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**THE STATE AND PROSPECTS OF THE CATHOLIC-JEWISH DIALOGUE
IN POLAND**

by **Waldemar Chrostowski**

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The dialogue with Jews and Judaism initiated by Vatican Council II is the duty of all local churches. The Church in Poland has special obligations for this field. For centuries Poland was the home of many generations of Poles and Jews, Christians and followers of Judaism. Their sometimes tension filled and troublesome but also harmonious coexistence was suddenly interrupted by the Nazi butchers, who carried out a mass extermination of the Jewish nation. It is becoming ever more clear to us that with the murder of the Jews in the Polish nation was impoverished, and the Polish culture suffered irreparable losses. So a dialogue with those who survived is also a tribute to all those who paid with their life for faithfulness to their religion and membership in the Jewish nation.

The dialogue with the Jews began here later than in the other countries of Europe and the world. There were several reasons for this. Historians contend that the annihilation of Jews were carried out in Poland because the largest number of Jews lived here. Other circumstances also have to be considered, however. After the Jews and the Gypsies, Poles were next in line to the crematoria. The choice of Poland as the place of extermination was an integral part of the precisely planned Nazi ideology. Jews were transported to Poland from remote regions of Europe, which in wartime conditions was a costly and troublesome undertaking. Poland was to become the cemetery of the followers of Judaism. That is why among Jews Poland evokes the most painful associations, and they are unable to think about Poland without emotions and bitterness. In a conscious or partially unconscious way this is carried over to the attitude toward Poles. On the other hand, the war and the occupation inflicted countless sufferings on Polish Catholics. Both communities closed themselves up in their own pain, and an irrational debate even heated up on who suffered the most, a debate which hindered and even made impossible mutual understanding. Both of the antagonistic sides contributed to the process of separation. This had an effect on the

atmosphere and the nature of theological reflection. Other factors also come into play. Right after 1945, about 100 thousand Jews lived in Poland, but their numbers steadily decreased. Today the estimates of the numbers of Jews in Poland vary. It is surmised that from five to fifteen thousand followers of Judaism live in different parts of the country. Such a small number makes the dialogue between copartners impossible. Many Jews are not interested in the change in the position of the church, while Catholics do not have the opportunity to experience and become familiar with "living Judaism." The dialogue was also delayed by the fact that after World War II the Church in Poland had to fight for its own survival, oppose totalitarianism and communism, which naturally pushed contacts with the followers of other religions into the background. Not until the changes of the 1980's was a new situation created in which the church and Catholics could rid themselves of a "siege mentality."

The Road Traveled

What is peculiar to Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Poland is that it is taking place in the shadow of a different history. Other religious groups and nations which make light of the specific context of Polish-Jewish history either do not know about this or do not attach enough importance to it. Contacts between Polish and Jewish historians, who worked to remove ancient prejudices and tensions, developed before the religious dialogue. Historical discussions and publications were the subsoil for a theological reorientation, for they often confronted the participants with philosophical, moral and religious questions. In the totalitarian system, however, theologians were held in contempt, even ridiculed and oppugned, while theology was put outside the pale of intellectual life. For this reason interesting and important opinions met with little response. Quite a few articles on Jewish subjects appeared in the second half of the 1960's and in the 1970's, i.e., during the time of a fundamental change in the position of the Church on Judaism. In discussions of the documents of Vatican Council II, especially the declaration "Nostra aetate" and later pronouncements of the Apostolic See, the participants mentioned the need to reorient thinking and change the point of view on the Jews. The leaders of this movement were Tygodnik Powszechny (Cracow) and the monthlies Znak (Cracow) and Wież (Warsaw). The publications were justified by the interest in Jewish history and culture and by Polish-Jewish tensions, which constantly had to be overcome. This was a stage in which taking up "Jewish" subject-matter had to be justified. Not until the beginning of the 1980's did the number of theological article perceptibly increase, reaching an unprecedented level.¹ The long years

¹E. Jzwiak and A. Kusmirek, "Dialog chrzescijansko-zydowski, Wybrana bibliografia polskojezyczna 1964-1989", Collectanea Theologica 60/1990/3, pp. 113-118.

of efforts to reach and understanding with the Jews and Judaism were capped with the publication in 1983 of a double issue of Znak, entitled "Catholicism-Judaism-Jews in Poland and in the World." Jewish subject matter was taken up in the monthly once again in detail in the 1988 issue entitled "Jews, Poland, Christianity--The Legacy and the Present Day." A big role in shaping a new attitude was played by the so-called Weeks of Jewish Culture held in various cities and the Oswiecim Weeks organized since 1985 by the Club of the Catholic Intellectuals in Cracow. Though their subject-matter was essentially historical, religious accents as well as philosophical and theological problems naturally appeared. An important event was the Judaistic session " Jewish Religion and Culture, " which was held on 16 and 17 April, 1986, as a part of the II Pieniezno Encounters with Religions. The doctrine and spiritual life of Judaism, Jewish Messianism and Orthodoxy, and selected questions from the history of Polish Jews were presented at the session.

The appointment in the spring of 1986 by the Conference of the Polish Episcopate of the Subcommittee for the Dialogue with Judaism headed by Bishop Henryk Muszynski must be regarded as the real beginning of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Poland. Earlier contacts with the followers of Judaism had taken place through the mediation of the Ecumenical Commission of the Episcopate and were rather sporadic. The first meeting of the Episcopate and were rather sporadic. The first meeting of the Subcommittee was held on 13 May 1986 in Warsaw. Emphasis was placed on the most important documents of the Church concerning the Jews, and a plan of action was drawn up for the immediate future. It was decided that the main task would be to stimulate and coordinate theological reflection and actions to advance cooperation between Catholics and Jews. Through the efforts of the chairman of the Subcommittee, on 14 June 1987, Pope John Paul II met with representatives of Polish Jews in the Primate's residence in Warsaw. Toward the end of 1987, the Subcommittee was elevated to the rank of a Commission. An important accomplishment was the organization in April 1988 in Tyniec and Cracow, with the cooperation of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, of an International Theological Colloquium "Jews and Christians in Dialogue." During the deliberations, a religious dialogue dominated. Though some of the participants were still inclined to focus on historical questions, there was awareness of the need to respect the status and rank of theological contacts and discussions.² After the Tyniec Colloquium the Commission worked on preparing a document on the attitude toward Jews and Judaism similar to those which had been issued by the Episcopates and Comissions of other countries. Later the dispute concerning the convent of the Carmelite nuns in Oswiecim became ever more prominent in the discussions. When in the summer of 1989, the conflict became so inflamed that a complete break in Catholic-Jewish contacts was imminent, the voice of the

²W. Chrostowski, "Zydzi i chrzescijanie w dialogu" Znak 12 /1989/407, pp. 105-110.

Commission and its chairman (18 July and September) had a great influence on the course of events.³ The controversy around the convent increased interest in Jews and Judaism. Theological premises, which for understandable reasons attracted the attention of Catholics, played a major role in the controversy. The pronouncements of the Commission of the Episcopate were widely publicized and commented on in the press. In the context of this dramatic dispute the Commission of the Episcopate were widely publicized and commented on in the press. In the context of this dramatic dispute the Commission did not ignore other work and came out with new initiatives. In the autumn of 1988, a decision was made to collect and publish in one volume the most important documents of the Church and the pronouncements of John Paul II on Jews and Judaism.⁴ The book Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue: 1970-1985, which summed up the successes of interreligious cooperation at the Vatican level,⁵ was translated into Polish and published. Also highly important were the numerous contacts of the chairman and members of the Commission, which made it possible to make use of the experience and accomplishments of other local Churches and organizations working to stimulate the dialogue. Both Catholic and Jewish foreign guests participated in some of the meetings of the Commission.

As a result of the cooperation of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for the Dialogue with Judaism with the Archdiocese in Chicago, in the summer of 1989 a group of twenty-two lecturers of theological seminaries and colleges (including an Orthodox theologian) took part in a Christian-Jewish Seminar organized by Spertus College of Judaica. This was an unprecedented undertaking, whose rank and importance cannot be overestimated. The visit of Polish lecturers and the exchange of ideas with Jewish scholars were widely commented on in the American press and in Polonia circles. It should be emphasized that this took place in the context of a growing controversy around Oswiecim, which was kindled by incidents created by Rabbi A. Weiss. Theological issues dominated in the one and a half month of work in Chicago. In addition to presentation of the doctrine and ethics of Judaism, eminent specialists addressed the most important problems of interreligious dialogue. An invaluable contribution was the experience of American philosophical and religious pluralism and becoming acquainted with the duties of the Church in conditions far different from Polish ones. The participants of the Chicago Seminar are preparing a book

³The satisfaction is expressed in the Statement of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, dated 19 September 1989.

⁴This book is in print and it will appear in Summer of 1990.

⁵Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue 1970-1985 Selected Papers, Libreria Editrice Vaticana-Libreria Editrice Lateranense, 1988.

entitled Children of One God, which consists of their own contributions and articles of a fee organizers directly or indirectly dealing with questions of the Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Theological institutions, especially the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw, are gradually becoming involved in the theological dialogue with Jews and Judaism. Starting from the academic year 1988/1989, regular lectures are being given on the nature and history of Judaism, with emphasis on the main problems that underpin mutual relations. Hebrew also has become an elective in the curriculum. In recent years students have written several good master's and doctor's theses, and others are in preparation. A Theological Symposium "The Church, Jews and Judaism," which initiated the tradition of annual symposia directed toward a reorientation of the attitude toward Jews and Judaism, was organized in June 1989 through the efforts of the Department of Theology of the Academy of Catholic Theology. Efforts are continuing to set up an Institute in the Academy dealing with the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. The teachers of the Academy are attending more and more conferences and meetings in various parts of the country. Fruitful contacts are being made with foreign colleges and institutions. The Commission for the Future of the State Museum in Oswiecim (Auschwitz) attached to the Ministry of Culture and Art was established in the autumn of 1989, and at the beginning of March 1990 the Council of the Museum was reactivated. Theologians, who put on the agenda questions of interreligious dialogue, are members of both bodies. Specific actions have been taken to create in the Society for Polish-Israel Friendship a separate Section of Religious Dialogue, which in time could be affiliated with the International Council of Christians and Jews. More intensive contact with Jews also is being promoted by the restoration in February 1990 of full diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel and the great commitment of Ambassador Dr. Morechai Palzur to closer relations between the two nations and religions. Theological publications are an important channel of influence. In recent years, their number has increased considerably. With appreciation, one should mention the two issues of Ateneum Kaplanskie published in February and April 1990 and devoted to the dialogue with Jews. These publications are all the more important in as much as their main audience are priests and alumni of theological seminaries, and we can rightly hope that their knowledge will be expanded and familiarity with the new theological thinking more widely disseminated.

The Ballast of the Past

In spite of unquestionably greater understanding and considerable accomplishments, the specter of the past still haunts Catholic-Jewish relations in Poland. Animositites and stereotypes on both sides make difficult and sometimes paralyze mutual contacts. It is

exceptionally difficult to break down these barriers, for their roots are deeply embedded in the collective subconsciousness of the communities at strife.

A real drawback of the dialogue initiated is the too infrequent publication of the content and results for theological discussions. Of the past meetings only the materials from the Judaistic session in Pieniezno and the symposium "The Church, Jews and Judaism" have been published in full.⁶ Only two papers have been published from the interesting colloquium in Tyniec and the plans to publish all of them are dragging on inordinately.⁷ The conferences and lectures from the Oswiecim Weeks are completely unknown to the public. Such a state of affairs is explained to some degree by the general difficulties in the printing industry which are plaguing all the branches of culture and sciences. But this is not the only, or even the most important, reason. The reserve and silence are due to the still existing psychological barriers and unwillingness to have closer contacts. There are publishing houses and editorial boards which are not interested in or refuse point-blank to include information and material on "Jewish" subject-matter. Sometimes such a position is justified by arguing that such publications evoke strong emotions and reactions from readers, who are unaccustomed to dialogue and even openly hostile to the prospect of closer relations with Jews. There are many corroboratory facts that this is indeed the case. The interview of Bishop H. Muszynski for Tygodnik Powszechny⁸ called forth a sharp rejoinder from Jędrzej Giertych in London,⁹ who accused the bishop of heresy and selling out Catholicism. The defense of Bishop H. Muszynski's position on the rightness of the interreligious dialogue¹⁰ was countered with a long brochure, whose author, J.L. Majewski, shows intense hostility toward any forms of cooperation.¹¹ Stating that "after the coming of the Savior, after His martyr's death and resurrection the special mission of the Jewish nation ended, and with it their elect status was suspended" (p.3), J.L. Majewski concludes: "If the Jewish nation wants to become the

⁶B. Wodecki SVD and E. Sliwka SVD (ed.), Religia i kultura zydowska. Materiay z sesji judaistycznej-II Pienieznienskie Spotkania z Religiami, Materiały i Studi Ksiezy Werbistow 28, Pieniezno 1986; "Kosciol a Zydzi i judaizm," Collectanea Theologica 60/1990/3, pp. 3-118.

⁷Chrostowski, "Nowe spojrzenie chrzescijanstwa na Zydow i judaizm--nowa teologia," Przeglad Powszechny 9/1988/, pp. 263-278 = "New Christian Views of Judaism" Theology Digest 35/1988/4, pp. 319-326; G. Wigoder, "Nowy Testament i chrzescijanstwo w swietle mysli zydowsko-izraelskiej," Przeglad Poowszechny 12/1988, pp. 344-358 and 1/1989/, pp.36-49.

⁸"Mamy wspolne korzenie i wspolne zadania," Tygodnik Powszechny" No. 49, 6.12.1987, pp. 1-2.

⁹ J. Giertych, "Czy narodzenie sie nowej herezji," Opoka 20. Londyn, Styczen 1988, pp. 1-18.

¹⁰Chrostowski, "Kto jest heretykiem?," Tygodnik Poweszechny No. 24, (12.06,1989), pp. 1 and 4.

¹¹ J.L. Majewski, Czy Jędrzej Giertych jest heretykiem? List protestacy do redakcji "Tygodnika Powszechnego, Wydawnictwo Narodowe "Chrobry", Warszawa 1989.

chosen people once again, let them give up the Talmud and Cabbala and join us - the followers of Jesus Christ. Then we will very willingly enter into a dialogue with them" (p.15). Judaism is called "a renegation which deserves to be condemned." The brochure ends with the statement: Christocentrism and Judeocentrism are two completely different, absolute contrary religions, between which there is not and cannot be any dialogue, any synthesis, any partnership and any ecumenism" (p.35). The Catholic advocates of dialogue are even more fiercely attacked in the brochure than the Jews. This pronouncement could be regarded as marginal and a symptom of a serious illness were it not for the fact that this publication is sold in Church news-stands , and the author regards himself as a leading Catholic. The hostility festering in these circles is not directed solely against Jews. There are equally malicious attacks on other ethnic minorities and religious denominations. There is an urgent need for the Church to dissociate itself from such attitudes and behaviors. On the other hand, it is unfair to form an opinion about Poland and Polish Catholics on the basis of such extreme cases.

Rarely do the opponents of dialogue reveal their nature and intentions as J. Giertych and J.L. Majewski did. The teaching of the Church is too clear for anyone to regard himself as a Catholic and at the same time express contempt for Jews. That is why efforts are being made to reduce the dialogue to a narrow circle of theologians and treat it as their private hobby. One can see this on the example of a certain reaction to the presence of Polish lecturers in Spertus College of Judaica. In the weekly Lad Jerzy Narbutt selectively quoted statements about the Seminar transmitted by "The Voice of America" and glossed over it by suggesting that the visit in Chicago was something individual, and theological reflection and closer relations with Judaism--a fruitless oddity.¹² Catholics do not gain any benefits from the dialogue with Jews. The publicist does not understand how one could say that the meeting with the followers of Judaism enhanced the awareness of the participants and of their Christian roots, resulted in a deeper understanding of our faith, who Jesus Christ is and what His place is in our religion. Apparently the enriching experience of a meeting with different people is alien to him. It looks as though a discussion consists solely in persuading and convincing an oppositionist and opponent. The author makes no mention of the documents of the Church and the papal teachings nor of his personal attitude toward the question of dialogue. His animosity is masked by polished words and phrases. Pronouncements of this kind are more concerned with paying off old scores than with making a constructive contribution to understanding and cooperation between people. Theology is a supplementary field for the articulation of certain political views. These voices

¹². J. Narbutt, "Zaskakujace implikacje," Lad No.50, (10.12.1989),: 8; W. Chrostowski, "Naprawde zaskakujace implikacje," Lad no 11 (18.03.1990), 6.

are less aggressive than the anti-Semitic views expressed in brochures and pamphlets, but they reach wider audience and have an influence on the mentality of believers. Anti-Jewish accents and illusions are a manifestation of a deeper mental attitude. This shows that in Poland there are outspoken opponents of closer relations with Jews who at all costs want to bring a stop to the dialogue which has started.

But grudges and the ballast of a difficult past do not define the tasks and nature of theology. On the contrary, theology developed in the spirit of the Gospel must lay down the guidelines for coexistence with the followers of other religions. Irrespective of the intentions of the critics of dialogue, their views have nothing in common with the mission of the church. One cannot tolerate a situation in which hostility toward and contempt for others is concealed under the label of the Catholic religion. In such an orientation we have to do with the ideologization and instrumentalization of religion, which is made to serve the immediate political plans and needs of right-wing parties. For this reason the Catholic press, theologians and publicists have much to do in Poland.

For a more complete picture one ought to mention another hidden but no less real current of reaction to the nascent dialogue. As a result of the meetings and discussions, publications and reflections, many anonymous letters have been sent to the diocesan curia, bishops, priests, superiors, and also to editorial offices and well-known and influential people. The contents and tone of many make them unfit for publication. They often contain arguments reflecting the stereo-types of a considerable part of the Polish society. Some of them contain charges, warnings and denunciations and continually reiterate that they are defending the Church from the "heresy of Judeocentrism." This channel of expression deserves special attention. Many of the opinions contained there, however, require the consultation of a psychologist or psychiatrist rather than of a theologian or historian.

The progress and quality of the interreligious dialogue, however, depends not only on the people directly involved in it. An important role is played by theologians, especially in systematic and basic theology, catechists, writers of homilies and preachers. Some deepen and develop the theoretical premises of Catholic doctrine, others are responsible for teaching and disseminating it. There is a wide field of research here, which has not yet reached its full potential. Many theologians are not familiar with or make little of the content and rank of the Vatican Commission for the Religious Dialogue with Judaism of 1974 and 1985. The second of these texts, which appeared in the monthly W Drodze was abbreviated (censored?).¹³ To this day there has been no treatment of these two documents or any deeper thought on the problems raised there.

¹³W Drodze 1-2 (1986) 149-150, pp. 59-67.

A frequent sin of the Biblical scholars is forcing through the view that the "new Israel," the Church, has completely replaced the "old Israel," which means that Judaism is a worthless relic and even an error deserving condemnation. This is associated with accusing Jews--all of them without exception--of the "murder of God." One can see this especially in the slogan: "his blood on us and our children." The attitude of the crowd in the courtyard of Pilate's palace is seen as the culminating point of the history of ancient Israel. For example: "Let his blood be on us and our children" (Mt27:25). This attitude of the people of the Old Covenant is a turning point in the history of salvation.¹⁴ The result of such a view is the theology of substitution: "The new people is united by baptism and obedience to the disciples of Jesus and radically differs from the old one, which continues to live in legalism and hypocrisy. And so the new people truly deserve to be called the true Israel."¹⁵ Judaism is depicted as manifestation of legalism and hypocrisy. The formation of students in most of the theological seminaries probably takes place in such a spirit. It is not surprising that anti-Jewish accents--sometimes very strong ones--appear in sermons and catechism. They are uttered especially during large scale missions and recollections during Advent and Lent and the traditional parish missions.

All of the above shadows and weak points of the dialogue concern the Catholic side. But the reconstruction and reorientation of thinking must take place on both sides. Though there is only a small number of adherents of Judaism in our country, too few Jews are taking an active part in the dialogue. There are also persons and circles opposed to cooperation and influential Jewish groups and organizations not interested in the reorientation of the Church. There are quite a few voices warning against closer relations with Catholics. It is to them that the Catholic opponents of dialogue most often appeal. Everything should be done to prevent the atmosphere of mutual relations from being shaped by the oppositionists on both sides. The idea of dialogue would then be a pretext for further bitter divisions and increasing the distance separating the two communities. Too little is being done to show Judaism through the eyes of Jews themselves, to present faith and practice, customs and norms of behavior. It sometimes happens that many Jewish subjects, including the theology of Judaism, are more clearly presented by Christian scholars than by Jews. The religious dialogue does not occupy much place in Jewish periodicals in Poland. An important aspect of mutual relations is to publish and explain the primary texts of Judaism. The theological reorientation of Christians evident in the new treatment of Judaism is not being accompanied by an indispensable reorientation among Jews in looking at Jesus Christ and Christianity.

¹⁴J. Kudasiewicz, Ewangelie synoptyczne dzisiaj, Biblioteka Wiezi 53, Warszawa 1986, pp 213-214 and Teologia Nowego Testamentu, vol. I, KUL, Lubin:1986 85.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 214-215 and 86.

There are many excellent papers in both languages on this subject which it would be useful to publish in Polish for the benefits of both Jews and Christians.

The dispute about the convent of Carmelite nuns in Oswiecim has had a very detrimental effect on the dialogue of the Church with the Jews. The anatomy of this controversy deserves the great attention and must be addressed honestly by both sides. The dispute unleashed and brought out into the open the symptoms of an uncured illness gnawing at both communities.¹⁶ It is common knowledge that many ardent and God-fearing Jews are not bothered by the presence and prayer of nuns near the place of extermination. Nonetheless, considering the feelings and fears of others, who are much more vocal in manifesting their dissatisfaction and demands, Cardinal F. Macharski took the unprecedented decision to move the convent to another place.

This was a sign of friendliness toward Jews and proof of understanding their feelings and demands. An even more suggestive confirmation of good will and the desire to engage in dialogue is supposed to be the Centre for Information, Meetings, Dialogue and Prayer. Unfortunately, the situation developed in such a way that instead of closer relations and cooperation a bitter confrontation took place. The opponents of dialogue on both sides gained the upper hand. For them every pretext is good enough to kindle the already tense relations. On account of the dispute around Carmel Catholic-Jewish relations in 1989 reached their lowest point since Vatican II Council. It is remarkable that in such an inflamed situation the interreligious dialogue in Poland continues to develop. The issue of moving the nuns is still a subject of lively debate. I believe that the sisters themselves, on whose attitude depends the happy resolution of the bitter conflict, have the most to say about this.

Tasks and Prospects

Important tasks for both the Catholic and Jewish sides can be deduced from the above diagnosis. Dialogue assumes thorough familiarity with and respect for the identity of the partner and willingness to cooperate in actions that go far beyond the good of both sides. Progress in closer relations is determined by the existing state of affairs, and only on this basis can one make predictions about the future and identify the obligations that rest on the followers of both religions. Jews and Polish Catholics ought to be aware of the truth that the attitude of dialogue is really the only way to overcome the ballast and barriers of the past.

Though dialogue has become a fact, it is being conducted by only a small group of people from both sides. It is true that both one and the other make their presence felt in

¹⁶W. Chrostowski, "O Karmelu bez emocji," Solidarnosc no 18, (29 September 1989), 3 and 10 In English Controversy Around the Auschwitz Convent, Christian Jewish Relations 22/1989/3-4, also OPREE, vol. 10, no 3, pp. 15-29.

publications and that the situation has changed so much that declarations that someone does not want dialogue are very offensive. Nonetheless, there is still no general climate conducive to reaching complete understanding and cooperation. It gives one much food for thought that in spite of the development of ecumenical contacts, the dialogue with Jews has the greatest number of opponents. And yet, as John Paul II emphasized in a Roman Synagogue (13 April, 1986), "the Jewish religion is not an external reality for our religion, but is internal to it. The attitude toward the Jewish faith is different from that toward any other religion." The statements for the pope, who in his country is the highest spiritual and moral authority, ought to be widely publicized. If his position were really known and understood, it would be an invaluable aid in forging new relations with the Jews. Bearing in mind the hierarchical structure of the Church, greater involvement is called for in the dialogue with Jews by the bishops, both on the part of the Conference of the Polish Episcopate and individual bishops. It is high time to publish a document on the subject of Judaism similar to those which were promulgated by other Episcopates. Such a document would be addressed first to the clergy and would influence sermons and the catechism. Some bishops and priests put off thinking about dialogue with Jews. These clerics claim that in Poland this problem does not exist because the number of adherents of Judaism is small, and in some parts of the country there are none for them at all. But the interreligious dialogue also is concerned with deepening awareness about oneself, hence about the nature of the Church and its role in the world today. It is worth recalling the words of John Paul II uttered on 17 November, 1980, in Mainz: "He who encounters Jesus Christ, encounters Judaism."¹⁷ The postulate of reorientation remains in force even when there are no real possibilities of contacts with Jews. The attitude of dialogue and a better understanding of Judaism helps Christians to become better understanding of Judaism helps Christians to become better followers of Christ. After the fruitful Seminar in Spertus College of Judaica, the time has come to set up commission for the dialogue with Judaism in individual dioceses. This should take place first in those cities in which the Jewish presence was strongly felt. In addition to theoretical subject-matter, there are many practical matters to take care of (sacral monuments, works of culture and art, Jewish cemeteries, etc.).

Of crucial importance is the education of students preparing for the priesthood. Most of the seminary students and young priests have no knowledge or only a superficial knowledge of Judaism and quite often see it through the prism of uncritically repeated stereotypes. One must speak in a new light about the Jewish identity of Jesus, about the permanence of the election of Israel and faithfulness of God. One should root out once and

¹⁷Chrostowski, "Kosciol wobec Zydow i judaizmu," Chrzescijanin w Swiecie 3(1989) 186, pp.16-30.

for all the charge for "murder of God" and representation of the Jews as cursed and rejected by God. Required lectures on Judaism ought to be given in theological seminaries and contacts with the followers of Judaism promoted. Common prayers on the model of those held during the Ecumenical Week afford great opportunities for closer relations and getting to know each other better. Making this a reality obviously depends on the openness and goodwill of the Jewish side. The participants of the Seminar at Spertus College are well aware of how profound and fruitful prayer meetings can be. In addition to visiting synagogues, we prayed together with Jews in a Catholic church on Virgin's Mary Assumption Eve. Male and female religious orders, which have close ties with and influence on the faithful, play an important role in Poland. All of the superiors of these orders, who themselves must first become more familiar with the directions of change in the thinking of the Church, should issue suitable instructions and suggestions.

The ballast of the past gives the theological dialogue in Poland a special color. It is impossible to understand the Jewish soul without going into the dramatic history of Jewish-Christian coexistence. One has to speak about this more openly, without hiding or passing over in silence cases of intolerance and hostility, discrimination and tensions. Catholics too with circumspection and with difficulty admit to excesses and manifestations of ill-will in coexistence with Jews. Such a necessary self-examination is carried out unwillingly and with resistance. Jews also have a lot to do. Events which took place in the present century weigh heavily on mutual relations. Listening to the charges addressed to them, Catholics recall the ties of some Jews with the revolution in Russia, the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920, the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, and the role of Jews in the political system and apparatus of ideology and repression imposed on Poles by force after the war. Catholics are awaiting a clear cutting off from repressions and atheization by persons who declared themselves as Jews or persons of Jewish origin. In the consciousness of the most recent generations a harmful stereotype has been created of the Jew as a subverter, communist and atheist, enemy of the church and the Christian faith. All Jews who are sincerely attached to God and the sacred traditions of their nation suffer from this impression. Such conditions are unknown or little known in Western Europe or the USA, where there is a picture of Polish Jews as deeply and traditionally religious people. The vast majority of Jews who managed to emigrate from Poland before the war were believers, whereas those who got themselves off from Judaism. These tensions are linked with the question of Jewish identity and are certainly painful for Jews themselves. Nonetheless, they are important to the intensification and course of the religious dialogue. Catholics must desist as soon as possible from blaming all the Jews for the actions of some of them. It must be strongly emphasized that Poles also, including persons who had been baptized, were part of the apparatus of compulsion and

atheization. This point should prevent hasty generalizations and antagonization of the two communities.

One can point out many fields that require special sensitivity toward our Jewish fellow-citizens. In the forefront is the Annihilation, which is called the Holocaust or Shoah. Catholics ought to be educated to be more sensitive to the scope and nature of this genocide. One should patiently recall and explain the martyrology and gehenna of the Jews, which had something specific in it that must be respected and honored. One cannot count on shaping attitudes of Christian charity without practicing solidarity with Jews, in whose minds Shoah has stamped an indelible mark. So far no complete reconciliation of Polish Catholics and Jews has taken place. The victims, whose sufferings ought to bring them closer together, are suspicious of each other and are at odds. Both groups see their own wounds and scars and are not concerned with other people's pain. The dispute over the convent in Oswiecim revealed this clearly. Both representatives of the Church and activists of various Jewish institutions and organizations must ask themselves whether they have done everything to understand the Carmelite nuns and to show them the indispensable directions of dialogue. The nuns themselves must open themselves up completely to the good of the universal Church and not allow their presence and prayer to continue to be a bone of contention and divisions. Irrespective of all declarations and solutions, a special responsibility falls on the Carmelite nuns. For it might happen that their move to another place will be of benefit for bringing the contending sides together.

Since 1948 the Jews have their own state. For the last twenty years (after 1968) there was official silence on this subject in Poland, which was interrupted from time to time by signs of clear ill-will or hostility. A young generation of Poles has grown up who know little about Israel and see it in a distorting mirror. There is no doubt that this is the result of obscure infighting within the (until recently) all-powerful communist party. Fortunately, rapid changes are also taking place here, the most important of which was the restoration of full diplomatic relations between Warsaw and Jerusalem. Believers in Christ also have plenty of work to do in this field. If for centuries the ideology of "the wandering Jew," dominated the way Christians looked at Jews the question should be asked with all earnestness whether the return to the land of their fathers, to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, does not make it necessary for us to see the Jewish destiny and identity in a new light.¹⁸ The Holy Land is rightly regarded as the land of Jesus, of His Mother and disciples, and the land of the birth and beginnings of the Church. But this picture must be expanded by remembering that the heirs of the First Covenant live in Israel today. Closer relations with them and

¹⁸Chrostowski, "Ziemia Izraela w ekonomii zbawienia i swiadomosci zydzowskiej," Ateneum Kaplanskie 1-2(1990) 485, pp. 63-76.

learning about their life will give us a greater insight into the earthly Savior, but in and of itself deserves the greatest respect and attention.

Changes in the attitude toward Jews cannot take place without a radical rethinking of the Christian faith. The ancient theological principle Ecclesia semper reformanda, is perhaps more timely in this field than in others. In the opinion of many Catholics, the goal of the dialogue is to convert Jews to the Christian faith. Jews defend themselves against such a dialogue and see it as a mortal danger to their identity. There is no doubt that the followers of Christ want to increase the number of converts and rejoice over every person who becomes baptized. From its very beginnings, Christianity has been a missionary religion, which means the obligation to preach the Gospel to all nations (Mt 28: 18-20). But the calling of the Christian is not so much to profess as to give living witness to the faith. There is a need to explain what a real dialogue is and what its relation is to the mission that is part of the Christian identity. The Jews in turn ought to understand and respect the missionary nature of Christianity, which is so different from the spirit and practice of Judaism. While demanding respect for their own identity, they have to respect the aspect of evangelization constantly present in the life and actions of the followers of Christ.

The social and political changes in Central-Eastern Europe face Catholics and Jews with new hopes and opportunities and also new challenges and dangers. There are signs of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, in the GDR, in Hungary, and also in Poland. With the end of the totalitarian system and before fragile democratic structures grow stronger, extremely nationalistic and chauvinistic tendencies are manifesting themselves. Even countries with stable democracies, such as France and Germany, are not free of them. Catholics ought to show greater maturity and resist all efforts to instrumentalize religion. The postulates voiced time and time again of "Catholic Poland" or "Poland with crown and cross" are understood as attempts to steer Catholicism from above and to define the criterion of Polishness. This carries the danger of intolerance and a new totalitarianism. Instead of Christianization "from above" as an integral part of the programs for political parties, the real task is to change people's consciences and to shape truly Christian life attitudes. The followers of Judaism, who are richer for a longer history, can help in this by showing the prophetic dimension of religion. Jews in Israel, the USA, and Western Europe, who enjoy the benefits of freedom, ought to be more outspoken in expressing solidarity with Christians who at the cost of sacrifices and sufferings are finally obtaining what by nature belongs to every person and nation. The changes taking place are putting an end to the programmed atheization of social life and are restoring religion to its proper place in public life. The Jewish as well the Christian communities are benefitting from the new political situation, which should bring these groups closer together.