

6-1990

Controversy Around the Auschwitz Convent

Waldemar Chrostowski

Academy of Catholic Theology, Warsaw, Poland

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chrostowski, Waldemar (1990) "Controversy Around the Auschwitz Convent," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol10/iss3/2>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

CONTROVERSY AROUND THE AUSCHWITZ CONVENT

by Waldemar Chrostowski

Dr. Waldemar Chrostowski (Roman Catholic) is a priest and a professor of theology at the Academy of Catholic Theology, Warsaw, Poland. He has written on Jewish-Christian relations in Poland. This is his first contribution to OPREE. The Polish version of the text was published in the Weekly Solidarnosc, Warsaw, September 29, 1989.

When making the decision to locate the Carmelite nuns' convent in the building of the so-called Old Theater adjacent to the walls of the concentration camp, neither Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, head of the Krakow Archdiocese, nor any one else from the Church in Poland could imagine that this decision would become a subject of controversy. The intentions of the nuns and the sense of Church's approval were explained in the "Word of the Krakow Metropolitan to the Clergy and the Congregation of the Krakow Archdiocese" from September 30, 1984, saying that the nuns "in the vicinity of the block of death will persist enclosed, praying and expiate for the crimes in Auschwitz and to obtain by intercession the mercy of God, as well as peace and unity in the world, in particular". No one thought it necessary to discuss the project with the Jews, even less with Jews living outside Poland - there was simply no such habit. The Christian-Jewish dialogue in our country was still in its infancy and the authors of the project had the best intentions. The smaller-scale initiatives to pray for the murdered and for their oppressors were being taken before, and the reactions of Polish Jews were absolutely positive. It seemed that the convent would more clearly reflect the good will of the Christians and their solidarity with the sufferings and martyrology of the Jewish nation.

I

The building chosen for the convent required adaption and repair. In view of the difficult economic situation of Poland, among others the organization "Kirche in Not" [Church in Need] expressed its wish to help. In a bulletin of this organization, which for

many years had been assisting the Churches in Eastern Europe, issued in May 1985, shortly before the visit of Pope John Paul II in Benelux countries, there was an urgent appeal to generosity "for a gift for the Pope--a convent in Auschwitz." One could read in that bulletin that the convent was to be "a spiritual fortress" and "a guarantee of the conversion of stray brothers;" no mention was made there about Auschwitz as the place of the annihilation of the Jews. The statement of Kirche in Not concerned the danger of atheization in Poland, but Jews have seen in it the attempt to convert them into Christianity. Jewish organizations in Belgium, France, and soon in other regions of Western Europe, in Israel and the USA raised the objection that Polish Catholics try to 'de-Judaize' the place of the Shoah and, more than that, to 'Christianize' it, thus depriving the Jews of a symbol important to them. The foundation of the convent was interpreted as a planned offense to the Jewish feelings, as a challenge to Jewish identity, as a violation of the sovereign rights of the Jews to Auschwitz and as ignoring the exceptional character of the Jewish sacrifice of life and blood.

First statements in such tone appeared in the second half of 1985, that is, a year after the nuns moved into the convent building. These were followed by an avalanche of other statements. Jewish delegations began to come to Krakow and Auschwitz demanding the transferring of the convent to another place. The demand was supported by an observation that the convent had been located in the building where stored. According to a map which Poland presented to UNESCO in 1978, that building was situated inside the camp. The Polish side promised to respect the integrity of the area of extermination and not to change anything within it. For a full picture, let us add that Auschwitz is also functioning in people's minds as a museum, and as such, it strictly corresponds to the war boundaries of the camp. The building of the Old Theatre, adjacent to the camp walls, does not constitute a part of the museum, and both the Krakow Metropolitan and Polish authorities followed that approach when enabling the nuns to take over the building. No one envisaged any legal consequences of Auschwitz boundaries as a monument of world heritage. It should be added that many Jewish circles engaged in the dialogue with the Christians, did not identify themselves with the objections declared which also included theses of a theological implication ("The sky above Auschwitz was empty and let it remain empty.") For example, Dr. J. Lichten (who was not isolated in his views) said that the decision on founding the convent "must be worthy of respect." Many Jews say till today that they see no reasons why the nuns should not pray in Auschwitz.

The dispute about the convent was started outside Poland and it was almost unknown in our country. True, that from time to time we could hear sporadic voices about the dissatisfaction of the Jews and the protesting actions being undertaken by them, but stronger were the voices which suggested a resurgence of old accusations about Polish anti-Semitism or imputations that the Church was doing nothing in the time of genocide. It became obvious

that Jews and Christians, and more so Jews and Poles, were not yet able to cope with the burdens of the difficult past and that some facts from the long history of co-existence still cast their shadow on mutual relations.

The controversy around the Carmel has laid open the deep layers of subconsciousness where the latent stereotypes and prejudices of communities unfriendly to each other are lying dormant. Any pretext will do to raise them up. Some statements by the Jews suggested that the location of the convent was an illustration of the common strategy of the Christians and a clear evidence of anti-semitism. The fact of the foundation of the convent was explained in categories existing in many minds and hearts, and that fact provided an opportunity for them to be openly released. One can hardly restraint oneself from a reflection that in spite of evident changes brought in by Vatican Council II and the consolidation of the Jews in their own State, the post-war period was not used for an effective change in the way of thinking of members of both communities. It also would not be unfair to say that the Jews from Western Europe were transferring onto the Auschwitz convent the suspicions and stereotypes which were not overcome by Christians co-existing with them in the West.

The claims raised by Jews were not understandable for Polish Catholics, both due to the specific Jewish way of thinking, different from Christian categories, and to the lack of any serious attempt to bring arguments and reasons closer to the Poles. The mere translation into the Polish of publications appearing in the West does not seem to be sufficient because these publications -prepared in the spirit of confrontation- assumed controversial valuation and formulated categoric demands whose tone could only make the conflict more acute. On the other hand, there were some among Polish Catholics who decided to ignore these publications and disqualify them for being merely an instrument of campaign against Poland and the Poles. Thus, the dispute was not only about the convent but also about problems which continuously revive in Polish-Jewish co-existence. In spite of all this it was just at that time that the theological and historical dialogue between Jews and Christians was clearly enlivened and intensified. This dialogue was conducted, on both sides, by people who decided to build new relations based on respect and tolerance.

II

How could one react to the accusations and demands flowing in from abroad? One could simply reply that the fears and objections are groundless, that the formulations contained in Kirche in Not bulletin do not reflect the real intentions of the nuns, nor the approach of the Polish Church, that the dialogue with Jews and Judaism is understood in the spirit of the post-Council documents of the Church, that is with respect for the identity of each of its sides. This, it could be said that the presence of the nuns cannot be interpreted in the way

suggested by its opponents and that, consequently, the nuns should stay in the place where they were settled.

True, there was the question of placing the convent in a building which, fulfilling the function of a monument of world heritage, should not be modernized, but one can hardly say that this argument was of any major importance in solving the dispute. The building, abandoned since some time, was formerly used as a storage. Christians felt that housing the nuns was an incomparably better solution than using it for storage. Obviously one could suppose that a categorical decision to let the convent stay would result in agitation and protests, but demanding respect for one's reasons, one should also respect the feelings and reasons of the other side.

The Polish side response to Jewish objections was very serious. There were two meetings (one on July 22, 1986 and one on February 22, 1987) in Geneva of the Catholic delegation headed by four Cardinals, with Cardinal Macharski in the lead, with the representatives of Jewish organizations. These contacts were an expression of good as well as an evidence of cooperation in that direction. This fact was not sufficiently strongly emphasized by the Catholic and Jewish mass information media.

Cardinal Macharski and his collaborators, Rev. Stanislaw Musial, SJ and Jerzy Turowicz, editor of Tygodnik Powszechny went to Switzerland not because they had to but because they wished to successfully settle the dispute. They met in Geneva because the main source of controversy was in Western Europe. Three other cardinals, Abbot Alfred de Courtray from Lyon, Abbot Jean Marie Lustiger from Paris and Abbot Godfried Daniels from Brussels were present as well. Later, a question was raised in a number of publications in Poland concerning the justification of these meetings abroad and the participation of cardinals from the West in them. There were also insinuations about conspiracy and making Polish problems a subject of bargaining. These are very unjust accusations. Not without importance was the fact that even John Paul II became an object of pressure for a firm and rapid intervention. The meetings in Geneva were supposed to protect the Holy Father from the necessity of making statements in a matter which did not require his participation as it was within the scope of competence of the Krakow Metropolitan. The result of the second meeting in Geneva was an understanding on the strength of which a Center of Information, Education, Dialogue and Prayer was to be erected in Auschwitz within two years. A new Carmelite convent was included in that undertaking. The purpose of the center was to eliminate prejudice and ignorance, to educate young generations in the spirit of tolerance and respect, and to assist the progress of the dialogue, plus the important dimension of contemplation prayer.

One must emphasize the unprecedented nature and boldness of such decision. It was agreed that the prayer of the nuns should not be a cause of strains and outrage, divisions and

animosity. This decision is a result of sincere dialogue. Its record begins with a Hebrew word zakor' [remember], which is a sign of respect of Jewish reasons. These reasons differ from the Christian ones and in some cases obviously contradict them, but in fact, taking them into consideration was a result of the will to get out of the deadlock. For the Jews, Auschwitz is a dramatic symbol of annihilation and of a wish to destroy. It is an immense cemetery filling one with the feeling of utter grimness and horror. Also, for the Poles Auschwitz is a symbol of essential meanings. Many other places of torture and genocide are scattered in Europe, especially in Poland. But a symbol is not a matter of choice; it is there or it is not; it emerges on the basis of criteria deeply latent in collective awareness rather than based on rational premises. The dispute on Auschwitz is a collision of symbols, and as such, it may only be solved by mutual understanding of the feelings and expectations of the partners. This time the Catholic side was 'stronger' because Auschwitz lies on our soil and we are the 'hosts' here. Should the Catholics have firmly said "no," the Jewish side would be helpless. It is significant that it is the 'stronger' side that decided to withdraw. That fact was supposed to be an unexpectedly good solution for the conflict and telling illustration of dialogue-oriented attitudes. The Geneva Agreement was in many circles appreciated as a proof of the vitality of the Church in Poland.

The beneficial meaning of Geneva wasted to a great extent. The exceptional nature of decisions made there was not presented sufficiently clearly, thus confusing both the Jewish and Christian communities. To the first community it was suggested that the document was a sign of the effectiveness of its protests, to the other one as a result of non-understandable concessions. The spirit of Geneva has not penetrated into the awareness of the followers of both religions. The people responsible for the mass communication media are to be blamed, in a great part, for that state of affairs. The basically new fact was continually interpreted in old language and according to commonplace stereotypes. One may suppose that should Polish Catholics be comprehensively informed immediately after Geneva about the intentions and the sense of the decision to move the convent and should the nuns actually move to another place (even a temporary one - after all the Old Theatre building had been adapted only temporarily for them) the dispute on the convent would soon become past history. But coincidence of misunderstandings and understatements aroused at that point resulted in a new wave of concern.

For a long time no visible steps aimed at fulfilling the Geneva obligations were being taken. The nuns were making renovations and modifications, the scope of which was raising suspicion that they did not really intend to move from the controversial place of stay. Also the attitude of Carmelite monks to this matter seemed to differ from what had been agreed in Geneva. When the date of moving the convent to another place became close, the Jews began to question the sincerity of the Catholics' intentions. In the recent period the words

spoken by Father Anastazy Gegotek, guardian of Barefoot Carmelite nuns, during his visit to the USA were being quoted quite often: "The fruit of the Geneva meeting was presented to Carmelite nuns in the following words: 'Be quiet and pray, and the whole problem will quiet down too'" (published in Chicago 4/5, 1989, p. 6). These words are seen by the Jewish side as a confirmation of the earlier suspicions. The Church and Carmelite nuns were accused of hypocrisy and insincerity. Then, anti-semitism was imputed to them again, and opinions were uttered that such a turn of events should have been expected from the very beginning.

At this point it becomes necessary to quote the word spoken by Rev. Stanislaw Musial, one of the signatories of the Geneva Agreement: "It must be strongly emphasized that the Catholic side did not start the dialogue with the Jews with an attitude that a bargain may be considered. It was a sincere dialogue undertaken in the spirit of love and respect for the partner." (Circular Letter of the Press Office of the Polish Episcopate, no. 22/89, p. 21.) Important light has also been thrown by the letter sent on January 18, 1989, by the Provincial of the Polish Barefoot Carmelites to all the Carmelite houses in Poland, in which we read, among other things: "Since some time malicious attacks of the Jews and pressure from the side of Cardinal Franciszek Macharski on our Sisters in Auschwitz that they voluntarily agree to be transferred to another place, have been intensified." From this, it obviously results that Cardinal Macharski wished to put the Geneva understanding into effect.

The situation worsened a few months before the elapse of the fixed date. Jewish circles were setting off only that part of the agreement which spoke about the obligation to move the convent elsewhere, ignoring the purposefulness of joint activities aimed at the erection of the center.

Unconditional evacuation of the nuns was demanded, without taking Polish realities into consideration. The old pretensions, animosities, and suggestive generalization were coming back to life, along with voices exhorting to the boycott of papal pilgrimages, or making the Pope responsible for the existing situation. The authors of such statements were disregarding the consequences of their statements and who the Pope is for the Poles.

In Poland, in turn, opinions could be heard that the Geneva Agreement had no binding force, that the Catholic side in Geneva did not represent the Church as its delegation, that Cardinal Macharski had no right to make the decision about the transfer of the convent to another place, in one word, that the Geneva Agreement was of no importance at all. In such statements one could trace not so much the noble concern for the future of the convent but rather the will 'to win' the dispute.

The controversy has revealed sharp divisions in Polish Catholicism around the model and need of a dialogue with Jews and Judaism, with the problem of the shape of the Church, its role in the life of the nation, and its position in relation to other religious and ethnic communities. In Spring 1989, texts began to appear in which the dispute on the convent was

only a pretext for setting forth the a priori fixed statements and for winning adherents for one's own line. Nothing wrong was seen in the fact that the terms set in the Geneva Agreement were not maintained. The ancient principle pacta sunt servanda met with a retort that the agreement was forced, signed by incompetent people, and therefore not valid. No one tried to establish who else might have had the appropriate scope of competence. Both sides of the dispute tried to include John Paul II into it. It was suggested that only he could settle the prolonged dispute and that the future of the convent depended on his decision. Such suggestions were being set forth both by the Jews and Catholics although there is no doubt that each side expected from the pope a decision that would be convenient for itself. John Paul II said the following in the matter of Auschwitz on June 24, 1988, in his speech during the visit to Vienna: "From among the various initiatives undertaken today in the spirit of the Council in support of the Jewish-Christian dialogue I wish to indicate to the Information, Education, Dialogue and Prayer Center being organized in Poland. The Center is to serve the researches on Shoah and the martyrology of the Polish nation and other European nations during the period of national socialism and the spiritual confrontation with these problems. It should be desired that it would bring abundant fruit and could constitute an example to follow also for other nations". The Pope's words were being explained in two ways, contradictory to each other. Those who agreed that the convent should be moved and the dispute settled maintained that the idea of the construction of the Center in the shape determined by the Geneva Agreement found a full and binding approval. The opponents riposted that in the papal speech there was no mention about the transfer of the nuns. This time, too, not much was done to popularize and explain the Pope's statement and to arouse the desire of reconciliation and cooperation among the adherents of Judaism and the Christians.

In Autumn 1988, a big cross was erected close by the Carmelite nun's convent. Its significance was all the greater because under that cross John Paul II said the Mass in Brzezinka during his first apostolic pilgrimage to Poland in 1979. The conflict was already sufficiently inflamed, no wonder, therefore, that for many Jews the appearance of the cross was a new manifestation of the 'christianization' of Auschwitz.

It was further a collision of the symbols: the cross which for the Christians is a sign of glory, a subject of adoration and worship was strongly attacked by the Jews, treating it as a sign of persecution and humiliation. A confrontation of this kind is a particularly ticklish component of the dispute. The majority of Poles remember the dramatic "fight for the crosses" in which strong religious and national feeling were expressed. Generally, Jewish feeling towards the most important symbol of the Christians were not presented in the publications, which were restricted to appeals for the "defence of the cross." The demands to remove the cross were being explained as an expression of hostility towards the Crucified,

the effect of obduracy and hatred towards everything which is Christian. In this light the possibility of moving the nuns to another place would nearly look like a blasphemy. Rev. Anastasy Gegotek said that "The departure of the nuns from this place would for them mean the renouncing of the Cross, that is the renouncing of their faith. The sisters cannot do it in the name of their faithfulness to God, to their conscience and religious vocation. The presence of the Cross and of the prayer of the nuns in this place where the Poles were dying, fulfills the wishes of the whole Polish nation too." To have a full picture of the controversy, let us quote the words of Rabbi Pinkas Menachem Joskowicz from the statement justifying his refusal to participate in the ecumenical Day of Prayers for Peace, in Warsaw on September 1, 1989: "We cannot pray in a place where a cross stands. That cross, which has been erected so close to the crematoria within the area of the former Nazi camp causes us more pain than our whole tragedy" (quoted after UPI Agency). A confrontation of these statements reveals a paralyzing drama of the dispute and is proving that the conflict is not merely over a convent. The task is to overcome the painful past of the coexistence of Jews and Christians. Neither of the two sides was able to perceive the feeling of the partner. Both easily used words without going into the effects such practice will cause.

On the turn of 1988 and 1989, more and more voices were being heard saying that the non-meeting of the obligation contained in the Geneva Agreement will result in very serious consequences including the suspension or even break of the Jewish-Christian dialogue started with such difficulties. The meetings of the Vatican commission for the Dialogue with Judaism with representative Jewish organizations, held regularly since a dozen years or more were already earlier postponed. Both sides appealed for calming the stresses and for concord. The dialogue-oriented Jewish circles and their Catholic partners urged to caution. Efforts aimed at a change of the location of the convent were enlivened. True that the construction of the Center was not started yet, but the place where it could be erected has been fixed. Jews and Christians showing conciliatory attitudes were inclined to admit that the term of two years determined in Geneva was not realistic, especially in the present situation in Poland and the immense problems the country now has to face. The signatories of the Geneva Agreement were giving us to understand that they were decided to fulfil it. On January 24, 1989, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski issued a statement saying that "In the unity of the Church with Carmelite nuns, the Krakow Metropolitan states that the sisters remain faithful to their vocation in Auschwitz and will continue to fulfil it in their own new convent building as soon as it is erected on the site indicated within the area of the Center with which the sisters will remain in spiritual unity. This is being done with selfless love and generosity, for the good of tolerance and respect. The building of the so-called Old Theatre will also serve the goals for which the Center has been appointed".

In spite of these assurances, impatience and pressure were growing on the Jewish side. Only one line was being accentuated, namely the matter of the quickest possible transfer of the convent. The problems of the Center and perspectives of ecumenical cooperation were being discussed seldom or not at all. At the time of the elapse of the fixed date (February 22, 1989) an average Jew like an average Catholic knew about the problem only as much as it was given by the press. As a matter of fact, from Jewish press it resulted that Polish Catholics did not move the nuns, which they promised to do, and it was an offence for the Jews and an open challenge to them. On the other hand, in some articles published in Poland the same facts were being explained according to anti-Jewish principles. In fact, there was a lack of serious reliable information in Poland about all the circumstances of the prolonged dispute. Silence was being broken mostly by appeals to the 'defence of the sisters.' Nevertheless, in the so strained situation the Geneva Agreement was again confirmed. In the communique from the 233rd Plenary Conference of the Episcopate of Poland, dated March 9, 1989, the following statement may be found: "Auschwitz, which was the place of martyrdom of the sons and daughters of many nations, has an exceptional significance in the history and awareness of the Polish nation. Therefore, Polish bishops acknowledge the great importance of the Center for Information, Education, Dialogue and Prayer, which is being put into effect by the Krakow Metropolitan, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski; the Center which is to embrace also the new convent". That statement offered solid grounds for the conviction that the ending of the conflict was only a matter of time.

Antagonizing the Jews and the Christians, the dispute on the Carmelite convent has also revealed tensions within the Polish Church itself. A little more than two months after the communique from the Conference of the Episcopate, the Higher Superiors of the Male Orders in Poland issued (on May 17th) an astonishing declaration:

We are deeply convinced that the building of the convent of Barefoot Carmelite nuns, which is their property, is situated in a right and proper place in our Fatherland, and that it neither violates anybody's rights nor does harm to anybody. Therefore, we are strongly concerned about the unjustified attempts of external pressure on moving the convent to another place, and the unfair removal of Carmelite sisters from their property is a threat of danger of a precedent for the future.

From the final words of the statement ("We, therefore, solidarize with the attitude of Carmelite sisters"), it would result that the nuns were against moving to another building.

In the same period there was a number of press publications and brochures in which the plan to build the Center in its former shape was strongly criticized and the intentions of its authors were questioned. Two texts, both with a strong similarity of formulations used in them, come to the fore: the article by B. Jeznach on "The Need of Prayer for the Auschwitz Victims and Torturers" in Slowo Powszechne (April 28 - May 1), and the brochure, distributed free of charge, written by P. Wolny (a pseudonym) "Truth about the Carmelite Nuns Convent in Auschwitz." The first one ends as follows: "The Geneva Agreement bears

the features of human error and therefore it should be withdrawn, because he who does not admit that he has made one error, commits another one." In the end of the brochure, the point of view of the Episcopate supporting the project to establish a Center with a new building of the Carmelite nun's convent was questioned "both for moral and patriotic reasons."

Incidents caused by Rabbi A. Weiss have filled up the measure of mutual prejudice and grudges. His and his comrades behavior have clear features of programmed provocation. The provocateur did everything to give sound amplification to the matter. He informed the police about his intentions, as well as the Secretariat of the Episcopate and the Krakow Curia; he also took care to have journalists present on the spot. Rabbi Weiss, well-known, for a few years, for similar actions, is a deliberate opponent of rapprochement with the Christians. Forcing his way to trespass on other peoples territory, obtrusively rattling at the door of female convent, where only a few construction workers were at work, and occupying the entrance to it, Rabbi Weiss should have expected the discomforts of a much acuter nature than those he had to suffer. Unfortunately, the provocateur has reached his goal. In the information about the incident the odium of dislike fell on the workers who, after hours of ineffective persuasion, decided to remove the troublesome intruders. In the cable of the Reuter Agency this action was called "One of the most abhorrent scenes of violence towards Jews which took place in Poland since many years" (quoted after Gazeta Wyborcza of July 17). Soon the provocateurs have been called "manifestants"[protesters]. Severe unjust charges were addressed to the police, the Curia, and the nuns, but the heaviest ones were addressed against the workers. All who are still inclined to condemn them should remember Jacek Wozniakowski's words:

I must admit sincerely that if I were a worker busy repairing something in the building of the convent, then, risking accusation of barbarity, I would apply myself probably to the throwing out of the intruders whoever they might have been. The fact that during such incidents not everybody behaves velvet-like, must have been included into the publicity apparatus: photographs, articles in Western press about the brutality of the Poles, about the new, dangerous wave of Polish anti-semitism and, even exhorting to the boycott of papal pilgrimages. (Tygodnik Powszechny, August 15, 1989).

What Rabbi Weiss wished to attain was the arousing of anti-Jewish emotions. Let us imagine an analogous incident caused in Israel of the USA by a priest and a small group of alumni. A similar scenario of events might rightly be expected. The effect was another dramatic clash of symbols: attacking helpless sisters respected and assisted by the Christians on the one side, and the rabbi, also greatly respected by the Jews, water poured on him, carried out into the street, on the other side.

Defending one's own symbol, one mercilessly strikes at somebody else's symbol. It would be difficult to quote even a part of voices resounded among the Jews. In general, their tone

coincided with what had been expressed by the national director of Anti-Defamation League B'nai B'rith, Abraham M. Foxman. He described the intervention of the workers as "intolerable return of the old Polish hatred and pogroms, the practices which--we thought--have finally been given up." The interpretation of the incident in the press was in glaring disproportion in relation to the views of many people, including the Jews. Fear was loudly expressed that it might worsen the already tense mutual relations. A warning about such possibility could be found in the communique of the Polish Episcopate Commission for Dialogue with Judaism (July 19). Should important Jewish organizations have issued statements in a similar spirit, the matters might go otherwise. Unfortunately, the incident aroused an unseemly anti-Polish campaign. What took place at the door of the convent, was being compared with the Kielce pogrom and was given as a new example of Polish anti-semitism.

August filled up "the squaring of the circle." The statement issued by Cardinal Macharski (August 8) and Cardinal Jozef Glemp's homily in Czestochowa gave rise to another storm around the Carmel. Referring to the "violent campaign of accusations and insinuations on the part of some Jewish circles in the West," Cardinal Macharski did not hide his bitterness on account of the "insulting aggression expressed not only in words. The attitudes and actions of this kind made it not possible to continue the construction of the center. In this atmosphere of aggressive demands and the unrest brought to us, one cannot jointly care after the construction of a place of mutual respect, without resigning from one's own religious and national convictions." It is not true that the statement is a reply to Weiss' isolated provocation. The statement was issued as a retort to the loudly publicized campaign that followed the incidents, and it was an appeal to self-control in the lavishing of the words and actions. However, the question whether the statement means a complete giving up of the idea of the center and of moving the Carmelite nuns to another place was pushed into the background. The commentators' attention was focused exclusively on the matter of the location of the convent.

Cardinal Macharski had been besieged from two sides: the silent satisfaction of the Catholic opponents of rapprochement was accompanied by the attacks of some part of influential Jewish circles. Under such circumstances the Polish Primate, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, rose to speak. In his homily at Czestochowa he spoke for the continuation of dialogue with the Jews, reminding at the same time Polish and Catholic reasons. Without taking these reasons into account, it is impossible to come to an understanding. Conciliatory words were addressed to the Jews. The Primate also reminded the advances to good relations caused by the turn of events after the end of World War II. But the homily included also formulations which were unacceptable. It has caused reactions on the part of many (Catholic) Poles. They were deeply embarrassed by Cardinal Glemp's words. These reactions

clearly showed that the common stereotype of Polish anti-semitism is very injurious. One cannot expect that a single homily would contain an all-sided and precise exposition of the global concept of inter-religious dialogue. Nevertheless, it is true that weight is attached to any shade of meaning of words, announced by the head of the Church in Poland. The Primate touched the sorest questions of Polish-Jewish co-existence, and in sharp words he condemned the Weiss' provocation. That what is - or may be - the bone of contention between the quarreling communities has been taken out, first of all, from the whole homily, once again ignoring the lines which might serve the understanding between them. A few days after the Czestochowa homily Cardinal Jozef Glemp in an interview for the Italian daily La Repubblica, proclaimed himself in favor of the re-negotiations of the Geneva Agreement: "Negotiations should be resumed, respecting of the principle of dialogue, with the participation of competent persons, not excluding the Poles" (quoted AP Agency, September 2nd). Cardinal Glemp further explained his position in an interview published in the Tygodnik Powszechny (September 17) and in the letter to Sigmund Sternberg (September 21), President of the International Council Christians-Jews. Discussing the Cardinal's homily all Poles were shocked by the words of Isaac Shamir that "all Poles imbibe anti-Semitism with their mother's milk." It was important how Jews, especially those engaged in dialogue with Christians, would react to such a statement.

The French cardinals and the Belgian cardinal too, who signed the agreement, spoke for the necessity to keep it, not avoiding sarcasm addressed to the Church in Poland. The statement of the Polish Commission for Dialogue with Judaism (September 6) supposes that we have to do with a temporary suspension of the project of the Center and that it will be realized when favorable circumstances return. The most decisive intervention in the dispute was the affirmation of Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, supporting the project of the Center and the relocation of the Carmelite convent with the declaration to help pay for the construction of the new building.

In a letter (September 21) of the Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki to Cardinal Macharski, he also declared his willingness to help in the resolving of the difficulties connected with the construction of the Center. The next day (September 22) Cardinal Macharski declared that the Center will be built.

One can hardly tell when and how the controversy around the Carmel in Auschwitz will finally end. It has become evident that it reveals many problems of which one did not speak sufficiently clear so far.

1. The true state of the Christian-Jewish dialogue has been revealed. On both sides the rapprochement has been undertaken by the elites which take seriously the requirements of their own religion and understand the necessity of credible testimony of those who believe

in God in relation to the world endangered by splitting, indifference and hatred. A question arises to what extent the efforts of people taking the role of the kamikazes are absorbed their co-religionists. Many people who worked for the good of inter-religious understanding became the victims of rough attacks both openly and in secret. Their involvement meets with attitudes bearing the symptoms of triumphalism and self-dependence. The Geneva Agreement has caused that official representatives of the Church have joined the dialogue with the Jews and Judaism, clearly expressing their will of reconciliation. Their intentions were unfairly read by some of the Jews and distorted by some Catholics. The opponents were not able to realize that the decision about the foundation of the center and about the center and about the transfer of the convent could become to the world - as was stated by John Paul II in Vienna - an example of the purposefulness and effectiveness of negotiations.

Problems and conflicts around the Auschwitz Carmel cannot destroy the once started dialogue. For both sides it would be a price without any proportion to what we have to do within the dispute. It would be difficult to rebuild broken contacts. The reluctance and the prejudices of the enemies of rapprochement should not affect its adherents. Persons and institutions involved in the dialogue should thoroughly analyze the wretched controversy as a symptom of an unhealed disease affecting both communities. A cure is a difficult, long term process.

2. The course of the dispute has revealed serious tensions inside the Church. The cardinals from the West as well as the representatives of lower ranks from local churches there, are rightly sensitive to Jewish reasons. The fact that they treat them seriously deserves to be appreciated and followed. But such an attitude cannot lead to the shutting of one's eyes against the particular sensitivity of the Poles. One simply must draw conclusions from it. The controversy has also uncovered the divisions in the Church in Poland. Greatly differing views on the purposefulness of inter-religious dialogue and, consequently, on the nature and shape of Christian religion have been revealed.

The majority of those expressing themselves in various publication do not know the post-Council documents of the Church concerning its attitude towards non-Christian religions and outlining the foundations of understanding. The quarrel on the Carmel has antagonized the circles which for a long time have been steeped in mutual animosities which have a completely non-religious base. The aim of the clashes was clearly to give a beating to the opponent when the opportunity permitted it.

A complete surprise was the statement of the superiors of male orders, issued as if no binding statement of the Episcopate on this subject existed at all. It is no secret that a part of the bishops and clergy had opinions on the construction and functions of the center and on the location of the convent, that differed from the view expressed in the Geneva Agreement. In these conditions one should not be surprised by the confusion among the

faithful. It would be good if the heads of the Church in Poland should issue an official statement on the attitude towards the Jews and Judaism because it would prevent any manipulation by the people wishing to instrumentalize religion for their own, regrettable goals.

3. The Jews, first of all, living far from Poland, should realize how sensitive the Poles are towards the problems revealed in the context of the dispute on the Carmel. A disastrous consequence of the war is the fact that although there was basically a reconciliation of the Jews and Poles with the Germans, so far there was no reconciliation between the Poles and the Jews. The victims of repressions and martyrdom continue to ardently quarrel with each other. A dispute on the "priority in suffering" cannot be solved rationally. The sufferings, which should have brought the two nations closer to one another, have definitely divided them. The utmost efforts should be made to cure oneself from this moral disease. Undertaking of a dialogue means the necessity to understand the partner as he sees himself. The Jews and Christians, demanding respect for their own symbols and institutions, must understand that these symbols and institutions are being understood completely different by the other side burdened with different historical experience. As regards Christian symbols, the cross comes to the fore.

Various forms of pressure and the forcing of desired behavior constitute another threat for the dialogue. "If so many matters are a source of pain" said the Primate at Czestochowa "then a dialogue is necessary. A dialogue for a systematic explanation of difficult things rather than for the presentation of demands." In recent years such a dialogue had been undertaken and was developing favorably. It suffices to remind the international theological colloquium in Tyniec (April 1988), the symposium on "Church, the Jews and Judaism" organized by the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw (June 5-6, 1989) or the highly fruitful seminar organized by the Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago in the summer of 1989 attended by twenty-to professors from Polish theological seminaries and higher theological schools. The latter event, in particular, is a speaking example of efficient cooperation; it allows us to hope for the continuation of the dialogue.

4. The controversy around the convent in Auschwitz is already a matter of the past. More and more Jews give us to understand that at the present stage they really do not mind whether the sisters will move or not. The conflict caused a lot of evil, but on the other hand, it has revealed the mechanism of mutual enmity. A thorough analysis of the intensification of the dispute should be made in order to develop an effective therapy for the chronically ill communities. This is particularly an obligation of the people who have already undertaken the painful dialogue and who must have a more pronounced participation in shaping collective mentality. In particular, the historians and theologians must do their utmost to prevent similar conflicts because otherwise this one certainly will not be the last

one. It does not seem that an immediate change of the location of the convent would now be regarded as a gesture of reconciliation. One can fear that irrespective of whether and when the sisters move to another place, the whole affair will long be presented as a new explosion of "Polish anti-semitism." This is just why the planned Center should come into being. It is also why the Geneva Agreement should be kept. The long lasting and disgraceful controversy has stiffened the attitudes of the two communities. Only a deep consideration of the facts may restore the weakened future of mutual relations and the strength of the attractiveness of the same God and the effectiveness of the testimony being given about God, depends on whether such consideration will really take place.