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## Jesus Christ in the eyes of Jews and Judaism

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Collectanea Theologica 71/Fasciculus specialis, 101-113

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2001

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WALDEMAR CHROSTOWSKI

## **JESUS CHRIST IN THE EYES OF JEWS AND JUDAISM**

You seem to think that the hard subject which has been announced in the title is supposed to be raised by a follower of Judaism. A presentation of Jesus Christ's image would be apposite to the extent that it would express, after all, this person's identity and viewpoint. However, there appears a certain correctness, which cannot pass unnoticed. A Jewish approach to Jesus looks different when it is taken for „internal” use, that is to say, when the addressees are other Jews, and totally different when they are Christians. It is not only the matter of comparatively new context of the dialogue of the Church with Jews and Judaism, which is conducive to polite formulas, but also it is the case of a variety of prejudices and stereotypes not being mentioned at all or irenically moderated. The difference in the presentation of the Jewish view of Jesus dates back to the ancient times and especially results from the long Jude-Christian coexistence. Jews in their communities avoided showing their true feelings and attitudes they had towards Christians. In this respect little has changed up to now. The overwhelming majority of Jewish authors' publications on the subject of Jesus and the beginnings of the Church have been edited and published for the use of Christians. Hence they contain issues that Christians may and should like. Actual views of the followers of Judaism at large, however, are far from this kind of favour.

### **Reserve and hostility**

In accordance with classical Jewish sources, which are normative for rabbinical Judaism, Jesus is one of false Messiahs, many of whom appeared in the long and dramatic history of Jews. In view of the above fact, Jesus is neither of any concern to followers of Ju-

daism nor is an object of the Jewish theology. He receives a lot of attention, however, and it happens in two paradoxically different ways<sup>1</sup>. One – it is the programme silence on the subject of Jesus wherever possible. The other – it is the constant presence in the Jewish life and religion of severe criticism of Jesus and Christianity He brought into being.

While reminiscing about her childhood and adolescence Michele Guinness, the author of *Córka Przymierza, Droga Żydówki do Chrystusa* published in Poland in 1997, in the very book recalls the day she got to know about Jesus. She wished for more information about Him and when she turned to his teacher whose name was Rosenberg with her request the man snapped at her saying, „Do not ever dare say this name in my presence again!” I experienced something similar in completely different circumstances. In winter and early spring in 1994 I conducted a seminar at Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago for rabbis who were interested in a problems of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. I asked them what they knew about Jesus. They replied that they scarcely knew Jesus as their Jewish tradition forbade them to deal with the subject. I suggested that they read one of the Gospels, the Gospel according to St Matthew best, because of its most „Jewish” character of the four canonical Gospels. They answered they did not have the text.

„But you can easily purchase it in Chicago.”

„We are not allowed to buy such a book!” they replied.

„So I will buy it for you.”

„But we must not have it at home!”<sup>2</sup>

However they all read the Gospel in the library, taking the problem of the seminar into account. After reading it they were honestly surprised that Christians of non-Jewish origin accepted and read the Gospel so much Jewish in its character.

A certain apprehension about bringing Christians’ anger down on themselves, for whom their own image of the founder of their religion is the only permissible one, is the most frequently repe-

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<sup>1</sup> See also W. Chrostowski, *Żydzi i religia żydowska a Jezus Chrystus*, Ateneum Kapłańskie 136(2001)1, pp.7-21.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth adding that pupils and students in the schools in the State of Israel must not use an edition of the Bible including the New Testament.

ated reason for the Jewish silence about Jesus. But gently speaking, this Jewish view of Jesus is far from reserved indifference. Some scanty mentions in the Talmud constitute its essence. They, what is typical, are absent in places where they may be expected but they appear as if thrown in, reflecting the generally accepted way of thinking that Jews should stick to in every situation. The prevailing understanding of Jesus, His life and teaching is definitely hostile. Jesus is portrayed as an adulteress's illegitimate child (Mishna, *Yebamot* IV, 3b,49a; the Babylonian Talmud [TB], *Kalla* 51a). His miracles, clearly associated with the ones we know from the Gospel, are depicted as manifestations of witchcraft (TB, *Sanhedrin* 43a and 107b; Sota 47b; the Jerusalem Talmud [TJ], *Chagiga* II, 2). Jesus is said to have had only five disciples, none of whom was a great success (TB, *Sanhedrin* 43a). Jesus himself deserves to be thoroughly despised because while he appeared publicly he scoffed at the teachings of sages, which was His manifestation of arrogance and ignorance (TB, *Gittin* 50b, 57a). As a false Messiah he committed the cardinal sin of deceiving and misleading Israelites into a sinful life (TB, *Sanhedrin* 43a). There are few allusions to the last period of Jesus' life yet still they clearly engage in polemic against gospel stories about His passion and death. The Talmud says that reasons for condemning Jesus to death were announced forty days before His crucifixion so as to find some circumstances which might make Jesus clear of charges and possibly innocent. But there was nobody to justify Jesus (TB, *Sanhedrin* 43a). That is why he was crucified as a blasphemer and a deceiver (TB, *Sanhedrin* 43a, 67a).

This negative image of Jesus launches, undoubtedly, in a fierce polemic against the Gospels, the Gospel according to St Matthew in particular. Stories about the passion and death of Jesus aroused special interest and confrontation because they made the generation contemporary with Jesus and Jewish leaders mostly responsible for what had happened. With time some information in the Talmud, especially this found too drastic, was rewritten and retouched in order to give it less hostile character. The whole process was caused only in the context of the coexistence with Christians so as not to throw their anger down on Jews and at the same time to protect the Jewish community against persecutions, the consequences of which could be disastrous for Jews.

An extensive work, known as *Toledoth Yeshu*<sup>3</sup>, shows the most far-reaching hostility to Jesus. Its origins date back to the late half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium but in general far older ideas and attitudes, transmitted orally particularly in families, are here only strengthened. Jesus is without doubt lampooned in this work. Anonymous authors, although well familiar with the four canonical Gospels, imitate their style and vocabulary and parody the Gospel according to St Matthew. This is a certain synthesis of centuries old Jewish „teaching of contempt” for the founder of Christianity. Jesus is savagely caricatured beginning with the very circumstances of his being conceived by Mary<sup>4</sup>. Jesus’ mother is presented as pious John’s promiscuous fiancée, who is driven into Joseph’s arms by her naivety and lust. She experiences the intercourse in the period of her life when she should avoid any physical contact with men. After her pregnancy becomes easily noticeable pious John heads towards Babylon. Thereby Jesus acquires worldwide notoriety for his being conceived in filthy circumstances. A Jewish reader finds the situation in which Jesus was conceived openly violating moral and cult laws of the Mosaic religion. It is the same with the actions and teaching of Jesus, which are diametrically opposed to that accepted and followed by Jews. That is why He gets what He deserves. A detailed summary of this lampoon may, in any situation, provoke only Christians’ irritation, indignation and anger. Despite its being rarely published, *Toledoth Yeshu* is well known to Jews. Many faithful reminiscences of this lampoon may be encountered in works of some Jewish writers such as Isaac B. Singer or Jerzy Kosiński. But even there Jesus is not directly spoken of. The characteristic features and shortcomings that are attributed to Jesus are rather embodied in His believers, the clergy in particular. Therefore the images of a priest or a zealous Catholic are highly satirised.

The criticism *Toledoth Yeshu* has received within the Jewish community has still been scarce. The little criticism of the book has not been voiced by rabbis (Orthodox rabbis have never stated their views in this case), but only by a small group of scholars who have

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<sup>3</sup> I am in the possession of a Hebrew edition from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century including a German translation: S. Kraus (Hrsg. und erl.), *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen*, Berlin 1902.

<sup>4</sup> See W. Chrostowski, *Żydzi i religia żydowska a Maryja Matka Jezusa, Salvatoris Mater* 2(2000)1, pp. 215-233 as to the Jewish way of discerning Mary.

been courageous enough to attempt any critical evaluation of the Jewish religious tradition. Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), a lecturer of the Biblical and Jewish history, was one of the first brave academics. In his estimation the work was „poor kitsch, comprising fragmentary transmissions about Jesus from the Talmud”. This strong opinion has had, however, no effect on the common attitude of the followers of Judaism. Seldom have they confessed to knowing the lampoon although they are familiar with its content thanks to an oral tradition, lively especially in families. The influence and efficacy of the oral tradition are far greater than knowledge coming to us from other sources.

In the works normative for the rabbinical Judaism you may yet meet other threads whose character seems to be more positive. For example, Jesus is said to have read and explained the Torah, as Pharisees did (Tosefta, *Chullin* II, 22-23), and to have taught that nothing could be either added or excluded from it (TB, *Sabbath* 116b-a); Jesus' disciples possessed the ability to heal the sick (Tosefta, *Chullin* II, 22-23; TB, *Avodah Zara* 27b). Nobody can resist the feeling that the scant signs of favour are of no significance alone, but they are to authenticate and emphasise an abundance of severe criticism. Never should such allusions be overestimated and taken out from the context, because their role is not so much to put Jesus in a good light but to put focus on the vitality and durability of the Jewish religion and to confirm, directly or indirectly, the criticism of Jesus and Christianity accompanying them.

Ancient Jewish thinkers echoed the approach so much in the tradition of the classical rabbinical sources. Majmonides (1135-1204), who was regarded as one of the greatest authorities by the Judaic believers, wrote: „Also about him [Jesus], who believed in his being Messiah but was condemned to death by the court [Sanhedrin], Daniel prophesied much earlier (comp. Dn 9,14). Has a greater mistake than that ever been made? All prophets claimed that Messiah would be a saviour and rescuer of Israel, gathering the dispersed around Him and confirming their commandments. But he let Israel be killed with a sword, while the rest got scattered and humiliated. He misled them to change the Torah and drove most of the world into insanity to serve another, but God” (Yad, *Melachim* 9,3-4). The depiction of Jesus is here very precise – he was the greatest deceiver and fraudster the Jewish nation had ever borne, a traitor who was to

take a full responsibility for the misfortune Jews suffered, particularly for their exile and humiliation. Christianity, at the same time, was treated as a pagan religion because God of Israel is not an object of Christians' worship. This viewpoint is still common in Orthodox Judaism.

Jewish communities have been strictly forbidden by their rabbis to read and contemplate the Gospels. It is certain that mainly doing this one may encounter „Jesus of history”. Instead of this, rabbis put emphasis upon a view of the Church, what is equivalent to discerning Jesus in the way Christians are observed and evaluated. Paradoxically, Christians find out the Jewish religion not through the lives of its believers but by making attempts to examine and respect their rules. For example, if an average Christian, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in our part of Europe, learnt of Judaism only by observing Jews known to him, their image of Judaism would have been savagely caricatured. At this point I would like to recall yet another experience. In 1994 I was giving a series of lectures in various Jewish centres in the USA within the framework of an exchange between Polish Episcopate Committee for the Dialogue with Judaism and American Jewish Committee. New York was the next place where my public appearance in a local synagogue on the Sabbath was one of the obligatory items. A local rabbi offered no support to this initiative and did not even conceal it from me. When I came to the service I had to wait for a long time. After more than two hours it was time for me to start. But the rabbi stood up in front of his believers and began the following dialogue in English:

„Do you know who the greatest anti-Semite and enemy of Jews is?”

The participants of the service loudly replied, „Christians!”

„Who are the greatest anti-Semites among Christians, though?”

„Catholics!”

„And who are the greatest anti-Semites among Catholics?”

And again a loud reply, „Poles!”

„Who are the greatest anti-Semites among Poles?”

The believers exclaimed, „Priests!”

„So now here it is a catholic priest from Poland who has been sent to tell us something.”

And only then I could speak.

This approach has been transmitted to all generations and Jesus Himself. Confessions from the childhood and adolescence of Ro-

man Brandstaetter leave no doubts about it, either. He remembers an episode when his Christian colleagues accused him of deicide, which put him in a difficult spiritual dilemma. With his concern he turned to his school friend, Elias Geber, who was called Socrates.

„You see,” Geber lowered his voice, „They say that Jews killed Him.”

„They say?”

„Yes, they say.”

„Why do they say so?”

„Because they are anti-Semites.”

„And why are they anti-Semites?”

Socrates got impatient and said, „Because Christ was an anti-Semite.”<sup>5</sup>

### Interest and favour

In the modern times there have appeared among Jews some more favourable attempts at discerning Jesus and the early Church. It should be emphasised, however, that no radical change in the general Jewish approach, except for single opinions some representatives of the Jewish religion have expressed, has taken place. As distinct from Catholicism, a horizontal structure with no recognition of so called central authority is a characteristic of Judaism, hence the whole situation constitutes its derivative only.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Asher Grinberg (1856-1927), Achad Haam was the pseudonym of his, opposed to Jewish religion being limited to a narrow range imposed and protected only by rabbis. To some extent it meant questioning the traditional estimation and attitudes or, at least, rejecting their monopoly. At the same time Yoseph G. Klausner (1874-1958) wrote a novel entitled *Jesus of Nazareth*<sup>6</sup>, where he put together the oldest mentions and allusions scattered in the Talmud and elsewhere in the way to show the gradual growth of hostility that reached its saturation point in *Toledoth Yeshu*. In his view, all the traditions were of no historical value but justifiable due to the polemic and the atmosphere of increasing dispute and conflicts with Christians. Later most of Jewish

<sup>5</sup> R. Brandstaetter, *Krag biblijny*, Warszawa 1986, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth, his Life, Times and Teaching*, London 1925.

writers followed the path, explaining anti-Christian ideas in the Jewish tradition as a response to the Jewish persecutions by Christians. Klausner, who departed from the rabbinical paradigm, focused upon a strongly Jewish context of the life and actions of Jesus and wrote: „For the Jewish nation Jesus is a teacher of lofty morality and a marvellous author of parables”<sup>7</sup>. Between the Two World Wars a tendency of the change in the discernment of Jesus among some Jews was reflected in the field of high literature. The book *Mąż z Nazaretu* by Shalom Ash, who was born in Kutno, was of special although underestimated significance<sup>8</sup>. Looking with favour on Jesus, it excellently portrays the Palestinian character of His life and actions without considering the stereotypes that have influenced the Jewish imagination for ages. You may find the problems which appeared in the USA with an edition of the book to come out in {jidisz} and later with its boycott very telling. Also Ash came under violent attack and, moreover, had to endure persecutions.

The contribution two Jewish precursors of the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity made should receive some recognition as well. Martin Buber (1878-1965) called Jesus „Big Brother”. Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) dared to question openly the Jewish views when he wrote: „ We can all agree to what Christ and the Church mean in the world: Nobody comes to Father if not through Him. Nobody comes to Father – it happens differently, however, when they do not have to come to Him as they are with Him. And the nation of Israel is clearly such a case”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore the approach to Jesus is inseparably linked to the Jewish theology of Christianity. Only when it becomes friendlier to Christianity the image of its founder will change for better.

Friendliness of few Jewish thinkers reached its extreme form when in Jesus, like in Mohamet, they saw a person who contributed to disseminate, in the whole world, an idea of one God, knowledge of Law and the Decalogue, expectation and Messianic hope the sa-

<sup>7</sup> D. Vetter, *Jezus Chrystus. Judaizm*, in: A.T. Khoury, *Leksykon podstawowych pojęć religijnych, Judaizm, Chrześcijaństwo, Islam*, trans. J. Marzęcki, Warszawa 1998, pp. 346-347.

<sup>8</sup> Sz. Asz, *Mąż z Nazaretu*, trans. M. Friedman, Biblioteka Pisarzy Żydowskich, Wrocław 1990; see rev. by W. Chrostowski, *Jezus – Brat i Pan*, *Przegląd Powszechny* 3/1992, pp. 481-484. There is no Polish translation of the book entitled *Maryja – matka Jezusa* by Sh. Asz; its French translation: *Marie mere de Jesus*, Calmann-Levy, Paris 1951.

<sup>9</sup> D. Vetter, *Jezus Chrystus, Judaizm*, pp. 347.

me. Christians, bearing in mind the fact that Jews are constantly awaiting Messiah and that the role of Judaism is to prepare His coming, may be helpful in the process if only they take part in it. Christianity may play a role of „praeparatio messianica” which is the equivalent of „praeparatio evangelica”, the role the Jewish religion was appointed to by Christians. Where the above point of view is present we can encounter the following opinion: „The founder of Christianity conferred a double blessing upon the world: On the one hand he strengthened the Torah of Moses, and emphasised its eternal obligatoriness. On the other hand he conferred favour upon the heathen in removing idolatry from them, imposing upon them stricter moral obligations than are contained in the Torah of Moses. There are many Christians of high qualities and excellent morals. Would that all Christians would live in conformity with their precepts”<sup>10</sup>. Jesus, paradoxically, legitimised the Jewish religion, what stimulated this kindness to Him. The possibility of „salus extra Synagogam” is acceptable but it may not be regarded from the doctrinal aspect but, practically, as a link to build better relations with Christians. These relations will become closer if Christians ally themselves with Jews for overcoming anti-Semitism. If only made, the Jewish-Christian dialogue moves to the social and political realm leaving its religious and theological character behind. Under these circumstances Jesus, as a subject of their mutual dispute, is to authenticate and support the policy of the State of Israel by Christians.

Byron L. Sherwin, an American rabbi, offered an interesting attempt at the new Jewish understanding of Jesus. He presented it during IV Theological Symposium „The Church towards Jews and Judaism”, which took place in Warsaw on 11-12 May 1992<sup>11</sup>. In relation to the classical Jewish sources which treated Jesus as a false messiah and taking earlier inspirations into consideration<sup>12</sup> Sher-

<sup>10</sup> J. Emden, *Preface to Seder Olam*, quot. from: L. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, West Orange N.J. 1973, pp. 286-287.

<sup>11</sup> All papers from the Symposium were published in „Collectanea Theologica” 62(1992)2, pp. 3-100; the paper by B.L. Sherwin was published in *Duchowe dziedzictwo Żydów polskich*, Biblioteka Dialogu 1, Warszawa 1995, pp. 283-309 under the title *A wy za kogo mnie uważacie?*

<sup>12</sup> I. Greenbergaw, *The Relationship of Judaism and Christianity: Toward a New Organic Model*, in: E.J. Fisher, A.J. Rudin, M.H. Tannenbaum, *Twenty Years of Catholic-Jewish Relations*, New York 1986, pp. 197-203.

win claimed: „Jesus was not a false Messiah but He was a Messiah that did not accomplish His mission”, in other words, He did not achieve His last objective of the mission<sup>13</sup>. In accordance with this approach Jesus would be Messiah, who failed, „because He did not redeem the world thoroughly. If he had fully succeeded, parusia – the second coming – would not be necessary”<sup>14</sup>.

The thesis of Byron L. Sherwin is, from the Christian point of view, unacceptable. The Messianic status of Jesus, understood in this way, contradicts His self-consciousness and demands, and questions the Christian belief that He will fulfil promises of the Old Testament. But its fundamental novelty, clearly visible in the light of the centuries old hostility towards Christianity and its founder, has implications for understanding Jesus as a Jewish Messiah, many of whom appeared through the Jewish history. For Byron L. Sherwin it is a certain way to „get Jesus back” for Judaism in its rabbinical nature as he ascribes not only a special place but also a Messianic role in the old tradition of the Jewish theology to Him and Christianity. If Jewish theology negated the Jewish nature of Jesus for so long His inclusion in Judaism, we must admit, constitutes great progress from the Jewish perspective. Too much optimism as to the possibility of making the idea widely known among Jews is out of the question. With regard to the thoughts of the rabbi B. L. Sherwin Stanisław Krajewski, one of the leading representatives of Polish Jews, wrote: „This idea is logically possible but without any justification in tradition. It is an elegant speculation, in a way attractive but at the same time inappropriate because it provokes Christians’ expectations that can never be fulfilled. It is just the essence of all such bows to the Christian theology”<sup>15</sup>.

Actual reasons for the Jewish reserve towards Jesus are openly depicted in the words of S. Krajewski. The attempt B.L. Sherwin made was regarded as „a bow to Christian theology” that just because of this does not justify its existence in Judaism. Yet another issue should be understood in the light of silence and aversion to Jesus and His teaching, namely undisguised reserve towards any dialogue with Christians about the matters. Even sporadic Chri-

<sup>13</sup> *A wy za kogo mnie uważacie?* pp. 296-297.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>15</sup> S. Krajewski, *Żydzi, judaizm, Polska*, Biblioteka Dialogu 3, Warszawa 1997, pp. 320-321.

stian-Jewish debates about Jesus have evoked among their Jewish participants opinions that the situations are unusual and inconvenient for them and, what is most important unwanted in a way. It has been clearly visible in the developing Christian-Jewish dialogue, that representatives of both religions can discuss almost everything but, as it was in the past, except for subjects referring to the identity and mission of Jesus. Explaining their reserve Jews claim to avoid such conversations with Christians for fear of persecutions. However, considering the growth of the Jewish-Christian dialogue in the last fifty years, a distinction between reasons and pretexts must be made. A mutual polemic about Jesus, no matter its results, will certainly cause no persecutions of Jews by Christians. Yet Jews avoid this debate maintaining the traditional view in accord with which there has been no place for Jesus in Judaism.

Lately, in various Jewish publications, there has appeared another way of understanding Jesus. They do not present what Jews think about Jesus but what Christians know and how they believe in Him. The following example comes from *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica*: „ Jesus (1st cent. BCE-1st cent. CE). Palestinian religious leader, founder of Christianity. According to the New Testament, he grew up in Galilee and was baptized by John the Baptist. He performed various miracles and announced the coming of the Kingdom of God. He was arrested and crucified by order of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, at the instigation of the Jewish authorities. His followers believed that he rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. They formed the core of the earliest Christian Church, and actively spread the good news about Jesus, whom they believed to be the Messiah (hence the addition to his name of «Christ»: the anointed one). According to Christian belief, Jesus was God Incarnate and is restored to the Godhead in the form of the Trinity.”<sup>16</sup>

We should appreciate the attempts at new understanding of Jesus and the early Church by Jews but we also should remember that opposition to Christian religion refers to the idea of God being incarnated in Jesus. Jewish thoughts and argumentation may be reduced to the following statement: Jesus is either a Jew or God. In

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<sup>16</sup> D. Cohn-Sherbok, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica*, Oxford 1992, pp. 262-263.

the Christian faith Jesus, of what He was aware Himself, is God, which excludes His Jewish nature as no Jew can claim to be God. Thus Christian religion becomes a certain absurd for the just presented thesis makes the unquestionable uniqueness of Jesus and His mission relative in the first place, and then challenges them. Believing in the Incarnation no Christian can claim that the event may be repeated. Most Jews with all orthodox ones state that God may not become a man, which strongly opposes to Christian religion. Thereby they assume that Judaic and Christian heritage have nothing in common.

The Jewish opposition to the Incarnation should not be disregarded. We owe invaluable theological thoughts on that subject to John Paul II, who presents them in his book entitled *Przekroczyć próg nadziei*. Referring to the Incarnation through which Jesus becomes a sacrament of invisible God and also to *scandalum crucis* that – as St Paul testifies (1 Cor 1,21-25) – from the beginning provoked opposition, John Paul II said: „Can we be surprised that even those who believe in one God, the witness of whom was Abraham, have difficulty to accept the faith in crucified God? They find God to be almighty and marvellous, absolutely transcendental and beautiful in His power, holy and inaccessible to a man. This is the only possible understanding of God! He may not be Father and Son and Holy Spirit. He may not be Love that offers itself, allows to be seen, heard and imitated as a man and which allows to be tied up, slapped across the face and crucified. This may not be God...! There is a great dilemma in the very centre of the great monotheistic tradition”<sup>17</sup>.

Explaining the Jewish perspective Eugene B. Borowitz wrote: „From the Jewish point of view there is a certain problem with concelebrating one’s life on a certain authority, in this case on Jesus Christ. In Jewish tradition his equivalent is the Synaitic Covenant between God and Israel. But the difference is significant. For Jews no historical hero is worth the status attributed to Jesus, especially if God is accessible in any historical time and the tradition of the Torah is already in our hands. The person of Jesus as paradigm se-

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<sup>17</sup> *Przekroczyć próg nadziei. Jan Paweł II odpowiada na pytania Vittoria Messoriego*, Lublin 1994, p. 30.

ems to lead too easily to individualism. Concentrating one's life on the religious experience of the Jewish nation offers individual existence, which Jews accept as a proper social context"<sup>18</sup>.

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The Christian attitude towards the Jewish understanding of Jesus of Nazareth oscillates between two extremes. On the one hand we can, like John Paul II, observe that protecting monotheism is of great concern. Rejecting the Messianic and Divine dignity of Jesus may be seen as faith in such transcendence of God in view of which He may not become one of us. If this aspect played a crucial role we could think that it has resulted from thoroughly thought and experienced faith in one God. However in the perspective of two thousand years of Christianity there has been the other extreme of the Jewish understanding. It consists of centuries old stereotypes and prejudices which make objective discernment of Jesus and the beginning of the Church impossible. During his jubilee pilgrimage to Holy Land John Paul II referred to them in his speech to Great Rabbis of Israel on 23 May 2000: „We must cooperate to build future with no anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian feelings among Jews”.

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<sup>18</sup> E.B. Borowitz, *Contemporary Christologies: A Jewish Response*, New York 1980, pp. 62-63.