Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel

Father Stanisław Musiał's Struggle with Memory

I met this priest only twice. On the second occasion, we had a longer conversation: for over an hour we strolled round the gardens of the Jesuits in Cracow, in Kopernika St., where Father Stanisław lived. It was July 2003. That conversation was very important for me; we were supposed to return to it. Unfortunately, we did not. On 15 March 2004 I attended his funeral. The mass, in a full basilica of the Heart of Jesus, was concelebrated by 87 priests led by Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, the then archbishop-metropolitan of Cracow; in attendance were also the bishop of the Evangelical Reformed Church and a Lutheran minister. The main celebrant also led the funeral ceremony at the cemetery, where Father Musiał drew even bigger crowds. The presence of a sizeable group of Jews was something extraordinary, and they had come not only from Poland but also from Israel. Among the Jewish celebrities were three rabbis: the chief rabbi of Poland, the rabbi of Cracow and the Hasidic rabbi of Jerusalem; the latter sang *kaddish* over the Father's grave. The Jews of Cracow were represented by the chairman of the local community. Israeli ambassador in Poland David Peleg was also present.

Who was this Polish Jesuit, around whose casket gathered not only Catholics, but also representatives of different Christian churches, with agnostics also present, and, what is most striking, and, at least to me, joyful, was a sizeable group of the elder brothers in faith, Jews?

The answer to this question – perhaps more – can be found in a book with the provocative title *Duchowny niepokorny* (The Rebellious Clergyman). Rebellious? For most ordinary people who had met him, he was a man of charming kindness and simplicity. The cover of this book, equally provocative, shows Father Stanisław Musiał with a friendly smile, appearing as if from the mist shrouding a Jewish cemetery. A Catholic priest in a Jewish cemetery? A rare sight. Finally, to describe the cover completely, we read that the book contains "Conversations with Father Stanisław Musiał" by two well-known and recognised authors: Witold Bereś and Krzysztof Burnetko.[1]

The authors specify the issues dealt with in the book as follows: "Nearly our entire conversation concerned Jewish-Catholic relations" (230). Indeed, even though the Father is only interviewed on his biography, and there are a few humorous epi-

[1] For more on the authors in Witold Bereś and Krzysztof Burnetko, *Duchowny niepokorny. Rozmowy z księdzem Stanisławem Musiałem* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2006), 262.

sodes, "tasty" and "juicy" events as a lush fruit, the interviewers were most interested in his remembrance of the Jews throughout his life. They deserve praise for that. Thus upon completion of a fascinating, lengthy interview, I was truly surprised that the interviewee, a well-known friend of the Jews, had taken so long and found it so arduous to discover the Jewish world.

All that began already in his childhood. "That might have been in 1942. I was," says the priest, "about four years old. A Jew we know knocked on the door of our house in Łososina Górna near Limanowa, asking for help. My mother prepared him a big parcel with food, when the Polish Blue policemen and German gendarmes arrived. My father managed to escape. My mother, my grandfather, we three children and that Jew, who didn't want to run away, stayed. We were to be shot for helping the Jew. We were all lined up, as I was told later, in front of the house. Then, I remember, by some child's instinct, I jumped and grabbed the German commander by his legs. He was moved. He sent the rest of his soldiers to search for other Jews in the neighbouring houses, and later he told me that he had left a son like me back in Germany. . . . More than that: every year, for Christmas, he brought me colourful candies, which were something unbelievable for me at that time. And the Jew we wanted to help was tied to a horse, dragged across the village and killed."[2]

Thus the four-year-old Staś became a real hero. His behaviour touched the heart of a German soldier and saved all his family from death. But the Jew, dragged by the horse and killed – did he leave a mark in the Father's memory? What about his memory of other Jews from those cruel war years? Could they have been so easily forgotten? They could. There are certain psychological defence mechanisms including the mechanisms of repression. And it seems that it came into play in the case of the Father. A long time had passed before Father Stanisław, with due respect, sorrow and love, showed his regard for that "murdered world", which was so close in childhood, and then was somehow strangely forgotten.

The interviews were conducted from January 1999 to December 2000,[3] and in one Father Musiał confesses: "I did not think about the Jew, either then or later. It is only in the last few years that I see this man dragged along. He appears from the depths of my childhood images, and [it] brings sorrow, sadness that I did not save his life. This sadness is no less when I tell myself that I was only four at that time" (10). What then happened that this event of half a century before appeared to be completely forgotten, and now returned to disturb and bring sorrow? It is an important question that will certainly not be left unanswered. Let us only state here that all father Musiał's encounters with Jews, and Jewish issues generally, mentioned in the book can be divided into two stages.

Stage one – apparent lack of interest in Jewish issues; stage two – stimulated by important events that reanimated memory. I hope that if we concentrate on these

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[2] Fragment of an interview, *Kadish za księdza* from 1999, in ks. S. Musiał, *Czarne jest czarne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), 152 and ff. Unfortunately this fragment is not included in the book in question. It only contains valuable biographical information on p. 14, which allows one to find the source of this text.

[3] Bereś and Burnetko, *op. cit*., 14 and 260–261.

two questions in turn, particularly when we try to shed some light on stage two, we will be able to understand the attitude of the *rebellious* clergyman and of those who regarded him as such. Perhaps we ourselves will answer an important question: what was and, it seems still is, the principal line of division among the Poles in the Catholic-Jewish dialogue? The latter issue is important not only for a correct assessment of the past, not only to understand the attitude of the *rebellious* clergyman, but also for a fruitful Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Poland now and in the future.

I

It is a truism to say that our home teaches us our early patterns of behaviour, the evaluation criteria of the world we perceive and the people we meet. Our hero heard from his grandfather that the parish priest and the rabbi from his home village of Łososin were the best educated men around, who met on the church's stone steps and talked. And that was about everything that could be branded "positive" between the Catholic and the Jewish worlds, which formed young Staś's consciousness. Because the rest – the story of the Jewish inn-keeper who pushed the poor peasant into drinking, of the Jewish matzah containing some Christian blood, of the knowledge borrowed from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the fairly voluminous (before the war)[4] anti-Semitic Catholic press – all this shaped the atmosphere, which Father Musiał himself called in an interview "the primitive anti-Semitism of southern Poland."[5] Apart from this, call it socio-cultural anti-Semitism, one should add religious anti-Semitism (anti-Judaism): it was basic knowledge each Christian received from the earliest days of his childhood, not only in southern Poland, but in the entire Christendom: blaming the Jews for the death of Christ.[6] Finally, apart from this "climate" that penetrated his home from the outside, from the inside of his home, from his parents Staś received integrity and preseverance in difficulty from his mother, "curiosity about the world, a rather merciful attitude towards things, and a kind of constant amazement at the complexity of reality and the resultant belief that I don't need to impose my opinions on others" (16–17).

Thus "equipped," our hero entered life, beginning his education in an elementary school in Łososin, which he finished as a Jesuit seminarian in Nowy Sącz. As the Communist government of the People's Republic of Poland closed this seminary, the 14-year-old Staś was accepted, by dispensation, into Jesuit novitiate in Stara Wieś, where he graduated from high school. Thus his "life in a cassock" began (33). His beginnings were particularly difficult, especially the novitiate with its austere educational practice, which in the light of what our hero says strikes one as severe

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[4] See e.g. *Kościół katolicki i antysemityzm w Polsce w latach 1933–1939*, (Kraków: Homini, 2004).

[5] *Cf*. *Uzdrowi nas Europa. Z ks. Stanisławem Musiałem SJ rozmawia Agnieszka Niezgoda*, in: ks. Stanisław Musiał, *op. cit*., 143.

[6] On p. 20 we read: "It was obvious. First of all we heard about it in church. We knew: all the mess in our Christian world is due to the fact that the Jews killed Christ." And on p. 46: "It was obvious: the Jews crucified Christ and then they were punished for that sin with disasters."

and fraught with didactic clashes. His road to priesthood led through philosophical studies in Cracow (1957–1960) and theological studies in Warsaw (1960–1964). He was ordained in 1963 in Nowy Sącz.

I read his stories of the austere Jesuit novitiate with very mixed feelings, as they contrasted with the exceptionally relaxed atmosphere – our hero calls it "a greater freedom" (*cf*. 56) – of theology students. As I studied at the Higher Seminary of Warmia[7] myself, and my teachers were wonderful Jesuits – Father Henryk Poczobutt and Stanisław Szymański, who also invited their Jesuit brothers[8] – I found it hard to imagine that they all had to go through such a nightmare as did Father Musiał, who called it "novitiate". On the other hand, the austerity of the novitiate is completely incompatible with a situation where a student of theology carries out, successfully, his plan to study in Rome, and attempts to obtain a passport, gets involved in contacts with high-ranking (and the most important) "dignitaries" of the then PAX. I began my theological studies in 1960 and I am certain that such ideas would lead to my immediate expulsion from the seminary, without a chance to give any explanation whatsoever.

Let us leave this and other threads of the book; anyone who opens it will not be bored. As to the main Jewish topic of these interviews, it is evident that until the last days of 1985 neither Jewish issues nor any specific Jews occupied our hero's mind.

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Before the war, out of the 33,000 inhabitants of Nowy Sącz 13,000 were Jewish. "Only a few individuals survived" (26). Little Staś, as we know, finished his elementary school there (1950–1952), living with the Jesuits in a small seminary. The windows of the seminary overlooked the street that separated the so-called "Aryan side" from the ghetto. This street witnessed murders of Jewish children.[9] The interviewers, therefore, asked him whether, as a student of the small seminary, he heard anything about Jews? Here is his reply: ". . . for the entire two years of my stay . . . a mere five years after the war, I never heard the word 'Jew' or 'Jews'. I didn't hear them in the sense of remembering it – this word might have been uttered in my presence. I know that if I'd asked my teachers or tutors about the Jews, I would have received some information. But nobody informed me spontaneously" (26). He remembers a marvellous prefect, who spent the war in Nowy Sącz, where in 1941 he was ordained. He told various stories, including those from the days of the occupation. "I don't recall," says Father Musiał, "him talking about the Jews, as if they didn't exist in that town" (*ibid.*). Similarly, as regards the material traces of Jews in that town, the priest says: "there must have been plenty of them. But I was blind. . . . The town was dirty, poor, dull. Yet, I didn't see empty, deserted houses or

[7] In Olsztyn.

[8] During 1962–1964, Father Dąbrowski, a man of wit and humour, frequently came to visit; unfortunately I cannot remember his first name.

[9] Little Staś, living in the small seminary, knew nothing about it: "It was only recently that I learned about it from one of the older brothers, who" – he confesses to the interviewers – "lived then in Nowy Sącz and saw atrocious scenes such as throwing little children out of the window onto our very street, during the ghetto's liquidation in the summer of 1942" (26).

buildings. They were inhabited by people, who, as if nothing had happened, as if they had been living there for generations . . . these were the early 1950s, so there was enough time to remove the traces, to paint over Jewish signboards over the shops. Their absence was normal – like breathing or drinking water, one pays no attention to them" (26–27).

During 1957–1960 he studied philosophy in Cracow, so he is asked whether he knew anything about the history of Polish Jews, whether he had visited Kazimierz? He replies: "I know something, but not much. In my three years in Cracow I didn't visit Kazimierz once. . . . I wasn't interested" (35).

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In 1965 he went to Rome to study philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University. It was the last year of the Second Vatican Council. But the issues debated by the council seemed to him "fairly distant from reality" (61). Moreover many of his Polish colleagues shared his opinion. But, it seems, he means not only the Polish Jesuits studying there, but Polish priests generally, for he says: "To tell you the truth, I think we weren't able to assess the significance of the council. We, Polish priests, at that time due to our isolation and specific situation related to the communist system, outside the Church's mainstream" (61). Finally, when asked directly about the famous council declaration *Nostra aetate*, which opened a dialogue with Judaism and non-Christian religions,[10] he replies: "I did not pay any attention to it. After all, it even crossed my mind that a council of the Catholic Church would not deal with relations with the Jews and Muslims" (62, 142, 143).

Well, as regards opinions on Polish priests studying in Rome during the last council, this seems unjust. In any case, Father Michał Czajkowski, who, for example, pursued biblical studies at that time in Rome, would not agree with it.[11] But, if one wants to find justification for such an attitude of the then student in his freshman year, it should be borne in mind that he decided to study philosophy (62), not theology and, originally, for his dissertation he chose the ideas of Feliks Koneczny (58). This scholar's historiosophical views were poles apart from the teachings of the recent Council.[12] Furthermore, according to Koneczny, the *Jewish civilization* was supposed to be the deadliest enemy of the *Latin civilization*, the only one that assured the growth of Christianity.[13]

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[10] Officially adopted on 28 October 1965.

[11] *Cf.*, *Nie wstydzę się Ewangelii. Z ks. Michałem Czajkowskim rozmawia Jan Turnau*, (Kraków: WAM, 2004), 85 and f. After all Father M. Czajkowski as the author of *Wprowadzenie* (Introduction) to *Rozmowy z księdzem…*, says: "If I had been asked to . . . [write] a review, I would have to sometimes disagree with Staszek Musiał" (5).

[12] *Cf.*, e.g. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, *U podstaw odnowy. Studium o realizacji Vaticanum II*, (Cracow: PTT, 1972), chapter IV: "Postawa ekumeniczna", 269 f.

[13] *Cf.* Feliks Koneczny, *Cywilizacja Żydowska*, (Komorów: Wydawnictwo ANTYK Marcin Dybowski, 1997). The author was finishing his work in September 1943 in Cracow, appealing for "making Poland Jew-free"; cf. *ibid.*, 409. Precisely at that time, in the nearby KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, gas chambers and crematoria were operating at full speed, making Europe "Jew-free".

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In 1968, Father Stanisław was granted a scholarship at the state university in Munich, where Prof. Ernesto Grassi introduced him to and fascinated him with the philosophy and culture of the Renaissance. It is difficult to determine to what extent Koneczny's books (in his days in Rome) reinforced our hero's anti-Semitism acquired at home in his village; in any case, the rest of his days abroad will be devoted to the ideas of the French philosopher Charles de Boveless[14]. He returns to Poland 13 years later, unfortunately without a doctorate, but with a fantastic command of French, Italian, German and English. Naturally, he visited all the countries where these languages are spoken, and he not only compiled a bibliography on the philosopher, but was also active as a priest and as a social activist.[15]

His contacts with the Jewish world, at that time, were scarce and superficial, although he calls the two relationships mentioned in the book "friendships". To wit, in 1972 he went to Florence to "immerse himself" a little in Renaissance culture. "It was," he says, "my first direct contact with the Jewish world" (64). Next to the Jesuits' home, where he was staying, "lived Mrs Joanna Marguilez-Pik, a Jewess born in Poland; during the war she was hiding in a convent, in Stara Wieś, as it happens." She found out that there was a Pole staying with the Jesuits, and, the priest confesses, "we soon became friends" (*ibid.*). This means that she told him about her complex experiences: her wartime baptism and her return to Judaism after the war, and her profound concern for her mother, to prevent her baptism in hospital against her will; finally his acquaintance – says our hero – [told him] about various events that stemmed from kosher rules and other Jewish customs (64–68). What was, then, the acquaintance for Father Stanisław? Primarily, it was a contact with a different, religiously motivated behaviour,[16] but to call it "friendship" appears to be an exaggeration. When the interviewers want to find out whether they talked about the war years, "at least about how she was saved, about the nuns" (68), who, as we know, were hiding her in Stara Wieś[17], the priest's reaction is reminiscent of the psychological mechanism of repression. There actually was no conversation about the war: "It didn't occur to me to ask her . . ." (68). But once, as a young boy, he had been lined up against the wall with a certain Jew, awaiting death. He didn't remember that? Why does he say that it was only in Florence in 1972 that he had his first contact with the Jewish world? It seems he did repress from memory eve-

[14] Also known as Carollus Bovillus (1479 – 1567).

[15] As for his stay in Germany he says: "On Saturdays and Sundays I visited parishes and helped the parish priests . . . Additionally, I was possessed by the idea of organising aid for Poland in Germany. I tried to arrange a scholarship for one of my colleagues, organised transports of books for seminaries in Poland and so on" (63).

[16] He says: "Her story did help me . . . get acquainted with a certain, sometimes difficult to understand, aspect of Judaism" (66). "Looking at Mrs Pik, I also learned about those aspects of Judaism we find bizarre. Eventually, I learned to respect those customs" (68).

[17] After all it was the very same Stara Wieś, where the fourteen-year-old Staś began his novitiate, and later went to high school.

rything he had seen during the war, particularly what he had experienced himself – that nightmare in 1942!

His acquaintance with a Russian Jewess, Ms Feinstein, seems to be even more superficial. He met her in 1975 on the way to Chantilly near Paris, where he was living. He helped her carry a suitcase, so "she invited . . . me to tea, and we became friends, just as with Ms Margueliez-Pik" (68). This lady was "a sworn Zionist" (69) and she promised to offer her entire fortune to Israel. For three years she invited the priest to tea every other day, but she never offered him cake. Once, when he whipped up the courage to ask for something sweet, she replied that she "doesn't buy cakes because she's saving money [to support] afforestation of Palestine. . . . And each cake means one tree less. . . . So we drank our tea, with sugar, but without lemon" (69). How does the priest assess this acquaintance? He says: "thanks to her I learned about the way Zionist Jews thought and how determined they were" (69). But, it seems, the priest met only one rather strange person, and there are so many of them all over the world, not only among Zionists.

The third example the priest quotes shows the actual distance between Father Musiał and the Jewish world. In the already mentioned town of Chantilly lived a famous Jesuit, Gaston Fessard,[18] a philosopher of history, with a wonderful history of war-time activity in the Resistance. He was a friend of Jeanne Hersch, known in [Parisian] philosophical circles, a Jewess living in Geneva, a student of Karl Jaspers. Thus Father Musiał says: "I was wondering: a Jesuit with such authority and the position of a Jewess" (69). A shocking statement, indeed! Would it be a trace of Koneczny's anti-Semitic bite? In any case, I am certain that friendship with this Jewish woman was the honour of many famous great people, not only Jesuits. . . .[19]

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When Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected Supreme Pontiff, our hero was in Chantilly near Paris, and was, like most of us, completely surprised. In connection with the planned papal visit to Poland, Father Stanisław was summoned back to Poland by his superiors. "It was in early 1979" (75). The communist government was very reluctant to accredit foreign journalists, so Father Musiał became a commentator for the French section of Vatican Radio. Thus opened a completely unexpected chapter in his life: he became a journalist. After the papal visit, in 1980 he was directed to work for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, where he published a very successful article (one of the first ever in that weekly): "Msza św. W Stoczni Im. Lenina" (a Holy Mass in the

[18] Gaston Fessard (1897–1978); his most important works were published after his death: *Hegle, le christianisme de l'histoire*, (Paris: PUF, 1990) *Journal de la conscience française 1940–1944*, (Paris: Plon, 2001).

[19] Jeanne Hersch (1910–2000); from 1956 a philosopher at Geneva University, specialising in the philosophy of law; during 1966–1968 headed the philosophy section at UNESCO. Among her friends were famous eminent people, such as: Stanisław Vincenz, Józef Czapski and Czesław Miłosz. Only one of her books was published in Polish: *Wielcy mysliciele zachodni* (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2001).

Lenin Shipyard) (80–85), which was a report from the end of the Solidarity strike in Gdańsk, in August 1980.

As he still had a consular passport and did not want to lose it, he had to go to the place where he had been last registered, i.e. to Austria. Thus, in the early months of martial law, "in late summer of 1982" (86), he left Poland again. He finally returned to Cracow in 1985, upon which his superiors insisted categorically, "some time before Christmas" (*ibid*.). During his last longer stay abroad, another important meeting took place. He met in person someone who murdered Jews during the war. The meeting took place – horrors – "in a small parish in Bavaria". The priest says that one of his parishioners invited him to tea: "Such a simple, pious man. He took out a family album and showed him war-time photographs. Suddenly he hands me a photograph and says, 'here we are shooting Jewish bandits' – and starts laughing. The photograph shows a few Jews on their knees, some already on the ground, we can see the shooters. . . . I was in Poland. And he is still laughing" (71). How did the priest react? He stood up and left without a word. The host ran after him, probably unable to understand his reaction. They phoned him later a few times, but he would hang up.

Years later, when he remembered that meeting, he said: "Maybe I should have punched him in the face? But I couldn't . . . I still wasn't sufficiently sensitive to these issues, although, as this reaction shows, I still felt that madness, that danger. It was 1982 or 1983 (71–72). Let us quote one more, very important comment of his on this last encounter and [his] reaction to that trace of Nazism. "Such gestures were, among others, a result of my meeting with Mrs. Pik and Ms Feinstein or watching Father Gaston Fessard's friendship with Jeanne Hersch. Each of these stories allowed me to look at the Jewish issue from a different angle. Thus the 1970s were, for me, a time of maturation" (72). This statement can hardly be overestimated. It demonstrates that the two earlier meetings and the third "observation" played a more important role in the priest's life than one could infer from what he said. As it turns out, those encounters stimulated his memory, or, more precisely, evoked what Henri Bergson, aptly, it seems, branded *mémoire-souvenir* (memory–recollection).[20]

II

At the end of 1985 we again find our hero in Cracow, in Wiślna Street.[21] At the time a storm was gathering in Catholic-Jewish relations, more precisely in Polish (Catholic)-Jewish relations, and its harbinger was a Belgian journalist of Jewish descent, Bernard Suchecky, who appeared – unannounced – on Christmas Eve in the editor's office of *Tygodnik Powszechny*. He came to find out about Polish reactions

[20] Unlike *mémoire-habitude* (*memory-habit*), we can call it mechanical memory, e.g. driving a car. On the other hand, *memory-recollection* concerns single events which, being useless, sometimes even interfering, in everyday life, are repressed and seemingly absent. C*f.* Henri Bergson *Materia i Pamięć* (Cracow: Zielona Sowa, 2006), 62 and f.

[21] Where the office of *Tygodnik Powszechny* is located.

to the location of the Carmelite Convent in Oświęcim in the Old Theatre building, adjacent to the Auschwitz camp. As the editorial staff of *Tygodnik Powszechny* were leaving on a Christmas visit to Cardinal Macharski, the editor-in-chief Jerzy Turowicz, not knowing what to do with the unexpected guest, suggested to Father Musiał: "Why don't you, Staszek, talk to him? He says there is a problem, but I don't really understand what he means" (87). During their conversation it became evident that European Jewish milieus object to such a location of the convent, treating is as appropriation of this monument of the Holocaust by Catholics. How did the priest react? When he recalls that meeting and that conversation, he admits that, "not very tactfully and not very politely," he began by saying "that it would be better to locate a convent there than a night club. Furthermore, as if to reassure the Belgian guest, he referred to arguments, popular until today, that a convent was not a very important issue and that there was nothing wrong in Christian prayer,[22] and that tolerance requires that we treat Judaism with equal respect, but they should respect ours in return" (87). Finally the interviewers recall the frequently repeated arguments: "at Auschwitz, hundreds of thousands of faithful Catholics died and that our faith consists in our prayer under the cross where they died" (*ibid.*). The Belgian guest did not get involved in a discussion, because that was not the purpose of this visit. When he returned to Brussels he published an account of this visit to Auschwitz (in the biweekly *Heugar*) (92), and recounted the opinions he heard in the editor's office of the Cracow-based Catholic weekly. This triggered a veritable storm in the media, both within and outside Europe; Poland saw an influx of various delegations and journalists. "Then", says our hero, "Cardinal Macharski asked me for help" (92). It was necessary to receive protests, answer journalists' questions, respond to written interventions. And there were plenty of them: "a stream of letters, appeals, memoranda" (93). Thus our hero found himself in the very heart of the storm.

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Before we examine his attitude, which was getting ready for transformation and finally was transformed, we should first say at least a few words to outline the circumstances that triggered the "storm".

First and foremost, we should outline a broader context and say that in the People's Republic of Poland, the dominant (called the "only proper") ideology aimed to embrace and interpret everything, including the reality of the Nazi concentration camps, among them Auschwitz-Birkenau.[23] Indoctrinated memory of the death

[22] With the frequent addition that we pray reciting *Psalms* from the old Testament.

[23] Father Stanisław says: "Oświęcim was appropriated by the People's Republic of Poland. Only propaganda criteria were applied: exhibitions and shows which demonstrated the technology of killing were to indicate the beneficial role of the Soviet Union (as the camp had been liberated by the Red Army), and inflame hatred of Germanic peoples, the perpetrators of this murder. The communist line of propaganda and historiography, in essence, overlooked the fact that Oświęcim was primarily the place of death of the Jewish people. Emphasis was put on citizenship, not on ethnic descent, thus demonstrating that the victims came from nearly all European countries. For propaganda reasons even the number of Oświęcim victims was increased."

camps was a special challenge for the Catholic Church in Poland, which had no right to enter any of the [former] concentration camps, including Auschwitz. Only in 1972, when Maksymilian Kolbe was beatified, did the communist government for the first time allow a mass on the camp's premises (i.e. in Auschwitz). In 1979, the Polish Pope celebrated a mass in Birkenau. Thus the tormented area of the former Nazi camp saw public prayer, in a way, witnessed by all the world. 200 priests, former prisoners of concentration camps, concelebrated the mass. The Pope paid homage to victims of different religions, ideologies, including non-believers. The Pope paid special attention to murdered Russians and Poles, and referred to the Jewish victims, saying that the sons and daughters of the People "were destined for total extermination. . . . this People, which received the commandment 'thou shalt not kill' from God Yahweh, was particularly affected by killing." These words met with a very favourable response from the Jewish world. But John Paul II, at that time, called Auschwitz-Birkenau the Golgotha of our times. This comparison, understandable to Christians, could cause objections among Jews, and indeed triggered critical remarks. After all, Christ, according to the Bible, freely gave his life for the sins of all humanity. But those murdered in this concentration camp, mostly Jews, did not die there of their own accord, and their death could not save others. It was a crime the Jews called by the Hebrew name – Shoah. I shall return to that later.

In 1984, i.e. five years after the mass celebrated at Birkenau by John Paul II, church leaders obtained government approval to move Carmelite Sisters into the already mentioned Old Theatre. The then archbishop – Metropolitan of Cracow, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, to whose diocese Oświęcim belonged – wrote on this occasion to his faithful: "I wish to inform you that Carmelite Convent was established in Oświęcim. . . . The authorities gave them the so-called theatre and they are already transforming it into a convent. They will live under rules of enclosure near the block of death, in prayer and devotion to make payment to God for crimes [committed] in Oświęcim and to beg for God's mercy, particularly for peace and unity throughout the world. . . . This will be yet another indication that God's love is possible and is stronger than evil."[24]

The context thus outlined of the arrival of the Carmelite Sisters in Oświęcim, and their location in the Old Theatre, did not cause any reservations in Poland, did not herald any conflicts, and, as Father Musiał rightly points out, perhaps it would not have been noticed abroad (91), had it not been for the pitiful condition of the building where they had been located: "the building itself was totally neglected, without electricity or running water" (89). In a nutshell, the Old Theatre needed serious renovation to be adopted as a Carmelite convent, which in turn required substantial funds, which the sisters did not have.

In 1985 John Paul II was scheduled to pay his apostolic visit to Belgium. "And then," I quote Father Stanisław, "a German Catholic organisation, *Kirche in Not* (Church in Need), comes up with idea to collect money for . . . the convent during this pilgrimage. . . . A booklet is published, *Zwycięstwo krzyża* (The Victory of the

[24] Quoted in: M. Deselaers, *Homilia Jana Pawła II wygłoszona w roku 1979 w Auschwitz-Birkenau – czytana 25 lat później*, see website: www.centrum-dialogu.oswiecim.pl

Cross), where we read: "Thus we offer the Pope a convent in Oświęcim – this is the victory of the cross." Of course, Father Musiał goes on, it contained no anti-Semitic overtones, and moreover, none of its authors thought that these words could trigger an international scandal. In any case, Jews construed this "victory of the cross" unequivocally: as a Catholic provocation and usurpation in a place that is symbolic for the Shoah" (91).

Well, one could complain about Jewish "oversensitivity". But, above all, one should bear in mind that the Jews had been taught such a "cross" by Christians for nineteen centuries. And, for this very long period of time, the cross had not been, alas, a symbol of love. To the contrary, it had primarily been a stigma that reminded them of the "crime of deicide" supposedly committed by the Jews. Thus, all over Christian Europe, the sign of the cross was for the Jews a harbinger of various persecutions, such as deportations, compulsory "conversion" and frequently death (at the hand of the crusaders, the Inquisition or the common mad crowd of "Christians" during the pogroms). Particularly shocking is the fact that, even during World War II, a famous and popular French writer, Henri Daniel-Rops, suggested in his books that Auschwitz and the Shoah were the price the Jews were paying for their sin.[25]

Thus, if we bear in mind the distant and the recent past of Christian-Jewish relations, it seems that the above interpretation of the meaning of the victory of the cross in the context of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Jewish community in Belgium, and generally in Western Europe, as a Catholic provocation and usurpation, is perfectly justified. All this might have looked like a provocation and usurpation, perhaps even more so, because these events took place "twenty years after the Second Vatican Council," when the Catholic Church, in no vague terms, expressed profound sorrow: decried "displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time by anyone;"[26] furthermore, for 19 years (i.e. since 1966) the Vatican had been [active in this field] through a separate Commission for Relations with Judaism. The Jewish side, in turn, established, in 1970, the International Jewish Committee for Inter-Religious Consultations. In the same year another body was set up, the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, which was to be an official institution to liaise between the Holy See and the Jewish Community.[27] Thus, in the context of these important bilateral initiatives that were to bring closer the Catholic Church and the Jewish community, the manner in which the organisation *Kirche in Not* decided to help the Carmelite convent in Oświęcim was inconsiderate, or even harmful.

Fortunately, there were people in the Belgian Catholic Church who were aware of embarrassment and the brewing scandal. One of them, mentioned by Father

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[25] Naturally the reference here is to the alleged sin of deicide. *Cf*. P. Pierrad, *Cent ans aprčs l'Affaire Dreyfus.Cinquante ans aprčs Auschwitz*, *Sens* No 6, 2006, 337–356.

[26] In the Council declaration *Nostra aetate*, No 4 we read: ". . . the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."

[27] The first meeting of this Liaison Committee was held in Paris in 1971.

Musiał, was the Benedictine monk Georges Passelecq from Maredsous Abbey,[28] who intervened in the popular Belgian daily, *Le Soir* (92). The already mentioned Belgian journalist, a professor of history, Bernard Suchecky,[29] Father Musiał's interlocutor on Christmas Eve of 1985, had been sent to Poland by the very newspaper, *Le Soir*, upon the Benedictine monk's request.

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We are already familiar with the argument Bernard Suchecky heard in Poland. We are aware that his article published in Belgium and the reactions in that country caused a media uproar, which also reached Poland. Let us note, however, that the "storm" changed its form on the way from Belgium to Poland. To rephrase: the "Catholic-Jewish conflict", in a way "conceived" in Belgium during the papal visit due to the lack of sensitivity of some Catholics to the tragedy of the Shoah, despite the closeness between the Catholic Church and Judaism,[30] in our own backyard "was born" and could develop in the form of a bitter **Polish-Jewish conflict**, or more precisely: between the **Polish Church and the Jewish world**. This conflict took this form because the objections by the Jewish world to locate the convent in the Old Theatre was viewed in Poland as an attack on the Catholic people.[31] Thus all the difficult aspects of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II became further complicated by post-war persecution, and added a particular intensity to this conflict. No wonder then that the Western European Church got involved in this conflict (which will be discussed later on).

Let us come back to the book in question. It seems that the part which describes the controversy surrounding the location of the convent on the premises of Auschwitz-Birkenau and a turning point in the Father's life – the last stage of his struggle with memory – are most interesting for our purposes (92–111). This part of the book seems to be the most difficult to discuss, because its hero replies to chaotic ques-

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[28] Georges (Paul) Passelecq (1909–1999). In 1925 became a monk at Maredsous Abbey. In 1941 tried in Berlin and sent to the concentration camp in Dachau for helping Jews. He was detained there at the same time as Dietrich Bonhöffer. From 1969 until his death he was the Secretary of the Episcopate of Belgium for Dialogue with Judaism.

[29] This Belgian Benedictine monk and the *Le Soir* journalist sent to Poland had co-operated in Christian-Jewish dialogue, see note 16, 87.

[30] In April 1986, in the heat of the Polish debate about the Carmelite convent in Oświęcim, the Polish Pope said in the synagogue in Rome, "The first is that the Church of Christ discovers her 'bond' with Judaism by 'searching into her own mystery'" (*cf*. *Nostra Aetate*, ibid.). "The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers."

[31] In the already quoted article (*cf*. note 24) on p. 5 we read: "As the protest against the convent intensified [i.e. obviously, the Carmelite convent in the Old Theatre building], most Polish Catholics were increasingly surprised and shocked; many perceived them as a continuation of Nazi and communist struggle against Christianity and Polish ambitions of independence. It was evident that Polish Catholics could not accept that and should not have relented."

tions, and his answers cover different topics. The questions, however, touch issues of gravity such as Catholic-Polish-Jewish relations.

Interestingly, Father Musiał soon realized that the national and religious aspects of this controversy were an important obstacle. He even claims that he noticed this obstacle quite quickly,[32] but, in fact, we shall see how often he stumbled upon it. In any case, for a person whose function placed him in the very heart of the "storm", he appears to be rather lost.

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The escalating conflict surrounding the Carmelite convent in Oświęcim no doubt led to the establishment of the Sub-Commission for Dialogue of the Episcopate of Poland, headed by Bishop Henryk J. Muszyński. It first met on 13 May 1986, exactly one month after the famous visit of John Paul II to the Roman synagogue. Was the visit of the Polish Pope of any help or indication for the Polish Church for the conflict in question? It seems that it was no accident. Although the Sub-Commission[33] was elevated to the status of Commission one year later (late 1987), it did not, according to Father Musiał, deal with the Oświęcim convent. This matter fell within the jurisdiction of Cardinal Macharski, and our hero was his representative. Furthermore, as I have already said, three cardinals of the Western European Church got involved as well: Godfried Danneels from Belgium and two French cardinals: Albert Decourtray and Jean-Marie Lustiger.

It was on their initiative, naturally by consent and in agreement with Cardinal Macharski, that the first meeting in Geneva was held on 22 July 1986. The Polish side was represented by: Cardinal Macharski, Father Musiał and Jerzy Turowicz, and the Western Church by the three above-mentioned cardinals. "The Jewish side was represented by France and Belgium, and, only as observers, German Jews, and, I think, someone from Italy" (97). What was the result of this meeting? According to our hero it "ended with a minimal Jewish victory; although agreement was reached and the convent's extension was blocked, not all work was suspended" (97).

In the priest's story, in which he revealed the background and circumstances of this first meeting in Geneva, we are struck by his evident aversion to cardinals from Western Europe. In his opinion, the inclusion of the latter and the establishment of the "competence triangle" only complicated the situation. Earlier on, "Cardinal Macharski received Jews, explained the situation, undertook certain obligations." The Jews, in turn, "tried to exert pressure, frequently through private channels, in order to get it done" (93–94). And in the new situation, "everyone put pressure on everybody else, for example – Jews on Cardinal Lustiger, he [in turn] on Western

[32] The priest says: "certainly I realised quite soon that these problems of ours with the Carmelite convent were rooted in our habit of attaching national and religious symbolism to all kinds of locations. . . . How many stupid, and worse, harmful things are done when one does them automatically, solely for ideological and political, not religious reasons" (88).

[33] Let me reiterate that already twenty years earlier, Pope Paul VI established such a commission at the Vatican within the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

cardinals, and they on Cardinal Macharski" (94). As for the meeting in Geneva, Father Musiał says: "Cardinal Lustiger was behind all this . . . Lustiger chose Cardinal de Courteray[34] and Cardinal Danneels" (*ibid.*) Decourtray (here misspelt as de Courteray) was selected because "he was then the chairman of the Episcopate of France". Danneels, in turn, [was chosen] "because pressure from an influential group of Brussels Jews was of key importance" (*ibid.*) And, what is most surprising, even though our hero, as we know, had taken part in the Geneva meeting, he did not agree with the arguments of the Jewish side. He says: "I somehow couldn't see that Oświęcim was the largest Jewish cemetery; initially this was the main religious argument. Apart from that the object of controversy was some building [i.e. the Old Theatre], which seemed petty and illogical" (95). But, Father Musiał not only disagreed with the decisions of the first Geneva meeting, but also expressed his position in a memorial. Moreover, he published his memorial in a bulletin of the Episcopate of Poland, as secretary to the aforementioned Episcopate Commission for Dialogue with Judaism. In this memorial he opted for the presence of the Carmelite nuns in the Old Theatre, thus putting the cross in the camp's landscape. "True," he confesses, "I was then convinced that it was the minimum of Catholic presence in that place. I was then under the influence of the cardinal, who dearly wished to include this motive. . . . from the very beginning I was of the opinion, and even insisted to the cardinal, that the matter should be settled in accordance with the expressions of the substantial majority of Polish clergy . . . ." (96).

Father Musiał's response to what happened at the second Geneva meeting, i.e. on 22 February 1987, was not unambiguous, either, although this time he seemed more convinced by the Jewish arguments. Primarily, this time a few days before the tripartite Geneva meeting, the Catholic side, on cardinal Lustiger's initiative, had met in Paris to work out a common position. At that meeting, the French side proposed "to found, in the vicinity of the camp, an institution of dual character, both religious and secular . . . a centre of culture, prayer and a meeting place for different religions, so that it would serve Jews and Christians. Next to it . . . on the same grounds, but of course fenced off, there will be a convent living a life of its own. That was, says Father Musiał, a brilliant idea and it saved the negotiations" (97). But when he is asked about the same negotiations that accompanied the second Geneva meeting, his reply contains a significant amount of aversion towards the Jews. "There was no time," says Father Musiał, "for a laborious formulations of positions . . . because the meeting had a special character – just like the first one it had been planned for one day" (98). The meeting opened at ten with solemn speeches of the parties. Among the speakers were Cardinal Macharski and our hero, who also said a few words. But he does admit that "these were rather vague declarations." Finally, "time for lunch. But what lunch! Gigantic! The food threw us off our feet, we were so full that everyone thought of at least a brief siesta. But now was the time to conclude the negotiations: the Jews have their own project, we have our own Paris project, naturally a third project is being developed on the basis of these two; everyone is in a hurry, people are talking at once, sheets of paper circulate around the table, disap-

[34] Regrettably, the cardinal's name was misspelt. The correct spelling: Decourtray.

pearing every now and then . . . ." (*ibid.*) Given this enormous mess, what amused me the most in the priest's account were his words: "Frankly speaking, I think that was part of Jewish tactics" (*ibid.*) Oh, those perfidious Jews.

Still, "we managed to put it all together. The project we were working out was based on the idea put forward by the French in Paris."[35] The Catholic side agrees to move the convent to a different, previously mentioned location. "And most importantly: there will be no places of religious worship on the camp's premises." The meaning of the agreement seemed evident to all the parties, i.e. that the camp's premises would be free from any religious symbols.

What about remembering Poles, who also died at Oświęcim? Obviously, Cardinal Macharski raised this problem. The Jewish side had but one answer: "The argument was simple and, in principle, convincing: the Poles have their sites of remembrance all over the place, while Jews have only one, which is at once the largest and most widely recognised symbol of the Shoah, regardless of where it had [actually] happened. Thus not even those camps only for Jews such as Sobibór, Treblinka or Bełżec, but precisely Oświęcim." Let me emphasise the concluding sentence: "We realized that due to this fact, the removal of the Carmelite nuns was for the Jews a matter of honour" (100).

Obviously, the decision to remove the Carmelite nuns from the Old Theatre, where they had resided for three years, was to prove most difficult for Cardinal Macharski. His consent, i.e. his signature, was of key importance in this case. He was not in Paris when the Catholic side worked out its position. At the Geneva meeting, he sat next to our hero and as he says: "he seemed absent in a way." (100) Of interest is the moment immediately preceding the signing of the document. The priest remembers: "the negotiations are virtually over, the final version is being typed . . . and the cardinal rises from the table, approaches the windows and looks at the lake;[36] he is silent for a while, with his back to the room. I stand behind him, which he must have sensed because he asked me suddenly: 'Should I sign?' I started to explain that yes, it was a success, that it should be signed, but he only glanced at the document and signed it without reading it. It was only after all the others had signed it, [but] his signature was decisive" (100).

After returning to Poland it was necessary to publish the Geneva agreement and, obviously, comment on it some how. It was not difficult to publish the [text of the] agreement because the Tygodnik Powszechny was available for such a purpose. But as for comment, the priest says: "the comment I had written for the editorial board was the object of much deliberation for all Cracow bishops. They debated, struck out this or that, and so on. The result: the commentary was perfectly obscure and intricate" (101). The solutions adopted at Geneva were still difficult to accept for the Polish Church.

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[35] One should be mindful that the French proposed "to found, in the vicinity of the camp, an institution of dual character, both religious and secular . . . a centre of culture, prayer and a meeting place for different religions. So that it would serve Jews and Christian. Next to it . . ., on the same grounds, but of course fenced off, there will be a convent living a life of its own.

[36] Both meetings "were held in a magnificent Rothschild palace on Lake Geneva" (96).

There was one catastrophic point in the Geneva agreement, i.e. the obligation of the Polish side to carry out the agreed changes within two years. In the realities of Poland as it was then this was completely unfeasible, even given everyone's best intentions. The point is, however, that in Poland at that time there was no intention to fulfil this agreement.

Let us leave out the presentation of the entire set of jurisdiction intricacies of the Church related to the foundation of the convent and its transfer. The most important consideration was that everyone – the Oświęcim Carmelite nuns with their superiors, and the superiors of the superiors, as well as an overwhelming majority of the clergy, together with the Catholic laity – everyone was convinced that they should not be moved, that they "should preserve and defend the Christian faith" (103). After all, "this is Poland, this is where Christians have died, this is our land, and it is up to us to decide . . ." (104).

This is how the notorious and embarrassing "struggle" began. What is even worse, it was an embarrassment for Poland and the Catholic Church in the eyes of the entire world. Suffice it to recall the provocative behaviour of Rabbi Weiss from New York in Oświęcim,[37] or to put it mildly, the rather rash words, with some anti-Semitic overtones, spoken at Jasna Góra by the Primate.[38] Finally, the climax of all this "struggle" came: a cross was put up in the gravel heap known as the "papal Cross", which was a clear breach of the Geneva agreement. Father Stanisław published a harsh text, "Prawda o oświęcimskim krzyżu" (The Truth about the Oświęcim Cross),[39] which led to an equally sharp reprimand and, in a way, punishment.[40]

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About the same time, when "the conflict surrounding the Carmelite convent intensified . . . I realized that the Jews were right" (111). About the same time, i.e. about 1988,[41] our hero "rediscovers" the Jewish world expelled (repressed) from memory, rediscovers the truth of those events, which the Jews call the Shoah.

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[37] Father Musiał calls it "an ordinary unfriendly provocation" (105).

[38] On 26 August 1989, i.e. on the feast of Our Lady of Częstochowa, a national and religious holiday, the Primate, standing on the Wały Jasnogórskie, addressed "Dear Jews": "Your power lies in the mass media, which are at your disposal in a number of countries. They should not promulgate anti-Polonism." Quoted in B. Lacomte, *Pasterz* (Cracow; 2006), 583. One should bear in mind that in 1986 the Polish Pope addressed Jews in a synagogue in Rome differently and said something else, *cf*. note 30.

[39] Published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* of 22 April 1998.

[40] The Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, published a special statement regarding the crosses (apart from the cross that was called "papal", others were put up next to it), which reads: "Father Musiał, a journalist of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, supports the Jewish opinion. This matter must be resolved, but on the condition that those who serve a unilateral solution like Father Musiał do not exacerbate [the situation] with apodictic judgements" (Życie No 184, 7 August 1988). The leadership of Father Musiał's order was forbidden to write on the cross-related controversy and similar matters. He did not obey.

[41] This book gives the turning point date as spring of 1989 (see 111). But Father Musiał did not look at the conversations with him in person. His interlocutors met him for the last time and talked

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Before we look at the "rediscovered" world of Father Musiał, showing precisely the reasons behind this rediscovery (as I promised in the beginning), let me propose that we take a look at the three cardinals from Western Europe, who were one arm of the "competence triangle". They had not been chosen by accident, and it was not true – as Father Musiał had suggested – that Cardinal Lustiger was behind all this and chose whomever he pleased. And then it was all simple: the Jews put pressure on Lustiger and Lustiger on the rest. That was not the case.

Primarily all three cardinals took part in the Geneva negotiations with the knowledge of the Holy See (see 94), and there seem to be many indications that it was with the blessing of John Paul II. Thus Cardinal Godfried Danneels took part in the negotiations not because "the pressure of an influential group of Brussels Jews played an important part" (94). The cardinal by no means represented influential Brussels Jews, he was simply the archbishop of Brussels-Mechelen and chairman of the Episcopate of Belgium. And because the entire problem "was conceived" in Belgium, a representative of the Belgian Catholic Church should have been present. An even more important and, to an extent, "source" figure among the three cardinals was, obviously, Cardinal Lustiger. But he did not select Cardinal Albert Decourtray, because as regards Jewish issues, in the French Catholic Church, one could say that precisely the opposite was the case: the former, archbishop of Lyon, Primate Galii and a central figure of the French Catholic Church, chose Cardinal Lustiger to take part in the Christian-Jewish dialogue. In any case, the latter went on a visit to Poland for the first time in 1983, and it was a painful trip to Birkenau. He was accompanied in Birkenau by Bernard Dupuy, a Dominican monk, and, precisely, Cardinal Decourtray. Let us quote a journalist who witnessed the event: "I saw the cardinal in a black cassock . . . plodding towards the grimy barracks. In one of them – which one? – his mother's life ended . . . . Suddenly we saw the Cardinal drop on his knees in front of a barrack and sink in prayer, in a long shocking meditation. After a long . . . while I saw him slowly returning from this terrible . . . pilgrimage. His face was ash-grey, deformed with pain: a son wept over his mother, a Jew wept over his brothers, a Christian experienced the horror of the Holocaust. He wept, no doubt."[42] When both cardinals (Decourtray and Lustiger) returned to Paris, they published a statement; this is a fragment important for us: "On Polish soil, in the heart of Europe, lies Oświęcim. We had gone there with the intention of sorrow, penitence, begging for God's help and justice. . . . In that place, where so many sons and daughters of the Jewish people had been led to the Holocaust, the same people that received the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', *we could mediate only on our responsibility*. In that place, where forever the ashes of the victims mixed with the soil and remembrance of the nation, where the earth cries at the insult done to it, **one can only remain silent** [emphasis – R. J. W.-W.]."[43]

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with him briefly in December 2004. But his attitude towards the cross in the gravel heap clearly shows that he was already "transformed".

[42] R. Serron, *Lustiger, kardynał. Żyd, syn imigranta* (Cracow: 2002), 27.

[43] *Ibid.*, 28.

I have no doubts that the presence of both cardinals at the site of Birkenau and their statement, quoted above, were known to the Polish pope. It is difficult, for a cardinal, to visit Oświęcim without paying a visit to Cardinal Macharski in Cracow. Thus the three cardinals who took part in the Geneva negotiations were no intruders, meddling in Polish affairs. To the contrary, these eminent representatives of the Catholic Church of Western Europe had something important to offer the Catholic Church in Poland, primarily, *humility towards the victims*, *particularly the Jewish victims*. Thus their presence as sides in the debate, which this book discusses at length was certainly not accidental. Let me reiterate: it must have been approved by the Vatican, and it is very likely that it had the consent (and blessing) of John Paul II himself.

Naturally, among the three cardinals one cannot overestimate the contribution of existential experience of the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger. One cannot overlook either the fact that the official representative of the Pope, then John Paul II, at the 60th anniversary of the liberation of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau was none of the two hundred former prisoners who had concelebrated his mass in 1979. The representative of the Polish Pope was in fact the son of a Jewish mother, murdered at Birkenau, Cardinal Lustiger. The Pope himself wrote a special address for this occasion. He referred to the plaque in Hebrew, "no one can ignore", and added: "I repeat these words today. No one can be indifferent towards the tragedy of the Shoah. This attempt at a planned extermination of an entire people casts a shadow upon Europe and the entire world; it is a crime that has forever blemished the history of humanity. May it at least be a warning today and in the future; one should not submit to ideologies which justify the humiliation of human beings on the grounds of race, colour, language or religion."[44] Let me only add that this *shadow* over Europe and the entire world, that this *crime* that has forever blemished the history of humanity, are also a challenge for the Church in Europe and all over the world, hence for the Polish Church as well.

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Let us return, as we approach our conclusion, to the book and our hero. I promised in the beginning that I would answer what happened that made our hero find, or more precisely, what brought back his memories of the Jew during the war, dragged by horses and murdered. I will have to disappoint those who expect a profound meditation or theoretical reflection; nothing like that was the case with our hero. Perhaps that is why when asked about arguments used during the meetings with Jews, Father Musiał replies: "actually arguments changed no-one, on either side . . . " (95).

In 1988, Father Musiał, then 61 years old, when asked why he became interested in Christian-Jewish dialogue, replied: "This is very odd. **Conversion** [emphasis – R. J. W. -W.]. And the odds were against that . . . I had been brought up in an atmosphere of primitive anti-Semitism of southern Poland, and even during the twenty

[44] Quoted in *Gazeta Wyborcza* of 28 January 2005.

years I spent abroad I wasn't interested in this matter.[45] If was only after I had returned that I began to read about the suffering of Jews during the war. It was a very profound experience. Imagine the life of a Jew, constantly hunted, his fear of every slightest noise, which could mean that this time they are coming for him. I read a story about the liquidation of a children's home in the Ukraine. Children were hoarded into one room, with the oldest of them being seven years old, and they had to be liquidated. One by one came groups of Nazis but they didn't have the stomach to do it. And finally somebody. . . . This was a shock for me and I told myself that if my life were to have such an effect that at least two or three people would turn away from hatred, from primitive anti-Semitism, then my life would make sense."[46]

That time, after his return, i.e. from late 1985, marked another stage in our hero's life. This was a time of refreshed memory, stimulated by the important events related to the Polish-Jewish controversy regarding the siting of the convent. What turned out to be the most important? The memory of that Jew from the days of the war, the one who had been hunted down and dragged by a horse. The reading evoked the memory of a child – he himself – who touched a Nazi's heart, but it brought back memories and stirred the imagination with the image of Jewish children from the liquidated children's home in the Ukraine. Indeed, "memory–recollection" can be repressed, but not completely erased from memory, cut out like a frame from a film. This cannot be done with the human psyche.[47]

But to return to Father Musiał's attitude around 1988 – what changed in this attitude with regard to Jews? This is his answer: "Then I understood that the Jews are right. Not only in the religious dimension, that this is a Shoah cemetery,[48] although this is obviously true. But they are also right in the sense that we, the Church, cannot falsify recent history. We were not there when the Shoah was taking place. I mean the institutional Church, the Pope, the bishops, not the thousands of the lower clergy, who saved Jews risking their lives. The truth is that we, as an institution, were not interested in the fate of these people. But it is not important whether they were Christians or not" (111).

These are very strong words, from the depth of a righteous heart, and it seems they are spoken "on the same wavelength" as the already quoted fragment of the statement by Cardinals Decourtray and Lustiger. Furthermore, this is the same "wavelength" we find in John Paul II's address, written on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. These words explain why the Carmelite convent had to be removed from the site of the death camp. The Jews who died there, I daresay, including the dying Edith Stein (a Carmelite nun), all of them died alone. That is why this void, the tragedy of the Shoah, cannot be filled today by any sanctuaries, churches or convents. "This truth," says our hero, "must remain naked." As it was.

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[45] I called this entire period the stage of disinterest in the Jewish issue.

[46] "Uzdrowi nas Europa", Agnieszka Niezgoda interviews Father Stanisław Musiał, SJ, in: Father S. Musiał, *op. cit*., (Cracow, 2003), 14.

[47] *Cf*. note 20.

[48] The reference here is, obviously, to the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

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It seems, therefore, that the attitude of the "rebellious priest" has been demonstrated. What separated the "rebellious priest" from those who called him so? Primarily, the conception of dialogue. Catholic-Jewish dialogue should not be embroiled in any national issues. The Polish Catholic Church should live by the Word of God, not by any nationalist ideologies. The Polish nation is to become increasingly Christian, not Christianity, even less so the Catholic Church [increasingly] national. Christianity (the Catholic Church) is by nature international.

A certain epilogue to issues discussed in *Duchowny niepokorny* (The Rebellious Priest) was the presence of Benedict XVI at the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 28 May 2006. This time, the site of the Nazi camp was visited by the German Pope, which added solemnity to the occasion. Let us note that the Pope visited all the important sites: the gate with the words "Arbeit macht frei", the Block of Death, where he met some of the former prisoners. Then he visited the Centre for Prayer and Dialogue, with Christians, Jews, Poles and Germans; also in attendance were the Carmelite nuns from the beautiful nearby convent, where they had moved upon the explicit request of Pope John Paul II of 1993. From there, the Pope went to the fields of Birkenau, where in his speech he pointed out that Israel, "by its very existence is a testimony of God, who had spoken to man and took him in his care." Those gathered in the fields of Birkenau heard the paralysing words of Psalm 22: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*? Was it the voice of forsaken Israel or dying Christ?

For Christians, Golgotha, dying Christ, embraces all execution sites, including the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau, but this does not exempt Christians from guilt for evil done in the past, and it does not free them from the responsibility to prevent similar crimes in the future.[49]

[49] That is why the Pope, Benedict XVI, did not visit the cross, known as "the papal cross". Perhaps it would be shameful to mention it all. That is why I refer to this in the footnote.