

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies
Memorial de la Shoah Fondation (CDJC); LXXII 2
Persecution and Deportation in Western Europe
– Jewish Responses to Persecution: The Case of France
Translation: D05 The Central Israelite Consistory protest letter on the French
government

July 1, 1941

Central Consistory

[illegible]

Marshal,

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At a time when strict exceptional provisions have placed a minority of French citizens beyond the reach of the common law because of their faith, it is the responsibility of the representative of their associations to raise a solemn protest.

In the proclamations you made before the French, you declared:
“I hate the lie that has caused you so much harm.” and “I fight injustice wherever I encounter it.”

Why should these noble words be so callously contradicted by acts that constitute the worst kind of injustice founded on lies?

Indeed, do the new laws that were passed last June 14th not harm people and goods? Do the declarations made before the press by the Commissioner of Jewish Affairs not officially take up and worsen the slanderous attacks, always so broad and vague, that constitute the worst kind of humiliation? Regarding these two ideas, the October 1940 declarations that were made before the government by Mr. BAUDOIN, Minister of Foreign Affairs, had provided guarantees that we had to believe were valid, given their source.

Yet can we still speak of guarantees and rights when the mere fact of being an Israelite is more often than not enough to legitimize the most arbitrary decisions made by government authorities and heads of private companies.

Our dignity as French people whose citizenship has not, as far as we know, officially been revoked compels us to protest against article 9 of the Statute and the last paragraph of the law on the census. The distressing, defamatory punishments

that they list for violators include, among other things, “the concentration camp, even for French citizens.” Therefore, the law does not target Israelites as French or foreign citizens but rather, in slavish imitation of the occupying power, only sees or no longer recognizes but one Jewish flock whose nationality, even if it is French, is now but a prop without value or significance.

[crossed out]

What then is the legal status of French Israelites? If they are still French; what is citizenship when it is stripped of almost all of its meaning, inferior to the citizenship status of the natives, citizens and subjects of many of our colonies who don't even know our language?

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Is the government in fact trying to make the French Israelites disappear and therefore, are the words, “measures of justice and non-repercussion,” not an expression of the truth?

The Bible is the only holy book of the Israelites, are its teachings therefore pernicious when they follow them, whereas the Christians see the Bible as the expression of the divine word since, when it is called the Old Testament, it is one of the sacred books of the Catholic and Protestant churches?

“We are all the children of Abraham, the sons of the Bible,” said his Eminence, the Cardinal VERDIER. Why should those who practice the ancient faith of Israel be pariahs in their own homeland today?

Alas, by calling on the vilest passions of the human soul, on hatred, greed, jealousy and envy, the foreign theorists of racial doctrines have found accomplices within our own country.

It seems that the French Israelites will thus have to endure, with the resignation and courage that they have demonstrated over the centuries and with the help of their Faith, the ordeals that await them.

They will try to contain their perfectly understandable feelings of contempt and hatred toward their foreign and French persecutors.

They will nevertheless maintain their faith in the destiny of Eternal France to seek just revenge for the rights that have been violated today.

Please accept, dear Marshal, the assurances of our profound respect and absolute devotion.

President of the Central Consistory

Jacques HELBRONNER

translated by Nina Fink