

UNDER THE SECRET OF THE HOLY OFFICE

S.O. [Sant'Offizio] 118/46

BRIEF REPORT ON THE FINALY CASE FOR THE [VATICAN] SECRETARIAT OF STATE

On January 14, 1953 His Most Reverend Excellency Cardinal Gerlier left a note at the Holy Office regarding the case of two Jewish boys, a copy of which is attached. Although the information provided was clearly incomplete, as His Eminence has requested an urgent response, the Holy Office examined the question and hastened to give the opportune instructions to the Most Eminent Gerlier on January 23, 1953, a copy of which is likewise attached.

In the instructions it was said, among other things, that Miss Brun, who had saved and baptized the boys, ought to “resist the order to give them up with all possible means”, but that this resistance “should not be pushed to the point that causes serious dangers either to this person or the Church”.

However, the woman had already placed the children in Spain with the aid of the Superior of the Sisters of Zion in Grenoble and for that reason on January 29 the Court of Cassation of that city ordered her arrest. The above-mentioned Superior was also arrested afterward.

Unfortunately – based on information that came from another source to the Holy Office – there had been on the Catholic side some imposters and the intervention of individuals of questionable morality in the complex dispute.

On the other side, the Jews, tied in with the Masons and the socialists, have organized an international press campaign aimed at:

- 1) stirring up a deep battle against the Church and against freedom of education in France;
- 2) closing down three houses of the Congregation of Zion compromised in the affair and perhaps obtaining the suppression of the “authorization” used by the Congregation in France.

It is worth noting that the two Jewish boys are apparently heirs of a very large patrimony.

In the face of so much press campaign and the adversaries’ fury, it seems that the reaction in the Catholic camp has been scarce. As far as the Holy Office is aware, only *La Croix* and *L’Observateur Catholique* have energetically raised their voice in defense of the rights of the Church.

Given the current state of things it seems opportune to seek to settle the dispute on the following bases:

- a) return of the boys to France, accepting the proposal of Chief Rabbi Kaplan and Reverend Father Chaillet to place them in a neutral educational institution, in such a manner, however, that the boys' own practice of the Catholic religion is not impeded;
- b) absolute guarantee that Miss Brun, the Superior of the Sisters of Zion, and others charged will be fully absolved or amnestied.

In the meantime, the Superior General of the Congregation of Zion could make it known that the Superior of Grenoble acted of her own private and personal initiative, in such a way as to free the Congregation itself from any responsibility.

His Excellency the Most Reverend Monsignor Montini could speak in this sense with Minister Bidault [French foreign minister] and after their discussion address a coded cable to the Nunciature of Paris with all the opportune instructions to Cardinal Gerlier, making clear that the instructions themselves were coordinated with the Holy Office and recommending to him the maximum reserve so as not to compromise the Holy See in such a delicate and sensational dispute.

From the Palace of the Holy Office, 24 February 1953.

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AAV, Segr.St. Titoli, anno 1950/54, Privati, pos. 2079, f. 74r. Letter from Giovanni Battista Montini.

March 2, 1953

N. 295833.

Most Reverend Eminence

Attached here I hasten to send Your Most Reverend Eminence the text – approved by the Holy Father in this morning's Audience – of the planned declaration relative to the case of the “Finaly” boys.

Your Eminence, in his enlightened wisdom, will judge if it is not the case to recommend once again to whom one must that he act in such a way as to not reveal that Supreme Sacred Congregation [of the Holy Office].

I profit by the occasion to confirm my sense of the deepest homage

GBM [Giovanni Battista Montini]

To His Most Reverend Eminence

Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani

Pro-Secretary of the Supreme

Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office

(with attachment)

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AAV, Segr.St. Titoli, anno 1950/54, Privati, pos. 2079, f. 198r

29 July '53

1= The Finaly brothers have been taken to Israel.

2= The Jewish press is presenting the fact as a victory

3= I wonder if it is not the case to have an article prepared for la Civiltà Cattolica to unmask the Jews and accuse them of disloyalty.

Dell'Acqua

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AAV, Segr.St. Titoli, anno 1950/54, Privati, pos. 2079, ff. 303r-v. Draft letter from Giovanni Battista Montini. [the final, somewhat shortened, version, dated September 1, 1953, is found at ff. 304r-v].

From the Vatican, 31 August 1953

To His Excellency the Most Reverend

Monsignor Paolo Marella

Apostolic Nuncio, Paris

Most Reverend Excellency,

At the distance now of some weeks since its unhappy conclusion, I beg the indulgence of Your Most Reverend Excellency if I turn your attention back to the "Finaly" question which was so widely discussed in itself and which – concluding in that manner – had dealt a serious blow to the rights of the Church and also to its prestige in the world.

The fury and the violence of the opposing press in this affair demonstrate clearly that what was at stake was very great and beyond that of the fate of the two poor boys. In fact, that they are now housed in a "kibbouz" [kibbutz] no longer interests public opinion, which is instead satisfied that the Church has thus lost the game.

The Court of Cassation, says Cardinal Gerlier's letter, has made its decision and its sentence is juridically "very solid" and escapes "all serious criticism."

So the jurists of Lyon say, with whom it seems the Eminence associates himself. But one should not forget that the sentence in question disregards – not being in its area of competence – a double right that was violated: that of the Church, and that of the boys themselves to not being exposed to the danger of apostasy.

Furthermore, an “agreement” existed which fully safeguarded the human and divine rights: that agreement seems to have been ignored by the sentence. Nor does the declaration that the Chief Rabbi made to Cardinal Gerlier have any worth, who, being satisfied by the victory obtained writes: “I have no need to tell you that we remain faithful to the spirit of the agreement of March. Madame Rosner...[sic] will do nothing, I am sure of it, of a nature to hurt their deep feelings”.

Given where things stand, I ask Your Excellency if You do not think it opportune, or indeed necessary, for one of our journals, e.g., *la Civiltà Cattolica*, to clarify the question; also because I have the impression that much more is being written and said by the opposing side that misses the point than in the right sense by our side, causing confusion of ideas and creating an erroneous mentality.

Thus, awaiting Your wishing to let me know Your point of view on the matter, I take advantage of the occasion to confirm my sense of distinct homage.