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ANTISEMITISM WITHOUT JEWS AND WITHOUT ANTISEMITES

The problem of antisemitism was a major factor bearing on the attitudes of Europeans toward Jews from the end of 19th century. It also strongly influenced the political scene of Poland between the two world wars. To a certain degree it has been poisoning Polish public life ever since. In Poland, which was once home to the largest community of Jews in the world (over 3 million people in 1939), the Jewish population has shrunk to about 6,000 Jews (registered in Jewish religious and secular organisations) and 10,000 to 15,000 people of Jewish origin.¹ Contemporary political antisemitism cannot be justified by any ethnic or economic conflict. There is simply no substance for such conflict. There is no “Jewish question” in this sense, as it was understood before World War II. The vigour of antisemitic sentiments remains a puzzling fact, for it seems to be antisemitism without Jews.

In my puzzlement I turned to a sociological survey that was conducted in 1992 by the Jewish Historical Institute with the co-operation of the Sociology Dept. of Warsaw University and under the guidance of Prof. Ireneusz Krzeminski.² Below I will present some results of the survey.³ I would like to present also some basic characteristics of the phenomenon in Poland in the last 3 years (1999–2001). They are the results of the program of monitoring antisemitism, sponsored by the Research Support Scheme of the Open Society Foundation⁴, which has been completed in 2002.

Prof. Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania,⁵ who analysed public opinion polls between 1975 and 1992, observed that a long-term tendency was that declared antipathy toward Jews slowly diminished, while the percentage of those who declared sympathy or a neutral attitude grew. As many as 41% of Poles ‘disliked’ Jews in 1975 and 17% in 1992.

1 This number is rather hypothetical. It was speculated from demographical changes of Jewish population in Poland between 1939 and 1968 (war losses and emigration waves). We do not know much about the ethnic awareness of this group of 10,000–15,000. Some probably feel Jewish, but have no contact with Jewish life, some feel Polish and Jewish, some feel themselves to be Poles with Jewish ancestors, and some have no Jewish consciousness at all.

2 The group included also Dr Helena Datner-Śpiewak and Dr Andrzej Zbikowski of JHI and Ewa Kozminska-Frejlich, MA, of the Sociology Dept. The poll was conducted on 1013 adult respondents, selected by their social class, sex, and residence.

3 The results were published in I. Krzemiński, *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?* (Warsaw, 1996).

4 Grant No. 1602/1999. The group was carried by me, Dr Dariusz Libionka of the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw and Stefan Zgliczynski, an anti-fascist activist.

5 A. Jasińska-Kania, *Bliscy i dalecy. Studia nad postawami wobec innych narodów, ras i grup etnicznych* (Warsaw, 1992), vol. 2.

The scale of antipathy in 1975 was:

1. Germans (60%)
2. Jews (41%)
3. Roma (39%)
4. Arabs (11%)

By 1992 the figures had changed and looked quite similar to the results of surveys in France and Germany:⁶

1. Roma (47%)
2. Arabs (34%)
3. Germans (32%)
4. Jews (17%)

The lowest level of declared antipathy toward Jews in Poland was observed in 1987 (16%), while it rapidly went up in the years 1988–1990 (19%, 21%, 20%). There was a decreasing trend in the following years, while from 1992 the level has remained stable at between 17% and 20%.

The “jump” in declarations of “dislike” observed in 1988–90 probably reflected the social frustration and fears connected with the collapse of communism and the transformation of the political system in Poland. The postulates of the most influential liberal opposition in Poland were ‘privatisation’ and ‘re-privatisation’ of nationalised property, like factories, houses and plots. The people who were working and living in them felt threatened by the possibility of losing their jobs and housing. Before the war many factories and houses belonged to ethnic Germans and Jews, and this was the reason for the sudden increase in declared antipathy toward those two nationalities. There was even a wave of *Judeophobia* observed during this period. Many people feared that “Jews would come back and take over the factories” or even that they would throw out people from the small-town cottages (which used to belong to Jews before the Holocaust) on to the streets. Those fears showed the trauma of Polish people who had witnessed the Holocaust and who had suppressed their feelings of guilt for profiting from the destruction of the Jews.

Such fears were easy targets for political manipulation – and some politicians took advantage of this (even Wałęsa). This was also a time of political formation⁷ – and antisemitic parties also wanted to find their place on the political map. It was their activity that probably stabilised the level of declared antipathy in the following years and broke the previous tendency for an increasing percentage of people declaring sympathy toward Jews. The readiness of Polish voters to submit to such manipulation is not clear.

⁶ Of course, in Germany we cannot have Germans at the top of the list of dislike, but in both countries Roma and Arabs are at the top, and Jews are on 4–6 position. See: *Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur seit 1945*, ed. W. Bergman and R. Erb Reiner (Opladen, 1990).

⁷ The law is very liberal as far as the legalisation of a political party is concerned. The court can only check the legal side of the statute and practically has no possibility of delegatisation.

Not a single party with an openly antisemitic program reached the required minimum of votes to win any seat in the Polish Parliament. But there were some parties and politicians who made subtle anti-Jewish references during their campaigns – and were then quite successful in the elections. Moreover, some smaller antisemitic parties entered into coalitions with larger ones in order to “smuggle” themselves into the Parliament (*Sejm*).

Several kinds of antisemitism have been identified by historians and sociologists. For the purpose of our research we have focussed on three of them: 1. popular folk antisemitism (with a component of the traditional anti-Judaism of the Catholic Church); 2. traditional antisemitism (the motives very popular in the antisemitic propaganda before World War II); 3. modern antisemitism (coloured by the conspiracy theory of history). The survey showed that the first kind of antisemitism has been in decline. A very minor percentage of the population of big cities is affected by it. It still has its place in peasant culture, where some (4%) still believe that “Jews killed Jesus”, that their fate “is a consequence of God’s punishment” (8%), that they are “enemies of the Christian faith,” etc. Such important prejudice as the blood libel (“ritual murder”), connected with this kind of antisemitism – has disappeared.⁸

Such statements as “Jews have only themselves to blame for their own problems” (35%) or “A Jew is a Jew, even if he feels Polish” (60%) represent the second, “traditional” type. Even if they look harmless, such statements were in fact the popular motives of the pre-war antisemitic arguments in Poland, and as we found, they were still quite alive when we completed our research. The first statement was used to justify anti-Jewish group aggression, such as pogroms. The second excluded assimilated Jews from the Polish society to which they aspired.

The strongest determinants of the attitudes of modern antisemitism have been, as we concluded, affirmative answers to questions about “Jewish influence,” “Jewish conspiracy” (including the role of Jews in establishing communism) or “Jewish power” in the world or in Poland. The percentage of affirmative answers to the question concerning ‘whether the world is ruled by Jewish power interests’ was very high. 58% believed that “they control the world’s finances”; over 50% that “they protect themselves against others”; and nearly 50% that “they secretly aspire to rule the world.” The reaction to the same type of statements in connection with Poland was a little more “realistic,” but still irrational. The percentage of affirmative answers to the question “Do Jews have too much impact on politics and economy in Poland” was 35%⁹ as compared to 25% rejecting such a view. Over 21% of respondents believed in “Jewish influence on Polish media,”

⁸ 0% of positive answers. It would be interesting to note that the disappearance of this prejudice took place in recent times. In my field investigation on *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) peasants were asked, if they believed in “ritual murder”. I noted only 12 negative answers in a group of 64 respondents.

⁹ According to the journalists, J. S. Mac and R. Kaminski, in 2001 their percentage grew to 47% (‘Upiory Jedwabnego’, *Wprost*, No. 4, Jan. 28, 2001).

but 25% did not. It was interesting to note that only 14% were ready to accept the statement that “Jews installed communism in Poland.” It is also worth noting that 40% chose the statement that “the only reason for anti-Jewish hatred is prejudice”.

The study focussed on 17% of people whom we could call “antisemites”. They were respondents who did not choose any “pro-Jewish” answers. Another 8% could be classified as a group of “philo-Semites” – people who did not choose any “anti-Jewish” answers. There were also 57% of those who did not choose any “pro-Jewish” answers, but who for the most part replied negatively to the questions determining an antisemitic attitude. We considered this group to be open to antisemitic influences and ready to absorb them.

Naturally, we found the first group most interesting for our purposes. What kind of people were those antisemitic 17%? Not surprisingly, they were poorly educated, frustrated, and pessimistic,¹⁰ while their political views were usually anticommunist and rightist. Many were active in the “Solidarity” movement.¹¹ A significant percentage of them were religious people – but also those from “philo-Semitic” group were mostly religious, practising Catholics.¹² Such determinants as sex, habitation (city, town, or village), social class, and political traditions in the family, seemed to have no significant influence on the attitudes toward Jews.¹³ To our surprise, the antisemites were not the oldest generation. They belonged to the age group of those who had been children during World War II. They could remember Jews as the victims of the Holocaust, but they could not remember the pre-war times. They witnessed the Holocaust as children, but they were young adults during the wave of antisemitism in Poland in 1945–46. Older and younger groups were less antisemitic.

As sociologists have noted, negative features usually prevail in the stereotypes of other nations, because we tend to believe that our own is better. Contrary to this theory, we observed a very interesting irregularity in the stereotype of Jews and Germans. Although the level of antipathy toward Jews is still high (they are placed in fourth position on the *Bogardus scale*, after Gypsies, Germans and Arabs), to our surprise, there are more “positive” features in the stereotype of Jews (39%) than “negative” ones (30%). 29% of answers include neutral features in the image of the Jew. The difference in the stereotype of Germans is even bigger: 66% of positive features and 27% of negative ones.

10 The questionnaire included questions that measured the level of frustration (for instance, “Do you think that you earn enough”; “Do you believe that your future / the future of the country will be better”, etc.).

11 It means, in the movement of “Solidarity” after 1989. It is called sometimes “Second Solidarity”, because its ideological form is quite different from the original one of 1980/81.

12 There are different modes of Catholicism in Poland. One is more open and ecumenical, the other fundamentalist and xenophobic.

13 H. Datner-Śpiewak, ‘Struktura i wyznaczniki postaw antysemitycznych’, in Krzemiński: *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?*

The stereotype of Jews contended such traditional elements as: national unity, solidarity, religiousness, and high culture; Jews were supposedly enterprising, resourceful, industrious, laborious, good managers, thrifty; intelligent, peaceful, sensitive; with two new features, noted for the first time: they were good soldiers and had skills for leadership¹⁴ (all positive qualities). Also among negative features one could hardly find something new. Traditionally, it was believed that Jews were interested only in their own *gesheft*, unfair, they were defined as swindlers, exploiters, misers, egoists, and usurers; greedy, shrewd, impertinent, insolent, etc.

We could note that the features relevant to their traditional economic role in the history of Poland were still important an part of the stereotype. But most of them were evaluated positively – which was something new. It was even more striking in the stereotype of Germans, which also have a strong component of ‘economical’ features (“skills in commerce,” “good workers,” etc.) In the pre-industrial society such features like “industrious, laborious, good managers” were valued negatively; “thrifty” was understood rather as “miserly ” or “niggard,” “intelligence” as “shrewdness,” etc. The actual stereotype of Jew was formed in the times when the system of values of Polish society was pre-industrial in type. It seems that our research catches the very moment of the change of the system of values into an industrial type. The transformation is taking place now and that is why there has been no time to change the content of the stereotypes of Jews and Germans; only the evaluation has changed.

The results of our investigation indicate that the stereotype will be changed to fit the high position of Jews on the list of antipathy. Probably the features “borrowed” from the modern antisemitism’s determinants will be adopted. As we may observe, statements like “Jews rule world finance,” “they protect one another against gentiles,” “Jews have too much power in the world,” “they secretly aspire to rule the world,” are accepted by over 50% of respondents.¹⁵ 35% of them believe that “Jews have too much influence on the economic situation of Poland.” Although those statements are not chosen as the answer to the question on the stereotype (which is an open question), they are a source of needed negative features. We know that stereotypes belong to the ‘structural’ level of culture and they do not change easily. We do not know if the above hypothesis is true, and if it is – how long the process of change will take. I hope we will have an occasion to check it, because Prof. Krzemiński is planning to repeat the survey.

The antisemitic movement in contemporary Poland comprises various marginal political parties, societies and organisations, as well as the skin-head and football-hooligan subculture among teenagers. The number of

¹⁴ These two new features occurred only in several banquettes. Probably they reflect the image of Israel in the media. By the way, “skills for leadership” seems to be the reverse of “thrift for power”.

¹⁵ See also: J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and A. Orła-Bukowska, ‘After the Fall: Attitudes toward Jews in Post-1989 Poland’, *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 26, No. 2 (1998).

parties decreased during the second half of the past decade. In 1992 there were 29 registered parties; in 1995 – 31; a year later – 12, and since 1997 their number has fluctuated between 9 and 6. The reason for this decrease was the introduction of a new electoral law in 1996, which favoured party mergers. Last year, however, brought an increase in their number to 10. It was a year of parliamentary elections, and on the unstable Polish political scene it always resulted in a high level of political activity. New parties were formed, some disappeared; others formed coalitions or underwent fusions. We cannot be sure if all 10 parties were active throughout the previous year.

Several groups appealing to chauvinism and antisemitism have been incorporated into the Solidarity Election Action (AWS), previously the ruling power (1997–2001), including two National Parties [Stronnictwo Narodowe], and the National Right [Prawica Narodowa] – a small but virulently chauvinistic organisation from Gdańsk, with offices in Warsaw, Posen and Lublin. One of its leaders became the minister of internal affairs in the past government, another was a consultant to the Prime Minister, proceeding to the post of deputy minister of education, while the third headed the Polish delegation to the European Council and had become its deputy chairman. One of the most influential factions in the coalition was the Christian National Federation (ZCHN), while a minor one was the Confederacy of Independent Poland – “Homeland” [KPN-“Ojczyzna”]. Leaders of both groups deny being antisemites, but utterances and actions of some members of these parties testify to their readiness to make use of anti-Jewish sentiments.¹⁶ Antisemitic activists and publicists for the most part deny antisemitism. It is difficult to assess whether the underlying reason for such a repudiation is fear of the law or an awareness that dissemination of lies and hate is wrong. Therefore the antisemitic propaganda presently advanced in Poland is lacking not only Jews, but also – antisemites. This ideology is also anti-European, and hostile to the European Union.

Although AWS used subtle anti-Jewish messages during election campaigns, its members, including the antisemitic activists, remained silent on the subject when they found themselves in the parliament. Probably it was a result of gentlemen’s agreement between more liberal and radical fractions of the ruling coalition, or a form of political correctness – they learned from the past adventures of former president Wałęsa or of the head of the Polish Catholic Church, Cardinal Glemp, that public antisemitic announcements by people at the ‘top’ were punished by international reaction. Because there is no “Jewish problem,” their antisemitic persuasions could hardly be observed in their parliamentary activity – with one characteristic exception: the re-privatisation law, which excluded Jews, former citizens of Poland. The President’s intervention blocked it successfully.

¹⁶ There were several training camps for skinheads and brawlers organised in the summer of 1999; one of them (at Ustron) was under the patronage of the members of Parliament J. Lopuszanski (ZChN) and A. Słomka (KPN-“Ojczyzna”).

Since the last parliamentary election (2001) the main ruling power has been the post-communist party SLD. The opposition includes the League of Polish Families [Liga Rodzin Polskich], which won 6% of votes, thanks to the promotion by Radio *Maryja*. Among leaders of the party are well-known antisemitic activists, like the Giertychs (father and son), descendants of a pre-war radical Polish fascist, Jan Lopuszanski (previously in ZCHN), and Zygmunt Wrzodak, a former populist member of "Solidarity."

The Catholic broadcasting station Radio *Maryja* has played a major role in the dissemination of antisemitic ideas; it was given a concession to broadcast in 1994. It broadcasts daily and thanks to satellite is heard also abroad. The radio is detached from the Catholic hierarchy, but many parish priests, particularly in towns and villages, tell people to listen to the radio station. Its influence has somewhat decreased recently. In 1999 7,7% Poles (that is about 3,000,000 people) were listeners of Radio *Maryja*, while late in 2000 there were 5,7% (that is a little over two million). The bulk of the audience are women (70%), from the age group of 55 to 65, having elementary or vocational education. A daily newspaper associated with Radio *Maryja*, *Nasz Dziennik*, has been published since 1998 in about 100,000 copies. Its title and ideology refer to the *Mały Dziennik*, an antisemitic paper initiated by the Polish episcopate and issued in the years 1934–39 by the Grey Friars situated at Niepokalanow near Warsaw. The *Nasz Dziennik* claims a Catholic background, but the editorial board does not include a church official and is thus unconstrained by any control or supervision of the Catholic Church or its hierarchy. The columns of the paper often contain openly antisemitic articles. The RM milieu has been very active on the political scene and has introduced 18 deputies and senators to the both chambers of the past Polish parliament, and the above-mentioned League of Polish Families in the present *Sejm*.¹⁷

In 1999 and 2001 the number of antisemitic publications offered at bookstores and news-stands all over Poland grew considerably, as compared to previous years.¹⁸ The fact that they have been circulated by the biggest, state-owned distribution agency *Ruch* has won it a bad reputation. Due to such mass distribution, antisemitic press and books reach every town, no matter how small, and are available at any *Ruch* news-stands and a majority of bookstores, not necessarily specialising in this kind of literature. Some bookshops, particularly in small towns, display antisemitic publications as their major offer, side by side with schoolbooks. This expansion has alarmingly increased their editions.

The following eight publishing companies likewise specialise in antisemitic production: *GoldPol* (of Leszek Bubel), *Retro* (Henryk Pająk's firm),

17 The last public opinion poll (September 2004) noted the jump of sympathy for the League from 6% to 16%.

18 See: A. Cała, 'Contemporary antisemitism in Poland', *Polish Western Affairs*, vol. 32, No. 2 (1991), pp. 161–71; A. Cała, 'Antisemitism in Poland Today', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 27, No. 1 (1993), pp. 121–7; A. Cała, 'Poland', in *The Skinhead International. A Worldwide Survey of Neo-Nazi Skinheads* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1995), pp. 59–62.

von Borowiecky, *Ojczyzna* (of Bogusław Rybicki), *Nortom* (of Norbert Tomczyk from Wrocław), *Fulmen*, *Antyk*, and *Ad astra*. New titles have joined the numerous reprints of the pre-war 'classics.' The *GoldPol* publishing company issued at least 13 titles (1999–2000), with over a dozen thousand copies of each, and has been issuing three aggressively antisemitic periodicals, distributed by the *Ruch* and other, private, distribution companies. In total, in 1999–2001 antisemitic productions amounted to at least 24 titles (including two re-editions of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*). There were thirteen periodicals distributed all over Poland devoted exclusively to antisemitic propaganda, and six others regularly featuring antisemitic articles.¹⁹ *Zins* of skinheads and football-hooligans, circulated in only a few copies, have a similar message for their readers. There were at least 26 websites of Polish Jew-haters in 1999–2000 and 39 in the following year (including two prepared by Polish antisemitic activists in the United States). Nationalism, racism or neo-nazism makes the colouring of the musical production of 19 bands (their number is hardly fixed, since many are short-lived, but new ones keep on emerging). There were over 34 tapes of this kind of music produced in 1999–2001.

The number of anti-Jewish incidents has grown for the last two years. In the early 1990s several were reported annually, whereas in 1999 there were at least 28 such incidents, 45 in 2000, and 48 in 2001.²⁰ The most common are profanation of Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust memorials. In Kraków there were four such events in 1999, and three in Tarnów. Frequent vandals' assaults against synagogues and other Jewish public buildings usually involve breaking windowpanes, destroying plates, leaving excrement and vituperative wall writings. Threatening letters and phone calls also happen occasionally. Jewish communities and local agencies of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews (TSKZ) have been forced to hire security guards, because the state administration seems unable to provide them with protection. Anti-Jewish graffiti can be seen in almost any town or city; and they are seldom removed. The acts of vandalism and violence are expected to increase. The perpetrators are encouraged by the inaction of the authorities, which are rarely successful in prosecuting them and seem very lenient towards the dissemination of hatred.²¹

The usefulness of antisemitism as a tool in the political game is the reason why politicians are not interested in combating this disease. Under the law, offences against a person's ethnic origin or religion and public calls for

19 We have excluded here any local or all-Polish periodicals that publish antisemitic texts occasionally.

20 One of the sources of information was a questionnaire sent to local Jewish organisations.

21 In total, there were 31 people beaten by skinheads and neo-Nazis in 1996, three persons were killed; a year later – 125 victims had to be taken to the hospital, and six were killed. In 1998 the numbers grew to 156 persons beaten and two persons killed. Most of the victims were the members of other subcultures, like punks or anarchists, two Africans were killed, and several – Arabs and Asians – beaten.

ethnic and religious hatred are to be penalised by three-year sentences. But this is a rather latent law. Most trials finished with acquittals because of the “low degree of damage to society”. The Ministry of Education did nothing to introduce programs teaching tolerance, on the contrary – it tolerated (for nearly 8 years) the existence of an obviously antisemitic school textbook.²² The feeble reaction of law enforcement suggests that the propagation of antisemitism is tolerated or even supported by the state administration. Organisations operate that should never be legal by virtue of the Constitution.

In such an atmosphere there is a wide margin of tolerance for antisemitism in society. The participation of parties and organisations that avail themselves more or less overtly of antisemitism in the legislature and state administration, together with antisemitic slogans or allusions used as socio-technique tactics in all election campaigns, have diminished public sensitivity to this phenomenon. Nobody tried to sue the candidates for their anti-Jewish utterances during the last presidential and parliamentary campaigns.²³ Sections of the Polish intelligentsia has long regarded antisemitism as an ideological proposition, which is somewhat ‘unreasonable,’ but legitimate enough to take part in the democratic politics and discourse, and not as a manifestation of dangerous social disease. The problem does not exist for Public TV or Radio; and the daily press seems to be bored and less ready to publicise incidents, which occur more and more often and lose their attractiveness as ‘scandals’ or sensations. Antisemitism is not denounced; it is negated or reduced to a minor aberration, which does not have any bearing on the main current of political life.

Law enforcement had started monitoring some websites set up by nationalists and extremists. But while the prosecution did manage to remove a periodical *Łódzki Szaniec* from a Polish server, it soon reappeared on a foreign one. In October 2000 a court in Kielce sentenced the author of antisemitic letters published on the Internet Radio *Shalom* to ten months imprisonment with a stay of execution. The Court decided that the actions of the accused, who used a pen-name ‘future Auschwitz commander’ and praised the genocide executed by Hitler and Eichmann, were of a “high degree of damage to society” because “he had disseminated the racist slogans all over the world”. This bizarre substantiation suggested that the propagation of similar ideas in Poland represented a “low degree of damage” (and, indeed, this is a legal practice). Still, considering the total impunity of the antisemites using other media (the press or Radio *Maryja* station), these are hardly real accomplishments. Use of the Internet is not very widespread in Poland, while its users are usually better educated, more critical, and less susceptible to antisemitic propaganda. As it is now, it seems much more sen-

²² See the special issue of the *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, No. 183/184 (1997).

²³ In the previous campaigns such attempts were made, but to no avail; all complaints addressed to the legal apparatus were dismissed or discontinued.

sible and advisable to eliminate antisemitic publications from kiosks and bookshops. Nonetheless, one can only welcome the decisions of the servers' owners to remove chauvinistic and antisemitic websites, sometimes also when prompted to do so by other Internet users.

Satisfactory tendencies can be observed in the Polish Catholic Church in recent years, although its bad traditions have not been overcome yet. It seems that the hierarchy has prevalently accepted the path of reforms initiated at the Vatican Council, while part of the clergy and some Catholic intellectuals are opposed to it. Very often the opposition involves the antisemitic ideas or public approval for some antisemitic propaganda motifs. Anyway, few antisemitic utterances have occurred recently on the part of priests – with the notable exception of the activities of Radio *Maryja* station, described elsewhere.

In June 2000 the Primate Cardinal Glemp publicly apologised for clerical advocates of antisemitism. Prior to that he had endorsed the action against the anti-Jewish graffiti in cities. While visiting Israel in March 2000, during a Sunday service at St. Catherine's Church in Bethlehem, he appealed: "Let us do our best to stop the anti-Jewish wall writings, so that we are not found lacking Christian love." Some bishops, however, have appended the sermon with a number of stipulations. Archbishop Michalik said: "It is my feeling that no one should be attributed with antisemitism, because this is the way to sow hostility, variances, and hatred. Today we scare people of antisemitism; we can see a dangerous taboo being enforced on the subject. It can result in incalculable damage."²⁴

The Lublin Catholic University remained a major centre of right-wing nationalistic Catholicism. Some of its professors, including priests, have been active participants of the antisemitic discourse in Poland, and have also been trying to develop a 'new' version of Catholic antisemitism, associated with anti-communism and close in a way to the Lefèbvre creed.

For the advocates of the national-Catholic outlook the concept of anti-Polonism is much clearer than that of antisemitism. It has been present in the Polish public discourse since the late 1960s. It has even earned a definition: "external or internal actions²⁵ aimed at the destruction of the Polish state and nation, hostility towards Poland and Poles, use of lies and insinuations calculated to blacken the image of the nation".²⁶ In the popular usage the anti-Polonism is limited almost exclusively to the alleged 'anti-Polish machinations' on the part of Jews. Regrettably, there is no denying that the

²⁴ Weekly *Niedziela*, June 11, 2000. Archbishop Michalik, who more than once used antisemitic hints in his sermons, was recently elected as leader of the Episcopate.

²⁵ It is an allusion to Jews as 'lackeys' of Israel – the motive from the 1968 communist propaganda. One can observe the 'hints' tactic in this text: every Polish reader knows that the 'definition' concerns Jews, although they are not mentioned.

²⁶ *Encyklopedia "białych plam"* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2000); this is a multi-volume publication compiled by the group of extreme rightists and by the circle connected with the Lublin Catholic University; the contents of the entries display the fundamentalist model of Catholicism and are extremely chauvinist.

concept of anti-Polonism has successfully established itself in the public discourse; many important publicists and intellectuals regard antisemitism and anti-Polonism as two equivalent phenomena. It seems, however, that the Polish antisemites run the workshop and the hotbed of anti-Polonism is there. No conspiracy of American Jews, even if planned in minutest details with such an accomplice as Israel's government, could do more harm to Poland than a single utterance of Father Jankowski or the president of American Polish Congress, Edward Moskal.

The main topics of antisemitic publicity can be traced back to the national and Catholic tradition, which attained its definite form in the late 1930s, and to the 'anti-Zionist' ideology of 1967-68. Antisemitic publicists like to refer to the pre-war traditions of the National Party and National-Radical Camp (ONR). They are not so eager to uphold the antisemitic slogans of the campaign of 1968. Still, some front propagandists of the period made a glorious return in the attire of nationalist and Catholic patriots, who prevent the 'invasion of Jews and masons.' In the propaganda of 1967-69 Zionism was described as a reactionary ideology, as a weapon used by the imperialists and neo-fascists, as the cosmopolitan hotbed of anti-communism, as racism, as striving towards world domination. Polish Jews were identified as Zionists and accused of 'double loyalty,' or rather of being 'lackeys' of Israel, acting against Poland. It was Jews who were blamed for the 'errors and distortions' of the Stalinist era, which had supposedly been premeditated anti-communist and anti-state actions. Some aspects of the March 1968 propaganda, such as reducing the extent of the Holocaust, were close to Holocaust denial.

For the last three years the adaptation of the so-called 'historical revisionism' has been rapidly progressing. The 'religion of the Holocaust' concept has not been used in the Polish public discussion until recently. It is a mild version of Holocaust denial. 'Jewish centres' are criticised for 'creating a Holocaust religion' and using it against the Poles or against Catholicism. In 1999-2000 it was one of the leitmotifs of the antisemitic discourse. Edward Moskal, a representative of the American Polish community, claimed, for instance, that Jews exploit the Holocaust to raise funds "to beat the Poles"; his views were formed mainly under the influence of Wojciech Wierzecki, the head of the communist party section at the Polish Philology Institute at Warsaw University after March 1968, presently an editor of the *Zgoda* biweekly in Chicago. This man is said to be the author of Moskal's letters and speeches.

Heated discussions on the problem of antisemitic publications in Poland have arisen around the scandalous publication of the *Tematy niebezpieczne* [Dangerous themes] by a scholar of The Opole University, Dariusz Ratajczak²⁷ (March 1999). It was the first time that a Polish author so explicitly upheld the Holocaust deniers' arguments. Ratajczak called the historians

²⁷ Ratajczak was an active member of a National Party, one of several active in Poland in the last decade.

studying the Nazi genocide of Jews “adherents of the Holocaust religion, who advocate censorship and thrust the false, propaganda picture of the past upon the international public.” In the conclusion he said expressly: “To sum up the subject, we may state without fear of a gross error, that Cyclone B was used in the camps for disinfecting, and not for murdering people.” Similar opinions began to appear in other antisemitic publications. In Radio *Maryja* the defence of Ratajczak’s theses has been put by a professor of Lublin Catholic University and a professor of history of Warsaw University.

The scandal surrounding Dariusz Ratajczak’s book resulted in the first ‘Holocaust denial’ trial against the author with the prosecutor demanding 10 months imprisonment. On 7 December 1999 the District Court in Opole decided that Ratajczak had, in fact, denied the Nazi crimes, but due to the “low degree of damage to the society” of the offence the case was discontinued. Upon appeal, however, on 14 April 2000 the Regional Court in Opole resolved the case needed reconsideration – but ‘the last word’ of the judge was not very different. He decided that the number of 300 issues of the book was a proof of rather limited circulation, and therefore – of a “low degree of damage to the society.” Meantime the book was reprinted en masse by the antisemitic press and the *GoldPol* publishing house.

‘Pandora’s box’ was opened in 2001 when a book *Sąsiedzi* [Neighbours] by an American scholar of Polish origin, Jan Gross, was published in Poland. Moreover, a documentary film by Agnieszka Arnold (under the same title) was shown on public TV. They dealt with the mass murder of Jews of the town Jedwabne by their Polish neighbours in 1941. The Polish public was shocked. Almost all dailies and periodicals took part in the discussion, some denying the incident, trying to place the blame on the Germans, or justify the crime by accusing the Jewish victims of collaborating with the Soviet secret police before 1941.²⁸ The official trial was introduced. It has not been finished, yet the most recent findings indicate that this crime was initiated and committed by a group of Poles of Jedwabne, who after a bloody pogrom herded the Jewish population of the town (their number unknown) into a barn and burned them alive. There is no evidence of an initiative by the Germans or their participation, or even their presence during the slaughter.²⁹

This knowledge was not easily absorbed by Polish society. The results of the public opinion poll by COBOS³⁰ showed that only 17% of Poles did not hear about the matter. Of 83% who learnt about it from the mass media, 41% believed that Germans were the sole perpetrators; only 6% of Poles were ready to accept the shocking truth. The most common reaction, even

28 The town of Jedwabne between 1939–41 was occupied by the Soviet Union.

29 Witnesses told of eight German policemen present at the time in the town.

30 COBOS no 131. It was completed 6–9 April 2001 on the group of 1036 representative respondents. The results were published on the Internet by Bogna Wciórka – before the official announcement on the results of the trial.

among those who could not accept the fact, was pity for and compassion towards the victims. Only 8% declared that they felt no empathy at all, and 4% of others declared their antipathy toward Jews on the occasion. On the other side, only 2% admitted to feelings of guilt. 11% believed that the affair was a provocation, set up by Jan Gross and Agnieszka Arnold just to “blacken” the image of Poles abroad.

The inhabitants of towns and villages, less educated and usually older, were least ready to accept the truth, and most often did not feel any moral responsibility for this crime nor for antisemitism in the past or present. While following the public discussion in the media, one could observe a hysterical response on the part of the antisemitic press and also a dramatic split of opinion among the Polish intelligentsia. It was not easy to accept the fact that Poles, who were commonly believed to be the main victims of Nazi occupation, had committed war crimes. The ‘Jedwabne affair’ touched upon a very sore point of national consciousness involving its vision of Polish martyrdom. It also stirred the subconscious, traumatic, guilt-ridden memory of witnessing (and maybe not only witnessing?) the Holocaust.

Those traumatic passions were, as usual, manipulated by some politicians. After the ‘invasion’ of journalists representing all types of press and other media, the second wave of visitors to Jedwabne were activists of anti-Semitic organisations. The local priest usually took their side, protecting ‘the good name’ of the town and its inhabitants. And their opinion of the past events changed rapidly. Before – the memory of the events was a shameful taboo, which was whispered to the ears of the terrified younger generation secretly. Now the Jedwabians negate all. Most of them boycotted the commemoration ceremony. The Mayor of the town who as an official was obliged (and wanted) to take part in it, soon after resigned – under the pressure of local public opinion. A Jedwabian family that had rescued a Jewish family and had had the courage to tell the entire story to the cameras, had to leave their town recently. It looks like the appalling truth is soon to become a skeleton hidden in the innermost recesses of Jedwabne.