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What I Owe to Interreligious Dialogue and Christianity

There are levels of existence where Jews and Christians meet as sons and brothers. (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

What do I *as* a Jew owe to interreligious dialogue and Christianity? I am aware that the question formulated this way may sound bizarre to many people. I have participated in interreligious dialogue for a long time and heard, for just as long, that such a dialogue is pointless. The critics point out that the worst crimes have been committed in the name of a religion, because each religion assumes it possesses the truth, and therefore the other religions are wrong. Since it is impossible to prove who is right, what is the point of any dialogue? Moreover, say the critics, if something interesting or useful can be obtained from religious people, it is because they are human beings, not religious human beings.

Also my mentioning that *as* a Jew I may be grateful to Christians for something often surprises Jews. Although they would agree that there are admirable Christians, it is doubtful if such individuals owe their worthiness to 'being Christian'. Perhaps they owe that to their talents, diligence, or culture. There are so many interesting issues, so why focus just on their religion, which used to be powerful, but now is in decline, much as *are* other religions? Christianity does not know how to come to terms with modern times: it wants to continue to rule but people find it increasingly irrelevant.

There are many relevant observations in such critical remarks. Nevertheless, I do not agree with their argument. Dialogue and Christianity have a profound significance for me. Besides, I think that both are meaningful and valuable for Jews *as* a group.

Below, I voice my own feelings and opinions. I do not represent Jewish Orthodoxy, whether along the lines of the Shulhan Arukh, or along any other lines, or Reform Judaism, or Modern Judaism, or even Dialoguing Jews, or any other organization, whether Jewish or dialogical. Nonetheless, I hope that my feelings are not far removed from those of many other people.

I would like my remarks on dialogue and Christianity to be understood as an expression of my gratitude. Gratitude is a fundamental feeling, but rarely do we reflect on it. That is a pity because I think it is worth being aware of what we owe to others. The feeling of gratitude is something positive; it seems to me that it is beneficial to one's mental health, and perhaps equally beneficial to one's physical health. Undoubtedly, it is highly advantageous to social health. It is also good for what I would call spiritual health. Of course, to achieve such results, the feeling of gratitude has to be sincere. It cannot be feigned or imposed because, were that the case, it would certainly be detrimental to one's health.

I owe a lot to various people: teachers, scholars, writers, artists, and leaders, both past and present, of whom many were Jews, but equally many, Christians. Among the latter, some were zealous; others owed their 'being Christian' only to their upbringing. To be sure, my gratitude was often unconnected to their faith. (The above-mentioned critics score a point here.) After all, we all live in a Christian civilization: the creators of our world and the authors of what is the best, and also the worst, in it are mostly Christians. So, it is not surprising that many persons to whom I am grateful were or are Christians. A more interesting and appropriate question is whether I *as* a Jew owe something essential to Christians *as* Christians and to Christianity *as* a religion.

Indeed, I do. And, in addition, I owe something to my involvement in interreligious dialogue which, in the Polish context, essentially means Jewish-Christian dialogue. Most of all, I can

be grateful that thanks to my participation in that dialogue I have reflected, indeed, had to reflect, on my own spirituality, on what was important for me in my Jewish heritage. Besides, I have felt the need to define what interreligious dialogue consists in and what it is about.

Many misunderstandings exist concerning interfaith dialogue. I think that people who doubt its value do not understand deeply enough what an authentic, or what I call deep, dialogue can be. In this essay, I propose to consider possible outcomes and objectives of interfaith dialogue. I will give examples of what I consider dialogue by referring to Christianity, my relation to that faith, and the gratitude I have come to feel as a result my contacts with Christians. (Some fragments from my previous publications have been adapted for this essay; essays that appeared in English are listed below.)

1. Should One Win?

The term "dialogue" generally refers to encounters in which participants converse rather than ignore, boycott, fight, or kill each other. The very act of discussion should then be considered positive. It is enough to think of any war, or, for that matter, of the present situation between Israel and the Palestinians, which continues to deteriorate. But not all verbal interactions are equal. If each and every exchange of information, discussion, debate or negotiation is regarded as dialogue, we miss something vital. It is because we use the term "dialogue" even when words are used as weapons, or when one's aim is to continue a struggle, beat the opponent, or discredit, even destroy, him or her. Words can kill after all. Verbal struggle has broken out more than once during meetings between representatives of various religions. If this is "dialogue," it is hard not to ask: What is it for? In such a situation, perhaps it is preferable not to meet at all, or to meet and discuss only neutral topics.

I argue that it is difficult to speak of serious dialogue if one party's presupposed aim in an interfaith meeting is to win. The winning strategies include discrediting or showing the mendacity of the other religion, demonstrating the incompatibility of its proclaimed ideals with the practice of its followers, or indicating other failings. In genuine dialogue, as opposed to debate, such objectives should be avoided. Let me emphasize that it is definitely possible to meet representatives of another religion without the intention of overwhelming them.

However, let's not be naïve: confrontation is often unavoidable. It may arise, for example, from the need to show the merits of our own religion. This impulse is perfectly natural, but it is only a step away from the desire to demonstrate our religion's superiority. Perhaps such a temptation cannot be completely overcome. If so, the critics may be justified in their claims that interreligious dialogue leads to boasting and attempts to dominate. However, even if one's desire to win is not entirely eliminated, it may sometimes be suspended, at least temporarily. It is enough to adopt an appropriate attitude: I come to my partners with good will, assuming that their religion is precious to them, and as a result I also must acknowledge its value.

Once I choose to compare our religions, I have to do so fairly. Comparing my achievements to the weaknesses of my counterparts, or my ideals to their bad behavior amounts to a denial of fair dialogue. In dialogue, the best in my religion should be compared to what is the best in the other religion: ideals to ideals, practice to practice. Generally speaking, I should demonstrate openness and respect. Adopting a correct attitude is key. To be sure, knowledge and faith are indispensable, but it is one's attitude that defines the nature of encounter. We can best express the proper attitude by showing gratitude for what is valuable in the other religion.

Example: Radical Teaching

Can I say that it is the Christians to whom we owe Jesus? In a certain sense, we do not owe Jesus to Christians because he emerged from the soil of Jewish life. In another sense, we do because, without Christianity, Jesus would not be the figure we all know. Everything we know about him comes from Christian writings. When I am talking about the central figure of Christianity, the supernatural person of the Christian narrative, Christ as a person of the Trinity, he is not a figure that appeals to me. Yet I find his teachings – or what we learn from the New Testament – quite fascinating. The admonition to love one's enemy is an important idea for me. Rooted in earlier traditions, this principle was elaborated and radicalized in the Christian message. The whole idea of non-violent resistance, which I find inspiring, is a Christian value, although I sense a Jewish undertone. Even so and even though Jews have probably behaved in that spirit more often than others in the Western world, and the Hindu *satyagraha* is particularly close to the concept, I nevertheless owe this idea first and foremost to Christianity.

The strongest expression of the teaching of non-violence consists in the idea of turning the other cheek. Of course, that idea is so radical that hardly anyone puts it into practice. (I cannot help reminding the Jewish maxim: "Christianity is the religion that teaches that Jews should turn the other cheek.") Radicalism is the most important message of the Gospel for me. That is not so apparent in everyday real life Christianity. Essentially, evangelical extremism reflects the views of people facing the imminent end of the world, disappearance of the normal world as we know it. In such a situation neither riches, nor power, nor any earthly advantages count. Obviously, almost no one around us lives according to such radicalism. Of the people I have met, perhaps Father Stanisław Musiał is one rare example. He was unable to rest until he gave away all his pocket money. Jacek Kuroń was another person I knew who naturally and earnestly adhered to radicalism in a certain evangelical sense. He was ready to say, for instance, that no one should ever be punished. Such an extreme view can be readily understood from the perspective of a messianic fulfillment: in the face of the approaching end of the world, even justice ceases to have any significance.

Uplifting of the meek is in tune with such radicalism. Of course, the Torah prescribes to care for the poor, the weak, and the socially disadvantaged, frequently admonishing to help "the poor, the orphans, and the widows." Nevertheless, a particular glorification of poverty is present in Christianity. While one can easily set this against the profusion of wealthy churches and mock the dissonance between theory and practice, I prefer another approach. After all, side by side with the wealth there exist religious orders called "mendicant orders" (according to friend who is a monk, even God does not know what they live on), and this is equally worthy of notice. The fact that the Pope washes the feet of ordinary people once a year is even more significant to me. I admire this and I am grateful for such impractical radicalism, still present in established Christianity. I even admire the coexistence in the churches of this radicalism together with its counterbalance: the moderate, sensible, institutionalized, and permanent way of life.

It is worth emphasizing that my interest in the person of Jesus and in some of his teachings is not equivalent to my approval of the movement of so-called "Messianic Jews." These are essentially Christians who want to retain elements of Jewish tradition. Above all, however, they want to convert Jews, which proves that they misunderstand Judaism. The question of conversion by dialogue, that is, by a wrongly understood interreligious dialogue, requires separate discussion.

Problem: Conversion

The aspiration to convert the other partner is the most characteristic aspect of interreligious dialogue undertaken with the intention to win. Such a victory has historically been the aim of much interreligious discussion, and many suspect that, in some form, it still is today. One who

holds that dialogue is intended to attain conversion and rejects this intention is forced to reject dialogue. But conversion is not the aim of properly conceived dialogue. Abandoning proselytizing in dialogue is not caused by weakness of one's faith or an institutional weakness of one's religion or simple acceptance of diversity in our world. Rather, authentic dialogue presupposes respect for one's partner, including his or her faith. Any kind of mission intended to convert, therefore, must be categorically rejected.

This rejection is easy for Jews because proselytizing has not been a tenet for Judaism for a very long time. It is much more difficult for representatives of proselytizing religions such as Christianity to give up the idea of converting others. Such rejection may be regarded as surrender. Nevertheless, the experience of interfaith encounters is clear: the intention to convert, even if concealed or subliminal, destroys trust vital for true dialogue. Although at present the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant churches do not attempt to convert Jews, the problem persists: it is still easy to encounter expectations that Jewish partners should overcome their blindness toward what is most important in the Christian faith.

Despite my gratitude to Christianity, I must mention the very long Christian belief that Jews should become Christians. They are allegedly missing something fundamental: God spurned them, and the Church is now the true Israel. In other words, whether they know it or not, Jews should be grateful to Christians for the most important insight into faith. It should be obvious that I reject such views entirely. Judaism has sufficient resources within itself to develop all dimensions of its faith and provide access to what is most important: a touch of transcendence, the dimension of eternity. That is why I do not need Christianity. But that does not mean that I do not owe anything to Christianity. Firstly, one can and should learn from everyone – and indeed, in particular, from Christians. Secondly, I can see in Christians not only our brothers and sisters, but also our partners and allies.

Allies

Father Tomas Halik quoted a Jew with whom I agree entirely: "Christians are not only the friends of Jews, they are the only friends of Jews." Easy to misunderstand, this statement is about an attitude towards Jews as Jews, and not simply as human beings. Friendship is understood here as something reaching beyond purely human relations. The point is that Christians can understand, and in any case respect, the mystery of Israel. And I am convinced that we can respect the mystery of the Church. We can be allies. This is possible despite the many dark pages of our history and despite the threat, visible in some churches, that Jews are not accepted as Jews. Alliance is possible, and so is friendship. The longer I am involved in Jewish-Christian relations, the more I am convinced of this principle, despite evidence to the contrary.

The source of this potential for alliance is clear: Christianity grows out of Judaism and the ancient history of Israel. (As Father Michał Czajkowski used to say, humans descended from monkeys and Christians from Jews.) Christianity needs to refer to the Jews, not the other way around. Although Jews do not have to refer to Christianity, the Christian focus on the Jews is a fundamental and extremely important reason to feel related to them and, indeed, to appreciate them.

I am aware that for many Jews there is something uncomfortable, even threatening, in being defined by Christians solely by religion. Personally, I am not far from that position: I believe that for all the complexities of Jewish identity Jews indeed are defined ultimately in terms of the Jewish religion. (Again, I allow myself to quote Father Michał Czajkowski: "The Jews are a people in the ecclesial sense.") At the same time, I do not accept the practice of singling out only one aspect of Jewish identity. It is especially distasteful when someone creates an image of the Jews to serve one's own purposes. And this is common. To bolster an attitude of either approval or hatred, one can represent Jews as the most religious or the most atheistic, the most

conservative or the most revolutionary, the most spiritual or the most materialistic, and so on. One can always find examples and put forward arguments supporting a particular viewpoint.

Despite reservations regarding instrumental uses of the Jews, the fact remains that Christian self-definition refers to the Jews, and the Hebrew Bible is acknowledged as the Holy Scriptures. As a result, churches have disseminated biblical history and ideas throughout the world: monotheism, absolute transcendence, the last judgment, the Messiah, sanctity of life, aspiration to sainthood, commandments, supremacy of justice, the world as created, the revelation recorded in the Scriptures, salvation, and the existence of an aim of history.

Briefly, it is thanks to Christianity that nearly all peoples on earth have heard that the true God is none other than the God of Israel. In Poland and the Western world, even non-believers and those who mock religion are brought up with some knowledge of the biblical tradition. When we want to explain the word 'God', we refer to the Jewish Holy Scriptures, disseminated widely thanks to Christianity, and not to stories about the gods at Mount Olympus.

For these reasons, Christians are the distinguished partners of Jews, not simply tied to them by the brotherhood of the sons of Adam and descendants of Noah. That is at least a potential partnership, although for some Jews (including myself), this partnership is real even now. We know how deep is the respect for Judaism and the appreciation for Jewish presence among our Christian friends. At the same time, there are Jewish thinkers who try to define Christians as members of an "extended" Israel. As Michael Wyschogrod says: in the house of Israel, ordinary membership is reserved for the Jews, while Christians are associate members.

2. To Compromise or Agree?

It is possible to imagine the aim of interreligious dialogue as the path to reach an agreement, compromise, or consensus; to achieve a common position rather than to win. This would be a matter – as many people believe – of finding the common denominator of the two religions, or of agreeing to common truths. I once witnessed an elderly gentleman at a conference who stood up and said with good will: "Let the leaders of various religions meet and finally agree on how things are." Some may add that the aim of dialogue is to reach a compromise on dogma, or at least on a formulation of the dogmas of one's own religion that would be acceptable for the other party. Such a purported aim of dialogue leads to understandable objections: Why conduct dialogue, if it is not possible to encompass what is most important to me in the common denominator or in the formulations satisfactory for my partner? Such a dialogue would constitute a betrayal of my religion or, at the very least, a shallow simplification. The conclusion is clear: such dialogue is worse than no dialogue. It is even more obvious that we should reject as inauthentic meetings aimed at creating a common religion or inventing a new one.

It is also unacceptable to define the other religion by using terms alien to it. That would reduce a religion to the general terms of a science of religion, or else to another religion and its understanding of faith. This approach amounts to intellectual domination and an attempt to overcome the partner's religion, rather than dialogue. To avoid that, we should adopt the following recommendation: in interreligious dialogue, allow your partners to define themselves. Only they know what is most important. The rule seems obvious, but it is not often encountered in interreligious encounters because participants often begin by assuming they know whom they are dealing with. What is needed is listening without preconceived notions.

At the same time, while serious dialogue should not aim towards a common religion, whether syncretic or new, finding common elements is quite natural. An attempt at understanding the other religion, using my own terms, may be valuable provided that we remember applicable restrictions.

To give a personal example, I learned to formulate in Jewish terms certain descriptions of Jesus important for Christianity, such as Jesus of Nazareth being "truth, way, and life." While I had understood this as a general metaphor – for Christians Jesus revealed the truth, showed the way, and one could find eternal life through belief in him – the evangelical phrase had sounded awkward. This changed when I realized that the phrase can be applied to the Torah, that is, the Pentateuch and the tradition based on it. Indeed, in Judaism Torah is obviously and naturally the "truth, way, and life." I thus perceived Jesus as a functional equivalent of the Torah. My use of the term 'functional equivalent' refers to the function that the person of Jesus performs in the structure of Christianity. I compare his role in Christianity to the role of the Torah in Judaism. To be sure, I do not claim that this conceptualization exhausts the role of Jesus in Christian religion, or even that it is acceptable to Christians.

My example demonstrates both advantages of such an approach, namely the increase of understanding of the formulations found in a different religion, and its disadvantages, namely its limitations: it makes sense only to those who grasp the religious language in which the interpretation is formulated. Such interpretations must be combined with an awareness of their limitations. We do not need, however, to reject them.

The above example shows an unexpected dimension of understanding. It can also be a source of debate. Namely, if we placed ourselves within the dispute that undoubtedly appeared among Jews in the first decades or even centuries of the Common Era, we would feel how those Jews had to choose whether to agree with such a perception of Jesus, or to reject it as a blasphemy. Now, the question is whether we must make this choice *today*. My answer is, No. It was a situation of choice then, when Christianity was slowly being created among Jews. This choice is not relevant today. Christianity has been a separate and "non-Jewish" religion for centuries. For this reason, the ancient conflict can be considered a historical question, not one that concerns us today. I can easily analyze the figure of Jesus by comparing his role according to Christians to that of the Torah because the issue does not concern me directly. The vast majority of Jews would say the same: we do not need to see the Christian innovation as a proposal for us. What is more, many Christians would agree, although at least as many would disagree. Those who get seriously involved in interreligious dialogue and understand what it is about, accept the value of a separate Jewish religious way. This is a reason to feel grateful.

Example: Universalism

My example of Jesus understood as an equivalent of the Torah does not necessarily suggest a direct reason to feel grateful to Christianity from a Jewish point of view. However, it is possible to do so naturally from a different perspective. One may certainly say that Christianity universalized Judaism, or rather Jewish insights. While there is a universal dimension in the Jewish religion, it has not always been visible. There are also Jews who marginalize that dimension and prefer to isolate themselves within the Jewish community and turn their backs on the world. In any case, Christianity (and later Islam) has been preached to everyone. This universalism is precious, even though it is inseparable from its own problems: conversion means reshaping someone after our model, which has led to the spread of Christianity (and Islam) by sword.

The question arises: Do I owe to Christianity my belief in universalism, in what is valuable in it? Maybe indirectly I do. However, far from being an exception among contemporary Polish

Jews of my generation, I have acquired this belief through the communist tradition. This statement may sound surprising to many Poles, but despite the deceit and criminal consequences that this ideology has come to represent, it was founded on authentic values, including universalism and the brotherhood of humanity.

Communism is probably closer to Christianity than to Judaism. Rather than attempting to prove this thesis in detail let me illustrate it with an anecdote from a Warsaw synagogue, where decades ago I used to regularly meet an elderly tall man, Mr. Józef Edelsztajn. He had received a traditional Jewish religious education, and long before World War II became a communist. He regarded me highly because he remembered the rallies of the 1920's addressed by my great grandfather Adolf Warski, a member of the Polish Parliament who represented the communists. One day, Mr. Edelsztajn told me: "I am a Jew and a communist, just like Jesus." I remember that moment well. His tone and look indicated that he knew how unusual was his statement. I smiled with appreciation, but regrettably I did not pursue the conversation.

The Righteous

This is a good moment to revisit a widely discussed historical issue in Poland: the idea that the people who helped Jews survive during World War II were usually Christian, and thus their deeds should be treated as an important contribution of the charitable role of Christianity towards the Jews. This is not so simple, however. Let us not forget that many of those who helped Jews were themselves Jews. This fact is essential when we describe Żegota, the highly regarded department of the Polish underground state that was dedicated to helping Jews and that cooperated with Jewish organizations. Leaving that point aside, let me ask: To what degree was the Christianity of those Christians essential? Can one say that we owe that righteousness to Christianity? I am open to such a view, but the reality was rather complex. Christian priests usually did not call their congregations to help the endangered Jews and sometimes even discouraged them from doing so. Some considered such help to be evil and forbade hiding Jews, because "they crucified Jesus." Also, many Gentiles helping Jews kept away from the Church. Political motivations, including belief in the brotherhood of humanity, were often more important for such people, and this was frequently associated with some acceptance of socialism. Of course, one can claim that socialism somehow originated from Christianity, as formulated by Mr. Edelsztajn. Yet in the realm of influences much is highly hypothetical. More conspicuous representatives of Christianity behaved in various ways. Overall, few helped. Those who did help and who were motivated by their faith deserve our gratitude, to mention only the monasteries and convents that accepted Jewish children and sometimes also adults. The French philosopher Levinas repeatedly stated that "Shelter was found wherever a black cassock could be seen," a generalization from his personal experience: French priests sheltered his wife and daughter, who were able to avoid deportation as a result. However, Jews who tried to retrieve Jewish children from monasteries in Poland after the war not infrequently met resistance. And much more should be remembered: there were Church leaders who blessed Hitler, and Fr. Tiso, head of the Slovak state that deported its Jews to Auschwitz, is just one of many examples of cooperation with Nazism.

Is it possible to reach conclusions from that complex story? I think that gratitude to righteous Christians is well justified. One should not neglect their Christian motivations, since some among them stressed the significance of religious motives. The degree, however, of Jewish gratitude owed not just to those Christians but to Christianity as such is still not clear to me. Clearly, there are two streams present in the Christian tradition: one open and motivating to help people, including the Jews, and the other tuned against those who do not subscribe to Christian dogmas, especially against the Jews.

3. Aim: to Get Acquainted with the Other Religion

A possible goal of interreligious dialogue is neither to win nor to find a compromise, but rather primarily to learn: get acquainted with the other religion. The dialogical value of this approach depends on the motivations to learn. Sometimes the motivation is to gain knowledge, the better to despise or fight the other religion. Learning about the partner, even learning for its own sake, is valuable for dialogue only when one is ready to be friendly or at least neutral towards the other religion.

Generally, we believe that the more knowledge one has, the better. However, when it comes to learning about another religion, many hesitate. They suspect that learning may be dangerous, if not to themselves then to their fellow believers, especially those without adequate education and unprepared for a confrontation of beliefs. Such fears should not be minimized. Serious dialogue may sometimes pose a threat. When listening to someone who represents their religion with compelling authenticity, we may doubt the absolute truthfulness of our own. This is a risk when the religious identity of the listener is poor and shallow. Who, after all, can be sure that his identity is strong enough? This is especially true if one is open to the other's religion and the apparent potential of conversion is real. The outstanding dialogue theoretician, Raimundo Panikkar, treats the emergence of such a prospect as a true criterion of fair dialogue. While conversion is not the aim of dialogue for him, he maintains that we should admit its possibility. Fair dialogue means being open and thus ready to accept, at least temporarily, the truth represented by the other religion. Such an option may scare many people, especially, as we said, those unsure of their faith or the faith of their fellow believers. Dialogue, as claimed by the interreligious dialogue prophet, Abraham Joshua Heschel, is not meant for the spiritually immature.

Although conversions do happen, I have experienced the opposite, as have others deeply involved in interreligious dialogue. Such encounters deepen not only knowledge of the other but also of our own religion, and strengthen our faith, as well. Dialogue allows for a more conscious and mature relation to our own beliefs. Moreover, deepening our knowledge of other religions enriches us, provides a fresh perspective, and can reveal or emphasize forgotten elements of our own tradition. This consequence of appreciating the beauty of the other has been called "holy envy" by Krister Stendhal, an outstanding participant and commentator of interreligious dialogue. Let me provide two examples.

Universities

The institution of the university is distinguished among the inventions of Christianity that are important for the world and for me personally. They were first established basically as monasteries, with monks as the scholars; this heritage is still evident in the grand chapels at the center of Oxford and Cambridge colleges. Universities became lay schools in the centuries that followed as a result of secularization, a process that also shaped European art, which owes much to Christianity as well. Needless to say, I am glad that we as university professors no longer depend on ecclesiastical authorities. Still, the fact remains that we owe universities to Christianity.

Denominational universities and schools continue to exist. Such schools have to meet both academic criteria and denominational principles. They also depend on church authorities and financing. This double belonging has obvious negative consequences for the freedom of critical debate essential for research. Yet there is another side of the coin: a purely secular approach also poses certain limitations, specifically concerning religious studies. A secular approach begins with assumptions that make it virtually impossible to understand a religion's

uniqueness. Psychological, anthropological, sociological, or philosophical analyses of religions may be highly interesting but in some respects remain superficial. A denominational approach, intentionally going beyond the secular, will also be biased, but has a better chance of understanding the living phenomenon, not only its corpse. The latter metaphor is inspired by a statement by a creator of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or the scientific study of Judaism, who allegedly said that the goal of that project was to arrange for a "decent burial" of Judaism.

I suggest that we need an interaction of both secular and denominational approaches, or a cooperation of Christian, Jewish, and other scholars to carry out research on religious topics and on issues involving a religious dimension. (And what in the humanities is devoid of it?) Consider, for example, the proposition of philosopher Franz Rosenzweig: in addition to Aristotle's *organon*, namely logic, and Francis Bacon's *Novum organum*, namely empirical studies, there is another type of *organon*, namely prayer. While a denominational viewpoint is controversial in academia, I am free to formulate such an idea is thanks to the power of Christian presence in the academic world.

Silence

Academia represents criticism, multiple interpretations, and a world of words. Judaism does too. Even when we remain silent when listening to the public reading of the Torah during the synagogue service, we concentrate on the recited or chanted words, sounds that unite us with the original revelation, in order to continue its presence. When we remain silent during the *Amidah*, standing, we fervently speak words without producing sounds. Silence without words is, in my opinion, inadequately represented in the Jewish tradition. I am grateful, therefore, to the Christian monastic traditions that do cultivate silence. Probably silence sounds even stronger – I mean, weaker – in the East. Yet, while many in the West seek silence in Buddhism and other Asian denominations, in our world, subjected more and more to noise, it is primarily Christianity that tries to perpetuate silence. My own experience of silence is due to the Swiss Protestant Grandchamps Convent near Lake Neuchatel. Associated with the famous monastery in Taizé, the convent receives all guests, including non-Christians. The silence during meals and silence as a constitutive part of collective liturgy and community experience was unforgettable lesson for me.

4. Deep Dialogue: Aimless Process

What aims should be sought in interreligious dialogue? Learning, establishment of a common plane, and convincing others about my convictions are all important, but there is more to a genuine dialogue. Namely, there can be dialogue without expectations, with no specific aims. Then no results are expected. By this I mean not only the familiar situations of pretending communication, playing diplomatic games or remaining satisfied with the very fact of being in one room, but also something entirely different – a situation where the other party is not perceived as an enemy, opponent, partner, or even as a source of knowledge, but rather as 'You', the Other One, who deserves my absolute attention. This approach is different from the intention to reinforce commonality, either by learning or compromising or winning, as each of these results implies overcoming otherness. Deep dialogue devoid of expectations provides the opportunity to recognize the otherness of the Other. This dimension has been described by such dialogical philosophers as Martin Buber and Emanuel Levinas. Its essence lies in openness to and even celebration of the other person. With no intention of changing our partner's religious involvement, we can assume an attitude of full affirmation. The idea is that I should treat the other faith with complete dignity, respect, and friendliness, without, of course, forgetting that the other faith is not mine.

The other faith is not mine: this statement is more consequential than would seem at first glance. To illustrate why, let me cite a limitation to the principle of absolute respect when applied to Jewish dialogue with so-called Messianic Jews, that is, with those who consider themselves Jewish, but accept Christian tenets, for example, the divinity of Jesus. It is crucial to me whether they claim to represent Judaism or not. If they perceive themselves as representatives of my religion, I need to enter dispute, rather than dialogue with them. Their position is contrary to my tradition, despite their claim of affiliation. They say they represent *my* faith, not another one. However, if I consider them believers of another religion, a religion other than Judaism, their belief in the divinity of Jesus is not a problem for me. It does not block the deep dialogue.

A historical perspective can clarify the problem. During the time of early Christianity, Jews generally treated Christianity as a sect or heresy rather than as a separate religion. Not any more – Christianity has been a separate religion for a long time. "Messianic Jews," who claim to be part of the Jewish world but consider Jesus as part of my faith – mine, not just theirs – are trying to perpetuate the ancient situation. Their relation to Jesus distorts Judaism and makes conflict unavoidable. "Messianists" are basically Christians. If they identify themselves in that way, fine. If, however, they claim to be Jewish, the dialogue becomes problematic: they perceive, and want me to perceive, my relation to their religion as a relation to my own religion.

Shallow Dialogue

When identifying deep dialogue, we also point to its opposite. Someone involved in shallow dialogue attempts either to overwhelm the opponent by argument or to attain compromise or expand one's knowledge, for example, by adopting a protocol of similarities and differences. Encounters not deserving to be named deep include meetings of diplomatic or of a technical (whatever this means) nature, although such dialogues can be valuable and constructive nevertheless. In addition, when talking about dialogue many of us immediately think of Platonic dialogue. However, these dialogues are one-sided; Socrates always knows best and admonishes others. Such admonition, or rather assistance, similar to the midwife's role, is valuable insofar as it facilitates the understanding of nuances. However, the relationship in such a dialogue is distinctly asymmetrical: one side knows and the other learns. In that sense, dialogue exists, but remains shallow.

One might object to the concept of deep dialogue presented here and claim that it is basically an expression of one party's weakness. Unable to impose one's will or at least present one's case properly, one has no better option than to concentrate on listening to the other party. To explain the misunderstanding, let me refer to a biblical analogy. In Numbers 12:3, Moses is called a very humble man, more so than anyone else on earth. Such a qualification is quite surprising since Moses was able to oppose the pharaoh, lead a large crowd, carry out military campaigns, adjudicate disputes, receive the revelation, and pass it on. It is hard to find a person of higher authority and majesty. Undoubtedly, his personality demonstrated power, control, and self-expression. Emphasis on his modesty, however, reveals the opposite aspect of his personality. Together, both created his greatness. It is the same with dialogue: a desire to win or compromise may exist simultaneously with the attitude of acceptance. Only then can dialogue become something great and noble.

Depth, when no expectations are nurtured, is hard to attain, and if achieved it can hardly last for more than a short period time. Many expectations always exist, often remaining implicit, and they would inevitably surface. They can disappear only at rare moments. However, without such moments, or at least a premonition of their potential, we remain at the level of debate or negotiation. That said, debates can be useful, too. Paraphrasing Kohelet, one can say that there is a time for profound dialogue and a time for shallow ones.

5. Philosophy of Dialogue

In order to understand deep dialogue it is useful to refer to thinkers and religious figures, Christians and Jewish, whose importance, also for me, lies precisely in their reflections on dialogue. Rather than list the names of all those open-minded individuals, some of them still alive, let me mention three significant philosophers: Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel who were Jews, and Raimundo Panikkar who was basically a Catholic. I feel gratitude to these exceptional representatives of their religions, whose influence continues to be felt and grow, at least in the circles that cultivate faith open to other religions.

Martin Buber and the Interhuman

The philosopher of dialogue, Martin Buber, author of the classic *I and Thou*, defined three varieties of communication: monologue disguised as dialogue, technical dialogue meant for objective understanding, and *genuine* dialogue conducted when we "make the other present as a whole and as a unique being." (*The Knowledge of Man*, London 1985) He considers the "interhuman" to be "a separate category of our existence," or even its separate "dimension," which makes dialogic relationship possible. In genuine dialogue we treat our partner as what s/he really is. Even when opposing some views, I still affirm "the person I struggle with." Generally, the idea is to experience the other "as a whole and yet at the same time without reduction or abstraction, in all its concreteness." That "wholeness, unity, and uniqueness" is contrary to modernity, which leads us to see things analytically, reductively, and genetically, in order to find discernible "schematically surveyable and recurrent structures" and destroy the mystery of the interhuman. (That does not mean that science and social science are not needed, but only that they are not fully adequate.) "Man exists anthropologically not in isolation, but in the completeness of the relation between man and man; what humanity is can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity." Genuine dialogue means turning to the partner, focusing on him, and the affirmation of him (although not necessarily approval of his views). Anything can then be expressed. "Everything depends on the legitimacy of 'what I have to say'." Turning to each other in truth, the partners can achieve unexpected fruit. "The interhuman opens out what otherwise remains unopened." One can notice here similarity to the idea of dialogue without assumed aim.

Abraham Joshua Heschel and Depth Theology

In my opinion, Heschel was not only a dialogue practitioner, but also an interreligious dialogue prophet. This is visible, for example, in his 1965 lecture on "No Religion is an Island" (available in *No Religion Is an Island,* ed. by H. Kasimow and B. Sherwin, Orbis Books, New York 1991), quoted below. His other books include *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man*. Heschel is also a pioneer and a spiritual father of the *Dabru Emet* declaration, the most explicit expression of Jewish appreciation of Christianity. (His pioneering role has been extensively justified in my paper "Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Declaration Dabru Emet.")

Heschel introduced so-called Depth Theology, which precedes each dogmatic formulation and even all conceptualizations. It refers directly to religious experience, and is supposed to avoid doctrinal or verbal frameworks. As he says, this experience is to be found not in books, but in the heart. Such an "anti-theological" approach to faith puts various religious traditions on equal footing, although it is disputable whether he refers to all religions, or only to those that recognize the authority of the Bible and its vision of a personal God. In any case, his perspective places Judaism and Christianity on the same level.

Heschel assumes that a person of faith is linked to all the people who strive to realize a "commitment to God." He also recognizes that such attempts inevitably lead to an awareness of "the tragic insufficiency of human faith." This insufficiency is revealed clearly in our inability to express adequately any kind of religious experience. In theology, says Heschel, "there is no truth without humility, no certainty without contrition." Against this background, it is possible to understand his treatment of interreligious dialogue. Its purpose consists in "mutual enrichment and enhancement of respect and appreciation rather than the hope that the person spoken to will prove to be wrong in what he regards as sacred."

The vision of interreligious dialogue revealed in the light of Heschel's Depth Theology seems similar to deep dialogue, discussed above. According to this vision, changing of articles of faith is not to be expected. Respect for one's partner, acceptance of his or her faith, and existential involvement are assumed, but there is no expectation that one must accept the partner's religious beliefs. Although those beliefs are treated with respect it is clear that they constitute only a "temporary" human expression of truths that cannot be adequately expressed in any language, and, therefore, are expressed in various ways that can be mutually contradictory. Such contradictions should be relativized by relating expressions of beliefs to particular traditions, rather than attempt debate, doctrinal discussion, and convincing each other. Although "we honestly and profoundly disagree in matters of creed and dogma … across the chasm we can extend our hands to one another."

Whether or not my approach to interreligious dialogue is similar to that emerging from Depth Theology, Heschel's vision provides unique inspiration for understanding the nature of deep dialogue. As the very act of faith is the topic of Depth Theology, the action of specifically interreligious dialogue would be the topic of "depth dialogue." Adequate description of that action has still not been accomplished.

Raimundo Panikkar and Dialogical Dialogue

Raimundo Panikkar, like Heschel, has been called a prophet of interfaith dialogue and may have been the first theoretician to try to characterize its "depth" quality. Associated with his father's Hindu tradition, Panikkar was a European Catholic who spent his life coming to terms with both traditions. While he had nothing in common with Judaism, he utilized the works of Jewish thinkers, such as Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. He proposed the concept of "dialogical dialogue" (for example, in his well-known book *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 1983, and Paulist Press 1999. I also quote from "The Dialogical Dialogue", in Frank Whaling (ed.) *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies. Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*. T&T Clark, 1984). He devised this type of dialogue primarily to describe desirable meetings of Christians with Hindus or Buddhists, representatives of geographically distant religions that do not have any direct cultural or historical connections, thus lacking a common language. His descriptions are, however, useful and adequate also for related religions such as Judaism and Christianity that possess a common language. Actually, this apparent commonality can be misleading because it as easily connects as divides. Even if religions are close, it is necessary to look at specific "living contexts" to see how the religious terms work for its believers.

Panikkar opposed "dialogical dialogue" to "dialectical dialogue," understood as rational dialogue based on logic (and the principle of non-contradiction), a necessary but only preliminary stage. At the next, dialogical, stage, the approach is to refer "to you and not only to your thought." Dialogical dialogue is not about something. The parties of the encounter "dialogue about themselves: they dialogue themselves." This approach is very similar to the previously mentioned concept of "dialogue without aim," as is Panikkar's emphasis on the idea that dialogical dialogue requires "the will to dialogue," which is the opposite of any desire for domination. Applying this approach and the differentiation between dialectical and

dialogical aspects to interreligious dialogue, he wrote: “With dialectical dialogue, we may discuss religious doctrines once we have clarified the context, but we need dialogical dialogue to discuss beliefs, as those conscious attitudes we have in the face of the ultimate issues of our existence and life.”

Example: Declaration *Dabru Emet*

Deep interreligious dialogue, as described above, is an idealization, given the various expectations that inevitably arise in all real interactions. Expectations should not be neglected. For example, in dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, we refer to our common roots and co-participation in many historical events. Thus, expectations, appraisals, and also misunderstandings, are unavoidable. Probably in all human encounters the possibility of unconditional affirmation without expectations, the attitude of “intended aimlessness,” cannot last. Only this attitude, however, can create the fundamental dialogical relationship that makes the term ‘dialogue’ precious. I consider it highly significant that in contemporary interreligious dialogue this attitude is present, at least sometimes.

From a Jewish perspective, the *Dabru Emet* declaration of 2000 is an example of this approach. This document, signed by more than two hundred Jewish theologians, presents Christianity as at least an ally and partner to dialogue, worthy of genuine respect, despite the burden of history on the two religions. (Extensive remarks on the text can be found in Chapters eleven and twelve of my book *Tajemnica Izraela a tajemnica Kościoła*, Biblioteka “Więzi”, Warszawa 2007.)

This declaration appeals to Jews by stating: “It is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity.” Composed of eight theses, *Dabru Emet*, which means “Speak the Truth” in Hebrew, refers to the truth about positive features of Christianity, indeed, positive from a Jewish perspective. The declaration is fundamentally theological, a rare occurrence in Jewish accounts of Christianity. The first four theses refer to the common sources of the two religions: the same God, Hebrew Bible, common biblical assumption that man is an image of God, and the biblical understanding that the Jews have special rights to the Promised Land, or the Land of Israel. These points focus on commonality despite differences. Expectations play an essential role, so the previously mentioned dimension of aimlessness is lacking. Specific expectations are present also in the subsequent thesis that “Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon,” and the seventh one claiming that friendly relationships with Christians would not lead to assimilation. The last thesis stresses the need for cooperation between Jews, Christians, and other communities of faith for common justice and peace. The most profound thesis, in theological terms, is the sixth one: “the humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world”, as promised in Scripture. It also states that just as Jews know and serve God through the Torah, Christians do the same “through Jesus Christ.” The use of this name in a Jewish document is quite shocking. Clearly, the authors consciously assumed that they should refer to Christianity in a manner with which Christians could identify. While they cannot do so “from the inside,” they respect Christian sensitivity. This fragment of the declaration expresses the most profoundly understood dialoguing approach: our partner is treated most seriously, without paternalism, with no hint that it is we who understand things correctly. The focus is on the otherness, not in order to minimize or suppress it, but to fully respect it.

6. Proper Attitude

As mentioned above, the proper attitude is key to profound “dialogical” interreligious dialogue. Heschel spoke about the need for reverence for other religions, or rather their

proponents. When we treat the faith of our dialogue partner this way, we are ready for self-criticism, especially concerning negative images of the other's tradition within our own. The proper attitude involves also a desire for unconditional mutual support, regardless of theological or historical differences. For Jews participating in Christian-Jewish dialogue, this means wishing Christians to be better Christians. And for Christians, wishing Jews to be better Jews.

One can go even further and say, "How good it is to be together." No wonder these words, taken from the psalm "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," can be treated as the motto of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. Differences and conflicts become irrelevant, at least in a moment of deep dialogue, as does any potential goal or expectation.

Let me notice again that abandoning all particular aims implies that one is not supposed to missionize. Treating my religion as a desirable option for my partner in dialogue, even implicitly, is unacceptable. Even delicate and friendly persuasion to change one's religion cannot be reconciled with the principle of intentionally aimless encounter. Therefore, justification of my previously expressed opposition to the "Messianic" Jews and to the idea that conflicts from the beginning of Christianity are still relevant follows from a profoundly dialogical attitude.

Partnership, a complementary relationship, extends even further than mere dialogue. Stressed by Jewish dialogue advocate Irving Greenberg, the need for partners in religious mission is controversial because its source is a feeling of inadequacy, this being the reason one seeks a complement. Mature religious traditions do not easily risk such a feeling. Rather, they nurture the conviction of their fundamental self-sufficiency, or, to use the language of Christian theology, they include a full set of the means of salvation. Now, when others feel this way about their own religion, our attitude of "theological respect" would lead us to accept their belief. As a result, we can recognize that the world needs both us and them. And moreover, God's need for both us and them.

Higher-Order Aims

When juxtaposing remarks about aimless deep dialogue and the need of a proper attitude, the question arises: Aren't they contradictory? Isn't the call to assume a proper attitude equivalent to formulating an aim of dialogue? In addition, it is impossible to avoid a certain essential expectation: *reciprocity*. Without it, that is, when a partner seeks to convince, win, or find a compromise, or even learn something, which is also a type of gaining control, the most profound trust, a prerequisite of disinterested dialogue, does not emerge. The expectations of reciprocity and of proper attitude are, indeed, essential but they do not do away with the aimlessness. This is because they constitute "meta-expectations," or second-order expectations, which refer to form, or even to atmosphere, rather than to the content of the meeting. In other words, to expect a proper attitude means an expectation with respect to the attitude towards the meeting and the partner, not towards his or her religious views and attitudes.

Although meta-expectation does not concern religion directly, its consequences do influence one's relationship towards the partner's religion. For example, it is a non-confrontational attitude, which is perhaps the same as the lack of intention to attain anything with regard to the other religion. Let me repeat that there is always a host of expectations present in real-life meetings, but I am speaking here about the moments of selflessness, of the approach to "the other present as a whole and as a unique being," when the lack of expectations is felt by all the participants. At this moment, full affirmation also encompasses my partner's faith. This

means the lack of intention to transform or convert my partner. Thus rejection of proselytism is a consequence of the meta-expectation regarding the attitude.

Buber's Approach is Not Sufficient

Buber formulated the concept of dialogue free of intention to achieve a specific aim. Levinas spoke about the appeal of one's face, or ethical relationship being a foundation of properly understood dialogue. The concepts of the two thinkers are visionary, but they are not sufficient: they concern inter-human, rather than specifically interreligious dialogue. The latter requires the treatment of its participants not just as generic humans, but as humans whose faith is a constitutive part of the dialogical relationship. Thus we require an expansion of the description available in the classical philosophy of dialogue, as well as in Levinas's philosophy, in order for a person to be treated not only as a component of the relationship detached from all contexts, but also as someone linked to his or her religion, with all its ramifications.

In order to extend the theory of dialogue, we should consider, I believe, not only "You" [singular], but also "Ye," or "You" [plural], as a fundamental reality. In interreligious dialogue, it is necessary to present the Ye not as a social structure, but rather as an original reality which expresses otherness and in which transcendence is manifested. Religiosity provides a special context here because it contains references to transcendence. Therefore, other avenues through which transcendence enters our lives can naturally be taken into account. Among them there is the way transcendence appears in interreligious dialogue relationships.

This proposal is, I believe, compatible not only with Heschel's depth theology, but also with the source experience of Buber himself, who wrote: "A time of genuine religious conversations is beginning … Only then will genuine common life appear, not that of an identical content of faith, which is alleged to be found in all religions, but that of the situation, of anguish and of expectation."

7. Who Is Conducting Dialogue?

Dialogue occurs basically between individuals. This is a fundamental starting point of any analysis of the phenomenon of dialogue. However, we use the term in situations when it is not persons, but rather certain supra-individual formations that participate, for example, dialogue between trade unions and the government, between two governments, or even between cultures, among others. Persons do the talking, but they treat each other as representatives of certain organizations, groups, or movements. Such formations may have well-defined distinct structures, as do governments or their agencies, or be more casual, as are social movements or, be even more amorphous, as are "cultures." In such situations one deals with a group, formed more or less formally by a situation, interest, or some biological, social, or cultural ties. It is, however, individual persons who meet and talk.

In the case of interreligious dialogue, whom or what do the participants represent? Religions? Then we must define religion, and this seems rather hopeless: there are many proposals and no generally accepted definition. A possible solution would be to say that we do not consider dialogue between religions in general, but dialogue among several definite "great" religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. This would be a comfortable solution, but we could immediately identify other major religions that should not be ignored, for example, Shintoism, Sikhism, Jainism, Bahaism, or Mormonism. Any list is rather arbitrary; nevertheless I do not think that each and every cult deserves to be treated as equal.

Who within a religion has the right to represent it in the context of inter-religious dialogue? In Catholicism, the Pope is the best representative, and then all those authorized by him either directly or indirectly. Neither Protestant churches, nor Judaism, nor Islam, however, have such hierarchies, although each has figures of authority and some local hierarchies. Their leaders often disagree on various religious issues, but this lack of established leadership is not an obstacle to dialogue. Moreover, even if religions have undisputed leaders, it is unclear who can participate in dialogue. Would a Catholic unauthorized by the Pope be declared unsuitable? It is obvious that such a restriction would be destructive. Official authorizations are required when it comes to decide on certain specific matters, but dialogue is something wider, and nobody should be excluded.

The problem with determining whether a dialogue participant represents his religion's leadership arises only if we see religion as an institution. While we should not neglect the institutional aspect, we must not be limited to it. It is not only the dialogue of institutions that we try to describe. The group thanks to which a religion lives exists not only at a given time, but also diachronically through generations. Can one represent former generations? This can hardly be excluded even though no authorization is here possible. The idea might arise to represent former generations by defining the "essence" of a given religion. As with defining a religion, it is very difficult to agree on what belongs to the essence, and even when some agreement is reached it will be hard to decide who can represent this essence in dialogue. Therefore, to reach a practical conclusion let us return to the obvious observation that each dialogue is a dialogue of persons, each of whom represents a specific religious tradition. Tradition is a comprehensive concept, hard to define but encompassing all relevant aspects of religion in its development. We do not have to determine who has the right to determine tradition, or even who or what embodies it best; depending on the context, it can be primarily an institution, or a group of people, or a body of texts.

Interreligious dialogue involves individuals who, through their personal convictions, represent particular religious traditions and are treated as representatives of those traditions by their dialogue partners. Participants need to identify with this tradition and should be familiar with its basic interpretations. This does not mean, however, that whatever had been once established must be accepted. The requirement is that the person should treat his tradition as a field in which his own religious identity, as well as his general identity, are rooted. Certain elements of the tradition are subjected to reinterpretation and modification with time, so modifications are possible. To retain legitimacy in dialogue one has to identify oneself with the tradition on a more profound level. What is indispensable for everyone is the conviction that it is *my own* tradition and that the dialogue partners accept this conviction.

It is instructive to notice that dialogue between philosophers is different. In this situation, if one began to defend one position and then switched to another, nobody would be offended; the discussion can go on. A change of position would be an acceptable, if rare, outcome of the discourse. In the case of interreligious dialogue, however, a change of position creates a serious crisis. Philosopher Norbert Samuelson remarked that the question whether the partner is *really* a believer of a given faith is legitimate at an interreligious meeting, whereas it is not asked in a purely intellectual debate. Interreligious dialogue assumes the integrity of the religious convictions of its participants and mutual recognition of the authenticity of the other's relationship with his or her tradition.

Example: Former Priests

There are publicly known persons in Poland who are former priests. Are they proper partners for interreligious dialogue? To me this is a practical problem. I am not going to mention names as I would have to reveal details of their stories. Suffice it to say that I know some of them and that I like and respect them a lot. And yet no automatic answer can be given to the

question whether I can treat them as representatives of the Christian tradition. Having left the priesthood they remain highly knowledgeable, they have not lost their personal qualities and are probably now even more thoughtful thinkers and more experienced individuals than before. Some of them still define themselves as Christians or Catholics, but I think this is not necessarily enough to consider them appropriate partners. Each case should be considered separately. Thus dialogue participants who have lost their previous status within their religion, which has rendered their representativeness doubtful, pose a problem. I used to recommend a certain book, for instance, in the framework of a class on interreligious dialogue, as an example of official teachings, since the author was a priest holding a prominent position. Since he left the Church, I have felt I could recommend his book only as a supplementary reading.

It is more difficult to imagine an analogous situation among Jewish dialogue partners. Loss of a representative status would most likely happen only in an incidence of conversion. A different problem, however, can arise from lack of knowledge. Serious participation in dialogue requires proper competency. There has been understandable criticism of dialogue meetings involving Jewish activists, representing various institutions, essentially bureaucrats, with little knowledge of Judaism. My feeling is that such persons may still be deeply immersed in or in contact with his tradition. His life experience, in any case, may be valuable, since Jews should be identified as a community and not only in religious terms.

In any case, conditions for interreligious dialogue include some competency to represent one's religious tradition, perceived by dialogue partners as genuine. To achieve deep dialogue other conditions must also be met, for example self-criticism, or critical scrutiny of existing religious traditions, and the current functioning of religious institutions, because both, the message of the tradition and present-day practice, include a number of non-dialogical elements – those that are confrontational or that express contempt for representatives of other religions. Many participants in serious interreligious encounters speak about the necessity of self-criticism.

The penitential service of Pope John Paul II, celebrated in Rome in 2000, was one of the greatest lessons of self-critical attitude in my experience. The Pope enumerated various sins committed by the people of the Church in the previous century. Critics pointed out that, during that spectacular service, the Pope did not go so far as to mention the sins of the Church as such. This criticism is correct, but it is worth adding that it is equally difficult for us, Jews, to formulate a holistic criticism of our sins. After all, according to the Mishnah, "the whole Israel" is supposed to be saved, so whatever the sins of Jews, Israel as such remains somehow untainted. Regardless of possible reservations, the attitude expressed by John Paul II created an admirable model of self-criticism, which should be an inspiration for everyone. I am grateful to him for that.

8. My Experiences

Are there Christians to whom I owe a lot in such a way that I can recognize my gratitude to them as gratitude to Christianity?

I recall immediately my meetings with Father Stanisław Musiał. I feel a deep bond with him and a genuine closeness. When my wife, Monika, and I used to visit him in Kraków, he was keenly interested in our lives and our sons. I witnessed his transition, from ignorance regarding the Jews to genuine empathy to active solidarity. He poignantly shared his evolution. I met him for the first time in Kraków's Catholic Intelligentsia Club, quite soon after his return from a long stay in the West. At a panel discussion in which we both took part

he argued that Nazism had been anti-Christian, and thus Christianity was not responsible for the Shoah. Later, he became the Secretary of the Polish Episcopate's Commission for Dialogue with Judaism, and his attitude gradually changed. He began to recognize indirect Christian guilt and Christian components of the soil from which Nazism grew. Staszek Musiał was one of the few people who represent for me a bright and pure face of Christianity. In a sense, it is to Christianity that I owe our acquaintance, as he was a man shaped by the Jesuit order he had joined at age fifteen. Yet, I must add that by the end of his life his order had isolated him and treated him in a way that was painful not only for him, but also for me.

I do not think it was accidental that Musiał changed his attitude towards missionary work as such. Although he probably once advocated conversion for the Jews, as was the standard approach of the Church, by the end of his life he not only directly rejected this attitude, but also questioned any kind of proselytism. I am almost sure that his evolution was an outcome of his openness towards Judaism.

There are others who have made me feel grateful for Christianity. My theologian colleague was once introducing me and a few friends to studying the Bible; pointing to the *Shema* prayer, the verse "Hear, Israel…", he remarked, "Those words are meant for you." I quickly felt that this was indeed the case. I remain grateful to him. Others to whom I am grateful include acquaintances and friends from both Catholic and other Christian circles with whom I have cooperated, especially in the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. I am not going to give the names of those who are alive, but let me mention one who has passed away: Jerzy Turowicz. He was a well-known figure, generating respect, which is virtually never encountered at the present time, a period marked by disregard for authority. For me, he personified not only noble traits of character, but also he deeply understood Christian involvement in culture and social issues. I owe much to the influential *Tygodnik Powszechny* weekly, which he established. It, as well as other ideologically close monthlies, *Znak* and *Więź*, introduced me to contemporary theology, the faith in dialogue with modernity, the approaches to social issues that connect left-wing sensitivity with faith, and, last but not least, examples of dialogical attitude, not only with respect to Judaism.

I also identify Pope John Paul II with these circles. I feel a special connection to him; during his meetings with Polish Jews he expressed the commonality, rooted in common Polishness, of Christians like him and Jews like me. I know that at present Polish Catholicism is under powerful influences of another stream of thought and that the Catholic intelligentsia circles to whom I owe so much, are being marginalized. Nobody knows what will happen, but to retain a degree of optimism, it is enough to hear how the present Pope Francis interprets Christianity.

Catholic intelligentsia, aside from their merits for Poland as well as for the Church, have played an important role for me personally. It is not only because they have taught me so much. They have also helped me evolve towards a more conscious Jewishness and a more profound involvement in Judaism. Not that this was their intention. But they needed knowledgeable Jews who would represent Judaism and at the same time share a Polish identity and dedication to Polish matters. In the 1980s, there were very few Jews in Poland with a degree of knowledge, representativeness, and readiness to participate in interreligious dialogue. Unfortunately, for all the considerable progress, the present situation is not that much better.

I owe something to their interests in two ways. In the early 1970s, I was fortunate to participate in the annual "Weeks of Jewish Culture" organized by the Cultural Section of Warsaw's Catholic Intelligentsia Club. These were unique meetings at the time, preceded by cleaning of the Warsaw Jewish cemetery, with participation of guests. I attended as a friend of the organizers, which expanded my contacts with Catholics active within a broadly

understood circle of the oppositional intelligentsia. These contacts encouraged me to learn about Jewish history, culture, and religion, a difficult task in a time of censorship and closed frontiers, and before the Internet. I soon actively participated in Jewish events and began speaking and writing about Jews and Judaism. I did my best to develop my knowledge and also my representativeness. I am grateful to them for the stimulus to deepen my studies and participation in Jewish life, even though I would have probably done nearly the same on the basis of my own needs. Incidentally, the annual Cracow Jewish Culture Festival, initiated in 1988, later played a similar role. The event catalyzed a general interest in Jewish culture and Judaism, and helped many people with Jewish roots to identify with Jewish tradition and community more openly. A cynic might ridicule the observation that only when Gentiles considered Jewishness positive were assimilated Jews ready to do the same. At any rate, the result has been positive. A broader and more public interest in Jewish history and religion by those with Jewish roots, which began in the 1980s, has transformed the situation among Polish Jews.

I am convinced that my presence in the Polish Council of Christians and Jews is a way to remain faithful to the feelings described above. We are jointly building a bond and partnership founded on mutual respect. I am grateful for that prospect to all the Christians involved in the activities of the Council and to those supporting it. I cherish similar feelings toward those belonging to the International Council of Christians and Jews. Among them are rabbis and other Jews to whom I owe much knowledge and understanding of how one can practice and support interreligious dialogue through Jewish tradition. I also owe to their presence my feeling of participation in an important collective mission in which we participate together as Jews, constituting, at the same time, a community with Christians and other people of dialogue.

“Proof”

I began and will now end with considerations on gratitude, on the assumption that it is good to acknowledge what we owe to others. And, perhaps, not only to other humans. Here is my “proof” of … the existence of God, founded on the feeling of gratitude. Well, I know this is unusual and sounds suspicious. However, I have neither lost my sanity nor have I forgotten the arguments that no such proof exists. This is a “proof” in quotation marks, and, moreover, can be accepted only by those with experiences similar to mine. And even they would be ready to accept this “proof” only when in the right mood. Those familiar with the writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel will recognize that he is my inspiration.

It sometimes happens to me, and I guess not just to me, that I feel gratitude that is neither for something specific nor to a particular person. It is gratitude as such, simply for the world around me. This feeling extends beyond tangible objects, and indicates a dimension of pure gratitude. The whole space in which I find myself becomes permeated with gratitude or rather *my* gratitude. If taken seriously, this state leads to the question: To whom am I grateful? After all, gratitude cannot be felt to things or impersonal forces. I cannot be grateful to the world, nature, matter, particles, fields, or structures. It must be a person. It is not, however, enough to say that I am grateful to my parents (for my existence) or to other ancestors or to the organizers of society, owing to whom my ancestors survived, or generally to the creators of our civilization. All that would not encompass my fundamental, unspecifiable gratitude. To whom then should I be grateful? Who is that person? The person who apparently exists as if facing me and my world; no, not only my world, but the whole world. That is the person who cannot be described or grasped in any categories but still remains to be one to whom it is proper to feel that fundamental gratitude. That person is the Person.

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