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V Theological Symposium The Church, Jews and Judaism : "The New Testament and Judaism"

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WALDEMAR CHROSTOWSKI, WARSAW

V THEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM THE CHURCH, JEWS AND JUDAISM: „THE NEW TESTAMENT AND JUDAISM”

The regular meetings of Christian theologians of various denominations, especially of the Catholic faith, with Jewish theologians have become a tradition in Poland. Every symposium attracts a sizable number of participants interested in dialogue and is an important forum for the exchange of common experiences and ideas. The Vth Theological Symposium, organized by the Commission of Polish Bishops for Dialogue with Judaism and the Theological Faculty of the Academy of Catholic Theology (ATK) was held on 18 and 19 May, 1993 at ATK in Warsaw. The subject matter of this symposium was the ties between the New Testament and Judaism.

Jesus Christ is at the center of the New Testament. Last year's symposium was devoted to the Jewishness of His person and mission. This meeting addressed new dilemmas and problems that are still unappreciated and neglected by theologians from both sides. Due to pejorative associations and painful past experiences, most believers in Jesus Christ still choose to abjure all ties with Judaism. Jews respond in kind, that is, with absolute ignorance of and hostility towards and contempt for the New Testament. For dialogue and closer relations to move forward, everything must be done to overcome this stereotypical and grotesque state of affairs.

The symposium was opened by Rev. prof. Roman Bartnicki, Dean of the Theological Faculty of ATK, with the prayer of Psalm 37 in the translation of R. Brandstaetter. In the opening address Rev. prof. Jan Łach, Rector of ATK, said: „The past sessions called forth a wide response in Poland and elsewhere as well. Common reflections were issued in publications that reached Rome, America, and various people in Europe and in our country. The reactions varied. The present session will probably be received in the same way. Perhaps even during the two days of deliberations in this auditorium we will be able to say how much we differ in our views and where we have found common ground. That is why we must meet (...). Let us hope that we will be able to listen to each other and consider the arguments of others. Let us hope that we will be able to humbly search for the truth and not obdurately reject obvious facts. Faith in one God may be and is the best basis for fruitful dialogue.”

The first session was chaired by Rev. prof. R. Bartnicki. An introductory paper to the symposium, *The New Testament and Judaism – Possibilities and Challenges*, was delivered by Rev. dr Waldemar Chrostowski (ATK). An absolute novelty in Christian-Jewish relations is the fact that the representatives of both religious communities have finally addressed the problem of the origin, nature and contents of the New Testament. This is a momentous event because it brings the New Testament into the orbit of Jewish thinking, from which it had been excluded in the past, and because Christians at the same time recognize that contacts with Jews may be useful for a better understanding the message of the New Testament. The long and common fear of the „Christianization” of the Jewish faith and the fear of the „Jewification” of Christianity as well as the fear of the dilution and weakening of the Christian message are abating. Studies of the ties between the New Testament and Judaism do not confine themselves to Biblical Judaism; they also take in contemporary Judaism, called rabbinical Judaism, which is a product of the reform undertaken by rabbis at the end of the 1st century A.D. Judaism of the 1st century A.D., in whose content Jesus lived and acted and the writings of the New Testament originated, found itself at that time at a critical turning point. After 70 A.D., from the diversity of Judaism, two groups survived: Judaeo-Christians, who were absorbed by the Christians forsaking paganism, and rabbinical Judaism. The differences between them and between what existed earlier are considerable. The divisions that originated around the person and mission of Jesus of Nazareth became the cause for the parting of the

ways of the Synagogue and the Church. But long centuries of ignorance and hostility should not forever rule out getting to know each other better and treating each other as partners.

The lecturer had several practical suggestions for both sides. The most important ones were addressed to Christians: the need for showing the importance of the continuity of Judaism, its vitality and durability, not treating it as a „dead“ religion; the necessity for elaborating a new Christian theology of Judaism; the necessity for showing the New Testament in the context of the diversity of Judaism in the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament; becoming familiar with rabbinical Judaism and its literature as an aid to understanding and explaining the New Testament; re-thinking the so-called anti-Jewish texts of the New Testament in the light of the new look at Jews and Judaism. Here are some of the suggestions addressed to the Jewish side: recognizing in Christianity a „younger brother/sister,“ which would be the proper response to the perception by Christians of Jews as „older brothers“; a new Jewish theology of Christianity and separating themselves from antiquated and mythologized stereotypes; reading and becoming familiar with the New Testament as testimony of the Jewish faith, greater appreciation of the element of messianism (faith in the Messiah, which is so fundamental for Christians, is not so important for Jews, but the question we may ask is: To what extent is this a continuation of Biblical or pre-rabbinical Judaism, and to what extent is it a product of the centuries-long confrontation with Christianity?).

Professor Stefan Schreiner, winner of the „Man of Reconciliation“ title awarded since 1992 by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, lecturer in the Institutum Judaicum in Tuebingen (Germany), delivered a paper in beautiful Polish entitled, *The Bible as a Document of the History of the Jewish Faith – The New Testament in the Interpretation of Leo Baeck*. Schreiner spoke of one of those Jewish scholars who in studies of the New Testament have blazed new trails, namely, rabbi dr Leo Baeck, born in 1873 in Leszno and died in 1956 in London. Baeck very early in his life became interested in problems connected with the origins of Christianity and the history of Jewish-Christian relations. In his best known work, entitled *The Essence of Judaism*, he defined the attitude towards Christianity and hence towards Jesus. He regarded Christianity as a child of Judaism and described relations between Judaism and Christianity as those between mother and daughter. He was also interested in the figure of Jesus, His teaching, activities, circle of followers, thus in the beginnings of Christianity. He perceived Jesus in every aspect as a „Jew among Jews.“ He also perceived Christian ethics as derived from Judaism and having its source in the Pharisaic movement. For this reason he defended the Pharisees against the attacks of Christian theologians, for whom the name „Pharisee“ was synonymous with hypocrisy. In the rejection and distortion of Pharisaism by the Church and Christian theology Baeck detected a great weakness of Christianity. Just before World War II he addressed an invitation to dialogue to Christians in Germany, during a time when his Jewish countrymen were being betrayed on a mass scale. At that time Baeck's words met with no response. Professor Schreiner emphasized that this is all the more reason why today they should reach all Christians.

Professor Chana Safraï, a Jewish theologian and lecturer at the Catholic University in Amsterdam, read an extremely interesting paper entitled, *Culture of Controversy – Applied to the Gospel Tradition*. According to wide-spread views, Jesus' disputes with various representatives of Jewish groups of His times, especially with the Pharisees and Scribes, reveal a gulf that led to an unbridgeable division between those who believed in Him and Jews who did not recognize His messianic role. Meanwhile, the conflicts described in such detail in the Gospels must be placed in the context of what prof. Safraï called the „culture of controversy“. In the Talmud and other ancient Jewish writings we have many examples of controversies between rabbis that stemmed neither from a climate of hostility nor created such a climate. These controversies, to mention only those over the Hillel and Shammai schools contemporary to Jesus, were a means of getting to know the views and arguments of one's partner and of a clearer articulation of one's own convictions. Only those disputes whose memory has endured to our times were disputes „for the sake of Heaven.“ Others, conducted for either egoistic or unimportant reasons, have been forgotten. Consideration of this sheds new light on the Gospels' narrations. The form and content of Jesus' disputes with the Pharisees and other Jewish groups have come down to us on the pages of the Gospels as eloquent testimony to the status and continuation of the problems taken up in them and the incessant appeal to penetrate their problems anew.

The afternoon session of the symposium was chaired by Rev. dr W. Chrostowski. Three more papers were delivered whose subject matter revolved around Synoptic Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. Rev. prof. Michał Czajkowski (ATK) asked *Is the most Jewish Gospel the most anti-Jewish?* When we say „the most anti-Jewish Gospel,” we obviously have in mind the Gospel according to Matthew. Most probably written around 80 A.D. for Jewish Christians in conflict with their brother Pharisees, who after the disaster of 70 A.D. closed the ranks of Israel in order to rescue the religious and national identity of the nation, it acquaints us more closely with the fate and teaching of Jesus in light of the conflict of His times. The history of the explanation (*Auslegungsgeschichte*) and influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of the Gospel according to Matthew was and still is anti-Jewish. Is this fair? Two lines run through this Gospel: particular (Jesus is the Son of David – for Israel) and universal (Jesus is the Son of Abraham – expansion of the gift of salvation to the pagans). The ambivalence of this Gospel consists in the fact that its wording creates the impression of a certain anti-Judaism, despite the fact that Jesus professed God’s faithfulness and love for Israel. The polemics contained in this book are often an intra-Church parenthesis, an admonition addressed to Christians. Matthew’s theology of fulfillment (of the promise – realization) does not limit itself to proving that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, but also serves the self-understanding of the Church of the pagans, which „stands on its own feet,” and shows its theological back coupling with the tradition of the promises of Israel. This accounts for the vital role of this Gospel in reminding us of the Church’s ties with Biblical and Jewish tradition.

The next two papers were delivered by lecturers from the Catholic University in Amsterdam. Professor Bart Koet attempted to answer the question posed in the title *Luke’s View on the Jews: Rejection or Controversy?* The text of the Paul’s preaching in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Act 13, 14-51) is subjected to careful exegesis. The commonly accepted understanding of this and similar texts (Lk 4, 16-30; Acts 18, 1-17; 28, 17-28) is that since the Jews rejected Jesus and His message, they themselves were rejected, and salvation became the exclusive privilege of the pagans. The lecturer discussed in detail the words describing the reaction of the Antioch Jews to Paul’s teaching. Professor Koet made an incisive analysis of Paul’s preaching and description of the crowd’s behavior, concentrating on the Greek word *dzélos*, translated as „jealous.” However, this word also has another meaning, namely, „zealous.” One can surmise that what was meant by the violent reaction of Jews in Antioch was their zealotry, the proper position of the Law and respect for it on the part of the converting pagans. Paul’s later contacts with Jews show that the Apostle did not cease his activities among them, nor did he recognize them as rejected. Only in later generations, when hostility between Christians and Jews intensified, were the New Testament texts used as arguments in polemics with Jews to support the thesis on their rejection by God.

Professor Leo Bakker suggested a *New Paradigm of the Relation of Judaism to Christianity: The Origin of Christianity as the Actualisation of Faith in the God of Israel*. In studying the gulf between Judaism and Christianity, Christian theology believes that this gulf is very wide and deep, but at the same time it perceives that from very beginning Christianity was entirely Jewish. Instead of the questions usually asked, Why did the Jews not come to Jesus?, Why did they not enter the Church?, and What does this refusal mean for them?, the lecturer posed a new one: How did it come to the acceptance of pagans in a Church still made up entirely of Jews? Professor Bakker traced the most important events of this process and identified the theological motives and arguments that played a decisive role in it. The main idea of his paper is that, if we take into consideration their religious, social, and cultural background, many texts of the New Testament require an interpretation from the one usually accepted. This is especially true for the writings of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles. According to Paul, Jesus, as the Messiah promised by the Scriptures, is a bridge leading from the Jews to the Pagans. In the anti-Jewish currents of Church Tradition this bridge – Jesus – has been transformed into an obstacle, for which the theological conception of the disinheritance of the Jews was largely responsible.

The deliberations of the second day of the symposium were chaired by Rev. prof. M. Czajkowski. The session opened with a paper read by prof. Stanisław Medala (ATK), *Jews in the Gospel According to John*. The author discussed the function of „Jews” in the literary, rhetorical and historical context of the fourth Gospel. He illustrated the literary context with an analysis of Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus (Jn 3, 1-21), Jesus’ discourse to the

Jews on His Sabbath work (5, 19-30), and the dialogue with the Galilean crowd on the „bread of life” (6, 24-59). Two levels of meanings are present in the Gospels: literal, describing events from the life of Jesus, and allegorical, referring to the experiences of the Christian community. The characterization of Jews in the literary context accentuates the separateness of Jesus and His divine origin and directs attention to His redeeming death on the cross. The speaker showed the rhetorical function of „Jews” on the example of an analysis of Jesus’ trail before Pilate. In the fourth Gospel the unyielding attitude towards Jesus serves as an argument that Jesus was sentenced to death as the Son of God. Prof. Medala illustrated the historical context of „Jews” by references to events from the history of John’s community in the speech on the Good Shepherd (10, 1-18) and in Jesus’ farewell speech about the „hatred of the world” (15, 18-16, 4).

Rev. prof. Henryk Paprocki, lecturer at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Warsaw, took up the subject *Elements of Old Testament Liturgy in the New Testament*. The author discussed the places in the New Testament in which Old Testament liturgy is mentioned and distinguishes two categories: general, saying that an event took place in a synagogue or a temple, and concrete, referring to specific liturgical practices. These references show that Jesus’ life was connected with Jewish religious practices, which through Judaeo-Christianity entered into all Christian liturgies. The analysis of various Christian liturgies as well as Christian liturgical customs lead to the conclusion that they are derived from customs of the synagogue and the Temple of Jerusalem.

The last paper was delivered by Rabbi dr Byron Sherwin, Vice-president of Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago, for many years a participant of the dialogue and – like prof. S. Schreiner – last year’s winner of the „Man of Reconciliation” award. The title of his paper was: *Corpus Domini – Possible Traces of the New Testament in East European Hasidism*. At the beginning he quoted a passage from The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians, Romans, and Corinthians, a passage from a sermon of St. Augustine, and a passage from a Hasidic text written by the 18th century founder of Hasidism, Baal Shem Tov. In all of the texts there is the idea of the mystical or spiritual body of God, applied now to the Church and now to the Jewish community. Rabbi Sherwin showed in detail that the writings of the New Testament and the theological concepts they contain had an influence on Hasidic thought, and he traced the lines of influence recognizable in Jewish literature. The channel between the New Testament and 18th century Hasidism became the *Zohar*. The conclusions based on careful analysis are very important: „For more than a century, most scholarly studies on »The New Testament and Judaism« have focused on the relationship of the New Testament to the Judaism (or Judaisms) of late antiquity. These studies are often preoccupied with demonstrating the close relationship between early Christianity and Judaism during the period of the rise and development of early Christianity”. But such studies have two flaws. First, they do not express the awareness that Judaism remains a virile religion. Second, they fail to appreciate the fact that also Rabbinical Judaism developed in the context of various Christian influences. The author concluded his paper with these words: „Dialogue is not monologue. We Jews have things to say, but we also have things to hear. The time for reciprocity in dialogue is long overdue. It is time for Jews to listen as well as to speak. As Scripture commands, »Hear O Israel«”.

Archbishop Henryk Muszyński, metropolitan of Gniezno and chairman of the Commission of Polish Bishops for the Dialogue with Judaism, summed up and concluded the symposium. He recognized the deliberations as enriching, enlightening and bringing the partners of the dialogue closer together. Despite isolation of long duration, for the entire time there were mutual ties and influences whose nature and intensity may be recognized only in our times, when a real turn is taking place in these mutual relations. It turns out that the spiritual closeness of Christians and Jews became a threat and source of great tensions and even confrontation. The present meetings are a great gift from God for which we had to wait many generations. The experiences of the Jewish faith, especially Hasidism, on Polish lands have an important role to play in thoughts on the subjects taken up in this year’s symposium. As the subject of next year’s symposium Archbishop Muszyński suggested the look at Jews and Judaism expressed in New Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Metropolitan of Gniezno ended the two days of deliberations with a prayer.