

DOI: 10.15290/rtk.2017.16.1.02

Rev. Andrzej Proniewski
Uniwersytet w Białymstoku

Interreligious Dialogue in Jesus Christ

This article presents a critical reflection on the advancement of interreligious dialogue between Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Considering the person of Jesus Christ as a common reference point provides another perspective on reconciliation as well as a means to bridge the differences that continue to hinder a communal experience of faith.

Key words: religion, interreligious dialogue, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism.

Introduction

The diversity that exists among cultures and religions in a world that, on the one hand, has an enormous need for unity and peace, and where, on the other hand, this unity is overpowered by divisions that are so strong that they cause conflicts and wars, makes it necessary for all peoples living in different countries and on different continents to take a concrete and definitive stand. Peoples of different cultures and religions can no longer remain mutually ignorant of or neutrally distant from each other; for, contact between different cultures and religions, which highlights their differences, is unavoidable. Since interreligious and intercultural contact is inevitable, it is necessary for individuals to facilitate this contact particularly through their own engagement in it. Successfully achieving unity among peoples largely depends on the way in which people overcome cultural and religious confrontation. One possible, effective, and pertinent way to overcome religious and cultural confrontation is to seek union through interreligious dialogue

in Jesus Christ, who himself prayed to God the Father that “they may all be one” (John 17:21).

Christianity, the Religion of the Person

Modern man understands Christianity in as many ways as there are people in the world. This diversity of understanding does not arise from the incoherence of Christian doctrine, but rather from the way that individuals understand the phenomenon of Christianity. In fact, put simply, Christianity is Jesus Christ. Every person’s encounter with God and with man is completely unique, personal, non-transferable, and inexpressible. In his heart, every believing Christian poses questions about the mysteries of birth; death; the resurrection of Jesus, who is the source of life; and the reality of God’s presence in his life. In turn, these questions give rise to further questions about the meaning of existence. The answer to these metaphysical questions, which begin from the very moment of a person’s existence, is found in faith. Karol Wojtyła, who perceived how his inner experience of himself (his “I”) and others (their “I”s) arises from his own experience of himself, examined this problem of man as an *alteri incommunicabilis*. “Auto-empiricism,” or self-experience, is first and the source; for, whoever experiences is human, and the one who experiences the subject of experience is also a human. The human person is simultaneously the subject and object.¹ In this respect, it is best to understand the multiplicity of the often very complicated paths of human religiosity. For, human existence forces all men to ask the same questions, whether they live under the Cross of Christ, the Star of David, the crescent moon, or any other sacred sign of faith.

In analysis of religions today, Christianity itself is subjected to numerous interpretations that distort its original aim revealed in the person of the Son of God. This is because the modern man dangerously separates and distances his daily life from faith and, in its place, seeks effective substitutes for traditions and centuries-old customs that have been cultivated in families. The sociology of religion provides many terms that reflect contemporary postmodern religiousness: Christianity outside of the Church (Trutz Rendtorff), subjective private religion (David Martin), religion of longing, postmodern popular piety (Maria Widl), seeking religiosity (Kurt Bowen), postreligious spirituality

¹ K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL Lublin, 2000), 375. I. Mizdrak, “Nieprzekazywalność podmiotu osobowego a możliwość spełnienia się poprzez drugiego w myśli antropologicznej Karola Wojtyły,” *Filo-Sofija* 23 (2013/2014): 203-218.

without God (Ignace Verhack), agnostic spirituality (Monika Wohlrab Sahr), and irresponsible religiosity (Andreas Feige).² Many references directly liken faith to a product that one can pick and choose, such that belief and the spiritual life have become commercialized or “McDonald-ized.”³ Even though many researchers have predicted the collapse of religion in Europe and in the world, religious belief does not die. Instead, manifestations of religion and religious belief simply take on new shapes and forms. The fundamental question that the missionary nature of the Church faces is the image of Jesus in which people believe. For, it is this image that they present to others in their evangelizing efforts to proclaim the good news about salvation.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not exclusive to the religious experience of Christians. The universalization of the teachings of the Master from Nazareth permeates the consciousness of millions of people who are unable to accept the fullness of truth about Christ because to be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ, and of Him only.

Bishop Artur Markowski specifies several fundamental elements that are characteristic of all religions. He states that all religions have some form of faith in God, doctrine, religious worship, religious community, and morality. In the case of Christianity, all of these elements are focused on the Son of God, Jesus Christ. What Jesus Christ said about proclaiming the reality of the Kingdom of God leads to these conclusions. Faith in God is synonymous with faith in God’s Son: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me” (cf. John 3:16-18; 14:1). This doctrine is summarized in the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor, which is the essence of all of the Law and the prophets. For the sake of his mission, Jesus implements the Law with a new spirit.

Among other things, biblical exegetes widely state that St. Matthew’s aim in his Gospel was to repragmatize and contextualize the person of Jesus, who the inspired author presents as the New Moses (in Judaic tradition—the giver of the Law) and the Good News of salvation as the New Torah. In Judaism, worship was closely related to the temple as well as the detailed norms and regulations concerning sacrifice, worship, and (im)purity. In his version of the Gospel, St. Luke describes

² Further discussions on the issue of new forms of religiosity can be found in: J. Mariański, “Powrót Sacrum,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 39 (3090), 09.28.2008. Internet Edition (Accessed: 11.14.2016).

³ See S. Morgalla, “Wiara w McSwiecie,” *Deon.pl* (08.19.2010), <http://www.deon.pl/religia/duchowosc-i-wiara/zycie-i-wiara/art,261,wiara-w-mcswiecie,strona,1.html> (Accessed 12.13.2016); V.J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Bloombury Academic, 2015).

Jesus as the new temple, while St. John writes about Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well about worshiping the Father “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). The person of Jesus Christ, and not a concrete place (i.e., the temple, the holy mountain, or other holy sites), is key to the “new” Christian worship. In Christ, the Church community will succeed the temple as the center of Christian worship. Unlike hermetic and rigorous Judaism, to which many of the first Christians initially belonged, Christianity and the Christian community are open to more people because the criterium by which a person becomes a member is his profession of faith in the Son of God.

On the issue of Christian morality, it is possible to use the German theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar’s statement (which was approved *in forma generica* by the 1974 International Theological Commission) from his *The Nine Theses* as an argument for referring all norms to the source that we find in the Person of the Second Adam.⁴

From the aforementioned document and the arguments contained within it, it is clear that the person of Jesus Christ is key to understanding Christianity. He is present in various forms in a variety of religions throughout the world. While his enduring presence can serve as the basis for interreligious dialogue, it can also make this dialogue more difficult. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s declaration entitled *Dominus Iesus*, which was published on August 6, 2000, has confirmed Von Balthasar’s teaching on the person of Jesus Christ.⁵ The conciliar document *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to*

⁴ “The Christian who lives by faith has the right to base his moral activity on his faith. Since the content of his Faith, namely, Jesus Christ, who revealed to us God’s trinitarian love, assumed not only the form and the guilt of the first Adam but also the limitations, anxieties, and decisions of his existence, there is no danger that the Christian will fail to find the first Adam in the Second Adam and along with him his own moral dilemma [...] Christian ethics must be elaborated in such a way that its starting point is Jesus Christ, since he, as the Son of the Father, fulfilled the complete will of the Father (= everything that must be done) in this world. He did this “for us” so that we might gain our freedom from him, the concrete and plenary norm of all moral action, to accomplish God’s will and to live up to our vocation to be free children of the Father. Jesus Christ is the concrete categorical imperative.” See: International Theological Commission, *Theses in Christian Ethics* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1974_morale-cristiana_en.html.

⁵ Some of the fundamental postconciliar documents on this subject are: *Mysterium Fidei Dei* (1972), *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973), and *Communione notio* (1992).

Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate has remained the point of departure for interreligious dialogue.⁶

Religiology

Jesus Christ in Other Religions

Judaism

In recent years, the dispute over the nature of the dialogue between Christianity and Judaism has become quite heated in Polish theology. The main protagonist in this discussion is the long-time consultant to the Polish Episcopal Conference for Religious Dialogue, Fr. Prof. Waldemar Chrostowski. One of the topics that Fr. Chrostowski addresses in his articles and popular books entitled *Bóg, Biblia, Mesjasz* [God, the Bible, and the Messiah]⁷ and *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska* [The Church, the Jews, and Poland],⁸ was the politicization of religious dialogue. He described such politicization as *Political Mitigation* in “Rzeczpospolita [The Republic].”⁹ According to Chrostowski, the heated point was an error in the Italian translation of a text published in *L’Osservatore Romano* on April 13, 1986.¹⁰ The theologians’ analysis clearly points to Judaism’s oppositional stance toward Christians, which, despite the intervention of many different groups and peoples, is still manifested among the Jewish people. In the diasporas, where the Jewish people were clearly in the minority in comparison to Christians, dialogue was

⁶ Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 333-337.

⁷ See W. Chrostowski, *Bóg, Biblia, Mesjasz* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Fronda, 2007).

⁸ See W. Chrostowski, *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Fronda, 2009).

⁹ Many publications published articles that covered this debate, including, among others, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and *Więzi*. Fr. Prof. The parties involved were Fr. Prof. Waldemar Chrostowski and Editor-in-Chief of *Więzi*, Zbigniew Nosowski. See Ks. W. Chrostowski: *Obecny dialog katolicko-żydowski politycznym mityngiem*, <http://www.pch24.pl/ks--w--chrostowski--obecny-dialog-katolicko-zydowski-politycznym-mityngiem,18350,i.html#ixzz4z1wL6Ltw> (Accessed: 10.11.2013); W. Chrostowski, *O dialogu*, <http://w.kki.com.pl/piojar/polemiki/kosciol/dialog.html>, recorded on tape (Accessed: 11.20.2016).

¹⁰ The error had to do with a contradiction of the controversial categorization of the Jews as Christians’ older brothers in faith. According to Fr. Chrostowski, such a literal understanding of Pope John Paul II’s words results in many inaccuracies that must be constantly corrected, which makes it even more difficult for Catholics and Jews to formulate positions in their dialogue. See. <http://ekai.pl/wydarzenia/polska/x23364/czy-zydzi-sa-naszymi-starszymi-bracmi-w-wierze>, (Accessed: 11.20.2016).

closed off to two fundamental realities: social isolation and a lack of reference to the person of Jesus Christ. Although anti-Christian texts have not survived and been passed down in Judaism, Jewish teaching on the Talmud has made it clear how Jews should interpret the person of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Undoubtedly, Jewish interreligious dialogue extends to much wider circles, affects the whole of social relations, and goes beyond doctrinal findings.¹²

In recent years, Jewish authors have more willingly reflected on the phenomenon of the Master from Galilee. For example, in Poland, the American Jew Jacob Neusner's book entitled *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* has been perhaps the most popular publication.¹³ Dialogues based on St. Matthew's Gospel provide contemporary Judaism's interesting attempt at see its teaching, which is based on the Law of Moses and onto which a new spirit was breathed, in a new light. Another attempt at Christian-Jewish dialogue can be found in an interview with Barr Schwartz, a scientist who researches the Shroud of Turin.¹⁴

Contemporary Judaism has at least a few factions whose interpretations of Christianity present extreme positions on the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Researchers generally tend to divide modern Judaism into the following two groups: Orthodox Judaism (which contains many factions), Conservative Judaism (reconstructive), and Reformed Judaism (otherwise known as Zionism, which is further distinguished into a cultural faction and a *religion of work*).¹⁶ For a Jew, the Tora, the Talmud, and those who teach them are the basis of doctrinal arguments. Thanks to these sources, works such as *Mishna*, *Tosefta*, and the dozens of *Midras* (in short, *Hazal*) exist. Daria Boniecka-Stępień

¹¹ See K. Kościelniak, *Chrześcijaństwo w spotkaniu z religiami świata* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo M, 2002), 189-193.

¹² It is sufficient to recall Tomas Gross' controversial publications dedicated to the topic of the German occupation of Poland.

¹³ See J. Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ See G. Górny and B. Schwartz, *Oblicze prawdy. Żyd, który zbadał Całun Turyński* (Warsaw: Rosikon Press, 2013).

¹⁵ In his publication *A Short History of Judaism*, Jacob Neusner provocatively uses the term "Judaism" in plural, arguing that Judaism (and the various forms of Judaism) has no uniform doctrinal system.

¹⁶ See Z. Levin-Gałyński, *Kierunki i odłamy w judaizmie współczesnym*, <http://poznan.jewish.org.pl/index.php/judaizmcom/Kierunki-i-odlamy-w-judaizmie-wspolczesnym.html> (Accessed: 11.21.2016); K. Kościelniak, *Chrześcijaństwo w spotkaniu*, 179.

shows the process of evolution of Jewish literature in her evaluation of the works of Rabbi Jeshyev.¹⁷

A number of Talmudic interpreters depreciate the positive role of Jesus Christ, and depict him as a provocateur and apostate of lawful teaching. The only point that Jewish teachers make that is contiguous with the Christian image of Christ is that historically Jesus was a teacher from Nazareth who had the power to heal people. In specific places, the Talmud states that Jesus' death sentence was just and Mary is depicted as a whore, whose child was begotten from her relationship with the Roman soldier Pantera. As we know from St. John's Gospel (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), the followers of Christ's deceptive teaching were quickly expelled from the synagogue.¹⁸ The conviction of Christians in synagogues is found in numerous documents by the Fathers of the Church such as Justin and Origen, who lived in the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century, and then later by Epiphanius and Jerome.¹⁹ Jewish critics hardly mention Jesus because they consider him and his early activity no different than that of other charismatic figures of the 1st century. Neta Shtal and Geza Vermes, who refer to the example of Hanina ben Dosa—a first-century Jewish scholar who had the ability to bring down rain, exercise power over satan, distinguish himself by his piety, and lived an exemplary Jewish life—are inclined to approach Jesus in this way.

Baraita and Tosefta write tersely about Jesus and describe him as a "stranger," "the son of Pandira," "the man," and an "Israeli criminal." The aforementioned Babylonian Talmud presents a reductionist view that depicts Jesus as a wise disciple, who betrayed the true teaching and followed the path of witches and idolaters. In all of these works, Jesus occupies a marginal place. These sources acknowledge the historical documents that prove Jesus' existence, yet they reveal how the Jewish people reject the essence of his teaching. The historian Shtal

¹⁷ See <http://www.jhi.pl/institut/pracownie-badawcze>, (Accessed: 06.10. 2017).

¹⁸ The Greek term ἀποσυνάγωγος which can be translated as "excluded, expelled from the synagogue," appears in this passage. This legally took place at the synod in Jamnia sometime between 90-95 A.D., even though St. John says in his narration that it took place while Jesus was still alive.

¹⁹ The *ha-minimir birkhat* formula, which is contained in the twelfth blessing of the eighteenth prayer of the supplication, arose at the same time as the Flavius Josephus' descriptions. The formula is a curse of all non-Jews, or heretics, including Christians. See G. Miletto, "Żydowskie spojrzenie na inne religie," *Religie świata w dialogu*, ed. U. Tworuschka (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciecha, 2010), 111; M. S. Wróbel, "Znaczenie formuły Birkat ha-Minim w procesie rozdziału Synagogi od Kościoła," *Collectanea Theologica* 78, no. 2 (2008), 65-80.

interprets this fact based on the tragic Siege of Jerusalem that occurred in the year 70 A.D. One would think that the Jewish people would remember that Jesus spoke of the fall of the temple and consider whether he might be the Son of God. Yet, even after the tragedy, the Jewish people's perception of Jesus did not change; they still considered him the provincial and insignificant apostle who preached the truth contrary to the official religion. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Jewish perception of Jesus was based on a false and magical account of him that had been created almost from the beginning of Christian dominance in Europe. This description was a response to the Jewish experience of the Crusades, during which the Jewish people were scornfully referred to as the murders of the Messiah. The work *Toldot* ridicules Jesus' holy aspirations, emphasizes his abasement and humiliation, and describes him as a bastard and the son of an impure woman in "nida."²⁰ Other Jewish writers say that Jesus was condemned by the wise men of Israel for false and deceptive teaching and, after he was killed, his body was abandoned and then thrown into a well.²¹

In 1770, the founder of the Jewish Enlightenment movement (the so-called *Haskalah*) Moses Mendelssohn brought to the forefront the problem of the heated relationship between Judaism and Christianity by initiating an interreligious dispute on the philosophical grounds.²²

The 20th century history of Jewish-Christian polemics spurred the founding of the Zionist movement, which revolutionized Judaism from within. In turn, this led to a discussion of Jewish identity and, subsequently, the topic of Jesus of Nazareth, which was based on British liberal Judaism. With this, certain Jewish writers began to think outside the bounds of the Hebrew Scriptures.

²⁰ The term "nida" is used for a woman in her menstrual period, which was considered impure. Being in this state with a man was punishable by death, and a child conceived when a woman was in this state was considered impure.

²¹ The first work that was completely dedicated to polemics against Christianity is the *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, which appeared at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries.

²² According to him, Judaism is a rational, whereas Christianity is based on miracles that serve as source of the truth about Jesus' divinity. The "cult" of reason did not permit the Jewish Enlightenment to recognize Jesus as God. Mendelssohn distinguished between two images of Jesus—the image that Christians promoted in their dialogue with Judaism, and the image of Jesus as a historical figure.

Currently, there are many authors who see the New Testament as a spiritual continuation of their Jewish heritage, and they promote Jesus as a great teacher in their comparisons of rabbinical literature.²³

Islam

Islam is the youngest monotheistic religion that has lasted to today. It spread in close contact with Judaism and Christianity. Interpreters of Muslim doctrine think that Christians have betrayed the one God by believing in three gods. After the persecutions of Christians during the early centuries after Christ's death, Christianity became the prevailing religion. Islam was formed during the 7th and 8th centuries. By that time, Christianity had already formed a coherent belief system and a three-century old tradition of interpreting and commenting on inspired texts. Those on the periphery of the modern world, which was dominated by Christianity and into which Islam arose have, over the centuries, supported various heresies and factions that are opposed to the teachings of the Church. Given the strong influence of Christianity, elements of Christian tradition and belief have been modified and are reflected in Islamic belief and interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ. Just like the Jews, Muslims used to assert that they believe in the same God as Christians. However, it is clear that this assertion is too optimistic, especially once one enters into a dialogue with Muslims on the nuances of their beliefs. For, in the Qur'an, Jesus is mentioned as a prophet named Isa, whose mother Mary was a pure virgin. While the holy books of Islam do not mention anything about St. Joseph, the story of the miraculous conception of Jesus—the Annunciation—bears a close resemblance to the story related in the Gospels.²⁴ It is very interesting that images of the mother of Isa are found in many Muslim homes. In the Qur'an, the prophet is given characteristic typological biblical names: the servant of God, prophet, the messenger, the Messiah, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, the One who brings good news. When mentioning Jesus' filiation, the Qur'an refers to Mary and

²³ Here it is worthwhile to mention Josef Klausner's work *Jesus of Nazareth* (1922) and Aaron Abraham Kabak's work *The Narrow Path* (1937). A contemporary author who examines these issues is David Flusser, whose book *Jesus* (1986) spurred an intense discussion about Jesus' place among Judaism's cultural and religious heritage. A further discussion of these issues can be found in: D. Boniecka-Stępień, "Wizerunek Jezusa w piśmiennictwie żydowskim-wyбір," *Scripta Biblica et Orientalia*, Vol. 3 (2011): 263-273.

²⁴ The Qur'an probably used the description found in the apocryphal text of James' Proto-Gospel.

does not use the term “Son of God.” The Qur’an does say, however, that it has come to pass as the will of God that the Prophet Isa is of superhuman origin and is without an earthly father. Jesus is the forerunner to Muhammad, the last prophet, who will surpass Jesus in his actions, resurrections, healings, and miracles.²⁵ In Islamic mysticism, Jesus is presented as an example of asceticism, piety, prayer, and great care and concern for the poor.²⁶

Islam alleges that Christian teaching is filled with many errors. For example, in Islam the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus and the existence of the Holy Trinity are considered idolatry. In addition, because of the discrepancies between the synoptic Gospels, Islam claims that the New Testament is only the work of Christian writers and not the inspired Word of God. Islam views St. Paul very critically and calls him a fanatic, heretic, and a forger of a religion who believed in two great falsities: that Jesus is God and that he redeemed man. Neither of these is in accord with the iron rule of Islam, which upholds that another person’s moral guilt cannot be wiped away or removed by any means. In Islam, every person will answer and pay for his actions—either good or bad—after death. Islam upholds that Jesus died a natural death. When Jesus died on the cross, only his natural body expired, while God protected Jesus’ soul by taking it to himself. The Jews mistakenly think that Jesus died. Islam interprets the Ascension as an exaggerated Christian interpretation.²⁷

There is a great discrepancy in the interpretations of Islamic commentators and their evaluation of Christianity, which is a result of their faulty arguments and dogmatic premises that arise from the dysfunctions they observe in Catholic societies. For example, Islamists believe that the Church hinders the free development of science. According

²⁵ The Qur’an’s description of this text is modeled on the apocryphal text of the Gospel of Thomas, in which is written, among other things, how Jesus brought a figure of a clay bird to life.

²⁶ See, for example, the works modern Muslim writers, including Islamic socialists, such as Khalid Mohammed Khalid (1996 d.) and Mustafa as-Sabai (1964 d.), who embrace Jesus’ unique role while emphasizing the reformatory aspects of his teaching as well as his efforts to eliminate social disparities. Abbas Mahmud al-Akkada (1964 d.) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr write about Jesus’ unique concept of love, which they believed had a fascinating power to attract others. See M. Tworuschka, “Islamskie spojrzenie na inne religie,” *Religie świata w dialogu*, ed. U. Tworuschka (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciecha, 2010), 148-149.

²⁷ Ahmed Shaladi sees many analogies between Christian doctrine and Buddhism, including: the concept of the Trinity, the reality of redemption from sin, and the renunciation of wealth for eternal life. See M. Tworuschka, *Islamskie spojrzenie*, 150.

to many Islamic writers, wars and conflicts are caused because Christians do not keep God's law, which, in turn, affects the external and spiritual lives of people and leads to the secularization of society. When he wrote, "*Christianity begets saints or violent men*,"²⁸ Seyyed Hoisein Nasr vigorously points out the hypocrisy of Christians who, on the one hand, call for peace, and, on the other hand, bless weapons and justify war. From a Christian point of view, this same author also expresses an interesting opinion regarding the figures of Muhammad and Mary—namely, Islam is convinced that its greatest prophet is illiterate. The reasoning behind this assertion is that, the less one who is to fulfill God's plan is educated, the more likely it is that what God reveals through that person can be trusted as coming from God and not from the individual's own intelligence. In other words, the assumption is that a less literate person is less likely to distort the original meaning of what God intends. In Islam, the divine mission is accomplished through to the soul of the Prophet and, in Christianity, through Mary—her virginity and limitation. Muhammad expresses the truth that God's human messengers must be pure and immaculate.

Although Islam and Christianity have shared a long 1,400-year history, the history of the dialogue between these two religions has been much shorter. Given the common interests of the followers of the world's two largest religions, the World Islamic Congress expressed a desire to enter into dialogue with Christianity in February 1973. In the same year, the Muslim League expressed the same desire. In March and April 1982, representatives from the world of Islam were invited to co-organize a conference with the World Council of Churches in Sri Lanka. Three years later, John Paul II took the next step in this dialogue by visiting the Muslim country Morocco for the first time.

Hinduism

Insofar as Hinduism does not know or understand Christ, it does not have a personal concept of God. As the third largest religion in the world, Hinduism came into contact with Christian teaching in several ways. First, Hinduism encountered the Syromalabar Rite of Catholicism that developed in the Indus valley in the 3rd century. Then, the Lutheran Bartholomäus and his followers came to India as missionaries in the 17th century,²⁹ Italian missionaries followed in the

²⁸ S. Hossein Nasr, *Idee i wartości islamu* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1988), 33.

²⁹ This German pastor translated the New Testament into Tamil in 1711.

18th century, along with British colonizers in the 19th century,³⁰ and then German Lutherans. In Hinduism, religious identity is strongly affiliated with social status. Consequently, even when Christianity was brought to India, many converts were still obliged to follow a Hindu lifestyle.³¹ The document *Jesus Christ in Hinduism*, which was published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue during the Great Jubilee Year 2000, most accurately systematizes the presence of Jesus Christ in Hinduism.³² The document points out that the evangelization of India, which occurred over centuries, involved numerous attempts to adapt Christian thought to Hindu culture, theology, and psychology. Current Hindu attitudes toward Christianity are the result of this process. The document specifies six fundamental trends in contemporary Hinduism that interpret the person of Jesus Christ. They can be briefly summarized in the following way:

- a) Jesus—yes, the Church—no.
- b) Jesus professed in Hinduism.
- c) Jesus and the Church—yes, but Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Keshave Chandra Sen (1838-84), among others, were advocates for such an understanding of Christianity.
- d) Syncretism as an attempt to synthesize. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975).
- e) Jesus Christ as an integral part of Hinduism. Swami Akhilananda (1894-1962), M.C. Parekh (1885-1967).
- f) Religiously we are Christian, but socially we are Hindus. Bhawami Charan Banerji (1861-1907), the owner of Brahmabandhava Upadyaya.

Mahatma Gandhi is widely regarded as one of the greatest Hindu proponents of Christian thought. However, while sympathetic to the teachings of Jesus Christ, his speeches are very reductionistic and

³⁰ This encounter between Christianity and Hinduism has strongly affected both religions. With regard to European culture, the encounter initiated an interest in the “orient,” which has resulted in religious syncretism and dangerous applications of Hinduism worship to Christian worship. Conversely, the encounter between the two religions introduced monotheistic sects into Hinduism. See K. Kościelniak, *Chrześcijaństwo w spotkaniu z religiami świata* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo M, 2002), 76.

³¹ Researchers usually define Hinduism as the national religion of India and a socioreligious approach to life based on the caste system. See T. Pikus, *Etiologiczna demarkacja dialogu religijnego w Kościele katolickim* (Warsaw: 2006), 330-335.

³² Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, “Jezus Chrystus w hinduizmie,” <http://religie.wiara.pl/doc/472435.Jezus-Chrystus-w-hinduizmie>, (Accessed: 12.2.2016).

distort the whole message of Christ's missionary activity.³³ It is sufficient to refer to this Hindu propotent of pacifism to understand what he thinks about Christianity: "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."³⁴ Many commentators appreciate Gandhi's contribution to the popularization of Christian thought. The atheist and Italian journalist V. Messori "condemned" Gandhi for inculturating Christian values into Eastern mentality.³⁵ In principle, Hinduism does not distinguish between what is divine and what is human. Therefore, although a Hindu may largely accept with certainty that Jesus is God, he is not obliged to believe that Jesus is the only embodiment of divinity. Ordinarily, Hindus see Jesus as the one of many masters and teachers; they interpret him almost exclusively according to Hindu principles. The syncretism of Hinduism strives to create a specific *universum* that presents Jesus as a symbol of enlightened humanity, thereby excluding him from reality completely. Hindus think that, because Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, his life should be regarded only from a spiritual point of view; therefore, they regard him as a soul that has been perfected. According to Hindu tradition, "history is only a partial knowledge of reality; therefore, this knowledge is imperfect. Consequently, if the Mystery of Jesus Christ is historical fact, then this limits (or reduces) God to being imperfect."³⁶

In summarizing the Hindu perception of Christianity, it is important to mention the very real and regular forms of oppression that are committed by extremist societies in Islam as well as the Hindu majority against the Christian minority.³⁷ In many instances, countless acts of

³³ In one of his well-known statements, M. Gandhi referred to the relationship between the value of Jesus' teaching and his role as historical figure: "I can say that the historical Jesus never interested me. It would mean nothing to me if someone proved that Jesus never existed or that the Gospel message was historical fiction because the message of the Sermon on the Mount will always be true for me. [...] I consider Jesus one of the greatest Teachers of mankind, but I do not consider him the only Son of God."

³⁴ The missionary Stanley Jones has written about Mahatma Gandhi's statements on Christianity and on Jesus' doctrine. See "Gandhi kontra Chrystus–Mahatma Gandhi o Kazaniu na Górze," in *Nauki Jezusa: Blog Poświęcony Rozważaniom na Temat Nauk Jezusa Chrystusa* (January 17, 2013), <http://naukijezusa.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/gandhi-kontra-chrystus/> (Accessed 12.08.2016).

³⁵ See H. Seweryniak, *Teologia fundamentalna*, Vol. 2 (Warsaw: Biblioteka Więzi, 2010), 252.

³⁶ See Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, "Jezus Chrystus w hinduizmie."

³⁷ To read more on the issue of Christian dialogue with other religions in Asia as well as models for dialogue that are promoted, refer to: J. Majewski, "Kościół

aggression are not registered by international agencies, and what does reach the mainstream media suggests that these acts are far greater in number than those reported.³⁸ This reality confirms that Hinduism does not take such a peaceful stance toward other religions as it claims, and that the decisions and statements made by many activists and dissidents cannot be regarded as official Hindu positions. Moreover, when the majority of Hindus look at Christianity, they attempt to incorporate into it an entire spectrum of Hindu beliefs, thereby proving the superiority of Hinduism over a religion that is strongly identified with the “West.” Depending on the version of Hinduism that a person confesses, Jesus Christ is regarded as God (one of many gods, but not the only embodiment of divinity), a spiritual example, a guru, a yogina, and the incarnation of Elisha (as Paramahansa Yogananda interprets Christ in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*).³⁹

Buddhism

It is even more difficult for Christians to encounter and eventually dialogue those who ascribe to the philosophical and ethical religion founded by Siddhartha Gautama, otherwise known as Buddhism. K. Kościelniak does not find any common points on key issues between Christianity and Buddhism. For, Buddhism is an atheistic religion that rejects the idea of the existence of a personal God.⁴⁰ Buddhism upholds man as capable of self-improvement and self-sufficient. Consequently, man does not need to comply and cooperate with a supernatural power such as God. In this way, the Buddhist mindset is completely different than a Christian mindset. Buddhism promotes indifference toward the world, which is a form of escapism from suffering through man’s exclusion and alienation from reality. One variation of Buddhism

w dialogu z innymi religiami. Dominus Iesus w kontekście azjatyckim,” *Znak*, 5 (2001), 74-94.

³⁸ See Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten: A Report on Christians Oppressed for their Faith 2009-2010* (United Kingdom: Surrey, 2010); Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten: A Report on Christians Oppressed for their Faith 2007-2008* (United Kingdom: Surrey, 2008), 61-80; Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten: A Report on Christians Oppressed for their Faith 2005-2006* (United Kingdom: Surrey, 2006), 32-38.

³⁹ The founder of the Hare Krishna, Bhaktivedanta Swami, believed that the Greek name of Jesus “*Christos*” is another version of the name of the god *Krishna*, or “*Krista*.”

⁴⁰ See John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 1995), 86.

known as Mahayana accepts many magical acts that Christianity does not accept. A Buddhist's life goal is to achieve nirvana—an enigmatic state of life wherein one's personality is lost after disintegration and even annihilation. Followers of Buddha believe that there are many ways to reach the Absolute, while Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Absolute. In light of these radical differences between the two religions, the statement of one of the greatest popularizers of Eastern philosophy in the West, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, who considered Jesus' sacrifice on the cross an act of sadomasochism and an the impulse of a mentally deranged mind, is particularly significant.⁴¹

What should dialogue between Christians and Buddhists who ascribe to an ethical and philosophical worldview and do not believe in a personal God, salvation, faith, or redemptive love look like? Protestant societies have opened a very wide door in order to promote dialogue as a way to bridge the gap between the two very different and distant (not only spatially, but also spiritually) worlds. Between six and thirty percent of American Jews are tied up with this milieu as a result of opening up to protestant-buddhist thought and philosophy.⁴² The 19th century brought a broad wave of inspiration from the cultures of the Orient to European Romanticism and Modernism. Among others, such thinkers as J. G. Herder, F. von Schlegel, W. von Humboldt, A. Schopenhauer, R. Wagner, and F. Nietzsche were fascinated by Siddhartha Buddha.

In its teaching on non-Christian religions, the Second Vatican Council provided very narrow guidelines for both Buddhism and Christianity, pointing out that what they hold in common is: an opposition to materialism, a recognition of the world's insufficiency and variability, and the need to liberate man from his own limitations through spiritual efforts.

Buddhists see Jesus only as a teacher; and the variety of Buddhism that is closest to Christianity is Chinese Pure Land Buddhism.⁴³ Their

⁴¹ In other statements, D. T. Suzuki compares Buddhist and Christian meditation and analyzes the philosophy of Zen Buddhism from a Christian perspective. See "Betania," <http://www.betania.odnowa.org/?zm=buddyzm> (Accessed: 8.12.2016).

⁴² Rodger Kamenetz defined the Judeo-Buddhist fusion in his 1994 publication *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (Harper One, 2007), in which he termed a Buddhist of Jewish descent a "JuBu."

⁴³ Pure Land Buddhism believes that, in addition to their personal involvement, another force makes the inner transformation of those initiated into its practice possible. See: F. Usarski and R. Shoji, "Buddyjskie spojrzenie na inne religie," in *Religie świata w dialogu*, ed. U. Tworuschka (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciech, 2010), 238.

comparative analyses are based only on chosen biblical passages of Jesus' teachings, in which they either look for similarities to Buddhist teaching (by, for example, presenting an erroneous interpretation of Catholic theology on *kenosis*) or by simply trying to show the superiority of Buddha over Jesus, which was the intent of the Taiwanese dharma of Chiu-jin.⁴⁴ Scholars and thinkers have attempted to compare the principles of Christian mysticism with the Middle Eastern practice of meditation or the life and practices of St. Francis of Assisi with the principles of universal harmony and friendship that Buddhists follow. In Polish language, Roman Małek, SVD, made a comparative analysis of Christianity and Buddhism based on Hans Wandelfels, SJ's articles. He examined the three realities of Jesus, dogma, and the Church in light of their Buddhist counterparts—namely, Buddha (the founder of Buddhism), dharma (the teaching of the Buddha), and sangha (the union of friends, the followers of Buddha).⁴⁵

The blending of Protestantism and Buddhism has undoubtedly overlooked many discrepancies between the two religions and opened up a minefield of misinterpretation. Today as varying declarations of faith and religious practices proliferate, many people are naively substituting Christian prayer and meditation with Buddhist and Hindu meditation techniques.⁴⁶ Although these forms of meditation may seem similar, Buddhist and Hindu meditation practices should be regarded as contrary to the teaching of the Church based on Buddhism and Hinduism's differing assumptions.

Is Jesus the key to the phenomenon of religions?

In their book *Evidence for the Resurrection*, Josh and Sean McDowell write: "We fully realize how politically incorrect it is for us to say that Christianity is the only true religion and that Jesus Christ is the

⁴⁴ According to him, this superiority of Buddhism is evident in, among others things, the social status of the founders of both religions as well as the number of their followers who determine how quickly the founders' teaching and thought spread. See F. Usarski and R. Shoji, "Buddyjskie spojrzenie na inne religie," 238.

⁴⁵ R. Małek, "Jezus i Budda, dogmat i dharma, Kościół i sangha. Chrystologia kenotyczna," in *Dialog kultur i religii, nr. 2: Oblicza Jezusa Chrystusa w kulturach i religiach świata*, eds. T. Szyszka and A. Wąs (Warsaw: 2007), 55-82.

⁴⁶ When writing about Buddhism, John Paul II referred to the commonly accepted and promoted assertion that Christian meditation and mysticism according to St. John of the Cross are similar to Mahayana Buddhism's practices. John Paul asserts that the two are not alike and that "*Carmelite mysticism begins at the point where the reflections of Buddha end*," *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 87.

only way to God. The truth is, Jesus is the one who made this claim in the first place!”⁴⁷ Referring to Ravi Zacharias, the authors of the publication provide a table that shows the essence individual doctrines of the aforementioned religions and, in doing so, refute the idea that all religions are equal.^{48, 49} This presentation also casts doubt on the increasingly popular idea that more than one religion can be true:

	Beliefs About God	Beliefs About Salvation	Attitude Toward Other Religions
Buddhism	No God	Enlightenment	False
Hinduism	Many Gods	Reincarnation	All True
Islam	Allah	The Five Pillars	False
Judaism	Yahweh	The Law	False
Christianity	Trinity	Grace	False

Zacharias’ conclusion is obvious: not all religions are true because not all religions point to God. Instead, all religions adhere to a specific way of perceiving God, speaking about him, and thus creating a purpose of life based on him. At its core, every religion excludes others; in fact, four of the top five religions are like this, including atheists and agnostics, who also see the truth in their beliefs.

The phenomenon of Jesus has influenced the doctrine of all great religions. However, when looking at the evolution of the positions of particular religious systems over time, it is necessary to ask the question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” This question is still relevant, both for the followers of Christ as well as those who have some personal, intellectual, or spiritual experience connected with him. Yet, even though Christ has revealed himself as the divine Son of God, there is no shortage of people, even among Christians, who believe that he is no more than a prophet, teacher, or historical figure.

⁴⁷ J. McDowell and S. McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, E-Book-Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 116.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ravi Zacharias (born March 26, 1946 in Madras, India) is a Canadian-American Evangelical Protestant Christian apologist. He is the author of the book *Can Man Live Without God*, which was awarded the ECPA Christian Book Award, as well as the bestsellers *Light in the Shadow of Jihad* and *The Grand Weaver*. Zacharias is the founder and president of *Ravi Zacharias International Ministries* and radio show host of *Let My People Think* and *Just Thinking*. He is also a Visiting Professor at Wycliffe Hall at Oxford University where he teaches apologetics and evangelization.

Under the influence of relativism and secularism, people easily separate the human and divine natures of God revealed in the person of his Only Begotten Son. Consequently, God as an indefinable reality disappears from the view of a present day society (let alone man—even the most noble and unusual in this vortex) that does not take time for reflection, or Christ remains only briefly at the center of man's attention and then becomes lost to him in the mad rush of modern life. Without a God and a Savior, man's thinking and acting become divided, and so his ways depart from truth. The answers to the burning questions in man's mind and heart can be found only by returning to the source—Jesus Christ—who “is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8).

DIALOG MIĘDZYRELIGIJNY W JEZUSIE CHRYSZTUSIE

Artykuł nt. *Dialog międzyreligijny w Jezusie Chrystusie* zawiera krytyczną refleksję na temat stopnia zaawansowania w dialogu między religiami takimi jak: chrześcijaństwo, judaizm, islam, hinduizm, buddyzm. Uwzględnienie wspólnego punktu odniesienia do osoby Jezusa Chrystusa ma być kolejnym głosem w sprawie pojednania i sugestią w niwelowaniu różnic, które ciągle utrudniają wspólnotowe doświadczenie wiary.

Słowa kluczowe: religia, dialog międzyreligijny, chrześcijaństwo, judaizm, islam, hinduizm, buddyzm.

Bibliography:

1. Boniecka-Stępień, D. “Wizerunek Jezusa w piśmiennictwie żydowskim-wybor.” *Scripta Biblica et Orientalia*, Vol. 3 (2011): 263-273.
2. Chrostowski, W. *Bóg, Biblia, Mesjasz*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Fronda, 2007.
3. Chrostowski, W. *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Fronda, 2009.
4. Górny, G., and B. Schwartz. *Oblicze prawdy. Żyd, który zbadał Całun Turyński*. Warsaw: Rosikon Press, 2013.
5. Hossein Nasr, S. *Idee i wartości islamu*. Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1988.
6. John Paul II. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 1995.
7. Kościelniak, K. *Chrześcijaństwo w spotkaniu z religiami świata*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo M, 2002.
8. Majewski, J. “Kościół w dialogu z innymi religiami. Dominus Iesus w kontekście azjatyckim.” *Znak* 5 (2001), 74-94.
9. Małek, R. “Jezus i Budda, dogmat i dharma, Kościół i sangha. Chrystologia kenotyczna.” In *Dialog kultur i religii, nr. 2: Oblicza Jezusa Chrystusa*

- w kulturach i religiach świata*. Edited by T. Szyszka and A. Wąs. Warsaw: 2007, 55-82.
10. McDowell, J., and S. McDowell. *Evidence for the Resurrection*. E-Book-Kindle Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.
 11. Miletto, G. "Żydowskie spojrzenie na inne religie," *Religie świata w dialogu*. Edited by U. Tworuschka. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciecha, 2010, 107-141.
 12. Miller, V. J. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Bloombury Academic, 2015.
 13. Mizdrak, I. "Nieprzekazywalność podmiotu osobowego a możliwość spełnienia się poprzez drugiego w myśli antropologicznej Karola Wojtyły." *Filo-Sofija* 23 (2013/2014): 203-218.
 14. Neusner, J. *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*. Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.
 15. Pikus, T. *Etiologiczna demarkacja dialogu religijnego w Kościele katolickim*. Warsaw: 2006, 330-335.
 16. Seweryniak, H. *Teologia fundamentalna*. Vol. 2. Warsaw: Biblioteka WIEŻI, 2010, 252.
 17. Tworuschka, M. "Islamskie spojrzenie na inne religie." *Religie świata w dialogu*. Edited by U. Tworuschka. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciecha, 2010, 145-188.
 18. Usarski, F., and R. Shoji. "Buddyjskie spojrzenie na inne religie." In *Religie świata w dialogu*. Edited by U. Tworuschka. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciech, 2010, 227-260.
 19. Wojtyła, K. *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL Lublin, 2000.
 20. Wróbel, M. S. "Znaczenie formuły Birkat ha-Minim w procesie rozdziału Synagogi od Kościoła." *Collectanea Theologica* 78, no. 2 (2008), 65-80.

Netography

1. Chrostowski W., *O dialogu*. <http://w.kki.com.pl/piojar/polemiki/kosciol/dialog.html>, zapis nagrania magnetofonowego, (Accessed: 11.20.2016).
2. <http://ekai.pl/wydarzenia/polska/x23364/czy-zydzi-sa-naszymi-starszymi-bracmi-w-wierze>, (Accessed: 11.20.2016).
3. <http://naukijezusa.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/gandhi-kontra-chrystus/>, (Accessed: 12.08.2016).
4. <http://religie.wiara.pl/doc/472435.Jezus-Chrystus-w-hinduizmie>, (Accessed 12.02.2016).
5. <http://www.betania.odnowa.org/?zm=buddyzm>, (Accessed: 12.08.2016).
6. <http://www.jhi.pl/instytut/pracownie-badawcze>, (Accessed: 06.10.2017).
7. <http://www.pch24.pl/ks--w--chrostowski--obecny-dialog-katolicko-zydowski-politycznym-mityngiem,18350,i.html>, (Accessed: 11.20.2016).
8. Levin-Gałyński, Z. *Kierunki i odłamy w judaizmie współczesnym*, <http://poznan.jewish.org.pl/index.php/judaizmcom/Kierunki-i-odlamy-w-judaizmie-wspolczesnym.html> (Accessed: 11.21.2016).

9. Mariański, J. "Powrót Sacrum." *Tygodnik Powszechny* 39 (3090). Internet Edition. 09.28.2008. (Accessed: 11.14.2016).
10. Morgalla, S. "Wiara w McSwiecie." *Deon.pl* (08.19.2010). <http://www.deon.pl/religia/duchowosc-i-wiara/zycie-i-wiara/art,261,wiara-w-mcswiecie,strona,1.html>. (Accessed 12.13.2016).
11. International Theological Commission, *Theses in Christian Ethics*. Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1974_morale-cristiana_en.html. (Accessed: 11.10.2017).