The Bond of Memory

Polish Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism

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POLISH YEAR IN ISRAEL 2008 | 2009

WIEZ

„Polishness is, in fact, variety and pluralism,
and not narrowness and enclosure"

(John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*)

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Polish Christians in Dialogue
with Jews and Judaism

Edited by Zbigniew Nosowski

Laboratorium WIĘZI
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WHY ARE THEY DOING IT?

Rabbi Michael Schudrich

Traveling throughout Poland I have found, in almost every city, town and village, a group or sometimes individuals who are restoring their local Jewish cemetery or synagogue. There are many serious groups of Poles who feel an obligation to preserve Jewish memory in their town. Some groups are effective and proactive. Others are well intentioned but produce no real results. But in either case, there are Poles who feel compelled to save Jewish memory and the Jewish contribution to Poland.

Why are they doing it? First of all, they are "John Paul II Catholics". This Polish Pope did more than any other person in 2,000 years to fight anti-Semitism. His teachings really did change the attitude of many (not all) Poles towards the Jews and Judaism. Secondly, the Jews comprised 10% of the Polish population before World War II. Their presence is missed by many (again, not by all). It is almost like the amputee who still feels his arm even after it was amputated.

In recent years the number of Poles who are fighting against anti-Semitism as well as advocating the preservation of Jewish culture and memory has grown significantly and found its voice in Polish public life. There is a stable change also at the official level. Both the government and the President of Poland continue to be outstanding supporters of Israel and our local Jewish community. City governments are often open to supporting Jewish cultural events.

There is also the negative. But there is significantly more positive activity taking place. Frustratingly, it too often goes unnoticed by the world's Jewish community. We Jews due to historical necessity and experience are very good in identifying anti-Semitism and fighting it. Unfortunately, we are not as good at identifying friends and allies…

Something positive is happening in Poland and we Jews need to understand this new reality, to appreciate it and to nurture it. This is the challenge of a generation that is different from the past and it is in our hands to make it even better.

Michael Schudrich
Chief Rabbi of Poland

AN ACHING EMPTINESS

Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska

After years of silence, in a free country in the year 1989, Poles began discovering the murdered Jewish world. The fascination with Jews, the people with whom we had lived in the same land for almost a thousand years, emerged unexpectedly, above all among young people. Everything Jewish suddenly became popular. At *Więź* monthly, where I worked at the time, we asked with a certain unease whether that often superficial fashion for Jewish folklore, music, and cuisine would overshadow the difficult, painful issues in Polish–Jewish relations, trivializing memory and taking the place of dialogue.

The slender book now before you shows that we need not have worried. Poles did not evade the difficult questions. The best evidence for this is the public discussion of the crime in Jedwabne, the Kielce pogrom, and March 1968. In many cases, fashion and fascination led to more thoughtful dialogue and practical action. This "fashion" has led to hundreds of publications. Jewish cemeteries are being put into better shape in more and more towns. Hundreds of school students from all over Poland have been taking part for years in the Shalom Foundation's contest for documentation on the history of their Jewish neighbors. Thousands of people participate each year when the Church observes the Day of Judaism.

Ordinary Poles, most of them Catholics—lay and religious—do all of this. Why? For whom? As one of the characters appearing in this book puts it, they do it for themselves. Many of us, when we look around, perceive this man-made emptiness, this absence in the Polish landscape, which hurts to this day like an open wound. We cannot bring back the murdered Jewish world, but we can, and should, bring back the memory. This living memory gives birth to new bonds between us.

Dear Friends,
In planning the Polish Year in Israel, we wanted to show Israelis modern Poland: contemporary, dynamic, and open to the world. Above all, however, we wanted to create bonds between people—Poles and Israelis—through joint projects, films, exhibitions, and conferences: to broaden and deepen the space of discourse. This book and the conference it accompanies are prime examples of this dialogue.

Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland
to the State of Israel

Stanisław Krajewski
Photo by Marcin Kiedio

OBLIVION OR REMEMBRANCE

Stanisław Krajewski

I sometimes hear people say: Poland today is a country without Jews. This isn't completely true, because Jewish organizations do exist in Poland. Few people belong to them, however. Somewhat more people have Jewish roots, but remain outside the current of Jewish life. Some, indeed, are well known and admired. Nevertheless, the definition of Poland as a country without Jews is accurate, painfully accurate, when we take interwar Poland as a reference point.

What is more, it is also accurate when we compare the present state of affairs with the period immediately following World War II, when only one in every ten Polish Jews remained alive. Since then, 90% of the surviving Jews have emigrated from Poland. The present number of Jews is only 1% of the prewar figure. From one perspective—mine—1% is far more than zero, but from the other perspective—from abroad—it is almost zero. Next to nothing.

We should also remember that Warsaw differs from Białystok, and Białystok from Włodawa. While you can find a small but real, living Jewish presence in some cities, you won't find any Jews at all in the provinces. Nevertheless, the traces of the Jews are still found in the towns and cities. The memory remains, and emotions are still strong—negative emotions, to be sure, but positive ones as well.

Yes, positive ones as well. It does appear that favorable feelings and authentic interest are gradually emerging. Sometimes they are

religiously motivated or expressed in a way that contains a religious dimension. The present book is about initiatives of this kind. It is a joyous thing that there are so many of them, that they are happening in different parts of the country, that they are being organized by enthusiasts who sometimes enjoy the support of local government and parishes, that there are such officially sanctioned Church events as the Day of Judaism, and that they are becoming increasingly widespread. This is an expression of respect for Judaism, and proof of the colossal changes in official Church teaching.

While celebrating these achievements, there should be no illusion that they make up the whole picture. Attitudes towards Jews are sometimes unfriendly, contemptuous, or spiteful, even among young people, and sometimes go hand in hand with involvement in the life of the Church. The best illustration of these negative feelings is the fact that people who are committed to learning about and remembering the Jews sometimes face incomprehension, criticism, and hostility. Almost all of them talk about how isolated they feel. Yet they are among us, and they are increasingly numerous and visible, and they can be found in every part of Poland. For me, their actions are at least as important as the presence of anti-Semites.

There is only one reservation, or in fact a bitter thought, that occurs to me when I see the good will, interest, and naive enthusiasm shown by young people. I do not question their authenticity, but I think: how easy it is to like dead Jews! As far as history goes, and learning about the culture, and stories of the former residents of their localities, then it is easy to dig deeper, because the Jews are only objects. As objects of study, they can be adapted to the needs of those studying them. There is no need, on the other hand, to consider the needs, feelings, and also the prejudices of real Jews. It doesn't cost anything to learn about the dead. Just a minute, someone might ask, what kind of cost are you talking about? I would reply with a question: How many of those people involved in restoring the memory would want the Jews to come back? I don't know how many, but I don't think it would be all of them—especially if coming back was combined with recovering their property. What would happen if Jews appeared not as individuals, but as a community, as neighbors, as a significant, influential minority?

Far be it from me to say that the respect for the Jewish past, culture, and religion are insincere, or that being interested in Jews when there are no Jewish neighbors is superfluous or dubious. The situation would surely look different if there were numerous Jews living nearby. This, however, is not the case.

For people born after the war, the absence of Jews is a given, the only possible starting point. Restoring memory, studying history, learning about Jewish culture, and becoming aware of the Hebrew roots of Christianity—this is the best that can be done in the situation, even though it cannot replace the presence of Jews. Sometimes, I find the forms of these activities distasteful, such as when cultural events place *kitsch* on display, or when stereotypes dominate discussions of Jews and Judaism, or when the commercial motivation is too obvious. However, there is always room for improvement, and sometimes no improvement is needed. The best example of this is the annual Jewish Culture Festival in Cracow, with its impressive standards and authenticity.

I can understand the misgivings of foreign visitors who are puzzled by the presence of Jewish themes in the absence of Jews. Nevertheless, the challenge we face is very simple: we have a choice between oblivion or remembrance. Can anyone have any doubts about which is preferable?

Stanisław Krajewski
Co-Chairman (on the Jewish side)
Polish Council of Christians and Jews

The Archbishop of Poznań, Stanisław Gądecki, and the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, with the "Menorah of Dialogue" awards during the Day of Judaism in Poznań, January 15, 2007.
From the archives of the Coexist Association

The Day of Judaism in the Catholic Church

DISCOVERING ROOTS

The Day of Judaism was the brainchild of Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki. The deputy chairman of the Polish Episcopate recalls how the idea caused an "open split" during a session of the Polish Bishops' Conference. There were fears, he explains, of the "Judaizing of Christianity."

The idea nevertheless won approval, and since 1998 the Roman Catholic Church in Poland has officially observed The Day of Judaism on January 17 as a reminder of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Proclaiming the Day of Judaism in Poland was a pioneering step on the scale of the European Church, preceded only by an analogous initiative by the Italian bishops' conference.

January 17 falls one day before the opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The choice of this date by the Catholic bishops is highly significant—it is intended to inspire all Christian Churches to seek the roots of their identity and unity in the Jewish faith.

Each year, the Bishops' Committee for Dialogue with Judaism chooses a special motto, derived from the Bible or Church teaching, as the theme for reflection. The maxim chosen in the inaugural year, 1998, was an important reflection of the idea of the Day of Judaism in the Catholic Church: "Whoever encounters Jesus Christ also encounters Judaism." These words come from Pope John Paul II's address in Mainz in November 1980.

One of the Roman Catholic diocesan sees in Poland is chosen annually as the focus for the nationwide observances. So far, the main ceremonies have been held in Warsaw (1998), Wrocław (1999), Cracow (2000), Łódź (2001), Lublin (2002), Białystok (2003), Poznań (2004), Katowice (2005), Kielce (2006), Gdańsk (2007), and Zamość (2008). Every Day of Judaism is different, and reflects the city where it is held. Sometimes it takes the form of a single event, such as a panel discussion followed by Mass, and on other occasions it becomes a festival lasting several days and including not only prayers but also workshops for young people, marches to places associated with the city's Jewish presence, concerts, exhibitions, films, and theatrical performances.

An interesting and specifically Polish offshoot of the Day of Judaism is the special Day of Islam first held in 2001. The date chosen in this case is January 26, the day after the conclusion of the week devoted to Christian ecumenism.

The small size of the Jewish community in today's Poland poses certain problems for the organizers of the Day of Judaism. While the goal of the event is the internal transformation of the Church, meetings with Jews are also important. Many contemporary Polish Catholics, indeed, have never had the chance to get to know a Jew. Interestingly, the Jewish participants in the Day of Judaism events include not only those who regard dialogue with Christians as an essential matter, but also adherents of traditional views who do not regard the need for dialogue as essential. Even they, however, regard the Day of Judaism as a good opportunity to present the Jewish faith and viewpoint.

The Day of Judaism in Cracow, January 17, 2008: Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz and the Rabbi of Cracow, Boaz Pash, during biblical worship in the Franciscan basilica.
PAP/Jacek Bednarczyk

The Day of Judaism in Białystok, January 16, 2003: the Archbishop of Białystok, Wojciech Ziemba, greets Rabbi David Rosen, honorary chairman of the International Council of Christians and Jews, before the biblical meditations at St. Adalbert's church.
PAP/Zdzisław Lenkiewicz

Michael Schudrich, the chief rabbi of Poland, attaches great importance to the Day of Judaism. He is happy to travel from one end of Poland to the other to be present at each year's event. He feels that the official introduction of the Day of Judaism was encouraging to those Catholics who wanted to organize similar events, but felt the lack of blessing "from above." He points out that the Day of Judaism tradition has been carried on in most of the cities that served as the focus for the nationwide celebrations. So it is in the Poznań, Cracow, Lublin, Gdańsk, and Wrocław dioceses, which observe the Day of Judaism annually on a varying scale and in various ways. There are also places like Płock, which has never hosted the main observances, but which nevertheless organizes local events to mark the Day of Judaism each year.

The Jewish intellectual Stanisław Krajewski, professor of philosophy at the University of Warsaw and the Jewish co-chairman of the Polish Council of Christians of Jews, has rarely missed one of the nationwide observances. He sees the Day of Judaism as an example of the enormous changes that have taken part in the Church following the Second Vatican Council. "Not so very long ago," he says, "an initiative like this would have been absolutely unthinkable."

Paradoxically, it is Catholic exponents of the Christian-Jewish dialogue who voice misgivings more frequently. They feel that the commitment to the Day of Judaism in Poland is less than total. On the one hand, the fact that the focus city is different each year means that more dioceses get involved; on the other hand, some observers note that certain dioceses seem to feel exempt from joining in.

The organizers of the Day of Judaism complain that rank-and-file parish priests often hide behind a wall of indifference. The organizers prepare pastoral material every year and distribute it to all the parishes, but few priests make use of it. The media show a greater interest in the Day of Judaism. It often serves as an occasion for striking photographs of bishops and rabbis

standing side by side, especially when they are plainly on friendly terms. Even a picture like that can make a difference in the minds of Catholics.

Stanisław Krajewski sums it up: "Many truly valuable meetings, lectures, and prayers take place in various Polish cities on January 17," he says. "Regardless of the fully justifiable criticism and misgivings, the number of events, and the number of people who join in, are a cause for joy."

What about the fear of the "Judaizing of Christianity"? This anxiety has deep roots in the history of the Church. Its source, says Fr. Łukasz Kamykowski, a Cracow theologian, is "tension between the Jews and the Greeks," that is, between the two different worlds that made up the primitive Christian communities. For many centuries, Catholics constructed their identity in opposition to Jews. Things changed definitively when the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) reminded Catholics that "searching into the mystery of the Church" leads to the discovery of Judaism. The "Judaizing of Christianity" is therefore nothing more nor less than becoming reacquainted with the living sources that the Church constantly draws upon.

The Day of Judaism in Poznań, January 17, 2008: biblical worship at St. Adalbert's church.
From the archives of the Coexist Association

Polish Catholicism developed after World War II and the Holocaust in a "dialogue-free" context. Never before in its history had the Polish public been so ethnically and denominationally homogenous. The Polish Church's dialogue with Judaism has therefore, to a large extent, been a discussion in which the Church talks with itself, or with its own memory. The Jewish community has been reviving in recent years and taking an increasingly lively role in the discussion. This does not change the fact that the purpose of the Day of Judaism is, above all, "reinforcing and enriching the awareness of our Christian roots, which rest upon the revelation of the Old Testament," says Bishop Mieczysław Cisło, present chairman of the Polish Bishops' Committee for Dialogue with Judaism.

Eleven years of observing the Day of Judaism have contributed to a considerable intellectual legacy, which could serve as a reference point for broader theological studies. By now, the transcripts of the Catholic-Jewish panel discussions, the systematic reflections by theologians, and the vast but often unnoticed efforts by scholars in many different fields add up to dimensions that are starting to attract notice on the scale of the Polish Church as a whole. Some day, perhaps, this work will truly become common ground for all Catholics in Poland.

Anna Pawlikowska, Zbigniew Nosowski

The Archbishop of Gniezno, Henryk Muszyński, and Rabbi Norman Solomon during the Shared Rejoicing in the Torah in Warsaw, October 23, 2008. They both took part in the first Polish Christian-Jewish colloquium in April 1988.
Marcin Kiedio

The Polish Bishops' Committee for Dialogue with Judaism

SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Attitudes among Polish Catholics favoring openness and dialogue with Jews and Judaism originated in lay intellectual circles. However, the structure of the Church meant that the Catholic-Jewish dialogue took on official form only when the hierarchy became involved. In Poland, that process began more than 20 years ago.

The Polish Bishops' Sub-Commission for Dialogue with Judaism was founded in 1986. Its first chairman was Bishop Henryk Muszyński, an outstanding biblical scholar who was then an auxiliary bishop in the diocese of Chełmno and is now an archbishop and the metropolitan of Gniezno. The Sub-Commission convened for the first time in Warsaw on May 13, 1986—exactly one month after John Paul's visit to the synagogue in Rome. At the end of 1987, the Sub-Commission was raised to the status of Commission.

Bishop Stanisław Gądecki, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Gniezno, became chairman of the Commission in 1994. The hand-picked successor to Muszyński, Gądecki, too, is a biblical scholar. The Polish Episcopate underwent restructuring in 1996. The Commission was transformed into the Committee for Dialogue with Judaism, and operates within the framework of the Council for Religious Dialogue. Stanisław Gądecki, now the Archbishop of Poznań and deputy chairman of the Polish Bishops' Conference, became chairman of both the Committee and the Council.

2006 brought further personnel changes. Bishop Mieczysław Cisło became both chairman of the Council for Religious Dialogue and chairman of the Committee for Dialogue with Judaism. As auxiliary bishop of Lublin, he is an experienced participant in the intensive development of the Christian-Jewish dialogue.

The first large-scale, official event embodying the Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Poland was an international theological colloquium held in Cracow and Tyniec in April 1988. On that occasion, a rabbi delivered an official address in the palace of the archbishop of Cracow for the first time in history. The Polish Bishops' Commission for Dialogue with Judaism and the Anti-Defamation League from the USA were the co-organizers of the conference.

The next important step was a special seminar for Polish theologians at the Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago in the summer of 1989. Twenty-two Polish priests spent 6 weeks there, studying inter-religious dialogue and the doctrines and ethics of Judaism. The Polish coordinator was Father Waldemar Chrostowski, who went on to become the organizer of the annual symposium on The Church, Jews, and Judaism at the Catholic Theological Academy in Warsaw.

From left to right: Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz, Prof. Stanisław Krajewski, and Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki during the conference in Poznań, October 24, 2005.
From the archives of the Coexist Association

The Polish Bishops' Commission (and, later, the Committee) for Dialogue with Judaism played an important role at moments of tension, including the disputes over the Carmelite Convent in Oświęcim or the erection of crosses in the gravel pit adjacent to Auschwitz. Commission members used their awareness of Jewish sensitivities to guide their course of action and help resolve the conflicts.

The most important long-term fruits of the Commission's work include the introduction of the Day of Judaism, about which we write elsewhere, and the official documents of the Polish Church on relations with Jews and Judaism. In 1990, the Commission prepared an official Episcopate Conference pastoral letter on Catholic-Jewish relations, for publication on the 25th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's groundbreaking *Nostra aetate* declaration. The letter was read out in Polish churches on January 20, 1991.

The historical portion of the letter attracted the most public attention. The bishops wrote that they were "particularly regretful of those among the Catholics who contributed in any way to the death of Jews. They will remain forever an affront to the conscience, in the public dimension as well. If even one Christian was able to help, but failed to reach out a helping hand to a Jew in the time of danger, or contributed to his death, this compels us to implore our Jewish Brothers and Sisters for forgiveness." However, the theological element was important, as well. The bishops stated that "God never withdrew His choice of the Jewish people, but rather continues to bestow His love upon them," and appealed for a closer bond with present-day Jews: "It is important for

Rabbi Tanya Segal from the Warsaw liberal Jewish community and Bishop Mieczysław Cisło during the visit by students from the Berlin Rabbinical College, Lublin, September 19, 2008.
Rev. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski

us to learn to experience and appreciate the religious values of Jews and Christians in the way that Jews and Christians themselves experience them today."

Another important document is the letter issued by Polish Bishops' Council for Religious Dialogue to mark the Great Jubilee Year 2000. It is all the more important because it gained the approval of the entire Polish Episcopal Conference in August 2000. The letter refers to the concept of an examination of the conscience of the Church, as proposed by Pope John Paul II. In the spirit of "the purification of the memory and reconciliation," the bishops mention the words of the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Joseph Glemp, who had publicly asked God several months earlier for "forgiveness for the attitudes of those among us who have been disrespectful of people of other faiths or who have tolerated anti-Semitism." The letter states that "aside from the noble attitude of the rescue of many Jewish human beings by Poles, sins of ours from the time of the Holocaust also exist: indifference or hostility towards Jews."

In recent years, the Polish Bishops' Committee for Dialogue with Judaism has regularly helped organize seminars at the Yad Vashem Memorial Institute in Jerusalem for Polish priests. Father Tomasz Adamczyk, secretary of the Committee and the Polish coordinator for these exchanges, notes that there is no shortage of interested priests: "And this is not in the least a matter of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, since the seminar program demands a great deal of involvement on the part of the participants."

"Everything possible must be done to rebuild and strengthen Christian solidarity with the people of Israel," the Polish bishops appealed in the 2000 letter. Surely not everything has yet been done. Yet much has already been achieved, and the special Bishops' commission for dialogue with Judaism has made an undeniable contribution to the work of reconciliation.

Zbigniew Nosowski

March of prayer to the monuments of the Warsaw ghetto, April 13, 2008. Praying (from right): Rev. Michał Jabłoński (Evangelical-Reformed Church), Fr. Artur Aleksiejuk (Eastern Orthodox Church), Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Fr. Roman Indrzejczyk, Stanisław Krajewski, Zbigniew Nosowski, Fr. Arkadiusz Szczepanik (delegate of the Warsaw Catholic Archbishop for dialogue with Judaism). *PAP/Jacek Turczyk*

The Polish Council of Christians and Jews

THE PSALMS, THE TORAH, AND THE JOY

The people of various ages, seated around the table, begin their meeting with a reading from the Psalms and the sharing of personal reflections. However, this is not one of the many Catholic prayer groups in Poland. It is a meeting of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. It begins with the Psalms because it's a good thing to start with a prayer, especially when the words are common to both of the religious traditions.

The Polish Council of Christians and Jews came into being during a period of tumultuous political and social change in Poland and all of Central and Eastern Europe. Communism was falling, and new, independent initiatives were arising in the liberated public space. First, a group of enthusiasts set up the Poland-Israel Friendship Society in Warsaw in November 1988. Before long, there was a Religious Dialogue Section within the Society. Next, in 1990, this Section evolved into today's Council, which became an affiliate of the International Council of Christians and Jews.

For the first five years, the Council met in the private apartment of Barbara Sułek-Kowalska and Tadeusz Kowalski. Barbara, a reporter for *Solidarność Weekly*, was secretary of the Council until 2000. "A desire rapidly arose among the members of the Council," she recalls, "to make John Paul II's visit to the Roman synagogue in April 1986 an example and model for us."

When working out their bylaws, the members of the Council voted to have two co-chairmen, one from the Jewish side and one from the Christian. From the very beginning, Stanisław Krajewski was a fixture as the leader of the Jewish side. Krajewski, a professor of philosophy at the University of Warsaw, is a leading figure in the rebirth of Jewish religious life in Poland. His Christian partners have changed. First, they were theologians: Father Waldemar Chrostowski, Father Andrzej Zuberbier, and then Father Michał Czajkowski. Since 2007, the Christian co-chairman has been a layman, the journalist Zbigniew Nosowski, chief editor of *Więź*, the Catholic monthly review.

Barbara Sułek-Kowalska, Secretary of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews (1991-2000), during the march of prayer to the monuments of the Warsaw ghetto, April 2003. *Wiktor Górecki.*

The statutory goal of the Council is to act in such a way as to further mutual understanding between Christians and Jews, to overcome stereotypes, to promote tolerance, and to reinforce interreligious contacts. The Council is intended to serve as a forum for Christian-Jewish dialogue, and to educate people about the connections between Christianity and Judaism, and about Christian-Jewish relations in Poland and around the world.

Stanisław Krajewski is very clear about the particular nature of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, saying that "we decided immediately to deal above all with the religious aspect of Christian-Jewish issues, and only afterwards with problems connected with history, social relations, or politics." Sułek-Kowalska agrees: "our proposals make a broad impact not because they call for social action, but because they are a proposal for a different kind of encounter. They appeal above all to our Lord Creator."

An extraordinary initiative by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, unique on a global scale, is an annual meeting, soon after the Jewish celebration of Simchat Torah, that has come to be known as the Rejoicing of the Torah of Christians and Jews, or even the Shared Rejoicing in the Torah. Sułek-Kowalska recalls a 1992 discussion: "I remember the unending discussions and proposals at our meetings about establishing a day in the Polish Church, as in Italy, that could be called The Day of Judaism—a day of familiarization with the heroes of the faith of the First Testament, and solidarity with the adherents of that faith who live among us today. We were so enthusiastic about the idea that we were incapable of seeing that the Bishops' Conference, which could proclaim such a day, was not quite ready for such a decision. And since our discussions were turning into complaints, we decided not to wait for official action, and went ahead on our own."

They managed to come up with a formula for meeting in a spirit of prayer around the Torah. The words, after all, are common to Jews and Christians. Yet they are interpreted in different ways, which is why separate Jewish and Christian commentaries are spoken during the meeting. Beginning in 1992, the event was held annually. It takes place in church buildings, first at Father Roman Indrzejczyk's parish of the Infant Jesus. After Indrzejczyk retired, the Torah celebration moved to the Jesuits' St. Andrew Bobola parish. Since 2007, a Jewish-Christian theological seminar has

Reading of the Torah in Hebrew and in Polish during the Shared Rejoicing in the Torah, October 23, 2008. From left: Helise Liebermann, President of the Jewish Women's Association in Poland, and Marta Titaniec, Secretary of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews.
Marcin Kiedio

accompanied the prayer. The Council's invited guests have included such outstanding Jewish thinkers as Rabbi Irving Greenberg from New York and Rabbi Norman Solomon from Oxford.

Another regular event in the life of the Council is a prayer march to the monuments of the Warsaw ghetto. It is organized in April, on the Sunday after the anniversary of the outbreak of the ghetto uprising. "What sets our march apart from other ceremonies," Krajewski explains, "is the fact that there are no speeches. The marchers concentrate on prayer. The Christians listen as Jewish prayers are intoned, the Jews listen as Christian prayers are intoned, and we recite the Psalms together in Polish."

The March follows the Warsaw Route of Jewish Martyrdom from the monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto to the monument at Umschlagplatz, from where the Germans sent Warsaw Jews to the death camps. The participants pause at the Tree of the Righteous, the Szmul Zygielbojm memorial stone, the bunker at Miła 18, and the Janusz Korczak memorial stone.

Each year, the Polish Council of Christians and Jews presents an honorary "Reconciliation" award to a person from outside Poland for accomplishments in the field of Christian-Jewish understanding in our country. The list of 16 honorees is impressive: Stephan Schreiner (Germany), Rabbi Byron Sherwin (USA), Sir Sigmund Sternberg (UK), John T. Pawlikowski OSM (USA), Sister Dominika Zaleska NDS (Switzerland), Rabbi James Rudin (USA), Sister Marie-Therese Huguet OV (France), Rabbi Michael Schudrich (USA and Poland), Tova Ben Tzwi (Israel), Fr. Manfred Deselaers (Germany and Poland), Halina Birenbaum (Israel), Jan Nowak-Jeziorański (USA and Poland), Jerzy Kluger (Italy), Rabbi Michael Signer (USA), Fr. Hanspeter Heinz (Germany), Sister Anne-Denise Rinckwald NDS (France), and Rabbi Irving Greenberg (USA).

It would be amiss to fail to mention the Council's special general-readership publication *The Catholic Church on Its Jewish Roots*, intended for catechism teachers, secondary-school students, and everyone interested in the Christian-Jewish dialogue. It has gone through two editions and

Co-Chairmen of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, from left: Zbigniew Nosowski (on the Christian side) and Stanisław Krajewski (on the Jewish side).
Andrzej Heldwein

all the copies were rapidly snapped up. The whole text is available online at the Council website, and discussions are underway on a new version.

Thinking over the accomplishments of the Council, Sułek-Kowalska remarks that "it must be stated, without false modesty, that the work of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews has become, in a certain way, an example or model for hundreds of people all over Poland who have become interested in Christian-Jewish dialogue in recent years and who are looking for patterns to follow." New ideas keep coming up at Council meetings. However, people prefer to talk about the things that have already been achieved, since they know full well that not all intentions can be put into practice.

The members of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews are a diverse lot. They belong to different religious traditions and Christian denominations. Some are intellectuals, and others are local activists. They are old and young. For some, dialogue is the passion of a lifetime, and for others, one of their many commitments. What do they all have in common? Stanisław Krajewski and Zbigniew Nosowski consider the question. "Perhaps it is a conviction that Poland should play an important role in the development of the global Christian-Jewish dialogue. After all, this is a very important country for the Catholic Church, and also one of the most important places in the history of the Jews."

Marta Titaniec

The Polish Council of Christians and Jews
http://prchiz.free.ngo.pl

In September 2008 the Center for Dialogue and Prayer was the site of a congress of Polish scholars on theology after Auschwitz. Seated: Rabbi Alon Goshen-Gottstein from the Elijah Interfaith Institute in Jerusalem.
From the archives of the Center

The Center for Dialogue and Prayer

GOODNESS AT THE THRESHOLD OF AUSCHWITZ

In the face of the tragedy of Auschwitz, is there a place for dialogue and prayer? Franciszek Cardinal Macharski, then the metropolitan of Cracow, decided in 1992 to offer a positive reply to that question. After consultations with many European bishops and representatives of Jewish organizations, he founded a Center for Information, Encounter, Dialogue, Education and Prayer in Oświęcim. In 1998, the institution was renamed as the Center for Dialogue and Prayer.

The orientation towards dialogue and cooperation is evident in the management. The director is Father Jan Nowak of the Cracow diocese, while the head of programming is Father Manfred Deselaers, a German theologian from the diocese of Aachen who has lived in Poland for 18 years, devoting his life to the reconciliation of Germans, Jews, and Poles. They take their motto from the Jewish thinker Joshua Abraham Heschel: "The languages of our prayers are different, but the tears are always the same," and from something that Pope John Paul II said at the Auschwitz-Birkenau site: "We are standing in a place where we wish to think of each people and each person as a brother."

The idea of the Center is to create a place for reflection, education, the exchange of ideas, and prayer for all those moved by what happened in Auschwitz. The house is called the Center for Dialogue and Prayer, yet, as its founders write on their website, it often "seems impossible to begin with either prayer

or dialogue in this place." For this reason, they first invite their guests to see the memorial, to "listen to the voice of this land." This concrete encounter with history touches everyone to the quick. "We need silence, reflection, meditation, and time in order to see what is invisible and to hear what is inaudible, so that in this way we may begin to gain an inkling as to the wound that Auschwitz is," says Desaelers, explaining the idea of the Center.

Father Manfred Deselaers, program director of the Center for Dialogue and Prayer in Oświęcim.
Marcin Kiedio

Interpersonal relations were destroyed in Auschwitz. Healing is therefore possible only through encounter. The most important—and the most difficult—task facing the Center for Dialogue and Prayer is therefore, as the program head says, rebuilding "trust after Auschwitz." Opening up one's heart to another is only possible if there is a "credit" of trust. Trust is essential to making it possible to open up without fear, to listen to each other and bear witness.

However, the goal of dialogue between people of different faiths and nationalities at the Center is not to blur their viewpoints. The operative principle is: "everybody talks about themselves, and not about each other." Deselaers explains that "Jews don't talk about Polish anti-Semitism, or Germans about what Jews are doing to Palestinians. They all talk about themselves, and the others are supposed to listen and be open-minded. This is very fruitful."

The Center holds meetings with Christian and Jewish former prisoners, young people from Poland, Germany, and other countries, and professors, priests, and rabbis. One question that is always relevant in the shadow of a concentration camp is: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" For this reason, the Oświęcim center also welcomes retreats and religious days of reflection. The participants' encounter with Auschwitz plays an important role. It highlights questions about God, evil, vocations, responsibility, guilt, forgiveness, and Christian-Jewish relations.

The seminars and retreats here "at the threshold of Auschwitz" are becoming increasingly international and interdenominational. At a Catholic Advent retreat in 2007, Professor Stanisław Krajewski discussed the wait for the Messiah from a Jewish perspective. In September 2008, the Center held a theological conference where professors from Israel, Germany, and Poland lectured on theology after Auschwitz.

Special things sometimes happen during the retreats. A German woman visiting Auschwitz began crying at the crematorium ruins, out of shame that her country could have committed such a crime. A rabbi from Israel came up, hugged her, and began comforting her. "At that moment, a new interpersonal reality came into being," says Deselaers.

He believes that it is not impossible that the site of the greatest crime in the history of humankind will become a school of peace and dialogue. In his book *Dialogue at the Threshold of Auschwitz*, he writes: "Auschwitz was possible. Why shouldn't the goodness that conquers Auschwitz be possible?"

Maciej Müller, *Tygodnik Powszechny*

The Center for Dialogue and Prayer in Oświęcim
www.centrum-dialogu.oswiecim.pl

Mutual prayer by Jews, Christians and Muslims during the Gniezno Convention devoted to "A Europe of Dialogue", September 17, 2005.
KAI/Jan Brykczyński

The Gniezno Convention

MUTUAL, BUT NOT JOINT

The Gniezno Convention stands out among the many Christian events in Poland for its vigor. It is an ecumenical meeting of Christians from Central-Eastern Europe, organized in the first capital of Poland. The metropolitan of Gniezno, Archbishop Henryk Muszyński, is the host, while the St. Adalbert Forum prepares and organizes the congress.

The name of the meeting alludes to an event in 1000, when the German emperor, Otto III, made a pilgrimage to the grave of St. Adalbert in Gniezno, where he met with—and crowned—the Polish prince, Bolesław the Brave. In our time, two meetings of presidents from Central and Eastern Europe, one of them on the occasion of Pope John Paul II's 1997 visit to Gniezno, have been defined as Congresses of Gniezno. The next stage in the development of the idea took shape in 2003.

The organizers of the present Gniezno Conventions emphasize their desire to strengthen the Christian roots of Europe, but to do so in dialogue and amity with the adherents of other faiths. Interfaith events were present in a special way in September 2005, when the theme of the Convention was *A Europe of Dialogue: Being a Christian in a Pluralistic Europe*.

Nearly 1,500 people from many European countries arrived in Gniezno. Most of them were leaders of various Christian communities and organizations. Characteristic of the atmosphere was the fact that the Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mustafa Cerić, received one of the most enthusiastic ovations at this Christian colloquium when he announced that he was

working on a declaration for Muslims who regard themselves as European patriots. Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of the Center for Interreligious Understanding in the United States, and Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, joined Cerić in discussing the perspectives for interfaith dialogue. In small working groups, Convention participants learned about practical dialogue in everyday life.

A unique event at this congress was mutual prayer for the intention of Europe by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. "Mutual prayer" is a neologism created especially for the occasion. Since theological differences make joint prayer by the faithful of different religions impossible, the Convention organizers (following a suggestion by Piotr Cywiński, chairman of the Council of the St. Adalbert Forum) proposed that the representatives of the monotheistic religions should pray for Europe by praying for each other in turn.

There were no religious symbols on the illuminated stage at Gniezno town square. Instead, three large windows—synagogue, Gothic, and Muslim—were placed against a black background. "Lamps of reconciliation," made by mentally handicapped people from the Arka Community, shined on the square. The three prayer groups came on stage one after another, taking up positions in front of "their" windows. They were led by the chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich; Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz, chairman of the Muslim Religious Union in Poland; and Archbishop Henryk Muszyński. Each group used the words of its own tradition to pray for the intention of the representatives of the other two. At the end of the prayer, three children passed out olive branches, brought in specially from Jerusalem, to everyone.

During the Gniezno Convention in September 2005. From left: Rabbi Jack Bemporad, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, Mufti Mustafa Cerić, Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz. Behind them: glass tablets by Paweł Przyrowski. *KAI/Jan Brykczyński*

The Gniezno mutual prayer turned out to be an indigenous Polish version of the prayer meeting of various religions held at the invitation of John Paul II in Assisi in October 1986. Three large glass tablets by the sculptor and stained-glass-window artist Paweł Przyrowski became a distinctive feature of the Gniezno Convention. They presented symbols that are crucial for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with passages from the most important prayers of the three religions. Each of them was free-standing. Without suggesting any kind of interreligious blending, Przyrowski nevertheless created a beautiful, coherent whole.

These events will long remain in the memories and hearts of those present, along with the fact that the Sunday morning Bible meditation at a congress of Christians was led by none other than Rabbi Schudrich.

Zbigniew Nosowski

The Gniezno Convention
www.euroforum.pl

A workshop organized by the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations, Warsaw 2007.
Wojciech Radwański

The Forum for Dialogue Among Nations

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

How did Poles behave during the Holocaust period? Why were Jews thrown out of Poland in 1968? What do Jews who left Poland think of the country? Polish high-school students ask questions like these during workshops. Once they have been sensitized to issues in Polish-Jewish relations, they experiment with things like playing the role of a Jew who left Poland years ago, returns to the country, and sees anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls. This is just one of many initiatives by the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations Foundation, founded in 1998.

"The origins of the foundation are tied up with my own experiences. I went through a shock on a visit to Israel," recalls Forum chairman Andrzej Folwarczny. "I met older people there, and they told me harrowing stories about their lives. They talked about Poles murdering Jews returning from the camps, about Poles moving into their homes… This was all they remembered from our country."

The Polish historical memory is completely different. It focuses on Polish suffering at the hands of the Germans, and Polish help for Jews. Is dialogue possible in the face of such basic differences? "At first, I felt that nothing could be done," Folwarczny admits. As a Polish Lutheran, however, he enjoys daunting challenges. So he set up the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations as an attempt at finding something that could connect Jews and Poles.

The Forum aims its efforts at young people and opinion-shapers above all. It set up a "Polish-Jewish Exchange Program" for journalists, scholars, artists, businessmen, and the heads of non-governmental organizations. The exchanges allow Poles to see what Jewish life looks like in Washington, Chicago, or New York. American Jews make analogous trips to Poland. The Forum organizes the exchanges in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee and the Polish Foreign Ministry.

Folwarczny sees personal contacts between Poles and Jews as the most effective path to understanding, which is why the Forum concentrates on setting up encounters. About 30 thousand young Jews visit Poland every year, mostly to tour Holocaust sites and cemeteries. Often, they have no chance to see anything else, and return home convinced that Poland is a terrible place. "Anything that shows them a different side of contemporary Poland counts as a success," says Folwarczny.

Forum staff bring Jewish young people together with the students at Polish schools. The first questions include "Do you have anything in common?" or "Do you like each other?" The answer, as a rule, is "No." After two hours together, it turns out that there are fewer differences after all. The young people have similar lifestyles, interests, and views of current events. They sometimes exchange addresses and keep in touch afterwards.

"Polish-Jewish Exchange Program" participants in Washington, D.C., 2006. Andrzej Folwarczny standing, third from left.
From the archives of the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations

The Forum is currently preparing other kinds of meetings for Jewish students, as part of week-long visits to Poland. The guests will have a chance to help Polish peers cleaning up Jewish cemeteries, to talk with Polish Jews over supper on the Sabbath, and to meet journalists who specialize in Polish-Jewish subjects.

Differing points of view can sometimes lead to serious misunderstandings, especially when not much is known about the partners in the dialogue. A publication titled *Difficult Questions in Polish-Jewish Dialogue*, the fruit of cooperation between the Forum for Dialogue and the American Jewish Committee, attempts to address these questions. Authentic questions culled from young Poles and Jews are answered by such authorities as Israel Gutman, Shlomo Avineri, Antony Polonsky, Władysław Bartoszewski, and Leszek Kołakowski. More information about the book is available at the website www.trudnepytania.org.

There are no easy answers to difficult questions. The process of mutual understanding between Poles and Jews will take years. Thanks to the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations, increasing numbers of young Poles and Jews know each other better, understand each other better, and see each other as friends.

Ewa Kiedio

Forum for Dialogue Among Nations
www.dialog.org.pl

Jarosław Banyś at the Katowice Jewish cemetery with students from the elementary school in Siemianowice, October 10, 2006.
From the archives of the Or Chaim Foundation

Katowice

THE NOURISHING LIGHT

Downtown Katowice: a blood bank next door to the ruins of a slaughterhouse, a gloomy prewar apartment building. Here, up the hill on ulica Kozielska, the Jewish cemetery has been discreetly tucked away for more than 140 years. Fifteen hundred gravestones and three generations of Jews, including families who made great contributions to the city: the Glasers, the Gruenfelds, and the Panofskis. Broken vodka bottles are strewn outside the walls. If you stand at the highest point on the street running alongside the cemetery, you can easily take it all in at a glance: the overturned gravestones and the collapsed mausoleums with what look like Roman columns.

"It's heartbreaking," says Jarosław Banyś, chairman of the Or Chaim foundation. He puts on his yarmulke. "A watchman will sit here in front of a bank of monitors, and the stonecutters' workshop and the Jewish museum will be here." In the depths of a dank, moldy room measuring 5 x 6 meters, the ceiling of the old burial house has fallen in. "And this will be the entrance! Beautiful, bright"—he makes an arc in the air with a sweep of his arm—"and here where this pile of rubble lies, there will be bookshelves, a Jewish library: the Talmud, the Torah, books in English, Hebrew, Polish, and Yiddish. Rabbi Schudrich himself has promised to bring me something!"

Banyś's deep dark eyes, his captivating smile, and the tone of his voice betray a fascination with Judaism. He wants to open a center in Katowice to familiarize people with Jewish culture. There will be lectures, discussions, and table talk. The sight of the cemetery that was devastated not so long ago

"Lesson in Judaism" at the Katowice Jewish cemetery. Speaking: Jarosław Banyś
From the archives of the Or Chaim Foundation

does not discourage him, and the scale of the undertaking in such a risky district is no obstacle. "This should be a warm place," Banyś remarks. He discovered his Jewish roots six years ago. Deep in his heart, however, something was burning long before that. As a student, he belonged to an academic Catholic community. "Judaism slowly drew me in, until it finally swallowed me up completely." He opened the Miriam art gallery. "I am a trader in works of art," he chuckles. The Miriam gallery is a meeting place for Christian and Jewish culture, exhibitions, concerts, field trips, discussions about art, and prayer.

Banyś visits schools and speaks with the predominantly Catholic students about Judaism, the Sabbath, and Jewish rituals and customs. "I was captivated by the things that John Paul II talked about: that Judaism, for Christianity, is an internal reality." He joined the headmistress of the intermediate school in Wojkowice and the local priest in organizing a Sabbath supper. Everything followed the ritual: lining up to wash their hands (200 people!), songs with Yiddish transcription, readings from the Torah, kosher food. "The young people sampled the taste, aroma, and color of Jewish culture," says Banyś, smiling.

He is not alone in his audacious plans. He co-founded the Or Chaim foundation with Father Paweł Buchta and the chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, along with the Catholic and Lutheran bishops of Katowice, Gerard Bernacki and Tadeusz Szurman respectively, and the chairman of the Jewish community, Włodzimierz Kac.

The cemetery on ulica Kozielska lies within the boundaries of Father Buchta's parish. This priest organizes the Days of Judaism in Katowice. There are concerts, lectures, and joint prayers. For a long time, the cemetery has been an important thing for Fr. Buchta. "This was always a hospitable land," he says, "and we treat newcomers like our own. Since only slightly more than 200 Jews remain of a community that once numbered 12 thousand, the responsibility for remembrance falls not only on the Jews, but on all the residents of Silesia. On me, as well."

After a meeting of the Council of the Or Chaim Foundation, December 2007. From right: Włodzimierz Kac, Chairman of the Katowice Jewish community, Fr. Paweł Buchta, Bishop Tadeusz Szurman (Lutheran), a guest at the meeting, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Bishop Gerard Bernacki (Roman Catholic) and Fr. Sergiusz Dziewiatowski (Eastern Orthodox). Sitting: Jarosław Banyś. *From the archives of the Or Chaim Foundation*

There was not much that the Jewish community could do about the cemetery—too little money, too little energy, and unsettled questions about property ownership. Nor could the city appropriate money for the community. Then Banyś came along. The interested parties sensed that things were going to happen. They set up the foundation. Mayor Piotr Uszok appropriated 200 thousand złoty, and the landmarks officer set aside 100 thousand to renovate the burial society building that will house the Jewish culture center. But that is only a third of the needed sum. Banyś is looking for sponsors. He still needs several million złoty to rebuild the old burial house, renovate the gravestones, and erect a solid wall. "But look, we're already finishing the roof," says the chairman of the foundation, proudly pointing at the workers on the scaffolding. "A month ago, a team of Or Chaim volunteers and municipal employees removed 33 tons of rubble and trash". The mayor paid for everything.

Father Paweł Buchta (front) and Bishop Gerard Bernacki during the Day of Judaism in Katowice, January 2005. *KAI/Rafał Książek*

Banyś has further plans. He is thinking of rebuilding the synagogue downtown, which the Germans demolished in 1939. He has Church backing. City Hall shouldn't raise any obstacles. The only problem, as usual, is money. A private investor purchased the lot where the monumental synagogue stood, and the price of land is rising by the day. "We'll be able to handle it."

He falls silent for a moment. Then he explains where all the energy comes from. "In Hebrew, *Keren Or Chaim* means light of life, spiritual light, nourishing light."

Joanna Brożek

Menorah—the monument erected on the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the Kielce ghetto. The annual march of prayer and remembrance starts here. Speaking: Bogdan Białek, July 4, 2008.
PAP/Piotr Polak

Kielce

AS POLISH PATRIOTS

On July 4, 1946, Kielce residents murdered 42 Jews, Holocaust survivors, most of whom were living in a building at ulica Planty 5/7 while waiting to leave Poland. The event has gone down in history under the name of "the Kielce Pogrom." Bogdan Białek, founder and chairman of the Jan Karski Association, says that "to this day, this crime stigmatizes our city. For many long years," he goes on, "both the government and the Church used 'deep sleep therapy' as a treatment for the problem of anti-Semitism. Nothing was said about the crime in schools or at church, and there were no books or newspaper stories about it. The Jewish community closed up in pain, while the Polish side, in turn, exhibited profound ignorance or denial."

A group of friends founded the association. They wanted not only to remind people about the tragic events from the past, but also to change the attitudes of Kielce residents to Jews and the history of their city. As their patron, they chose Jan Karski, the famous courier who was the first to attempt to inform the world about the Holocaust, even though no one wanted to believe the horrible things he reported on. "In 2005, we erected a statue of him on the main street of the city," says Białek. It stands near the building where the atrocity occurred; Karski, however does not look in the direction of the building. Instead, he sits on a bench, calmly playing chess. There is an informational plaque next to him, so that people can read about the Holocaust. "I encouraged people to sit next to him, in order to reduce the distance," says Białek. "It worked. People from

Kielce fell in love with the monument. They bring their children there and tell them about Karski. It's part of the city landscape."

Kielce hosted the national observance of the Day of Judaism in January 2006. The schedule included a solemn ecumenical service in the cathedral, a meeting of Christians and Jews, an exhibition, cultural events, and a march of remembrance and prayer following a route connected with the history of the Kielce Jews. A memorial tablet was unveiled in the Planty park then, featuring the text in Polish and Hebrew of the prayer that John Paul II inserted in a nook in the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem: "God of our fathers, You chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the nations: we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of Yours to suffer and asking Your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

Day of Judaism participants were given a brochure titled *The Catholic Church on Its Jewish Roots*, prepared by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews and containing a selection of declarations from the Church's teachings on Judaism. The people of Kielce snapped up all the brochures in a single day. After 50 years of silence, they wanted to learn something about the people who had been their neighbors before the war.

Rabbi Michael Schudrich and the auxiliary Bishop of Kielce, Marian Florczyk, planting a Tree of Peace during the ceremony on the 60th anniversary of the Kielce pogrom, July 4, 2006. *PAP/Piotr Polak*

In August 2007, the Association marked the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the ghetto. They erected a new monument near the building at Planty 5/7. Like the Karski statue, it was paid for by private donations from local individuals. Depending on how you look at it, the Silver Menorah is either sinking into or rising from the pavement—a pavement made up of stones that the Jewish residents of Kielce walked on.

"What have we managed to do here in Kielce? Some people have started thinking about the Jews and the Holocaust in different categories," says Białek. "We wanted to show the crime of the pogrom as a fratricidal crime. All Poles need a change of perspective in looking at the Jews, to stop thinking in terms of 'us' and 'them.' On the 60th anniversary of the pogrom, the mayor said that each of the murdered people was someone from Kielce, one of us. Cain raised his hand against Abel here. This is the new way of seeing things. There have also been other initiatives to restore the memory of the shared Polish-Jewish presence in this land, in this region."

"I work as a Polish patriot," Białek explains, "because I regard anti-Semitism as a stain on the good name of the Polish people. Anti-Semitism doesn't affect Jews; there are hardly any of them left in Poland. It affects me, as a Pole. It affronts my dignity. Anti-Semitism today also means downplaying the memory of Polish-Jewish history. I have an obligation towards the

Jadwiga Lenoch-Bukowska unveiling the monument to her cousin, Jan Karski. The monument was funded by the Jan Karski Association for the citizens of Kielce.
From the archives of the Association

dead, who no longer have anyone to commemorate them, light a candle, heave a sigh. There are more Jewish cemeteries in Poland than Jews. This, too, is an obligation before God, myself, and my contemporaries, to remind them of their identity. That identity includes the past of the place they live in. The past must be understood."

Bogdan Białek, chairman of the Jan Karski Association and editor-in-chief of *Charaktery*, a popular psychology monthly.
From the archives of Charaktery

Perhaps this is why the annual memorial march on the anniversary of the pogrom each July 4 attracts increasing numbers of people. The march begins at the Menorah, passes the site of the pogrom, pauses at the Karski memorial, and ends at the Jewish cemetery. Despite terrible weather in 2008—pouring rain and a chill wind—the turnout was high and included many young people who wanted to pay homage to the victims. "I was 19 when the pogrom took place and lived next door," an elderly woman recalls with emotion. "I remember everything: the screams, the shouts, and the weeping". People are finally beginning to talk and argue about these things. Before that, they did not talk about it because they did not remember. Now they remember.

Ewa Karabin

The "new" Jewish cemetery on Racławicka Street, Koszalin; march of prayer on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, November 15, 2007.
Zdzisław Pacholski

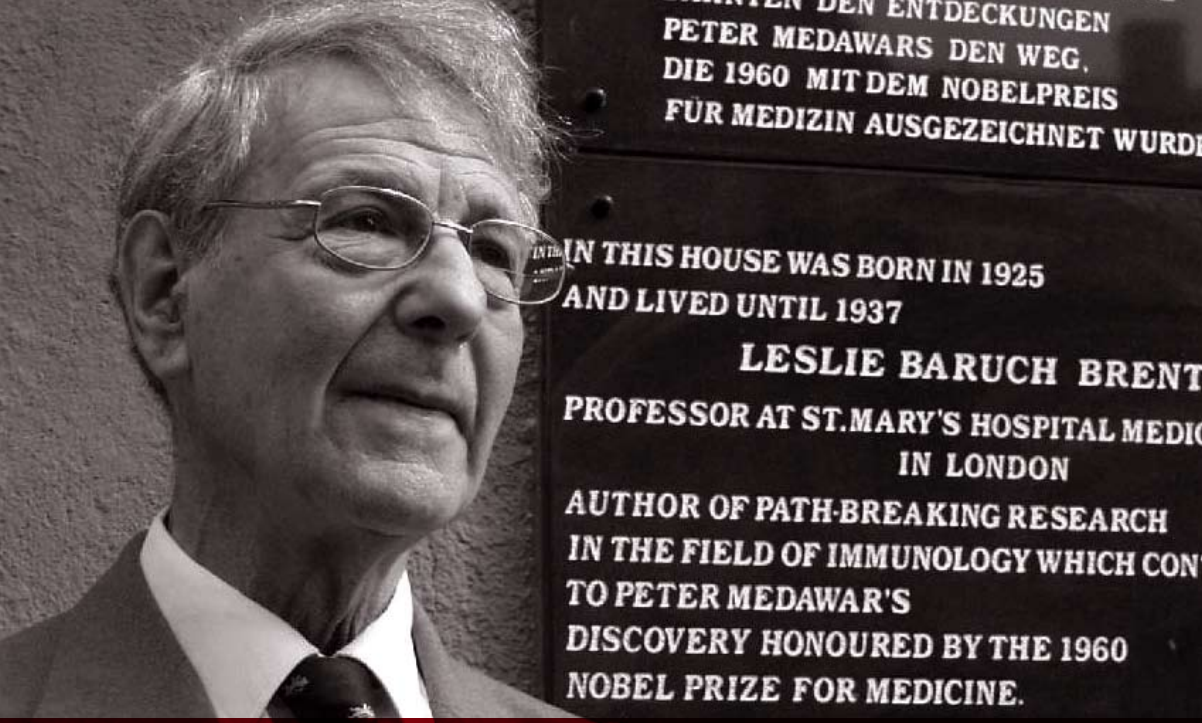
Koszalin

SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT'S GOOD

"For me, it really started in 1998," says Father Henryk Romanik, one of the driving forces behind the Christian-Jewish dialogue in Koszalin. "In the fall, my friend Zdzisław Pacholski, a photographer, put on an exhibition titled *Anne Frank: A Story for Today*. It was a big success. Almost 3,500 people attended. It was also a chance for lay Catholics, clergy, and Jews to meet together. That was the first time we spoke out loud about our city's Jewish history. For the previous 60 years, the residents of Koszalin had pushed that issue out of their minds, and hardly anyone ever talked about Jewish matters."

Each new contact with Jewish culture led to new questions about the Jewish presence in the Pomerania region. One such occasion was the Tolerance Days in nearby Kołobrzeg. Jewish youth from all over the world were invited, and Romanik, a biblical scholar and guide to the Holy Land, attended regularly. He found himself asking more and more insistently: "How long can we go on pretending that there were no Jews here?"

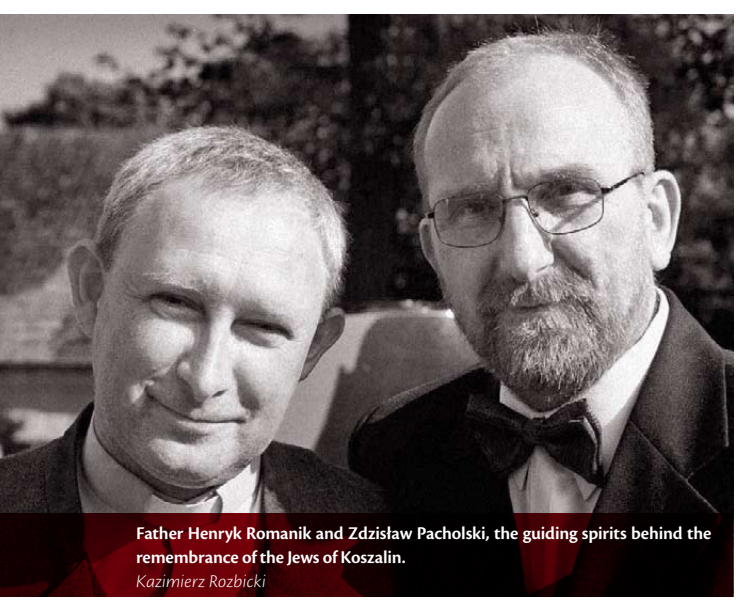
A meeting with an exceptional Koszalin Jew was the key to the breakthrough. The Nobel-Prize-winning immunologist Leslie Baruch Brent was born in Koszalin in 1925. At the age of 13, he was one of eight Jewish boys transported from Berlin to Great Britain. As a result, he survived the Holocaust—the only member of his family to do so. In 1989, Professor Brent, by then a famous immunologist in London, decided to visit his birthplace. Ten years later, Zdzisław Pacholski learned



Prof. Leslie Baruch Brent next to the plaque dedicated to him.
Zdzisław Pacholski

about the visit and was intrigued by Brent's story. He was astonished to learn that the only macevah left standing in Koszalin after the maelstrom of the war marked the grave of Professor Brent's great-uncle. Pacholski convinced the city council to invite Brent for another, official visit.

The upcoming visit piqued the curiosity of Koszalin residents about Brent's roots. They discovered, belatedly, that the "old" Jewish cemetery was in ruins, and that a Koszalin Polytechnic building had been erected on the site of the "new" Jewish cemetery. Romanik insisted on doing something. "I said that Christian and patriotic customs required that respect be paid to the graves of others before the Church could participate in the meetings with Professor Brent. A new fence was built around the old cemetery, the grounds were put in order, and a monument was later added. The ceremonial opening took place in 2005."



Father Henryk Romanik and Zdzisław Pacholski, the guiding spirits behind the remembrance of the Jews of Koszalin.
Kazimierz Rozbicki

The first memorial march passed through the streets of Koszalin in the fall of that year. Its route passed the two cemeteries and the place

where the synagogue, burned down long ago, once stood. "We carry candles and read the Psalms as we march," says Romanik. "There are prayers, and there is silence. Many young people come, as well as older people from all over Poland who have Jewish roots or who had positive contacts with Jews before the war, and who want to light a candle in Koszalin in tribute to those they remember. The heads of local schools and the media are informed, but the majority of those who attend learn about the march from text messages and emails."

To bring history alive for his contemporaries, Romanik wrote a book about the Jews of Koszalin, combining historical sketches with his own poems. When he doesn't know what to say, he reports, he writes a poem, since it's sometimes better to speak to the heart than to rely on erudition. He is surprised that his efforts have been noticed outside Koszalin. On April 19, 2007, he traveled to Warsaw to receive a "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" medal from a Jewish veterans' group. He donated it to the museum in gratitude to all the local groups who have supported Christian-Jewish dialogue with their time and energy.

The monument at the "new" Jewish cemetery in Koszalin, with the buildings of the Technical University in the background. *Jacques Lahitte*

Romanik is not resting on his laurels. He has become a member of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. He is also working on the upcoming anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the anti-Jewish pogrom throughout the Third Reich on the night of November 9/10, 1938 (Koszalin lay within the prewar borders of Germany). He collects archival materials, lectures, and tries to acquaint other people with Jewish traditions and culture.

"The important thing," he says, "is to avoid reinforcing stereotypes—neither falsely positive ones, nor the negative ones that are current around the world and also in Poland. My strategy is to speak as much as possible about what's good, about people who are involved in a positive way. Meetings with real people are very necessary, so that everyone can see a living Jew. Instead of empty ideological discussions, the thing to do is to let people meet each other, have supper together, and talk."

Ewa Karabin

The memorial plaque at the Jewish cemetery in Krasiczyn, funded by the local Roman Catholic parish.
Marcin Kiedio

Krasiczyn

IN MEMORY OF OUR ELDER BROTHERS IN FAITH

"You want to make a cemetery, Father, but where am I supposed to graze my cows?" There was no shortage of such remarks when Father Stanisław Bartmiński, parish priest in the little town of Krasiczyn in southeastern Poland, attempted to improve the condition of the Jewish cemetery. Only four headstones remained in the entire cemetery after World War II. The Germans used the rest of them to pave the muddy roads. Later, the site served as the village pasture. Few remembered what it had originally been.

Bartmiński has noticed a rule that applies in all his community work. "About 15% of the people are dead set against, and 15% are wholeheartedly in favor. The rest are undecided, and those are the ones you have to persuade." In this case, he used the parish newsletter, *Krasiczyn News*, to convince them.

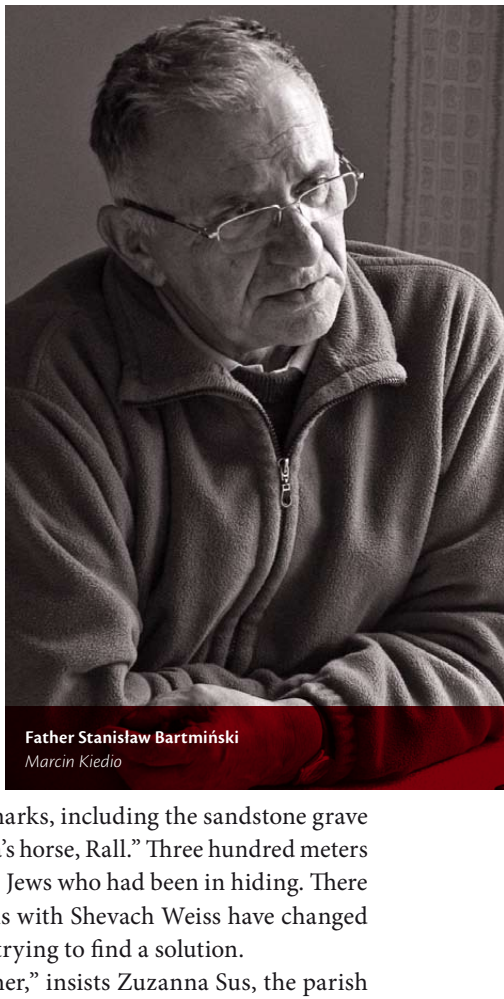
A dozen or more local young people set out for the hill overlooking the town early in the morning on May 13, 2000. When they got to the top, they went to work. Gravestones became visible as they pulled the weeds. Not long afterwards, a fence went up.

On the Jewish side, an American professor of psychology, John J. Hartman, supervised the work. He is the chairman of Remembrance and Reconciliation, an ecumenical foundation.

He helped prepare English and Hebrew translations of the text inscribed on the memorial tablet. "In memory of our elder brothers in faith"—Father Bartmiński used these words of John Paul II to express why the Roman-Catholic parish took care of the Jewish cemetery.

The story of the restoration of the cemetery is echoed in *The Presbytery*, a popular Polish TV serial. The priest in the series is modeled on Father Bartmiński, who serves as a consultant for the writers. Bartmiński managed to arrange something special: the jubilee 1000th episode of *The Presbytery* was devoted entirely to the Jewish theme.

During the Jewish Culture Festival in Cracow in 2001, Shevach Weiss, the ambassador of Israel in Poland, awarded Bartmiński an honorary diploma recognizing his "services in the preservation of the Jewish cultural heritage in Poland." The award was not only for his work at the cemetery, but also for organizing the Day of Prayer and Reflection devoted to remembrance of the local Jews.



Father Stanisław Bartmiński
Marcin Kiedio

About 200 people, half the population of Krasiczyn, attended. Bartmiński remembers how he and Hartman sat up all night making yarmulkes for the participants. The main event was the prayer for the dead at the Jewish cemetery. However, the observances opened at the castle, a pearl of Renaissance architecture and the pride of Krasiczyn. Rabbi Sacha Pecaric introduced the assembly to some Jewish customs and rituals. The young people burst out laughing at the blowing of the *shofar*. The first encounter with Judaism took them by surprise—no Jews have lived in Krasiczyn since the Holocaust.

Three years later, in 2003, the sound of the *shofar* no longer seemed strange. The singer Tova Ben Zvi came from Israel. During her concert, she showed slides from Israel and talked about the Hasidim, rabbis, and *tsaddikim*. By then, the young people even felt at home singing along in Hebrew.

Bartmiński has not yet accomplished everything he set out to do. There is a rather odd nature trail in Krasiczyn known as the Rall Trail. An informational sign notes that "this trail illustrates valuable cultural and historical landmarks, including the sandstone grave marker commemorating the life and death of Prince Sapieha's horse, Rall." Three hundred meters from the memorial to the horse, the Germans murdered 30 Jews who had been in hiding. There is not the slightest sign of this event. Not even negotiations with Shevach Weiss have changed this. Bartmiński, however, does not seem to have stopped trying to find a solution.

"You won't find another community organizer like Father," insists Zuzanna Sus, the parish housekeeper for the last 35 years. "He's done a lot for other people." Bartmiński himself regards his work with great humility. "The cemetery in Krasiczyn is so tiny," he explains, "that its significance is more symbolic than real."

Yet symbols can have real power, can't they?

Ewa Kiedio

Tha Archbishop of Lublin, Józef Życiński, and the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Shear Yashuv Cohen, after prayers at the site of the Majdanek German concentration camp, during the Day of Judaism in Lublin, January 17, 2002.
PAP/Mirosław Trembecki

Lublin

WHO IS THIS ALL FOR?

Lublin is a special place on the Polish map of Christian-Jewish dialogue. The current multitude of initiatives reflects the onetime Jewish splendor of the region. For centuries, Lublin was a city of many cultures and faiths, among whom the Jews were one of the most important groups. They also lived in the villages and small towns nearby. Józef Życiński, the metropolitan archbishop of Lublin, believes firmly in the necessity of discovering and protecting their heritage. "In normal human relations, indifference to the fate of an elder brother might indicate a lack of elementary sensitivity, or spiritual narcissism," he says. "However, if that brother had died in the Holocaust, then ignoring his tragedy would be a sin of omission indicating the erroneous formation of the conscience."

The Center for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, convoked by the archbishop at the seminary that trains future priests, helps remind the city about its Jewish roots. "We try to educate our students in the spirit of the Christian-Jewish dialogue," says Father Alfred Wierzbicki, the Center director, "and we are proudly observing the first fruits of our labors. This year, one of our alumni was assigned to the parish in Kraśnik. When he saw what poor condition the Jewish cemetery was in, he decided to clean it up even though he was well aware of the deep-seated local memory of anti-Semitism. He convinced young people from Kraśnik to help him, and got the job done. We know how important the proper education of the younger generation is, and for this reason the

Center extends its patronage to selected Catholic high schools where it holds meetings between young people from Poland and Israel."

The Lublin region is a vast Jewish burial ground. Forgotten or devastated cemeteries can be found in localities where the population was 50% Jewish before the war. Seeing that there was no one left to mourn their death, the Center organized prayer meetings for the intention of the victims of the Holocaust. Mourning was observed in Izbica, Piaski, Trawniki, and many other places near Lublin. It began with a liturgy in the local Catholic parish church, after which those assembled walked to the Jewish cemetery, if one was left. There, they joined in prayer with members of the Jewish community and such Holocaust survivors as David Efrati, Father Grzegorz Pawłowski (Jakub Hersz Griner), or Father Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel. "Mourning the Jews was aimed at making Christians aware of the void that remains in the absence of the Jews," explains Wierzbicki. "After all, the Jews were our neighbors, and together with us they make up a community of the faith that reaches back to Abraham."

Important dialogue events occur regularly in Lublin. Rabbis and Jewish professors find amicable partners when they come here. The prestigious Lublin Congress of Christian Culture always has a place for discussions about Jews and anti-Semitism, and artistic programs recalling the Jewish past. It is hardly a surprise that Lublin Auxiliary Bishop Mieczysław Cisło is currently chairman of the Polish Bishops' Committee for Dialogue with Judaism.

Nor is there any shortage of symbolic initiatives. The Day of Judaism is observed each year at the seminary. In September 2008, Archbishop Życiński invited students and professors from

The Day of Judaism in Lublin, January 17, 2000. Jews and Christians at prayer in the Theological Seminary church. From left: Sławomir Żurek, representatives of the Warsaw Jewish community Piotr Kadlčik, Lesław Piszewski, and Helena Datner, Bishop Mieczysław Cisło. *PAP/Mirosław Trembecki*

Father Alfred Wierzbicki, Director of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue at the Lublin Theological Seminary
Rev. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski

the Abraham Geiger Rabbinical College in Berlin to join Lublin seminarians in learning openness to dialogue and exploring the places where the Jewish community once thrived. The future rabbis and Catholic priests listened to lectures, toured the city, and studied the Bible together.

Several hundred young Poles and Jews prayed together for the victims of wartime terror at the site of the Nazi concentration camp at Majdanek. "In this way, we express our faithful memory of events that must never be forgotten," says Życiński. "Previously, I was somewhat irritated," admits Konrad, a Lublin seminarian. "I couldn't understand why there was so much talk about Jewish culture and religion, and so little attention paid to our own internal Church problems. Now, after this meeting, I have changed my mind. I understand better now."

"Our guests viewed with amazement the things that are happening now in Lublin," says Professor Sławomir Jacek Żurek, head of Poland's only Polish-Jewish Literature Workshop, at the Catholic University of Lublin. He showed the students from Berlin the landmarks of the old Jewish city: the rebuilding of the Sages of Lublin Yeshiva with its own renovated synagogue, and the mikvah building. "They were incredulous," says Żurek, "and asked me, 'Who is this all for?' I answered, 'it's for you, and for all the other Jews who come here, so that you can function while you're staying in town.' I hope that Jewish religious life will be reborn here, one step at a time."

Bishop Mieczysław Cisło and Konstanty Gebert from the Warsaw Jewish community during the Congress of Christian Culture in Lublin, September 28, 2008.
Roman Czyrka/from the archives of KUL

Who is this all for? I heard one other answer to this question that the Jewish students from Berlin asked. "It's for us, for ourselves, because we wouldn't be keeping faith with Lublin's past otherwise."

Ewa Karabin

March of remembrance and prayer in Otwock, August 19, 2007. Walking in front (from left): Minister Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź, Ambassador David Peleg, Allen Greenstein, Otwock Mayor Zbigniew Szczepaniak. *Janusz Maciejowski.*

Otwock

NOT ONLY THE SAND

On a sweltering evening in the middle of summer vacation—August 19, 2007—several hundred people gathered at a railroad siding in Otwock. A banner above their heads reads: "No other day changed the history of Otwock so much." Sixty-five years earlier to the day, in 1942, German occupation forces loaded some eight thousand Otwock Jews, half the population of the Warsaw suburb, on a train to the Treblinka death camp.

About 400 Jews returned to Otwock after the war. They oversaw the erection of a memorial stone at the site of mass executions. Soon, however, they were gone; they could not bear to look on the way their town had changed. For long years, some individual Otwock residents still remembered the Jews. Local history buffs gathered on occasion, but in miniscule numbers. Memories were fading—it was already possible to be born and grow up in Otwock without knowing anything about its Jewish past.

The turning point came in the spring of 2002, before the 60th anniversary of the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto. Four local residents—Father Wojciech Lemański, the parish priest; Zbigniew Nosowski, editor of *Więź*, a Catholic monthly review in Warsaw; and history teacher Maria Bołtryk and Polish teacher Katarzyna Kałuszko from the high school—published an announcement in the local newspaper headlined "Remember for the Future." Instead of going on feeling bad about having done so little to remember their Jewish fellow citizens, they decided to found a Citizens'

Prayer during the march of remembrance and prayer in Otwock, August 19, 2002. From left: the Rabbi of Łódź, Symcha Keller, and Father Wojciech Lemański.
Przemysław Bogusz

Committee for the Remembrance of the Jews of Otwock and Karczew, and to go to work.

Since then, the Committee has held many events. The best known is the annual march of remembrance and prayer, held on August 19, the date of the liquidation of the ghetto. The local government always lends its active support. The march sets out from the railroad siding and ends at the memorial stone, where Jews and Christians join to pray the Psalms and say the Kaddish and John Paul II's prayer for the Jewish people.

Jewish former residents of Otwock and their descendants attend each year. There are also officially invited guests. In 2007, on the 65th anniversary, they included Minister Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka from the chancellery of the President of Poland, Ambassador David Peleg of Israel, Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź of the Warsaw-Praga Diocese, and the chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich.

Work has also been underway since 2002 to improve the condition of the local Jewish cemetery. Committee members point out that their work is also a form of compensation for vandalism committed since the war by other Otwock residents.

The appearance of the cemetery, located in the woods, has changed markedly. A few years ago, the gravestones were completely hidden by dense undergrowth. Today, the bushes have been trimmed, dried-out tree trunks removed, and the grounds surrounded with fieldstones. Polish and American volunteers, Catholics and Baptists, worked at putting a total of some 80 tons of stones in place.

A Christian-Jewish march to the former synagogues of Otwock, October 20, 2002, at the site where the Goldberg synagogue once stood (opposite the town hall).
Lidia Dańko

The committee has also organized numerous lectures, educational sessions, and cultural events, addressed mostly to young people, in the belief that the future depends on them.

Today, thanks to the work by the teachers, Jewish youth groups, including participants in the March of the Living, stop willingly in Otwock during visits to Poland. In recent years, students at Otwock schools have met repeatedly with

A meeting of Israeli youth with their Polish counterparts in Otwock, October 24, 2006.
Piotr Cmiel

their Jewish peers from Australia, the USA, and Israel. They join in the work at the cemetery, and there is time for discussions and relaxation afterwards.

Committee members have played a role in publishing important books on Otwock's Jewish past. Several times in recent years, the Committee has also helped organize ceremonies where local residents who risked their lives to rescue their Jewish neighbors received Righteous among the Nations of the World medals. In an exceptional ceremony, the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, who ran an orphanage in Otwock during the war, received a medal for sheltering Jewish children.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, who won the Nobel Prize for literature, was one of many who wrote about Otwock: "At a distance of a dozen or more kilometers from Warsaw lies the little town of Otwock. It was famed throughout Poland for its crystalline air and its sanatoria for people suffering from lung disease. … Thousands of families came to Otwock and the nearby localities in the summer. … It is hard to imagine that there are no Jews there anymore. Nothing remains but the sand on which we built…"

Today, the members of the Otwock Committee point out proudly on their website that the great writer was in error: "Much more remains of the Otwock Jews than only the sand. The memory remains. True, the Otwock synagogues are gone, and the Jews of Otwock are gone. As long as the memory remains, however, they too are present."

Katarzyna Jabłońska

Citizens' Committee for the Remembrance of the Jews of Otwock and Karczew
www.zydzi-otwoccy.info

A menorah in front of the altar in St. Adalbert's church in Poznań, with Christmas decorations in the background, during biblical worship on the Day of Judaism, January 17, 2005.
From the archives of the Coexist Association

Poznań

IMAGINING DIALOGUE

At first, there were only a handful of people drawn together by the idea of dialogue. They prepared the Day of Judaism in Poznań, in the form of worship and scholarly symposia. The current shape of the events was cast in 2003, when the new Archbishop of Poznań, Stanisław Gądecki, then chairman of the Bishops' Commission for Dialogue with Judaism, persuaded a group of enthusiasts in Poznań to organize the main national observance of the Day of Judaism.

"In order to take up the difficult issues of a shared but often uncomfortable history, to discuss the most important theological subjects, or to join in a serious debate about identity, we need patience and mutual understanding. Only then can Christian-Jewish dialogue overcome the slavery to stereotypes and slowly replace the parallel monologues that are delivered from perspectives of misunderstanding and prejudice," says Father Jerzy Stranz, one of the organizers. The concept of Day of Judaism observances lasting for several days, a unique phenomenon anywhere in Poland, slowly emerged. "We felt that the prayerful meditation and theological reflections should be preceded by an encounter with words, images, and music reflecting the colorful and exquisite world of Jewish culture," he explains. "This culture helped to make up the ambiance of our city, and there is no excuse for the sin of forgetting and indifference to it."

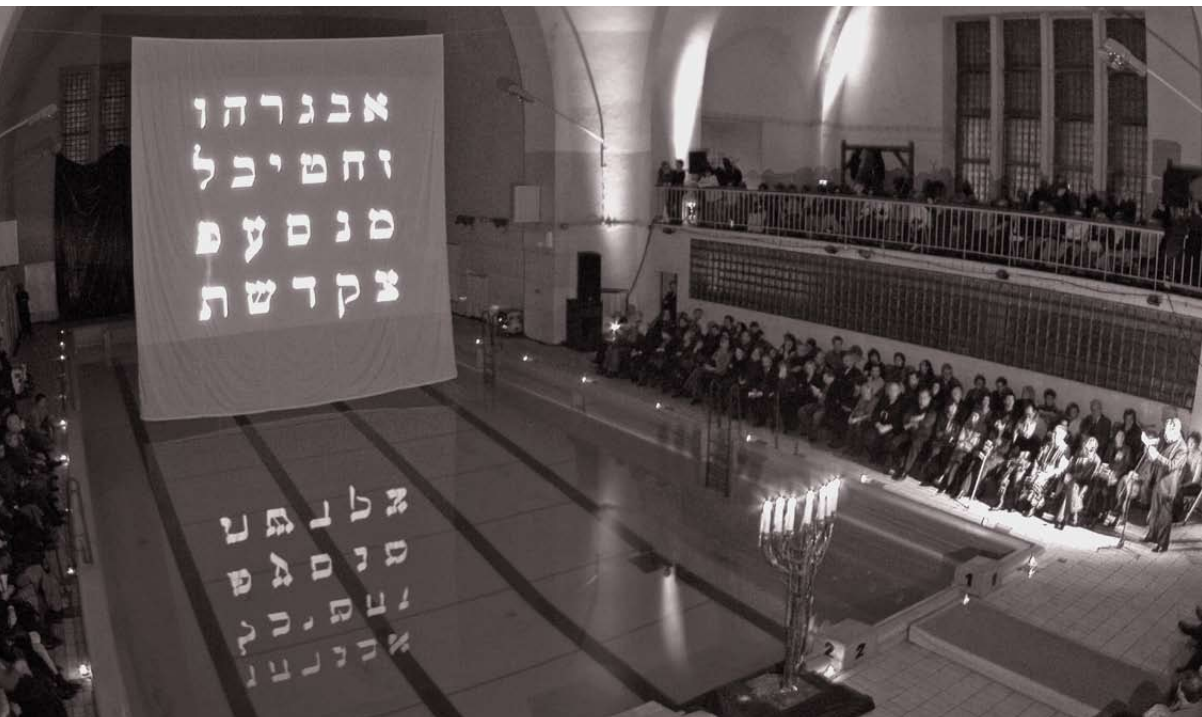
This formula for the observances was accepted for the first time during the nationwide Day of Judaism held in Poznań in 2004. It instantly won approval from local people. The level of interest

exceeded the organizers' dreams. Encouraged by their success, they broadened the schedule each year, until, by 2008, it lasted for almost two weeks. Government and local bodies joined in, along with municipal cultural and educational institutions. The Poznań Days of Judaism became the largest and richest observances in the country.

Since 2006, the Coexist Association, headed by Father Stranz, has been involved in the Christian-Jewish dialogue in Poznań. "The Association arose out of our good experiences of working together to promote attitudes favorable to dialogue on the religious, cultural, social, and artistic levels," he says. There is now a team of more than a dozen members, in Poland and abroad, who combine their professional activities with the work of the Association. Numerous volunteers also take an active part in preparing the Day of Judaism and other events throughout the year.

Each year, Coexist awards the "Menorah of Dialogue" to figures who have contributed in a noteworthy way to bringing peoples, cultures, religions, and nations together. The first winners, in 2007, were Archbishop Gądecki and the chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich. In 2008, the statuette went to Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, the historian and politician who belonged to the *Żegota* organization that rescued Polish Jews during World War II.

Coexist is also active in education, through meetings, lectures, exhibitions, concerts, and workshops. In 2008, the Archdiocesan Museum mounted an exhibition devoted to Akiva Eger (1761-1837), the best-known rabbi of Poznań and Great Poland. Soon afterwards, the Union of Jewish Religious Communities completed the restoration and ceremonial unveiling of Akiva Eger's grave. Coexist has also decided to focus public attention on the "New Synagogue" building, which has



An artistic event directed by Janusz Marciniak in the "new synagogue" building, converted into a swimming pool, January 15, 2006.
From the archives of the Coexist Association

The "Menorah of Dialogue" awards, January 15, 2007. Standing at center: Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki and Rabbi Michael Schudrich, surrounded by the co-founders of the Coexist Association (from left): Marek Kalemba, Jarosław Przyborowski, Zbigniew Theus, and Father Jerzy Stranz. *From the archives of the Coexist Association*

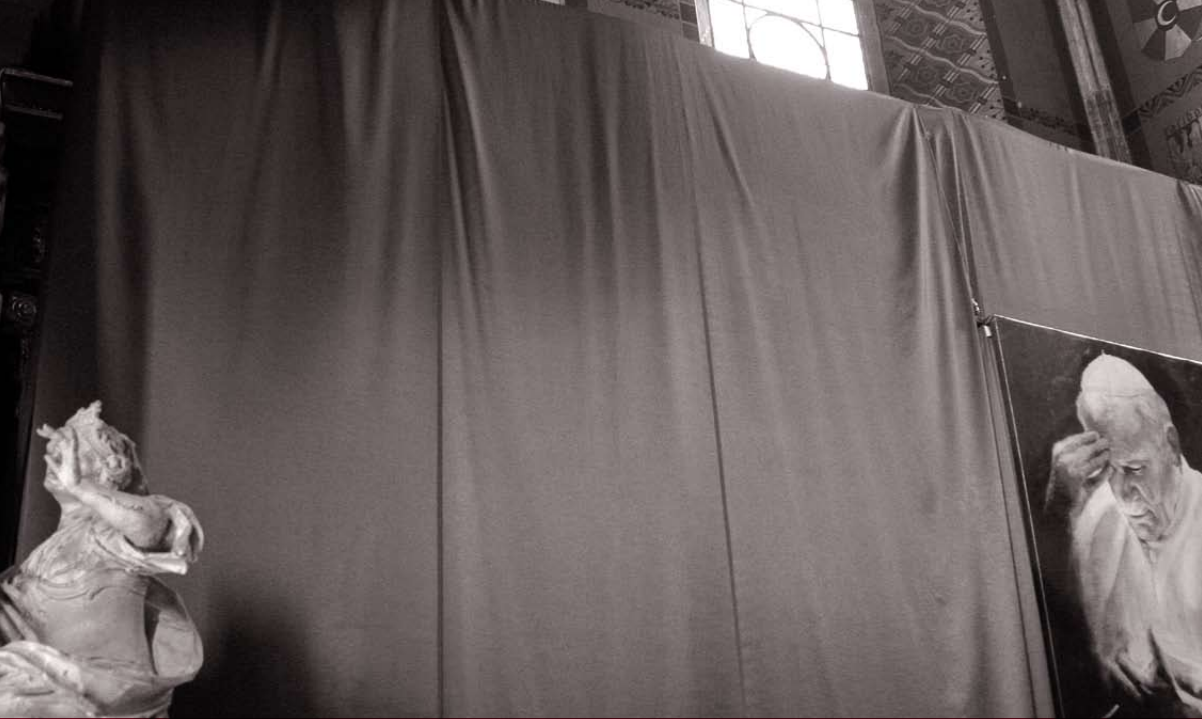
been profaned and stripped of historical architectural elements. The Germans converted it into a swimming pool during the war, and it has continued to function as a pool under both the communist-era local authorities and the current owners, the Jewish community. Despite being the site of an annual meeting devoted to prayer and artistic events, the historic building still serves as a municipal recreation facility.

Activists in the Christian-Jewish dialogue in Poznań stress that they have never encountered any direct opposition or attempts at interfering in the observances that they organize. Local residents attend in such numbers that the "Old Synagogue" cannot hold them all. "Although we do occasionally hear hostile or critical remarks," says Stranz, "these are always tentative, minority opinions."

The chairman of Coexist has plans for the future. "There is a project that we have not yet carried out, for a dialogue center in the synagogue space," he says. "We dream of a place where we could put on a year-long schedule of events, work, and research on the issue of dialogue, broadly conceived, in the present-day world. We held the Day of Islam in Poznań for the first time in 2007, and we have held a conference titled 'Monologue or Dialogue? Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.' We sponsor the publication of a series on 'Imagining Dialogue.' We want to expand the space for dialogue to include other levels, other religions. A great deal lies before us."

Ewa Karabin

The Coexist Association
www.coexist.org.pl



Drapery hung in front of the painting in the Sandomierz Cathedral depicting "ritual murder", September 2006.
Kamila Tyniec/Archiwum Etnograficzne

Sandomierz

IN THE SHADOW OF THE LIBEL

A Jew holding a knife leans over a naked child. In the next scene, Jews throw the child into a barrel with nails pounded into it, in order to drain his blood. In the third scene, the Jews have tossed the child's mutilated body to a dog, which gnaws at it. These "events" appear in an 18th century painting by Charles de Prevot, which hangs to this day in Sandomierz Cathedral.

"The presence of this painting affronts the feelings of us all, believers and non-believers alike," said the late Stanisław Musiał, a Jesuit priest. "We cannot become inured to such things in any way. As a Catholic, and a religious, and a priest, I would like to live in a Church that refuses to tolerate such slander in its places of worship." Father Musiał is deceased, but the effort goes on to remove the painting from the church and place it in a museum, or at least to add a special tablet explaining that it does not depict historical truth. A drapery was hung in front of the painting in 2006, on the pretext of conservation. This improvised solution remains in place. What next?

Leszek Tyboń has family ties with Sandomierz. "This is not a Jewish problem. It is, above all, a problem for Catholics and their consciences," he explains. He founded an association, Ekosan, for like-minded people. "Its bylaws describe it as an association to promote Christian values and encourage reconciliation and brotherly love," says Tyboń. "If the people of Sandomierz do not decide on their own to restore the truth, then no one can do it for them. The truth is the best way to set free the things in us that are the most beautiful: the feelings of love and brotherhood."

"Dialogue for the Future. The Other in the Collective Memory" conference, Sandomierz, November 30, 2007. Speaking: Leszek Tyboń, with Robert Kotowski, chairman of the Sandomierz branch of the Polish Historical Society, presiding over the discussion.
Katarzyna Batko

An important part of Ekosan's work is organizing conferences and public discussions. Are xenophobia and the sickness of anti-Semitism curable? How can we prevent the reinforcement of prejudices and biases today? Is Christian-Jewish-Muslim reconciliation possible? Participants in a 2004 conference in Sandomierz on "Dialogue for the Future" pondered these questions. In a letter to John Paul II, they wrote, "we will continue, with great conviction, to follow the road of dialogue, and to invite all people of good faith and righteous consciences to join us." A 2007 conference under the same title focused on the problem of the replication of stereotypes about ethnic and religious minorities.

Leszek Tyboń, Chairman of the Ekosan Association.
From the archives of the Association

Ekosan also works through publications. In 2005-2006, the Sandomierz biweekly *Accent* carried a series of articles on the legend of ritual murder. In 2007, a teachers' guide titled *Through Sandomierz* contained plans for lessons on the Jews of Sandomierz and featured a DVD with recordings of example lessons. "All of these publications," says Tyboń, "were intended to make people in Sandomierz aware that accepting the falsehood of the blood libel is un-Christian and sinful, because it flows from hatred and intolerance."

The members of the association are active not only in Sandomierz, but also throughout the region. The flood that struck Poland in 2001 exposed bones and headstones buried beneath a school playground in Klimontów.

The recreation area had been built in the 1960s at the site of a Jewish cemetery that was destroyed during World War II. Ekosan took steps to prevent the further profanation of the burial ground, suggesting that the local authorities open a cultural center in the abandoned building that once housed the local synagogue. The center will include a concert hall and a memorial chamber dedicated to local Jews and recipients of the Righteous among the Nations of the World medal.

The association has also joined a campaign to honor the memory of the Opatów Jewish community. During a meeting at the school there, Leszek Tyboń reviewed the history of the community from medieval times to the present. An art contest was announced, inspired by works by Mayer Kirshenblatt depicting life before the Holocaust as he remembered it. Prayers were said for the intention of Holocaust victims during Mass at the Bernardine Fathers' church on the 66th anniversary of the liquidation of the Opatów ghetto.

The plaque in memory of the Righteous citizens of Staszów, unveiled on November 8, 2007, on the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the town's Jewish community. *Jan Mazanka*

Ekosan also honors the memory of people who aided Jews during the war. When Jack Goldfarb of the USA suggested paying tribute to one of these rescuers, Tyboń presented the idea to the cultural association in Staszów. As a result, four Jews and three Poles sponsored a plaque honoring 23 righteous Staszów residents who saved Jews during World War II.

Not every effort, however, ends in success. A proposed memorial plaque about the local Jews—the victims of the blood libel—has still not been installed on the wall of the building that housed the synagogue in Sandomierz. The planned inscription conveys the message guiding Ekosan's mission: "Paying homage to the Jewish martyrs of Sandomierz, we hold in our minds and hearts the warning that bias and prejudice can all too easily fan the flames of hatred."

Ewa Kiedio

The Ekosan Association
http://www.ekosan.org

More on the legend of ritual murder, in English:
http://www.ekosan.org/ritualmurder

Presentation of the *Memorial Book* of the Sierpc Jews: Father Jan Oleszko and students from the Catholic high school in Sierpc. The young people prepared a spectacle depicting the fate of the expelled Jews. After they read the testimony, their hands would be tied again. *Tomasz Krukowski*

Sierpc

CLEANSING HISTORY

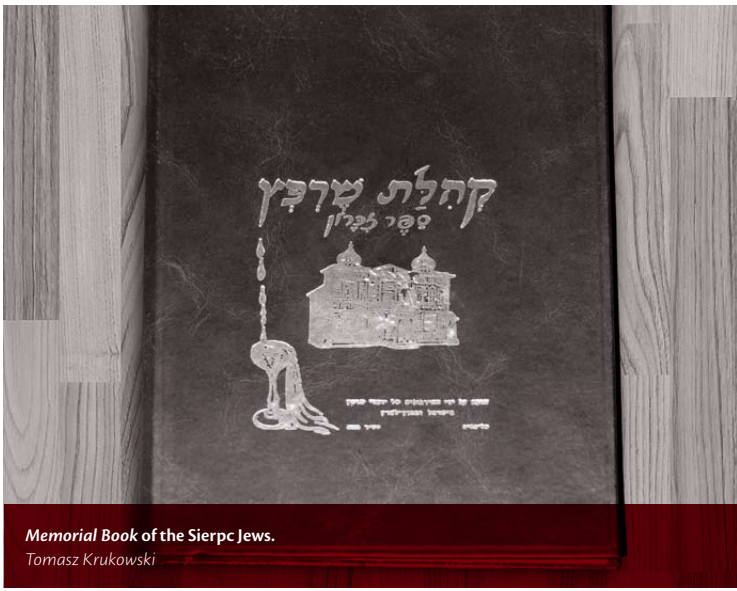
Leon Gągoła, a Sierpc Jew and a survivor, donated a copy of the *Memorial Book* of the Sierpc Jews to the Museum of the Mazovian Village several years ago. The *Book* contains reminiscences of Jews from Sierpc, describing their journeys through life," says Father Jan Oleszko, the Pallotine priest who worked in Sierpc. Thanks to him, the *Book* was translated into Polish. "The authors lived in the Diaspora. They had nothing to return to. Their homes were burned down during the war and they were forced to flee. They wanted to memorialize the facts, events, and tragedies, to preserve the memories that still lived within them."

It took a long time to bring the Sierpc *Memorial Book* out in Polish. At first, there was no money to pay to translate it from Hebrew. Sierpc mayor Marek Kośmider tried repeatedly to have it published, but failed each time. He ended up joking that there was a curse on the translation. In 2006, the mayor appealed for help to Father Oleszko, who was known for his frequent trips to the Holy Land and his many Jewish friends. "No problem. I'll find a translator," he replied. He took the *Book* to his friend Abraham Nanes in Jerusalem. "I was convinced that he'd agree as soon as he saw it, because we think alike," says Oleszko. "Abraham is a man who was driven out of Poland during the purges of 1968, but he does not blame the Poles. Like me, he tries to find historical evidence of good relations between neighbors."

Nanes got right down to work, and the initial version, a compilation of selected excerpts, was published six months later. The 700 copies sold out immediately. The publishers wanted more, so Nanes kept translating. The entire 800-page tome came out soon afterwards.

Why is this collection of memoirs so valuable? Oleszko explains: "The *Memorial Book* talks about the exceptionally positive relations between the Jewish and Polish residents of Sierpc." There are no signs of antagonism. The authors say clearly that Poles helped them, and that some of them lent Jews considerable sums of money for ransom or to help them acquire passports or other documents. The *Book* tells about the harmonious life of the community.

"Sierpc is a city of four cultures. There were Germans, Russians, Jews, and Poles here," he continues. "The accounts by the Jews are exceptionally candid and fascinatingly personal when they talk about the great tragedy. Sometimes there are contradictions between different reports, because human nature is fallible, but that just shows how dramatic it was! In the situation they were in, it wasn't important to remember details. The important thing was to stay alive, to survive. I find those accounts enthralling, but they're also terrifying. Reading them is like holding your finger on an open wound and feeling the pulse."



***Memorial Book* of the Sierpc Jews.**
Tomasz Krukowski

Sierpc residents gave the *Book* a positive reception. They discovered previously unfamiliar streets and learned about new customs. The *Book* helped them learn the history of their town. The eyewitnesses who remain alive confirm the Jewish version of events; people come forward spontaneously, wanting to tell about their Jewish neighbors. A year ago, one of Oleszko's parishioners brought him a gravestone he had dug up from the sidewalk in front of his house and asked for it to be returned to the cemetery, where it belonged.

Oleszko mentions that his mother, who lived near Lublin, sheltered Jews during the war. "She made a hiding place for them underneath the kitchen floor, and knocked on it in warning whenever a German search party approached. Thanks to her, three Jewish families survived. I once told her that I could track down those families, but she said, 'The good Lord will sort everything out in heaven. I don't need any reward from people.' That's the spirit I was raised in."

Father Jan Oleszko is convinced that the Polish mentality is free of the rejection of others. "Nevertheless, we point our fingers at an Orthodox Jew on the street today. Why?" he wonders. "Because we are not prepared mentally to accept the multiculturalism that was the norm long ago. That is why we try to talk to people and change their mindset when we promote the *Memorial Book*. We want to cleanse history of mutual prejudices and stereotypes".

Ewa Karabin

March of the Living in 2007: young members of the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intellectuals walk with the Polish flag.
Julia Koszewska

Warsaw

A SCHOOL FOR DIALOGUE

Founded in October 1956, the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intellectuals (KIK) continues to this day as a gathering place for Catholic laypeople who wish to live out their vocation in a conscious way. Drawing inspiration from the Second Vatican Council, the Club promotes the idea of the responsibility of the laity for the Church and the world in a spirit of dialogue and mutual respect. Christian-Jewish dialogue has been a priority for the Club for many years now.

In 1973, KIK members decided to do something about the neglected condition of the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. "We wanted to contribute to preserving the memory of the cemetery," says Krzysztof Śliwiński, one of the participants. "We wanted to prevent the people who buried their loved ones there from being forgotten. We wanted to hear their voices, to listen to what their lives were like, how they prayed and what they fought for when they went forth to fight."

Each afternoon during the final week of June for ten years, the volunteers went to the old cemetery to weed, trim the trees, and prop up gravestones in danger of falling over. When they finished work, they attended a Mass celebrated especially for them, and then took part in meetings, lectures, and discussions about the history of the Jews and Judaism. "We studied the past in order to understand our present better," Śliwiński recalls, "and, at the same time, to protect the future in some way, because we noticed around us signs of aversion and hostility towards strangers."

The admirable tradition of discovering the city's Jewish past continues to this day. For years, the Club has collaborated with the Warsaw Jewish community in organizing meetings and lectures about Judaism for the Club's younger members, but also for ordinary people from Warsaw. Visits to the synagogue, combined with learning about the history of that exceptional place, are always popular. The contacts formed there have had time to develop into friendship, which bears fruit in the form of mutual invitations to the ceremonies that both the Catholics and the Jews organize.

Since 1998, the Warsaw Club's youth section has attended the annual March of the Living at the site of the Auschwitz camp. At first, the March was held exclusively for Jewish groups from outside Poland. "The first time they allowed non-Jewish youths to march, it was an uncomfortable experience," says Piotr Cywiński, the president of KIK. "The young Jews often had a negative attitude towards their Polish counterparts, and lacked the proper historical preparation. We went there to show that such events could unite people, rather than dividing them. It was important to us to travel there with a Jewish group, to make it a joint outing. Now, many members of the Club attend the March each year. Some of them lost members of their own families in Auschwitz, others want to bear witness to the community of suffering, and others still regard it as their duty."

Piotr Cywiński, president of the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intellectuals, introducing the mutual prayer by Jews, Christians and Muslims during the Gniezno Convention, September 17, 2005. *KAI/Jan Brykczyński*

For several years now, KIK has held meetings with young Jews who come to Poland for the March of the Living and offered an educational program about Auschwitz for young Poles. "We want to show why something that happened decades ago is still so important, and why we should speak about it," says Julia Koszewska, a member of the Club board.

In order to acquaint young people with Jewish culture, KIK began organizing trips to places associated with the *tzadikim* in the late 1990s for Club members and people from the Jewish community. "We visited the graves of the *tzadikim* and the places where their courts and schools were located," says Koszewska. "We learned about the Hasidic tradition. We toured Lublin, Włodawa, and many other towns."

Since 2006, Piotr Cywiński, the chairman of the Warsaw Club, has been director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. "This is a symbolic expression of the fact that many of the people who took part in Club dialogue work have been able to build on that experience afterwards, for the sake of Polish-Jewish and Christian Jewish reconciliation," says Koszewska.

Ewa Karabin

The Club of Catholic Intellectuals in Warsaw
www.kik.waw.pl

Children in the Neighborhood of Mutual Respect learn about the faith of their neighbors in a special educational program. Here, they learn about the role of bread by baking their own.
Katarzyna Płochocka

Wrocław

NEIGHBORLY COOPERATION

First, somebody threw a rock through an antique stained-glass window at the Catholic church. Somebody hurled the next rock at an icon outside the Orthodox church. At the same time, young neo-Nazis stepped up their attacks on members of the Jewish religious community. This was in 1995. Jerzy Kichler, then the leader of Wrocław's Jews, had already had positive experiences of cooperation with Christian clergy. He decided that this was the way to combat intolerance. He paid a call on Father Jerzy Żytowiecki at the Roman Catholic parish, and then went on to the Eastern Orthodox and Lutheran churches.

Thus was born the concept of ongoing collaboration that came to be known as the "Neighborhood of Mutual Respect." Location played a large role in the interfaith cooperation: the Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran churches, and the synagogue, all stand within a radius of 300 meters in the Old Town.

"The first thing we looked for was a common denominator, and we found one: the dead," says Father Aleksander Konachowicz, an Eastern Orthodox priest, looking back on joint prayers for the people who died and were murdered during World War II. "We held a series of ecumenical observances. Then we began inviting each other to our festivals, concerts, and other parish ceremonies. That was when our congregations realized what cultural riches surrounded them. They had a chance of their own to demonstrate their distinctness and exceptionality."

The Neighborhood of Mutual Respect had no legally registered status. It was more a matter of ordinary neighborly friendship, but recently a foundation has been set up to support its activities. Żytowiecki stresses that the unofficial contacts came first, as a result of private meetings and relations between people of different religions. Jerzy Kichler recalls, "I discovered how close Judaism is to Eastern Orthodoxy when I examined the iconostasis. It was my friend, the Orthodox priest, who let me do so."

There is a long list of projects and spontaneous initiatives already carried out. The Jews invited their Christian neighbors to the synagogue for New Year's Day. The Eastern Orthodox replied in kind. Joint prayer sessions were held at difficult times, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and during Pope John Paul II's final days. Jewish, Lutheran, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox choirs come together to praise the Lord through the Psalms, singing the same verses in different languages and with the varying melodic lines employed in each of these traditions—a special expression of unity through diversity. The dialogue of cultures and religions has also proven popular with young people, thanks to meetings in the Jesuit-run Angelus Silesius Educational Center.

However, the most important of the Neighborhood projects is the "Kids" program, started by the Jewish community. It permits the youngest Jews and Christians to learn about the faith of their neighbors. "We always try to find the elements that connect the different religions, and to build our meetings around them," explains Iwona Orawska, one of the organizers. "One such element, for example, is bread. It is a symbol of universal eloquence." Working with children requires special methods. The children learned about the role of bread by baking their own.

It is hard to do this kind of work without running into problems. "I remember one misunderstanding to which I contributed," admits Tamara Włodarczyk, a Catholic who helped found the project. "Several members of the Jewish community felt offended when they saw a cross in the synagogue. We had asked the children to paint something from the Bible. Many of them presented scenes from the life of Christ—including the crucifixion."

Walking along the Path of Four Denominations (from right): Archbishop Jeremiasz, Fr. Jerzy Szczur (both: Eastern Orthodox), Rabbi Icchak Rapoport, Stanisław Rybarczyk (Chairman of the Foundation), Archbishop Marian Gołębiewski (Roman Catholic). *Andrzej Korus*

The record of activities in Wrocław is impressive. However, is the Neighborhood of Mutual Respect more a realm of admirable ideas than an everyday reality? The floods that devastated Poland in 1997 proved to be a test of how much brotherly friendship stands behind the declarations. The Neighborhood passed the exam: aid was given regardless of denomination. Jerzy Kichler remembers, for instance, how his community received a truckload of kosher potatoes sent by Cardinal Gulbinowicz. After all, neighbors have to help each other out.

Ewa Kiedio

The Neighborhood of Mutual Respect
www.fundacja4wyznan.pl

Father Roman Indrzejczyk and Rabbi Michael Schudrich before the Monument to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto, April 13, 2008.
PAP/Jacek Turczyk

Ks. Roman Indrzejczyk

I'M JUST AN ORDINARY PRIEST

A menorah on the altar in a Catholic church and Jews in yarmulkes sitting in the presbytery—the holiday of Simchat Torah in the Warsaw parish of the Infant Jesus came as a great shock to many Christians. The "Shared Rejoicing in the Torah" is an ecumenical prayer meeting organized by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews since 1992. For a long time, from the beginning until 2005, it took place at the Infant Jesus. The open-mindedness of the parish priest, Father Roman Indrzejczyk—a member of the Council and now its deputy chairman—made the joint prayer possible.

"It was not my idea to hold the 'Shared Rejoicing in the Torah' in my parish," Indrzejczyk recalls. "but it seems as though the members of the Council trusted me." During the annual encounter, Jews and Christians of various denominations gather to reflect on the words of the Torah. They sing Psalms together and listen to commentaries from inside both religions. "Joint prayer is one of the most beautiful of all encounters," says Indrzejczyk. "We meet on the level of contact with God, where man is at his most noble and pure."

Indrzejczyk's calm voice seems noteworthy during the sometimes tempestuous meetings of the Council. His desire for reconciliation clearly emerges in highly varied contexts—including everyday communication. He chooses his words carefully in conversation, taking pains to prevent language from being a source of conflict. People who talk to him also notice his knack

for putting the most vexed matters in very simple—but accurate—terms. "The only thing that conflicts with individual identity is a lack of identity. Anyone lacking an identity will blow with the wind," he says when asked about the downside of the interreligious dialogue. "People who are aware of their own identity are enriched by contact with others. It opens them up to other ways of seeing things, spurring them to test and deepen their own faith."

Each year, Indrzejczyk attends the march of prayer along the route of the memorials to the Warsaw ghetto. The procession makes its way in silence and reflection from the monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto to the monument at Umschlagplatz, where the Germans dispatched thousands of Warsaw Jews to the death camps. He joins the chief rabbi of Poland and clergy from other Christian denominations in leading the prayers along the way.

Indrzejczyk is also involved in numerous initiatives in support of the Christian-Jewish dialogue and popularizing Jewish culture. Perhaps this is why anti-Semitic organizations place his name on their lists of people with Jewish origins. "Being listed there doesn't bother me, even though I don't seem to have Jewish roots," he says without a hint of indignation. "I'm only puzzled by the people who check on who's Jewish. That takes a special kind of person. I find such actions quite painful, and argue against them whenever I can."

Father Indrzejczyk presents the "Reconciliation" award, granted by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, to Rabbi Irving Greenberg, October 16, 2008. *Maria Tajchman*

In 2005, Indrzejczyk became chaplain to the President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński. They knew each other from Żoliborz, the Warsaw district where Indrzejczyk worked. When Hanukkah candles were lighted in the Presidential Palace two years later and Kaczyński issued invitation to a large group of Polish Jews for the occasion, some saw his chaplain's influence at work. Asked about this, Indrzejczyk pauses for a moment and then says, "the president is open-minded, and I would not want to take any credit."

Will the important official position that he holds make Indrzejczyk a significant influence on the Polish mindset? "I'm not an important personage. I'm just an ordinary priest," he says. "I'd certainly like to have an influence on the existence of cooperation and respect between people of different faiths. I always saw my pastoral role as one of spreading love. That's all. I always say that you can't change high-level politics or the big issues in this world, but every person has a chance to do a lot of good in their own immediate surroundings."

Ewa Kiedio

The Lord's Sepulcher on Good Friday 2001 in the Divine Mercy parish in Otwock: the figure of Jesus lying among the ruins of a burned-out barn.
Aldona Piekarska

Ks. Wojciech Lemański

WE HAVE TRAVELED A LONG WAY

Good Friday is the day when Christians all over the world recall the death of Jesus on the cross. In Polish churches, a special decoration known as the Lord's Sepulcher is traditionally prepared, and a symbolic figure of the Crucified Christ is placed in it. The Sepulcher is the focus of prayer and all-night adoration. The ornamentation of the Sepulcher frequently features allusions to current events, as a way of connecting the mysteries of faith with everyday life.

In 2001, Poland roiled with the debate over the previously little known crime in Jedwabne, where several hundred Jews were burned alive in a barn in 1941. The disputes had to do with the part played in the crime by the victims' Polish neighbors. On Good Friday, in the midst of this atmosphere, Father Henryk Jankowski of Gdańsk—known for his anti-Semitic beliefs—added to his Lord's Sepulcher a miniature, charred barn with the inscription "The Jews killed Jesus and the prophets, and have also persecuted us." The local bishop, Tadeusz Gocłowski, immediately issued a sharp rebuke to Jankowski, admonishing him that "even if only a single Pole took part in the crime, it puts all of us in a troubled situation. There is no excuse for manipulating such tragic events, because the death of each person is the death of Jesus Christ." A scandal broke out regardless.

That same day, in Otwock outside Warsaw, the priest at the small local parish, Father Wojciech Lemański, was also making an allusion to the Jedwabne tragedy as he decorated the Lord's

Sepulcher. His intention was the opposite of Jankowski's—he placed the figure of Jesus among the ruins of a burned-out barn, with an inscription nearby reading, "Forgive us." On the cross, he placed a tablet containing the first two letters of a word: "Je…"—which could be read as "Jesus," but also as "Jedwabne." Today, Lemański recalls thinking that many Polish churches must have been mounting similar decorations. Unfortunately, he was wrong. His was the only one. No one knew about his decoration except his own parishioners, while Jankowski's provocation became notorious throughout Poland and beyond the country's borders. Only after an interval of several weeks did *Więź* magazine publish photographs of the Otwock sepulcher. The images also featured at a theological conference on *Dabru emet*, the Jewish declaration on Christianity, and the world finally learned about the priest from Otwock.

Over the following years, Lemański emerged as a leading figure in the Christian-Jewish dialogue in Poland. In 2002, he was one of the founders of the Citizens' Committee for the Remembrance of the Jews of Otwock and Karczew, and hosted committee meetings. In Otwock, he became the symbol of the Church's commitment to remember the local Jews and Judaism. He was more than a spiritual adviser. He planned and organized cleanup work at the Jewish cemetery, and carried the heavy stones used to surround the cemetery in the woods.

He made a lasting impression on the young Jews who visit Otwock, not by making long speeches to them, but by saying the most important things. When the young New York rabbi Harry Pell brought his students to Otwock—where his wife's grandfather was once rabbi—Lemański

Father Wojciech Lemański and Rabbi Michael Schudrich during the march of remembrance and prayer in Otwock, August 19, 2007.
Janusz Maciejowski

told them, "We have both traveled a long way to meet here. You, in the physical sense, crossing the ocean. And we Polish Catholics have traveled a long road in the spiritual sense: we had to start from scratch and learn to think positively about Jews and Judaism".

Lemański had too much of a sense of responsibility to confine his activities to Otwock. He encouraged a priest in nearby Sobienie-Jeziory to dig up hundreds of Jewish gravestones that the Nazis had used as pavement in 1942 around the parish vicarage, which they confiscated for use as Gestapo headquarters. A team of volunteers—the priest, fire fighters, and jobless people—moved the *matzevot* back to the site of the Jewish cemetery. A professional company had estimated that the job would take a week, but the volunteers did it in 8 hours.

A special chest for Catholic liturgical books, modeled after synagogue Torah scrolls, in Fr. Lemański's present parish in Jasienica.
Marcin Kiedio

Next, Lemański joined the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. He now travels around the country for the Council, taking part in projects aimed at Christian-Jewish dialogue and preserving the memory of the Polish Jews. The fact that the delegate is a priest means a lot, especially in small localities. "Judaism can exist without Christianity, but Christianity cannot exist without Judaism," he says when asked about the reasons for his sensitivity. "When Christianity turns away from Judaism, it cuts itself off from its own roots."

It is hardly surprising that, at his new parish in the village of Jasienica near Tłuszcz, the Catholic liturgical books are stored in a special chest modeled after synagogue Torah scrolls.

Lemański's work has been recognized. He received the medal awarded by the Association of Jewish World War II Veterans and Victims to people who have made outstanding contributions to improving Jewish-Polish relations. For the same reason, Polish President Lech Kaczyński awarded him a high state decoration, the Knight's Cross Polonia Restituta, on the 65th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Kaczyński referred to Lemański and other recipients as the "custodians of memory" of the Polish Jews.

Medals mean little to this modest priest. If any form of recognition brings him joy, it is the fact that he receives more and more phone calls from Michael Schudrich, whenever the chief rabbi needs advice or help from a Catholic priest.

Zbigniew Nosowski

Stefan Wilkanowicz.
From the archives of the "Znak" Christian Culture Foundation

Stefan Wilkanowicz

IT'S WORTH HAVING IDEAS

A small, gray-haired man, he will soon turn 85. He goes to work every day. He is chairman of the Znak Christian Culture Foundation in Cracow and editor of the *Forum: Jews-Christians-Muslims* website. After work, he takes part in discussions or stops by various organizations. He is deputy chairman of the International Auschwitz Council and the Polish UNESCO Committee. Lately, he has been devoting time to the recently founded "Covenant" Club of Christians and Jews in Cracow, of which he is also the co-chairman.

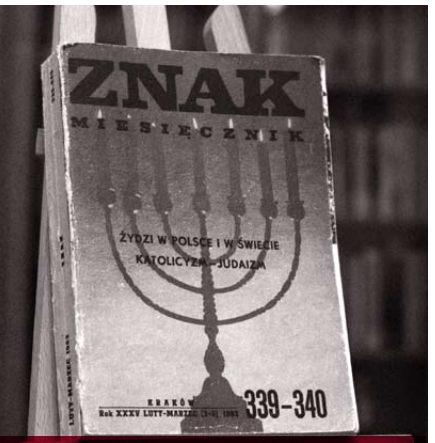
"I often work by the rule: I toss out an idea and you pick it up," chuckles Wilkanowicz, explaining his many functions in organizations devoted to dialogue. He is, in fact, a person who inspires others, because—thanks to his education as an engineer and social philosopher, as he points out—his ideas are suited to "mundane reality." They are not necessarily spectacular. One of his ideas was to use a poster featuring John Paul II's prayer for the Jews to plaster over anti-Semitic graffiti, or to pass out copies of the prayer at rallies for xenophobic politicians. He has been carrying out similar low-key "campaigns" for half a century.

"A great deal depends on whether you are capable of the encounter with another person, because it is in direct encounter that true dialogue takes place," Wilkanowicz notes. This is why he regards the ethnic-religious monoculture of postwar Poland as overly restrictive. As his spiritual homeland, he points to Jerusalem, and also to Vietnam, where his wife comes from.

The "Covenant" Club of Christians and Jews paying a visit to Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, Cracow, June 6, 2008. *Tadeusz Warczak*

In his work, he wishes to acquaint Poles with other religions and cultures—Jewish and Islamic, especially. He has organized debates on the trialogue of the monotheistic religions. Several years ago, he got a group of more than 500 Jews, Muslims, and Christians to pray together at Auschwitz. It was his idea for Jews, Muslims, and Catholics to sign a joint "European Declaration" that remains a unique document to this day.

Earlier, in the 1960s and 1970s, Wilkanowicz took part in the German "Sign of Penance" Movement; he joined young Germans in retreats and work on the Auschwitz-Birkenau barracks. He began shaping the Polish-Jewish dialogue in the following decade. In 1983, as chief editor of the influential Catholic monthly magazine *Znak*, he put together a special double issue on the subject, which has since become legendary. In the 1990s, Wilkanowicz played a role in defusing the Auschwitz-Birkenau crisis and founding the Center for Dialogue and Prayer. At present, he is dedicating himself to creating an Internet platform for the exchange of knowledge and experiences among Jews, Christians, and, recently, Muslims as well. Several years ago, as the first Polish Catholic intellectual to appreciate the potential of the virtual world, he set up information services about interreligious, intercultural, and European dialogue. His Forum website has an English version and enthusiastic readers in Israel and the USA.



The special double issue of *Znak* monthly review (February-March 1983) devoted to Jewish themes. *Marcin Kiedio*

Deeply imbued with Catholicism, Wilkanowicz feels that the most important thing about people is their elementary faith—that is, their capacity for disinterested goodness and love, and the commitment that must accompany them. The Congress of European Jews recognized Wilkanowicz's openness and concrete accomplishments in 2002 by awarding him their prize for "pioneers in the Jewish-Catholic dialogue in Europe." In 2006, in turn, Pope Benedict XVI awarded him the John Paul II Auschwitz Human Rights Prize.

"It's worth having ideas," Wilkanowicz interjects. It's obvious that some new inspiration has just come into his mind.

Tomasz Ponikło

The "Znak" Christian Culture Foundation www.fundacja.znak.org.pl	*Forum: Jews-Christians-Muslims* www.znak.org.pl

THIS ISN'T EVERYTHING

The Bond of Memory presents selected positive initiatives by Polish Christians towards Jews and Judaism. It describes people for whom the memory of the Polish Jews is a challenge to deepen the spiritual bonds between Christianity and Judaism. It must be noted that not all such initiatives are described here.

On the one hand, this is not everything, because there is far more of this positive activity in Poland. There is also the Christian-Jewish intellectual dialogue—only hinted at here—which is reflected in many publications on the Catholic bookshelves and in periodicals, as well as in scholarly conferences held by Catholic universities and theology faculties. There are many more people, many Polish Christians, who are noteworthy people of dialogue.

In Poland, there are also growing numbers of pro-Jewish cultural and civic projects in which the religious aspect is less obvious. Their significance should not be underestimated. We have not written about them here because we wish to concentrate on those initiatives and people whose involvement for the sake of Jews and Judaism is clearly guided by Christian religious motivations.

On the other hand, not everything is described in this book because there are also projects, circles, and people who promote attitudes that are the opposite of the ones we present here. Aside from the good and the positive, there is also evil, unfriendliness towards Jews, and sometimes downright hatred and anti-Semitism. On occasion—but increasingly rarely—these attitudes are combined with a declared Christian faith.

On this occasion, we have permitted ourselves to pass over the evil, and describe the good—which is usually quieter, less showy, and less well known. This is not the "propaganda of success," because we are still a long way from success. Nor is it a matter of downplaying evil, but rather of noticing and appreciating the good. The good, after all, cannot triumph by itself. It needs a helping hand.

Zbigniew Nosowski
Editor-in-chief, Więź monthly
Program director, WIĘŹ Laboratory
Co-Chairman, Polish Council of Christians and Jews

THE POLISH YEAR IN ISRAEL

The Polish Year in Israel, which began in spring 2008 and will be continued in 2009, is an initiative of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme of the Polish Year in Israel 2008/2009 comprises events in such diverse areas as culture, science, tourism and economy. Our aim is to bring the societies of Poland and Israel closer through the strengthening of cultural, economic, scientific and tourism-related contacts, as well as to initiate long-term cooperation between institutions of the two countries.

The cultural programme of the Year is coordinated by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, a governmental institution whose task is to promote Polish culture abroad and to initiate international cultural exchange with Poland. The programme is co-organized with the Polish Embassy in Israel and the Polish Institute in Tel Aviv. The programme includes several dozen concerts, theatrical performances, exhibitions, publications, film screenings and contemporary dance shows. We invite everyone to the film and theatre festivals, to the best clubs, galleries, museums, concert halls and public areas of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Acre, Holon, Haifa, Beersheba, Herzliya and Bat Yam.

The details of the programme of the Polish Year in Israel, which was prepared in close cooperation with our Israeli partners, can be found on the website www.poland-israel.org.

THE WIĘŹ LABORATORY

For more than 50 years, the monthly review *Więź* (*The Bond*) and the initiatives which grew around it have been important parts of Polish cultural, intellectual, and religious life.

The monthly was founded in 1958 by a group of lay Catholics, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as their leader. The future first non-communist Prime Minister of Poland (after the 1989 breakthrough) was *Więź*'s editor-in-chief until 1981. Mr. Mazowiecki is now the Chairman of the advisory Editorial Council. Under communism, *Więź* played an important role in creating first the democratic opposition, and later "Solidarność".

The Cracow weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the Warsaw monthly *Więź* are Catholic periodicals that have devoted extensive space to Jewish themes for many years. *Marcin Kiedio*

Today, *Więź* is not just a monthly review, but also a small, yet prestigious, publishing house. Since 2008 a new form of activity appeared: the WIĘŹ Laboratory – Institute for Social Analysis and Dialogue. It is an independent, interdisciplinary analytical-research center that initiates and helps shape public debate. We want our reflections and work to reinforce the foundation values of civil society. The diagnoses of contemporary life carried out by the WIĘŹ Laboratory will contribute to a vision of the future of Poland, the Church, and Europe.

LABORATORIUM WIĘZI
INSTYTUT ANALIZ SPOŁECZNYCH I DIALOGU

The WIĘŹ Laboratory brings together academics, experts, analysts, artists, and journalists of the middle and younger generations. True to the *Więź* tradition, we wish to search for the common ground, in the interests of reconciliation and overcoming prejudices and stereotypes. We do not want to blur existing differences. However, we feel that dialogue among people of different nations, cultures, religions, and convictions is the right way to build a human community in a pluralistic world. We understand dialogue as the continuation of the traditions of Jagiellonian Poland, and also as an expression of Catholic thinking—after all, the word *katholikos* means "universal".

The WIĘŹ Laboratory is a Polish Christian think tank. We see the world through the prism of faith, so we not only describe, but also try to shape Polish religiousness of the 21st century—aware, mature, with spiritual depth, open to the encounter with the world, and socially engaged. We want to encourage both faithfulness to Christian roots and an attitude of wise criticism among Polish Catholics, a symbiosis of profound identity and openness.

The interests of WIĘŹ Laboratory include society, culture, the Church, and religion. We are especially interested in what is taking place—the presence or the absence of dialogue—at the contact points between these mutually-intersecting fields.

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Traveling throughout Poland I have found, in almost every city, town and village, a group or sometimes individuals who are restoring their local Jewish cemetery or synagogue. Why are they doing it?

MICHAEL SCHUDRICH
Chief Rabbi of Poland

Many Poles, looking around, perceive this man-made emptiness, this absence in the Polish landscape, which hurts to this day like an open wound. We cannot bring back the murdered Jewish world, but we can, and should, bring back the memory. This living memory gives birth to new bonds between us.

AGNIESZKA MAGDZIAK-MISZEWSKA
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the State of Israel

I can understand the misgivings of foreign visitors who are puzzled by the presence of Jewish themes in the absence of Jews. Nevertheless, the challenge we face is very simple: we have a choice between oblivion or remembrance. Can anyone have any doubts about which is preferable?

STANISŁAW KRAJEWSKI
Co-Chairman (on the Jewish side) of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews

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POLISH YEAR IN ISRAEL 2008|2009

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