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Christians and Jews: historical and theological perspectives of their relationship

Abstract

The article analyses the subject of Christian-Jewish relations in historical and theological terms. In the historical part, the following periods are briefly discussed: New Testament, patristic, medieval, modern and contemporary. In the theological part, the common elements of Judaism and Christianity are first presented. Herein: Jews and Christians identify their faith and action through the interrelations between justice and love; they base their beliefs on the common “scripture” (the “Old Testament”); they understand each other as the people of God; they profess the one God, the Creator and the Redeemer; they express their faith in worship, in which there are many similarities; Jews and Christians also live in the expectation for the common history of God with His people, whose fulfilment they expect. Distinctive elements (the divergence of the ways) are: the belief in Jesus, the Christ; the interpretation of the Scriptures; a different understanding of what God’s people are; different developed piety. In conclusion, it is said that the rediscovery of a positive relationship with Judaism facilitates a positive formation of Christian identity and memory.

Keywords: Jewish People, Church and Synagogue, Holocaust, religious prejudices, intolerance, anti-Judaism, declaration *Nostra aetate*, Christian-Jewish dialogue, people of God.

Chrześcijananie i Żydzi: historyczne i teologiczne perspektywy ich relacji

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje temat relacji chrześcijańsko-żydowskich w aspekcie historycznym i teologicznym. W części historycznej krótko omówiono kolejno następujące okresy: Nowego Testamentu, patrystyczny, średniowieczny, nowożytny i współczesny. W części teologicznej przedstawiono najpierw wspólne elementy judaizmu i chrześcijaństwa: Żydzi i chrześcijanie podkreślają w ich wierze i działaniu związek między miłością i sprawiedliwością; opierają oni swoją wiarę na wspólnych pismach (Stary Testament); rozumieją siebie nawzajem jako lud Boży; wyznają jednego Boga jako Stwórcę i Odkupiciela; wyrażają oni swoją wiarę we własnych służbach liturgicznych, które zawierają wiele podobieństw; żyją w oczekiwaniu nadejścia wspólnej historii z Bogiem, to znaczy wypełnienia się historii

w Bogu. Elementy odróżniające (różnice w sposobach działania) są następujące: wiara w Jezusa Chrystusa; interpretacja Pism; różne rozumienie, czym jest lud Boży; odmienne rozwinięta pobożność. W konkluzji stwierdzono, że rozwijanie pozytywnych relacji chrześcijańsko-żydowskich ma istotne znaczenie dla zachowania chrześcijańskiej tożsamości i pamięci.

Słowa kluczowe: naród żydowski, Kościół i Synagoga, Holokaust, uprzedzenia religijne, nietolerancja, antyjudyzm, deklaracja *Nostra aetate*, dialog chrześcijańsko-żydowski, lud Boga.

For many centuries, Christians have seen their relationship with the Jews almost exclusively through the question: what separates us from them? This was done on the basis of a relationship between Christians and Jews, which was determined by strangeness and mutual rejection. They have not only harmed each other, but also inflicted damage on themselves. Following the catastrophe of European Jewry, Christians began to rethink their relationship with the Jews after the Second World War. They have discovered how much of the connection between them still exists and have become aware of the common heritage. From both sides, a conversation has begun, which was not possible in the centuries before¹.

Since the time of the separation between Church and Synagogue, the so-called *protoscism*, in the first half of the Second century, Christians have never even dared to imagine being able to speak of Christian-Jewish dialogue, since among them has always dominated only an attitude of “contempt” towards the Jews². So much so that Jules Isaac himself (1867–1963), a Jewish historian of French nationality, knocking on the door of the Vatican on June 13, 1960 to meet John XXIII, perhaps could not imagine the beginning of a dialogue between Jews and Christians, despite his serious and passionate research. He could not even pronounce the term “dialogue” and perhaps he did not even dare to think of the possibility of dialogue between Jews and Christians. He dared, however, to strongly and confidently call for an end to the teaching of contempt and hatred.

¹ Geoffrey Wigoder. 1988. *Jewish-Christian Relations since the Second World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

² Jules Isaac. 1962. *L'Enseignement du mépris*. Paris: Fasquelle.

I. Historical view

1. New Testament period

Early Christianity is deeply rooted in Judaism and cannot be understood without simultaneously having a sincere sympathy and direct experience of the Jewish world. Jesus is fully Jewish, Jews are the apostles, and their attachment to the tradition of the fathers cannot be doubted. The messianic Easter that Jesus, the Universal Redeemer and Suffering Servant, announces and realizes, does not oppose the Sinai covenant, but completes its meaning³.

The anti-Jewish controversies present in the New Testament can be understood at different levels:

- at the historical level, in the atmosphere of the sectarian divisions among different groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Qumran, Essenes, etc.);
- at the theological level, particularly in the Gospel of John: the “Jews” are a category covering those who reject salvation (this terminology was well clarified by Karl Barth [see for example the *Römerbrief*, commentary on the Letter to Romans⁴]);
- at the eschatological level, whereby the “end” of the structures of the covenant is felt as a necessity of the Kingdom, when God reigns “all in all”;
- at the ecclesial level, as a reaction to the Judaizing claims that were present among Christians from a pagan background. But all this does not mean that the original Christianity and the New Testament have an anti-Semitic character.

2. Patristic period

The study of the Church Fathers in order to understand their relationship with the Judaism of *Eretz Israel* and the diaspora (as expressed in particular in the Talmud) has not yet been completed. Herein, the study of the heresies of the first centuries, especially in Asia and the East, and their relationship with the Jewish thought, would be valuable to understand the origins of Islam.

The term *judaeus* did not, until the Fifth century, have a negative meaning among the Fathers; the categories of thought and Semitic mentality continue to penetrate Christian thought, in particular, up to the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD), but also afterwards; they especially influence the Syrian authors, like Saint Ephrem, and

³ John Barclay, John Sweet (Eds.). 1996. *Early Christian Thought in Its Jewish Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Karl Barth. 1922. *Der Römerbrief* (Zweite Fassung). Zürich: Theologischer Verlag.

through them – also thanks to Saint Ambrose – are present in the West⁵. This is even more true in case of liturgical life and prayer, for which reference to the synagogue experience is essential, as we see in Alexandria at the time of Origen⁶.

This connection begins to break in Visigothic Spain (700 AD), when the councils will force the converted Jews to abjure and abandon all previous traditions. Augustine, always careful to grasp the seeds of truth (the Stoic *logoi*) also from the pagans, introduces a negative element in the assessment about the Jews: it is the so-called “theory of substitution” of ancient Israel by the new Israel, the Church. But we are not yet in a situation of heavy intolerance, as the paleo-Christian mosaic of Santa Sabina Church in Rome, depicting the *Ecclesia ex circumcissione* like a noble matron, which in the Middle Ages will be replaced by that of the Blind Synagogue.

3. Medieval period

Léon Poliakov (1910–1997) has exhaustively shown that, until the Crusades, the situation of Jews in Europe is still generally of peaceful coexistence with the Christian population⁷. An abrupt and bloody turn is caused by the fanatical masses that move disorderly together with the armies heading to the Holy Land: they are responsible for fierce massacres of entire Jewish communities in Germany, despite the opposition of bishops and counts; the Jews were only left with the choice between baptism and martyrdom, and in the thousands they chose the latter by proclaiming their loyalty to God⁸.

From 1144 onwards, the accusation of ritual murder also spread, and later that of a hateful conspiracy of the Jews, cursed because they commit deicide, against the human race. The consequences, especially at the popular level, will be very serious: the Jews become almost a symbol of satanic evil to be relentlessly eradicated by any means.

The Church did not participate in these aberrations, but was affected by this atmosphere: thus, in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council imposed the distinctive “sign” on the Jews.

⁵ Jacob Neusner. 1987. *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Marcel Simon. 1948. *Verus Israel. Étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain (135–425)*. Paris: Éditions E. De Boccard; ed. 2, 1964; ed. 3, 1983; John G. Gager. 1983. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*. New York, NY – Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Léon Poliakov. 2003. *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 2: *From Mohammed to the Marranos*. Trans. by N. Gerardi. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.

⁸ Bernhard Blumenkranz. 1960. *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096*. Paris: Mouton.

The 13–14th centuries, however, saw a particularly thriving Jewish community in Rome, and in 1310–1311, the Council of Vienne decreed the establishment throughout Europe of chairs of Hebrew and Aramaic for the study of the Talmud, although this reform of studies was never implemented. Of note, in Spain, France and Italy the collaboration at a cultural level between Jews and Christians was profound; an atmosphere that transpires in the novella by Boccaccio (*Decameron* I, 3) on “Melchisedèc giudeo and Saladino”.

The Middle Ages, for Jews, will continue in Europe until the French Revolution, marked by two very serious events: the exile from Spain (1492) and the establishment of the ghetto, determined by the Papal Bull *Cum nimis absurdum* (1555), accompanied by burning of the Talmud, harassment, religious trials, cultural collapse. These persecutions must inspire us to reflect seriously in order to understand their causes, and certainly religious prejudices, fuelled by heated popular preaching (for example, that of Saint Bernard), offered easy pretexts to those who sought to gain political or economic advantages from insecure and threatened Jews.

Recognizing the errors of a misunderstood religiosity or worse, blind fanaticism, is humble wisdom. Religious intolerance often disguises irreligiousness, and a less attentive religiosity can be exploited for other purposes: there is no shortage of examples in Scripture, and Jesus therefore urges conversion of heart, to worship the Father “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4,23).

4. Modern period

After the emancipation, the Jews were actively present in scientific, literary, philosophical, political, economic and artistic spheres in the nations born in the modern period; while trends calling to the return to the “land”, to Palestine, are inspired by religious or purely political-ideological reasons. In the same period, however, the Church experiences a season of not easy relations with the new social order and new mentality.

New pogroms follow one another in Russia at the end of the Nineteenth century: here too fanaticism, intolerance and religious prejudice are combined with political motivations. Tragic and indescribable is the horror of the extermination of European Jews programmed with systematic and absurd ferocity by the Nazis: this new state tyranny cleverly exploited common age-old anti-Jewish prejudice.

We experience deep sorrow and hurt if we consider how much indifference, or worse, how much hatred often separated Jews and Christians in those years; but we must also remember the heroism of many who helped the persecuted Jews. Indeed, Pius XI was preparing an encyclical condemning anti-Semitism, but his death interrupted this project.

The terrible tragedy of the Second World War and the abyss of evil of the Holocaust unfortunately showed once again, and to an extent never experienced before, how fragile the journey of man in history is, and how much horror we can be responsible for; thus the ethical question about evil has been forcefully restated in the consciences of individuals and nations⁹.

5. Contemporary period

The post-war period saw the resurgence of the Jewish State¹⁰ with its own autonomy and with democratic characteristics, for which most Jews prayed, greeting it as “the beginning of the flowering of the Redemption”. In turn, the Church adopted an attitude of dialogue with the world, attentive to discerning the “signs of the times” in a spirit of service to humanity still torn by serious contradictions¹¹.

The Second Vatican Council expresses the whole passion of the Church for the salvation of the world and for peace and rejects the accusation of “deicide” and “the teaching of contempt” (Jules Isaac) in regard to the Jews, stressing on the contrary, the great common heritage of faith in the mystery of the salvific plan desired by God (*Nostra aetate*, n. 4). The signs of these great opening, such as the visit of John Paul II in the synagogue of Rome or the great prayer for peace in Assisi, are very important for the future of Christian-Jewish relations¹².

In the expression *Christian-Jewish dialogue*, we seem to grasp a sense that is difficult to define adequately. This expression, in fact, entered timidly into the language of the Christian Churches only around the ‘70s, certainly under the impetus of the Declaration *Nostra aetate* (28 October 1965). Even the Council Fathers, who approved paragraph 4 of *Nostra aetate*, perhaps did not fully realize what they would have stirred up by inserting this passage in the text:

⁹ Carol Rittner, Stephen Smith, Irena Steinfeldt. 2000. *The Holocaust and the Christian World*. London: Kuperard; Zygmunt Bauman. 1991. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁰ James A. Rudin. 1983. *Israel for Christians: Understanding Modern Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Krzysztof Chaczko, Artur Skorek, Łukasz Sroka. 2018. *Demokracja izraelska*. Warszawa: PWN.

¹¹ Eugene Fisher, Leon Klenicki (Eds.). 1990. *In Our Time: The Flowering of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue*. Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press and Stimulus.

¹² Augustin Bea. 1966. *The Church and the Jewish People: A Commentary on the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*. London: Geoffrey Chapman. The Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews wrote: “The fact that the Shoah took place in Europe, that is, in countries of long-standing Christian civilization, raises the question of the relation between the Nazi persecution and the attitudes down the centuries of Christians towards the Jews” (*We Remember: Reflections on the Shoah*, 16 March 1998).

“Therefore, since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so great, this sacred Council wishes to promote and recommend among them mutual knowledge and esteem, which are obtained above all through biblical and theological studies and through a fraternal dialogue”.

However, it must be acknowledged that the term “dialogue” gradually emerges within a path that has its starting point in the *Ten Points of Seelisberg*, a document addressed to all the Churches that marks a historic turning point in the context of the International Jewish-Christian Conference against Anti-Semitism, held in the Swiss city on August 5, 1947. This document was followed by other statements, in particular the document of the first General Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of Churches on the Christian attitude towards the Jews (Amsterdam 1948), the *Theses of Bad Schwalbach* (1950), written by Catholic and Protestant theologians, the resolution of the third Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of Churches on the subject of anti-Semitism (New Delhi 1961) and the declaration on the subject of Church and anti-Semitism by the Lutheran World Federation (Løgumkloster 1964).

II. Theological view

1. Common roots

The Christian community has its roots in Judaism. Jesus lived and taught within the Jewish people. He, as well as his disciples and the apostles, were Jews; they had a share in the faith and history of their people. Within their Jewish environment, they proclaimed the novelty of their message: that the expected Messiah had come in the person of Jesus, and the end time had come with His resurrection. The acceptance or rejection of this message produced differences and opposition. At first they remained within a common framework, but then it led to the independent formation of the Christian community, and, finally, to a complete separation between Christians and Jews. In the course of this development, both communities of faith have received their own unmistakable character in mutual demarcation.

Despite this separation, two common elements have not been lost. The similarities have since been rediscovered in the overall context of the Christian or the Jewish faith and are therefore determined; at the same time, these commonalities open up the possibility of new encounters and concerns about shared responsibility in today's world.

1.1. “Thou shalt love Him as thyself” (Lev. 19,34)

Christians and Jews are shaped in their self-understanding by the fact that they both choose to be partners in the covenant with one God. In this election, God revealed both His love and His righteousness. This is the basis for both of the obligation to realize justice and love in this world. Jews and Christians identify their faith and action through the interrelations between justice and love¹³.

Justice and love form a unity in the action of God; therefore, they also belong together in human action: human justice requires the constant inspiration of love; human love is dependent on justice. For the credibility of Christians and Jews, much depends on whether they fulfil this claim.

The Old Testament first relates the demand to love to one's own people as the covenant partner of God. However, in view of the stranger, as far as he lives together with the people, it means, “Thou shalt love him as thyself” (Lev. 19,34). In certain groups of post-biblical Judaism, this extension of the commandment to love one's neighbour reached out to the people outside Israel. Jesus freed it from all barriers by demanding the love of the enemy.

The demand for a life in righteousness, which is determined in all details by the will of God, is strongly emphasized in Judaism. This can give the impression that love is being dominated by justice. However, even the prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the teachers of Judaism, justified the righteous life in God's love for His people: for out of love God gave His people the Torah; It describes the sphere of life in which justice is realized in response to this act of God in the love of one's neighbour.

Also according to Christian understanding, justice and love are closely related. For the Christian, however, the justifying act of God in Jesus Christ is the crucial precondition for justice and love to be realized among men. Thus, there are profound differences in the foundation of justice and love among Christians and Jews. However, there are broad similarities in the understanding of specific demands. Therefore, Christians and Jews can work together to realize justice and love in the world and promote peace.

1.2. The Holy Scriptures

The early Christians, like all Jews, possessed a collection of biblical books that essentially corresponded to what the church later called the “Old Testament”. For these writings, the term “the law and the prophets” is found in the New Tes-

¹³ Justice; love. In Leon Klenicki, Geoffrey Wigoder (Eds.). 1995. *Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Expanded Edition*. New York: Paulist Press (Kindle Edition).

tament (Matthew 22,40). In many cases, they are simply called “the Scriptures”, as this collection of scriptures was well known and acknowledged as a fundamental testimony of faith. Both Christians and Jews found many instructions in the Scriptures for daily life, prayer, preaching, and worship. Jews and Christians base their beliefs on the common “scripture” (the “Old Testament”), to which the “New Testament” of the Christians is also referred¹⁴.

When proclaiming His message, Jesus naturally referred to Scripture as it existed. He took the double commandment of love, which He made at the heart of His message, from the Scriptures by combining two originally independent sentences: “You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6,5) and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. 19,18). This was quite possible in the context of the Jewish scripture interpretation at the time; His scribal Jewish interlocutor therefore agreed with Him: “Master, you have truly spoken rightly” (Mark 12,32). However, Jesus drew conclusions from this commandment that transcended Jewish scripture interpretation, including referring to enemies, publicans and Samaritans.

Like Jesus, Paul used Scripture as the basis for his proclamation and also used the Jewish rules of interpretation customary in his day. It is noteworthy that Paul only uses the words of Jesus in a few passages, but very often quotes Scripture. But he also gives Scripture a new and unusual interpretation for Jews.

This scripture is common to Jews and Christians. It is made known to those who are not Jews by the Christian proclamation. Even Paul turned with statements of Scripture to pagan hearers. Since then, non-Jews have become acquainted with God’s history with the people of Israel and are being included in them.

His own writings were written early on in the Christian community, in which, with constant reference to “Scripture”, God’s saving action is unfolded in Jesus Christ. They form the “New Testament”, which Christians used to summarize the Old Testament as their Bible.

In the history of the church, the understanding of the Old Testament has been repeatedly undervalued. There have also been repeated attempts to devalue individual books of the Old Testament or to denounce them altogether as part of the Scriptures. But such attempts were rejected by the Church because it confesses the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the Father of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Old Testament, the Holy Scriptures of the Jews, remains at the same time one of the two components of the Christian Bible¹⁵.

¹⁴ Philip A. Cunningham. 2003. *Sharing the Scriptures*. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press/Stimulus Books.

¹⁵ Commission Pontificale Biblique. 2001. *Le Peuple Juif et ses Saintes Écritures dans la Bible chrétienne*, (pl. trans.: Papieska Komisja Biblijna. 2002. *Naród żydowski i jego Święte Pismo w Biblii chrześcijańskiej*. Tłum. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz. Kielce: Verbum).

1.3. Jews and Christians understand each other as the people of God

According to the Old Testament faith, God, the Creator and Lord of the world, is, at the same time, the God of His people, Israel, whom He has chosen, and with whom He has made a covenant. The justification for this is not seen in the merits of the people, but only in the attention and love of God.

At the same time, this love of God for His people demands the love of the people for their God, which manifests itself in doing the divine will. On Sinai, the commandments have been revealed according to which Israel is to live as a people. Even if the people as a whole fall short of the obedience demanded, the prophets proclaim that God will hold fast to the election and lead His people to repentance, so that in the future it can fully do its will.

The Jews are still determined by this fundamental self-understanding as the people of God. This finds its constant expression in the prayers that say, "You have chosen us and sanctified us among all peoples". And despite the knowledge that a great part of the people do not fully obey the commandments of God, they say in Jewish tradition: "All Israel has a share in the world to come". The election of God remains for the sake of the covenant God made with the fathers.

The New Testament also speaks of the people of God. This refers to the people of Israel. Jesus says He is sent to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15,24). Paul, too, affirms to the Jews that they are the people of God and remain: "God did not cast away His people" (Romans 11,2); and He expects that they will participate, now or in the future, in the salvation opened up by Christ. In the Christian proclamation, the limits of belonging to a certain people are abolished; All who believe in Jesus Christ are Abraham's children and heirs of the promise given to the people of Israel. So now the church is created as the people of God from Jews and Gentiles.

The New Testament uses the term "people of God" to convey fundamental elements of the Old Testament covenant to the Christian community. It is referred to as "the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy people, the people of property", as stated in the Old Testament by the people of Israel (1 Peter 2,9 / Exodus 19,5-6).

So both Jews and Christians see themselves as the people of God. They are called to do so, destined to be witnesses of God in this world, to do His will, and to face the future consummation of His rule¹⁶.

¹⁶ Paul van Buren, 1983. *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*. Part II: *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel*. San Francisco: Harper & Row; Lud Boży (People of God). In Jakob J. Pietuchowski, Clemens Thoma (Eds.). 1995. *Leksykon dialogu chrześcijańsko-żydowskiego*. Warszawa: ATK, 145–149.

1.4. Jews and Christians profess the one God, the Creator and the Redeemer

When we speak of God as Christians, we are convinced with the Jews that the God described in the Holy Scriptures is one. It is a fundamental knowledge since the early days of Israel¹⁷, that God as the Creator and Redeemer claims exclusivity. It is precisely in this that the Jews already differed in the Old Testament era from the other peoples, who recognized and worshiped a multitude of gods. This was also a special characteristic of Christians right from the beginning, and in the first centuries of Christian history, Jews, as well as Christians were attacked and persecuted because of their commitment to the one God.

The basic Jewish creed was then as it is today: "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6,4). Jesus and His disciples also spoke this sentence daily in their prayers, just as the Jews do today. The same sentence has become the basis of the first article of the Christian Creed.

The commonality is also visible in the unfolding of this confession among Jews and Christians: the belief in God the Creator is placed at the beginning of the Bible. It has been pervading Jewish prayer since ancient times and is also a central part of the Christian faith. According to both Christian and Jewish understanding, God is the God of all humanity, yet at the same time He is in a special relationship with those who belong to His people. In the faith in God, the Redeemer, God's relationship with His people finds its central expression. This experience of faith is witnessed in many ways in the Old Testament, from the miraculous salvation of the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage, to the expectation of the final homecoming and salvation of the whole nation¹⁸.

In the New Testament, this has been taken up and shaped by new experiences: faith in God's actions in the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the assistance of the Spirit in the time between Easter and the Second Coming of Christ, as well as in the expectation of redemption at the end of time. The hope for the raising of the dead, which is already indicated in the Old Testament, has become more pronounced in Judaism at the time of Jesus; since then, it has been an essential element of Jewish prayer language. In the Christian end-time expectation,

¹⁷ Self-designation of the faith- and folk community of the twelve tribes, who gathered in faith in the one God in the area between the Mediterranean and the East Bank. After the founding of the empire by Saul and David around 1000 BC, Israel also became the name of their state, after the division of the empire after Solomon's death only of the northern part of it. However, "Israel" remained the name of the whole of the faith and folk community, especially in the religious sense. The land was named "Land of Israel". The founding of the state in 1948 made "Israel" again the name of a state.

¹⁸ Stwórca/stworzenie (Creator/creation). In Jakob J. Pietuchowski, Clemens Thoma (Eds.). 1995. *Leksykon dialogu chrześcijańsko-żydowskiego*. Warszawa: ATK, 230–232.

it is inextricably linked to the faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In many cases, such traits that are considered characteristic and fundamental to Christianity also characterize Jewish piety. In the prayers that have been passed on from one generation to the next in Judaism for many centuries, God, the Creator and Redeemer, who raises the dead, is repeatedly called the Gracious and Merciful, and the Lord Father of His people addressed and praised. His love for His people and for all human beings finds as many expressions as the confidence that He forgives sins.

For the Christian faith, these statements are related to the revelation of God in Christ. This is most clearly expressed in the fact that the one God is witnessed and called as the Father of Jesus Christ.

1.5. The service

Jews and Christians gather in worship to listen to God's Word, to confess their faith and to pray. This results in common basic elements of their services, which distinguish both from most other religions. This commonality is due to the fact that both are bound to the divine revelation witnessed in the Scriptures. In the process, the entire life of the faithful is included in the case of Jews and Christians: through faith and obedience, it is meant to become worship as a response to the Word of God itself. Jews and Christians express their faith in worship, in which there are many similarities¹⁹.

Today's form of Jewish worship is the result of a long evolution. In the course of this, there was a juxtaposition of the sacrificial worship service in the Temple of Jerusalem and the possible prayer service in the synagogue at all places. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, this service became the focus of Jewish religious life. The Christian community service, which has its origins in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, took over elements from the synagogue service and developed them independently.

Therefore, there are many commonalities and similarities in the liturgical life of Jews and Christians: e.g. the weekly holiday (Sabbath / Sunday), the organization of the liturgy of the Word (reading, prayer, blessing) down to individual liturgical formulations (*Hallelujah*, *Amen*), certain celebrations in the course of the feast year (Passover / Easter) and in the expiration of life (circumcision / baptism, witnessing the hope of a future new life at the burial of the dead). It should not be overlooked that the existing differences are often the result of deliberate demarcation.

¹⁹ Kerry M. Olitzky, Daniel Judson. 2006. *Jewish Ritual. A Brief Introduction for Christians*. Woodstock VE: Jewish Lights Publishing.

Due to the similarities in the structure and forms of the life of God, the first Christians were initially able to maintain the worship service with the Jews by participating in their Synagogue services. After a long period of separate development, the reflection on the unity of Christians and Jews in the present leads again to attempts to hold joint services on special occasions.

1.6. Relationship to history and their purpose

Jews and Christians are related in their relationship to history and their purpose through the experience that the people of Israel have had with God ever since the days of Abraham throughout their history. Jews and Christians also live in the expectation for the common history of God with His people, whose fulfilment they expect.

At that time, there was a widespread belief that human beings, together with the world, were at the mercy of eternal becoming and dying. On the other hand, the people of Israel learned – often in tension with their own ideas and wishes – that God called them in an irreversible way. This path leads to a goal where Israel will receive the final salvation of God, along with all other peoples.

In the course of such experiences, it is a common belief of Jews and Christians that they do not see the course of history as a blind fate or a chain of unpredictable coincidences; they recognize and testify that the ultimate purpose and purpose of history is the salvation of God for all men. Christians confess that in Jesus Christ, the prophetic promises of the covenant of God with His people have taken on a new and far-reaching form in order to bring the world to perfection. At this point there is the tension: for the Jews, the fulfilment of the Torah leads to perfection, for Christians, salvation lies in believing in the Messiah Jesus who has already come, and in the expectation of His return.

Nevertheless, the existing commonalities oblige Christians and Jews to endure this tension and make it fruitful in view of the expected completion of the history²⁰. Christians and Jews are called to perceive their responsibility for the world not against each other or side by side, but with each other according to God's will.

2. The divergence of the ways

The faith of Jews and Christians has common roots, but their paths have widened over the centuries. The opposites were particularly infected by the following

²⁰ Eschatology. In Leon Klenicki Geoffrey Wigoder (Eds.). 1995. *Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Expanded Edition*. New York: Paulist Press (Kindle Edition).

questions: 1. Whether Jesus was the Messiah; 2. How to interpret the Scripture; 3. What is meant by “the people of God”; 4. In what way the statements of faith would have to be developed. The contradictory answers to these questions and the related claim to truth still separate Jews and Christians today.

Thus, the mutual demarcation became inevitable; In addition, there was increasing open hostility and persecution, but they were also fed by a variety of other motives. In the early days, when Christians were attacked by Jews, the Jews became soon the persecuted ones. Often their existence was threatened, countless Jews lost their lives in the course of centuries of conflict.

Thus, a seemingly irreconcilable enmity between Jews and Christians arose and covered the similarities more and more, but without being able to cancel them completely. Today, we are faced with the question of whether and to what extent the existing commonalities, despite substantial differences, can become the basis of mutual understanding.

2.1. The belief in Jesus, the Christ

Judaism at the time of Jesus understood itself as the one people of the one God. Within this one people, however, there were various groups, between which strong contrasts existed²¹. The hope and action of almost all groups were directed towards the realization of the salvation promised by the prophets. In the face of a depressing external situation, a part of them expected the end of the old world and the coming of a new one; another part hoped for salvation from the dawn of God's reign, which would include the political liberation of the chosen people and the Holy Land from pagan Roman power. Long before Jesus, in this context, the expectation of a saviour sent by God, the Messiah, played a special role. By believing in Jesus as the Messiah, the first Christians came into conflict with other Jewish groups, but at first did not break out of Judaism²².

Similar to John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed: “The Kingdom of God has come” (Mark 1,15, cf. Matthew 3,2 and 4,17). His proclamation of the gospel and His mighty deeds awakened the expectation among the people around Him that He would save Israel. Thus, arose around Jesus a new group of the Jewish people, which at first did not appear as something out of the ordinary.

However, as Jesus unfolded the religious traditions of His people in the context of His message of the dawning of the kingdom of God in an unusual manner and brought into the fold, the outlawed and sinners contrary to the existing order,

²¹ Günter Stemberger. 1995. *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

²² Christ-Jesus-Son of God. In Leon Klenicki, Geoffrey Wigoder (Eds.). 1995. *Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Expanded Edition*. New York: Paulist Press (Kindle Edition).

it soon came to arguments. The religious and political leaders in Jerusalem felt the presence of Jesus and His followers to be a nuisance and danger.

In the face of such a death, the disciples of Jesus were faced with the question of whether their attachment to Him as the Messiah was a mistake. The reign of God had not occurred in the manner hoped for, and His death by crucifixion was considered particularly dishonourable. In this situation, through the encounters with the Risen One, the certainty of the disciples of Jesus was newly established and deepened: Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ; Salvation belongs to Him; whoever trusts and believes in Him is saved. In this certainty, they began to proclaim Jesus' life and action, His suffering, dying and resurrection.

The time of salvation has begun; in it they recognized the proof of the love of God, which is turned towards all men. The early Christian community saw in this event the fulfilment of the promises for Israel and the peoples. That is why they were committed to witness about their faith, love, and hope to Jews and Gentiles.

With this proclamation, the first Christians wanted to persuade the remaining Jews about the truth of the claim that in Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, the expected Messiah had come. They had to deal with other messianic expectations that did not focus on the person of Jesus as the Saviour. Although they were not leaving the Jewish community, the paths were already beginning to diverge²³.

2.2. The interpretation of Scripture

Jesus introduced the promised reign of God and made the double commandment of love the standard for understanding the Scripture. In addition, His followers rediscovered their Bible because of their belief in the crucified and risen Jesus as they began to read the Scripture as a reference to Jesus Christ, to read His story and its meaning as a testimony to the preparation of the salvation that was fulfilled in Him. This new understanding of the Scripture found its expression in the writings that gradually developed, which were then summarized as the "New Testament" and united with the Old Testament. The interpretation of the Scripture related to Jesus Christ and the unfolding of the faith in its uniqueness led to a further distance from Judaism.

In the New Testament, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ was described by statements taken from the Old Testament into the non-Jewish environment, and there-

²³ John Pawlikowski. 1982. *Christ in Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*. New York: Wipf & Stock; Pinchas Lapide, Karl Rahner. 1987. *Encountering Jesus – Encountering Judaism*. New York: Crossroad.

by transformed. These included numerous sovereign titles such as “Son of Man”, “Messiah”, “Son of God”, “Lord”, “Saviour” and salvation expectations such as the redemption of the world and the return of Jesus at the end of time. Some of these statements, from the Jewish point of view, appeared to be endangering the belief in the one God because Jesus was too much equated with God. These were, above all, statements made in the Christian proclamation with regard to pagan hearers.

In contrast to these types of interpretation of the Scripture, Judaism developed its previous interpretation. After a period of oral tradition, the scribal interpretation of the Torah was reflected in various collections, especially in the Mishnah and the Talmud. Different interpretations of the Scriptures, which were developed by Christians about the person of Jesus Christ and by the Jews about the Torah led to a growing estrangement between Christian communities and Judaism.

2.3. Christian community and people of God

The first Christian communities were considered at first as one of several sects in Judaism; however, the description in the book of Acts and, in particular, the work of Apostle Paul show a development that soon led out of the framework of the Jewish community. The Christian communities, besides Jews, accepted more and more pagans and did not demand from them initiation into Judaism. Thus, the proportion of Jewish Christians became ever smaller.

To the extent that the Christian communities consisted predominantly of non-Jewish members, the Jews could no longer recognize them as belonging to their people. Therefore, it became difficult for those Jews who had received baptism in the name of Jesus to maintain communion with their people. The Christians of other origins were in any case less interested in such a community. The Christian communities became more and more independent. The acceptance into the churches through baptism was understood as acceptance into the people of God. The importance of natural ethnicity, on the other hand, took a back seat. Thus arose the “Church of Jews and Gentiles”.

For Christians and Jews, this resulted in a different understanding of what God’s people are. For Jews, belonging to the people of God was as much synonymous with that of the Jewish people. This meant that both Jews and Christians claimed the heritage of the history of the people of God since the days of Abraham. However, Christians also described the community of believers with other ideas more related to Jesus Christ. They used the biblical term “the people of God” and used it as a self-designation for “the church”.

The Christian community, made up of Jews and Gentiles, saw themselves as the people of God and thereby came into conflict with the same claim of the Jewish people. The conflict over belonging to the people of God has weighed heavily on the relationship of Jews and Christians through the centuries. To this day, the question of whether the claim of the one to be the people of God must exclude the same claim of the other seems relevant.

2.4. Differently developed piety

The relations between Jews and Christians were increasingly complicated by the fact that the understanding of their piety developed differently. The effort to define God's commandments in Judaism and to systematically develop the beliefs in Christianity increased the estrangement between the two.

In Judaism, the direction prevailed which emphasizes the observance of the commandments of God in daily life. The dispute how the application of the commandments should be shaped and how everyday life was to be determined down to the last detail was the subject of great care in Jewish teaching houses. Every generation took up the questions and answers of previous generations and developed them. The collective works of Mishnah and Talmud in which these conversations extending over centuries found their expression, became the foundation of the religious life of pious Jews up to the present day.

On the other hand, little emphasis was placed on exact definition and formulation of the beliefs. They were conveyed in a narrative tradition. However, the centuries-long individual prayers and community worship are particularly important elements in the expression of Jewish piety²⁴.

In the Christian realm, the need to further develop the message of Jesus Christ and to present it to the Greek spiritual world led to intensive work on the conceptual clarification of the statements of faith and the formulation of official doctrines of the church. A particular problem was the description of the unique meaning of Jesus Christ for the Christian faith and the relationship of Jesus Christ to the one God. In the course of intense theological efforts, which were accompanied by violent ecclesial-political arguments, the Early Church answered this question through the teaching about the Holy Trinity (the one God is recognized and worshiped in three "persons" – the Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and the doctrine of the two natures of Christ (Jesus Christ is at the same time "true God and true man"). This was based on statements from the New Testament and developed by way of new forms of thought.

²⁴ Kult, Kult świątynny/zburzenie Świątyni, Liturgia. In Jakob J. Pietuchowski, Clemens Thoma (Eds.). 1995. *Leksykon dialogu chrześcijańsko-żydowskiego*. Warszawa: ATK, 135–145.

To Jewish thinking, these doctrines seemed more and more a violation of the command that no one but God should be worshiped. The Church, however, held the belief in the one God in these teachings and was determined to defend the confession of Jesus as the Christ.

Conclusion

The promulgation of *Nostra aetate* 4, altered profoundly the relation of the Roman Catholic Church toward the Jewish people. Still, it also highlights new theological challenges. Among them, Christology appears as a major discipline that must contribute to a Christian theology of Judaism. What significance does the Jewishness of Jesus have for the Christian of the 21st century?

Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (2002–2010), has called for Jews and Christians to take hold of a renewed emphasis on *memoria futuri* and to reflect on the more positive aspects of memory. Religious remembrance, he argued, is not an act of nostalgia, but one that empowers in the present. For example, in their liturgy, Jews and Christians remember not only what God has done for them in the past, but remember that God's people continue to have a role today.

Christianity has recognised that past practices about and traditional views of Jews are wholly unacceptable, and many Christians have worked to create a new relationship. The tackling of Christian triumphalism and overcoming the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition illustrates a shift from what was, for the most part, an inherent need to condemn Judaism to one of a condemnation of Christian anti-Judaism. It has also led to a closer relationship with “the elder brother” and not, as some have feared, to the undermining of Christian teaching. The rediscovery of a positive relationship with Judaism facilitates a positive formation of Christian identity and memory.

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