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The Church, Jews and Judaism

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Dr WALDEMAR CHROSTOWSKI

THE CHURCH, JEWS AND JUDAISM

Through the efforts of the Theological Faculty of Academy of Catholic Theology, and with the help of members of the Polish Episcopate's Commission for Dialog with Judaism, on the 5th and 6th of June, 1989, a symposium was held in Warsaw on the topic of *The Church, Jews and Judaism*. Although research and the open exchange of views by Polish and Jewish historians has already achieved a certain tradition, with a great deal of progress being made in this area, the theological dialogue — urgently recommended by the Second Vatican Council and papal teachings — is still in its infancy in Poland. Recently, however, the situation has improved somewhat. In 1985 KIK (Catholic Intellectual's Club) in Cracow began a series of *Auschwitz Weeks*; in 1986 there was a session on *Jewish Religion and Culture* in the town of Pieniezno in northern Poland; in April, 1988, an international colloquium *Jews and Christians in Dialogue* was held in Tyniec. The Symposium at Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw brought together many theologians from all over the country, especially younger ones, and represents the further step in the process of deepening and enlivening the contacts between the two religious communities.

The Symposium was opened by the Dean of the Theological Faculty, Prof. Jan Łach. In his presentation, which was preceded by a common prayer from Psalm 123, he pointed to the need for cooperation among Christians and Jews in the face of the threat from those who would build a world without God. The centuries-long tradition of mistrust and enmity between the adherents of the two religions served to obscure the clarity of the witness to the One God. The fruits of this dialogue should thus be the overcoming of mutual animosities, and barriers on the path to reconciliation, as well as testimony to an authentic religious faith.

The first paper was given by Dr. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz from the Catholic University of Lublin, and was entitled *Jews and Judaism in the Teaching of John Paul II*. Dr. Rubinkiewicz is the person co-responsible for preparing all the most important Church documents on Jews and Judaism for publication under the auspices of the Episcopal Commission. He discussed the theological bases for the dialog as set forth by the Second Vatican Council, particularly in Point 4 of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. A common dimension for relations between Christianity and Judaism is found above all in the belief in God, and in the particular ties between the Church and the Jews, based on God's plan for salvation. The fraternal theological dialogue, which John Paul II has called the dialog „between the first and the second parts of the Bible”, represents a full appreciation of the live heritage of faith. The goal of this dialogue is to have each side get to know the other better while honoring the religious identity of both sides, far from syncretism or proselytism. The speaker highlighted two important historical conditions for the current shifts in attitude of the Church toward Judaism — the drama of the Shoah and the reality of the State of Israel. The mass genocide of the German Nazis' represents a serious danger sign to the world, a „salutary warning” (in the words of John Paul II in Auschwitz) against the dangers of evil structures and criminal disregard for the law. The rebirth of a Jewish state in turn requires the revision of the traditional Christian thesis that the long Jewish diaspora was a sign that they had been rejected by God. At the same time this rebirth brings new challenges and

new responsibilities to the Jewish people. The desire by both sides to come closer should be expressed in practice in life and in close cooperation.

In the second paper Dr. Waldemar Chrostowski (Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw) discussed the *Fundamental Aspects of the Church's Reorientation towards Jews and Judaism*. The attitude towards the Jews in Christian theology has to this day been a derivative of the general state of mutual relations, loaded down with stereotypes, prejudices and aversion. What is more, the theology was often subordinated to assumptions which tended to reinforce the mechanisms of enmity. It has become increasingly clear in this century marked by the stigma of genocide and totalitarianism that Christians and Jews cannot give credible testimony about God while maintaining prejudices and living in mutual enmity. It has also become apparent that it is not possible to do theology without engaging in an ecumenical dialog — a dialog among the divided Christians and a dialog between Christians and those of other religions — just as there can be no authentic dialog without reorientation in theology. Inasmuch as theology legitimized an attitude of mistrust or even enmity toward the Jews, then it must undergo change. Theologians must become conscious of their prophetic role, a role based on their duty to call bad habits and ways of doing things into question. Theological reflection after Vatican II would like to provide a model of a new way of acting for the Church today. In the area of relations with the Jews theology has set itself a number of goals, but two of these come to the fore: deeper penetration into the consciousness of the Church, and the chance to change improper attitudes towards adherents of Judaism. The speaker discussed both of these key aspects of the reorientation on the basis of the statements of the Magisterium of the Church and of John Paul II — statements that simultaneously reflect and reinforce transformations which have already taken place, as well as mark out new horizons for the theory and practise of Christians. Their motto was taken from the papal speech in Mainz (on November, 17, 1980): „he who encounters Jesus Christ, encounters Judaism”, and „the holy obligation of brotherhood”. Theological reflection undertaken in the spirit of improving relations should hasten the process of reconciliation of these religious communities which have been at odds for centuries. The fundamental role in this arduous process is played not by reasonable premises, however, but by the highest law of conscience. The fruit of this dialogue should be to bring the participants closer to the fullness of God's mystery, and effective cooperation in a world in need of divine change.

The afternoon session of the first day began with a talk by Dr. Michał Czajkowski (Academy of Catholic Theology) entitled *What Does It Mean To Say That Jesus Is a Jew?* When we look back at the Jewish roots of Christianity we cannot pass over the fact of Jesus' Jewishness. He himself had a great appreciation for his Jewish identity and heritage, marked by faithfulness to the laws of the Old Testament and to the customs of his people. The paradox of continuity and fundamental newness is brought out in the person of Jesus and in his mission; he revealed himself an almost ceremonial fashion in the words: „Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). At the same time that greater knowledge of their earthly Saviour is spreading among Christians, a greater interest is evident among Jewish thinkers in Jesus of Nazareth. Many of them write about Him with sympathy. At the center of Christian theology is the Christological truth: Jesus Christ is true God and true man. The true humanity assumes the Jewishness of Jesus. Whoever ignores it is only a step away from Docetism, the view that God only apparently took on a human body, only seemed to live, teach and suffer. The speaker discussed at length the formulation found in the Vatican's Instruction on „Jews and Judaism in the Proclamation of God's Word

and in the Catechesis of the Catholic Church" (1985) that „Jesus is a Jew, and will always be a Jew". If one keeps the Old Testament history of salvation in mind, one must state that: Jesus the Messiah had to be a Jew, because this represented the fulfillment of the God's promises given to Chosen People. Jesus-Jew represents the normative beginning of Christian identity.

The topic for the next lecture, given by Dr. Stanisław Krajewski (Warsaw) was *The Land of Israel in Jewish Consciousness*. When we speak of „Israel" we think of Jacob, of all of the generations of Jews, but we also think of the land, a concrete land — even of the State of Israel, which goes together with thinking about the land, as it is difficult to differentiate the Jewish relationship to their own land from their attitude toward their own state. Jews are linked to the Land of Israel through memory, and hence through the past. This land was also, however, their future, and continues to be so. The relationship of the Jews to the Land of Israel has to be understood in terms of all dimensions of time, including even one more — eternity. In almost every generation there have been Jews who made their way to the Holy Land in order to live and die there, to study Torah and to serve God. Those who lived in the Land of Israel — called Yishuv — were supported mainly by offerings collected in Jewish communities scattered over the whole world. The Holy Land also represented the image and anticipation of the eschatological future. Against the background of this deep attachment of Jews to the Holy Land a specific role falls to the diaspora, a role which has been accepted by Judaism in varying degrees. The vision of the centrality of Zion dominated, despite the factual dispersion. Sometimes the vision became so metaphysical that it did not even have to lead to practical attempts to go to the Land of Israel. This situation notwithstanding, the State of Israel came into being in 1948, and from that time on it has served as a reminder to the world of the Jewish right to the land of their ancestors, and at the same time it has brought about opposition to acknowledgment this right. In Israel love for one's own land is experienced in a very concrete manner. The new historical circumstances also brought about a particular tension between the situation of the Jewish population living in the reborn state and that of the diaspora. The majority of Jews feels a deep connection with the State of Israel, even though their actual relationship to it and to its meaning is quite varied.

On the first day of the sessions Andrzej Kosiński (Warsaw) read a communique on *The Churches in West Germany and Shoah (1945—1985)*. A number of important documents were issued by the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches in this 40-year period concerning Jews and Judaism. All of them were aimed at coming to terms with the dramatic past, and to the issue of German responsibility for the extermination of the Jews. The Churches' statements generally were issued on the observance of the anniversaries of events which had represented tragic turning points in the history of German-Jewish relation. Examples are the observances each year of „Kristallnacht" (The Night of the Broken Glass) and the end of the War. A constant element in all of these official pronouncements is the desire to strengthen cooperation, in spite of the burden for such cooperation represented by Shoah.

On the second day of the Symposium there were two papers and two communiques. Konstany Gebert's (Warsaw) presentation, entitled *Jewish Religious Life of the Time of the Shoah*, was well received as a testimony to the Jewish heroes of the faith during the time of martyrology. It is only possible to give a picture of religious life during this time marked by the stigma of incomprehensible violence and illegality on the basis of documents and accounts which have been preserved, and which together form a very fragmentary and often internally-contradictory picture. When we read these

accounts our consciousness is weighted down by the fact that the essential reality of Shoah eludes our comprehension. We only know one thing for certain — faith was possible and it endured. The speaker gave moving examples of the deep religiousness of the Jews, people tormented and humiliated beyond human measure. Hitler's attack on Poland altered the fate of the adherents of Judaism living there in a fundamental way. Jewish religious life was made impossible even before the Nazi extermination program began because of the general difficulties brought on by the war and by the deliberate policies of repression of the occupying force. In spite of these difficulties the majority of Jews remained faithful to the requirements of religious law. Jewish religious observances went underground, and continued. Faithfulness to the religious principles released the highest form of heroism, paid for often with one's life. An anonymous person active in the Warsaw Ghetto remarked on the religiousness in the Ghetto that: „The truly pious became even more pious, because in their understanding they see the hand of God in everything. Those who were unbelievers, on the other hand, became even more firm in their unbelief. Those who were wavering, however, began to rebel against God, to wage war against Him, to spit at the Heavens”. The speaker dealt with the shameful stereotype of Jews „led to their deaths like cattle”. Citing the words of Marek Edelman, the leader of the Ghetto uprising, he said that a „quiet” death is much more difficult than shooting. Religious impulses played an important role in the formation of positions which rejected armed battle. Jews were raised in a spirit that knew violence from the side of the victim, not from that of the oppressors. Violence for them was always something wrong, inappropriate, and even abhorrent.

Michał Klinger from the Christian Theological Academy (Orthodox and Protestant institution) presented a communique entitled *The Church in Ecumenical Dialog and the Dialog with the Jews*. From the point of view of adherents of the Orthodox Church, dialog with the Jews should be preceded by a dialog among all Christians. The Church can only be a credible partner in contacts with Judaism when it has rebuilt its own unity. This shows the need for reviving and intensifying ecumenical efforts which would help to unite the split in the Christian communities.

Stanisław Musiał, S. J. (Cracow) read the communique *On the Issue of the Carmelite Sisters at Auschwitz*, in which he discussed the controversy of the convent situated in the immediate vicinity of the extermination camp at Auschwitz. This issue has been of enormous interest to both the Polish society and to Jewish communities around the world. He talked about the circumstances surrounding the decision to move the Sisters to the new Center for Information, Instruction, Meetings and Prayer planned there. The presentation appeared in the „Pismo Okólne” („Circular Letter”) of the Press Agency of the Polish Episcopate on May, 29 — June, 4, 1989, and it is also given in this issue of „Collectanea Theologica”.

The Symposium was closed by a speech given by the Chairman of the Polish Episcopate's Commission for Dialog with Judaism Bishop Henryk Muszyński (Włocławek). The speech was entitled *Dialog with Jews and Judaism — An Attempt of Balance and Perspectives for the Future*. Dialog has already been established. Some local churches, especially in Western Europe and the USA, have already made substantial progress in this area. In Poland such contacts got off to a slow start but are now developing fairly intensively. They are not without their difficulties and set-backs, mainly consisting of the ballast of the past. Dialog is a requirement for all who believe in Christ, who in this way become more aware of and experience more deeply their own identity.

Several outstanding guests took part in the theological meeting of Christians and Jews, and it gives me a great deal of satisfaction to note their presence. On the first day we had as our guest Ambassador Mordechai Pal-

zur, Chief of the Israeli Interest Section in Poland. In his remarks he stressed that the difficult past in Polish-Jewish relations should not be allowed to paralyze relations now. It is necessary to work untirelessly toward bringing Judaism and the Church closer together. This is the only credible reply to the outdated burdens and mutual animosities. While always being aware of the past, it is now necessary to turn to the future, and not continually go back to opening old wounds. The Ambassador felt that the Symposium was a valuable contribution to mark the end of a 20-year period in which Israel was not represented in Poland (from 1968), after 1000 years of a Jewish presence in this country.

On the second day two guests from Paris were present: Fr. Jean Dufardin, Secretary of the French Episcopate's Commission for Dialog with Judaism, and Fr. Pierre d'Ornellas, Secretary to Cardinal J.M. Lustiger. Fr. J. Dufardin paid tribute to the fact that dialog between Christians and Jews had commenced in Poland, and felt that his participation represented a valuable experience for him personally. Also among the guests from other countries was Prof. J. H. Satterwhite from Bluffton College (Ohio, USA), currently in Poland doing research in Polish intellectual history.

Close to 60 people attended the two-day exchange of ideas. Among them were professors of theology from all of the important academic institutions in Poland, Seminary lecturers and Superiors, PhD candidates and the students, journalists from the Catholic press, a historian, a writer, and a medical doctor. The papers and communiques provoked a lively discussion, in which over 20 people participated. The dominant theme in all of the ideas put forth was the desire to see the contents of the discussions among specialists disseminated as widely as possible. These ideas have to have an influence on the practical life of Christians and penetrate the consciousness of believers. Everyone present was in agreement in emphasizing the importance of organizing such theological meetings, which contribute to the adherents of both of these brother religions coming closer together.

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