BY ALL APPEARANCES, the Kielce pogrom was a complex event, not just a mere inchoate aggression to which the Jews fell victim. In their own minds, people in Kielce were enforcing what was vigilante justice, but justice nevertheless. Scattered uniformed state representatives visibly supported the aroused citizens, who gratefully acknowledged the fact, on occasion shouting “Long live the Polish army!” Their presence on the scene gave an aura of institutional sanction to what was going on. Throughout the day, men in uniform—soldiers, policemen, scouts, railwaymen, a prison guard, an armed watchman from PPS Party headquarters wearing an “American uniform”—were chasing, assaulting, beating up, and killing Jews (as well as people who looked like Jews) all over town. They applied themselves to this task together with many other concerned citizens. A sense of threat was easily communicated across a vast social spectrum, and a large crowd mobilized quickly to fend off the danger. Why were the people of Poland so threatened by their fellow citizens, the Jews? Was it really because Jews were sucking their children’s blood?

A UB agent who arrested Szymkiewicz, one of those sentenced to death in the first Kielce trial, identified him by his “American uniform, and red armband with the letters PPS inscribed on it . . . The defendant Szymkiewicz seemed especially conspicuous to me because there were only three people in similar uniforms” (Meducki, Anryżdowski, vol. I, pp. 283–84). “American uniform” is probably in reference to a vest that was quite popular at the time, made of cloth used in American or British army uniforms.
On the face of it the claim of ritual murder was taken with utter seriousness by many people. Even distinguished churchmen did not hesitate to express qualified support for this proposition. The Citizens’ Militia was sent to investigate whether an incident of Christian child kidnapping and murder by the Jews had indeed taken place. In an unpublished appeal to the people of Kielce, the voivode together with a representative of a local bishop stated reassuringly that “on the basis of materials assembled by the investigators, no murder of Polish children by the Jewish population had taken place.” When a group of foreign journalists arrived in town the day after the pogrom, they first went to meet with the voivode; “while waiting in the house of the wojewoda,” writes Saul Shneiderman, “I asked a soldier who sat in the corridor if he knew what had caused the pogrom. He replied candidly that the massacre had started because ‘the Jews had kidnapped Christian children and hid them in their building at Number 7, Planty Street.’”

During the interviews Łoziński filmed in the mid-1980s, forty years after the events, his subjects already knew the politically correct answer to questions about ritual murder, but they did not necessarily agree with it. So many people, and not just simple people, evidently believed in the accusation “that there had to be something in it,” the solidly middle-class widow of a defense attorney said on camera; while a “simple” elderly lady who lived nearby, when asked if the story about ritual murder was true, answered with a noncommittal smile, “It is their secret” (“To jest ich tajemnica”).

One of the defense attorneys argued during the first Kielce trial that “the people who went to Planty Street for the purpose of protecting the young were motivated by a paternal feeling. This motive of self-defense should be taken into account by the court in evaluating the psychological condition of the defendants.” Shneiderman, who sat in the courtroom and heard the speech, was wrong to view this as an exercise in hypocrisy. As the responses of many people throughout the country to the pogrom in Kielce (and to the summary trial of the first group of perpetrators) were to demonstrate, the attorney’s reading of the popular mood was on the mark. Except, of course, that the Jews were not killing Christian children for blood.

Łoziński’s collaborator who was doing the interviews did not know how to ask this question properly. She was so convinced of the nonsense she was drawing people to comment about that she repeatedly asked them a leading question—“Do you think that people believed in [or, ‘What did you, at the time, think of’] the legend [emphasis mine] of ritual murder?”
The Kielce pogrom drew an immediate response from the authorities: there was a (kind of) judicial investigation of its circumstances, and there were several trials of the perpetrators. If nothing else, this legal aftermath is a constitutive part of the story, as it additionally serves to establish the historical record of what happened. But response to the pogrom reverberated through various milieus of Polish society, and only by taking these aftershocks into account can we make sense of what happened on July 4 in Kielce.

How the Working Class Reacted to the Kielce Pogrom and What the Communist Party Made of It

The Communist Party always took propaganda very seriously, and in 1946 it was deeply engaged in the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Polish population. Every public event called for ideological spin, and the Kielce pogrom was no exception. The educational and propaganda benefit that the Party initially thought might be derived from the massacre—by drawing “the masses” into protesting against the killings, and then switching the targets of opprobrium from the direct perpetrators to the “real” culprits, that is, “reactionary elements” who presumably “inspired” these events and were the regime’s political opponents—backfired: it turned out that “the masses” felt no sympathy for the Jews, even in the face of the horrible crimes to which the Jews fell victim.

A group of the PPR’s Central Committee instructors who came to Kielce on July 4 and then fanned out through the region to carry out propaganda work submitted a chilling memorandum a few days after their return to Warsaw. “Attitudes among the masses are for the most part rather negative”—that is, workers are unwilling to publicly condemn perpetrators of the Kielce pogrom—their report begins. “In several localities moral terror had to be used—for example in Pionki, in the State Powder Factory employing some 700 workers….”7 “Workers in a brewery in Radom opposed an anti-pogrom resolution. Also in a cooperative, and in the Directorate of State Forests, people opposed a resolution condemning the Kielce crime. It is mostly railwaymen who drive anti-Semitic attitudes…. [and] spread anti-Semitic slogans throughout the voivodeship. It is a fact that railway guards identified Jews on the Częstochowa–Kielce line and incited aggressors to beatings. In Radom a number of railwaymen opposed a resolution condemning the pogrom.”8

The July report of the Radom Department of Information and
Propaganda noted matter-of-factly: “In the current month very strong anti-Jewish opinions manifested themselves, especially among the intelligentsia. The fact of the Jewish pogrom in Kielce met with the moral approval of many groups in our society.”

Padraic Kenney, in his excellent study of the early years of Communism in Poland, drew on local and central Party archives to provide a long description of how the issue played in the industrial center of Łódź:

Between 8 and 11 July, labor leaders called meetings in many factories to condemn the pogrom. They prepared resolutions and invited workers to sign them. The meetings themselves passed without incident, but few workers cooperated. In the Łódź thread factory “the assembly accepted the proposed resolution indifferently and calmly, but supposedly [only] a small number of workers signed it.” Only one shop in Scheibler and Grohman agreed to the resolution, and only some PPR members signed it. The next day, however, the daily newspaper of the

“Meducki, Antyjydowskie, vol. II, p. 151. “During a meeting in Ostrowiec,” the report of the Central Committee’s instructors continues, “Comrade Józef Kasiór (PPR) gave a speech against the Jews. ‘What is it all about? We are slaying like mad, and Jews in Ostrowiec live as if there was no tomorrow’ [czytaj sobie jak u Pana Boga za piecem]—literally, ‘they live as if behind the stove at God Almighty’s’], they buy butter and chicken, where were they when we fought in the guerrillas?’ This was said by a comrade who studied in a voivodeship and in a central Party school. Another comrade in Ostrowiec turned to a speaker at a meeting: ‘Just give Jews a good thrashing and you will draw applause’” (Meducki, Antyjydowskie, vol. II, pp. 139, 140). The Ostrowiec city Department of Information and Propaganda in its July report signaled that condemning the Kielce pogrom perpetrators to death was viewed in the city as “an act that was not entirely just” (ibid., p. 147).

In Skarżysko-Kamienna, 500 people were assembled on July 8 in the Kamienna factory to hear a representative of the PPR’s city organization speak on the topic “Pogrom of the Jews in Kielce: Provocation of the Reactionaries.” “The atmosphere was rowdy,” we read in the report of the local Department of Information and Propaganda. “After the meeting disbanded, workers did not accept a resolution condemning the shameful Kielce crime.” Neither did 150 employees of the Polish State Railways, who were addressed on the same day by the first secretary of the PPR’s city committee, a Comrade Baran. On subsequent days meetings were held in other factories and institutions in a “good atmosphere” and appropriate resolutions were accepted. We are not told whence the change of mood, but perhaps a dose of “moral terror” was skillfully applied (ibid., pp. 152–54). In Pniewów, the county’s Party secretary reproached one of the Central Committee instructors who came there for “defending” Jews too much in his speech. When Comrade Buczyński advised activists in the Pniewów county to organize mass meetings about the Kielce pogrom, one of the comrades from the county committee protested: “How can one go and defend the Jews in front of peasants if Jewesses get forty thousand złoty for giving birth to a child?” Of course, Comrade Buczyński refused such lies” (ibid., p. 140). From Sandomierz, the county Department of Information and Propaganda reported on July 10 that “people in the area are saying that Jews really did murder several Polish children and they deserved to be killed in Kielce” (ibid., p. 144).
Łódź PPR reported “in large type” that the workers at these and other factories had approved resolutions and demanded the death penalty for those found guilty of the pogrom. This attempt to propagandize the incident backfired, arousing workers’ anti-Semitism and politicizing it by turning it toward the government and the PPR. Workers began to perceive the PPR and the government as “Jewish” in their opposition to the workers. When workers saw this report, strikes broke out at nearly a dozen factories, mostly cotton mills and sewing shops. The strikes’ connection to the Kielce tragedy was clear; in one factory, there was even a spurious phone call informing workers that all of Kielce was on strike and asking for Łódź’s support.

Although the strikes lasted only an hour or so, PPR observers were taken by surprise at their vehemence. When the PPR secretary in one factory attempted to oppose the strikers, she was beaten by several of them. Warned a Central Committee report: “The situation in Łódź is serious, as evidenced by the mood among strikers, the strikes’ swift leaps from factory to factory, and the aggression of striking women in all factories; they clawed and screamed ferociously. Slogans of revenge and terror from the moment of execution [of the convicted killers of Kielce] were heard in the shops. [They] compare the alacrity of the Kielce trial with that of [Arthur] Greiser [Nazi leader of the Warthegau, Polish lands annexed to the Reich], who is still alive, though he is guilty of so many millions of victims. Striking workers use such anti-Semitic arguments as “A pregnant Jew gets a thousand zlotys, and what do I have?” . . . or “Why don’t Jews work in factory shops? Poland is ruled by Jews.” Łódź Jews described a “pogrom atmosphere” in the city; there were rumors, for example, that Jews in the Baluty district (a large worker district and the location of the Jewish ghetto during the war) had murdered a Polish child. While the strikes themselves were easily broken up once the workers had made their demand (usually that a retraction be printed in the newspaper) the hostility lingered long after. The sentencing of the pogrom leaders sparked more protests.9

The working class of Łódź had a bellwether quality for the Communists. This is where the wave of strikes began that sparked the 1905 revolution in Russia. The city and its working class—the greater proportion
of its garment industry made up of women—figured in Bolshevik lore as a symbolic gateway to the great October. On this occasion, though, the seamstresses and weavers of Łódź did not foreshadow much of anything. They were rather like chorus girls—one voice among many that reverberated throughout the country. Under the circumstances this made their message particularly significant, and the Party listened carefully.

Some 16,000 workers participated in strikes with anti-Jewish slogans in Łódź alone, and the Communist Party’s second highest decision-making body—the Secretariat of the Central Committee—during its first meeting held after the Kielce pogrom, on July 29, 1946, placed on the agenda the issue of workers’ strikes in Łódź, not the Kielce pogrom per se. The usual self-criticism one finds in Party documents on such occasions—that the quality of Party work and of Party cadres was inadequate and needed to be strengthened in order to counter the influence of “reactionaries”—was refined and sharpened during the discussion by Comrade Witaszewski. Workers were angry with the regime, he said, because they were exploited by shopkeepers, merchants who sold foodstuffs at bazaars, privately owned eating establishments, and all sorts of individual, private entrepreneurs who did not produce much of anything but acted as middlemen. And when they were angry with the regime, the workers succumbed to reactionary influences, including anti-Semitism. As a countermeasure to overcome anti-Semitism, Witaszewski proposed getting rid of the private sector. The unspoken subtext of this line of argument was that Jews, as paradigmatic middlemen who by and large shirked work and were “unproductive,” should be dealt with in the first place.

“A wave of better or less well conceived protests against the Kielce pogrom appeared in various newspapers; in factories, offices, in tramways, on the railroad, among crowds gathering in the street, protests against the sentences passed in the trial of Kielce perpetrators subsided,” wrote Witold Kula a month after the Kielce pogrom (Witold Kula, “Nasza w tym rola,” in Marcin Kula, Uparta sprawu, p. 159).

This is a very complex theme made up of multiple strands. There was a whole effort, both within the Jewish community and outside it, to bring about “productivization” of the Jews, who presumably did not want to be employed except as middlemen and traders, that is, in jobs that “do not produce” anything. The movement reflects a derogatory outside perception of the Jews as people who live off the work of others, but also an internalized sense of the inferiority and social backwardness of the traditional Jewish community. To fully reconstruct the theme, one would have to concurrently analyze Zionist efforts to teach Eastern European Jews working skills to prepare them for aliyah; Nazi categorizations of Jews in the ghettos according to working ability, Judenrate response to those demands during wartime (much was written on the subject in the officially circulated Gazeta Żydowska); and also the Communist mythologization of the working class and institutionalized efforts to “productivize” Jews both by the Central Committee of Polish Jews and designated agencies of the Polish government.
This should not be read as an oddball assessment of how to deal with anti-Semitism by a proverbially brainless Communist functionary who in later years would earn the derogatory nickname “General Iron Pipe” (“General Gazurka”). We find this line of argument already in a document submitted by high party officials named Hilary Chelchowski and Władysław Buczyński, who arrived in Kielce at noon on the day of the pogrom and wrote a quick assessment of the situation two days later: “An organizational system where all the Jews are assembled in one place [the reference here is to the building at Planty 7], do not participate in productive work but live very well, and engage in all kinds of wheeling and dealing with impunity and very often to the detriment of the government [‘zajmuje się najrozmaitsza kombinacją bezkarnie i bardzo często na niekorzyść Rządu’], all of which is then exploited by elements inimical to us, should be avoided in the future.”

The July 18 report by the entire visiting delegation of Central Committee instructors takes the matter further: “180 Jews were living in the Jewish building [Planty 7] in Kielce and they did not work; there were only two members of the PPR among them. In Ostrowiec several hundred Jews are also not working. In the majority of state-run spas one finds mostly rich Jews and Polish reactionaries.” During a joint meeting of the PPS and the PPR organization in the city on July 11, Central Committee instructors continue, “it was decided to begin arrests among the parasitic elements [presumably those who traded on the free market rather than working “productively” in state enterprises] and to close entertainment establishments. . . . During all mass meetings people transferred their anger from Jews to parasitic elements in general [emphasis mine]. The action was very successful as it responded to burning feelings of discontent. A conviction arose that the Party, finally, also seeks out and pun-

"Concerning "Jews ... assembled in one place": A Jewish Committee building in a town with a substantial number of Jewish survivors might typically serve multiple functions. It was often a hostel for Jews returning from camps or hiding places, or for those passing through town or searching for relatives. It might also have a room or two accommodating an impromptu orphanage, or an old people's home, or a school, or a kibbutz where a group of young Zionists was preparing for departure to, eventually, Palestine. Such arrangements stemmed less from an "organizational system" than from the shortage of building stock and the unwillingness of local authorities to accommodate Jewish requests for space beyond some necessary minimum, as well as from the need to provide security for Jews who would be easier targets for assault when dispersed.

There are two documents from Central Committee visitors in Medućki's volume: a longer piece, dated July 18, billed as the report of "Central Committee instructors" (pp. 137–43), and a shorter one, dated July 6, authored by Chelchowski and Buczyński (pp. 98–100). This quotation comes from the shorter report.
ishes those who prey on the people.” And while nobody asked specifically for wholesale arrest of the Jews as a well-defined subcategory of “social parasites,” at the conclusion of the July 29 Central Committee Secretariat meeting Ostap Dłuski suggested “that an institution be established which would facilitate departure of the Jews from Poland, so that they could join their families.”

For the record, the Jewish population in postwar Poland was destitute, emaciated, ruined, sick, and traumatized. If there ever was a group of people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder before the diagnosis was invented, they were that group. The dire general condition of Jewish survivors is amply documented in the records of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, which for the most part tried to address and remedy the situation. Matters became critical when a rapid influx of Jew- ish repatriates from the Soviet Union, also impoverished and exhausted, began reaching Poland in large numbers in 1946. In March the CKZP issued an appeal addressed to world Jewry—“Tsu Yidn fun der Gancer Welt”—to send material assistance.

Generalities aside, we can also have a glimpse inside the building at Plany 7 in Kielce as some of Loziński’s interviewees visited the place and remembered it forty years later. We have good testimony by the teacher featured in the opening shots of Loziński’s film, who speaks to the issue briefly in Witnesses. She is a good witness because of her intelligence and articulate ease before the camera, but also because of personal circumstances. At the time, she was trying to find people with connections, because her mother had been imprisoned, and she truly hoped that she could get such help among the Jews, who were supposed to be rich, powerful, and well-connected with the authorities.

To her disappointment and dismay she was struck instead by the “bare primitivism” of conditions inside the building where most rooms were furnished only with simple cots and an occasional chair. “This was a house as if after a funeral.” People wrapped in gray blankets sitting on cots “made an incredible impression. They seemed like they were shipwrecked. Among the older ones there must have been some who were

“The interview as a whole includes more details about the context of her visit. The family had turned to Jews for help because they had sheltered a Jewish family throughout the war and figured that somebody might return the favor. The woman they saved had written a note, and holding this letter the teacher (at the time still a teenager) went to Plany 7. When the interviewer asked her whether the family thought Jews worked in the secret police or government and therefore could be of assistance, she smiled and uttered an awkward denial, but it was clear that this must have been on the family’s minds.
mentally ill.... They looked as if they were waiting for something, waiting to go somewhere, find somebody, and start a new life.... sad, subdued, crushed" ("smutni, przegniali, przypłacic"). No one could help her with access to local authorities, but they offered to collect money among themselves so that she could afford to hire a lawyer.

The actual circumstances of this transient, destitute, and sick population did not prevent the circulation of rumors about conspicuous consumption, of Jewish children allegedly bringing delicacies and citrus fruit to school—alongside stories about emaciated and exhausted Jews using captured Polish children for blood transfusions in order to fortify themselves.17

**The Party Draws Conclusions**

The Party lagged in addressing problems confronting the Jews; so did the two law enforcement organizations. At the end of September 1945, several months before the Kielce pogrom, as we may remember, a "strictly secret" memorandum was sent to the Ministry of Public Security, with copies forwarded to the Ministry of Justice and to the Supreme Command of the Citizens’ Militia (the MO, or regular police). The head of the political department in the Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) wanted to know what was being done by the Security Service to stem a wave of murders and robberies of Polish citizens of Jewish nationality. We have "numerous complaints and reports" about these crimes, he wrote, and "no information whatsoever" about countermeasures undertaken by state authorities. An addendum was attached to the query listing selected episodes from the preceding six months—unnecessarily, we might add parenthetically, because Jewish Committees from all over the country were continually sending complaints and reports on such matters directly to the UB.*

In August 1945, a few days after the pogrom in Kraków, the Secretariat of the PPR’s Central Committee put "the issue of pogroms" on its agenda for the first time. "Attempted pogroms which took place in

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* AAN, MAP, 786, 17, 18; also Meducki, Antysemityzms, vol. II, pp. 55–61. The Ministry of Public Administration was not the only official forum where assaults against the Jews were documented during this period. In successive sessions of the provisional parliament, the KRN, in May and July 1945, Emil Sommerstein provided statistical and geographical data concerning Jewish casualties and demanded an energetic response from law enforcement organizations and the judiciary (Szyndorf, Pogrom, p. 9).
Kraków and in other localities (Radom, Miechów, Chrzanów, Rabka) suggest that they have a general character and that they were planned. That they were planned implies that there was a center issuing orders.”

Thus the entire problem was framed in the characteristic paradigm of a conspiracy aiming to subvert the rule of the Communist Party.

This was a knee-jerk response by Communist ideologues—any social phenomena not planned by Party organizers must be the result of somebody else’s deliberate planning and organization. Especially when a breakdown of public order was at issue—as in strikes, riots, meetings, or, as it were, pogroms—the correct analysis was to suspect a conspiracy, and the right thing to do was to identify those who, hidden from view, were pulling the strings. Apparently the Leninist paradigm of social action was universally applicable. Just as “professional revolutionaries” were necessary to lead the working class to victory, so “professional reactionaries” lurked behind every challenge to the Communist ambition to establish a monopoly of power.¹

Yet the really experienced Communists had honed a dual sensibility. While organizational work was supremely important, they believed one also needed to carefully monitor the “pulse of the masses.” Party organizers could never stay too far from the concrete interests and ideas held by the people, or else they risked becoming “detached”—and becoming “detached from the masses” was a capital offense under high Stalinism. Over the long run, through propaganda, one could instill the right class consciousness into all subjects. This was, to borrow the title of a canon novel by Nikolai Ostrovski about forging new Soviet men, “how the steel was tempered.”¹ But while forging the new man one had to pay attention to timing. Issues being tackled had to be carefully sequenced, lest the Party risk “losing touch.”

In the event, the PPR Central Committee’s Secretariat took cognizance of “strong anti-Semitic attitudes in society, as well as an absence of awareness and activity among the democratic parts of society [presumably to counter those attitudes]. The notion of the anti-Jewish pogrom is not yet sufficiently associated among the broad masses with the activities of the reactionaries aiming to achieve other broader goals [my emphasis]. Anti-Semitic attitudes can be found even among the leading elements of

¹One may point out that church sources displayed an exactly identical frame of mind. Thus when Bishop Kaczmarek’s commission described how “the authorities,” that is, the police and military on the scene, were killing Jews, it asserted that they were acting under orders.
the working class.”20 In the Polish parliament, a left-wing Zionist named Adolf Berman hit the nail on the head during the September 1946 session: “For us, who represent Jewish workers, what happened in several factories in Łódź and in Ostrowiec, after the sentencing in the Kielce trial, came as a great shock. It was the second Kielce pogrom.”21

Clearly, such treacherous terrain had to be navigated carefully. The Party had “to keep in constant contact with the masses” (“utrzymać staly kontakt z masami”) to explain “the core of anti-Semitism as one of the means employed by reactionaries to struggle against us,” and in the meantime Jews should be put to work. It was after all, as we remember, their “unproductivity in Poland which fuels anti-Semitic actions.” This was a persistent theme, which reemerged as the Party’s diagnosis of the Kielce pogrom as well. On July 25, 1946, the Council of Ministers established a new office, that of governmental commissar for the productivization of the Jewish population in Poland.22 In August 1945, the Secretariat of the Central Committee recommended the enactment of a special decree combating anti-Semitism and putting in place provisions to materially compensate Jewish pogrom victims and their families.23 A year later, soon after the Kielce pogrom, the initiative was killed in light of the mounting intensity and violence of anti-Semitic assaults. When the Central Committee Secretariat met for the second time to evaluate the issue, in the aftermath of that pogrom, it was primarily, as we know, to discuss working-class reactions to the pogrom rather than anti-Jewish violence itself. The Party did not want, as it were, to be preoccupied with the Jews. It wished that anti-Semitism, and the Jews into the bargain, would go away.24

The Response of the Polish Intellectual Elite

Postwar manifestations of hatred toward the Jews—the Kraków and the Kielce pogroms and then the reactions of common people in the aftermath—came as a surprise to the political and intellectual elites in Poland. This is in part, as I will argue in the next chapter, because what had happened between Jews and Poles since 1939 had played itself out on the lower rungs of society and was therefore obscured from the elites’ view owing to the highly stratified political culture characteristic of Poland. Whatever the reasons for their surprise, the shock of those who imagined that Nazi occupation had cleared the general public mind of rabid anti-Semitism was overwhelming.
The upper crust of the Polish intelligentsia expressed its despair in the main cultural periodicals. The weekly *Kuźnica* published unsparing details of the Kielce pogrom: the policeman Mazur’s statement that he had killed a newborn because the mother was already dead “and the child would cry”; the information that “thousands” participated in the pogrom by stomping, stoning, knifing, and clubbing Jewish victims to death; the specifics of the killings on the railroads; and the involvement of the local police in the day’s violence. “Today Kielce is Judenrein,” wrote Mariusz Margal in this important weekly on July 22, using the German term to drive home the point. “Hitler’s plan has been executed in Kielce to perfection and der Generalgouverneur Herr Hans Frank [Hitler’s plenipotentiary in occupied Poland and at the time of the Kielce pogrom one of the accused in the Nuremberg Trial] must be very happy in far-away Nuremberg.”

Given the circumstances and the duration of the pogrom, Margal wrote, “the entire [emphasis in the original] Kielce population bears responsibility” for what happened.

But the debate about postwar anti-Semitism had begun in high-brow periodicals a year earlier. Its initial focal point was an article by Mieczysław Jastrun published in the weekly *Odrodzenie* on June 17, 1945, entitled “Potęga ciemnoty,” “The Might of Darkness,” or dimness rather. The opening paragraph of Jastrun’s article articulates precisely what many authors would also find so inexplicable and morally perplexing. “Anti-Semitism in Poland, already deeply rooted before the current war [Germany had only just surrendered], did not abate—even though over three million [Polish] Jews, and presumed Jews, were murdered by the Hitlerite inquisition. In terms of moral evaluation this fact is no less horrifying than the fact of Hitlerite mass murder.” One could not be any more direct. And Jastrun continued: “One would expect that this murder, unprecedented in history, and committed by a hated enemy who so mercilessly and brutally repressed the Polish populace, would evoke in Polish society—which had itself been tortured and abused—a collective response of compassion, a sense of brotherhood in suffering. . . . But instead, the Jewish blood spilled so profusely by the barbaric enemy of the Polish nation and free humanity only awakened the mob instincts.”

With the passage of time, Jastrun’s somber diagnosis gained more adherents who felt moved to speak in a public forum. Kazimierz Wyka wrote three months later (*Odrodzenie*, September 23, 1945) that Jastrun was correct after all, that “potęga ciemnoty” was confirmed. The “last straw” which prompted Wyka to say so came with the Kraków pogrom of Au-
gust 1945—this “brutal and beastly spectacle which took place in the Kraków district of Kazimierz.”

Wyka’s article took Jastrun’s diagnosis one step further: it was not just “the mob” that was infected with anti-Semitism, he argued, but also the stratum of educated people, the intelligentsia. Poland, said Wyka, coining a brilliant paradox, was now suffering the consequences of not having had a Quisling-like native administration during the Nazi occupation. As a result anti-Semitism was never compromised as a requisite of collaborationism. “It still remained a requisite of patriotism and an attribute of a so-called responsible citizenship syndrome.”

A clever insight no doubt, but it did not suffice to bridge the chasm between expectations predicated on common sense and a presumption of simple decency, and the reality of postwar Polish anti-Semitism. Wincenty Bednarczuk, who spent the war abroad, framed this dilemma clearly in an article he wrote following the Kraków pogrom: “The events in Kraków were like a bursting boil, which we had felt filling up since we returned to the fatherland [Poland]. When as émigrés we got the first news about the horrible massacre of Jews perpetrated by the Nazis, still unsure whether the information was exaggerated, we asked with trepidation: how did the Poles respond? . . . We hypothesized that the frightening tragedy of the Polish Jews would cure the Poles of anti-Semitism. It cannot be any other way, we thought, but that the sight of massacred children and old people must evoke a response of compassion and help. The common fate suffered under the occupation must somehow reconcile them. But we didn’t know human nature. . . . It turned out that our notions about mankind were naïve. The country surprised us.”

One year later, after the Kielce pogrom, the most eminent representative of humanistic sociology in Poland and a public intellectual par excellence, Stanisław Ossowski, wrote a long piece in Kueśnica, carefully laying out the multiple aspects and factors that determined shifting Polish attitudes toward the Jews.

Let us imagine that in 1939 somebody predicted the inconceivable destruction of the Jewish population in Poland during 1940–1944, as well as the political and economic changes that took place in Poland and in Europe after the war. Let us imagine that given those assumptions we were asked to deduce what the attitudes of the Polish population would be toward the remnants of the Jews in 1945 and 1946.

Simple human compassion, in view of the terrible sufferings
of the murdered masses and the horror of the extermination camps; hatred of a common enemy; blood jointly shed on numerous occasions; rejection of the ideology propagated by the defeated occupier; a sense of justice, calling for some satisfaction for the survivors, satisfaction at least in the form of simple human goodwill; and the radical numerical decline of the Jewish population, eliminating the economic bases of prewar anti-Semitism—these would be arguments sufficing, probably, to lead one to conclude that in postwar Poland anti-Semitism as a social phenomenon would be an impossibility.

But someone more insightful, or more cynical, or more disputatious, or better informed about historical precedents could have reminded us even then that compassion is not the only imaginable response to misfortune suffered by other people. That those whom fate has destined for annihilation easily can appear disgusting to others, and be removed beyond the pale of human relations. . . . We could be reminded that if one person’s disaster benefits somebody else, an urge appears to persuade oneself and others that that disaster was morally justified, and it could be pointed out that this is exactly the situation of today’s proprietors of formerly Jewish shops, or those who felt previously threatened by Jewish competition.

There was a political motive that could be added after the war, writes Ossowski: the well-entrenched habit of associating left-wing politics with Jewish influences. Anti-Semitism could then be imagined as merely an expression of political protest against the current regime. “With foresight one could have predicted postwar anti-Semitism. But only a real cynic or psychopathic misanthrope could have foreseen that in liberated Poland a tendency to continue Hitlerite mass murder would survive. For this murder is something different than barbaric struggle, as it targets not only grown-up men but also the newborn and the elderly.”28

Intellectuals were flabbergasted by the moral condition of a Polish society that allowed for postwar anti-Semitism. Jerzy Andrzejewski, one of the most eminent epic writers of postwar Poland, published a long essay in Odrodzenie (July 7, 1946) entitled “The Question of Polish Anti-Semitism.” It must have been written and typeset before the Kielce pogrom as it came out dated only three days afterward and didn’t mention the events at all.

“I wish I could honestly say,” writes Andrzejewski, “[that] yes, anti-
Semitism in Poland is disappearing. . . . Unfortunately, after many years of thinking about this matter as an open, infected wound festering within our organism, witnessing all that happened in Poland before and during the war, and what is taking place at present; listening to people from various milieux and of different levels of intelligence, noticing their often unconscious gestures and reactions, observing how certain gestures and reactions automatically follow, I am not able to conclude, I cannot conclude, anything else but that the Polish nation in all its strata and across all intellectual levels, from the highest all the way down to the lowest, was and remains after the war anti-Semitic.  

Having made this deeply troubling (to themselves, first of all) determination, the nation’s most brilliant intellectuals struggled valiantly to explain the phenomenon. One theme recurred in their writings—the presence of an ill-defined stratum of persons who gained material advantages as a result of Jewish catastrophe. Under the pen of marxisant authors, these are portrayed as a residuum of the petty bourgeoisie, stallkeepers in bazaars, worthy only of contempt. The metaphor of the marketplace looms large in characterizations of miscreants—“peddlers and tradesmen”—strangely reminding one of the idiom used before the war for derogatory characterizations of the Jews.  

But the matter could not be disposed of so easily, because the shameful sentiment was not limited to a narrow, marginal group in society. Wyka, Andrzejewski, Ossowski, Jastrun, and others said as much in their alarming texts. One reads dramatic warnings: “Anti-Semitism is no longer an economic issue, it is no longer a political issue either . . . it is a moral problem pure and simple. Today it is not a question of saving the Jews from misery and death, it is a problem of saving the Poles from moral misery and spiritual death.”  

Wrote Andrzejewski: “Mankind—let us use this big word—fought six years for freedom and justice and for human dignity in the cruelest combats in history, and woe to those nations who are not able to draw appropriate conclusions from that experience. Hatred, contempt, and racial prejudice certainly could not count among such conclusions.” He closes his long article, which *Odrodzenie* ran in two consecutive issues, with the following words: “I say this: without respect for a human being, without serious reflection about humanity, without solidarity with the truths for which millions sacrificed their lives—in view of the past few years’ experiences, no nation can be worthy of respect.”  

After Kielce, Polish intellectuals signed dramatic letters of protest
and public appeals expressing their sense of the tragedy that had taken place and that should not have done so, if Poland’s recent history had been what they thought it was. Several moving texts were published in cultural weeklies signed by dozens upon dozens of eminent intellectuals—writers, actors, journalists, academics, composers. The cause transcended ideological differences: a protest letter by Catholic intellectuals, originally published in Tygodnik Powszechny (July 28, 1946), was reprinted in the pages of its fierce ideological opponent Kucznica (August 12, 1946). The Polish Union of Writers put out a powerfully worded statement and members of the organization who had somehow missed the first opportunity to sign—it was midsummer and many were on vacation—kept sending individual letters asking to add their names to the list.33

Deeply pained reflections and tough words coming from those who were the country’s maîtres à penser—every schoolchild in Poland, certainly every student of the humanities, would have been familiar with at least some of their works—make all the difference for Poles today, and can be cherished as a measure of moral sensitivity which has not been dulled among the country’s spiritual elite. But at the time they went unheeded, and their calls for vigorously combating anti-Semitism fell on deaf ears, very much like the warnings Jan Karski delivered to the Polish government-in-exile in 1940, when he reported that anti-Jewish measures of the Nazi occupiers resonated well with large segments of the Polish society.34

*An example of spectacular “deafness” and of disregard for the corrupting influence of anti-Semitic violence may be found in the memoirs of none other than Stanisław Mikolajczyk. An eminent personality, the public symbol of Polish freedom trampled on after the war by the Communists, a man who fled the country over a year after the Kielce pogrom and was in a position to inform himself fully in the meantime, wrote a truly outstanding page and a half of nonsense about the day’s events in his book The Rape of Poland, published in English in 1948. His confabulations are all the more remarkable since at exactly the same time, also in 1948, the former American ambassador to Poland, Arthur Bliss Lane (with whom Mikolajczyk was in frequent contact as leader of the opposition party, whose fate the West monitored as a litmus test of Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe), wrote a balanced and well-informed account of the Kielce pogrom (Bliss Lane, I Saw Poland, pp. 246–51).

Mikolajczyk begins his account of the pogrom in Kielce with a little fib about a camel in Częstochowa. “In Częstochowa people were told that a camel—part of the Red Army’s livestock—would be displayed in the marketplace. When the people had gathered to view the animal, Security Police raced through the crowd shouting, ‘The Jews are killing our people!’ A riot was narrowly averted by a quick-thinking priest who stood up and branded the shouting as a provocation.

*In Kielce, Major Sobczynski, the Security Police officer . . . now ordered foundry workers to gather in the marketplace at a certain time, for a meeting. His plan was to point to a Jewish boardinghouse that fronted on the marketplace and to have his operatives shout that Polish children were being killed there. Major Sobczynski hoped to produce a rush on
How the Catholic Clergy Reacted to the Pogrom

Jews had been frightened by persistent anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish violence in Poland long before Kielce. It was clear to secular and religious Jewish community leaders that the key, or one of the keys in any case, to ending the lurking danger was held by the Catholic clergy, who exercised spiritual authority over the Polish population. Cardinal August Hlond, the titular head of the Polish episcopate as primate of Poland, was approached at least twice before the Kielce pogrom with a request that he issue a pastoral letter or a statement condemning anti-Semitism and explaining that accusations of ritual murder were false. When, one week after the pogrom, nine foreign journalists appeared at Hlond’s residence for a scheduled interview and asked why he had not earlier published such a pastoral letter despite urgent pleas from various Jewish personalities, the cardinal answered: “I investigated the facts and did not discover sufficient grounds to publish such a letter. Now the situation has changed, but I must first consult my bishops.”

the building, in which case the army would open fire on the crowd. This would add to the terror of the times.

“But the Communists had forgotten to remove the telephone from the boardinghouse. A rabbi, informed that a mob was being provoked to attack the place, phoned the local army headquarters to appeal for protection. Troops soon arrived under the command of a Russian colonel. The colonel, who was, of course, familiar with the entire plot, was surprised to see that the crowd on which his men were scheduled to fire had not as yet gathered. He had to change his plans. Lacking all pity, he sent his men against the boardinghouse, killing forty-one of its Jewish occupants and wounding forty others. In the hope of arousing the impending crowd to an overt act against the army he ordered the dead thrown into the streets. Any movement of the crowd would have been his cue to shoot into the gathering. The workers, however, crossed everybody up by escaping while en route to the scene of their intended slaughter” (Mikołajczyk, The Rape of Poland, p. 167). The most benign interpretation one could put on this would be that someone had pulled Mikołajczyk’s leg and the former prime minister of Poland was so uninterested in the subject that he put the story on paper without bothering to check any of his facts. One should also note that a 1972 reprint of Mikołajczyk’s book (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press) repeats this entire passage verbatim.

‘Dr. David Kahane, the chief rabbi of the Polish army, later complained to S. L. Shneiderman that one of the attempts was brushed off: “the cardinal returned the memorandum to us through his secretary and refused to see us.” However, Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, president of the American Federation of Polish Jews, was received by the primate “on June 3, 1946, one month before the Kielce pogrom. Dr. Tenenbaum had made an extensive trip throughout Poland and informed the cardinal that more than one thousand Jews had been murdered since the liberation of Poland. As the Polish Jewish leaders had done before him, Dr. Tenenbaum appealed to the cardinal to publish a pastoral letter dealing with the Jewish
Hlond did consult his bishops, but as a result he did not publish any pastoral letter on the Kielce pogrom, anti-Semitism, or ritual murder. With one notable and very important exception, no Catholic hierarchy issued a statement decisively and unequivocally addressing these matters after Kielce. Only the bishop of Częstochowa, Teodor Kubina, spoke forcefully and unambiguously against anti-Semitism and the lie of ritual murder, and he was promptly reprimanded by fellow bishops for having done so.

Direct involvement of Catholic clergy in quelling the Kielce pogrom was insignificant. Sometime between 11 A.M. and noon on July 4, two priests, Jan Danielewicz and the rector of the Kielce cathedral, Roman Zelek, tried to approach the building on Planty 7 but were stopped at a military checkpoint. Upon seeing the crowd, the commotion, and hearing gunfire they nevertheless insisted on talking with a superior officer. A lieutenant showed up, accompanied by two civilians, to tell them that "the situation is under control" and that soldiers were under orders "not to allow civilians into the area."36 So they turned around and went back where they came from, only to return at 2:30 P.M. in the company of three more clergymen. "It was ascertained on the spot," Meducki quotes from their report, "that there weren't any gatherings on Planty Street, question. The cardinal merely promised to study the reports" (S. L. Shneiderman, Between Fear and Hope, p. 111).

In his memoirs, published in Israel in 1981, Dr. Kahane gives a different, milder, and very interesting version of the encounter with Hlond. Before Passover, or Easter, of 1946, leaflets were circulating in many parts of Poland warning the population to watch over the children, because they had lately been disappearing. The Jewish Religious Association got deeply worried, and in the context of increasingly frequent and intense assaults against Jews decided to contact Hlond with a request that he make a calming statement. A secretary of the association, Michal Zylberger, went in the middle of May to Hlond's residence to set up a meeting at which a Jewish delegation could acquaint the cardinal with the situation and present the formal request.

The meeting was unproductive. Hlond procrastinated and did not want to commit to a specific date for the visit, arguing that he was old and indisposed. But he was extremely cordial. As Zylberger later recounted the conversation to Kahane, Hlond expressed his deepest sorrow over murders of Jews committed after the war, adding that those who killed Jews under the pretext that they were fighting Communism were deeply mistaken and wrong. As a Pole and a Catholic, he condemned these acts of thoughtless cruelty, he said. When Kahane compared Hlond's statement during the press conference with the conversation that Zylberger reported, he was very surprised (David Kahane, Aharei Hamabul, pp. 60--69).

Conceivably, because of his advanced age and poor health, Hlond was no longer in charge of official business. Younger bishops and his entourage drafted whatever pronouncements he issued to the outside world. Catholic of the old school as he was, this new, ruthless, and aggressive anti-Semitism was probably not much to his taste, but he was no longer running the show.
and that people on Sienkiewicz and Piotrkowska Streets were standing in small groups and were calm." As we know, for instance from the visit to this place by foreign journalists the next day, the whole area was splattered with blood and littered with pogrom debris, while pogrom activities were continuing all over town.

The earliest statement issued in the aftermath of the pogrom by a church official was drafted jointly one day after the events by Voivode Wiliński and a priest representing Bishop Kaczmarek of Kielce. We already know one of its memorable sentences, namely that "people [or "human beings"] were not shot at" in Kielce. In addition, the statement contains a declaration that the Christian ethic does not permit murder and favors religious tolerance, and it summarizes the substance of the day's events in a two-sentence-long hyperbole: "Certain quarters have misled the local population and used it for base purposes, as a result numerous victims fell. Blood stained Kielce's pavements."

Who had killed whom on that day, one cannot tell from this declaration. As for the word "Jew," it appears only once in the text, in the following context: "According to materials already assembled by investigatory authorities there was no murder of Polish children by the Jewish population," thus tentatively exonerating the Jews of ritual murder on this particular occasion.

On Saturday, July 6, the first church document was issued by the Kielce diocese. All the priests in Kielce were supposed to read it the next day "without commentary" during mass. On July 4, Kielce was "the site of a bloody drama," the document informs us, with events quickly following one another "like an avalanche." The Kielce diocese declined to comment in the statement on either "the background," the "immediate causes," or "what actually happened" (because it lacked "exact knowledge"), but felt compelled "to state nevertheless that a misfortune took place, especially in that it [emphasis mine] all happened in plain sight of youth and underage children. Because of this, no Catholic can refrain from expressing real and sincere regrets at such tragic and deplorable events." The statement ends with an appeal for "calm" addressed to the "Catholic population in the city of Kielce."

Hlond referred sympathetically to their report; see below.

It was never published but is part of the record quoted by scholars and invoked by church officials as well as one of its authors in an autobiography written four decades later. I have already quoted some excerpts that were published in the collection edited by Meducki. Cardinal Hlond also mentioned it in his statement of July 11 (see Meducki, Antytydowskie, vol. II, p. 118).
Someone, somewhere, must have concluded that something important was missing from a declaration that did not even acknowledge that the “deplorable” “it” that took place was murder. So on July 11, a second, somewhat longer statement was issued by the Kielce diocese, again to be read during the coming Sunday mass “without commentary.” It began with a preamble condemning murder as such and ended with an appeal for calm and an admonition that “no Catholic should allow anybody to deceive and push him toward committing such deeds.” The key message repeated almost verbatim from the previous statement identifies as a particularly aggravating circumstance that young people had witnessed what happened.40

This may have been rhetorically an improvement over the earlier formulation, and Tygodnik Powszechny duly published the text in its next issue, even though one still couldn’t tell what happened in Kielce—who killed whom and under what circumstances. As a result of such equivocations, the only concretely named and identified victims in church-drafted texts were “youth and underage children” who had witnessed we-don’t-know-what.*

At this point Cardinal Hlond issued his statement during a meeting with foreign correspondents on July 11. Its content, enumerated in five points, may be briefly summarized as follows: the Catholic church opposes all murder, irrespective of where it takes place or who the perpetrators or the victims are. The primate opined that “the miserable and deplorable events in Kielce cannot be attributed to racism”—which probably should be understood as a denial that an anti-Jewish pogrom had taken place. Whatever the intended meaning of this passage, one cannot find any indication in the text of the statement that the murder victims in the day-long violence in Kielce were Jewish. Cardinal Hlond also stated that “the Catholic clergy in Kielce fulfilled its obligations.” His fourth and most important point offers an interpretation of the events cast in a historical rather than theological perspective. "Numerous

*Jarring as this is in its awkward insensitivity to the real victims of the pogrom, it was also misleading. The Kielce clergy knew firsthand that “youth and underage children” did not just watch what happened, as scouts (and undoubtedly many of their peers not wearing scout uniforms that day) joined their elders and actively took part in the pogrom.

A careful reader will note a slighty polemical turn of phrase in Hlond’s declaration that murder is deplorable “also in Poland,” and “no matter whether Poles or Jews are being killed, in Kielce or anywhere else in the Polish Republic.”

*As evidence, the cardinal mentioned two visits by Kielce priests “to where the events took place” (we know the particulars of these visits already), and statements (with which we are also already familiar) drafted earlier by Kielce’s clergy.
Jews in Poland owe their lives to Poles and Polish priests,” Cardinal Hlond begins, truly. Then he continues: “and it is Jews, now occupying leading positions within state institutions and bent on imposing a kind of regime which is rejected by the majority of the nation, who are to a large extent responsible for the deterioration of this good relationship. It is a pernicious game, which produces dangerous tensions. In regrettable armed confrontations on the front of political struggles in Poland, some Jews unfortunately perish, but the number of Poles perishing is incomparably greater.” In point five of his statement, Cardinal Hlond declared that he was not an anti-Semite.41

Even though the cardinal did not state things directly but preferred to put them in oblique generalities, he delivered a blunt and unequivocal opinion about the events of July 4, 1946: whatever happened on that day in Kielce was an episode of “armed . . . political struggle” against a regime that was rejected by a majority of the nation, and to the extent that there were Jewish victims they had only themselves to blame. In any case, the real victims of present-day struggles in Poland were the Poles.

In general outline, this would become the boilerplate position of the Polish Catholic church, and as church dignitaries were approached to address the issue, they followed the line laid down by Cardinal Hlond or remained silent.42 Sapieha never broke his silence on the issue of the Kielce pogrom. A French attempt to get him to make a statement condemning the pogrom had failed. Nor did the British ambassador in Poland, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, succeed in obtaining an interview with Sapieha; he spoke with his chancellor, Stefan Mazanek, instead.43

“A meeting of Polish bishops is to be held at Częstochowa on September 5 and thereafter a Pastoral letter will be issued,” Cavendish-Bentinck cabled London on August 29.

“When S. L. Shneiderman tried to interview Kraków’s metropolitan, Cardinal Adam Sapieha, on the subject of the Kielce pogrom he was received instead by the cardinal’s chancellor, Stefan Mazanek. Shneiderman came out of the meeting full of respect for the cardinal, who had maintained dignity and decorum throughout the German occupation. He also appreciated that Sapieha kept under his wing Tygodnik Powszechny, a forum for one of Poland’s enlightened intellectual milieux. But he heard the same story from Mazanek about the pogrom with which we are already familiar: ‘express[ing] deep regret over the tragic event, but also repeat[ing] the familiar leitmotif of the excessive number of Jews in the government. But the chancellor touched his remark in a tone of friendly advice to the Jews rather than of reproach, as was the case with Cardinal Hlond . . . I had left the palace with the feeling that out of this very place might come the just words that would help to appease the flame of blind hatred now raging against the Jews. But the proud and stubborn Sapieha keeps silent’ (Shneiderman, Between Fear and Hope, pp. 277, 282).
I urged that this letter should contain a condemnation of anti-Semitism or at least of racial hatred, and I understand that the inclusion of some allusion to anti-Semitism has been suggested. However any such allusion will be in a guarded form so that it cannot be interpreted as a repudiation of the interview given by Cardinal Hlond to foreign press correspondents here which is said to have been misinterpreted and twisted. Moreover I was told that owing to deep anti-Semitic feeling in Poland the bishops fear that an open condemnation of anti-Semitism might weaken the Church's influence. This I do not believe, and I regard it as an excuse for evading condemnation of anti-Semitism in strong terms. I fear that the Polish clergy are fundamentally anti-Semitic.43

The British were anxious to stem the tide of anti-Semitism in Poland: it was causing panic among the Jews, who were fleeing westward in large numbers, filling Allied DP camps in Germany. For many, the camps were but a brief stopover on the way to Palestine. The resulting illegal Jewish immigration caused enormous difficulties for British mandatory authorities, and in 1946 they were waging a multipronged campaign to ensure that Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe were repatriated to, and/or stayed put in, their countries of origin. Hence the British ambassador's pleas for a statement condemning anti-Semitism.

But Shneiderman's hope and Cavendish-Bentinck's expectation that Sapiela might publicly condemn anti-Semitism and the hoax of ritual murder were misplaced. Sapiela shared his colleagues' dislike of Jews. A month before the Kielce pogrom, he had received a group of Polish and French Catholic intellectuals and, as writer Tadeusz Breza wrote to Zofia Nalkowska, "the visit with the cardinal turned out to be an awful experience. He seemed a ruthless and evil person, and an anti-Semite (Reverend Glasberg to Sapieha: '60,000 Jews remain in Poland.' Sapieha: 'Well, well, you should add one more zero, father')."44 Emmanuel Mounier, whose trip to Poland in 1946 occasioned the Catholic intellectuals' visit

43 "In late May or early June, a group of French Catholic intellectuals, including Emmanuel Mounier, visited Poland and was received in Krakow by the cardinal. Tadeusz Breza described the meeting to Zofia Nalkowska, a preeminent writer and memoirist of this period. His letter is dated June 10, 1946. In contrast to Sapiela's "ill-disposed and dismissive" attitude, Breza wrote, "the local progressive Catholics were extraordinarily courteous and dignified: Zagorski, Natanson, Turowicz, Morstin-Starowieska, etc." All the "progressive Catholics" Breza names here were either members of the editorial board or contributors to Tygodnik Powszechny (Zofia Nalkowska, Dzienniki VI, p. 257).
with Sapieha, was equally baffled by an “anti-Semitism so vivid among even the highest ranking Catholics, as if extermination of the Jews had never happened.”

While the silence of the Polish Catholic church resounds as an indictment in view of the scope and significance of tragic events in Kielce, it was worse when churchmen spoke up and openly revealed what they thought on the matter. “Bishop Bienie[ł]k, Auxiliary Bishop of Upper Silesia, astonished me yesterday,” the British ambassador cabled the Foreign Office at the end of August, “by stating that there was some proof that the child whose alleged maltreatment by Jews had provoked the Kielce pogrom, had in fact been maltreated, and that the Jews had taken blood from his arm. If a bishop is prepared to believe this, it is not surprising that the uneducated Poles do so too. I am sending a copy of this letter to the Holy See.” The Polish clergy was so blatantly anti-Semitic that the Holy See, Cavendish-Bentinck suggested, should be enlisted to condemn anti-Semitism with a view to creating “a counterbalance [to] the innate feeling of the Polish bishops.”

It was a rather naïve suggestion on the part of the British diplomat, for the Vatican was being fed information about the situation in Poland through church channels and had no reason or intention to speak on behalf of the Jews. This became evident when Sir Francis D’Arcy Osborne, Michael R. Marrus, in his unpublished manuscript, gives an account of another great French Catholic intellectual, Jacques Maritain, who was then French ambassador to the Holy See, and his appeal to Pope Pius XII in light of the Kielce pogrom to speak up against anti-Semitism, pleading for a solemn declaration denouncing the great scourge of antisemitism in the context of the Nazis’ destruction of European Jewry and the widespread complicity of Catholics in those events. Maritain’s interlocutor in the exchange . . . was his old friend Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini [the future Pope Paul VI] . . . one of the very closest aides of Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII . . . Some fifteen years younger than Maritain, Montini considered the French philosopher his teacher. For many years, the newly installed diplomat reminded Montini, Maritain had been aware of the most savage hatred directed against “Israel.” Nazism had simply carried the ancient campaign to new levels of atrocity. “During the [recent] war six million Jews have been liquidated,” he wrote, “thousands of Jewish children have been massacred, thousands of others torn from their families and stripped of their identity . . . Nazism proclaimed the necessity of wiping the Jews off the face of the earth (the only people that it wanted to exterminate as a people)” [emphases in original]. Maritain accepted that during the war, “for reasons of prudence and a higher good, and in order not to make persecution even worse, and so as not to create insurmountable obstacles in the way of the rescue that he was pursuing, the Holy Father had abstained from speaking directly to the Jews and from calling the solemn and direct attention of the whole world to the iniquitous drama that was unfolding. But now that Nazism has been defeated, and that the circumstances have changed,” he asked,
The British ambassador to the Holy See, conveyed to the Foreign Office the content of his conversation with the Vatican’s under secretary of state, Domenico Tardini. This high functionary of the Curia informed the British diplomat that “the Russians have recently sent into Poland nearly half a million Bolshevised Jews, many of them Russian, who are expected to promote Bolshevisation of Poland”—a piece of news which Cavendish-Bentinck dismissed with characteristic understatement as a “great exaggeration.”

So, not surprisingly, a long telegram from Ambassador Osborne entitled “Facts about Kielce” and dated September 12, 1946, gave a litany of Jewish mischief as a description of the pogrom. Again we hear about “Russian Jews” and the “mysterious vanishing of Christian children” after these Jews began to arrive in Poland; about the callousness of the authorities who took no steps to search for the missing; and about the population’s “tacit suspicions directed towards the large establishment given by the Government to the Russian Jews and situated in the street

“could it not be permitted, and that is the reason for this letter, to transmit to His Holiness the appeal of so many anguished souls, and to beg him to make his voice heard.” Four days after writing to Montini, on July 16, Maritain had an audience with the Pope. Apparently informed of his [the French] ambassador’s request, Pius chose not to act.

[Just as Maritain was pursuing his appeal on behalf of the Jews he was learning of new outbursts of antisemitism in Eastern Europe, culminating in the atrocious outburst of communal violence in the Polish town of Kielce, on July 4, 1946. The western press reported these events, together with shocking loss of Jewish life, accusations of ritual murder and the complicity of Polish bishops, immediately before Maritain’s letter to Montini on July 12. Le Monde relayed the story on July 7 and 8, and The New York Times on the 11th. On July 16, the day he saw the Pope, Maritain received an appeal from the Jewish Labor Committee in New York deploiring the silence of the Catholic church and appealing to him to denounce the atrocities. Maritain responded sympathetically three days later, on the 19th. That day, with the dreadful events in Poland much on his mind, Maritain saw Montini and once again gave vent to his frustration, as he recorded in his diary: “Visit to Montini. I speak to him of Jews and antisemitism. The Holy Father never even named them [emphasis in original]. Catholic conscience is poisoned, something has to be done. Article in the O[sservatore] R[oman]o of yesterday on the pretext of Kielce in which the Kielce pogrom is declared to be non-racial!” [sic; emphasis in original]


“One may add for good measure that the British ambassador’s blunt diagnosis would have been confirmed in extenso by the Polish wartime ambassador to the USSR, Professor Stanisław Kot, who in his dispatch to London of January 5, 1942, wrote: ‘[The Jews] sense of the humiliation and victimization they suffered, despite their sympathy for Russia, is so great that it has generated resentment, contempt, even hatred for Russia. Their attitude
called Planty." There followed the bloodcurdling story of "Enrico Baszlozyk" and his imprisonment in the nonexistent cellar. And then a description of a literal battle waged against the Jews: "An officer and a group of militiamen arrived at the Centre. They found the doors closed. At orders to open they were greeted with insults by the Jews. The doors were forced and the militia were received with gunfire. The officer was killed and some men wounded. The militia then proceeded to attack the interior of the house. A battle between militia and Jews ensued, the Jews being well-armed even to hand grenades, which caused victims among the militia. . . . How many Jews were killed? How many soldiers fell in the fight against the Jews? The Authorities state that 43 Jews died, but the names of only 11 are given." A lengthy and detailed laudatio for the intervention of the Kielce clergy is followed by this punch line: "It was thus the clergy and the clergy alone which, in these critical days from the fifth to the tenth of July, managed to maintain calm among the population, which was highly excited and, it would seem, perniciously stirred by sinister agents provocateurs of the U.B. . . . Meanwhile the U.B. has done everything to misrepresent the character and nature of the facts. The Press never tired of repeating that the Jews of Kielce were victims of a lingering racialism in Poland."48

Confidential Report from the Bishop of Kielce

All this information was supplied to the Holy See via Polish church channels. And there was more to come, as it is unlikely that by September 12 (the date of Osborne’s dispatch) the Vatican had already absorbed a confidential report on the Kielce pogrom prepared by a commission set up in secret by Kielce’s bishop, Czesław Kaczmarek. A group of priests headed by the Reverend Dr. Mieczysław Zywczynski from Płock (who was later appointed to a chair of history at the Catholic University in Lublin), assisted by some lawyers from Kielce, spent over a month draf—

toward Russia today is far sharper and more determined than among ethnic Poles, who had no illusions that Russia would treat them in a friendly manner. So the Polish–Soviet pact and recognition of Polish statehood evoked loud expressions of attachment to the Polish state even among those Jews who were most anti-Polish before. They express allegiance to Polish identity and a desire to return at all costs to Poland and their small towns in the borderlands. . . . Under no condition do the Jews want to remain subjected to Russian rule ["Po prostu Żydzi za żadną cenę nie chcą być pod rosyjskim panowaniem"]. Local authorities have a good reading of these sentiments and this is, I believe, one of the main reasons for not letting the Jews out of the USSR" (Stanisław Kot, Listy z Rosji do gen. Sikorskiego, p. 252).
ing the eighteen-page document, which was handed by Bishop Kaczmarek to the U.S. ambassador in Poland, Arthur Bliss Lane, on September 1, 1946."

The report of Bishop Kaczmarek’s commission was conceived as a counterweight to the official version of the Kielce events propagated by the government. It offers, therefore, both a description of what had happened and a polemic. This was an entirely understandable approach to take for a church engaged in a tough political struggle with Communist authorities. Official propaganda used the occasion to blame what had happened on the church and on so-called reactionary political milieus. The church hierarchy was reproached for its refusal to stem the tide of anti-Semitism, as it was unwilling to issue an outright condemnation of anti-Jewish violence or to speak up against the fraudulence of ritual murder claims, which were circulating widely.

Thus, the report issued by Kaczmarek’s commission in the first place takes the government’s politicized version of the story to task and shows that the trial held in the immediate aftermath of the pogrom was a travesty of justice. Not only were the defendants’ rights violated, but no examination of how the police, the military, and the Security Service had acted throughout the day was allowed during judicial proceedings. The report shows that no proof was offered in support of official claims blaming the violence in Kielce on underground organizations and on some alleged conspiracy by the regime’s political opponents. In fact, it was “the authorities,” wrote the authors of the report, who had carried out most of the killings—the police, the military, and workers from a big enterprise (in the second murder wave at Plantly Street), many of whom

"The content of Osborne’s dispatch follows in almost every detail a long memorandum describing the events drafted by the rector of the Kielce cathedral. Reverend Zelek was an eyewitness to the events, participated in conferences with local authorities afterward, and wrote his account several days later (he mentions the funeral of pogrom victims in the document). He was also a member of the commission that drafted the Kaczmarek report. His eyewitness memorandum may have been passed along to the Vatican right away.

Church documents concerning the pogrom, including Zelek’s memorandum, were confiscated by the Security Service on January 12, 1952, during a search of the Kielce cathedral. Bishop Kaczmarek’s report of September 1, 1946, was not among these documents. It surfaced in U.S. diplomatic archives only in the 1990s. For extensive excerpts of Zelek’s memorandum, see Cała i Datner-Śpiewak, eds., Dzieje Żydów, pp. 53–57. Kaczmarek’s memorandum has been published by John Mięciel, "Kościół katolicki i pogrom kielecki," Niepodległość, XXV (1992), pp. 134–72. On the workings of the commission set up by Bishop Kaczmarek to draft the report, see Jan Śledzianowski, Pytania nad pogromem kieleckim, p. 173. Osborne’s memorandum most likely predates the delivery of Kaczmarek’s report to the Vatican (see Mięciel, "Kościół," p. 150)."
undoubtedly were Communist Party members. Instead of blaming the regime’s opponents, the report points out with sarcasm, the authorities should explain how the “pogrom” could go on for an entire day in the capital of a voivodeship where large detachments of the police, the army, and the Security Service were available on the spot.

These are all good points and valid questions, which should have been raised; the commission deserves credit for them. Yet in the end, the answers suggested to those well-taken questions, and the description of the day’s events in which these answers are grounded, enlighten today’s historian more about the mentality of the Catholic hierarchy in Poland at the time than about what actually happened in Kielce on July 4, 1946.

The commission began by raising a very general issue: how was one to account for the extraordinary cruelty of the crowd in Kielce? The answer provided goes to the heart of the commission’s argument. Hatred is the self-evident explanation: “There can be only one answer,” Bishop Kaczmarek’s commission stipulates, “the crowd hated the Jews.” But why, since Poles are not particularly sadistically inclined? Furthermore, “after the massive killings of Jews perpetrated by the Nazis in 1943, neither in Poland generally nor in Kielce did people show hostility toward the Jews, or anti-Semitism. Everybody felt compassion for Jews, even their greatest enemies. Many Jews were saved by Poles. After all, without Polish help not even one would have survived. They were saved even though punishment for assisting Jews was harsh, including the penalty of death. It was so in 1944, and in the beginning of 1945.”

The seamless mixing of fact and fiction makes it difficult for a casual reader to sort out these claims. But the false premise being established—of allegedly universal Polish compassion, sympathy, and assistance extended across the board to Jews during the war—is crucial in rendering the rest of the argument plausible. For if Polish attitudes toward the Jews were so friendly and supportive until the end of the German occupation, they must have changed under the impact of what came afterward. The reason for that change is named forthwith and without equivocation: “After Soviet armies entered Poland, and the Lublin government ex-

“In the report, the word “pogrom” appears in inverted commas (Miczgiel, “Kościół,” p. 142).

“Many Jews were indeed saved during the war by the Poles, yet anti-Semitism and hostility toward Jews were widespread in Polish society and made helping Jews such a risky business that righteous Gentiles tried to conceal what they were doing primarily from their own neighbors; and, as we know, Jews were being killed in liberated Poland as early as 1944.”
tended its authority over the entire country, the situation radically changed. Enmity toward the Jews began; spreading fast, it engulfed large masses of the Polish society, everywhere, and that means also in Kielce. Jews are disliked, even hated on the entire territory of Poland. This is a phenomenon which cannot be denied.” Even those Poles who “belong to the ruling parties” hated the Jews, states the report, for the reason that “Jews are the main propagators of Communism in Poland, while the Polish nation does not want Communism, which is being imposed on it by force.”51

Widespread, aggressive anti-Semitism—“Jews are . . . hated”—in postwar Poland was attested to by church authorities, who were certainly competent to make the assertion, and the commission made it plain that the Jews had only themselves to blame for this state of affairs. “Every Jew has a good job or unlimited opportunities and help in industry and commerce. Ministries are full of Jews . . . everywhere they occupy choice, leading, main positions. . . . [T]hey are in charge of security police offices, and carry out arrests.” On top of everything else, they were tactless, brutal, and arrogant, and many did not speak good Polish since they came from Russia. “On the basis of the above reasons one can say that Jews are responsible for the lion’s share of the hatred that surrounds them.”52

We have barely reached the fourth of twenty-five pages, but the frame of reference is already firmly established.53 From here on, the authors merely fill in the blanks. Several of their subsequent arguments are nuanced. Some are unexpected. But, the thrust of the presentation set, it would stay on course to the end.

The commissioners’ approach to ritual murder, for instance, shows great dexterity in handling difficult material. They neither confirm nor deny the story directly, but in the end say enough to enable readers to know where the authors stand on the matter:

“The apparent contradiction of the claim that regime supporters hated Jews for introducing Communism into Poland is resolved later in the report, when we are told that the only genuine Communists in Poland were Jewish, while those Poles who supported the regime did so only out of opportunism.

Children had been disappearing in Kielce for months prior to July and the “general public” (“zaróki ogół” or broad stratum) believed that Jews were using them for ritual murder, states the commission. Even members of the intelligentsia were stirred. “Some, for example, informed this writer that Jews make blood transfusions using the children, and then murder their victims” (Miciciel, “Kościół,” p. 146). Those “facts” were reported to the police, who did nothing in the matter, thereby “reinforcing the conviction among the broad masses that Jews can do anything they wish in Poland with impunity” (ibid.). The commissioners do not offer any commentary on these revelations, and they change the subject at this point only to re-
Government propaganda, as well as the indictment in the trial held in Kielce, dismissed the story of the kidnapping as a lie. Why then, asks the commission, did the government not produce the boy at the trial to show that he had been lying? Why wasn’t he confronted with the Jew who allegedly sent him to the building on Planty 7 on an errand, only to have him abducted? If the boy was lying, this would have come out. “How did the police establish ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ that the boy was lying? Was the basement in the building inspected, and had the Jews living in the building been questioned?”

If what the boy originally said was untrue, “if indeed, the Jews had not tormented him, then someone had to order him to make up that story.” Who could have done so? It was established that the so-called reactionary underground did not provoke these events, so—and here comes the pièce de résistance—it must have been the Jews. “This may seem unlikely, even absurd, because it implies that a Jew was the main cause for the murder of Jews in Kielce. But is this indeed so absurd?” the commission’s report asks rhetorically.

Given that Jews were pressuring Great Britain for the handover of Palestine, and that they complained of being persecuted in some European countries (“Poland is one of those countries, particularly disliked especially by Russian Jews because it does not want to voluntarily accept the Communist regime being imposed upon it”), “given all the factors here invoked, it is by no means out of the question that some Jew might have persuaded Henryk Błaszczyk to tell the above-mentioned story, expecting that it would incite the crowd, already angry with Jews, to some excesses, which later could be amply exploited [‘które będzie można potem oszernie wyszukać’]. In the light of this hypothesis, the disappearance of Błaszczyk for three days becomes clear (and it does not matter if between July 1 and July 3 he was somewhere in the countryside, or in the basement at Planty 7), and [it also explains] why he was not brought as a witness during the trial. The hypothesis is also strongly confirmed by the fact

turn indirectly to ritual murder a few pages later, when they discuss what really happened to Henryk Błaszczyk.

An investigation by the Institute of National Memory revealed only one documented case of a lost child in this period. On June 7, 1946, Maria Binkowska reported to the police that her eight-year-old son, Jan, had disappeared. He came back home on July 16, claiming that he ran away because of trouble at school (GKBZpNP-IPN, p. 13). “Inexplicably, commission members didn’t seem to know that there was no basement in the building and that several surviving Jews who lived in the building had testified during the trial.
that the police did not try to prevent the crowd from murdering Jews, which could only have happened if it had orders to act in this manner."56

The bishop's commission was not constrained by facts or probabilities. It reports as "an indubitable fact" that Jews shot first into the crowd at Plancy 7, wounding scores of people. They used, the report implies, automatic weapons—"a series of shots was fired" ("oddano serię strzałów")—a statement repeated twice in consecutive paragraphs; on the second try, the Jews managed also to "kill an officer." According to witnesses, the Jews inside the house were defending themselves with grenades." "Thus the first victims during the Kielce events were the Poles."57*

But the first of two main points I want to draw out of the commission's report is its answer to the question "whether the church refused to condemn the crime in Kielce."58 The report goes back over several statements issued by church sources (and discussed earlier in this chapter) following the pogrom and wonders why the official press continues to attack the church for its putative silence about the "excesses in Kielce. The press calls simultaneously for a joint statement of the Polish episcopate condemning anti-Semitism. . . . The vast majority of the Jews in Poland eagerly proselytize Communism, work in the notorious Security Service, make arrests, torture prisoners and kill them, and for this they are disliked by society, which does not like Communism and has had enough of Gestapo-like methods. And here the church, according to the wishes of the government press, is supposed to solemnly declare that this dislike of society is unjustified, that the behavior of Jews is utterly blameless, that only Poles who dislike them are guilty. This is the real meaning of

"The report also includes a description of how soldiers and the police killed Jews inside the building ("the military, especially shared in the hatred of Jews"), and kept bringing Jews out and delivering them to "hysterical individuals" in the "mob" outside ("one could hear in the crowd people screaming: 'Long live the Polish army!'") who then "massacred" them. There were times, people who had been on the scene reported, when the whole disturbance could have been suppressed "if the security service, the police and the military were willing to really take action" (Miecz, "Kościół," p. 153). One cannot disagree with this portion of the assessment, which brought a welcome correction to the official version, where the nefarious role of the law-and-order personnel, though mentioned, was downplayed. Having so complimented the commission, however, I would be remiss if I did not reiterate that it was repeatedly carried away by its polemical animus, even in trivial but characteristic matters— as when it noted, for example, that the panel of three judges in the Kielce trial included one "with pronounced mongoloid traits, who did not look Polish, while the other two looked-Semitic" (Miecz, "Kościół," p. 157), and when it reproached the authorities for allowing foreign journalists to sit in the audience during the trial ("the Kielce events . . . wrote the authors of the report, were, after all, a crime ["wypadki kieleckie . . . były jednak zbrodnia"], which left a stain on [the reputation of] Polish society") (Miecz, "Kościół," p. 160).
what the government press wishes. . . . It seems like a request to have the church approve the system of terror currently implemented in Poland.”

This declaration portrays Jews and Communism as the selfsame and, conversely, conflates anti-Semitism with anti-Communism. To declare against anti-Semitism is therefore tantamount to supporting the Communist regime. According to this mental construct, nothing is what it seems. As the report winds down toward its “conclusions and summary” we are informed that “the analysis of events and of witness’ testimonies” demonstrates that “certain Jewish Communist milieus, in cooperation with the Security Service, which they controlled, [induced] the pogrom, which could later be trumpeted as proof that Jews should emigrate to their own country, as proof that anti-Semitism and fascism predominate in Polish society, and as proof that the church to which the killers belonged is reactionary.” Jews, in other words, are Communist and Zionist simultaneously. They support the regime and run away from it at the same time; in fact, the same Jews do both things at the same time. Such texts, to paraphrase Cavendish-Bentinck, could not have been drafted and then passed along by church authorities unless many a “Polish bishop was prepared to believe this.”

Finally, it should be pointed out that yet another future grandee of the Polish church is on record in a similar spirit. In 1946, Stefan Wyszyński was the recently installed bishop of Lublin; following a long and distinguished career, he was hailed after his death as “the primate of the millennium,” and the process of beatification began in Rome. In the files of the legal department of the Central Committee of Polish Jews we find a memorandum reporting his conversation with a delegation of Jewish leaders some two weeks after the Kielce pogrom.

Unlike the old and sickly Cardinal Hlond, who granted only a brief interview to foreign journalists, Wyszyński gave time generously to his Jewish interlocutors. He had ample opportunity to explicate his views in detail, and he directly addressed the issue of ritual murder. The Jewish delegation left a record of its failed attempt to persuade him to make a statement condemning anti-Semitism.

“The bishop did not agree with [our] assessment [of the Kielce events],” wrote the Jewish committee members.

He argued that the causes are much deeper, that they are rooted in the general dislike of Jews who take active part in the current political life. The Germans wanted to destroy the Jewish nation
because it was an advocate of Communism. . . . The bishop stresses that the horrors of the Hitlerite camps had their model in Siberian camps. They were the primary school of Hitlerite barbarism, which has its sequel also at the present time. Jews, according to the bishop, should work hard to get a state in Palestine, or some colonies in South America. . . . In Poland, Jews are not the only ones being murdered; Poles, too, suffer that fate. Many are in prisons and in camps. The bishop condemns every kind of murder from the point of view of the Christian ethic. In the specific case of Kielce, the bishop has nothing to add or expressly condemn, because the idea of condemning evil is always spread by the church.

During the discussion of how the crowd was agitated by the myth that Christian blood is necessary to make matzo, the bishop clarified that during the Beilis trial, a lot of old and new Jewish books were assembled, and the matter of blood was not definitively settled. In the end, the bishop declared that he could not issue an official statement about the Kielce events, but during a soon-to-be-held meeting of priests he would explain this matter in the spirit of calming down the faithful.61

This conversation took place almost exactly seven hundred years after Pope Innocent IV issued the first papal bull, in 1247, declaring that accusations of ritual murder against the Jews were fraudulent.62

The Response of Bishop Kubina

Among the hierarchs of the Catholic church only the bishop of Częstochowa, Teodor Kubina, spoke with a different voice—direct, informative, and categorical. His proclamation, issued on July 7, was signed jointly with the city and county officials of Częstochowa and carried special weight as it emanated from the most important site of religious pilgrimage in the country. In the very first sentence one reads that Jews had been killed in Kielce, and what a scandal this was, given the horror of the Jewish fate under the German occupation and given that the murder was

*The reference is to the trial of Mendel Beilis, who was accused of ritual murder in Kiev in 1913. The trial was reported on and widely written about at the time as a manifestation of Russia’s backwardness and the reactionary politics propagated by the czarist regime. Beilis was acquitted.
perpetrated by people who had also suffered terribly during the war. Those who committed crimes in Kielce were driven by lies and fanaticism, the declaration continues, and into the bargain they also soiled Poland’s reputation in the entire world. This crime violated fundamental principles of Christian ethics and simple decency.

We declare: all statements about ritual murders are lies. Nobody from among the Christian population in Kielce, in Częstochowa, or anywhere else has ever been harmed by Jews for ritual and religious purposes. We do not know of a single case of a Christian child abducted by Jews. All news and stories spread on this topic are either deliberately invented by criminals or come from confused people who do not know any better, and they aim to provoke a crime. Criminals and people who are confused ought to receive a fair trial or merciful pity, but they ought not to be listened to and followed by society at large. We appeal to all . . . to combat with all your strength all the attempts to organize anti-Jewish excesses. We trust that responsible citizens of Częstochowa, attached to principles of Christian morality, will not follow criminal suggestions and will not debase themselves by raising their hands against a fellow citizen only because he is of a different nationality and denomination.63

Unlike the other texts we saw earlier with their equivocal “it,” mysterious “events,” regrettable this and that, or Jews in high office, this was a straightforward statement about ritual murder, anti-Semitism, and the murdering of Jews—all of which had just been fused in an explosion of violence during the Kielce pogrom. How did Kubina’s fellow bishops react to his public stand? We can only imagine what was said in personal exchanges, but the written response was not long in coming.

In early September, during its “plenary conference, the episcopate obliged individual bishops to refrain from taking individual stands on any and all events ["wobec wszystkich bez wyjatku wydarzen"] that take place in the country in order not to create a situation similar to that which followed the events in Kielce . . . when a bishop from one diocese . . . collaborated in issuing a statement whose content and intended meaning were unacceptable to bishops from other dioceses on the grounds of fundamental intellectual and canonic principles of the Catholic church.”64 This was the “pastoral letter” that the British ambassador hoped would condemn anti-Semitism albeit “in a guarded form.” Instead it declared
that Bishop Kubina’s statement was unacceptable “on the grounds of fundamental intellectual and canonic principles of the Catholic church.”

What could Kubina’s fellow bishops object to “canonically,” except his scathing rejection of the canard of ritual murder? Intellectually, they must have objected to Kubina’s identification of Jews as victims rather than as Communists—in any case, those among them who had spoken publicly had consistently done the reverse.

Church historians writing in Poland in the 1990s endorsed the position of the Catholic episcopate criticizing Bishop Kubina’s statement. The Catholic church, they argue, which was at the time under political assault by the Communist regime, had to make sure that it spoke with one voice and that Cardinal Hlond’s position was not being undermined. Today’s historians remind us that the public rhetoric concerning anti-Semitism was at the time highly politicized, and that the episcopate could not be expected to take a stand that might be misunderstood by the general public as an endorsement for the regime. Using a sentence that could have been lifted from Bishop Kaczmarek’s commission report, historian Zenon Wrona wrote in 1991 that calling on the church to issue a condemnation of anti-Semitism was tantamount “to requesting an official endorsement by the church of the entire system of terror that the Communists had introduced in Poland.”

As if opposing Communism necessarily requires that one be an anti-Semite! The logic of such a premise hinges on accepting the identification of Communism with Jews. Otherwise, it is not clear why one could not object on moral and doctrinal grounds (rooted in Catholicism, for example) to anti-Semitism and Communism at once. And if there were reasons to fear that the general public did not appreciate the disjunction, one might simply infer that the public had not been properly enlightened on the matter by those whom it trusted to offer spiritual guidance. Bishop Kubina thought so; he tried to remedy the situation and managed to defuse mounting tension in Częstochowa by speaking directly and forcefully against the lie of ritual murder.

Cavendish-Bentinck was shocked that cannibalistic theology held such sway over the minds of the Polish clergy. Likewise, men of letters in Poland were outraged that the worn-out tale of ritual murder could still

*It was Kubina who spoke first, on July 7, so that it was Cardinal Hlond who undermined the only public statement by a Catholic bishop about the pogrom when he issued his declaration on July 11.
move people. "If Greiser"—Hitler's plenipotentiary in one area of occupied Poland, who was then on trial for his crimes—"in his last word [at the trial] had justified the extermination of the Jews as the revenge of the German nation for ritual murder, he would have been laughed off by the Germans themselves," mused Jan Rojewski in the July 22, 1946, issue of Kwiecina. "In our grandfathers' time one could hear such arguments in the Balkans; today... only in Poland."

But, as the British ambassador noted, "uneducated Poles" could hardly be blamed for holding such views if bishops were "prepared to believe this." And so we should not at all be surprised that a medieval prejudice brought people into the streets in postwar Poland on many occasions and in many different towns—in Rzeszów, in Kraków, in Kielce, in Bytom, in Białystok, in Szczecin, in Bielawa, in Otwock, in Legnica."

This is a history book, not a moral tale, but since the Catholic church's business is with the Ten Commandments, one can evaluate the deeds of its functionaries in the light of moral criteria without being inappropriately judgmental. It behooves us to note that unlike the intellectual elite of the nation, the institutional elite of the Catholic church chose to completely ignore postwar anti-Semitism in Poland.66 It did not respond even when faced with the breathtaking violence of the Kielce pogrom. Confronted with mass murder committed by people who in their own minds were defending the Catholic religion, all that the shepherds of a flock that had run amok brought themselves to do was to call for calm.

When the people of Kielce lost their way, the hierarchy of Poland's Catholic church abdicated its responsibility to offer spiritual guidance and simply coasted along. Their hands-off attitude reinforced what people already learned when men in uniforms, bringing a semblance of institutional authority, joined the crowds battering Jews in Kielce: the

"The town council of Sopot (or Zoppot), a famous spa on the seashore, took the matter seriously under consideration and passed a resolution ordering the town council's department of culture and art to organize a series of public lectures to demonstrate to the public that ritual murders did not take place. They hoped to organize these lectures in cooperation with the clergy. Then the council took paid advertisements in Dziennik Bałtycki (The Baltic Daily), Zycie Warszawy (The Life of Warsaw), and Kwiecina "in order to encourage town councils elsewhere in Poland to undertake a broad enlightening initiative, aimed at tearing our society away from the mad psychosis of anti-Semitism" ("mającej na celu wywarcie naszego społeczeństwa z obłądnej psychozy antysemityzmu") (Kwiecina, August 19, 1946). I am not sure how well this initiative caught on, but one might still have to characterize such efforts, I am afraid, as a "work in progress."
Jews were somehow at fault. Priests could not and would not condone murder, but Catholic hierarchs said that Jews were Communists and that they brought all their misfortunes upon themselves. The bishops even missed an opportunity simply to keep quiet when one of their ranks made an honorable statement. Their criticism of Bishop Kubina’s pronouncement paralleled the indignation of the Łódź and Radom factory workers, who also did not want to be identified with outright protests against the Kielce pogrom. The symbolism of officials “washing their hands” while innocent Jews were tormented to death was lost on this Catholic clergy, blinded by prejudice.

**Not Much Official Ado About the Kielce Pogrom**

Two officials from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the PPR, arrived in Kielce by midday on July 4 and were later joined by several more Central Committee “activists.” After a briefing from the bedridden Kielce voivode, the newly arrived Hilary Chelchowski and Władysław Buczyński still had time to mingle with the crowds in the streets; they then wrote a report full of scathing observations about the incompetence of the Kielce Party committee. A day after the event, an important member of the Politburo and Władysław Gomułka’s close associate and friend, Zenon Kliszko, arrived in town to assess the situation. All these actions, however, addressed the Kielce pogrom as a breakdown in local public order rather than a major issue of moral or political significance.

In hindsight, one is struck by the inattention, at the highest decision-making levels of the Party and the security apparatus, to pervasive anti-Semitism and continuing assaults on Jews. Political rhetoric and propaganda were turned on immediately after the event, of course, denouncing anti-Semitism and producing, as we saw, considerable embarrassment when workers’ meetings refused to condemn the pogrom’s perpetrators and occasional strikes broke out venting people’s anger against... the Jews. “Do you want me to send eighteen million Poles to Siberia?” the minister of public security, Radkiewicz, retorted when fac-

“The faithlessness of Polish Catholic clergy was noted by many an observer, including, recently, an esteemed philosopher and theologian, Reverend Professor Józef Tischner. “In my life,” wrote Tischner, “I have not met anyone who has lost faith after reading Marx and Lenin, yet I have met many who have lost faith after meeting with their own parish priest” (quoted from Michal Glowinski, *The Black Seasons*, p. 157).
ing the insistent entreaties by representatives of the Central Committee of Polish Jews that he counter anti-Semitism after Kielce. But in reality, Poland’s leadership had never focused attention on the Kielce pogrom itself, except in the way described earlier.

If we scrutinized the archives of the leadership of the Ministry of Public Security or searched the files of the leading bodies of the Polish Workers’ Party, we would hardly be able to tell that the Kielce pogrom ever took place. We have this on the authority of a scholar who is recognized as a most knowledgeable specialist on matters pertaining to the history of the security police for this period: “I looked over all the protocols, even though some were incomplete, from the regular meetings of the leadership of the Ministry of Public Security with chiefs of the voivodeship security offices,” said Professor Andrzej Paczkowski during a conference about the historiography of the Kielce pogrom. “The issue of the Kielce pogrom was never addressed in this forum.” As Professor Paczkowski pointed out later in the discussion, this was a busy time for the Party leadership and the security apparatus: they were hard at work falsifying the results of the June 30, 1946, referendum.

Another eminent historian, Professor Jerzy Tomaszewski, suggested that the absence of Kielce-related documents in government files was due to lack of interest. The pogrom was not an event bearing on the issue of holding on to or consolidating power. “Whether five Jews had been killed, or one hundred, either way the grip on power by the regime was not threatened by this,” Tomaszewski argued. “And therefore this was not interesting for the authorities. Other things were much more important.”

The tragic events in Kielce were described by Bolesław Bierut during a July 5 meeting of the Presidium of the National Council of the Country (KRN); there followed a report by the minister of public security. But this is the extent of documented interest in the matter at the highest echelons of power. Six weeks later, the KRN shelved a project concerning a decree to “combat anti-Semitism.” Its chief legal expert, one Itzak

“This was probably the moment when the decision to falsify the results of the referendum was made. Zambrowski, Mazur, Gomułka, Bierut were totally absorbed by the referendum. It is sufficient to peruse the notes left by Bierut: city names, numbers of voting districts, figures, pluses, minuses, time noted every quarter of an hour. All of this during the first days of July. A dozen groups of ranking voivodeship Security Service agents plus a large team of specialists led by Colonel Aron Palkin which came from Moscow, were busily filling out anew the ‘protocols of People’s Elections’ from eleven thousand electoral commissions’ (Paczkowski, in “O stanice badan,” p. 12).
Klajnerman, argued that all the requisite laws were already on the books, and that “it seems unnecessary to issue a new decree specifically devoted to combating anti-Semitism. It is not only unnecessary, but counterproductive, perhaps even harmful, as such a decree would certainly become an excellent pretext for energized agitation against the Jews and against the government. The reactionary underground will offer arguments about the privileged position of the Jews, and the government will be accused of protecting the Jews with special care.”

Needless to say Klajnerman was too small, no pun intended, to decide such an issue. During a meeting of the KRN on September 21, 1946, Adolf Berman, the Zionist younger brother of the powerful Communist leader Jakub Berman, gave a speech from which I have already quoted an important portion. Precisely in view of the Kielce pogrom, he called for the passage of a decree aimed expressly at protecting the Jews. “I believe that the moment has arrived when it is necessary to issue a special law or decree to combat anti-Semitism. The current Article 12 of the decree on special courts, in the present situation, after Kielce, is no longer sufficient. It is necessary to state in law, addressing this to the entire nation, that not only murder but also the surreptitious passing around of vicious anti-Semitic propaganda is a punishable crime; that spreading horrible lies about the snatching of children or ritual murder is a punishable crime too. Such a legislation or decree is necessary. I say it in the name of all the Jews in Poland. It is necessary to undertake politico-ideological combat with anti-Semitism among the masses, especially among some parts of the working class.”

But the legislative initiative, even though already in its final draft, was shelved—one would think inexplicably, given what had just happened in Kielce.

Upon a moment’s reflection, however, we realize that the Communists, who were running away from this issue, must have dropped the matter precisely because of what happened in Kielce. The vox populi concerning the “Jewish problem” mattered to them, and as the people had spoken loud and clear, the rulers listened. They made a mistake in organizing “spontaneous” protest meetings in the aftermath of the pogrom, but then quickly drew appropriate conclusions. By September, Jakub Berman did not have patience for his Zionist brother’s waxing sentimental over the fate of Polish Jews. The Communists would solve all such problems, and more, after they consolidated their grip on power. But in order to do so they needed to sway and cajole the masses into allegiance, not “combat” them at every turn.
The Communists were picking their fights carefully; the defense of Jews against popular anti-Semitism entailed a confrontation they preferred to avoid. The Kielce Communist Party secretary knew it at once, when he refused to address the crowd advancing at midday against the building on Planty 7 because, we remember, he "didn't want people to be saying that the PPR is a defender of the Jews."

The Taste of Matzo

People in Poland were tired and irritated in the early days of July 1946. They had just gone through an intense, rough, and humiliating patch of ideological politics. During the several weeks leading up to the "Three times yes" referendum held on June 30, Poles had been subjected to a barrage of propaganda and intimidation. And in the end they were lied to brazenly when Communist officials falsified the results to show that the people had overwhelmingly supported them.*

Security personnel were also tired. In Kielce the voivodeship police commander, Colonel Kuźnicki, had called in sick that day, and the commanding officer of the Security Service, Major Sobczyński, spent a sleepless night collecting materials while waiting for a plane to take him on the morning of July 4 to Warsaw, where he was to report on his handling of referendum-related assignments. Paradoxically, Communist Parties everywhere always took electoral politics very seriously, not as a mechanism for selection of the leadership, but as a public ritual conferring popular legitimacy upon their own rule. Hence the proverbial 99.9 percent voter turnouts and "yes" votes in elections from Cuba to Vladivostok. The "Three times yes" referendum of June 30 was the first Communist-run electoral experience inflicted on the Poles.75 If pent-up resentment was to be vented, July 4 was as good a day to act out as any.

A unique negative synergy had been at play in the time span of no more than two morning hours on July 4 in Kielce, transforming an absurd but not unusual complaint into the deadliest peacetime European pogrom of the twentieth century.* In the pogrom's opening phase, we

*The first secretary of the Communist Party, Gońulką, rhetorically linked, in his inimitable style, the referendum and the Kielce pogrom when he spoke to Party activists in Warsaw on July 7—"The Hitlerite 'nein' [meaning those who did not vote "Three times yes"] spoke immediately after the vote by organizing a Hitlerite pogrom of the Jews" (Daniel, Zyd w zielonym, p. 104).

With the exception of the Kristallnacht, of November 9 and 10, 1938, in Nazi Ger-
witnessed a breakdown of discipline: police agents acting like vigilantes; a crowd rapidly drawn to the scene and energized by the spectacle of official intervention confirming a deeply held and inflammatory prejudice; and small army detachments arriving on the scene without unified command or any clear understanding of what they were supposed to do. Put one way, the choice before policemen and soldiers was not terribly problematic: should Polish children be defended against the Jews, or should Jews be defended against irate Polish mothers and fathers? Those who had a moment to reflect experienced conflicting thoughts, like one man interviewed in 1987 by Łoziński who cringed and cried before the camera at the recollection of the abuse he had suffered from the crowd when he appeared on the scene with his military unit. And so he broke down—then, and forty years later once again, just as many of his colleagues did when the mood of the crowd and the ongoing behavior of the police promptly sucked the soldiers into attacking the Jews.

When the situation got out of hand—and it did so very rapidly—people with institutional authority felt helpless and wanted it to go away. Priests who appeared on the scene simply walked off and declared that everything had returned to normal. Police officials called on the military to intervene. Officers refused to order their soldiers to forcefully suppress the crowd. The Security Service commander, usually an energetic and decisive man, procrastinated and seemed “unusually calm.” The Party secretary refused to address the crowd, and the voivode lay incapacitated in bed after a motorcycle accident.

Yet everyone present also knew that there would be a tomorrow. A high-powered investigative team from Warsaw’s Ministry of Public Security got to work that very evening. Scores of policemen, soldiers, and security personnel were placed under arrest. Party Secretary Kalinowski was dismissed. The officers responsible for law enforcement, Sobczyński, Gwiazdowicz, and Kuźnicki, were jailed and later put on trial. What amounted to a kangaroo court—given the speed with which it proceeded and how quickly its sentences of death were carried out—dealt immedia-

many. But Kristallnacht, where close to one hundred Jews were killed in Nazi-instigated anti-Jewish riots throughout Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland, was less a “pogrom” than a government action carried out by unorthodox means. Still, if one takes into account also the number of Jews killed all around Kielce on July 4, the total murdered may have topped eighty.
ately with one dozen direct participants of the pogrom, condemning nine of them to execution.*

But the energy of those empowered to assess responsibility for the breach of law and order quickly dissipated. None of the superior military officers present on the scene was ever court-martialed. Of the three main protagonists, Gwiazdowicz, Sobczyński, and Kuźnicki, only the latter received even a slap on the wrist: a one-year sentence. The other two were acquitted and went on to successful careers in the service of the regime. After the first Kielce trial with its nine death sentences, a number of rank-and-file militiamen, soldiers, and junior officers were also tried, as well as a handful of civilians. Many were acquitted, the others given prison terms of varying length; one soldier was sentenced to life in prison. It is difficult to assess the full scale of military trials, as these records were destroyed in 1989. Altogether, perhaps as many as sixty people were tried for their involvement in the Kielce pogrom, and half of them were found guilty.77

Coincidence of time, circumstance, incompetence of local officials, and sheer bad luck proved lethal to several dozen Jews in Kielce and the vicinity. But as Krystyna Kersten put it succinctly in her preface to Bozena Szaynok’s fine study, we must think about the Kielce pogrom as an episode in collective “behavior involving ordinary people on an ordinary day in an ordinary voivodeship town.” This could have happened anywhere in Poland, and at any time during this period.78

*An official investigation carried out in 1997 (hence with full access to Communist Party and Security Service archives) concluded that the defendants were selected for trial, from among several dozen people detained on the day of the pogrom, on the basis of “unknown criteria” (GKBZpNP-IPN, p. 33). In the immediate aftermath of the pogrom, a Security Service commission—headed by Adam Humer, the deputy head of the Investigative Department of the MBP, who happened to be in town for several days prior to the event in order to supervise the carrying out, or rather the falsification, of the June 30 referendum—tried to assemble all the facts. Humer reported directly to his superior officer, the head of the department, Józef Rożanski. In 1997 Humer was interviewed by GKBZpNP-IPN investigators preparing their report, and various files of the security police from 1946 to 1947 were declassified for the first time in order to facilitate the investigation.

The authorities wanted a speedy trial of the perpetrators; hence the first group, which was immediately identified by Humer. They may have contemplated some follow-up—the 1997 commission identified several files of forged depositions, for instance—but the effort was apparently abandoned. Several dozen people arrested on the first day were kept in jail without following requisite procedures—for instance, the Blaszczys, father and son, were held by the Security Service until February 1947—and then were let go for the most part at the end of July 1946, without any follow-up or official disposition of their cases. As Humer told the investigators, no link between the pogrom and any conspiracy by the “reactionary underground” was ever established (see GKBZpNP-IPN, part II, pp. 4, 5).
And this is the essence, it seems to me, that endows the Kielce pogrom with such profound significance. To give an account of the uniqueness of time and place, of specific triggering factors, of the personal relations between actors who controlled organizational resources, is less significant than to understand how thousands of ordinary people could engage in a prolonged murderous assault against their fellow citizens. We can hope to understand this more adequately by following what people actually did during the course of the day and thereafter than by focusing on the initial escalation leading to serial murder or speculating whose provocacja may have triggered the slaughter. One brief recorded exchange between the police corporal Mazur and that anonymous truck driver in the middle of Kielce tells us more about the July 4 events than would a log of telephone conversations held on that day by Major Sobczyński of the UB.

People killed Jews with gusto on that day, and looted their belongings at the same time.* Vast numbers of Kielce residents were involved in the events, young and old, of both sexes and from all walks of life. The assaults on Jews lasted for several hours and took place over an extended area in the city as well as at railway stations along the routes leading to and from Kielce. The scenography of the assaults varied widely, from frenzied mob action near the building on Planty 7 to deliberate, focused, pinpoint attacks on individuals somehow identified as Jewish who were then plucked from the street, a house, or a train compartment and wounded or killed (unless they managed to escape). Complete strangers joined in these endeavors in total openness, unfazed by the blatantly criminal character of the deeds they were embarking upon. Evidently all such concerns were overridden by a widespread social sanction for getting rid of the Jews once and for all.

* Eugeniusz Krawczyk, a messenger employed by the Kielce police, was put on trial with more than a dozen co-defendants on November 18. He came back from a swim on July 4, 1946, we read in his indictment, and quickly "ran to Planty 7, squeezed through the surrounding crowd, and put into a suitcase he found five kilograms of rice, two shirts, two towels, seven packets of tea, one pair of underpants, a blanket, a razor, and some dried apricots and walnuts. He took all this to a store on Sienkiewicza Street, where he sold the rice, tea, and apricots for 1,50 złoty. In the open-air market (bazar) he sold one towel to a stall-keeper for 30 złoty and exchanged another for a bottle of lemonade and one cigarette. He took the rest to the [police] barracks, where he sold the razor. He returned to the market, where he saw a Jewish man being led by policemen, and he hit that man with a stone on the elbow. Policemen took the man to the police academy building, on the steps of which Krawczyk hit him several times with a stick found in the street" (Meducki, Antyjasłowskie, vol. 1, p. 250).
Evidently the moral economy of Polish society after the war allowed for the murdering of Jews. The apparent normalcy of this monstrous transgression in the eyes of participants in the Kielce pogrom leaps out of every other document we take in hand, starting with the brief dialogue between policeman Mazur and the anonymous truck driver. This was also the most disturbing realization of Marcel Łoziński’s interviewees, with which they visibly struggled before the camera. How could it be that simple, normal people come back from work or a family outing one day, and then take off “to kill them some Jews”? Introductory matter from the November 18, 1946, trial indictment, for instance, reads like didaskalia to an Ubu-esque play: “Krawczyk Eugeniusz… returned on July 4, 1946, from a swim and…; Świętek Zdzisław returned on July 4 from an outing in the countryside with his family around 2:30 PM and…; Franczak Stefan, having finished his shift in the Sanitation Department, dropped by a restaurant with a couple of friends and by 4:30 PM…; Krasowski Mieczysław finished his work for the day at the cooperative ‘Spolem’ and….” Only, Alfred Jarry could not have invented the story line. But such is life, always more daring than fiction.

This very same document also shows (and we know this from other sources as well) that the killings in Kielce went on for hours, into the late afternoon, all over town. So much for the reassuring report by five Kielce priests who showed up at Planty 7 around 2:30 P.M. and noted that everything was in order. If what they did was all that needed to be done on that day by Catholic priests, then evidently not much was happening in Kielce on July 4, 1946. In their statement they offered, indirectly, a certificate of quasi normalcy to the day’s events. This is where the formula of prowokacja—provocation—came in so handy for all concerned.

The conspiratorial frame of reference that put forth prowokacja as an interpretive strategy to come to terms with the Kielce pogrom—and which had a very long life in Polish historiography, until Krystyna Kersten shifted the field’s perspective in 1981—stemmed from two motives. One was an inability to account for what happened, so well exemplified by the baffled expressions of Łoziński’s interviewees when they were asked how such a pogrom was possible in Poland one year after the war. People were helplessly groping for an explanation until the word prowokacja was ushered in, and then they latched on to it with a sigh of relief, which in fact was only another way of saying what they already had revealed—that they had no idea how such a thing could have ever come about. And besides their inability to account for what happened, the
other reason to invoke prowokacja was people’s unwillingness to confront the facts.

Instead of studying what had happened during the Kielce pogrom, advocates of the prowokacja hypothesis asked Cui bono? Who could have benefited from such an act of anti-Jewish violence? And the answer they offered (for the moment, I leave aside Communist propaganda, which also described the pogrom as a “provocation,” only by “reactionaries”) was “the Communist regime and its Soviet sponsors.” By deliberately inducing a Jewish pogrom through prowokacja, the Communists (or, more specifically, the Security Service or even the Soviet NKVD) allegedly attempted to divert the world’s attention from the referendum vote that they falsified. Simultaneously, they also hoped to reduce Western sympathy for the plight of Polish society as it was being subjected to Sovietization. Or, as in the report of Bishop Kaczmarek’s commission, it was the Jews-slash-Communists who tried to accomplish all of the above plus induce an exodus of the Jewish masses to Palestine.

Not only is there no material evidence to support such a scenario but also the very fact that the pogrom began, and reached the point of no return, at the level of a police precinct makes the hypothesis untenable.* What NKVD operative would entrust the launch of such an important clandestine operation to policemen Sędęk, Zagórski, Zajac, a few of their colleagues, an eight-year-old boy, and the boy’s semiliterate, alcoholic father? And if the incompetence and emotional indifference of a slew of higher officers to the day’s events—Kuźnicki, Sobczyński, Gwiazdowicz, Szpilewoj, and more—is brought in as supporting evidence of a conspiracy, we would be dealing with a cabal of some two dozen people who, though barely on speaking terms with one another, had managed to coordinate their actions on that day and to keep the secret of their illicit

*Save rumors of a sighting in Kielce in 1946 of an NKVD operative, Demin, who in the 1960s allegedly surfaced in Israel and thus, presumably, was a Soviet expert in Jewish affairs who first honed his skills in Kielce. Michał Chęciński puts forth this trope in his book Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism. Chęciński was later interviewed by investigators of the 1997 commission and maintained his version of events. But a detailed search of Soviet archives did not permit an identification of Demin, even though one secret NKVD report from Kielce was signed with that name (GKBZpNP-IPN, op. cit., pp. 29–30). Analysis of dispatches by the Soviet secret police resident in Kielce, Szpilewoj, indicates “that Soviet advisers were surprised by the tragic events in Kielce and there is no basis to link them with the conception that it was a Soviet provocation” (ibid., p. 35).

See GKBZpNP-IPN, pp. 35–36. There is no record in the secret police files that Walenty Błaszczyk, who was a functionally illiterate alcoholic, was ever a secret collaborator with the UB, as maintained by Chęciński and proponents of the prowokacja hypothesis.
collaboration forever, leaving no trace in the archives of the Communist secret police, which have since been opened. This is highly improbable, and there is no need to explore this hypothesis at greater depth except to say that the Cui bono? perspective can be turned around and argued against its proponents.

Those who are dissembling often attribute their own motivations to those whom they intend to compromise. So we may ask instead who benefits from the hypothesis of prowokacja? Whose interest does it serve to introduce such a putative explanation of the Kielce pogrom? And the answer is, The interest of those who do not care to find out or dwell on what really happened.

Communists immediately evoked in their propaganda the image of the Kielce pogrom as a conspiracy by “reactionaries,” while their opponents in the Catholic-nationalist camp attributed it to a Communist (or Jewish-Communist) conspiracy. Neither side was willing or able to confront anti-Semitism for what it was, and while differing as to the content of the story they agreed about the framing of the narrative. For if the Kielce pogrom was a prowokacja, one needed simply to look for provocateurs. If found, they would be dealt with; if not, then not; and that’s where the matter ended.

“In the matter of ritual murder accusations, we may identify a directly associated reverse practice, which has never been widely discussed as a contested issue of Catholic-Jewish relations. I have in mind the “ritual murder” of Jewish children by Catholic clergy, which took place, in a manner of speaking, every time a Jewish child was baptized without a specific request or authorization by his or her parents. In January 1905, the international press reported the finding of an instruction from the Holy See to the papal nuncio in France, Angelo Roncalli (the future Pope John XXIII). Roncalli was credited with saving very many Jews from Nazi persecution; the one-page instruction, written in French and dated October 23, 1946, provides guidelines for responding to requests by Jewish institutions reclaiming Jewish children who had been confined during the war to Catholic families and institutions. In the first place, the document stipulates, such requests should never be answered in writing. Second, when it is necessary to respond, it should be stated that the church must investigate each case separately. “Children who have been baptized,” we read in point 3 of the instruction, “cannot be surrendered to institutions which could not assure their Christian education.” Jewish parents reclaiming children whom they had previously confided to Catholic institutions could get them back (point 5 of the instruction), provided the children had not been baptized. This is a decision that has been approved by the Holy Father, says the last line of the document. (I am grateful to Michael Marrus for providing me with a copy. For press coverage, see, for example, The New York Times of January 9, 2005, and an opinion piece by Daniel Goldhagen in Le Monde—"Non, Pie XII n’etait pas un saint"—of January 15, 2005.)

As Ambassador Bliss Lane put it succinctly in his book, “both government and antigovernment sources admitted that it was not spontaneous, but a carefully organized plot” (Bliss Lane, I Saw Poland, p. 248).
The crux lay somewhere else, however, and the real challenge—as the Polish intellectual elite knew right away and as some historians, notably Krystyna Kersten, persistently repeated—was to acknowledge and comprehend the mass-scale involvement of Poles from all walks of life in a murderous assault on their Jewish fellow citizens one year after the war. Neither the Communist authorities nor the Catholic church, who rarely agreed on anything in this period, wanted to confront society on this issue.

Nothing on the murderous scale of the Kielce pogrom fit into the repertoire of traditional Polish anti-Semitism, and the customary historiography of the war additionally rendered the episode an emotional enigma. How could one victim assault another, even more cruelly victimized by the Nazis? The question “How could a pogrom like this take place in Poland one year after the war?” was posed by Łoziński’s interviewer to every interviewee, and they were all baffled. When asked a leading question some, as I have indicated, readily subscribed to the notion that it was a prowokacja, but to the more thoughtful this idea did not bring relief.

Familiar categories are not easily applicable to this story. In the minds of the perpetrators, a sort of justice was administered in Kielce on that day: the Jews got what they deserved. I find the terms “pogrom” and prowokacja misleading in denoting episodes of collective behavior such as took place in Kielce. They relegate the phenomenon to the repertoire of “mob behavior,” attributing it implicitly to socially marginal malcontents presumably acting out their frustrations and quite frequently manipulated to do so by unscrupulous agents of the ruling strata, who thus deflect the resolution of mounting social conflicts. But on July 4, 1946, in Kielce, we did not see an unexpected blowup by the lumpen proletariat. Instead, it was Mr. (and Mrs.) Tout-le-Monde, the Mom-and-Pop crowd, deliberate and very much at ease with what they were doing.

One should rather turn to lynching as a useful concept for grappling with such a reality. As to the canard of Jews killing Christian children for blood, which so effectively mobilized people for action, it is perhaps analogous to the imaginary terror of “southern whites, [who] in their belief that black men were preoccupied with having intercourse with white

*Pogrom kielecki, or “Kielce pogrom,” is by now a proper name denoting the event, and to try to change or substitute it for the sake of conceptual exactitude would result in confusion.
women, were largely battling a monster of their own creation: the long-standing sexual access to black women that white men had enjoyed.\textsuperscript{80}

In other words, it was not Jewish violence against Poles (whether innocent children or, for that matter, adults, as put forth in that other canard, which declared Jews responsible for bringing Communism to Poland) that made their continuous presence in Poland unbearable, but the other way around. The conceptual and emotional fog veiling this story lifts somewhat only after we recognize that Jewish survivors were an unbearable sore spot because they had been victimized by their Polish neighbors—for centuries, but especially during the Nazi occupation. The wartime historical record, its postwar social consequences, and the findings of experimental psychology all bear this out: people have a propensity to hate those whom they have injured.

This was not an unexpected, spontaneous outburst. Episodes of collective violence that from a distance appear random and elemental are on close scrutiny semantically rich. Virtually every moment is endowed with significance, as people continuously communicate and comment about what they are doing, through symbolic shortcuts and by talking incessantly.\textsuperscript{81} As evidenced in depositions from the post-Kielce trials, ongoing conversations during the pogrom were voluminous.

A barber, Tadeusz Szcześniak, who drew a seven-year sentence in the first Kielce trial, thus began his deposition: “I went for a walk and on the corner of Sienkiewicza and Planty I joined some women who were talking and gesticulating wildly, and I heard what sounded like agitation that Poland had three governments [Polish, Russian, and Jewish], that after the present events the newspapers would again surely write, as they did after anti-Jewish riots in Kraków, that they were inspired, provoked, and staged by the National Armed Forces [an anti-Communist conspiratorial organization]. The women then commented ironically that after what happened people should vote ‘Three times yes,’ and other things like that.”\textsuperscript{82} The man who witnessed the leisurely stoning of a Jewish youth in the afternoon was struck, as he told the filmmaker, by the sight of a crowd plunged in animated conversation (“rozgadanie tłumu”). Abram Moszkowicz and Regina Fisz talked with their would-be murderers while they were being transported outside of Kielce, tried to negotiate terms of release, and argued back and forth. Rachela Finkelsztajn described the intense, long negotiations that preceded the mass murder of Radzilów Jews on July 7, 1941.\textsuperscript{83} That same July, near Szczuczyn, a Jewish pastry cook named Magik talked to his murderer, Franek Konopko, all
the way to the spot in the Jewish cemetery where he was clubbed to death.

My point is this: the perpetrators involved in collective episodes of anti-Jewish violence gave plenty of thought to what they were doing, and talked about what they were doing as well. Their acts were deliberate, weighed, tested against the arguments of victims, and socially sanctioned in multifaceted exchanges with fellow miscreants.*

The first anniversary of the pogrom was marked by the unveiling of a memorial plaque at the Kielce Jewish cemetery. Afterward, for several decades, the issue sank into oblivion. In Communist Poland, the Kielce pogrom remained a taboo subject. The silence of the authorities, the silence of the Catholic church, and the silence of fellow passengers in a train compartment from among whom a Jew had been plucked for slaughter—all were piercingly resounding statements. And they carried the selfsame profoundly disturbing message, perversely imparting normalcy to what their audiences knew was a monstrous transgression.

The story appropriately ends where it began, with matzo. The building at Planty 7 was sealed at some point that day by security forces. Armed guards were posted there after the events, so the premises of the Jewish Committee would not be completely looted. As the Committee decided to close for business in the aftermath of July 4, a number of Jews returned to the building to collect what remained of their files and other personal items, and move out. In sifting through the debris they found some intact provisions, canned food, and packages of matzo. They couldn’t, or wouldn’t, take foodstuffs with them, and put everything out for anyone interested to pick up. The Polish woman who lived next door and was interviewed in 1987 for the documentary film Witnesses smiled in fond memory of the moment. A lot of people helped themselves to canned food, she said on camera, and “they also took matzo because it tastes good. I liked it too, why not.” Łoziński’s

"Indeed, they kept talking about their misdeeds for years." Jan Cytrynowicz (Jewish by birth), a harness maker, lived in Wizna before the war and had been baptized there as a child. He lived in Jedwabne after the war and now lives in Lomża: "I came to Jedwabne after the war and lived with my Polish stepmother. My drinking buddies didn’t know about my origins, so after a few drinks they’d start their stories: ‘I chased that one,’ ‘I stabbed that one hard.’ They were proud if they had killed two or three Jews.” (Anna Bikont, “‘We of Jedwabne,’ in The Neighbors Respond, p. 276).
assistant, who was conducting the interview, immediately asked a follow-up question: And what about the blood of Christian children that people believed Jews were using to produce matzo? The lady smiled again, shrugged her shoulders, and dismissed the question with a chuckle.