove” the Jews. For the sake of style, they sometimes added a comment on “lack of justice,” “boundaries dictated by natural law,” “unnecessary brutality in execution,” and so forth. Even if the Hungarian government had desired to take note of the protests of Christian leaders, it would have been unable to do so because such protests were simply never made.

Here are additional instances of so-called church intervention.

An Evangelical priest from the town of Mohacs wrote on June 30 to the national head of his church after the deportation of three families of his flock:

Strangers by virtue of the blood flowing in their veins, yet close to us spiritually, members of our flock who have converted and joined us are suffering from an approach which not only contradicts our Evangelical
outlook, but also opposes our 900-year-old Hungarian-Christian past. Until now they lived in the ghetto together with the other Jews, and bore their fate with true Christian resignation. As for me, both as a Christian and as a Hungarian, I accept without reservation the methods adopted by the exalted governmental authorities. I do not wish to become the spokesman for all the Jews of Mohacs, for other than my own flock I have never had any connection with any of them. I am aware that Jewry has been a foreign limb on the national body, and that it has been obligatory to remove it. I have no objections to this, merely to the execution. At this stage I limit my protest to my own brethren only.

Here the priest provided the names of those three families and continued, "I was never a friend of the Jews, but I am both a brother and a friend of those who have joined me in Jesus. On this basis I undergo mental suffering together with my beloved flock."

The bishop of Csanad, Hamvas, wrote to Seredi on July 15, 1944,
The honorable prime minister's promise that the Jews of the Christian faith will not be expelled from Budapest is extremely calming. For this achievement I am especially grateful to Your Holiness. But what about the fate of those who have already been deported from the towns and provinces? Members of my flock from Szeged and Mako have already been deported. We should demand their return. Similarly, we must insist that the deportation of converts from the towns and provinces where the deportation has not yet been completed be stopped. The honorable prime minister also wrote that Christians of Jewish origin will reside separately in the future and will be able to live according to the tenets of their religion. But will they have the opportunity to earn a livelihood?

The special interest displayed by the priesthood and the heads of the churches in the problems of the converts, while almost completely ignoring the Jewish tragedy, did not escape the attention of an expert on the Jewish question. SS General Winckelmann wrote to his superior, Himmler, on July 13, "Last week such incidents occurred here as would elsewhere have given rise to much anxiety. The nuncio and Cardinal Seredi registered constant protests with the regent concerning the Jews of Budapest. The fact that in this context all their anxiety was for the converts alone stems undoubtedly from the very nature of the church."

There exists the testimony of a person who in the summer of 1944 was involved in a daily, practical sense in the "solution of the Jewish question," the Hungarian minister of the interior, Jaross, who stated in his interrogation after the war was over,

The leaders of the priesthood made declarations on behalf of the converts only. Cardinal Seredi requested that they be exempted from the obligations
of the anti-Jewish legislation, while Reformed Bishop Ravasz himself, in a speech delivered in the Calvin Square Church in Budapest on Good Friday, stated that “the Jews are now receiving their punishment from God for having crucified Jesus.”

Ravasz was not the only bishop who thought along those lines and expressed himself accordingly. In mid-May 1944, the Jews of the Debrecen area were concentrated in the city of that name, in eastern Hungary. Rumors spread through the ghetto that due to the advance of the Red Army and the threat it posed to Hungary’s eastern border, the authorities wanted to evacuate the Jews from the area of the expected battle. It was thought that the Jews, as a factor disloyal to the regime and supportive of the Bolshevik enemy, might betray the Hungarian army attempting to block the advance of the Red Army. The rabbi of the Jewish Status Quo community of Debrecen, Rabbi Meir Weiss, asked to be received by Reformed Bishop Imre Revesz. At their meeting the rabbi proposed that since the bishop was familiar with the Jewish community and knew of its loyalty to Hungary, he might be willing to guarantee that the Jews would not perform any hostile acts against the Hungarian army. In this way the reason for removing the Jews from their homes and from the town would fall away, and perhaps the authorities would agree to leave them in the Debrecen ghetto.

Revesz replied that if he were able, he would save the converts. As for the Jews: since at the time of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus the Jews took upon themselves and upon their seed the curse of the Messiah’s spilt blood—he was unable to be of assistance to them.

The Shepherds’ Epistles

Some time after Seredi received the Vrba Report in mid-May, he commented to his secretary, “I have prepared the outline of a draft of a Shepherds’ Epistle, which I shall discuss with the bishops.”

And so, the archbishop sent copies of the epistle to the bishops of Eger and Kalocsa, as well as to those of Szekesfehervar, Csanad, and Gyor. The only recipient who reacted to it in a substantial and fundamental manner was Czapik, the bishop of Kalocsa, who was second in the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church in Hungary. Czapik’s letter to Seredi provides insight into the attitude of the highest-ranking church leaders toward the mass murder of Hungarian Jewry, and toward its perpetrators and its participants. The letter provides a kind of ideological guideline to the Shepherds’ Epistle of the Catholic church, as it was later worded by Seredi:
We must mention the deprivation of the rights of the Jews only in a general fashion. While it is true that everyone is aware of the horrors, and everyone knows what happens to them at their final station, it would not be right to put this before the public in writing. We, at any rate, are not permitted to do so. ... We will be criticized, because the epistle presents the Jews only as persecuted beings who are suffering, without mentioning the fact that many of them sinned against Hungarian Christianity while none of their community ever reprimanded them for this.

We must avoid going into great detail on the question of the deprivation of Jewish rights—as I have already noted above. Such details would be the first source which could be interpreted as an admission of the facts. Let the Synod of Bishops not do this!

Those passages dealing with the deprivation of Jewish rights should be reworded, it being preferable for us to defend the natural laws of God and to stress our dissatisfaction with the violation of these laws. With all due respect and appreciation, I am opposed to the suggestion that we criticize the government publicly and that we break off all contact with them.

Czapik's comments can be summed up in three sentences: the bishops should not make public what is happening to the Jews; what is happening to the Jews at the present time is nothing but appropriate punishment for their misdeeds in the past; the leaders of the church should maintain correct relations with the government.

The final wording of the epistle was done by Seredi. It is dated June 29, 1944. Between the idea of preparing such an epistle and its actual writing, the Jews of Hungary endured six fateful weeks, and by the date the epistle was actually written the vast majority of the Jews had already been deported from the towns and the provinces.

The epistle is an interesting document and worthy of study. In his introductory remarks the cardinal presents the virtues of the 2,000-year-old church and the privileges of the heirs and followers of the church fathers, the bishops, who have always spread their protection over the oppressed, and even defended slaves. They have always supported the poor and assisted those of the lower classes. The Hungarian Synod of Bishops, during the thousand years of its existence, has also spread the wings of its protection over the poor and simple who suffered persecution. After the epistle elaborates on the subject of church generosity, it reaches the middle of the nineteenth century. Here the epistle describes the sacrifice made by the church in liberating the vassals, despite the great damage this act caused. The cardinal told of the generosity of the church in the age of the agrarian reform and of its contribution in this respect, and described the church's struggle on behalf of human dignity, freedom of religion, the right to possess property, and so on. All this is done while
quoting freely from the Bible and mentioning the humane approach adopted by various popes.

In dealing with his own era, Seredi devoted a lengthy passage to a condemnation of the Allies for bombing of the cities of Hungary and causing damage to peaceful citizens. Even the idea spread by the Nazi propaganda machine about the evil Allies who parachuted booby-trapped toys from their airplanes in order to strike at innocent children found its way into the epistle.

At this point Seredi went on to mention deeds being carried out in Hungary that were liable to bring down the wrath of God upon their perpetrators: “These steps have reduced and even negated the natural rights of a certain section of our society, including even the rights of those who accept the holy faith we accept—all because of their origin.”

The first half of the sentence quoted above was intended to imply a defense of the Jews, but in this central sentence the word “Jew” does not appear, and it may be reasonably assumed that this omission was deliberate. The fact that in the second half of the sentence Seredi mentions “those who accept the holy faith we accept” should prove who it was that the church and the Shepherds’ Epistle proposed to defend.

However, the epistle does indeed go on to mention the word “Jew”:

We do not deny that a number of Jews exercised a wicked, destructive influence upon Hungarian economic, social, and moral life. It is also a fact that the others did nothing to protest against their coreligionists in this matter. We do not doubt that the Jewish question must be solved in a legal and just manner. And so, we do not voice any opposition to the steps which have been taken against them until now in the economic field in the interests of the state. Similarly, we lodge no protest against the eradication of their undesirable influence. On the contrary, we would like to see it disappear. Nevertheless, we would be neglecting our moral roles in the church, were we not to speak up against the damage to justice and the harm to Hungarian citizens of our own Catholic faith, who are being harmed only because of their racial origin.

For this purpose we have tried, both orally and in writing, to spread the wings of our protection over our neighbors, citizens of Hungary, and over those of our faith who have been harmed by the regulations recently made public. We have requested that these regulations be canceled or amended. ...As we rely upon the Christianity and humanity of our government ministers, we do not despair nor have we given up hope, despite the fact that our achievements to date have been few and inadequate. Thus, we have not made any declarations until now, though in the meantime we have taken all possible steps to achieve our aim.

Nevertheless, we now perceive in amazement that despite our efforts
and all our discussions, our pressure on extremely important matters has been almost fruitless. For this reason we are formally denying any responsibility for the results.

Seredi concludes his epistle: “Pray and work for our friends, all Hungarian citizenry, and especially for our Catholic brethren, for our Catholic church, and for our beloved Hungary.”

It should be noted that traces of Czapik are distinctly noticeable in the final wording of the epistle. Seredi accepted his suggestions and went even further: not only does the epistle not include any details of brutality toward the Jews; it completely ignores this brutality. A general reference was the only indication of certain unpleasantnesses the Jews had been encountering of late. The terminology adopted by the two most prominent personages of the Hungarian Catholic church is fascinating. They both used the legalistic term “deprivation of rights” to mean, in practice, the murder of almost half a million people. In accordance with Kapi’s counsel, Seredi was extremely cautious in choosing his words, and preferred to write euphemistically.

The question of the purpose of the epistle should be examined in light of what it included and what was omitted from it.

The document includes some two thousand words. It is very doubtful if the population, visiting the churches in the heat of a Hungarian summer, was capable of following such a drawn-out reading, of concentrating on its content, and of absorbing its significance, especially since it was written in an archaic, medieval style that made it all the more difficult for its audience to concentrate. Its lengthy introduction and historical review certainly led the listeners to wonder about its relevance to the difficulties of their daily lives.

With regard to its content, as soon as the epistle begins to discuss current affairs, its language becomes obscure, and the average listener certainly had difficulty understanding its meaning. Only on a single topic did the epistle use clear, unambiguous language—in besmirching the Jewish population, a topic to be discussed below.

Seredi refers to his discussions with the authorities in his diplomatic, enigmatic style, saying, “Indeed we registered sporadic successes.” In other words, Seredi termed a success the fact that as a result of his intervention elderly converted priests would henceforth be permitted to employ Christian domestics, as well as the fact that in the future Jewish converts would be permitted to wear a white cross on their clothing in addition to the yellow six-pointed star. Seredi modestly describes his successes as “few and inadequate,” yet the very use of the term success in describing the events of those days is a clear sign of a lack of sensitivity.
As noted above, in contrast with the obscure language employed throughout most of the epistle, Seredi’s style becomes clear when he speaks of the topic that was the real reason for the document’s being written: the Jewish question. Yet, instead of defending them, Seredi’s clear style attacks and condemns the Jews: “We do not voice any opposition to the steps which have been taken against them until now in the economic field.” Every Hungarian was aware of the nature of the economic steps taken against the Jews: expelling them from their homes in the presence of their Hungarian neighbors, throwing them out of their shops, removing them from their lands, and robbing their property in broad daylight. These were “the economic steps which have been taken until now”—the steps to which there was no opposition. Those Hungarians who eyed Jewish property greedily now enjoyed the implicit support of the leader of their church in their thinking: “We do not deny that a number of Jews exercised a wicked, destructive influence upon Hungarian economic, social, and moral life. It is also a fact that the others did nothing in protest against their coreligionists in this matter.” Seredi, together with Kapi, divided the Jewish population into two parts, each part being worthy of punishment—one because it behaved badly, the other because it did not protest. Seredi’s approach in his epistle reflects his consistency. More than five years before the tragedy of 1944, while debating on the second anti-Jewish bill, Seredi had declared, “Part of the Jewish population casts doubt upon those things sacred to Christians. They do so with the acquiescence of the other Jews.”

A Catholic listening to the cardinal saying, “we lodge no protest against the eradication of their undesirable influence. On the contrary, we would like to see it disappear” could rightfully deduce that both his government and the heads of his church believed it desirable that the unwanted influence of the Jews disappear. In facilitating the disappearance of their influence, the facilitators made the Jews themselves disappear. And even if there were some differences of opinion between church and state over the technical steps employed by those facilitating the disappearance of the Jews in the execution of their duties, there was complete agreement between the two sides with regard to the importance of the disappearance itself.

One way or another, the job was done, and Hungary remained clean, purified of those Jews with “the wicked, destructive influence.” The foremost church institutions justified, at least a posteriori, a deed for which the Hungarian people were ready as a result of the many years of incitement provided by their leaders, including the leaders of their churches.

What did the Shepherds’ Epistle omit? It omitted any reference to
accepted moral standards; it omitted any call for an examination of current events and contemporary leaders on the basis of the religious precept "Thou shalt not kill."

On the other hand, the Shepherds' Epistle contains the declaration that the Synod of Bishops relied on "the Christianity and humanity" of the government ministers. In Seredi's considerations, his sense of obligation to collaborate with the authorities was stronger than his basic human emotion, which would have obliged him to save the innocent from their murderers.

The Protestant churches, too, prepared a Shepherds' Epistle in the summer of 1944, and there is a strong resemblance between their epistle and that of the Roman Catholic church.

The Protestant churches suggested to Seredi on a number of occasions that all the Christian churches adopt a common stance in their talks with the government. In order to achieve this cooperation between them, Ravasz declared that "for the defense of the interests of Christians of Jewish origin, he is willing to cooperate with the Catholic church." The Catholic priest who heard this declaration reported it to Seredi, but the latter did not respond to this appeal, just as he refrained from responding to other appeals. When he did respond, his reaction was negative.

In light of Seredi's rejection, the bishops of the two Protestant churches prepared a Shepherds' Epistle to be read out in their churches. The epistle is dated "the last Sunday of the month of June," that is, June 25. It is to be noted that, in contrast with church documents prepared in the summer of 1944, this document was exceptional in that it lacks the usual emphasis that the appeal was being made on behalf of the Jewish converts to Christianity. Nevertheless, the epistle does refer to the memorandum which the nine Protestant bishops had presented to the government a few days earlier, in which the demand to prefer the converts was prominent. The Shepherds' Epistle strongly condemns the action taken by the government and demands unequivocally that an end be put to the deportations, the torture, and the brutality accompanying them.

Yet this epistle, too, like Seredi's, was composed after considerable delay, after the deportation of most of Hungarian Jewry outside of Budapest. Like the Catholics, the Protestants also refrained from publicly depicting the government as serving a foreign power in the murderous policy it was following.

The church leaders did not inform the government of their intention to appeal in Shepherds' Epistles to their faithful, but the government learned of it nevertheless. The postal system was instructed to delay
the dispatch of Seredi's epistles, but some of these were packed in parcels and so reached their destinations. Despite the tone of the epistle—hostile to the Jews—the government feared for some reason the possibility of the epistles being read out in churches throughout the country, and appealed to the church leaders to consider canceling their reading. The government sent Minister Istvan Antal to meet with the cardinal, who was staying at his summer home in Gerecse. The meeting took place on June 6. Antal tried to persuade the cardinal that no good could come of reading the epistle, hinting that the reading might have "undesirable consequences" both in Hungary and abroad. I assume he was indicating the possibility of the Arrow-Cross party taking power under German auspices.

Despite Antal's points not being well reasoned, and despite the fact that his threats, under the circumstances at the time in Budapest, were vain threats, Seredi hurriedly retreated and agreed in principle to postpone the date upon which the epistle was to be read out, while postulating three conditions: first, the prime minister would guarantee officially that the violations of civil rights would cease; second, the converts would be exempted from all the decrees applying to the Jews—more specifically, they were not to be expelled from the country in the future, and the prime minister would do everything possible to have those already deported returned; and lastly, the church authorities would be entitled to inform their believers that they were negotiating with the government over the Jewish question, and that some success had already been achieved.

Antal accepted the first two conditions and realized it would be better if the cardinal and prime minister discussed the third condition between them. On the following day, July 7, Seredi instructed his bishops and priests by telegram to postpone reading out the Shepherds' Epistle until further notice.

The next day, on July 8, the prime minister, accompanied by three members of his government, visited Seredi in Gerecse. The cardinal, together with two archbishops and two bishops, received them. The prime minister handed the cardinal a document in which he referred to the previous correspondence between them concerning exemptions for the converts from the anti-Jewish decrees. The prime minister was now happy to inform the cardinal that certain steps, which until then had been mere thoughts, would now be put into effect on behalf of the converts, to lighten their burden. The prime minister summed up his position in five points:
The government had set up a council to protect Christians of Jewish origin. This council would function separately from the Jewish Council.

The government had checked into the complaints of brutality against the Jews, and found that in most cases the complaints were groundless, while in other cases they were exaggerated. The government had punished those responsible for this unseemly conduct, and would prevent repetition of such cases.

The deportation of Budapest Jewry had, for the time being, been canceled.

If at any time in the future the Jews of Budapest would be deported, the Jews who had converted to Christianity would be permitted to remain in Hungary.

The relatives of priests—parents, brothers and sisters and, in the case of Protestant priests, wives and children as well—would be exempted in the future from the requirement to wear the yellow Star of David and from all the other decrees accompanying the wearing of this emblem.

The government seems to have understood just what the churches expected of it. Three of the points concern advantages to be awarded to the converts, while the two remaining points concern the Jews and the converts equally. In return for the prime minister’s promises, Seredi agreed to refrain from reading the Shepherds’ Epistle in the churches.

A study of this agreement reveals an interesting situation. The second point was nothing but a lie, and was recognized as such by both sides, each of whom was aware of the fact that the other realized that such was the case.

As for the third point, the government simply deceived the church. As we shall see, the government had decided on the day before the premier’s meeting with the church leaders to stop the deportation of the Jews. There was no connection between this decision and the contents of the epistle. In other words, depicting the cessation of the deportation of Budapest Jewry as a response to the cardinal refraining from having the Shepherds’ Epistle read out in church was only a pretense.

That same point should be read in light of the condition written into the following point, that if the deportations were renewed, it would be the Jews of Budapest who were to be deported, while the converts would remain in the city. The church leaders accepted this point, which meant, essentially, Jewish blood in return for saving the converts and refraining from reading the epistle. It should be noted that the prime minister met
with Seredi in Gerecsé a mere two days after he met with the nuncio in Budapest.\(^1\) The impression he received from the papal representative was still fresh in his mind, and he surely deduced that the idea that conceding the safety of the converts would render it easier to deal with the Jews would be acceptable to the cardinal as well. Seredi and his colleagues did not disappoint him.

From a practical point of view, the parties concluded that on the evening of July 8 and the morning of July 9 an announcement would be made on the state radio in the following wording: “Cardinal Justinian Seredi, Prince Primate of Hungary, wishes to inform all parish priests that the general pastoral letter entitled ‘Successors of the Apostles’ and dated June 29 is intended for the information of the clergy only. This being the case, the letter is not to be read out to the congregations.”\(^2\)

Instead of the Shepherds’ Epistle, on Sunday, July 16, the priests were to read from the pulpits an announcement agreed upon by Seredi and the prime minister:

Cardinal Justinian Seredi, Prince Primate of Hungary, in his own name as well as the name of their Excellencies, the Hungarian Synod of Bishops, informs the Catholic congregations that he has repeatedly intervened with the Royal Hungarian Government on behalf of the Jews, especially those who have been baptized, and is continuing his negotiations in this direction.\(^3\)

The fate of the Protestant pastoral letter was very similar and perhaps identical with that of the Catholics. The government minister, Istvan Antal, visited Bishop Ravasz on July 11, told him of the arrangement reached between the government and Seredi, and proposed wording a similar arrangement with the Protestant churches. It was agreed that on July 16 the priests of the Protestant churches would read out the following announcement in their churches: “The leaders of both Protestant churches have repeatedly intervened with the competent Government authorities regarding the Jewish question and especially with reference to the baptized Jews. Their endeavors in this respect are continuing.”\(^4\)

In this way the pastoral letter affair came to its inglorious end. During the period under discussion the ovens of Auschwitz functioned more than at any previous or subsequent time.

It is interesting to follow the government’s energetic action taken to prevent the Shepherds’ Epistle from being read out in public. It is surprising that leading government figures attributed so much importance to these letters, that they took part in pressuring the church leaders, and made use of various devices to have the letters shelved. Had they reached
their destinations, it is doubtful if they would have attracted much attention, and it is almost certain that no activity whatever would have resulted from them.

The government feared the epistles because it ascribed to the churches—rightfully—considerable influence over their believers. The government's error was in ascribing to the church leaders the desire to use their influence on behalf of the Jews. It is not difficult today to imagine what the churches could have achieved had they put into effect the potential of their ability to influence the people.

In other words, preparing the epistles took between a month and a half, whereas shelving them was a far more rapid process and took place even before the letters themselves had been made public. One possible explanation for this is that the preparation of the epistles was intended only to calm the consciences of their writers, those who had been able to help and to save Jews but had refrained from so doing. When they encountered the first obstacle in the path of making the epistles public, their writers desisted from the rest of their initiative, and the subject of pastoral letters ended in roaring silence.

It was roaring silence in more than one sense: when the priests were about to put into effect what little was left of the Shepherds' Epistles, and prepared to read the cardinal's announcement, the loudspeakers in the churches suddenly went silent—with Seredi's approval.105

Yet the silence in the churches was not absolute. When the Jews had been expelled from the town of Veszprem, and the city was then Judenrein (cleansed of Jews), the residents of the town were invited to a thanksgiving ceremony in the Franciscan church. The announcements that appeared throughout the town read,

With the help of Divine Providence our ancient city and province have been liberated from that Judaism which sullied our nation. In our thousand-year national history, this is not the first time we have been freed from some scourge which had befallen us. However, no previous event can compare in its importance with this event, for no previous foe threatening us, whether by force or by a political takeover, had ever succeeded in overcoming us to the extent that the Jews had succeeded, with the aid of their poisoned roots which penetrated our national body and took hold of it. We are following in the footsteps of our fathers in coming to express our thanks to our God who saves us whenever we are in distress. Come and gather for the thanksgiving service which will take place on June 25 at 11:30 A.M. at the Franciscan Church.

The local branch office of the Arrow-Cross party signed the fliers and distributed them.106
The German ambassador, Veesenmayer, reported the thanksgiving prayer service at the Franciscan church to his superiors in Berlin: "The arrangements for organizing the service were agreed upon by the leader of the Arrow-Cross party in Veszprem, Dr. Ferenc Schiberna, and the local Franciscan priest, without the involvement of the Catholic bishop. When the bishop heard of the planned thanksgiving ceremony, he expressed his opposition because 'those deported included some converts.'"

As a result, Dr. Schiberna discussed the matter with the bishop, who then agreed to hold the thanksgiving prayers on condition that the Te Deum prayer not be recited and that the Arrow-Cross party men would not appear at the ceremony in uniform. "The Arrow-Cross men rejected these conditions, and the service was held before an overflowing church. The Arrow-Cross men appeared at the ceremony in their uniforms." In other words, other voices replaced the pastoral letters.

A Quarter of a Million Budapest Jews—Trapped

The deportation of Hungarian Jewry was an operation unprecedented in its efficiency, in its brutality, and in the lack of any humane reaction on the part of any sector of the Hungarian population. Its uniqueness stands out even more clearly when one takes into consideration the fact that it took place during that stage of World War II when the war had already entered its decisive phase, and the oppressive regimes in various European lands were drawing rapidly to their collapse. It is thus simple to comprehend the expressions of anger and condemnation voiced by statesmen and leaders in the free world regarding the leaders of the Hungarian regime. They even threatened the latter with reprisals for their deeds. At the government session held on July 5, 1944, the deputy foreign minister spoke of the heavy pressures being brought to bear on him: "The representatives of the neutral states in Budapest are protesting to me unceasingly on this subject." He even mentioned the demand voiced by public opinion in the Anglo-Saxon countries "to apply sanctions to Hungary; one of the suggestions made was to bomb Budapest and obliterate the government buildings."108

In addition, the military situation of the Axis powers, which was deteriorating rapidly on all fronts, compelled the Hungarian government to devote some thought to its future actions. On June 19–20 the Japanese navy had suffered a defeat near the Mariana Islands. The Russians were sweeping ahead rapidly on all fronts. And in the west, the allies had liberated Cherbourg on June 26.109
The new situation encouraged Horthy to reconsider the passive approach he had adopted ever since the German invasion. He invited himself to the June 26 government session, which convened as the Crown Council and discussed the matters on its agenda with Horthy in the chair. He told of the pressure being applied to him from various directions, and claimed that public opinion ascribed to Endre and Baky the brutalities carried out against the Jews. Therefore he demanded they be dismissed from their positions. With regard to the deportation of the Jews, his tone was less decisive:

I would like the deportation of the Jews to be stopped. The deportation is merely a cruel solution and does not coincide with the Hungarian character. Yet if the government feels that the Germans demand the deportation to continue and are unwilling to give in, and we are under obligation on this matter, then I will not permit the Hungarian gendarmes to engage in the deportation process. In this case, the Germans themselves will have to carry out their plan, using the troops they have here.110

Horthy's demand to put an end to the deportation, which was not sufficiently decisive, did not lead to that result; the deportations went on in accordance with the original plan until the last Jew had been expelled from the cities, the towns, and the villages, including even the suburbs of greater Budapest.

The seeds of doubt had, as we have noted, already been sown in the hearts of the ministers, but nevertheless the deportations went on. There was need for a dramatic shock to stun the members of the government so that they would resolve to put an end to the deportations. Such an occurrence derived from a telegram sent by Veesenmayer to Ribbentrop on July 6, in which Veesenmayer tells of his meeting with Sztojay, which had taken place two days before, at which Sztojay had read out to him in absolute secrecy three telegrams deciphered by Hungarian counterintelligence. The telegrams had been dispatched from Bern, Switzerland, by the Ambassadors of England and America, and they contained a detailed description of the fate of the Jews deported from Hungary.... They therefore propose to bomb and to destroy the final train stations reached by the deported Jews. Furthermore, they propose to bomb the train tracks linking Hungary with these stations. The telegram also contains a proposal to carry out spot-bombing of all Hungarian and German centers in Budapest and of all agencies collaborating with them, and marks precisely the streets and building numbers where these centers and agencies are located. Another telegram contained a list of the names of seventy Hungarians and Germans described as the main parties responsible for the deportations.
Sztójay attempted to make an impression upon me, and so explained to me that this threat does not frighten him, for in case we are victorious, the threat will then be meaningless, whereas in the opposite case his life will at any rate be forfeit. Nevertheless, it was possible to see that the telegrams had a very strong effect upon him. He even mentioned the telegrams at the government session and—as I have since heard—they had an appropriate effect there as well.

On the following day Sztójay informed Veésnmayer of the government’s decision to stop the deportations. The Jews of Budapest, about a quarter of a million persons, remained in Hungary at that time. This Jewish population knew nothing of the government decision. On the contrary, everything pointed to their having to follow the same path taken earlier by their brethren from outside Budapest.

During the month of April a rumor had spread through Budapest, according to which the Jews of the capital were to be collected up in ghettos, just as the other Jews of Hungary had been gathered before them. In light of these rumors, Radio BBC announced from London that if this did take place, England would alter its policy of bombing Budapest. Until such time only industrial sites and other targets of importance to the Axis powers’ war effort would be bombed. But if the Jews were evacuated from the various sections of the capital, even the residential quarters in the evacuated areas would be included among the targets of the British air force. The Hungarian officer in charge of anti-aircraft defenses protested, for the same reason, against the intention of concentrating the Jews in a ghetto in Budapest.

In light of the new situation, Endre developed a new system of gathering the Jews up without concentrating them in a ghetto. On June 15, the mayor of Budapest promulgated a decree requiring all the Jews of Budapest to move into certain buildings, the names of which appeared in the list attached to the decree. These buildings were marked with a large yellow Star of David near their entrance, and were termed from then on “Jewish buildings.” Before the decree was made public, the Jews of Budapest had lived in 21,250 apartments. The list of buildings intended to become “Jewish buildings” included no more than 2,681 apartments, slightly over 12 percent of the number of apartments held by Jews previously. The quarter of a million Jews were to carry out their move into this reduced area within eight days, and the entire operation was to come to an end by 8:00 in the evening of June 21.

The move caused the Jewish population great suffering. Finding living space in the Jewish buildings was an almost impossible task, despite the efforts made by the Jewish leadership to assist and to guide those who
had been evicted from their homes. Wagon and truck drivers took advantage of the opportunity they were offered and raised the price of transporting those few belongings that the Jews were permitted to take with them.\textsuperscript{114}

Hardly had the evicted persons managed to place their belongings in their new living quarters when a new decree descended upon them: the curfew decree. This was made public by the chief of the Budapest police on June 23, and went into effect that very day. In general, people wearing the yellow Star of David were forbidden to be outside their living quarters. Exceptions to this rule were those who had to leave their homes for vital purposes such as medical attention and shopping. These sallies were limited to the three hours between 2:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M., and the quarter of a million Budapest Jews were imprisoned in their homes for twenty-one hours a day. That decree also forbade the Jews to accept visitors to their homes or to hold conversations through windows that opened onto the street.

In every Jewish building the owner or janitor was required to prepare in triplicate a list of all the Jews in the building, in which apartments they lived, their sex, and their age. The janitor was to hang one copy of this at the entrance to the building or in some other suitable place. He was to keep two copies, to be shown to the authorities or handed over to them whenever this was required. The Jews were forbidden to visit the homes of Christians, public parks, or esplanades. They were also forbidden to travel in the city trolley cars, except for the last carriage.\textsuperscript{115}

These and many additional decrees aroused the Jews' fear of what the future might hold in store for them, for they viewed these decrees as a preliminary stage of their deportation. The Germans did not accept gracefully the idea that the quarter of a million Jews of Budapest might escape them, many of these Jews being educated and cultured, others still considered wealthy despite having lost their possessions as a result of the regulations. The Germans found faithful allies among the government ministers and the high-ranking officials in Hungary. The Jaross-Imredi-Baky-Endre group agreed with the Germans, and did whatever it could to thwart the government decision and carry on with the deportations. Jaross told German Ambassador Veesenmayer on July 9 that "despite the regent's stand, he was prepared to go on with the de-Judification of Budapest, even if he had to do so indirectly."\textsuperscript{116}

Interior Minister Jaross did not conceal his opinion from his colleagues in the government, and at their meeting of August 2 he made a proposal both practical and indirect, which would facilitate the continued deportation of the Jews:
There are at present in Budapest approximately 280,000 Jews... The number of converts to Christianity in Budapest may be estimated at 20,000. The idea he proposed was that by giving in on the question of deporting the converts, it might be easier to expel the Jews... The technique of such an expulsion would be as follows: the Jewish candidates for deportation would be transferred from Budapest to camps located outside the capital, from where they would be deported... The prime minister views the situation as follows: in another week or two the deportation of the Jews will be resumed. In his opinion, it simply will not do to leave so large a number of Jews in Budapest.¹¹⁷

Jaross knew that he had nothing much to fear from Horthy's pro-Jewish feelings, for at the very same session of the Crown Council in which he expressed his opposition to the deportation of the Jews, he expressed another element as well. Over and above Horthy's taking pity on the Jews, he was perturbed that events were taking place in Hungary without his knowledge and perhaps even against his will. Horthy had been brought up on the concepts of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Before World War I he had served for years as the military aide to the old emperor, Franz-Josef, and believed that all those subordinate to the head of the hierarchy owed him absolute allegiance. Horthy believed that he was the one to make decisions in his kingdom. Reality, however, was stronger than his beliefs. In the spring and summer of 1944 events took place without his knowledge or consent. Horthy expressed his annoyance in a conversation that he held on July 4 with Veesenmayer, who reported on his talk with Ribbentrop:

Two evenings ago I had a lengthy two-hour talk with the regent, at his request. He began by saying that he requested of the Fuehrer to begin urgently removing the Gestapo from Hungary in order to restore Hungarian sovereignty, as he had indeed been promised. He is in a very difficult situation. He feels he is merely a pawn in the hands of others, and that he is not in control of what takes place in his own country.¹¹⁸

For the restoration of Hungarian sovereignty Horthy was prepared to pay a suitable price, and some time thereafter did not hesitate to propose an exchange: the deportation of the Jews in return for the withdrawal of certain German units. The protocol of the August 10 government session reads:

After obtaining the consent of His Excellency the Regent, the Royal Hungarian Government is prepared to declare that in order to bolster up the economic war effort, it will place at the disposal of the German Reich, from August 28, 1944, all those Jews: [a] serving in the labor battalions...
and whose families are already in Germany (some 50,000—60,000 persons); [b] with a criminal record or those who are dangerous to the public. In return, the Hungarian government requests permission to carry on with the solution to the Jewish problem. Therefore, it would appreciate it if— for the sake of friendly German-Hungarian relations—the German security police, and especially the unit commanded by Obersturmbahnfuehrer Adolf Eichmann, be returned to Germany.\footnote{19}

Horthy was less perturbed by his anxiety for the welfare of the Jews than he was busy searching for an efficient way to be suitably rid of his uninvited guests, the Germans. What he had to say at the Crown Council session expressed his fears for his status and authority being reduced, as well as his anxiety for Hungary’s good name in the international community. His negative attitude toward the Jews had not changed. In the summer of 1944 he spoke about the Jewish question with his confidant, Baky, who had served under his command in the days of the White Terror,\footnote{20} and said to him,

Baky, you are one of my old Szeged officers. . . . Now the Germans want to deport the Jews. I don’t mind. I hate the Jews and the Communists. Out with them, out of the country! But you must see, Baky, that there are some good Hungarian Jews too, like little Chorin and Vida [wealthy industrialists, converted Jews. Chorin was the chairman of the National Union of Factory Owners in Hungary between 1933 and 1941]. Aren’t they good Hungarians? I can’t let them go, can I? But take the rest, the sooner the better!\footnote{21}

One of the researchers of the period describes Horthy as a person who “had . . . Christian humanistic values.”\footnote{22} As a matter of interest it should be noted that even Hitler noted the Christianity of Admiral Horthy and his wife. Horthy tells in his memoirs of the friendly attention Hitler paid him and his wife, noting that on the occasion of one of his visits to Berlin their polite host made sure that there was a crucifix in the room assigned to Mrs. Horthy, who was a Catholic.\footnote{23}

It is to be noted that the Vrba Report reached Horthy at the end of May or at the beginning of June 1944, and thus it is clear that he was aware of the fate awaiting those whose “removal from the country” he recommended so convincingly.\footnote{24}

Thus, Jaross and his colleagues who strove to continue the deportations even after the government had resolved to end them knew on whom and what to rely. It is no less significant to stress that Jaross, like Horthy, distinguished between Jews and converts as candidates for deportation. This is evident from Horthy’s consent to the arrangement the government proposed in its August 10 session as well as from his conversation with
Baky. It has already been shown that this distinction was paramount in the government’s discussions with the leaders of the churches. It remains to be shown that the entire government made this distinction when considering the Jewish problem.

The impression reached from statements made by various personages is that the government resolution of early July to put an end to the deportations was neither absolute nor final. In mid-July, Himmler’s confidant, Hottl, spoke with one of the leaders of the Arrow-Cross party, Vajna (who filled the post of interior minister in the Szalasi government after October 15), and quoted one of Himmler’s remarks to him: “The solution of the Jewish problem is not merely a Hungarian problem, but rather a pan-European one. And if the Fuehrer decided that the Jews must be removed from Hungary he will not stand by idly doing nothing in light of what is now going on in Hungary. These steps go against his will.”

On July 18, the Hungarian government sent an informative dispatch to the foreign delegations in Budapest in which it stated,

The following alleviations in the treatment of Jews were approved: 1) No more converted Jews will be sent abroad. . . . All Jews baptized before August 1, 1944, will remain in the country but will be separated from non-Jews. . . . These rules will not only apply to the converted Jews living in Budapest, but also to those in the provinces. A revision is promised in respect of the converted Jews already sent to Germany for labor purposes. . . . The deportation of Jews for labor purposes will take place in the future only with particular regard to the laws of humanity. The Red Cross will be granted the right to carry out inspections.

This dispatch reflects the government’s consent to the demands made by the church leaders to give the Jewish converts preferential treatment in comparison with that given the Jews. It would seem to indicate that the deportation of Jews might once again become feasible in the future.

In a telegram sent by the German foreign office on July 27, 1944, to the German embassy in Budapest, the foreign office urges the embassy to inform it of the date set for the deportation of the Jews of Budapest. Ambassador Veesenmayer’s reply, sent two days later, indicates that he had already acted on his own initiative:

In the conversation I had with Sztojay three days ago, I urged him to begin immediately and with no delays to expel the Jews in the direction of the Reich. . . . Sztojay mentioned that he was in a government crisis which he desired to resolve speedily, after which he would request the government’s consent to renew action against the Jews. He expressed his hope that the
separation of those whom he called Christian Jews—those who had converted prior to January 1, 1941—would be completed in a few days. I replied to him... that first of all and without any delay fifty thousand Jews should be expelled to camps outside the capital city, in order to deport them at a later date to the Reich.\textsuperscript{18}

Indeed, in his telegram dated August 14, 1944, Veesenmayer informed the foreign office in Berlin that the Hungarian interior minister had informed Eichmann of the government's resolution to propose to the regent that the deportation of Budapest Jewry begin on August 25. "All the technical preparations for the action against Budapest Jews have been made."\textsuperscript{1}\textsuperscript{8}

The intention to renew the deportation was floating in the air. Not only the Jews were worried about this; the representatives of the neutral countries in Budapest viewed it as very possible that the deportations were to be renewed. The Apostolic Nuncio and the Swedish ambassador thus visited Deputy Prime Minister Remny-Szneler on August 21 and handed him a memorandum in their name and in the name of their diplomatic colleagues, the representatives of Portugal, Switzerland, and Spain:

The envoys of the neutral states represented in Budapest have been acquainted with the fact that the deportation of the Jews still remaining in the capital is about to take place. They all know what this means, even though it has been described as "labor service."

It is the human duty of the representatives of the neutral countries to protest against these actions.... The representatives of the neutral countries herewith request the Hungarian government to forbid these cruelties.\textsuperscript{13}0

Since experienced diplomats sensed the impending deportations, it is not surprising that the Jews, imprisoned in their homes and nourished by rumor, viewed the restrictions imposed upon them as the preliminary steps leading to deportation. And if they still had a spark of hope, the new prime minister of Hungary smashed their illusions.

On August 23, Rumania executed a 180-degree reversal by requesting and obtaining a ceasefire with the Soviet Union. Rumania broke off relations with Germany and turned her armaments against the Germans, on the side of the Red Army. This dramatic shift that took place in Hungary's eastern neighbor forced Hungary to act, and, on August 29, Horthy appointed General Lakatos as prime minister in place of Sztojay, and entrusted him with three assignments: to restore Hungarian sovereignty to whatever degree possible, considering the German presence; to put an immediate end to all persecution of the Jews; and to prepare for
Hungary an armistice agreement to be put into effect at the appropriate
time.

The first and third assignments do not fall within the scope of the
present work. As for the second, Lakatos reached an agreement with the
Germans whereby the Jews of Budapest were to be removed from the
capital, and gathered together in concentration camps outside the city,
where they would have to work for their livelihood. The Jews, of course,
were not informed of this arrangement. On the contrary, the Jews heard
that in a speech delivered on the radio, Lakatos had said that he knew
that the task of removing all the dangerous elements living among the
Hungarians—members of a foreign race although they spoke Hungarian—had not been completed, and that they still endangered public life
and especially Hungary's righteous struggle. He calmed the public, saying
that there was a desire to guarantee in every way the spiritual and eco-
nomic supremacy of those of the Hungarian race, and that this would
be carried out in accordance with noble Hungarian thought, in a humane
fashion and in accordance with the obligations in the agreements reached
and in light of the demands made by the lofty goals before them.131

Except, perhaps, for the last sentence, which could be interpreted in
mutually contradictory ways, the rest of what Lakatos had to say was
merely a literal repetition of what Hungarian Jewry had become accus-
tomed to hearing through the long years of their persecution. If the Jews
had based any hopes on the appointment of Lakatos as prime minister,
this speech dashed them completely. The most they could expect was
that when their removal as dangerous elements was carried out, they
would be treated in accordance with what he had defined as "noble
Hungarian thought," and so forth, the meaning of which they had become
familiar with over a period of years. With regard to their daily life, the
personnel changes in the government led to no change whatever. All the
prohibitions and decrees remained valid.

Thus the summer of 1944 found the Jews of Budapest in a state of
constant fear of the future, as well as anxiety for the fate of their relatives
who had been deported from the cities and provinces of Hungary. The
threat of deportation continued to hover over them until autumn, when
the Red Army completed its encirclement of the city. It is therefore no
wonder that the Jews of Budapest tried to hang on to whatever seemed
to extend some little hope—including conversion to Christianity.

Their naive hope that conversion would serve as a life-saver was based
upon the rumors they had heard concerning the preferential treatment
the government was to give the converts in the event that the Jews of
Budapest were to be deported. As we have noted, these rumors had some
basis in fact. And so, while between early January and March 19, 1944, the offices of the Jewish community in Budapest had received 176 statements of the intention to convert, during a single month following the German invasion, 788 such statements were received.\textsuperscript{132}

The offices of the Budapest rabbinate were flooded with such statements, the result being that rabbinate officials had to work around the clock—and were still unable to cope with the administrative work involved in dealing with these statements of intent. Rabbi Dr. Zsigmond Groszman complained that he was unable to meet with all those who wanted to convert, and especially that he was unable to hold an intimate conversation with them: "This is not a religious movement; the vast majority of those who desire to convert state this openly. They want to improve their chances of survival and believe that by converting their situation will be better."\textsuperscript{133}

The conversion movement lasted during the months of April, May, and June and was accelerated during the first half of July. On July 11 a public announcement by the mayor of Budapest was promulgated, calling for all those who had lived previously in the cities and provinces of Hungary, outside the municipal jurisdiction of Budapest, and had been baptized before August 1, 1944, to bring a document proving their conversion to the offices of their churches in order to be registered in the offices of their churches in Budapest. The final date for registration was fixed for July 17 at 5:00 P.M.\textsuperscript{134}

The mayor’s public announcement provided support for those who believed there was a chance that conversion would facilitate their survival—and thus created an increased stream of would-be converts to the churches.

If it is true, as some scholars would have it, that several church leaders suffered pangs of conscience as they saw in 1944 where their antisemitic incitement in previous years had led,\textsuperscript{135} they were now given the opportunity to atone to some degree for their deeds in the past. The laws of the church require a certain period of preparation for all would-be converts, but if such a period was not feasible because of the existing conditions, Seredi could have relied on a certain paragraph in his church’s regulations. Chapter 752, paragraph 2 of the Catholic church’s lawbook states, “An adult in danger of death, with no way of enjoying thorough instruction in the principles of the Catholic faith, can be converted without delay.”\textsuperscript{136}

There is not a shadow of doubt that it was possible at the time to apply this paragraph to the Jews of Budapest, thus enabling church authorities to extend their protection to those fleeing for their lives. But
the church leaders did not choose to act in this fashion. Not only did they not extend a helping hand to those in need of succor, but they even set up impassable barriers at the entrances to their churches, and the flight of those fleeing was blocked by the high priests of religion.

Seredi published in the Roman Catholic church's official newspaper instructions requiring the priests to consider carefully the true intentions of candidates for conversion. Seredi's instructions were promulgated on July 24, some two weeks after the announcement by the mayor of Budapest regarding the registration of converts, at a time when the confusion of the Jews was at its peak and approached hysteria. They stated:

The rites connected with the sacrament of baptism are to be strictly adhered to. The period of dogmatic instruction laid down is to be prolonged, as now, in view of the growing number of candidates for conversion, it is more necessary than ever for the priest responsible for the baptism or his deputy to ensure that the applicant not only possesses the dogmatic knowledge required, but also yearns for the Church of Christ from the bottom of his heart and has sincere intentions. The sacrament of baptism can only be administered after the conscientious observance of a term of probation, and only to those of whom it can be certain that they seek not only the possession of a certificate of baptism, but mainly the regenerating force and redeeming grace of Christ, that is to say to those who will not only augment the number of so-called registered Christians, but who wish to be a part of the community of the Church of Christ. 137

Seredi was not operating in a vacuum. It is reasonable to assume that Seredi's act and the views of his flock regarding the would-be converts had a mutual effect: on July 19, just a few days before the publication of Seredi's instructions in the newspaper, a citizen—a retired high-ranking official—visited the office of the archbishop in Budapest and held a conversation with its director, a prominent priest. She had come to warn of the ominous phenomenon of Jews of no internal convictions coming to convert, and warned the church not to accept them into Christianity. She related that the tenants of a certain building had resolved to convert "out of fear and out of individual interests, for they hoped that their conversion would obtain various advantages for them."

On the following day she summed up her visit in a letter:

In the future the Jews must be prevented from violating Christianity and desecrating its sacraments... I would be violating my own conscience and would view myself as being a partner to the plot, were I not to inform you of its existence. In my humble opinion, such deeds could have been prevented by making an appropriate announcement in the press, drawing the attention of those in charge, for the betrayal of Christianity will lead
both to the church being punished and to strong reprisals by the state authorities.

Allow me to add that insofar as I am guided by a sense of obligation and considering the present dangerous situation threatening both my church and my homeland, I permit myself to send a copy of this letter to his Holiness, the Cardinal-Archbishop, most supreme Prince of our Church.\textsuperscript{138}

We do not know if His Holiness actually read the copy of the letter that was sent to him, and we need not assume that the most supreme Prince of the Church was in need of civilian encouragement in order to publish his announcement in the press. Yet the juxtaposition of dates—of the writing of the letter and of the promulgation of the announcement—as well as the complete agreement of the head of the Catholic church hierarchy with a simple daughter of the church is indeed a coincidence.

The Evangelical church acted similarly. On July 10, Bishop Kapi instructed the priests of his church in the Transdanubia region as follows:

Our church must adhere to its basic views. According to these views our church does not deny its missionary obligations regarding the Jews as well. On the other hand, the church is not willing to become a pawn in the hands of those trying to take advantage of it in order to attain individual and selfish goals. Regarding those who come to be baptized we must insist on a minimal period of instruction of sixty hours spread over a period of six months. This period is also a trial period. I reserve the right to decree an additional trial period if necessary.\textsuperscript{139}

A few days later the general directorate of the Evangelical church considered this question. In its resolutions, it called upon its priests to bestow favor upon veteran converts at present in distress. They were to be visited on every occasion, both in the ghetto and outside it; they were to be provided with the various church publications, and so on. But as for those who were trying to convert at the present time, the brochure calls unambiguously for an uncompromising hard line to be adopted in fixing the conditions for conversion, as in Kapi’s directive.

The two circulars are almost identical, and this emphasizes the uniformity of opinion on the subject between the religious leader and the lay leadership of the church. "The period of instruction is at least sixty hours, spread out over half a year. This period is also a trial period. The bishops’ right is hereby reserved to decree a trial period lasting even more than half a year."\textsuperscript{140}

The period required for the conversion of Jews was treated by the
churches as if those who sought sanctuary with the church had all the time in the world at their disposal.

Against this background one must interpret the protest made by the general secretary of the Evangelical churches in Hungary against the letter he had received from the general secretary of the Evangelical church in Germany. The latter referred to a publication that appeared in the city of Dresden on July 14:

From this publication it would seem that the Evangelical priests in Budapest are performing a considerable number of conversions to Christianity. I find it difficult to believe this rumor and actually refuse to believe it, especially in light of the terrible events of our time, when the responsibility for their occurrence rests on the shoulders of the Jews, those very Jews against whom our Father Luther already adopted so strong a stand. Taking this fact into consideration, I cannot imagine any priest in any church being ready to convert to Christianity even a single Jew.

I would greatly appreciate receiving your clarifications on this point as soon as possible.

I thank you in advance for the trouble you have so kindly taken.

With the blessing of a fellow-priest and with a “Heil Hitler.”

Your faithful admirer, Father Voigt.

In light of the consistency of his church with regard to the Jews and their sufferings, the suspicions voiced by the German priest hurt his Hungarian colleague, and he hastily replied as follows:

As for your letter taking an interest in the Jewish question, I speedily inform you as follows: it is indeed true that a fever of conversion has broken out among the Jews of Budapest. The storming of the church offices in order to obtain a certificate of baptism is so great that these offices hardly manage to fill their regular functions. There is no question here of them repenting. By conversion the Jews merely desire to save their lives.

The Hungarian Evangelical church is not prepared to compromise on the Jewish question. We accept into the six-month preparatory course only those who are married to an Evangelical-Aryan spouse.

Accepting other Jews into the church is absolutely forbidden. Two priests, who out of flightiness baptized Jews at their request, have been suspended from their posts. For decades now the Evangelical church has been extremely careful on the Jewish question. The duration of the preparatory period is almost a year, and so the Jews have preferred to turn to the Roman Catholic church, which has not put any obstacles in their path and settled for more convenient conditions. The Catholic church takes
a liberal approach on this matter; nevertheless, ten days ago a directive of
the Catholic church came out, adopting the Evangelical approach."

The approach of the church leaders won public support. The following
is a contemporary editorial of a newspaper: "It is evident that the mass
turn to conversion at the present time is motivated by a desire to obtain
material and social advantages." The newspaper quotes faithful Chris-
tians expressing their bitterness at the Jewish invasion of their churches:

Where is the modern Jesus to drive these peddlers out of our sacred
curches?... Why must we suffer, in that by virtue of the invasion of all
these new Christians our churches will turn into inferior, stinking syn-
agogues? Why must we suffer a situation in which those who have grown
up on Christianity and live lives of deep faith in the Christian spirit are
forced to find themselves outside their churches, so that in the pews of
those very churches those very Jews engaging in their dark and dismal
businesses are able to find comfort?... The priests must not allow these
bloodsucking peddlers to manage their business at the expense of the priests
in the sacred temples of God. They must pray to Jesus who in his time
drove the peddlers out of the House of God with a whip."

The thought that certain priests did indeed convert Jews to Christianity
with irresponsible haste served as a convenient battlefield for intrachurch
bickering. The importance of the subject required that it be discussed
before a high-ranking government authority—the minister of religion and
culture. Raffay, who was interested in putting a stop to the criticism of
his church, reported to the minister on July 24, 1944, that there were
no grounds for the complaint lodged by a Catholic priest that in a suburb
of Budapest Evangelical priests baptized Jews in contravention of the
standing instructions. Raffay announced that after a thorough exami-
nation of all the documents, "it was ruled that the baptismal ceremonies
had been carried out in accordance with the standing instructions." The
protocol reporting on the examination of the subject states, "The church
regulations concerning the baptism of Jews are maintained fastidiously
by the priest's office, including the particularly severe instructions recently
added."

On another occasion, in the autumn of the same year, priests of the
Reformed and Catholic churches lodged yet another complaint against
an Evangelical priest for baptizing Jews with insufficient preparation.
The Evangelical church was not prepared to appear in the eyes of its
sister churches, the Catholic and Reformed churches, as showing mercy
to Jews. The consideration of the allegation occupied the Evangelical
church and reached the desk of its leader. A final memorandum dated October 3, 1944, of over a thousand words, demonstrates at length that the allegations were groundless, and that the Evangelical priest was innocent of all wrongdoing.145

As already noted, the memorandum was composed at the beginning of October. The Red Army had crossed the Hungarian border on September 23. By October 7 its front lines were at the gates of Szeged, the second-largest city in Hungary, which fell into Russian hands three days later, on October 10, after a short battle. With the conquest of Szeged, the vanguard of the Red Army crossed the Tisza River. There was no further natural barrier on their way to the capital of Hungary, and the Red Army advanced toward Budapest, meeting with no resistance.

In other words, the churches and priests in Budapest had their own order of priorities. Even while the old world order was collapsing about them and, while the Bolshevik threat was approaching the gates of their capital city, thereby realizing their worst fears, they had the time to justify their actions in face of suspicion of aiding Jews. There was full agreement between the plaintiffs and the defendants—the suffering of the Jews and their efforts to escape were to be ignored.

The survival of the Jews of Budapest in the spring and summer of 1944 is to be viewed in light of the events described above. Their survival did not result from the efforts of the church or from its desire to help, but rather—as noted above—from the situation at the various fronts, which deteriorated extremely swiftly as regards the Axis forces, who strove to the best of their ability to stem the tide of the Allied forces driving in on them. Doubts began to assail the hearts of the rulers of Hungary. The war had reached the homes of a million inhabitants of Budapest, who had suffered over the summer from almost daily Allied bombing. Airplanes appeared over Budapest by day and by night, unimpeded by any resistance, contrary to the promises they had heard from the Nazis over the years. All this played a part in the hesitations of the rulers of Hungary, and encouraged them to settle for the sacrifice of almost half a million Jews, who had lived in the towns and provinces of Hungary, and whom they had already managed to deport.

It is reasonable to conclude that the decoded telegrams described above played a weighty role, ruling in favor of putting an end to the deportations and not renewing them. It may be said with certainty that the survival of the Jews of Budapest in the summer of 1944 is not to be attributed to the churches. These were at best indifferent.
Hungarian Initiatives

In setting out to execute its anti-Jewish policies, the Hungarian government enjoyed the support of the population of its country. The Hungarian public expressed its support by its various actions, as well as its proposals aimed at rendering Hungarian liberation from the Jews more efficient and at making life more difficult for the Jews being expelled. Here are a few examples of such initiatives, in addition to those mentioned above. Among the initiators were both organizations and individuals.

Even the Germans noted the enthusiasm with which various Hungarian circles brutalized the Jews under their control, above and beyond the level decreed by the authorities. This was apparently the background for the oral appeal made by the German embassy in Budapest to the Hungarian foreign office. This appeal was summed up in a memorandum on August 12, during one of the stages in the drawn-out negotiation regarding the renewal of the deportation of Budapest Jewry, at a time when such a step seemed reasonable to the Germans:

The German Embassy is honored to direct the attention of the Royal Hungarian Foreign Office to the fact... that it is desirable that the Hungarian authorities guarantee to whatever degree possible the humane treatment of the groups of Hungarian Jewish laborers being sent to work in the Reich. In the opinion of the German commanders of these labor groups, it is very desirable that the laborers be provided with food for the duration of the trip, which takes a considerable time.

May we thus request that the relevant Hungarian institutions be persuaded to devote special attention to the trains being provided with food for the duration of the journey.... The German Embassy will be grateful if the appropriate institutions look into an existing problem: that the equipment the laborers traveling to Germany take with them and the food provided for them not be expropriated from them by the Hungarian border police. This has occurred in the past, possibly because the police were not properly instructed. It is extremely important that such expropriations cease.\textsuperscript{146}

Hungarians in no way connected with the deportations offered their own vehicles—horses and wagons—to speed up the removal of the Jews from their areas:

In every town and in every village the local population accepted the steps taken for the de-Judification of their settlement with open support and undisguised rejoicing. They regarded very favorably the execution of the government's instructions in this respect. Everywhere the local population assisted in furthering the actions taken by the authorities. In most places
the people placed at the disposal of the authorities, and at no cost whatever, vehicles to speed up the removal of those who, by their very presence in the immediate vicinity, detracted from the ability of the Christians to survive.\footnote{147}

At the official ceremony marking the beginning of the campaign to destroy Jewish books, the official in charge of the campaign, the commissioner of communications, Mihaly Kolozsvari-Boresa, delivered a speech, saying:

> In this solemn act, the end has come upon an unhealthy process which has lasted fifty years.\ldots The Jewish spirit succeeded in making its influence felt by a large portion of the Hungarian reading population through the agency of Jewish publishers, printing houses, and literary institutions. The fact that day after day my office receives hundreds of reports of Jewish books being found in many and various locations proves that we have exposed the jungle which had existed in this area.\footnote{148}

The Royal Hungarian Club of Vehicle Owners turned on May 13 to the minister of the interior and requested “the wise guidance of his Excellency is solving a juridical problem the club members were faced with, as a result of two government directives which seem mutually contradictory.” The writer claimed that according to a certain interpretation, one of these directives could be understood as forbidding the continued membership of Jews in the club, while from the other directive it would seem that the Jews were allowed to continue as members of the club. The club passed the matter along for the decision of the highest relevant authority: the minister of the interior.

Yet the club did not wait for the minister’s reply. In accordance with the atmosphere prevalent in the summer of 1944 it took its own decision. Along with the question, the club also presented the minister with the solution it had arrived at:

> We are honored to inform His Excellency that until we receive clear instructions we are demanding that our members produce documents testifying to their origin. The names of all those who, according to their papers, are considered Jewish will be removed from the register of club members, even without introducing any amendment of the club’s regulations.\footnote{149}

The eagerness of the Hungarian populace to make life insufferable for the Jews sometimes took on so grotesque a form that it would have been amusing had it not taken place against so tragic a background. In early May, a local newspaper raised the question whether the Jews were to be permitted to own dogs:
The eight hundred thousand Hungarian dogs are of considerable national economic value. . . . The pedigree dogs have value as exports and as imports. A pedigree dog is worth between 400 and 500 pengo, and on occasion even more. Our dogs are thus property worth many millions.

In this respect we have put the question to the ministry of agriculture: are the Jews permitted to own dogs? The relevant department replied as follows: for the present we know nothing of any directive explicitly prohibiting the possession of dogs by Jews. However, since the Jews are obligated to declare their property and possessions of value, this directive can be interpreted in such a way as to obligate the Jews to declare any pedigree dogs of great value. . . . At any rate, the dog tax directive, to be promulgated in the near future, will deal with this aspect of the problem as well. 150

The ministry of industry admonished the mayor of Budapest for not complying with the directive concerning

shutting of shops belonging to Jewish craftsmen and selling products manufactured by others [opticians selling spectacles]. . . . Since the National Association of Christian Opticians has complained to me that my aforesaid directive has not been executed in Budapest to this day, I hereby request the mayor of Budapest to see to it that the aforesaid directive is carried out, to see to the quality of its execution, and to report to me accordingly on the execution of my instructions. 151

In other words, there were Christian opticians who carefully saw to it that the municipality obeyed its instructions.

A citizen wrote to the mayor of Budapest and proposed a way to deal properly with the Jews:

The Jews must not be expelled from Budapest, for their presence here provides us with anti-aircraft defenses. Likewise, they must not be gathered into a ghetto, for then we may be destroyed while the ghetto may survive. On the other hand, I would like to suggest that in apartment houses the Hungarian Christians should live on the ground floor and the lower floors of the buildings, while the Jews will live on the upper floors. During air attacks, they must be forbidden entry into shelters. They must remain in their apartments, and must be prohibited from opening doors and windows while the air attack is in progress.

Electricity to the homes of the Jews should be cut off. In this way they will no longer have any way to use the radio sets they have hidden, and which they use both to transmit and to receive. They must also be prohibited from using pocket flashlights, for they might use these to signal enemy aircraft.

If these ideas of mine are put into practice, a much smaller number of Hungarians will be harmed and many more Jews will perish. After all is
said and done, every Hungarian is duty-bound to strive to attain these goals."

Support for this kind of thinking can be found in the newspaper article written by a Catholic monk and printed in a Catholic periodical in the summer of 1944. It said, "The Christian doctrine of brotherly love is not violated by what is being done at present with the Jews. On the contrary, it is realized by means of these deeds." That is, the priest supported the steps taken by the authorities.

The monk could have found support for his view in the appeal made by high-ranking priests to the Hungarian population to support the state authorities. Thus, a senior official of the Greek Orthodox church wrote to the priesthood and to the public in a Shepherds’ Epistle:

His Excellency the regent, in his role as the commander-in-chief of our army, has given his order. Hungarian soldiers are bound by the bonds of war to defend our nation and our European culture against Bolshevism, which strives to destroy it all.

May your pure Hungarian heart, the defender of Jesus and sword of our religious belief, be your weapon in this great struggle. The Holy Ghost shall strengthen your spirit.

In the contemporary Hungarian terminology, the term “Bolshevism” had an unambiguously Jewish meaning, and this was to be opposed.

Two new bishops were consecrated in the spring of 1944. In honor of the occasion the two bishops addressed their flocks. Bishop Jozsef Mindszenty wrote in his first Shepherds’ Epistle, “The Hungarian people have always been God-fearing, faithful Catholics, living in accordance with the laws of their faith. The Hungarians have always lived with Jesus above and beyond the way of life of other nations. This is indicated by our laws as well.” The bishop did not specify to which of the laws of Hungary he was referring, but it may be assumed that his believers knew what he was talking about.

The other bishop to address his flock was Endre Hamvas:

When we were lonely and alone after the treaty of Trianon which was forced upon us, our soldiers came out of Szeged in the name of God and under the flag of the Virgin Mary to spread the gospel of the Hungarian resurrection, and if we have indeed reached such a point that by virtue of our adherence to our ways we have been lifted up and have now attained the clouds, we must continue to put our trust in God, who has liberated us from our sufferings in order to maintain forever in our hands our national revival.
Here is a fitting place to recall that in Szeged, under the flag of the Holy Virgin, Horthy and his colleagues began the White Terror twenty-five years before.

In the city of Szeged, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the counter-revolution was celebrated. The deputy mayor of Szeged said at the ceremonial rally, "The Szeged counter-revolution raised up the flag of Christian, popular Hungary, a flag that was borne aloft by Miklos Horthy and Bishop Istvan Zadravecz."  

At a convention commemorating the outbreak of the counter-revolution, held at the military academy of Budapest, the minister of trade and transportation, Antal Kunder, participated:

Those present approached the Catholic or Protestant prayer chapels. The prayer was led by a ranking military chaplain. In his sermon he spoke of the connection between the Gospel and our modern period, stressing that "only unsullied faith in the doctrine of Jesus can guarantee the triumph of our arms."

The minister spoke after him, and described the historical background of the counter-revolution. He spoke at length of the unbridled behavior of "the foreign race that pushed our Hungarian nation toward absolute destruction."

The minister told of Communist activists, whose Jewish names he stressed deliberately, and made sure to add the title elvtars (comrade) to their names; the term elvtars—reserved for active members of the Communist party—was despised in the Hungary of that time. He told of how they defiled Christian sacraments:

They took action with the assistance of the foreign race... and we stood by helplessly, watching how the foreign race humbled and destroyed everything Christian and Hungarian.... But when the time came we rose courageously, ready for self-sacrifice, for the sake of that lofty concept: defense of our God, of our homeland, of our Christianity, and of our Hungarianism.

Our suffering, however, is not yet over. We are once again being called upon to make sacrifices in order to be able to remain Christian and Hungarian. The enemy is the very same enemy, threatening once again our national survival. But today we meet the enemy when we are armed. In our present struggle we are not alone, as we were twenty-five years ago. The Fuhrer of the great German Reich, Adolf Hitler, and his courageous army stand today at our side.

The priests and bishops had solid ground on which to base their hatred. They had before them the image of Bishop Prohaszka Ottokar, who had been active at the beginning of the century until his death in 1927, and
was considered one of the founding fathers of clerical antisemitism. With regard to the Jews he freely used poisonous phrases and enjoyed immense popularity, both among the priests and among the general public.

A certain weekly journal quoted at length in the summer of 1944 from the writings of Bishop Prohaszka:

Jewish morality is anathema to Christian civilization, and this curse will completely obliterate Christian civilization if the latter does not succeed in removing the poison. . . . In the eyes of Jewry, all the Christian nations are enemies, and all means capable of leading to the stifling of the Christian nations are justified in their eyes. . . . It can clearly be seen how, without any pangs of conscience, the Jew sucks the blood of his victim, the victim he has already destroyed.

In brief: there is no such thing as Jewish morality, and consequently Jews have no knowledge whatever of the concept of “moral values.” Thus, the main qualities of the Jew are unlimited egoism, crushing his fellow man—pressuring him mercilessly and drinking his blood. A Jew is unable to distinguish between good and evil; in his eyes, any means leading to a flow of money into his pockets are justified, including forging checks, false testimony, or even trading the shirts, trousers, or bodies of young girls. It’s all the same in their eyes. . . . May a Hungarian person not defend his life, his livelihood, and guarantee his happiness, his culture, and the Hungarian spirit?

The Christian nations must not give the Jews equal rights; they must defend themselves from them and must constantly get rid of them, at every opportunity and in any way they are able.”

And so, in the summer of 1944 Hungary was busily realizing the will of the bishops “to get rid of the Jews.” As this task drew to a close outside of Budapest, the Hungarians there became aware of the new situation that had evolved in their immediate vicinity: for the first time since Hungary had been liberated in 1688 from Ottoman occupation, Hungary was Judenrein. With the very first wave of emotion generated by their liberation from the “Jewish oppression,” the Hungarians realized that the expulsion of the Jews had been accompanied by a positive side effect: there was abandoned Jewish property throughout Hungary, ownerless, available to any outstretched arm. They assumed it was all at their disposal.

The government was aware of the expectations of the people, and thus decided to clarify what it intended to do with the Jewish property. Interior Minister Jaross said,

I make it clear that all property and valuables which Jewish greed managed to accumulate during the liberal period has ceased to be their property.
All this now belongs to the Hungarian nation. . . . This property must benefit the entire Hungarian nation. We must inject it into the economic bloodstream, so that every honest and fair working Hungarian will receive his portion. 160

At the close of part 2 of the present study, we considered the hostile triangle—the regime, the public, and the church—that embittered the lives of the Jews in Hungary. Now, too, in connection with the property, the triangle reappeared. The regime, which inherited the Jewish property, promised the public its part in the booty. These are two sides of the triangle. What was the stand of the third side, the church, in this matter?

The third traditional partner, the church, did not stand idly by; it was not prepared to give up its portion of the spoils.

The priest of the Evangelical mission in the province of Bekes sent a letter on July 25 to the office of Bishop Raffay in which he described the request he had made to the authorities to transfer into the hands of the church the real estate that had belonged to the Jewish community. Raffay’s secretary wrote in the bishop’s name to the chief provincial priest, pointing out improper administrative steps that had been taken in the process of acquiring the abandoned buildings of the Jewish community. Therefore, he was “unable to justify the request of a permit for the Evangelical church to transfer to its own jurisdiction the synagogue, other buildings, and real estate once belonging to the Jewish community of Bekes, and use it for the purposes of the religious Evangelical community.”

Raffay’s secretary went on to clarify the substance of this administrative defect, which rendered the church impotent even to ask to inherit this abandoned Jewish property:

Church law rules explicitly that if a certain community is about to bring about any change whatever in its sum total of immovable property, it may do so only in accordance with the permission of the church institutions in charge. . . . The church in Bekes has acted contrary to the existing regulations in proposing to purchase Jewish property without acquiring a permit from the supreme church authorities. His Excellency is asked to bring this to the awareness of the church in Bekes, so that it may cancel permanently its application to the authorities to acquire Jewish property. 161

In other words, the bishop did not voice any criticism whatever of the morality of the step, but merely of the violation of the regulations.

In contrast to the priest of Bekes, the priest from the mission of the town of Kiskunhalas found a way to proceed that won Raffay’s approval.
In his letter of August 16, 1944, to those in charge of the mission in Kiskunhalas, he wrote,

Blessed be the reader in the name of the Lord!
The general leadership of our church has taken its stand concerning the proper form of applications concerning real estate belonging to the Jews. The relevant resolution has been sent to His Excellency as well. The stand taken by the general leadership of the church applies in every case, being the only stand to suit our church’s moral level.

Raffay expressed his opinion that, since in Kiskunhalas the mission was to lease from the authorities a villa that once belonged to Jews, no change thus coming about in the list of church immovable property,

I express no opposition to the way the church in Kiskunhalas is acting, and I express my consent to the creation of the relationship between lessor and lessee, the authorities and the church.
May the Lord's mercy rest upon us.

In Raffay’s letter one cannot but note the efficiency of the church: it successfully formulated regulations by which to take control of the property of those who, only a few months earlier, were the neighbors of the church flock. It had already distributed these regulations to whoever had need of them. This efficiency is noteworthy in light of the fact that only a short time before, the bishops of the Protestant churches required over a month to sign a memorandum they were sending to the government, supposedly to protect the Jews.

As in many other cases, here, too, the church was in the forefront of developments. Others, in various circles, who were interested in participating in the division of the spoils, viewed the church as an example. In most of the applications made to the authorities in this connection, stress was placed on the Christianity or the Christian loyalty of those applying. Here are a number of examples:

A man whose occupation was providing sound amplification and music on special occasions told of his struggle against the Jews who had controlled the area, a struggle that had gone on for years: “In this application of mine, I request no private profits for myself. All my desire is to work for the good of the public, and for this purpose I am interested in bolstering up my company—the only Christian company in this field of business.” To attain his aims the man added the names of three Jewish firms that had engaged—until they were closed down—in supplying equipment to cinemas and theaters, and that owned equipment suited to his own needs and those of his business. The applicant also added that
those firms were now shut down, and he requested that they be transferred to him with all their equipment and materiel.\textsuperscript{163}

"The Commissioner for Leather Works calls upon the Christian shoe dealers in Budapest to inform him in writing within 48 hours of the quantity of shoes they wish to receive from the stock of shoes in those Jewish shops which have been closed down."\textsuperscript{164}

A war casualty complained of the dishonesty shown by the heads of his village in distributing the shops the Jews had left behind when they were deported:

May I note that the regulations make it clear that when distributing Jewish shops, preference is to be given to those whose own shops have been destroyed by bombing; immediately after come those of old, deeply rooted Christian families—especially if these Christians are war casualties. . . . I am a veteran Christian and a war casualty, yet nevertheless I have received nothing.\textsuperscript{165}

The Order of St. Domunkos fielded a football team that applied to the official in charge of the distribution of Jewish property:

Considering the fact that each and every member of our organization is a Christian . . . we humbly request Your Excellency to deliver to us the equipment of the football team which used to represent the leather factory belonging to Adolf Vidonyi, and which no longer exists. . . . Since we are aware of Your Excellency's generosity and positive attitude to Christian sport and sportsmen, we are sure that our modest request will be met.\textsuperscript{166}

If in the small towns faithful Christians and churches took action to expand their activities by making use of abandoned Jewish property, the Catholic church had a problem of another kind in Budapest—from which the Jews had not been expelled. Jews, both as students and as employees, were present in Catholic educational institutions. Under the inspiration of the cardinal and in accordance with his directives, the church acted to solve this problem.

On August 5, 1944, shortly before the school year was scheduled to reopen—on September 1—the inspector-general of the Roman Catholic educational institutions sent out a circular to all the educational institutions under his supervision. "In accordance with the instructions of His Holiness the Cardinal, promulgated on June 28, and in order to facilitate the carrying-out of these instructions, I hereby inform the management of the aforesaid institutions, that a renewed examination must be made of the origins of all people employed by these institutions."\textsuperscript{167}

The inspector-general explained how the examination was to be carried out, and stated who had to be examined. He based his instructions on a
government directive that appeared in March 1944. However, the document he was referring to, ME 1210/1944, deals with limiting the employment of Jewish lawyers and various professionals employed by the civil service. The document makes no mention of teachers, and so does not require their origins to be checked. But even if the Catholic inspector-general gave the aforesaid government document an extremely broad interpretation, applying to teachers the limitations affecting various professionals, it is still difficult to understand how he included in this examination the technical employees of Catholic educational institutions. The explanation is, apparently, that the inspector-general, relying on the cardinal’s directive, as he himself notes, outdid the government itself.

In fact, his directive bore fruit. In the spirit of the demand made by the Catholic inspector-general, an announcement was made by the Catholic university, the Peter Pazmany University of Sciences, on August 11, 1944. The announcement revealed that the university went even further, and checked the origin of its students. The announcement listed the documents a candidate for acceptance had to present to the university institutions. At the top of the list were the documents intended to indicate the student’s racial origin. These documents even preceded certification of the candidate’s previous education.

The Catholic university’s announcement, like that of the Catholic inspector-general, was based on government directive ME 1210/1944, which, as already noted, is irrelevant to the subject. The university correctly assessed the mood of the cardinal and the inspector-general, and in accordance therewith published its instructions prohibiting the acceptance of Jewish students.

On August 23, the Catholic inspector-general sent a circular to the schools under his supervision, instructing them to refrain from accepting Jewish pupils into the first-grade classes of their institutions. As for the higher grades, the inspector wrote to the schools as follows: “Even those pupils who have already been studying at their institutions are not to register automatically. Likewise, they are not to expel them. They are to be registered in separate lists, and until a final arrangement is reached they are to be allowed to study in the institutions they have already been frequenting.”

The final arrangement was reached ten days later, when, on September 2, the Catholic inspector-general wrote to the educational institutions under his supervision: “With regard to the circular I sent out on August 23, I hereby inform you that a pupil required to wear a yellow Star of David is not permitted to study in our educational institutions.”

It may be assumed that among the 13 million Hungarians there were
those with human feelings who took pity on their neighbors when they saw what was done to them, and there may even have been those willing to act to save the lives of their neighbors and their acquaintances had they been encouraged to do so by their spiritual leaders. But in most cases, these leaders conducted themselves otherwise.

In a certain town the gendarmes prepared a list of those suspected of communism and of espionage. In the list appeared the names of many Jews. The gendarmes handed the list over to the local magistrate in order to have it stamped with the town emblem and officially confirmed. The Jews on the list were to be sent to their final destination beyond the borders of Hungary. The magistrate, who was aware of the fate awaiting the Jews on the list, suffered pangs of conscience. He appealed to his priestly confessor for spiritual guidance. His confessor calmed him down: "You need suffer no pangs of conscience for sending these Jews to their fate. They have sinned so greatly that whatever befalls them is actually a light punishment for them."  

In light of this priest's attitude, and in light of the many statements made by both political and religious leaders, it is not surprising that one of the bishops, in his letter to the cardinal, described how he had encountered the phenomenon "of Christian believers raising the question in the confession booth: is it permitted to take pity on the Jews? Yesterday I was told by an old religious woman that she had given bread to people who were shut up in the ghetto."

The writer added that the woman told him her story in a whisper, fearful that she had committed a serious transgression.

In the midst of a description of the hard-heartedness of the priesthood at its various levels, it is refreshing to recall the great personality of the bishop who wrote this letter—Baron Vilmos Apor, bishop of Gyor. Contrary to most of his colleagues, he acted constantly, devotedly, and unceasingly in the summer of 1944 to get the supreme church authorities to work to save Jews. He begged Cardinal Seredi time and again to use his influence to restrain the actions taken by the government, but encountered an absolute refusal. He was deeply tormented by the afflictions and sufferings of those persecuted, and his image shines forth to this day out of the black memories of 1944.

Yet activities like those of Bishop Apor were not common. One of the characteristics of the period, as we have already seen, were the initiatives taken by various secular and religious bodies and by the public. The public approached the authorities with many proposals to render the system more efficient, in addition to making the thirty-five thousand
The heads of the town of Soltvadkert, in the province of Pest, invented a system to torture the deportees to the maximum. In this town there had lived, up until the deportation, some hundred Jewish families. Toward the end of June, while the deportation was under way, only women, elderly people, and children remained in the town. Those men who had not met their deaths in the battlefields of the Ukraine between 1941 and 1944 were suffering in compulsory labor camps throughout Hungary. Those helpless people who remained in the town until the deportation reached them were to be sent by train to the provincial capital of Kecskemét—the point from which they would set out for their fateful trip to Auschwitz.

Before the deportees were taken aboard the carriages, the train station workers and townspeople padded the floors of the carriages with a fifteen- to twenty-centimeter layer of whitewash powder. When this powder penetrates one's breathing passages, it causes a terrible sense of suffocation, and when it attacks one's eyes, it causes a terrible burning sensation. This is also true of its contact with one's skin. As the deportees entered the carriages, their foot movements raised up a cloud of whitewash powder from the floors of the carriages, and the suffering they underwent from this powder was added to the tortures stemming from having seventy, eighty, or even ninety people locked up in a single airtight carriage in the burning summer of the Hungarian lowlands.

The enterprising local residents were, however, not satisfied with that. A locomotive was linked to the carriages with the deportees, and, for no purpose whatever, dragged the carriages back and forth with strong and sudden lurches. These lurches raised up additional clouds of whitewash powder and increased the sufferings of those locked up in the airtight carriages.

The unconcealed rejoicing of the townspeople at the game they were playing with their victims reinforced the mirth caused by realizing their wildest fantasies: the removal of their hated neighbors, the Jews. Only after they were satisfied by watching the torments of suffering human beings was the train allowed to proceed on its way.
Conclusion

The last chords in the symphony of antisemitic hatred that had begun to be heard decades before were sounded in 1944. The events of this year demonstrate in retrospect that all the acts of antisemitic incitement, of anti-Jewish legislation, of making the lives of Jews unbearable, of excommunicating them and outlawing them were merely preparatory steps leading to 1944. The year 1944 also brought the Jewish question to the doorsteps of the Hungarian masses. While the anti-Jewish legislation of previous years was carried out in the legislature in the distant capital by members of the superior upper classes, in 1944 every minor official and every gendarme became master of the lives and fates of the Jews. Whereas earlier others took the initiative or carried it out, in 1944 the Hungarian people were given the opportunity to participate personally in the historic events. Thus the number of Hungarians involved personally and directly in the deportations came to many tens of thousands: the gendarmes, the various officials, the wagon drivers who transported the Jews to their concentration points, trainworkers, and many, many others. Everything was done openly, and since the Jews generally lived in various streets in each town, many millions, even if not personally involved in the expulsion of the Jews, were at least eyewitnesses to the terrible scenes enacted before them.

It has been said that “The Hungarians were the most brutal of European nations. Such a degree of bestiality, such a lack of humanity toward the Jews was not shown by any nation in Europe. In this field the Hungarians surpassed even the infamous Latvian people.”

Eichmann stated at his trial, “The Hungarians virtually urged us to relieve them of their Jews. . . . Hungary was the only European country to encourage us relentlessly. They were never satisfied with the rate of the deportations; no matter how much we speeded it up, they always found us too slow.”

In the words of an oral historian,

Rumania and Bulgaria had been occupied four years earlier than Hungary and even so, although thousands of Jews had been killed, Rumanian Jews survived at a much higher rate than Hungarian Jews, while the Bulgarian government did not allow the Jews to be deported at all. In the case of the Hungarian Jews the antecedents here sketched resulted in one of the most puzzling tragedies.

This attitude prevailed during the deportation period as well. The priests did nothing to save the Jews. Even if we assume that the priests
were convinced that their secret correspondence with the government on behalf of the converts and the draft of the Shepherds’ Epistle they had prepared to protect them were acts required of them in defense of those persecuted, we are still confronted by a contradiction: the incitement, the ridiculing of those persecuted, and the rejoicing at their being removed were all done openly, out loud, and even with a thanksgiving service in church. On the other hand, the so-called protesting voice of the priests was missing from all those places where it could have legitimately and almost freely expressed itself. As already noted, even the microphones were put out of order when a declaration was being made that might have been interpreted as giving some support to the Jews, even though this was done only after they had already been deported from the smaller towns and from the provinces.

In contrast to what happened to the Jews, the church came through the summer of 1944 unscathed. As Szenes puts it,

The Roman Catholic church was strong, free and influential. Even in 1944, during the period of the German occupation of Hungary, the Catholic church had about 5,000 churches and a similar number of priests and pulpits in those churches, which at the time were the only places where the public could gather to hear what was said. In the 660 monasteries some twelve thousand monks and nuns lived and worked. The administration of the church and its institutions, its schools and its social circles operated freely. Church newspapers appeared both in Budapest and in the other towns. While the authorities were persecuting and oppressing all resistance ... the church was completely untouched.179

Thus, had the churches and their leaders wanted to act in a humane fashion, they could have done so with the means at their disposal. But the church leaders made use of their power to express their confidence in the acts of the government, and in most of their contacts with government representatives, they besmirched the Jews. This approach was consistent throughout the period considered in this paper, from the end of the previous century. Were the leaders of the priests in agreement with the leaders of the Catholic organization, Actio Catholica? This organization, which was an apolitical federation of all the Catholic organizations, enjoyed the support of the Synod of Bishops. The organization was headed by a leading bishop, and the bishops and other leading priests played key roles in the activities undertaken by it.180 In an article written by one of the prominent leaders of the organization in 1939, he mentions various prohibitions concerning the Jews enforced by popes and church bodies over the centuries, concluding as follows: “These papal decrees and synod resolutions have never been abrogated. Consequently, all these
decrees are valid to this day.” Even if there were priests who did not fully agree with the contents of this article and with the opinions of its writer, his spirit undoubtedly hovered over their activities.

Certain Reformed church circles met in the summer of 1946 and again in 1947, and considered the stand adopted by their church and its attitude toward the Jews in the Holocaust period. These circles adopted a resolution recognizing the responsibility of the church for the events of the Holocaust and demanding that the church request the forgiveness of the Jews. Yet this attitude did not reflect the official position of the church, and was even opposed to it. The unambiguous response of the church was handed down swiftly. After the stand taken by these circles was made public, the priests of the Reformed church were called to a general convention held in Budapest. The chairman of the convention, who was also the head of the Reformed church in Hungary, Bishop Ravasz, announced, “The Reformed church has no reason to ask forgiveness of the Jews for what befell them.” His statement was received with cheering rounds of applause.

There is thus no reason to be surprised at yet another event that demonstrates the spirit and atmosphere of the period:

As the lines of Jews were driven in the drizzling rain through the streets of the capital toward the race tracks [where the Jews were concentrated] amid the abuse of their fellow citizens, a little girl of four, whose parents had previously been shot, strayed away from the column. An Arrow-Cross man grabbed the little thing and threw her back into the line with such vigor that she landed with her face on the muddy pavement, lacerating her skin. The onlooking crowd greeted this feat with laughter, roaring its approval.

To sum up: together with the long campaign in which their rights were denied, the Jews were also denied their identity as human beings. Their delegitimization went hand in hand with their dehumanization. The church and the priests were present throughout the delegitimizing process, and the Hungarian legislators enjoyed their support.