

SECOND THEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM ON "THE CHURCH, JEWS, AND JUDAISM"

By Waldemar Chrostowski

In Poland the dialogue with the Jews initiated by Vatican Council II was taken up for good in the middle of the eighties. The landmark was the creation by the Conference of the Polish Episcopate in the spring of 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 Oswiecim. The tensions reached their peak in the summer of 1989, when Catholic-Jewish contacts sank to their lowest level since the middle of the sixties.

At the beginning of June 1989 the Theological Faculty of the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw organized the first meeting of Polish theologians devoted to the reorientation of the Church toward the Jews and Judaism (see: JES 26(1989)3, p.601-604). 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 starting up a useful dialogue with American Jewish leaders. At the same time the ACT 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 the fraternal religious communities that have been at odds for centuries. As part of this program and a continuation of last year's meeting the Theological Department of the ACT organized the II Theological Symposium "The Church, Jews and Judaism" on 3 and 4 April, 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 are the specific features of contacts in Poland, and what are the prospects and tasks for the immediate future.

The Symposium was opened by the rector of the Act, prof. Helmut Juros, and introductory addresses were given by Dr. Mordechai Palzur, the ambassador of Israel in Poland, bish. prof. Henryk Muszynski, chairman 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 ask 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 anti-Semitism on the one side and anti-Polishness on the other." Bishop H. Muszynski put the dialogue of Polish Catholics and Jews in an all-Church perspective and accented the directions of cooperation: "It first ought to help us to overcome our prejudices, animosities, and then promote closer relations based on truth. We have to come to this truth, we have to seek it." Rabbi M. Joskowicz reminded that the meeting was being held in an atmosphere of

the still unfinished dispute about the convent in Oswiecim. This dispute shows what a great need there is for respect for every person and his/her religion.

The first paper, entitled "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. To England also appertains the opprobrium of the first Ritual Murder accusation, concerning High of Lincoln in 1255." The lecturer gave a concise panorama of English history, stressing the most important aspects of the attitude toward Jews. He talked about 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. He devoted the most attention to the text of the resolution adopted during the Conference in Lambeth (1988), which laid down the principles of dialogue between the followers of the three great monotheistic religions-Christians, Jews, and Moslems. This document has not only theoretical value but also a practical aim. its signatories believe that it can contribute to peace in the Middle East. On Christian-Jewish relations the lecturer mentioned several areas: the special links of Christianity with Judaism, the importance of the state of Israel, the need to completely abolish the "teaching of contempt," the vitality of Judaism, the Jewish context of the life of Jesus, the necessity for renewed teaching about Jews, and the common mission of people who believe in One God. Rabbi Solomon also talked about the initiatives of the Catholic Church in Great Britain, joint social endeavors of Christians and Jews, and practical undertakings, e.g. academic studies of Judaism and the work of the Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations which he heads. He also pointed out the dangers and benefits of dialogue. "The real line of division"-- he said -- "is not between Christians and Jews but between conservatives and those on both sides who want progress." The correctness of this diagnosis must be confirmed from the Catholic side.

The second of the foreign lecturers, Dr. Etienne de Jonghe, came from Antwerp (Belgium). He is the international secretary of the Catholic movement "Pax Christi," which was started up toward the end of World War II with the aim of working for the reconciliation of Frenchmen and Germans. Gradually the movement expanded its activities to other areas of peaceful cooperation, including the promotion of closer relations with the adherents of Judaism. The subject of his paper was "Pax Christi and the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue." Closer relations with Jews were promoted by pilgrimages to the Holy Land and close contacts with Israelis, and reconciliation with Germans -- by pilgrimages made since 1964 to Auschwitz. Of great importance was the recent pronouncement of card. F. Konig of Vienna (chairman of the "Pax Christi" movement) calling for the reconciliation of Catholics and Jews in the context of the dispute over the convent of the Carmelite nuns. "Pax Christi" is working up a special program concerning faith,dialogue, and reconciliation. The movement intends to expand its activities to Poland and declares the desire to become involved in the promotion of closer interreligious relations.

"Cardinal August Hlond in re the Jews" was the subject of bish. Henryk Muszynski's paper. Cardinal Hlond was the object of indiscriminate attacks directed against him in reference to Polish-Jewish tensions before World War II and the so-called Kielce pogrom in 1946. The most serious charge was made by the Dutch Zionist Jan Rogier, who called card. Hlond an "extreme anti-Semite." Bishop Muszynski quoted card. Hlond's pronouncement in its entirety, which gives it a completely different sense than when it is quoted tendentiously and selectively. The most important pronouncement of the cardinal before World War II is the pastoral letter of 1936, which has an antithetic literary structure. "This letter"-- bish. Muszynski stated -- "fully reflects the economic and social tensions of 1936, but at the same time it tries to do justice to the Jews by condemning the injustices committed against them and calling for respect and love." In the first part of his letter card. Hlond mentions the dangers of the activities of some of the Jews: "It is a fact that Jews are fighting with the Catholic Church, are infused with free-thinking, are the avant-garde of atheism, the Bolshevik movement and seditious activity." In the second part we read: "But -- let us be just. Not all Jews are like this. Ver many Jews are religious, honest, just, compassionate, charitable, in very many Jewish families the family sense is healthy, inspiring. In the Jewish world we also know people who are outstanding, noble, venerable from the ethical point of view." Only against this background do we fully understand the sense of the dangerous attempts to antagonize Poles and Jews, consisting in quoting only the first part of the document. The cardinal wrote: "I warn against the fundamentally and uncompromisingly anti-Jewish ethical attitude imported from abroad. It is inconsistent with Catholic ethics." Card. Hlond's pronouncement in connection with the Kielce tragedy of 4, July 1946 was never published because it was inconvenient for the Communist Party and state authorities of that time. Condemning all murders "always and everywhere," the cardinal explained that the murder of these Jews could not be attributed to racism. "They grew up from an entirely different, painful and tragic breeding ground. These events are a terrible calamity that fills me with sadness and pain." A subsequent part of the pronouncement unequivocally shows the cardinal's intentions, when he recalls his initiatives during the war to save Jews and help them.

An important part of the Symposium were two views on "The Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in Poland." The Jewish view was presented by Dr. Stanislaw Krajewski (Warsaw), and the Catholic one by Rev. Dr. Waldemar Chrostowski (ACT). The main idea of both speakers was the same: 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. Thanks to this one can more clearly and calmly voice common wishes and postulates. Dr. Krajewski believes that Polish nationalism is responsible for the fact that Poles are unable to accept that others have suffered more. He is disturbed by the revival of anti-semitic feelings. In the context of the dispute over the convent of the Carmelite nuns in Oswiecim 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. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Catholics and Jews need each other. W. Chrostowski recalled the circumstances of the origin and development of the dialogue in Poland and pointed out the difficulties and obstacles which are 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 Church. There remains much to do in religious instruction, in propagating and teaching the Catholic faith, in the education of Priests and popularizing the principles of theological reorientation. The dialogue in Poland is taking place in the shadow of the past, chiefly in the shade of Auschwitz. The Jews have repeatedly urged Catholics to undertake an honest self-examination, and this cannot be taken lightly. Neither can one expect to inculcate the attitude of Christian compassion without practicing solidarity with Jews, in whose minds Shoah has left an indelible mark. Nor can Jews ignore the burdens of the past. "Catholics expect the followers of Judaism to cut themselves off clearly from the 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 and unfair stereotype of the Jews has developed as a destroyer of the traditional order, a communist and atheist, enemy of the Church and Christian faith. All Jews who are sincerely attached to God and the holy traditions of their nation suffer from this (...) These tensions are coupled with the question of Jewish identity and are surely painful for Jews themselves. Nonetheless, they are important for the intensification and course of the religious dialogue. Catholics in turn as soon as possible 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 hasty generalizations and antagonizing the two communities."

Rev. prof. Andrzej Zuberbier (ACT) read the paper "Jews and Judaism in the Teaching of John Paul II during Pilgrimages to the Homeland." We see a gradual expansion of the perspective of the papal pronouncements, which reflects the development of relations of the Church with the Jews on a universal scale and also the development of these relations in our country. In first is the presence of Oswiecim, the annihilation of the Jews in Polish lands and uniqueness of the Jewish fate, which is a warning to the world against a repetition of this terrible genocide. Against this background the Pope stressed the need for solidarity with the Jews and the dignity of every person. This attitude stems from the personal life experiences of John Paul II. Following this Rev. prof. Michal Czajkowski (ACT) read the paper "The Seeds of the Interreligious Seminar in Chicago." He talked about the nature and directions of activities undertaken to promote the dialogue with Judaism in circles from which the participants of the scientific experiment in Spertus College of Judaica are recruited. The fruit of their activities are numerous publications, conferences, lectures and talks, both popular and specialistic.

Four communiques also were read during the Symposium: "A Few Remarks About the Nature of Dialogue"(Rev. Jakub Gorczyca, Cracow), "Religious Beliefs as the Source of Anti-Semitism"

(Rev. Zdislaw Kroplewski, MA, Koszalin), "Christians and Jews in the Soviet Union -- Hopes and Fears" (Michal Klinger, MA Warsaw), and "Jesus in the Writings of Martin Buber" (Rev. Dr. Franciszek Dylus, Czestochowa). Discussions for which there was not much time started up around the papers and communiques. Two practical motions were made: 1. a request to the Commission of the Episcopate for the Dialogue with Judaism to

send a letter to theological seminaries and other centers educating priests urging them to become familiar with and educate their students in the spirit of the Vatican documents on the attitude toward Jews and Judaism; 2. a proposal to announce in Poland a Day of Remembrance and Brotherhood of Christians and Jews, with the suggestions that this could be April 13, the anniversary of the historic visit of John Paul II in a Roman synagogue (1986). Both notions were accepted by the participants with approval.

All of the materials of the II Theological Symposium "The Church, Jews and Judaism" will be published in the quarterly "Collectanea Theologica" in the first half of 1991.