



Seventh Annual “Day of Judaism” Observed in Polish Churches

17.02.2004

Under the motto “You shall be a blessing” (Zechariah 8:13), the seventh “Day of Judaism” was celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church of Poland on January 15th, 2004. This yearly event is an initiative of the Polish Episcopacy. The main celebrations took place in Poznań, with Rabbi Daniel Epstein from Jerusalem as special guest. At a symposium in the Renaissance town hall, Rabbi Epstein spoke of God’s calling to Abraham, which brings God’s blessing, but is associated with the goal appointed for humankind by God. “It is what God does, and not what people think and plan,” said Rabbi Epstein. His panel discussion partner, Rev. Prof. Łukasz Kamykowski from Kraków, reminded the audience of John Paul II’s saying: “Christians and Jews are called to be a blessing to the world.” This becomes fulfilled if they seek justice and peace, and this requires their better mutual relations, getting ever closer to God, dialogue and openness.

The symposium was attended by the Bishop of Poznań, Archbishop Stanisław Godecki, President of the Polish Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, as well as the rabbi of Warsaw and Łódź, Michael Schudrich, and other representatives of the Jewish and Catholic communities in Poland. The latter included the co-presidents of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, Dr. Stanisław Krajewski and Rev. Prof. Michał Czajkowski. Also in attendance were regional authorities headed by Andrzej Nowakowski and representatives of Poznań University.

In late afternoon, Archbishop Godecki presided over a biblical service at All Saints Church, where passages of the Scriptures were read out and commented on by Jewish and Christian representatives. Commenting on the Genesis passage about the calling of Abraham, Dr. Krajewski said that it remained a big challenge for Jews and Christians to form individual and social life without idolatry. Rev. Czajkowski introduced the gathering to the Lord’s Prayer, which, he said, “was born of the Jewish faith, hope and love that were in Jesus”. This prayer can unite us with Jews, he continued.

The service at All Saints Church was followed by a Meditation on Peace presided over by Rabbi Schudrich at the synagogue. The whole week of January 11-19 in Poznań was filled with artistic events – concerts, exhibitions, and lectures referring to the Jewish heritage and the challenge of dialogue.

Another festive celebration was held in Kraków, starting on January 11 with what had already become a tradition: a trip around the Jewish district, Kazimierz, guided by the president of the local Jewish community, Tadeusz Jakubowicz. On the 15th, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski presided over a biblical service gathering Christians and Jews. This was followed by a panel discussion at the Pontifical Academy of Theology. Commenting on the quote from the prophet Zechariah, Rev. Dr. Stanisław Wronka, a biblical scholar, reminded the audience of the biblical guarantee and the conciliar rediscovery of the God’s never ceasing covenant with the Jewish people. The speaker expressed his hope that the Days of Judaism in the Church in Poland would help bring about that both Christians and Jews would be able to affirm about each other: “We have understood that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23) – and that the world would be able to make the same affirmation, and join us.

The representative of the Jewish community, Konstanty Gebert from Warsaw, said that the whole Torah says Jews are given to the world as a measure and example of both blessing and curse. The blessing, included in the calling of Abraham, is based on the fact that it is owing to Jews that people came to know their Creator. This means that it would be a supreme blessing to say to someone: May your fate be like that of Jews. Although God's curse in the history of the Jews was God's punishment for sins, “it was not God's but a human curse that shut the doors of the gas chambers.” After 1500 years of the teaching of contempt for Jews – without which there would have been no Auschwitz – the Church started a reform that is manifest in the declaration *Nostra Aetate* and in her Jubilee penitence. This evokes respect and gratitude. All great religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – are being eaten by the cancer of hatred. There is no religion free from evil, because evil sticks to good to push it down. It is obvious that believers in One God should confront evil instead of confronting one another.

In Lublin, at a meeting held on January 17 in the seminary, Archbishop Józef ?yci?ski awarded Prof. Leon Kieres, president of the Institute for National Remembrance (IPN), with the Medal of the Lublin Archdiocese, *Lumen Gentium*. Prof. Kieres lectured on “Jewish Issues in the Work of the National Remembrance Institute in Poland” (from investigating the persecutions of March 1968 till the legal reinvestigation of the crime in Jedwabne). A service was celebrated by Archbishop ?yci?ski and the gathering prayed for the Jewish people with the words of the prayer of John Paul II for Jews.

At the Church of Wroc?aw, a panel discussion was held with Rev. Prof. Roman Rogowski and Jerzy Kichler, the former president of the Association of the Jewish Communities in Poland. In the seminary of Wroc?awek, a lecture “From Assimilation to Dialogue” was delivered by Rev. Dr. Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waszkine? from the Catholic Lublin University, the famous ghetto survivor who was an adopted child in a Polish family, and learned about it at the age of 35, long after his priestly ordination.

Violetta Reder, Kraków