

THE SUFFERING, CHOSENNESS AND MISSION OF THE POLISH NATION

By Waldemar Chrostowski

Dr. Waldemar Chrostowski (Roman Catholic) is professor of systematic theology at the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw, Poland. He has contributed articles to OPREE, Vol. X, Nos. 3 and 6.

In looking at their history and identity the Poles show a clear tendency to highlight sufferings as the key to the nation's philosophy of history. For more than three centuries suffering has been a constant historical determinant of Poland and the price paid for patriotism. Suffering can mean defeat; it can be regarded as proof of the absence or impotence of God. Polish spirituality, however, puts suffering in a different perspective. Suffering is seen as a sign of chosenness and the specific mission of Poles. The notion of chosenness is historically rooted. It explains all events in the light of the role and position of the Polish nation in God's plans. This trend took on new luster after the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla as pope. The papal pilgrimages and charges at home have continued to sustain this notion.

It will be interesting to trace how the idea of suffering of the Polish nation was verbalized in its history, how it was explained theologically, and how the claim appeared and took root that the Poles are a special nation with an exceptional role to play. The philosophy of history of the chosenness and mission of Poland has much in common with the biblical idea of the chosenness and mission of Israel. Considering the painful past of Christian-Jewish coexistence, we may ask whether the attitude of Polish Catholic toward Jews and Judaism does not have its roots in the Polish theology of history. Since the Poles are disposed to attribute to themselves a messianic mission, are not such a theology and spirituality a prop for intolerance and even discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, especially the followers of Judaism?

Polish Messianism

The religious consciousness and spirituality of Poles today have been shaped by a more than thousand-year history and tradition. The historical watershed which initiated the still continuing series of the nation's tragedies and misfortunes are the Polish-Cossack wars of 1648, which plunged Poland into the vortex of domestic and foreign conflicts. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance a person felt the pain of his own existence individually and in the Christian faith found the light to solve personal problems and sufferings. Perhaps it was the simple peasants who were most prone to identify themselves with the suffering Savior. This found its expression in the road-side crosses and statuettes of Christ erected especially from the 15th century. In time they became a permanent part of the Polish landscape and an integral component of Polishness, part of the legacy that was passed down from generation to generation. Characteristic for the Poles is the cult of the humanity of Christ. The cult of the Virgin Mary developed simultaneously. At the turn of the 16th century the destinies of individual people began to be ever more closely linked with the destiny of the fatherland. Poland started to decline, and the situation was

worsened by religious disputes and natural calamities. The painful historical experiences heightened the mood of sadness, despair, and pessimism. Closest to the lot of Poles seemed to be scenes representing Christ's sufferings. Enriched with elements of the imagination and feeling such descriptions became very popular. The unrest stirred up by the Cossacks in the eastern outskirts of the Commonwealth and the Polish-Russian wars had religious overtones. In each case these were conflicts with Orthodoxy. The invasion of Poland by the Protestant Swedes (1656-1658), which was called the "deluge," had important consequences. For the first time most of the territory of the country fell prey to an invader, whose actions were directed against the national identity and religiousness of the Poles. The Swedes behaved like enemies of the Catholic religion. They destroyed religious symbols, killed priests, and in fear of them the nuns fled to the south, often across the border. The invaders failed to take the monastery on Jasna Gora, which from then on begins to play the role of a national sanctuary. The defense of Jasna Gora and the vows of God, laid a solid foundation under the Marian cult. Two other facts that must be emphasized are the large-scale participation of the peasant masses in the defense of the country and the support by most Polish Protestants of the Swedes, which evoked great hostility among the common people.

The Poles entered the period of growing crises prepared by the Jesuit Peter Skarga (1536-1612). His preaching played a tremendous role in shaping the "Polish national character." Especially the famous "Sermons to the Sejm" influenced the collective consciousness. Skarga, like his predecessors (e.g. Stanislaus of Skarbimeirz), laid emphasis on the geopolitical position of Poland and the traditional ties with Rome. Both of these elements became especially important in the context of the Reformation and the growing danger from Russia. The countries of Western Europe were experiencing powerful upheavals. In the Poles Skarga saw the biblical "Remnant," which had victoriously survived the time of severest trial. Protestantism did not gain widespread support in Poland, but it did strengthen the feeling of catholicity. The Poles perceived a reason for pride vis-a-vis their coreligionists from the West, and from then on this theme will be constantly present in Polish spirituality. Poland is *sui generis* the chosen nation, for it always defended the purity of the Christian faith. "*Polonia semper fidelis*" is an obligation which is universalistic in nature. The mission of Poles is the renewal of Europe and the conversion of the Ukraine and the East, including Japan. In spite of changing historical conditions, this will be a permanent determinant of the mission of Poles, and in principle this is still true today. Poles have to defend and expand the influences of the Church and the faith. "The Church and the Fatherland" are identified one with another while the nation is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (I Peter 2:9). Evil is destroying the Church and the Fatherland. The mission of Poland comes from the great concern of God, who has sent prophets of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and urged his countrymen to renew their religious and moral life. He liked to make bold analogies between the Commonwealth and the nation of Israel and Jerusalem. The destinies of both nations and in the hands of the same God and depend on the moral fiber of their citizens. The appeal to the masses strengthened the ties of the Church with the nation. Patriotism became a priestly need. Skarga's "old Polish messianism" is found at the beginnings of "ideological Polishness." A characteristic feature of the latter is its astonishing persistence and the fact that it was really never developed into a coherent philosophy or

theological system. On the other hand it penetrated into the deepest sublayers of the collective consciousness and as a rule came to the surface in times of danger and crises. Skarga was imitated by other preachers. The great ardor and rhetorical persuasiveness of patriotic preaching left an indelible mark on the religious mind of Poles.

Poland became a Catholic country in the second half of the 17th century and Polishness became ever more closely linked with Catholicism. In Poland there were no religious wars such as had raged in Germany and elsewhere. When the Protestant tide ebbed, this was seen as a triumph of Catholicism, which dominated life and customs. The concept of "Christian Nation" became synonymous with catholicity. Political and religious threats thus became intertwined. When the Polish nation is threatened, God and God's cause are threatened. Poles view themselves as the only country in northeastern Europe which guards Christianity. A decisive role in consolidating this belief was the victory of John Sobieski III at Vienna (1683). Poles regarded their throwing back of the Turkish invasion as a unique contribution to Europe. A reality of social compulsion in relation to religious minorities began to take shape. Though it was not formally codified in the law, it strongly influenced social life. In 1710 King Michael Korybut Wisniowiecki offered himself up to the Virgin Mary. Seven years later the painting of the Holy Virgin Mary was crowned at Jasna Gora. Poles became the "populus Marialis," and this state of affairs continues to this day. One can also perceive an evolution of the notion of holiness. The Jesuit Rev. Florian Jaroszewicz (1694-1771) put together in the prayer-book, "Poland, Mother of the Saints," with more than 350 biographies of saints, one for every day of the year; it included great historical heroes such as Mieszko I and Boleslaus the Bold, whose sainthood the church has never claimed. An elemental Passion religiousness, signs of which had existed earlier as a response to historical experiences, especially natural calamities and lost wars, took root. The shift toward formalism and folklore resulted in a superficialization of many of the forms of the cult of Christ's Passion, but they became part of the Polish religious mind. Evangelical descriptions were enriched with new elements that were experienced and repeated during non-liturgical services. A large role was played by the tradition of the "knightly nation." In the religiousness of the Baroque there was an increasing tendency to understand faith as a field of battle and to represent God and Jesus Christ as "Commander" and "Marshal." The worse the position of the nation became, the more Passion religiousness spread. Alongside the idea of the fortified "rampart" of Europe there ever more often appeared the image of Poland as a "messiah" suffering and praying for Europe. It was believed that Poland's prayers and intercession with God would bring conversion to the true faith and help for other nations. This is Poland's special role among the Slavic nations, a messianic vision which exists to this day.

From the middle of the 18th century Russia and Prussia openly moved toward a final showdown with Poland. Live contacts of a large group of Orthodox and Protestants with neighbors hostile to Poland stiffened the position of the Catholics. A stereotype took shape of non-Catholics as internal enemies favored by outside forces. In 1767 the Russians kidnapped the bishop of Cracow, Sotyka, and several other patriots and transported them to the heart of Russia, to Kaluga. This was the beginning of a long history of exiling Polish "political criminals" to the East, a history that with varying

intensity lasted till the middle of our century. The kidnapping touched off the uprising known as "Confederation of Bar," which was the first in a series of lesser and greater insurrections that lasted till 1863. For the first time the unity of the national ideology and the Catholic faith was expressed. In order to save the Fatherland and the faith the confederates formed a sort of brotherhood. Their catchword was "Jesus-Mary." They wore a cross sewn on their clothes, and on their ensigns appeared the Mother of God, Queen of Poland. In the poetry of Bar the sufferings of Bishop Sotyk kidnapped by the Russians were compared with the Passion of Christ. The atmosphere of the confederation strengthened the association with the Passion of the Savior. The collapse of the spontaneous insurrection (1771) brought about an atmosphere of mourning. Many of the confederates were exiled to the heart of Russia. The unification of the national ideology with the Catholic faith took place in the outskirts of the commonwealth. It was the product of popular religiousness and for a long time influenced the religiousness of Poles. In the face of the growing dangers the question of Polish national identity became a constant subject of reflection.

In the last three decades of the 18th century Poland was divided among her neighbors--Russia, Prussia, and Austria--in three successive partitions (1772, 1793, 1795). In the face of humiliations and the loss of political independence the image of the sufferings of Christ became ever more suggestive, to which the Poles added their own highly emotional input. Disillusionment on account of the defeat of Napoleon (1812) and the consolidation of foreign hegemony intensified the mood of suffering and abandonment. At the beginning of the 19th century there was an even stronger fusion of Passion motifs with the national consciousness and patriotism. A new watershed was marked by the November uprising (1831), the work of a generation of Poles who had been born in captivity. The insurgents wanted to restore the country of their fathers by force. The uprising was crushed, and after 1831 repressive measures and persecutions, which also struck at the church, intensified. Political emigration swelled to a wave, especially to France, where an energetic movement of religious renewal was formed. Europe was faced with the "Polish question," which still comes and goes today. The popular Polish religious mind was formed in this time. Parish churches and non-liturgical services, in which religious and patriotic elements were linked, were instrumental in this process. The Polish elite in emigration and the common people felt an urgent need for a national theodicy that would "justify" God in the face of the calamity of "His" nation. The alternative "God is pitiless, or God does not exist" was rejected, but why had God permitted the collapse of Poland? The catastrophe was perceived as the extermination and "death" of the nation. Repressive measures and persecutions for voicing ideas of national independence and the sufferings of innocent people intensified the feeling of helplessness.

The theological explanation of the sufferings and fall of Poland was the work of the romantics. In contrast to their ideological kinsmen from the West they did not draw from ancient pagan literatures but from the Bible, especially from the New Testament. It is significant that once again these were people who had been born and brought up in the outskirts of the Commonwealth. Their view of things expressed the faith which came from their homes. The tragedy of the nation was explained in categories of a struggle

between the forces of good and the powers of darkness. Poland, according to this view, is a place of especially brazen attacks of evil, but she was made fit for martyrdom by special favors. Just as it suffices to be a Christian to expose oneself to persecution (Matthew 10:17-33; 24:9), so it suffices to be a Pole to suffer various torments. Participation in the suffering and Passion of Christ is expressed in the sufferings of Poles. In the first half of the 19th century specific analogies between the lot of the Savior and Poland became part of the Polish religious mind: unjust accusations, betrayal by friends, the hypocrisy of enemies, silence as a form of defense, etc. Poland is "Golgotha" or the "Christ of nations." The martyred Christ and martyred Poland were identified: the cross of suffering, the way of the cross of exiles to Siberia, the mockery and floggings by the occupiers, the partitions as the removal of robes, the Mother of God in Sorrow-the Queen of Poland. In 1831 J.M. Hoene-Wronski used the expression "Polish messianism" for the first time. People believed in the complete similarity of the situation of Christ and Poland. Golgotha was the condition of Resurrection; the martyrology of the Poles has the same end--it will lead to a new life. This will be a new life for all of Europe: "And on the third day the soul will return to the body, and the nation will rise up from the dead and liberate all of the peoples of Europe from captivity (...). And just as bloody sacrifices on earth came to an end with the Resurrection of Christ, so wars in Christianity will cease with the resurrection of the Polish nation," wrote Adam Mickiewicz in 1832. Poland's mission is carried out on two planes--historical and eschatological. In historical perspective the tragedy of Poland and the Poles protected other nations from equally painful and well-earned blows. Suffering and martyrdom have a redeeming value and are also an example and inspiration for those who have survived. The evangelical symbol of "seed" (John 12:24) was best suited to express the eschatological mission of Poland.

The idea of the martyrdom and choosing of the Polish nation spread rapidly. A big role in this process was played by A. Mickiewicz, J. Sowacki, members of the Community of the Resurrection, and Z. Krasinski, C. Ujejski, and C.K. Norwid. After the election of John Paul II J. Slowacki's verse "Amidst Quarrels God Will Strike" enjoyed great popularity in Poland. The work, which was written in 1848, predicted an "open throne" for a "Slavic Pope." Referring to contemporary events in Rome the poet painted a picture of a pope who boldly faced the challenges of the world. The verse was known to Poles, but until 1978 the reality of a Slavic Pope seemed impossible. Emigré poetry and literature were ably brought to the homeland, where they were favorably received. They eloquently articulated the deepest needs and hopes of the masses. The apotheosis of suffering and martyrdom appeared in some circles. The fall of Poland was explained as "*felix culpa*." The result was a sudden religious revival, especially among men. Faith was so strongly linked with patriotic feelings that sometimes it was difficult to distinguish what was the goal and what the means. In the middle of the 19th century, especially after the Spring of Peoples, missionary activity on a large scale intensified. Many preachers took advantage of this to promote national aspirations and to emphasize the chosenness of the Polish nation. Patriotic and religious feelings began to intensify at the beginning of the 1860s. The custom became popular of erecting crosses with the inscription "God save Poland." Processions singing patriotic hymns made their way to these crosses, while during the January uprising (1863) priests under these crosses swore in the insurgents. The slogan "God and Fatherland" united those fighting for freedom. The family was the place of

religious and patriotic instruction, and in the family this was the task of the mother. The belief that the woman in her role as mother had a special mission quickly spread. This was accompanied by a reanimation of the Marian cult.

The collapse of the January uprising (1863) was a crushing defeat for solutions undertaken with force. Ever more voices were heard that in the face of the power of the occupiers nothing could be done. Messianic frames of mind waned, at least those aspects which coupled the suffering of the nation with the hope of an early resurrection. The resurrection of Christ was a miracle. The hope for the resurrection of Poland was nothing else but demanding a miracle from God. In history, however, God does not perform miracles; it is people who have the obligation to make them happen. The postulates of "organic work" were promoted in the philosophy of positivism. Henryk Sienkiewicz and others made new syntheses of the history of the nation with the intention of "raising the spirits." They met the spiritual needs of the society, which wanted to know more about its own history. Since debating downfalls and suffering was too painful, another method of healing the wretched nation was suggested--recalling the heroic pages of its history. Emphasizing the love of freedom and power of the former Poland, it was argued that a nation with such a past cannot perish. There was a shift from accenting suffering to recalling the times of splendor and glorifying sacrifices for the common good. Once again a big role was played here by religious elements. The nation has a body and a soul. It is the "soul of the nation" which determines its personality and identity as part of the divine order of creation and redemption. Every nation has its place in God's plans, but on account of its painful historical experiences something specific is reserved for the Polish nation. In the face of the ever more intense propaganda of the occupiers, the family became the mainstay of Polishness, which was clearly identified with Catholicism. The family spirit protected the individual from foreign influences. The notion crystallized of the nation as a "family of influences." This idea goes back to Pawel Wlodkowicz and the Council of Constance, but it was most fully developed in the teaching of Cardinal S. Wyszynski (1901-1981) and in the homilies of John Paul II during his pilgrimages to Poland.

The regaining of independence in 1919 was explained as the long awaited "resurrection." The more than 120-year period of captivity recalled "committing a body to the earth." Now a new life had to be begun. Yet hardly had Poland arisen when she faced a new mortal danger from Soviet Russia. The forces of the Red Army pushed westward and reached Warsaw. The Polish victory before the gates of the capital (15 August, 1920) became called the "miracle of the Vistula." This victorious battle safeguarded the identity of Christian Europe against the deluge of Bolsheviks and atheism. The Poles maintained that they fulfilled well their historical mission. The twenty years of independence (1919-1939) was too short a period to develop all aspects of the life of a free country. If in previous centuries religious language often had been used to explain painful events, it is quite understandable that the rebirth of the nation was presented in the same categories. Among various conceptions the idea of a national state gained many supporters. Its most outstanding theoretician was R. Dmowski, who often referred to the traditional conceptions of the mission of Poland and the Poles. In practice the theoretical idea was perverted. The most dangerous of these vitiation was the fusion of Catholicism with

nationalism. In the opinion of national minorities and neighbors the nationalistic superstition became the Polish cardinal sin. The generation which well remembered the times of captivity experienced a new tragedy in September 1939. Poland was divided between hostile neighbors, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Expulsion from one's home, adversity, deportations, fear, the loss of loved ones, suffering, and martyrdom once again became the integral part of the Polish destiny. Questions about the sense of martyrology resurfaced. Motifs of the Passion of Christ again arise in the collective mind as a prefiguration of the martyrdom of Poland. This was expressed by poets (K.K. Baczynski, T. Gaycy, W. Bak), but this mood was common. The time of occupation was perceived as similar to the Passion of Christ also because of the mass persecution of the Jews. Yet there was little awareness of the common blood of Christ and the Jews. The Poles experienced the "crucifixion" of Poland. This time her martyrdom was associated not so much with the salvation of other nations as with the rebirth of Poland herself.

For most nations World War II ended in 1945. The agreements reached at Yalta and Potsdam were so painful for the Poles that the postwar "status quo" was regarded as a continuation of captivity. In many respects the sufferings of the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s were worse than the years of occupation. It appeared that the ideology of the "suffering nation" had collapsed. The regime imposed by force gained supporters also among native Poles. Animosity and prejudices as well as mistrust and suspicion poisoned the atmosphere. It would take time to understand that the tactic of dividing the nation was one of the main goals of the hostile ideology. In times of contempt for well-tested models and criteria of Polishness the Church took over the "rule of souls." While in prison (1953-1956) Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, elaborated the principles of the "Great Novenna," which prepared the nation for celebrations of the Millennium of the Christianization of Poland. The Novenna began on 5 May, 1957, under the watchword "Faithfulness to God, the Cross, the Gospel, the Holy Church, and its Shepherds." The nation had great confidence in its primate and confirmed the traditional ties with the Church. Membership in the church and practicing the faith were recognized as an external test of credibility. There was awareness that this might be an unfair and even false criterion, but no better way was seen of confirming one's identity. The messianic state of mind never became as intense as in the 19th century, but patriotic literature was nevertheless very popular. In the context of the celebrations of the Millennium of Poland (1966) people became aware that the nation had existed from its very beginnings as a nation that believed in God. "Faithfulness to God, the Cross, and the Gospel" was the clasp of a long history and the guarantee of survival. Poland has to maintain this faithfulness. The Marian

cult reached unprecedented proportions. The belief took root that the Queen from Jasna Góra "shines not only for Poland." On 3 May, 1966, Cardinal Wyszyński offered up the entire Fatherland and all Poles in the world to the "motherly bondage" of the love of Mary for the freedom of the Church. This submission was repeated in all dioceses, parishes, and Catholic families. Soviet domination had imposed alien cultural patterns and an open battle with religion. In the common thinking "to be a Pole" meant "to be a believer," most often "to be a Catholic." The stereotype "Pole-Catholic" functioned as a safeguard of national identity. This requires unceasing concern for introducing a moral

order. The final victory will certainly come. The Catholics believe in this in the context of the words of Cardinals A. Hlond and S. Wyszyński. Not much store was set by the reactions of the members of other denominations and religions. Besides, they were too few in numbers to make their mark in public life or to express any real opposition to foreign domination. More than ever before it became Poland's mission to be the "rampart" of Christianity. The Soviet Union was perceived as the bastion of atheism, Moscow as its symbol and capital. The Poles prepared themselves for meeting the challenges that would have to be faced when this bastion fell. The church must be prepared to send priests to the East at the right moment and to fill the need for the necessary religious ministrations. The Polish nation is also supposed to play another role "ad extra," which consists in showing the world the Christian values of the Slavs. Close ties with Rome make Poland a bridge between the East and the West. This atmosphere intensified after 1978, when a Pole was elected pope. This event was seen as a lofty epilogue to Polish history that would pave the way for the completion of Poland's mission.

The Jewish Complexes of Poles

Does the theology of suffering and the chosenness of the Polish nation influence the attitude toward Jews? This question can be expanded to other religious and ethnic minorities, for the stereotype "Pole-Catholic" also affects them. Yet the relation to Jews is so special. For the idea of chosenness and the mission associated with it is characteristic of Israel.

In many respects Polish Catholics and Jews have a similar view of their own history and nature. The Poles have not displayed any special talents in speculative theology, and they were never much very interested in it. Little attention was paid to doctrine, seeing hypocrisy as a worse sin than heresy. The specific feature of Polish religiousness in comparison with other European countries came from the course of Polish history and from the constant tendency to create a theology of history. In the Old Testament the key to understanding the past of Israel is the concept of chosenness. All events are depicted as the work of God; the notion of chosenness creates the framework for theology. It is hard to say whether and to what degree the Polish fondness of history is not a result of the long coexistence with the followers of Judaism. The Poles, like the Jews, are enamored of history, and this is a love form which they cannot and do not want to free themselves.

Basing themselves on the Bible and the Jews they linked up their genealogy with the beginnings of the world. Relying on chosenness in a particular moment of history gave rise to questions about what had been earlier. The answers gave chosenness timeless and sacral dimensions. The Poles in this imitated the Jews. This took on completely unexpected forms. In the first half of the 17th century the Franciscan Rev. Wojciech Dembolecki (c. 1585-1647) gained renown for his "complete" reconstruction of the genealogy of Poles in order to increase the national splendor. He even Polonized Adam and Eve by stating that the first parents had spoken Polish in paradise. He recognized Polish language as the first language of the world. Other languages appeared as a result of the corruption of the Polish spoken in paradise. The kings of Poland are the descendants

of the ancient Slavs, the first rulers of the world. The Polish nation deserves primacy over other nations. The Scriptures foretell of the victorious battles of the Commonwealth which will restore to it its proper place and rank. Poland is a chosen nation whose destiny is political domination over the world. This messianism has much in common with the political claims of popular Jewish messianism. The Jews with the equal eloquence argued that Adam and Eve spoke Hebrew. Dembolecki was not the only propagator of these strange ideas. Kollataj, the leading ideologist of the Polish Enlightenment, also proclaimed himself in favor of the primacy of the Polish nation and the Polish language. After the November uprising (1831) there was a strong belief in the innocence of the Polish nation. It came from the view that all nations had been created and to each of them God had given a specific life and calling. On the margin of this state of mind were tendencies to eschatologize nationality or the nation. They took firm root among the simple folk and also among the clergy. This current of Polish spirituality deserves closer attention, for its mechanisms still remain intact. Though they are sporadic, voices are heard even today that God chose Poland before He created the World. It seems, however, that the hopes of conquering the world under the Polish scepter have disappeared. In spite of this, the idea of the conquest of the world by some nation shows surprising vitality. These intentions and possibilities are often ascribed to the Jews, which is a serious charge made against them.

In the thinking of Dembolecki we recognize the desire to attribute to Poland the privileges of Israel. Where such claims were made they did not stem from religious premises but from the proverbial old Polish megalomania. In the mind of the Poles there was neither the stereotype of "Poland--the second Israel" nor looking at themselves as the "second (new) People of God." And yet the history of the Jews has always intrigued the Poles, who saw in it not a typology or allegory of the lot of Poland but numerous similarities in the history of the two nations. An illustration of this is the career of Psalm 137 "*Super flumina Babylonis.*" Recognizing the common tragedy of Jewish exile in Babylon and Polish emigrants in various places of Europe, it was translated many times into Polish in the first half of the 19th century. The Poles treated with caution the stereotype of the Jews in Christianity as a nation without a homeland and exile as the external punishment for infidelity. Referring to the history of Israel K. Brodzinski wrote that "a nation without a homeland can live for long centuries and that it can outlive most of its oppressors." The books of the Old Testament were seen as a model of how love of God and Fatherland can be combined. This had a considerable influence on creating common features in the viewpoint of the two nations. The Jews have always emphasized the idea of the people, perceiving the individual as "composed" in the whole. The Polish vision is similar. The Jewish tradition of chosenness is universalistically oriented: it serves God's overall intentions in relation to mankind. This aspect also appears in Polish spirituality. The Poles steadfastly believe that they have an important function to perform in relation to other nations. The Poles and the Jews came closest together during the January uprising (1863), when messianic feelings were very strong. Poland was called Zion, Warsaw - Jerusalem, and the insurgents were compared with the heroic Maccabees. This did not mean the appropriation of someone else's history or divesting the Jews of the privilege of chosenness. The Polish version of messianism did not clash with the Jewish messianic tradition. The Jews eagerly supported the Poles in their aspirations for

independence and joined the uprising. To a certain degree the "redemption" of Poland was also a Jewish cause.

Israel associated its chosenness with the appointment of Abraham and the other patriarchs and the liberation from Egyptian captivity. Memory of liberation from the "house of slavery" gave the Jews hope of new acts of salvation. The theological paradigm of Judaism is: we are chosen and are the People of God; we bear witness to God and that is why we suffer, but the last word belongs to him. The Polish idea of chosenness was developed in two ways. The first linked chosenness with the idea of suffering, but it has a different schema from the Jewish one: we suffer and this situation must have some meaning; suffering is a sign of chosenness. There is a serious redemptive quality in a situation of suffering. Old Testament analogies did not suffice here. The Poles compared their lot with the martyrology of Christ. The life of the nation was compared with the life of the Savior, who suffered, died, and rose from the dead. The idea of the suffering, chosenness, and mission of the Polish nation has an evangelical background. Jesus changed the axiology of suffering and death. In imitating and even identifying themselves with Him Poles see the sense of painful historical experiences and explain them in the light of the Christian faith. Reflection on and experience of the descriptions of the Lord's Passion and proliferating miracle plays and Passion services were not without influence on the attitude toward Jews, who were viewed as continuators of ancient opposition to the Savior. And so we come to the second variety of messianism. Catholics in Poland did not differ from their coreligionists in other parts of the world in the opinion that the Jews ought to be converted to the Christian faith. This was the intention of the missionary work of St. Paul, which created the base for the missionary activity of the Church. The idea of chosenness (Acts 15:7; Romans 8:33; 16:13) was linked with missionary practice. The chosen "remnant" are the Christians. While St. Paul compared the "chosenness" of the Christians with the situation of Israel by emphasizing that God's choice and promises are irrevocable, the later writings of the New Testament and the Fathers of the Church ascribed the privileges of the People of God exclusively to the Christians. The "theology of substitution" rather quickly gained a following: The "old" Israel had performed its task, and the Church is the "new" Israel. For many centuries Poland was open to foreign influences and favorably disposed to newcomers. This also concerns Jews, who were one of the many immigratory groups. They were accepted as Jews and allowed to retain their own identity. From the end of the 16th to the end of the 17th centuries tensions in Christianity stiffened the position of the Catholics. Missionary activity on a large scale was launched. The countries of western Europe were active in America and in Asia and Africa. The Church in Poland engaged in this activity at home, especially in relation to the Jews. Toward the end of the 17th century the Jewish community in Poland comprised three-fourths of world Jewry. Missionary activity was organized not in the national spirit, that is, with the idea of "purifying" or consolidating" the nation, but for religious reasons. The Poles attempted to carry out what elsewhere was rather a theoretical postulate. The conversion of the Jews was seen as a lofty task that stemmed from the missionary nature of the Church. Though missionary campaigns broke down at the beginning of the 18th century, this aspect of Polish spirituality is still very vital today. It is linked with the geopolitical position of the country and the persistent desire to have missionary influence resulting from the mentality of the "rampart" of Christianity. The Polish nation sees in

this an important aspect of the universalism of its mission and a sign of service in behalf of other nations. The Poles see the invaluable "fruits" of faith in successful missionary work. The Jews receive this as a manifestation of dogmatic intolerance. The Poles regard the Christian faith as a gift which they want to share with others. This impedes mutual relations and arouses constant suspicions as to the intentions of Catholics in contacts with the followers of Judaism.

Mutual tensions intensified in the second half of the 19th century. This phenomena still awaits a thorough analysis. Some historians are of the opinion that during the reign of Casimir the Great (1333-1370) a special alliance was formed of the Polish gentry with the Jews that lasted until the decline of the gentry in the 19th century. A more important circumstance, however, were the intensifying efforts of the Jews to restore their own state, which took the form of the Zionist movement. The Jewish question became part of the Polish national complex. The process of the mythologization or more precisely of the demonization of the Jews went hand-in-hand with deepening animosity. On the turn of the 19th century an image of the Jew whose basic elements are still topical today took root in popular folklore. The situation became more complicated after 1919 with the appearance in free Poland of political orientations with nationalistic tendencies. After the revolution in Russia and the war of 1920 the Poles regarded their country as the last line of defense against Bolshevik invasion and atheism. The catchwords "Catholic Poland" and "Pole--Catholic" were eagerly used to gain political supporters, in spite of the fact that one-third of the inhabitants of the country were not Catholic or ethnically Polish. The Jews, like other minorities, were prevented from participating in shaping the independent Fatherland. The accent on Polishness took much of its nourishment from the ideology of the Confederation of Bar and the romantics, but religious and cultural differences were not perceived as enrichment but as danger and misfortune. The appeal to "Polish national pride" and "honor" was often transplanted to religious soil. A considerable influence was played by Niepokalanow with its printing shop and radio station. The strong opposition to atheistic currents could not avoid an alliance with right-wing nationalistic groups.

The tragedy of Shoah (1939-1945) has weighed most heavily on Catholic-Jewish and Polish-Jewish relations. The authors of mass genocide on Polish lands were German Nazis. It is they who elaborated the plan of exterminating the Jews and set up the concentration camps. An extension of anti-Jewish ideology was the anti-Polish ideology. After the Jews and the Gypsies, the Poles were the next in line to the crematoria. Poland became the grave of millions of Jews, their cemetery. This fact stands in the way of any reflection on the lot of Christians and Jews in their common homeland. World War II not only resulted in the destruction of the Jews, but also set the victims of the crime greatly at variance with each other. The dramatic dispute over "first place" in suffering continues. Signs of mistrust existed earlier, but they were never as strong as after the war. The question is repeatedly asked whether the Polish Christians did everything they could for their Jewish fellow-citizens. Every answer must take into account the fact that in connection with the extermination of the Jews no other nation faced such enormous challenges as the Poles. Calls are made from various sides that the Poles make a collective self-examination. In connection with this one must seriously think about the words written by the Polish Jew, S. Krajewski: "The Poles are rather inclined to see

suffering in common with the Jews than the Church which they have in common with the Germans."

After the cessation of hostilities more than 100,000 Jews from the Soviet Union came to Poland in her new borders. Many of them actively took part in the laicization and atheization of public life and held high posts in the apparatus of political terror and compulsion. There were also many native Poles in this apparatus, but the classical mechanisms started up of projecting onto the Jews what one doesn't like in one's own people. The invasion of communism pushed the church back to the positions of a besieged fortress. A strange paradox came into being: Poland was more Catholic than ever before, but the communists ruled the country. The nation cut itself off from all foreign influences. The authorities disliked the religious Jews just as much as the Christians. Perhaps the fate of the Jews was even worse, for they lacked the possibility of worshipping and speaking out in public. The few synagogues gave no inkling of the spiritual richness of the followers of Judaism. In the mind of the young generation of Poles Jews did not mean a follower of Judaism but an atheist who was openly at war with the Church and religion. A similar situation existed in Hungary, where the same stereotype of the Jew took root. For the Christians of Western Europe and America this is an unknown problem. The vast majority of the Jews who succeeded in emigrating to the West were believers and had not allowed themselves to be pulled into the orbit of influences of the communist ideology.

The shape of the Christian-Jewish relations in Poland in the 1950s and 1960s was not a result of the usurpation by Poles of special messianic privileges. The determining factor was the strong adherence of the Poles to the Christian faith. By successfully opposing the offensive of atheistic ideology they sustained and developed the hope for a better future. All the aspects of the mission of Poles created in the past intertwined in the collective consciousness. The most devoted were even prepared for martyrdom, which intensified the qualities of the traditional ideology of suffering. The "rampart" mentally was also strengthened. The feelings of injustice dominated over everything, and the churches became the places where this was articulated. The year 1968, which weighed so heavily on the image of Poland and the Poles, ought to be looked at through the prism of contests within the communist party. The allies of yesterday, who long since had lacked any scruples became open enemies. The Catholics were powerless in the face of the campaign against the Jews, but neither did they see any need to come to their defense. It was an unjust simplification that the image of Jew-atheist was extended to all Jews without exception. The Church and believers did not show enough sensitivity to the lot of individual people. The 1970s created an enormous vacuum. It became ever more clear that one had to look in a new way on mutual relations and build them on different principles. After centuries of living together under one roof, dialogue became the need of the moment in a country without Jews. An important factor in changing thinking and attitudes is the theological reorientation. Initiated by the elite it is slowly boring into people's consciousness and penetrating the collective consciousness of the Poles.