

Waldemar Chrostowski

Second theological symposium on "The Church, Jews and Judaism"

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Dr. WALDEMAR CHROSTOWSKI

SECOND THEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM ON «THE CHURCH, JEWS AND JUDAISM»

In Poland the dialogue with the Jews initiated by Vatican II was taken up seriously in the mid-1980' s. The landmark event was the creation by the Conference of Polish Episcopate in May 1—2, 1986, of the Subcommittee for the Dialogue with Judaism, which at the end of 1987 was raised to the status of a commission. Soon, however, the first contacts and voices calling for mutual understanding and closer relations were drowned out by the dispute around the convent of the Carmelite nuns in Oświęcim. Tensions reached their peak in the summer of 1989, when Catholic-Jewish contacts sank to their lowest level since the mid-1960' s.

At the beginning of June, 1989, the Theological Faculty of the Academy of Catholic Theology (ACT) in Warsaw organized the first meeting of Polish theologians devoted to the reorientation of the Catholic Church toward the Jews and Judaism (see *Collectanea Theologica* 60(1990)3, p. 5—118). Among the participants were scholars who had been invited to attend the Christian-Jewish interreligious seminar organized by Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago. The Warsaw symposium turned out to be very helpful in beginning a useful dialogue with American Jewish leaders. At the same time, the Academy undertook the task of working up an extensive research program on Judaism and Catholic-Jewish relations. This program is to be strictly theological, serving to bring closer together these religious communities that have been at odds for centuries. As part of this program and as a continuation of the previous year's meeting, the Theological Faculty of the Academy organized the second theological symposium *The Church, Jews and Judaism* on April 3—4, 1990. Its main task was to answer the question whether the dialogue with the adherents of Judaism really has begun in Poland, what has been done, what the specific features of contacts in Poland are, and what the prospects and tasks are for the immediate future. The symposium was attended by nearly 100 persons from throughout Poland and from abroad — Roman Catholics, other Christians, and Jews.

The symposium was opened by the Academy's rector, Prof. Helmut Juros. Introductory addresses were given by Dr. Mordechai Palzur, the ambassador of Israel in Poland; Bp. Prof. Henryk Muszyński, chair of the Commission of the Episcopate for the Dialogue with Judaism; and Rabbi Menachem Joskowicz. The ambassador referred to painful events in relations between Christians and Jews, after which he added: „The important task of our generation is to try to bring our two nations closer together through getting to know each other better, mutual visits, and cooperation in all possible fields, of which there are very many. I believe that we ought to bring up the new generation of Poles and Jews with this understanding in mind and thereby eliminate Antisemitism on the one side and anti-Polishness on the other”. Muszyński put the dialogue of Polish Catholics and Jews into an all-church perspective and accented the directions of cooperation: „It first ought to help us to overcome our prejudices and animosities and then promote closer relations based on truth”. Joskowicz reminded par-

ticipants that the meeting was being held in an atmosphere of the still-unfinished dispute about the convent in Oświęcim, which shows the great need for respect for every person and his or her religion.

The first paper, *Christian-Jewish Relations in Britain*, was read by Rabbi Dr. Norman Solomon, president of the Centre for the Study of Judaism and Christian-Jewish Relations in Birmingham (Great Britain). At the outset, he said: „Let no one say that Poles or Russians or Ukrainians invented the pogrom. Poles also never expelled all Jews from their dominions; indeed, the English were the first nation to do this, in 1290 under Edward I”. He discussed the origin and activities of the Council of Christians and Jews, which has contributed so much to interreligious dialogue, and discussed consultations between the adherents of Judaism and particular church groups in Great Britain. Solomon devoted the most attention to the text of the resolution adopted during the 1988 Lambeth Conference, which laid down the principles of dialogue among the followers of the three great monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This document has both theoretical and practical value, as its signers believe it can contribute to peace in the Middle East. He mentioned several initiatives of the Catholic Church in Great Britain, joint social endeavours of Christians and Jews, and such practical undertakings as academic studies of Judaism and the work of the Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations. He also pointed out dangers and benefits of dialogue, contending that: „The real line of division is not between Christians and Jews between conservative and those on both sides who want progress”.

An important part of the symposium were two views on *The Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in Poland*. The Roman-Catholic view was presented by Rev. Dr. Waldemar Chrostowski (ACT, Warsaw); the Jewish, by Dr. Stanisław Krajewski (Warsaw). Both declared that a dialogue of Polish Catholics and Jews is necessary. We have traveled a certain path, coming closer together and understanding each other better than ever before.

Chrostowski recalled the circumstances of the origin and development of the dialogue in Poland and pointed out the difficulties and obstacles encountered in the effort to establish closer relations with Jews and Judaism. One cannot play down the fact that there are still opponents of dialogue who like to mask their dislike and even contempt for Jews by hiding behind the screen of the authority of the Catholic Church. There is still much to do in religious instruction, in propagating and teaching the Catholic faith, in educating priests, and in popularizing the principles of theological reorientation. Jews have repeatedly urged Catholics to undertake an honest self-examination, which cannot be taken lightly. One cannot expect to inculcate the attitude of Christian compassion without practicing solidarity with Jews, in whose minds the Shoah has left an indelible mark. Nor can Jews ignore the burdens of the past. Chrostowski declared: „Catholics expect the followers of Judaism to cut themselves off clearly from facts of violence and atheization committed by people who had declared themselves as Jews or persons of Jewish origin. In the consciousness of recent generations of Poles an unfair stereotype of the Jew has developed as a destroyer of the traditional order, a communist and atheist, an enemy of the Church and the Christian faith. All Jews who are sincerely attached to God and the holy traditions of their nation suffer from this... Catholics... must desist from blaming all Jews for the activities of some of them. It must be strongly reminded that Poles, people who had been baptized in the past, also served in the apparatus of terror and atheization. Remembering this ought to prevent hastily generalizations and antagonizing the two communities”.

Krajewski believes that Polish nationalism is responsible for the fact that Poles are unable to accept that others have suffered more, and he is disturbed by the revival of antisemitic feelings. In the context of the dispute over the Carmelite convent, one may ask whether the explanations of the Commission of the Episcopate for the Dialogue with Judaism are known to and accepted by the broad masses of Polish Catholics. He is also concerned about attempts to „Christianize” the presence of Polish Jews.

Cardinal Hlond in *re the Jews* was the subject of Muszyński's paper. Hlond was subjected to indiscriminate attacks regarding Polish-Jewish tensions before World War II and the Kielce pogrom in 1946. The most serious charge was made by Dutch Zionist Jan Rogier, who called Hlond an „extreme Antisemite”. Muszyński quoted Hlond's pronouncement in its entirety, giving it a completely different sense than when it is quoted tentatively and selectively. Hlond warned „against the fundamentally and uncompromisingly anti-Jewish ethical attitude imported from abroad. It is inconsistent with Catholic ethics”. His pronouncement in connection with the Kielce tragedy of July 4, 1946, was never published because it was inconvenient for the Communist party and state authorities of that time. He condemned all murders „always and everywhere”, and recalled his initiatives during the war to save and help Jews.

The Rev. Prof. Andrzej Zuberbier (ACT, Warsaw) read the paper on *Jews and Judaism in the Teaching of John Paul II during Pilgrimages to the Hometown*. There is a gradual expansion of the perspective of papal pronouncements, which reflects the development of relations of the Roman Catholic Church with the Jews on a universal scale and also the development of these relations in Poland. First of all is the presence of Auschwitz, the annihilation of the Jews in Polish lands, and the uniqueness of the Jewish fate, which is a warning to the world against a repetition of this terrible genocide. Against this background, John Paul II has stressed the need for solidarity with the Jews and the dignity of every person.

Among the materials of the symposium, published in this issue, two other articles are included: *Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in Poland*, by Rabbi Dr. Byron L. Sherwin, Vice-President for Academic Affairs of the Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago (USA), and *The Religious Arguments in the Contemporary Antisemitic Statements in Poland*, by Beata Krawczyk, recently graduated at ACT.

Five communiques were read during the symposium. Rev. Prof. Michał Czajkowski (ATC, Warsaw) discussed *The Seeds of the Interreligious Seminar in Chicago*, as to the nature and directions of activities undertaken to promote the dialogue with Judaism in the circles from which the participants of the experiment at Spertus College of Judaica have been recruited. Dr. Etienne De Jonghe, from Antwerp, Belgium, is the international secretary of the Catholic movement „Pax Christi”, which began near the end of World War II to foster French-German reconciliation. His lecture, *Pax Christi and the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue*, noted that closer relations with Jews were promoted by pilgrimages to the Holy Land and close contacts with Israelis. Of great importance is the recent pronouncement of Cardinal F. König of Vienna (chair of „Pax Christi”) calling for the reconciliation of Catholic and Jews in the context of the dispute over the Carmelite convent. „Pax Christi” is working on a special program concerning faith, dialogue, and reconciliation, with the intention of expanding its activities to Poland, where it seeks to become involved in the promotion of closer interreligious relations. Three other communiques were: *A Few Remarks about the Nature of Dialogue* (the Rev. Dr. Jakub Gorczyca, Cracow), *Religious Beliefs as the Source*

of *Antisemitism* (the Rev. Dr. Zdzisław Kropiewski, Koszalin) and *Jesus Christ in the Writings of Martin Buber* (the Rev. Dr. Franciszek Dylus, Częstochowa).

Two practical decisions were made: first, to request that the Commission of the Episcopate for the Dialogue with Judaism send a letter to theological seminaries and other priest-educating centres, urging them to become familiar with and to educate their students in the spirit of the Vatican documents on the attitude toward Jews and Judaism; second, a proposal to announce in Poland a Day of Remembrance and Brotherhood of Christians and Jews, with the suggestion that it be April 13th, the anniversary of the historic visit of John Paul II to a synagogue in Rome.

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