

A QUESTION OF JUDGMENT: DR. ALOJZIJE STEPINAC AND THE JEWS*

Esther GITMAN**

The number of letters and sermons written and delivered by Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac is far too great to be discussed in this article.¹ However, for those interested in exploring the subject further, many books have been written about the Archbishop by the representatives of the Catholic Church, by historians from both Croat² and Serb³ perspectives. Opinions of the Archbishop are contradictory.⁴ In 1998, Pope John Paul II beatified Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac in Marija Bistrica, a village near Zagreb, where

* This article is a sequel to my Ph.D. dissertation completed May 2005. While the Archbishop of Zagreb fought for the rule of law and for the rights of all the people who experienced the iron fist of the NDH regime, the focus of my work is on his relationship and conduct towards the Jews.

** Esther Gitman, Ph. D., New York City, USA

¹ HDA, Ivo Politeo, Alojzije Stepinac File. Dr. Ivo Politeo, who served as attorney for the defense of Archbishop Dr. Alojzije Stepinac, before the Special Council of the People's Supreme Court at the proceedings on October 8, 1946, in Zagreb. Also in Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941-1945, Dokumenti* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institute za povijest - Dom i svijet, 1998). See also *Fontes, izvori za Hrvatsku Povijest*, issued by the National Croatian Archives (Hrvatski državni arhiv - HDA), Zagreb, 2/1996.

² Aleksa Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac, Hrvatski kardinal* (Rim: Zajednica izdanja Ranjeni labud, 1974); *Stepinac mu je ime*, ed. Vinko Nikolić, vol.1, Knjižnica Hrvatska revija, 9 (München, 1978); Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 1998); Miroslav Akmaž, *Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj i komunistički režim 1945.-1966.* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 2004); Lav Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac, O stotoj godišnjici rođenja* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1998).

³ Vladimir Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac. Dokumenti* (Beograd: "Rad", 1987) [*Jasenovac - das jugoslavische Auschwitz und der Vatikan* (Freiburg: Ahriman-Verlag, 1992); *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican: the Croatian massacre of the Serbs during World War II*, translated by Harvey L. Kendall, (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992)]; Milan Bulajić, *Ustaški zločini genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, 4 vols. (Beograd: "Slobodan Jović", 1988); Dragoljub R. Živojinović & Dejan V. Lučić, *Varvarstvo u ime Hristovo: prilozi za Magnum Crimen* (Beograd: Nova knjiga, 1988); Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Vatikan, Katolička crkva i jugoslovenska vlast 1941-1958* (Beograd, 1994).

⁴ Holm Sundhaussen, "Der Ustascha-Staat: Anatomie eines Herrschaftssystem," *Osterreichische Osthefte* 37, no. 2 (1995) 497-533; Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000) 31-40; John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: the Secret History of Pius XII* (London: Viking, 1999); Menachem Shelah, "The Catholic Church in Croatia, the Vatican and the Murder of the Croatian Jews," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4, no. 3 (1989) 323-339; Idem, "Genocide in Satellite Croatia during the Second World War," *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, ed. Michael Berenbaum (New York, London: New York University Press, 1990) 74-79; Jonathan

the Archbishop used to pray. Ivan Mestrović, a prolific artist who has created many works of art dedicated to the history of Croatia, also sculpted a statue of the dead Cardinal resting in the main Cathedral in Zagreb. His dedication reads:

Archbishop Stepinac was not a man of idle words, but rather, he actively helped every person—when he was able, and to the extent he was able. He made no distinctions as to whether a man in need was a Croat or a Serb, whether he was a Catholic or an Orthodox, whether he was Christian or non-Christian. All the attacks upon him be they the product of misinformation, or the product of a clouded mind, cannot change this fact....⁵

In contrast to the Croat perspective, in 1946, the Yugoslav Communist regime of Josip Broz Tito charged and tried the Archbishop of Zagreb for alleged crimes he committed against the people of the region.⁶ To this day, both Serbs and the Orthodox Church consider him “evil.” One of the main accusations held against him by a large number of historians is that, while he was the head of the church in Zagreb, he did not do enough for those persecuted by the Ustaše regime.⁷ In many instances, the Serb literature portrays the Archbishop as responsible for crimes committed against the Serbs.

The following research is based on documents that show the extent of the activities of Archbishop Stepinac; these include samples of a vast correspondence between him and various government and private entities, sections of the sermons he delivered in the Cathedral of Zagreb and other locations, and

Steinberg, “Types of Genocide? Croats, Serbs and Jews, 1941-5,” David Cesarani (ed.), *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London and New York, 1994) 176-177; Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Clergy and Fascism: The Hlinka Party in Slovakia and the Croatian Ustaša Movement,” Stein Ugelvik Larsen et al (ed.), *Who were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo and Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1980); Martin Broszat and Ladislaus Hory, *Die kroatische Ustascha-Staat. 1941-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1965); Mark Biondich, “Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Policy of Forced Religious Conversions, 1941-1942,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 1 (2005) 71-116; Stan Granic, “Representations of the Other: The Ustaše and the Demonization of the Croats,” *Journal of Croatian Studies*, no. 34 (1998) 3-56; Ronald J. Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* (Columbus, MS: Genesis Press, Inc., 2000); Pierre Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War According to the Archives of the Vatican* (New York – Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997).

⁵ Vladko Maček, “Kardinal Stepinac i ‘nasilno prekrštavanje pravoslavnih,’” *Hrvatski Glas*, (Croatian Voice, Winnipeg, Canada, March 16, 1953). Maček was the head of the popular Croatian Peasant Party who refused, in April 1941, Nazi offer to lead NDH.

⁶ *Suđenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i drugim ustaško-križarskim zločincima i njihovim pomagačima*, ed. by Milan Stanić (Zagreb: Društvo književnika Hrvatske, 1946).

⁷ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, document 326. Pismo Nadbiskupa Poglavniku radi pokolja Srba u Glini, Zagreb 14.V.1941. # J997/46. (Regarding the execution of Serbs in the village of Glina.) Some historians, based on Communist propaganda, attributed the very act of the murder to Stepinac, basing the accusation on one testimony. This document demonstrates not only that Stepinac had no hand in this murder; it demonstrates his anger and dismay at the lawlessness and gruesomeness of the act.

several circulars and articles about him that appeared in the local and international media.⁸ My research also covers recorded testimonies presented to the National Commission for Verification of Crimes committed against the Jews during World War II, recent interviews with survivors by the “Shoah Foundation,” and the personal interviews I conducted and recorded in Zagreb, Sarajevo and in Israel.⁹ But before examining Stepinac’s activities during the years 1941 to 1945, it seems important to give a short biographical sketch of the Archbishop.

Alojzije Stepinac, Archbishop of Zagreb

Alojzije Stepinac was born on May 8, 1898, in the village of Brežarića in Croatia to Josip and Barbara. He was one of eleven children, three from his father’s first marriage. Like many other families in Croatia, the Stepinac family existed on farming; life was marked by toil and prayers. In 1906, the family relocated to the village called Krašić, not far from Zagreb. Shortly after his graduation from high school in June 1916, Stepinac was drafted to fight in World War I as an Austrian officer on the Italian front where he was wounded and taken prisoner of war in Italy. In 1919, he enrolled in the Faculty of Agronomy at the University of Zagreb. Dissatisfied with school, he returned to farming at home where, in addition to work, he became involved in the activities of the Catholic youth. At that time, he still contemplated a life of marriage and family.¹⁰

During the period that he stayed at home, his mother Barbara, together with a Jesuit priest and a former teacher, who had been his mentor from high school days, slowly guided Stepinac towards the priesthood. Despite reservations, in October, 1924, he made the decision to become a priest. Recognizing his capabilities and devotion to the Church, the then Archbishop of Zagreb, Antun Bauer, sent Alojzije Stepinac to Rome.

From 1924 to 1931, Stepinac studied at the Pontifical Gregoriana University where he completed his Doctorate in Philosophy and Theology. He was ordained as a priest on October 26, 1930. After the ordination, Stepinac’s great wish was to serve the ordinary people. Stepinac wanted to be a parish priest. However, Archbishop Bauer brought him to his curia and engaged him as a Master of Ceremonies working in the Archdiocesan Chancellery. Since his thoughts and concerns remained with ordinary people, Stepinac established the first Zagreb Archdiocesan Caritas just before Christmas 1931.

⁸ BBC radio broadcast from London on July 8, 1942, BBC radio broadcast from London July 7, 1943. On the same date Radio New York, in Serbo-Croatian language, radio broadcasted “Slobodna Jugoslavija (Free Yugoslavia). The New York Times Editorial, “Human Rights,” October 13, 1946 “No one in or out of Yugoslavia have been surprised by the conviction of Archbishop Stepinac. This was clearly a political trial...”

⁹ In the academic year 2002 and 2003, I interviewed over 60 individuals who survived the war; approximately 50 percent mentioned favorably the conduct of the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac.

¹⁰ L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, 11-20.

In 1934, Stepinac initiated and edited the Caritas magazine where he emphasized that, because of the harsh economic times, all those with means should help the poorer members of the society. On May 29, 1934, Pope Pius XI nominated Alojzije Stepinac as the Archbishop's Coadjutor, granting him also the right to succession. At the age of 37, Stepinac became the youngest bishop in the world. Archbishop Bauer assigned his coadjutor many tasks and responsibilities. For three years, Stepinac traveled around the country, establishing good relationships with the local people. On December 1937, Archbishop Bauer died and the young Bishop Alojzije Stepinac took over the administration of the Zagreb Archdiocese.¹¹

The Independent State of Croatia

On April 10, 1941, the new Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH*) emerged, a dream come true for most Croatians, including the Archbishop, who had yearned for a free and independent Croatia. But by May 1941, Stepinac already chose not to join Pavelić on two diplomatic missions: one, to visit the Duke of Spoleto and, two, to seek official recognition of the Independent State of Croatia from the Holy See. The Vatican was cautious; it had pre-existing diplomatic relations with the Yugoslav government in exile. Despite pressure from the Italian government to receive Pavelić and his suite at a special audience, Cardinal Maglione, Vatican's Secretary of State, and the Holy See were careful not to be manipulated into the official recognition of the new Croat State. On May 18, 1941, Pavelić was informed that he would be given an audience as a private individual, "without publicity". His delegation was invited to attend a public audience as ordinary members of the faithful. The whole experience was demeaning. Nevertheless, Ante Pavelić put pressure on the Catholic Church in Zagreb and on Archbishop Stepinac to write to Pope Pius XII, via Cardinal Maglione, with a request for the official recognition of the Independent State of Croatia. On July 11, 1941, Stepinac received this response from the Vatican: Cardinal Maglione informed Archbishop Stepinac that the Holy See had a long standing rule that a new state that was formed during wartime could not be officially recognized by the Holy See while war continued. After peace between warring nations was achieved and the world community had declared a new state to be a legitimate entity, the Holy See would grant recognition of that state.¹²

The unwillingness of the Vatican to bend the rules on behalf of NDH so as to give the new regime official recognition was a setback for the new Ustaše

¹¹ Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth—A Life of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac*, (New York: East European Monograph, Boulder, Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1987), 18-22.

¹² Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 59, 73. Also: Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić između Hitlera i Mussolinija* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 140. Pavelić was aware of Stepinac's negative attitude towards the Ustaše. He explained to Ribbentrop, Germany's Foreign Minister, on June 6, 1941 that the lower clergy supported the Ustaše, and that the higher clergy and in particular Archbishop Stepinac were opposed to the movement, not because of their pro-Serb sentiments but because of Vatican international policy.

state. The relationship between Pavelić and Archbishop Stepinac was tense on several accounts: first, the Archbishop did not participate in the welcome extended to Pavelić at the Zagreb railroad station on April 13, 1941; second, no “Te Deum” was sung at the cathedral on the occasion of Pavelić’s birthday. The animosity between the two was also recognized in Pavelić’s conduct; he attended services at the Zagreb Cathedral only once in four years, and, even on that occasion, he was not greeted at the entrance by Stepinac. Another issue of contention was Stepinac’s active discouragement of the clergy from joining the Ustaše movement. Stepinac stated that to join was a political act and contrary to the tradition that maintained neutrality.¹³

Stepinac and Croatian Jews

Based on archival documents and oral testimonies given by both rescuers and rescued, it is clear that, during World War II, the Archbishop of Zagreb, Dr. Alojzije Stepinac, rescued hundreds of Jews.¹⁴ He achieved this through direct action and instructions to clergymen, and, more indirectly through his sermons in which he vigorously condemned the implementation of Racial Laws. In a conversation with me, a prominent Jewish professor from Zagreb Stjepan Steiner spoke very highly of two extraordinary Croatian individuals who rescued a large number of Jews during the war. He referred to both Archbishop Stepinac and Dr. Ante Vuletić. According to Dr. Steiner, Stepinac saved at least 400 Jewish lives and Vuletić also rescued several hundred Jewish physicians and their families.¹⁵

Dr. Steiner also alluded to the fact that Archbishop Stepinac’s life was often in danger because of his subversive actions against Nazi Germany and the hard core Ustaše. In this regard, Steiner recalled an incident when, after the end of the war, he asked Dr. Miroslav Deutsch Dujić why he had joined the syphilis expedition in Bosnia, in 1943, at such a late date given that Dr. Steiner knew that Dr. Dujić was a convert to Catholicism and had also been protected by Archbishop Stepinac. Dr. Dujić told him that, in 1943, Archbishop Stepinac approached all those that were protected under his umbrella and asked them to leave Zagreb as soon as possible since his own life was in danger. The

¹³ Richard Pattee, *The Case of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company 1953), 79, 83. Also: Count O’Brien of Thomond Anthony Henry, *Archbishop Stepinac: The Man and his Case* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Bookshop, 1947), 15. Also, Count O’Brien of Thomond writes: “There were, it is true, a very small number of individual Catholic priests and religious in whom their nationalism was stronger than their religion. But the Catholic Church as a whole, all her Bishops and the overwhelming majority of her priests, led by the Archbishop of Zagreb, made this evil plan impossible”.

¹⁴ Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, document 287, 298. Cardinal Maglione to the Apostolic Visitor Marcone: Request for intervention on behalf of 400 Jews that were up to June 1943 under the direct protection of Archbishop Stepinac, however, since the Archbishop’s life was in danger, they were candidates for deportation to concentration camps. Also: Ljubo Boban, *Kontroverze iz povijesti Jugoslavije*, vols. I-III, (Zagreb: Globus, 1990), 431.

¹⁵ Stjepan Steiner, Interview, December 16, 2002, Zagreb, Croatia.

Archbishop, who was named “protector of Jews” and one who preached against the Racial Laws, was aware that his days were numbered and he did not wish the lives of those under his care to be compromised.¹⁶

In an interview, Olga Rajšek Neumann, a non-Jewish woman now in retirement home, described how she became a rescuer. One day, she received a letter of request from her fiancé, who was serving as a prisoner of war in Germany, to go to a small village in Slavonia and collect his nephew, Danko Shtockhammer, and care for him until one of his parents returned. Danko needed special care because, at the tender age of eight, he had already experienced two concentration camps. Danko, his mother, and grandmother had been captured and sent first to Stara Gradiška; shortly thereafter, they were transferred to the concentration camp in Đakovo.

Danko’s grandfather, who lived in Pakrac, Slavonia, had heard about the opportunities that existed in Đakovo where children were “sneaked” out of the camp. He sent their Christian maid to Đakovo to visit his wife and daughter with the intention of rescuing his grandson. After a change of guard, the maid walked out holding Danko’s hand, and no questions were asked. After this success, the maid knew that once Danko’s grandfather realized how easy it was to enter Đakovo, he would not hesitate to leave everything behind, to visit his wife and daughter; but he was captured and sent to Jasenovac. Danko, the eight-year-old boy, remained alone with the local maid until Olga, his Christian aunt to be (she later married his father’s brother), came to pick him up and brought him back to her home in Zagreb.¹⁷

However, a neighbor reported to the Ustaše that Olga Rajšek was sheltering a Jewish child. On April 12, 1943, Danko was caught for the third time and sent to the large detention center on Savska Street in Zagreb. Not knowing what to do, Olga ran to her parish priest and told him what had happened; the priest reassured her that Archbishop Stepinac would come to their aid. The priest told her that, by the time she reached home, the boy would be waiting for her. Although Danko remained in Olga’s care, for reasons of safety she placed him in a Catholic orphanage where he stayed until the end of the war in 1945.¹⁸ Dr. Teodor Gruner told me that his father, Bernard Gruner, the chief Cantor of the Jewish Community in Zagreb, was taken to the detention center in Zagreb

¹⁶ HDA, Ivo Politeo, Stepinac, file prepared for Yad Vashem. Archbishop Stepinac advised all those who were under his protection to leave Zagreb since his very life was in danger.

¹⁷ Olga Rajšek-Neumann, Interview, December 26, 2002, Zagreb Croatia. Danko Shtockhammer gave a sworn testimony on behalf of Olga Neumann in 1998. In April, 2004 Olga Rajšek-Neumann was proclaimed by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as a new Croatian recipient of the award “The Righteous Among the Nations.”

¹⁸ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, Testimonies of Dan Baram, Jerusalem and Ljudevit Stein, Zagreb. Out of over 60 testimonies written on behalf of Archbishop Stepinac Baram’s and Stein’s testimonies are sample letters. All the testimonies submitted individually to Yad Vashem in an effort to proclaim Archbishop Stepinac as one of the “Righteous Among the Nations.” Among those who wrote on behalf of the Archbishop are Dr. Danko Shtockhammer and his wife Lea Kon Shtockhammer who were rescued by Archbishop Stepinac. Today Dr. Danko Shtockhammer and his wife are American citizens residing in Chicago.

which served as an assembly and sorting center before deportations to concentration camps. Word was sent to Dr. Stepinac about the imprisonment of the Jewish Cantor; a short time thereafter, Bernard Gruner was freed.¹⁹

Dr. Amiel Shomrony, who was called Emil Schwarz at the time, currently lives in Israel was eager to tell me everything he knew about the Archbishop both because of his own experience and with the hope that somebody at Yad Vashem might listen.²⁰ During World War II, Emil Schwarz was the personal secretary to the Chief Rabbi of Zagreb, Dr. Miroslav Šalom Freiburger. Since Emil's father had special protection; even as late as 1943, he was free to roam the streets of Zagreb without having to wear the Jewish identification tag. While on an errand for the Rabbi, he went to the Archdiocese; there he was informed that, in the following few days, there would be new roundups of Jews. He was also told that the Archbishop invited the Rabbi, his wife Irena, his parents and his sister, Ljubica, to stay in his palace in the Archdiocese of Zagreb. Emil Schwarz delivered the message from Archbishop Stepinac to Rabbi Freiburger. When Rabbi Freiburger heard that the plan of deportation included all the Jews of Zagreb, he declined Stepinac's offer, choosing instead to be deported with his congregation. However, the Rabbi wanted to know if he could send his library for safekeeping in the Archdiocese. Emil Schwarz stated clearly that the library was saved and that Dr. Stepinac assisted and rescued many Jews; he and his conduct also served as a role model for many other clerics as well as his own parishioners.²¹

The testimony of Amiel Shomrony, Emil Schwartz, is not unique in emphasizing the close working relationship that existed between the Archbishop and the Jewish Community. The letters of the Chief Rabbi of Croatia, Dr. Miroslav Šalom Freiburger, attest to their positive relationship. The Rabbi frequently turned to the Church for assistance; on July 4, 1942, the Chief Rabbi wrote a letter of thanks to Pius XII. The Rabbi indicated that the remaining Jews had lost almost all hope, and had no more energy to fight the daily hardships: they placed their destiny in the hands of God who had tested Israel for centuries, with blessings and punishments, and always came to their aid. The Rabbi ended his letter to Pius XII by saying that he would like to con-

¹⁹ Teodor Gruner, Interview, January 14, 2003, Zagreb, Croatia. There are many similar stories, in fact too many to be told in detail.

²⁰ Amiel Shomrony, (Emil Schwarz) Interview April 21, 1996, "Prenosimo 'Glas koncila' 21 travnja 1996. Razgovor s dr. Amielom Shomroniyem, promicateljem istine o Kardinalu Stepincu, Kardinal Stepinac je svetac i mučnik" *Bilten*, Židovska općina Zagreb, June 1996, 44-45. In an interview with Ivan Miklenić (*Glas koncila*) Amiel Shomrony was asked: "if Archbishop Stepinac helped so many Jews, why, then, have such a small number of Jews spoken on his behalf? Shomrony answered: "The Jews are neither united nor do they hold one opinion in about their own religion let alone about other matters. I, for example, never favored the Communist regime, this is one of the reasons that I never chose to return to Zagreb, yet many Jews favored Communism."

²¹ Amiel Shomrony, (Emil Schwarz), Interview March 10, 2003, near Tel-Aviv, Israel.

firm his eternal gratitude for helping the Jews.²² On December 15, 1942, the Rabbi, through the Apostolic Visitor to Croatia, Monsignor Giuseppe Ramiro Marcone, asked the Holy See for help in transferring 50 to 60 orphan children from Zagreb to any of the three places Florence, Livorno, and Padua on the expense of the Jewish Community.²³ Another letter from the Rabbi asked the Archbishop to speak on the behalf of 200 Jewish orphan boys aged 7-17 who needed to be evacuated to Italy. On January 9, 1942, the Archbishop sent a letter to Cardinal Maglione asking for his assistance and intervention in sending 200 boys to the Jewish community in Florence—or to any other community, outside NDH, that would care for them and enable them to attend regular school.²⁴ Archbishop Stepinac also wrote to the Minister of the Interior, Andrija Artuković, with the following request: On the request of the Jewish Community in Zagreb dated April 13 1942 which I personally delivered to the office of the Minister a permit #2550-I-A-1942 dated April 15, 1942, a request for the relocation of 50 Jewish children to Turkey. Out of the 50 children, 11 children were relocated to Turkey. The current request pertains to the extension of the original permit to include the balance of 38 children who are mostly orphans.²⁵

On April 8, 1943, Archbishop Stepinac arranged work permits for the Jewish Community in Zagreb. He wrote a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Andrija Artuković:

Mr. Minister: I feel free to present to you a request from the Jewish community in Zagreb, in which they are asking you to free some of their workers from detention so as to resume work for the welfare of those who are still left in freedom. Their request is enclosed. I ask of you, Mr. Minister please assist them by giving instruction to your people to free some of their employees. I am thankful to you for all you have done and for the things that you would do so that the ethical and Christian character of our people may be saved.

Respectfully: Dr. Alojzije Stepinac.²⁶

²² Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941-1945*, Document 198, 209, Title: Recognition for the deeds that the representatives of the Holy See and the bishops have done on behalf of the Jews of NDH. The request was made on behalf of thousands of widows and orphans.

²³ *Ibid.*, Document 231, 242. An answer was received that the Minister of Interior did not approve the relocation of the children from Zagreb to Italy.

²⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo documents, p. 1187. The Jewish Community in Zagreb asked Archbishop Stepinac to write to his contacts in the Holy See asking them, if at all possible, to obtain from the Italian Interior Ministry entry visas for 200 Jewish children from Croatia to Italy.

²⁵ HDA, Ivo Politeo, Subject A. Stepinac document 1188.

²⁶ HAD, Ivo Politeo, Subject A. Stepinac, document 1175. Also: M. Skalić-Štambuk, J. Kolanović, S. Razum, (ed.) *Proces Alojziju Stepincu, Dokumenti*, (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1997), 64. Document 62. 23.3.

On December 6, 1943, the German authorities in Zagreb entered the home for the Jewish elderly, "Lavoslav Schwarz," and ordered the residents to vacate the building within ten days. The Nazis warned them that if they remained in the building, they would be deported to Auschwitz. At the request of the Jewish community in Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac organized the transfer of all the elderly, about 60 people, to the archbishopric's building in Brezovica near Zagreb.²⁷ The former residents of Lavoslav Schwartz lived for four years, from 1943-1947, on Church property in Brezovica where the Archbishop became one of their frequent visitors.²⁸ During their four-year stay, 1943 to 1947, the elderly received regular financial assistance from a humanitarian organization in Switzerland. Archbishop Stepinac cared for them and attended to their needs. Because of the protection of the Church, only five residents died from natural causes.²⁹

Another incident involving the Archbishop took place on October 16, 1944. After the capitulation of Italy, the Jews from the Italian concentration camp in Rab were transferred to the Partisan freed territories in Croatia. During the course of liberation, there were many skirmishes with German and Ustaše forces. In one of these incidents, the Ustaše captured two groups of Jews; one group numbered 130 people, and a second 180. Only two individuals managed to escape: Jakica Gaon and Moric Katan, both from Sarajevo. Both reached Zagreb and found employment in the Jewish Community. Despite warnings to be careful when leaving the premises of the Jewish Community, one of them was recognized by an Ustaša who originally had been responsible for their capture. An Ustaše officer, named Čeko, and his agents then entered the premises of the Jewish Community and arrested eight people. Dr. Robert Glucksthal, the official representative of the Jewish Community, was one of those arrested. Although six of the captives were killed, Glucksthal and Asher Kisičkog were released due to the intervention of the representatives of the International Red Cross and the Archbishop of Zagreb.³⁰

²⁷ HDA, Ivo Politeo, A. Stepinac file, April 14, 1943, 1588/P/43-Dr.F/DA. The Chief Rabbi of Croatia Dr. M. Freiburger wrote to Archbishop Stepinac a letter requesting his assistance in relocating approximately 60 elderly Jews to a safe location. HDA, ZKRZ-GUZ 2235/45-2, box 10, Zapisnik, Br. 1771.

²⁸ Slavko Goldstein, Interview with *Globus* magazine, July 23, 1991 implied that the favor was partial since UNRRA (United National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) paid for their sustenance. Such remarks might have been construed as ungrateful considering that acts of benevolence and kindness were rare in those days and always involved an element of risk.

²⁹ HDA, ZKRZ-GUZ 2235/45-2, box 10, Zapisnik, document 1771, testimony given by Josipa Shulhof on June 9, 1945, 2-21. On page 11 Josipa Shulhof testified that when a demand to vacate the home for the elderly arrived, in their desperation the Jewish Community turned to Archbishop Stepinac who immediately agreed to provide a building and a permission to renovate it so as to accommodate 58 elderly.

³⁰ HDA, ZKRZ-GUZ 2235/2-45, Box 10, Zapisnik, June 9, 1945, 14.

Dr. Amiel Shomrony, formerly Emil Schwarz, recalls the sermon given by Archbishop Stepinac in October 1941 in Zagreb cathedral, shortly after the destruction of the main synagogue in Zagreb. The Archbishop stated:

A House of God, of whatever religion, is a holy place. Whoever touches such a place will pay with his life. An attack on a House of God of any religion constitutes an attack on all religious communities.³¹

In his testimony given in 1944 to the National Commission for the Verification of Crimes committed against the Jews, Srećko Bujas told the Commission about the relationship between Rabbi Freiburger and Archbishop Stepinac:

Whenever I visited the Jewish Community in Zagreb, I met the chief Rabbi, Dr. Freiburger and the President, Dr. Hugo Kon, and presented to them the current situation of the Jews of Sarajevo. At those meetings, I heard both of them give great praises to the manly and heroic stand of the Archbishop of Zagreb and the Kaptol and the help and assistance provided by the nuns in this period of the deportation of Jews. In the Jewish Community, we read many uplifting sermons.³²

The files of Hans Helm, the German police attaché in Zagreb, demonstrate that Archbishop Stepinac was often identified as a “traitor” by the Nazis and the extreme Ustaše.³³

From the testimonies given by Hinko Mann to the National Commission in 1945, as well as of Amiel Shomrony and many other survivors, it is clear that the Archbishop was called to act on behalf of the Jews on many occasions; he always responded favorably but, very often, his interventions were unsuccessful since he was considered a “Jew lover” by the regime. Obviously, the regime had no interest in assisting him, particularly when the cause involved helping the Jews. Stepinac’s efforts were often unanswered because of the conflict of interest between his requests and the goals of the Ustaše and the Gestapo.³⁴

Every year, the bishops of Croatia gathered in Zagreb for a meeting. The objective was to deal with any pressing issues and to arrive at a set of resolutions that would help solve any mounting problems. Two resolutions con-

³¹ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file of Dr. Stepinac, Shomrony’s testimonies on file. Shomrony volunteered to come to Zagreb in 1946 during the trial conducted against the Archbishop, in which he was accused of committing crimes against the people of the region. Dr. Shomrony was urged not to come because most likely the Communist government would arrest him. Shomrony filed a petition to award “The Righteous Among the Nations” to Archbishop Stepinac.

³² HDA, ZKRZ-GUZ 2235/2-45, Box 10, Srećko Bujas, Sarajevo, 27 February, 1945, 243 (40).

³³ HDA, Hans Helm File, box 33, book XIV, letter dated 24.3.1943, states that two Nazi agents Mravunac and Gosnjak reported that Archbishop Stepinac is the protector of Jews and that he intends to close all the churches should the deportation of Jews of mixed marriages continue. Two documents sent to Berlin informing the authorities that the life of the Archbishop was in danger. Similar letter was sent on 25.3.1943.

³⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, 356. Also, Menahem Shelah, ed., *Holocaust in Yugoslavia*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Jerusalem, 1999), 292-293.

cerned the situation of converted Jews: one, the bishops requested that the NDH government give all the Jews who had converted to Catholicism and their family members, the rights and privileges granted to Croatian citizens [at that time there were thousands of convert]; two, the bishops asked that Jewish assets be protected.³⁵

On July 7 and on November 16, 1942, the voice of the Serbian Royal family in London was broadcast on the BBC. Speaking in the Serbian language, the Serbian speaker expressed the peoples' disappointment with the conduct of Catholic Church in Croatia, arguing that he [Stepinac] had taken a weak stand against the forces of occupation and the Ustaše. The broadcaster suggests that the head of the Church is devoid of soul and conscious once he stood for the victory of Fascism and Nazism.³⁶

On July 7, 1943, another broadcast was made on Radio BBC London in the Croatian language:

Yesterday the Vatican published two excerpts from speeches delivered by Dr. Stepinac to his parishioners. The Archbishop of Zagreb has strongly and sharply condemned the deportations of Jews and other ethnic groups that were based on Nazi theories and Nuremberg Laws. The Vatican radio announces that Archbishop Stepinac, in his weekly address, stated that every people and every race on earth has a right to exist and to human treatment. If God gave this right to mankind there is no government on earth that can take it away.³⁷

When the NDH ordered that everyone should act according to the Nuremberg Laws, Stepinac condemned the adaptation of this ideology, arguing that only when a crime was committed by an individual then the perpetrator should be brought in front of a court of law, however, a blank accusation and capital punishment were not acceptable.³⁸ Stepinac also preached that nobody had the right to dissolve the sacredness of marriage conducted in the Church. No human authority could pillage or restrict the right of matrimonial union. The Archbishop gave this sermon on March 3, 1943 after the Ustaše regime had ordered the imposition of the Nuremberg Laws on all Jews in NDH. Radio Vatican portrayed the Archbishop as a resolute soldier advocating moral justice and freedom.

³⁵ HDA, Ivo Politeo, Rezolucija Hrvatske biskupe konferencije o Židovima, Vrhovni Sud NRH stup 6/1946, 863.

³⁶ Ljubo Boban, *Hrvatska u diplomatskim izvještajima izbjegličke vlade 1941-1943.*, vols. 1-2 (Zagreb: Globus, 1996), 1:29-30, and 30-31.

³⁷ HDA, MUP RH, I-25, 426-428.

³⁸ During the years 1941 to 1945 Archbishop Stepinac's unequivocal stand for the rule of law and for the right of every people and every race to exist because God gave this right to mankind. He argued that there is no government on earth that can take this right from them. Leaders from all corners of the world wrote praises on his behalf and against the accusations brought against him by the Yugoslav Communist government. This is a main reason that many individuals and newspapers, too many to quote in this footnote, around the world protested the conduct of Tito's government. For further information see: Ljubo Krasić, ed., *Croatian Almanac 1999, Stepinac the Man for this Time*, (Chicago: Croatian Franciscan Publications, 1999).

Words of thanks and gratitude from all parts of the world were delivered to Archbishop Stepinac by the United States via the New York Times on October 15, 1946. The British Broadcasting Corporation, in at least four news broadcasts in Serbo-Croatian addressed to listeners in Yugoslavia, made direct reference to the archbishop's sermons. Not only did the BBC utilize these statements to the full, the Vatican Radio Station also reproduced them. Stepinac's work was acknowledged by Evelyn Waugh.³⁹

Stepinac's Correspondence

As early as 1936, Dr. Stepinac supported those Jewish refugees who were fleeing Nazi Germany and Austria. As a young Archbishop, in 1938, Stepinac founded "Action for help to refugees." Stepinac sent a fundraising request to 298 eminent Croats asking for help on behalf of the refugees who were predominantly Jewish. The letter read:

Dear Sir,

Due to violent and inhuman persecution, a large number of people have had to leave their homeland. Left without means for normal life, they wander throughout the world... Every day, a large number of emigrants contact us asking for intervention, for help in money and goods. It is our Christian duty to help them... I am free to address You (capital you), as a member of our Church, to ask for support for our fund in favor of emigrants. I ask You to write Your free monthly allotment on the enclosed leaflet." Signature: Alojzije Stepinac, the Zagreb Archbishop.⁴⁰

On January 11, 1939, Stepinac sent a fund-raising letter to his parishioners, similar to the one quoted above. He informed them that, every day, masses of new refugees from Europe were flocking to the church with requests for help. In his letter, Alojzije Stepinac emphasized the Christian duty to assist those in need.

Archbishop Stepinac's relationships with the Jews bore him the title 'judenfreundlich,' "Jew lover:"

Archbishop Stepinac [of Croatia] and his entourage are 'judenfreundlich' (friendly to the Jews), and therefore enemies of National Socialism. The same Archbishop had been the protector of Jewish émigrés under the Yugoslav regime, although he paid no attention to the misery of his own people. ... In August of 1942, at the Vlaška Church in Zagreb, a priest named Pietker preached among other things this: the Jews are the chosen people and have remained so to this very day. There is no other leader than God who has chosen the Jews.⁴¹

³⁹ HDA, MUP RH, I-25, 426-428.

⁴⁰ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, Source: *Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, Copia Publica* Trans. Proc. S. Virt. et Mart. In the Kaptol Archive it is designated as; CP, Arhiv Postulature, Kaptol 31, Zagreb, sv. CVIII, str. 3140 (preslik).

⁴¹ Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing, The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-1943*, (New York: Rutledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1990), 80.

Stepinac's Caritas helped all, his own people as well as to Serbs, Jews, Slovenes, and Poles that came flocking to the door of the Archdiocese. Due to his disregard of the implicit ordinances issued on April 17, 1941, that stated: "Whoever and in whichever manner intends to insult or has insulted the honor and the living interest of the Croatian People ... would be convicted as traitor" Stepinac became "persona non grata" and an embarrassment to the Ustaše authorities.

Throughout the bitter years of war, whenever it became known that Mgr. Stepinac was to preach, immense crowds packed the Cathedral at Zagreb to hear the only voice which even the dreaded Gestapo could not and dared not silence, as it was raised time and again against the pagan doctrines of totalitarianism.⁴²

On May 22, 1941, the Archbishop wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Andrija Artuković, regarding the interpretation of the anti-Semitic legislation:

...But to take away all possibility of existence from members of another nation or race and to mark them with the stamp of shame is already a question of humanity and of morals. And moral laws have application not only to the lives of individuals but also to those who rule the states. In these days, general morality does not brand as ill-reputed those criminals who have been released from prisons and who have been sentenced as murderers....Why treat in this way those who are members of another race through no fault of their own? Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the fact that, as a result of these measures, the instinct of revenge and the so-called 'Minderwertigkeitskomplex' (inferiority complex) will become well developed, especially among the youth who are now growing up and who will be affected by these measures. Do we have the right to commit on this outrage to the human personality...I ask you, Mr. Minister, to give appropriate orders so that the Jewish laws and others similar to them (the measures against the Serbs) are executed in such a way that the human dignity and personality of every man is respected.⁴³

⁴² Count Anthony Henry O'Brien, Count of Thomond, *Archbishop Stepinac the Man and His Case*, (Westminster, MD: The Newman Bookshop, 1947), 15. Also, in October, 1943, Mgr. Stepinac warned the Ustaša Government that if they did not change their methods they would alienate the entire population. As a result he was kept under house arrest by Pavelić for several days, and was violently attacked by all the newspapers, especially in an article by the Croat Minister for Education in the Government daily *Hrvatski Narod*. This denounced him for "meddling in politics", 22.

⁴³ HDA, Ivo Politeo, A. Stepinac, file 301681, jacket 12, box 1, pp. 21, 22. A personal letter sent from the Archbishop of Zagreb to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Artuković, on May 22, 1941. The original letter found in the Archives of the Archbishopric. Also in Optužnica Pavelić-Artuković box 118.

In another letter, written in July and in September 1941, Archbishop Stepinac protested to Pavelić:

As an Archbishop and representative of the Catholic Church, I am free to call your attention to some events that touch me painfully. I am sure hardly anyone has the courage to point to them, so it is my duty to do so. I hear from many various sides about the inhuman and cruel treatment of non-Aryans...⁴⁴

On March 7, 1942, the Archbishop wrote yet another letter to the Interior Minister, Andrija Artuković:

I do not think that it can bring us any glory if it is said of us that we have solved the Jewish problem in the most radical way, that is to say, the cruelest. The solution of this question must provide only for the punishment of Jews who have committed crimes, not for the persecution of innocent people.⁴⁵

On March 6, 1943, the Archbishop wrote a letter to Ante Pavelić, the Head of NDH. In the letter, Stepinac writes diplomatically that he understands that actions against the Jews in Croatia were imposed by external forces and not initiated by the NDH government. He warns that if the government cannot change the course of the events, then the Catholic Church will act:

But if there is here [the anti-Jewish policy] the interference of a foreign power in our internal and political life, I am not afraid if my voice and my protest carry even to the leaders of that power; because the Catholic Church knows no fear of any earthly power, whatever it may be, when it is a question of defending the most basic rights of men.⁴⁶

Among the letters received, many acknowledged with gratitude and praise the work of the Archbishop on behalf of the Jews.⁴⁷ There is one letter from Dr. Meir Tuval Weltmann, representing the Jews in Palestine. Dr. Weltmann was stationed in Istanbul in order to assist in the rescue of European Jews. On June 11, 1943, he wrote two letters of thanks, one to apostolic legate Monsignor Angel Rancolli (later Pope John XXIII) and the second to Archbishop Stepinac. Weltmann wrote:

With deep gratitude, recognition and appreciation to the Holy See and to Archbishop of Zagreb Stepinac for his conduct and assistance to the Jews of Croatia and especially for assisting Dr. Hugo Kon and the Chief

⁴⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, 332. Also Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 17. Stepinac's letter to the Poglavnik Ante Pavelić. Also Richard Pattee, *The Case of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company), 1953, 96.

⁴⁵ M. Skalić-Štambuk, J. Kolanović, S. Razum, (ed.) *Proces Alojziju Stepincu*, 162, Document 6.23.1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 164, Document 6.23.2.

⁴⁷ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, after the burial of Sabina Steiner the Jews made a collection to honor the dead. The sum collected was donated to an orphanage as gratitude and in honor of Archbishop Stepinac.

Rabbi Dr. Freiburger. A specific request was made to the Archbishop to use his power to convince the regime to allow the Jews to transfer peacefully to Hungary and Italy and, from there, to Palestine⁴⁸

In February 1944, the Chief Rabbi Herzog wrote two letters from Ankara on the eve of his departure for Erez Israel (Palestine). One letter is addressed to the apostolic legate, Monsignor Angel Rancolli, and the second to Archbishop Stepinac. The letter to Rancolli reads:

Gratitude for steps taken on behalf of the Jews:

Before my departure, God willing tonight, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude for your energetic efforts to rescue our unlucky, innocent casualties from unimaginable fear and forceful conduct. These inhuman conducts with which our people are confronted are contrary to all religious and moral behavior. Please relay my appreciations to the Holy See from the bottom of my heart. May God bless you with the blessings of Zion and Jerusalem. The Jewish People will never forget the help that His Holiness and his high officials.

A similar letter was addressed to Archbishop Stepinac:

Here I am, for some time now, making an effort to assist our unfortunate brethren and sisters who encounter tremendous persecutions.... I beg you, do all you can to save the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in our most tragic moment in history, one that is still a living proof of God's providence in this world.⁴⁹

The Apostolic Legation in Istanbul to Cardinal Maglione" May 30, 1943:

In relation to your wire # 153, the Jewish Agency ...Palestine is very grateful to the Holy See for the intervention on behalf of 1,500 Czech Jewish children and informs them that there is an urgent need to intervene with the Hungarian government and to ensure their safe passage to Palestine. The same Agency is requesting the intervention on behalf of 400 Jewish deportees, together with their president, Hinko Kohn, and Chief Rabbi Freiburger. The Agency without delay needs information; it seems that they plan an action to transfer them to Palestine.⁵⁰

Dr. Stepinac and Mixed Marriages

On May 3, 1943, the newspaper "Narodne novine" in a bold caption declared:

Statutory Orders given by Pavelić [the Poglavnik], state that from today onwards, all the customary and legal practices of conversion from

⁴⁸ Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 300, Documents 291 and 292.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 343-344, Documents 329 and 330.

⁵⁰ HDA, Ivo Politeo file, subject Alojzije Stepinac. Also, Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 294, Document 283.

one religion to another are abolished. For a conversion to be legal, a person desiring to change his religious affiliation must first notify the local authority and receive an official receipt that the notification was registered. At the same time, a declaration has to be made from which religion a person desires to convert. Only after an approval is given by the Minister of Religion, can a person approach a local church.⁵¹

As a follow up to the legal decree quoted above on July 30, 1941, the NDH government sent the following circular:

The government of NDH is aware that many Jews are registering with the Catholic Churches requesting conversion to Catholicism. But conversion to Catholicism would not have any impact on the status of these individuals in relation to the State. The laws enacted on April 30, 1941, preclude Jews from Aryan rights.⁵²

Archbishop Stepinac was aware that, no matter what he said and how much pressure he exerted regarding the Racial Laws, the likelihood of their being abolished in Croatia was virtually non-existent.⁵³ Hitler was determined to follow through with his ideology of ethnic and religious annihilation. But Stepinac was also determined to speak on behalf of mixed marriages in his request that they remain intact.⁵⁴ He also tried to obtain permits so that priests could visit the many Jewish converts in concentration camps, and give comfort, as well as last absolution rights to those who so desired.

One of the most serious accusations that have been made against Archbishop Stepinac is that he failed to issue formal statements of condemnation against the Nazi and Ustaše genocide and slaughter of Jews. Yet one reason for this omission could be a letter sent by Pius XII on June 2, 1943 to the Sacred College of Cardinals:

Every word that We address to the responsible authorities and every one of Our public declarations had to be seriously weighed and considered in the interest of the persecuted themselves in order not to make their situation unwittingly even more difficult and unbearable.⁵⁵

Apparently there is sizable documentation that supports Pope Pius XII's concern regarding a potential negative German reaction to a formal and vocal objection on the part of the Catholic hierarchy.⁵⁶ Vocal reaction might affect adversely, rather than improve the lot of persecuted Jews. Ernst von Weizsacker,

⁵¹ *Narodne novine*, Zagreb, May 3, 1941.

⁵² HDA, MUP NDH, Pr. 21378/41, box 25.

⁵³ Lav Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac, o stotoj godišnjici rođenja*, (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1998), 116.

⁵⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, Documents 1183, 1197. Many Catholic women individually and in groups fought against the Racial Laws and separation of mixed marriages. They wrote directly or via their priests asking assistance of Archbishop Stepinac.

⁵⁵ Sir Alec Randall, "The Pope, the Jews, and the Nazis" (pamphlet), (London: Catholic Truth Society), 1963, 18.

⁵⁶ See: Ronald J. Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* (Columbus, MS: Genesis Press, Inc., 2000).

the German ambassador to the Vatican during World War II, wrote in his memoirs:

... not even institutions of worldwide importance, such as the International Red Cross or the Roman Catholic Church saw fit to appeal to Hitler in a general way on behalf of the Jews or to call openly on the sympathies of the world. It was precisely because they wanted to help the Jews that these organizations refrained from making any general and public appeals; for they were afraid that they would thereby injure, rather than help, the Jews.⁵⁷

Despite implicit instructions from the Pope to act with caution, Stepinac remained vocal and persistent in his attempts to rescue those who embraced Catholicism, focusing on the issue of mixed marriages. The file of Hans Helm in the section “*Judaism*” written on March 22, 1943, shows that the address of the Rendeli family was the same as that of the Archbishop; apparently this family was sheltered on his premises.⁵⁸ However, it is not clear whether the Rendeli family was the only one to reside on the Archbishop’s residence. This area requires further research and investigation.⁵⁹

In September 1942, Franz Abromeit, a German SS officer, was appointed to organize the final deportation of all the Jews. The list included those that were essential to the economy, those with special protection, and those involved in mixed marriages. Once accurate lists of all the Jews in Croatia were ready, systematic roundups were planned to begin. The deportees were to be detained in the local concentration camp, Stara Gradiška, which would serve as a temporary detention center until all the Jews had been captured. They would then be deported by rail to German camps in the East. When these rumors reached Archbishop Stepinac and the Vatican visitor to Croatia, Giuseppe Marcone, who represented the Vatican at the Bishops’ conference, Stepinac sent letters to the NDH authorities—to Pavelić in particular—demanding that they refrain immediately from undertaking such extreme anti-Semitic measures.⁶⁰

Pavelić approached the German Ambassador in Zagreb, Siegfried Kasche, and told him that, due to the intervention of the Catholic Church, he could not permit the continuation of deportations of Jews to the East. Kasche replied that he was aware that the Catholic Church had an enormous influence in Croatia but that he (Kasche) was anxious to see which party was in control - who would have the upper hand, Kasche or the Church? Obviously, Kasche

⁵⁷ Peter White, “An Attack on Pope Pius XII,” *Jubilee*, June, 1963.

⁵⁸ HDA, Hans Helm File, section *Judaism*, under letter “R” Rendeli, 77, 22. 6. 1943.

⁵⁹ Vjekoslav Cvrilje, “Stepinac i Židovi u ratnom razdoblju 1941-1945,” Zagreb, *Novi Omanut* 1-2, Prilog židovskoj povijesti i kulturi, August 26, 1992.

⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt, *A Report of the Banality of Evil: Eichmann in Jerusalem*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1964, 183. The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Judgment part 31 of 70. On behalf of the Accused [Adolf Eichmann] Section (T/907, 1142 of his statement T/37), Abromeit dealt with these matters in cooperation with Hans Helm the German Police attaché at the German Embassy in Zagreb.

was determined to win. Despite specific instructions given by Ante Pavelić to the German SS to stop the deportation of protected Jews, of converts, and those in mixed-marriages, Kasche reported to Germany that the final *Judenaktion* in Croatia ended “this week,” and that the deportation of the last 2,000 Jews would take place in March 1943.⁶¹

The news that Dr. Stepinac vigorously defended mixed marriages encouraged many Aryan women whose husbands were Jewish to seek his help. Aryan women from Osijek, Zagreb, Sarajevo and other places in NDH, begged and pleaded with Stepinac to act on behalf of their husbands. In March 1943, Hubner, a German agent, wrote to Hans Helmsaying that he had received the following information from his agents, code names Mravunac and Gošnjak:

As a result of the registration of Jews involved in mixed marriages some of them turned to Archbishop Stepinac and requested his protection. It is also said that the Archbishop promised protection and that he sent a letter to the Pope in Rome. According to the “dogmas” of the Catholic Church, a couple in a mixed marriage cannot be separated. And if the Croat government undertakes action against mixed marriages, then in protest against such acts, the Archbishop will close all the Catholic Churches for a certain period. Such acts he [Stepinac] considers interference in the internal affairs of the church.” Furthermore, the rumors circulating in Zagreb are that the Pope turned personally to the Fuhrer to obtain assurances that no actions would be taken against mixed marriages. For the time being, verification of this information cannot be obtained. But it is probable that this information is accurate *because it is acknowledged that Stepinac is a protector of the Jews.*⁶²

A similar letter was sent to Reichsfuhrer SS, the Chief of Police in Germany –RSHA-Amt VI, Amt IV, Berlin: Subject: Mixed Marriages in Croatia, 25.3.1943:

The Croatian government instructed that all Jews be registered, including those involved in mixed marriages. As a result of this order some Jews turned to Archbishop Stepinac for protection. The Archbishop promised full protection, sending a memorandum to this effect to the Pope. In case action is taken against the Jews involved in mixed marriages, as a sign of protest, Stepinac declared he would close for a certain period all the churches in Croatia. In his opinion, this action by the government would constitute interference in the internal affairs of the Church. Although not as yet confirmed, the Pope intends to take up this matter with the Fuehrer. But since it is known that *Archbishop Stepinac is a great friend of the Jews*, it can be assumed that he would involve himself on their behalf.⁶³

⁶¹ “Eichmann Crimes in Yugoslavia”, *Facts and Views*, 125, 1961, 8-9.

⁶² HDA, Hans Helm File, Subject Mixed Marriages, 24. 3. 1943, 267.

⁶³ HDA, Hans Helm File, Subject Mixed Marriages sent to Berlin, 25. 3. 1943, 266.

As Archbishop of Zagreb, Dr. Stepinac intervened strongly on behalf of all the Jews, but specifically on behalf of those involved in mixed marriages where the financial support of the family depended upon the Jewish husband and father.⁶⁴ Due to his personal intervention, many converted Jews in mixed marriages were rescued. Often, reasons other than being Jewish accounted for the fate of some of those who were not saved—for example, that they were Communists or were aiding the Partisans. Efforts made by other religious leaders to rescue Jews who had converted to Catholicism and Islam resulted in moderate success. However, Jews that had four Jewish grandparents fared little better than Jews who did not convert, particularly if they lived in locations where it was well known that they were Jews.⁶⁵

Sermons, Actions, Documents—A Glimpse into Dr. Stepinac's Activities

From documents sent by the diplomatic core stationed in Zagreb, NDH—the French Consul, Georges Gueyraud, the American diplomat William Philips, the British ambassador, Frances Osborn, and other diplomats that were still in the country — it seems that many foreign diplomats were alarmed by the developments in NDH and by the control that Germany exercised over Pavelić. The American diplomat, “Morris”, wrote to the American Secretary of State on April 10, 1941: “Germany Contemplates Independence for Croatia.” On May 3, 1941, the French Consul in Zagreb, Gueyraud, wrote to the French Secretary of State, Admiral François Darlan:

The Ustaše, using the Nazi blueprint, implemented their first legislative ordinances that promulgated the “act” known as the “Protection of the purity of the Croatian blood and the State.” These ordinances laid the groundwork for establishing a legislative system in which their civil rights were taken and the murder of Jews was legally justified.⁶⁶

As soon as Archbishop Stepinac realized that Nazi Germany and, to a lesser extent, Fascist Italy were in control and that Pavelić was no more than a puppet seeking power, he distanced himself from the NDH authorities. On May 17, 1941, Pavelić traveled on a diplomatic mission to Italy to invite the Duke of Spoleto, a cousin of the King of Italy, to accept the “Crown of Zvonimir,” a medieval Croatian king, and to seek recognition from the Holy See. Pavelić's delegation should have included the Archbishop but, since the two already had a strained relationship and Stepinac was determined not to join Bishop Salis-Seewis was asked to take his place. On September 9, 1967, in an inter-

⁶⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, Alojzije Stepinac talk on October 31, 1943 in Marija Bistrica.

⁶⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, May 6, 1941, AIHRPH, zbirka NDH, cartons 278, 291.

⁶⁶ Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 37.

view for the semi-official biweekly of the diocese of Zagreb, *Glas koncila*, Salis-Seewis was asked about the reasons for the animosity between Pavelić and Stepinac. Salis-Seewis stated:

The relations between Pavelić and Stepinac were from the beginning tense, and the Archbishop chose not to be a part of Pavelić's delegation. I was selected. I objected, arguing that I didn't like the idea of being mixed up in this business...I didn't like anything about it. I knew that the people from the Peasant Party were against it; those people were already in sympathy with the English and French. The Archbishop, however, just said: that's the way it's got to be' (*Kaj je, je*)...at that moment we couldn't all withdraw and someone had to go as a matter of form.⁶⁷

From a historical and moral perspective, Archbishop Stepinac was against Hitler's philosophy and Pavelić's political aspirations based on racial divisiveness; he saw that this greatly endangered the moral and humanitarian fabric of society. Stepinac also expressed his fears of Communism at every opportunity. Addressing in 1940, these two competing ideologies in the page *Hrvatica*, Stepinac writes:

We are retreating to old desecrations. And with desecration there is a return to brutality and slavery. Concentration camps, like in the old establishment forced labor in which millions would be taken, all these are new names for a very old principle.⁶⁸

In this context, in a Circular Letter # 1722a dated February 4, 1942, Stepinac, acting for the archdiocese of Zagreb, warned all priests — as he had done on February 12, 1935, and August 10, 1938 — against participating and siding with any party. The policy of the church was based on old Church principles:

This Church of Christ gives us our general directives and also sheds light on those questions which trouble the world today, and on the chaos of war, a war that would not be if the voice of the teacher had been heeded. The questions are these: (a) the freedom and worth of the individual as an independent entity; (b) the freedom and respect for religion; (c) the freedom and respect for every race and nationality; (d) the freedom and respect for private property as the basis of the personal freedom of the individual and independence of the family; and, finally (e) the freedom and respect for the right of every nation to its full development and to independence in its national life.⁶⁹

Clearly, the Archbishop had no argument with the ordinary people; it was with the political ideologies of both Fascism and Communism that he took issue. Dr. Stepinac recognized that, among the few thousand Jews that

⁶⁷ *Glas koncila*, 16. 9. 67, interview with Bishop Salis-Seewis.

⁶⁸ *Hrvatica*, no. 3, March 1940, Archbishop Stepinac.

⁶⁹ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, Document 1026, October 26, 1941.

had converted to Catholicism between 1938 and 1941, a considerable number chose to convert because they believed their lives and those of their children would be spared. Archbishop Stepinac instructed his clergy to issue certificates of baptism to endangered Jews and Serbs whenever they asked for them.⁷⁰ Acting on the instructions of Archbishop Stepinac, the head of the Church of Saint Blasius (sv. Blaža), Dr. Mijo Selec, soon understood that conversion to Catholicism was no longer a guarantee of survival. Those who came to him, he shielded and protected in various church premises knowing that he did all to shield the disadvantaged.

In his sermon in Zagreb Cathedral on the Feast of Christ the King on October 26, 1941, Archbishop Stepinac, without mentioning names, clearly referred to Ante Pavelić, the Ustaše and those misguided priests who followed the Ustaše philosophy and tried to appeal to the masses by using the Catholic religion. The Archbishop stated:

...Within the past ten years, certain theories and atheistic ideologies have succeeded in infecting so much of the world that hate has become, so to speak, the main incentive of all human actions. The danger exists that even those who glory in the name of Catholic, not even to speak of those who glory in a spiritual vocation, may become victims of passion, of hatred, and of forgetfulness of the law which is the most beautiful characteristic trait of Christianity, the law of love.⁷¹

In his sermons, he attempted to clarify his position regarding both ideologies, fascist and communist. At the end of May 1942, Stepinac preached:

It would be an absurdity to speak of a new order in the world, no matter what its source, if human personality is not valued in that order, the immortal soul of man, which surpasses all systems and for which nothing can ever be substituted: the soul which has its inalienable rights which no human power can or ought to limit. It would also be an absurdity to think that the Catholic Church could be afraid of any human force in defending the elemental rights of human individuality and the freedom of conscience.⁷²

On October 25, 1942, Archbishop Stepinac states: "How then must we judge individuals who arrogantly behave as if God no longer exists on the earth..." Most likely all those who listened to the sermon understood whom he was addressing. It is not surprising that Ante Pavelić, the Poglavnik of NDH, visited the Cathedral only once during the entire four years. It was not a place where he would have found solace or words of comfort and encouragement. But the Archbishop had no fear, he continued:

⁷⁰ Zvonimir Despot, "Tragom našeg napisa o ljudima koji su zaslužili pravednika, ali im se ne zna ime. 'Župnik koji je spašavao Židove' je Mijo Selec," *Večernji list*, Zagreb, June 1, 1998.

⁷¹ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac. The sermon was delivered by Archbishop Dr. Stepinac on October 26, 1941 in Zagreb Cathedral.

⁷² M. Štambuk-Škalić, J. Kolanović, S. Razum, *Proces Alojziju Stepincu*, 264-266.

That is why the Catholic Church has always condemned and condemns today all injustice and all violence whether committed in the name of theories of class, race, or nationality. One cannot exterminate from the face of the earth the Gypsies or the Jews because one considers them inferior races...⁷³

Archbishop Stepinac did not have to mention the names of the perpetrators; it was self evident; his listeners comprehended that the sermon was directed towards Hitler, Mussolini and Pavelić. Stepinac spoke against all those who aimed to gain power by dividing mankind into races.

The following sermon was delivered in the Cathedral of Zagreb on October 25, 1943, during the time when the Nazis controlled for more than a year the deportations to concentration camps. Archbishop Stepinac delivered the following sermon:

And what, before God, are the peoples and races of this world... The first thing that we affirm is that all nations, without exception, are as nothing before God.... The second thing that we affirm is that all nations and all races have their origin in God. Only one race really exists and that is the Divine race. Its birth certificate is found in the Book of Genesis. The third thing that we affirm is that all nations and all races, as reflected in the world today, have the right to lead a life worthy of men and to be treated with the dignity with which one treats a man... All of them without one exception, whether they belong to the race of Gypsies or to another, whether they are Negroes or civilized Europeans, whether they are detested Jews or proud Aryans, have the same right to say "Our Father who Art in Heaven!"⁷⁴

Archbishop Stepinac's sermons were not known to many outside his church, but it seems reasonable to assume that, for some, his sermons gave encouragement to continue to fight against the forces of occupation. In 1942, the First Secretary of the Italian embassy in Zagreb noted:

The general public in Croatia feels great distrust towards the new regime and is adversely affected by the repeated illegal activities of the unscrupulous Ustaše officials. The Croatian people are reacting very

⁷³ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, Archbishop Stepinac, in his sermons on the Feast of Christ the King, on October 25, 1942. He alluded to Pavelić himself, whose wife seems to have been a Jew (Pavelić's mother-in-law was Jewish - Ivana Herzfeld), as well as 12 other highest state officials, whose wives were either Jewish or Serbian. Also, Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 141.

⁷⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo, file A. Stepinac, fond, Documents prepared for Yad-Vashem. Also, O'Brien, Count Anthony Henry, Count of Thomond, *Archbishop Stepinac the Man and His Case*, 19. O'Brien, Count Anthony Henry suggests that Stepinac strongly condemned anti-Semitism. When the two priests and six nuns of Jewish ancestry were forced to wear the Jewish yellow "Star of David" he comforted them saying: "I have ordered these priests and nuns to continue wearing this sign of belonging to the people from which Our Saviour was born as long as any others will have to do so!"

negatively to the anti-Jewish measures and are very skeptical about the further course of events.⁷⁵

Some hardcore Ustaše rebelled against the Archbishop, considering him a traitor to their cause.⁷⁶ Stepinac's sermons and attacks on the regime led to rumors that the Archbishop had been imprisoned. On December 24, 1943, announcement of the imprisonment of Stepinac December 19 No. 60, states:

In Belgrade it was confirmed that Stepinac, with his sermon, openly attacked and judged the Ustaše regime. It is said that such accusations, in case of a change of regime, would not help; this he had to state from the start, but nevertheless it was good that he spoke out now.⁷⁷

The Archbishop of Zagreb kept the Vatican abreast with what was happening under the NDH regime as seen in the following letter from Cardinal Maglione to Archbishop Stepinac:

The Vatican, June 17, 1943

Most Reverend Excellency: I have noted with great interest the abundant documentation sent to me by your Most Reverend Excellency regarding the work carried out by you in favor of the Serbs and Hebrews in Croatia. In thanking you heartily, I beg you to continue to keep the Holy See informed in the matter adding, if possible, some news also regarding the work of the other Croatian Bishops. Sentiments of particular and sincere esteem, Of Your Most Reverend Excellency's Servant, L. Cardinal Maglione.⁷⁸

The Vatican received information from Croatia not only from Archbishop Stepinac but also from other bishops and from the apostolic representative to Croatia, Monsignor Giuseppe Ramiro Marcone. From letters sent by the Osijek clergy, it is apparent that Archbishop Stepinac was not the only one to assist the oppressed, although many clergymen turned to him when action was required. Menahem Shelah, known as the harshest critique of the NDH regime and the Croatian people, agrees with Falconi's description of the character and nature of Archbishop Stepinac:

⁷⁵ Source: Josip Kolanović, HDA, Roma, ASAE, AG Croazia 35: Condizione degli ebrei in Croazia VI.1941-V.1943. "L'opinione pubblica croata non sufficientemente preparata ad una campagna razziale ed ancora diffidente verso il nuovo Regime ma soprattutto impressionata da un continuo susseguirsi di atti illegali compiuti da funzionari ustasci senza scrupoli, reagi piuttosto negativamente contro queste misure antiebraiche, osservando con molto scetticismo lo svolgersi degli avvenimenti."

⁷⁶ HDA, ZKRZ, GUZ, carton 45, no. 2235/21a, Ibid, carton 284, no. 28640;

⁷⁷ HDA, MUP-RH, I-22, also MUP-RH, I-25 and MUP-RH, I-49, in this news report there is an indication that there was a quarrel between Stepinac and the representative of the German Army.

⁷⁸ Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, Document 59, 73.

Stepinac was a man of God, righteous and loyal. More than that, he lacked all personal ambition. He was accused of not missing any opportunity to participate in the affairs of the government as demonstrated in numerous photographs. However, upon careful examination of these photos, one can see his pale and gaunt face, his eyes turned towards the ground expressing both his unease and revulsion. At those times in which he is seen with political leaders and high army officers from his country and foreigners, one can notice his lack of confidence and unease, standing on the side without pride.⁷⁹

Shelah argues that the assessment of Stepinac by Falconi, a former Catholic priest, was in principle accurate, and that Stepinac was an ethical man who was thrown into circumstances beyond his control. He was in a serious dilemma in that he had to choose between his moral values and those of the NDH which he initially supported, where the privileges of the Church would undoubtedly fare better than under Communism. Eventually he recognized that the Ustaše regime was morally and totally wrong for the Church and for Croatia. At the same time, he abhorred the Nazi regime, and he feared Bolshevism.⁸⁰

The NDH regime prohibited the printing and distribution of Archbishop Stepinac's sermons. Nevertheless, the message of the sermons was spread to the masses in secret. Glaise von Horstenau, a German Nazi general in Zagreb, declared: "If any bishop in Germany spoke this way in public, he would not come down alive from his pulpit!" And when Stepinac visited the Holy See in 1943, he was warned that the Nazis marked him as a traitor and that his life was in danger. While in Rome, Archbishop Stepinac met Ivan Meštrović, a famous Croatian sculptor, to whom he said: "With God [farewell], it is most likely that we will not see each other again. My life is threatened, either the Nazis will kill me now, or the Communists will kill me later."⁸¹

The documents of Hans Helm and also the files of Ivo Politeo,⁸² who headed the 1946 defense of Archbishop Stepinac against Tito's government, assert that neither the Nazis nor the Communists had much love for the outspoken Stepinac. He was a man who was disliked by the Nazis as well as the Communists for refusing to compromise the interests of the Catholic Church to the regimes of the moment. Stepinac was aware of the fact that both the Nazis and the Communists were plotting to kill him but his response was

⁷⁹ Carlo Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII*, (London: 1970), Secret Documents, 247-253.

⁸⁰ Menahem Shelah, ed., *Holocaust in Yugoslavia*, 283-284. (Shelah quotes Falconi's report "Tajni Dokumenti."). Lately, it has been ascertained that those documents ("Tajni dokumenti") were given, before being manipulated with, to Falconi by the Yugoslav secret police, see: Stjepan Razum, "Dugo očekivani odgovor. Osvrt na knjigu Jure Krišto, *Sukob simbola. Politika, vjere i ideologije u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj*, Nakladni zavod Globus – Plava biblioteka, br. 206, Zagreb, 2001, 460 str.," *Tkalčić*. Godišnjak Društva za povijesnicu Zagrebačke nadbiskupije, br. 6, Zagreb, 2002, 583-593.

⁸¹ HDA, Ivo Politeo file, Stepinac's Defense.

⁸² HDA, Fond Hans Helm, under Alojzije Stepinac, Ivo Politeo file on the defense of the Archbishop.

always that he was not afraid to die for ideas that he strongly believed.⁸³ After the war, but before his trial, the *New York Times* wrote:

When the Nazis occupied Croatia, Archbishop Stepinac risked his life to aid the Jews. With his aid, hundreds of Jews were smuggled out of the country and obtained the repeal of an order that all Jews must wear a yellow tag. He denounced the "Nazi Racial Laws." He worked with the International Red Cross to rescue Jews in other countries, concealed these victims of racism under his own roof, and many of his priests did likewise.⁸⁴

My objective in presenting the above letters, documents and media clippings is to highlight the thoughts, deeds and actions of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac during the years 1941 through 1945. In writing about the Archbishop, I do not wish to take sides, but rather to present an account by which the readers will have an opportunity to understand the historical context and within this context evaluate Dr. Stepinac's conduct and predicament in his role as the head of the Archdiocese of Zagreb and as a citizen and human being.

⁸³ Richard Pattee, *The Case of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac*, 79.

⁸⁴ HDA, Ivo Politeo, File: A Stepinac, *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1946.

Die Frage des Urteils: Dr. Alojzije Stepinac und die Juden

Zusammenfassung

Über Erzbischof Alojzije Stepinac wurden von den Vertretern der Katholischen Kirche, Historikern, Journalisten von beiden Seiten, kroatischen und serbischen, viele Bücher geschrieben. Die Meinungen über ihn sind umstritten. 1998 wurde Kardinal Alojzije Stepinac in Marija Bistrica, einem kleinen Ort in der Nähe von Zagreb vom Papst Johannes Paulus II. selig gesprochen, einem Ort, wo der Erzbischof oft betete. Ganz der katholischen Perspektive entgegengesetzt, klagte 1946 das jugoslawische kommunistische Regime von Josip Broz Tito den Erzbischof von Zagreb an und versuchte ihm die angeblichen Verbrechen, die gegen das Volk in dieser Region begangen waren, zur Last zu stellen. Bis zu diesem Tag, hielten ihn die Serben und die Serbische Orthodoxe Kirche für "Verbrecher". Eine der am meisten verbreiteten Anklagen vieler Historiker gegen ihn bestand darin, dass er als Leiter der Katholischen Kirche in Zagreb nicht genug gegen Verfolgung des sog. Ustascha-Regimes unternahm. Bei vielen Gelegenheiten stellt die serbische Literatur den Erzbischof als verantwortlich für Verbrechen dar, die gegen die Serben begangen wurden.

Die vorliegende Untersuchung gründet sich auf den Dokumenten, die den Umfang der Aktivitäten von Erzbischof Stepinac zeigen; das schließt Beispiele der lebhaften Korrespondenz zwischen ihm und verschiedenen Regierungen und privaten Personen ein, Teile der im Zagreber Dom gehaltenen Predigten und Predigten auf anderen Lokalitäten, aber auch viele seine Rundschreiben und Artikel über ihn, die in einheimischen und internationalen Medien erschienen sind. Die Untersuchung deckt ebenfalls aufgenommene und der Nationalen Kommission für die Beurteilung der gegen die Juden während des Zweiten Weltkrieges begangenen Verbrechen präsentierte Äußerungen. Die jüngsten Interviews mit Überlebenden der "Shoah-Stiftung," und die persönlichen Interviews der Autorin, die in Zagreb, Sarajevo und Israel geführt und aufgenommen worden sind, sind auch durch die vorliegende Arbeit vertreten.