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# Poland and the Jews

Reflections of a Polish Polish Jew





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Reflections of a Polish Polish Jew**

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To Monika Miriam, my Wife



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## *Foreword*

This book is on Jews and Poland, and the relations between the two both today and in the past. I speak not only as an observer, but above all as a participant in Polish and Polish-Jewish life. I present an account of problems from my personal perspective, that of a Polish Polish Jew. This puzzling phrase means that I am a Polish Jew from Poland, or a Polish Jew who is a Pole. To make it clear to the reader where I come from, my personal development is presented in the introduction.

The introduction as well as the other eight essays are adapted from papers published in the past decade (with the exception of one printed in 1989), mostly after the year 2000. They are not uniform in character but taken together they give, I hope, a picture of contemporary Poland's Jewish dimension, together with the historical background of the issues.

Each chapter is preceded with a short note explaining the circumstances in which the original paper was written. The main themes of the essays are as follows.

Chapter 1 presents the challenge of Auschwitz. This is put at the beginning because the topic seems to be of supreme interest for non-Polish readers. I do not give the history of Auschwitz; I present

some problems, their roots, meaning and significance. The same remark – that this is not a history book – applies to all the essays in this book.

Chapter 2 summarizes the whole history of Jews in Poland from the present point of view, dealing with the facts, images and stereotypes that are essential for the contemporary perception of Poland and Polish Jews.

Chapter 3 reviews the main controversial points appearing in the relations between Poles and Jews.

Chapter 4 deals with a problem that is still the subject of great interest in Eastern and East-Central Europe, and is virtually unknown in the West, the story of Jewish communists. They used to be relatively numerous and influential, and, in my opinion, this fact implies a moral challenge for Jews. My approach is, I admit, rather controversial.

Chapter 5 is essentially a reprint of a text from the 1980s, published in the USA under my penname Abel Kainer. It is about the Jewish dimension of the justly famous “Solidarność”, or Solidarity, movement. Unlike the other chapters, it is not modified (though some footnotes have been added) so that the flavour of that era can hopefully be perceived by the reader.

Chapter 6 is about the influence of the Shoah, particularly its indirect influence, on Jews in post-World War II Poland, and especially in the free Poland of 1989 and afterwards.

Chapter 7 is about the changes in the Roman Catholic teachings on Jews and Judaism in the last decades. I deal with the Church in general and the Polish Catholic Church in particular.

Chapter 8 is about Christian-Jewish relations and, more specifically, the Christian-Jewish dialogue in contemporary Poland.

The last two chapters concern the area that is of special interest to me, the Christian-Jewish dialogue. I am writing these words in the first week after the passing of John Paul II. The whole world

seems to have been affected. In Poland, the dying and the death of the Polish pope has prompted unprecedented national mourning. The country has virtually stopped functioning for the week between his death and the funeral. It has brought to the light of the day the best qualities in the people around. Conflicts have been put on hold, even the football (soccer) fans have stopped fighting among themselves. Among many unprecedented occurrences it is worthwhile to mention the special prayer services that Polish Jews organized in synagogues. Asked to describe my feelings, which are, I guess, identical or similar to those of many Polish Jews, I would emphasize warm gratitude to that remarkable man, and deep solidarity with the Polish Catholics most of whom seem to feel themselves to be “orphans.” At the same time I feel neither orphaned nor left without guidance.

While I never called the pope either “Father” or “Holy”, I have sincerely expressed my admiration and praise of his achievements. They are generally known. It is, however, less obvious that his last years, and in even greater intensity his last days, have brought about another accomplishment; he introduced into public life the presence of an old, handicapped, suffering, and even dying man so different from the young, fit, happy media heroes. And yet he remained a venerable media hero. This unexpected expansion of the category of who is counted among accepted celebrities, is moving and significant to me. In addition to being a university professor, an author, and an active Polish Jew, I am also the father of a handicapped child. But this does not belong to this book.

Warszawa, April 10, 2005, *Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5765*  
Stanisław Krajewski

