

Antisemitism in Poland from a non-Jewish perspective

This presentation concerns the problem of the social withdrawal of the Jews in other communities both now and in the past. The life in the diaspora brought about a certain amount of tension conditioned by economic, political, social, moral, national or religious factors. There emerged various attitudes of non-Jews towards the Jews customarily called anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, anti-Jewishness as well as anti-Zionism. All the aforementioned phenomena have common grounds: such was the price of constructing, protecting, preserving and developing one's identity in a strange community. There are, however, essential differences between these phenomena and this is usually forgotten. Consequently, any attempt at subsuming all of them under the term 'anti-Semitism' is unfounded and unjustifiable. The presentation aims first and foremost at characterising the above phenomena and particularly the differences and similarities between them as this affects their proper understanding and evaluation.

It is widely believed that there exist two attitudes towards reality: alienation or acceptance. Subsequently, there appears an alternative situation where a clear-cut choice is required: either this or that. No one takes into account a possibility of at least a partial conjunction where some lack of acceptance is not synonymous with complete alienation¹. People do not necessarily have to agree with one another about everything, which does not testify to mutual hostility. It is only natural that there should exist differences between individuals or communities and that they should always result in certain tensions and conflicts. Thus tolerance (which, however, is not to be identified with total acceptance or alienation) is necessary in constructing mutual relations.

Alienation (Latin *alienus*, *alienum* – alien, strange) is a sense of isolation from the rest of the community. "Alienation is a state of having no ties with

¹ White is not the only opposite of black. So is any other colour. And the spectrum of hues is broad.

those around and feeling a stranger”². An alienated person experiences a sense of rejection. Acceptance (Latin *acceptio* – taking) is tantamount to agreement, taking, approval or confirmation of something or someone. The acceptance of a person means recognising their qualities or functions in a certain environment. “If people accept a person, they agree to their presence and show them their amicability”. The following pairs of terms are crucial in understanding the problem: strange – well-known, distant – close as well as an enemy – a brother³.

The question of brotherhood is not unequivocal; on the contrary, it has numerous shades of meanings and applications. We can refer to brotherhood when talking about someone close, common or well-known. There are various criteria of closeness: racial, social, cultural or religious. In the most original and basic sense, brothers are those who have a mother and a father in common. Those having one parent in common are called half-brothers. At times we tend to extend this kinship to our distant relatives and cousins by calling them distant brothers and sisters. We also use terms “brother” and “sister” in a religious context when referring to a member of our religious denomination. Hence the various religious communities make use of the term “brother”, and so during pilgrimages we call each other “brothers” and “sisters”. This also lies at the roots of a well-known Christian phrase, “Brothers and sisters beloved in Christ the Lord”, used by clergymen at the beginning of a sermon.

The problem of being a stranger concerns each person and each community. We tackle it in interpersonal, international and interreligious relations. Objects, phenomena or people can be strange or alien. As far as people are concerned, everything that is not themselves or theirs appears as alien⁴. The most conspicuous determinant of being a stranger is the fact of not belonging to the particular group (familial, tribal, national, social, religious, cultural), and the entrance into it brings qualities which are not the essential determinants of self-identity and self-consciousness of an individual and a community. There occurs a new situation which is characterised by a clash of what is one’s own (the old) with what is alien (the new). The unity between the closeness and distance inherent in every human relationship is constantly being modified. There always appears some tension, however, stemming from the contrast “close – distant”. Hence what is strange may become close and what is close may turn out to be alien. In general, however, the distance increases or shrinks, which is accompanied by a change in social coexistence.

² *Alienacja*, M. Bańko (ed), *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2007, p. 26.

³ Acceptance, M. Bańko (ed), *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 1, p. 16.

⁴ Employing Hegel’s scheme, one could say that everything constitutes an antithesis of a thesis (a concrete person) and a negation of the thesis the result of which is unavoidable tension.

The idea of strangeness is not unequivocal. "Strange" usually denotes not belonging to something, foreign or unknown. According to dictionary definitions "strange is what is not ours, which, for example, does not belong to us or is different from our habits, traditions, culture [...]. An alien person is someone we do not know or who does not belong to a certain circle of people such as our family, group, society, religion [...]. If some things or phenomena are strange to us, we do not know them [...]. If people are strangers, then there are no bonds between them and they are indifferent towards one another [...]. If something is strange to someone, it is incongruent with their system of values, nature, habits"⁵ as well as with their religion. In the Jewish community, as in any other, there has always existed the problem of being a stranger. We usually encounter the problem of Jewish minorities within other national groups where the Jews were perceived as strangers. The aim of our reflections is to show the attitudes of non-Jews to the Jewish community.

In the historical context we can note an ambiguous attitude of nations towards the Jews living in the diaspora: certain common interests on the one hand and fear and aversion on the other. At its basis there was first of all the ignorance of the Jews, their life and religion deriving from a strong bilateral isolation of the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours. If people know so little about each other, prejudices, one-sidedness and yielding to stereotypes are almost inevitable. Father Chrostowski recalls, "my parents, who lived next to a Jewish family, knew very little about it. Admittedly, the children would occasionally play together, yet there was no talking of going to see one another, the contacts being limited to the necessary minimum"⁶. Moreover, we need to be aware of a huge burden which affects our relations.

The attitude of other nations towards the Jews has to be examined after a thorough understanding of and reflection upon the past events. On the whole, it can be said that although the Christian-Jewish relations were extremely difficult and tense over the centuries, there were also periods of peaceful coexistence. The Jews and the Christians existed despite each other, but also with and beside each other. In spite of the lack of dialogue, the both parties tended to follow the path of conciliation as it was life itself that made them act like that.

The tensions existed from time immemorial, and, frankly speaking, were unavoidable. Despite the various factors – financial, economic, political, social, moral, national and religious – they had common grounds: such was the price of constructing, protecting, preserving and developing one's identity in an alien community. If a community desires to preserve its identity, it will sooner or later

⁵ Obcy, M. Bańko (ed), *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 3, Warszawa 2007, p. 224.

⁶ G. Górny, R. Tichy (ed), *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska. Rozmowa z księdzem profesorem Waldemarem Chrostowskim*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 9-10.

have to face critical choices and situations and to pay a high price. The Jews did pay it many times. This also goes for the Christians. This could be illustrated by an interesting example: "I met a Polish woman who married a Jew. They lived in Warsaw. He was a party activist and a lecturer at Warsaw University. They left Poland in 1968. They had a son who in Poland was called *a Jew* and in Israel *a Gentile*. The husband died of cancer. The wife worked in a hospital as a nurse and would often hear that she was a gentile. After a few years she had enough of it. She wanted to return to Poland very much, but she had been deprived of a Polish passport. The son was growing up and thinking of leaving for America. His mother would repeat his rhyme: "I have two homelands neither of which is mine. *One – because I'm a Jew and the other because I'm a Gentile*"⁷.

A thorough reflection upon the attitude of other nations towards the Jews requires an essential distinction. One needs to identify three phenomena which have different causes and bring about different results, although to a certain extent they have much in common: anti-Semitism, anti-Jewishness and anti-Judaism. There also appeared another phenomenon described as anti-Zionism, which is markedly different from the others.

Anti-Semitism⁸ means hostility and hatred towards the Jews as well as all kinds of prejudices and aversion to them. The criterion employed by an anti-Semite is the race. It is indisputable that this is a blameworthy and dangerous ideology as it perceives the Jews as an inferior and worse human or even subhuman or non-human species. For racial reasons, it calls for the isolation or elimination of the Jews from the rest of society. The term was first used by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 following the official emancipation of the Jews in the German Empire. "The anti-Semitic campaign was a reaction to the entrance of the Jews into a non-Jewish community after the emancipation [...]. The disappointed intellectuals, the Protestant and Catholic clergy, conservative feudal nobility and the traditional middle class (petty merchants and craftsmen) felt endangered by capitalism and especially by the Jewish competition. The new ideology was becoming more and attached to the budding nationalism in almost all European countries, the nationalism which stigmatised the Jews as alien, *Asian elements* incapable of adjusting to the European culture and way of life"⁹.

The notion of anti-Semitism is etymologically unspecified because it is the Arab nations rather than Jewish that constitute the bulk of the Semites.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 30.

⁸ For more information, see L.S. Almog (ed), *Antisemitism through the Ages*, Oxford – England, New York 1988; L. Poliakov, *Geschichte des Antisemitismus*, vol.8, Frankfurt / Main 1988; E. Zolli, *Historia antysemityzmu*, Kraków 2010.

⁹ J.H. Shoeps (ed), *Nowy leksykon judaistyczny*, Warszawa 2007, s. 57.

Most Jews consider the Merneptah stele (a stone dating back to the end of the XIII century B.C. extolling the pharaoh's victory) as the first recognised anti-Semitic text. It concludes that Israel was destroyed and *its seed is no more*¹⁰. The twentieth century and the Second World War, in particular, put an end to the greatest and most drastic instance of anti-Semitism ever, which appeared in a new form of hostility as embodied by a planned, formalised and implemented physical extermination of the Jews.

Anti-Jewishness constitutes an adverse result of the coexistence and existential contacts of the particular nations with the Jews. It has an economic, political, social, cultural and moral basis. The phenomenon is accompanied by a fear of the Jews who are perceived as a threat to the local community, security, existence, social status or identity. In this case, a Jew is not looked upon as someone worse but as someone else, suspected of disloyalty to the host country. Paradoxically, it can be said that anti-Jewishness appears when the Jews (be it right or wrong) are seen by non-Jews as better, cleverer, wealthier, more powerful, resourceful or influential. It is then presumed that this happens at the expense of or against the given nation.

“In many respects Jews differ from their non-Jewish neighbours and go to great lengths to preserve and protect these differences. Every community with its own unique lifestyle, its own sense of dignity and solidarity, its unique virtues and vices has to be prepared for various inconveniences and difficulties. For example, in economic terms the Jews are united by bonds of solidarity and loyalty which are much more profound than those demonstrated towards non-Jews. The latter may happen to fall prey to this situation. They may also victimise the Jews because these do not belong to their circle [...]. The age-old prejudices and tensions also stemmed from different behaviour and attire, different habits, different language and culture. All that bred mistrust, suspicion and aversion, which in times of crisis could have given way to much more drastic attitudes and led to repressions and persecutions”¹¹.

Clearly, a fear of communism whose frequent champions and advocates were the Jews is another reason for anti-Jewishness. The Second World War brought about, especially in Poland, an increase in anti-Jewish atmosphere, as “on the one hand, the stereotype of “Jew-backed communism” turned out to be true in the cases of Jewish-Soviet collaboration and, on the other, the Nazi propaganda (which, by the way, has survived until this day with the graffiti

¹⁰ G. Górny, R. Tichy (ed), *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska...*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹ Op. cit., pp. 49-50.

like *Jude raus, Jews to the gas chamber*¹²) made its contribution as well. The idea of “Jew-backed communism” is deeply rooted in Polish collective consciousness, which is confirmed in the following opinion: “When I was about to finish elementary school, the word *Jew* was synonymous with an atheist and a communist and so had nothing to do with religion”¹³. It seems that the identification of a Jew with a follower of communism and a party activist has given rise to a negative attitude of the Poles towards the Jews even today. This is confirmed by another testimony: “In all frankness, I can say that in the early 1970s I still did not come across devout, religious Jews, and those I knew were all involved in the communist system and appeared as atheists – and so were they viewed”¹⁴.

Anti-Judaism is a hostile or contemptuous approach to the Jewish religion and its confessors as well as a refusal to concede any redeeming value to Judaism. It largely owes its existence to the religious factors and is of theological nature. Following the Jewish synod of Yawne which took place in 90 A.D. Judaism (the Synagogue) and Christianity (the Church) went their separate ways. Since then both religions deriving from the biblical Israel have been evolving in opposition to each other. Therefore, on both sides there has always existed and will continue to exist the necessity to demonstrate what is common and what is different. In the course of history, however, it was usually the differences between Judaism and Christianity that were pointed out and popularised in order to stress above all *specificum Iudeorum* (specifically Jewish elements) and *specificum Christianorum* (specifically Christian elements). It was just because of the common roots and the religious proximity that Christianity offered favourable conditions for Judaism. These mean “much more than just indicating that Rabbinic Judaism does not simply and solely derive from biblical Judaism [...]. The difficulty we encounter can be re-expressed as a question of whether the Old Testament qualifies us for both the Jewish and Christian faith and way of life or whether one of the two religions is its more faithful and competent continuation. So far, the Jews and the Christians have considered themselves to be the only successors of the *true Israel*. Behind all the polemics and tensions there remained a well-known question about *verus Israel* (the true Israel). The both sides would provide a confrontational answer and this also accounts for the existence of a substantial anti-Judaic potential on part of the Christians and a substantial anti-Christian potential on part of the Jews”¹⁵. Over the centuries the

¹² M.J. Chodkiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918-1955. Współistnienie – Zagłada – Komunizm*, Warszawa 2001, p. 472.

¹³ G. Górny, R. Tichy (ed), *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska...*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁵ G. Górny, R. Tichy (ed), *Bóg, Biblia, Mesjasz, Rozmowa z księdzem profesorem Waldemarem Chrostowskim*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 397-398.

followers of Judaism and the Christians would not only distance themselves from each other but also accuse each other. "Rabbis perceive the Christians as idolaters worse than pagans, and certain Church Fathers will readily provide repayment in kind seeing the Jews as the hardened traitors of the true Messiah"¹⁶.

Nevertheless, the main problem responsible for the division is the attitude to Jesus Christ, His Person and mission. According to Ben-Chorin¹⁷, Jesus' faith unites while the faith in Jesus divides the Christians and the Jews. The first step towards the dialogue for both Christians and Jews should involve the recognition of Jesus' Jewishness. In the past and also today the issue seems to be evaded in some way. "Being different, the Jews and the Christians agree that neither of them want to publicly recognise or even ponder Jesus' Jewishness"¹⁸.

The followers of Judaism have their own, usually negative concept of Jesus. They perceive Him as the one who goes beyond the boundaries of their own religion since He poses a threat to pure monotheism. Hence the Jewish presumption about the impossibility of being a Jew and of accepting Jesus' Divinity at the same time. Jesus is believed to have contributed to the persecutions and suffering sustained by the Jews on part of the Christians. The Christians also refused to discuss Jesus' Jewishness as He was not the kind of Jew that they perceived.

Father Chrostowski points to three reasons for abandoning the reflections upon this aspect of Jesus' person. The first was of socio-historic nature¹⁹ (a Jew's negative image as a communist, atheist or persecutor of the Church made it awkward to refer to Jesus as a Jew). The second had religious grounds (belittling Judaism in the name of defending the uniqueness of Christianity where the Jewish faith was argued to be inferior and out of date). The third aspect drew on debasing Rabbinic Judaism in the belief that it was Christianity alone that constituted the continuation of biblical Judaism (the Christians prefer to look upon Jesus as an Israelite rather than as a Jew). It is worth noting that in the case of anti-Judaism we deal with polarity. On the one hand, Judaism offers a very strong criticism which is rooted in the disappointment of those Jews who having recognised Jesus from Nazareth as the anticipated Messiah were rejected by the adherents to Judaism and experienced a painful form of hatred or even hostility. So conceived Judaism appears as a proof of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. On the other hand, there exists anti-Judaism resulting Christianity's failure to overcome the adverse attitude

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 367.

¹⁷ C.f. for more information, Ben Chorin, *Fratello Gesu': Un punto di vista ebraico sul Nazzareno*, Brescia 1985, p. 28.

¹⁸ G. Górný, R. Tichý (ed), *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska...*, p. 471.

¹⁹ See op. cit., pp. 484-485.

of baptised pagans towards the Jews. "Furthermore, it was in Christianity that this pagan aversion, distorting the actual nature of the Church found an alibi. This involved, among others, blaming all the Jews for the sin of deicide. This led to viewing them as cursed and condemned by God the visible sign of which was exile and the figure of the Wandering Jew. It was claimed that God turned away from Israel. This fuelled popular beliefs about children being kidnapped with the aim of using their blood for producing matzoth, etc. These stereotypes would easily catch on among the faithful owing to the scarce knowledge about Judaism within the Church"²⁰.

Anti-Zionism is a direct reaction to Zionism the latter being seen as the recognition by the Jews the legitimacy of the state of Israel and as the emanation of Jewish culture and self-determination. It is a term describing the ideological and political attitude which formally defies not so much the Jews, as the state of Israel and its citizens. It had its origins in the resistance of the Arabic inhabitants of the British mandate for Palestine against the Judeo-national immigration and settlement policy before World War II. The term anti-Zionism also refers to the opposition to the rise of the state of Israel, its policy and activities. The state owes its rise to the ideology of the Jew's return to Zion viewed as a symbol of Jerusalem and also of Israel. Israel has existed for over 60 years, grown strong and pursues its own, carefully planned policy. As its implementation takes various forms, the above mentioned policy also contains negative elements and rejects what is unacceptable"²¹. There are also anti-Zionists of Jewish origin who have not recognised the state of Israel up till today²².

The above considerations make one conclude that the effects of the negative attitudes towards the Jews are of similar nature whereas the causes markedly different. The criterion for anti-Semitism remains the race, for anti-Jewishness – the fear of the alien stemming from ignorance, complexes, prejudices and distrust, for anti-Judaism – religion, for anti-Zionism – the state of Israel. All these phenomena need to be judged with extreme care. Undoubtedly, anti-Semitism is widely believed to be a wrong to be firmly opposed and from the Christian perspective is seen to be a grave sin. "Also anti-Jewishness or anti-Judaism are blameworthy and sinful attitudes to be eradicated although the difference is huge"²³. The matters become complicated when it comes to anti-Zionism. While the Jews cannot be denied the

²⁰ Op. cit., p. 51.

²¹ G. Górny, R. Tichy (ed), *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska...*, pp. 59-60.

²² A case in point can be ultra-Orthodox Jews, who, despite inhabiting Jerusalem's quarter of Mea Shearim, question the existence of the Jewish state for religious reasons.

²³ G. Górny, R. Tichy (ed), *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska...*, p. 60.

right to the existence of their own state, one cannot bar anyone from the criticism of those actions of the Israeli government, which seem to be morally unacceptable or doubtful. Therefore, it seems to be erroneous to reduce a Jewish joke, a boycott of a Jewish store and the extermination of the Jewish people to the common denominator. Nevertheless, in practice, the notion of anti-Semitism is frequently distorted and abused. All the '*anti*' elements directed at the Jews is looked upon as anti-Semitic and each person criticising the Jews is stigmatised as an anti-Semite.

The above distinction is well-founded and justifiable. If we aim at healing the situation we first need to recognise the sources of the diseases which take various yet always painful forms. "What is essential is the right diagnosis of what needs to be cured and opposed. When two neighbours chat to each other, it is enough for one of them to complain about a headache. This, however, will not suffice during a visit to a doctor [...]. If we treat certain forms of behaviour, attitudes, and teachings against the Jews as inappropriate and blameworthy, we need to give a reliable diagnosis before combating them"²⁴. Licking the wounds themselves will take us nowhere. A real and effective therapy involves removing the cause rather than just alleviating it. The everyday experience, however, teaches us that a suffering patient generally strives for soothing the pain.

On the whole, this distinction is perceived by the Jews as totally unnecessary, inadequate or even aimless. "They claim it does not matter whether they suffer from anti-Semitism and anti-Jewishness or anti-Judaism and anti-Zionism"²⁵. The problem, however, does not concern semantics but the essence of the phenomenon and is much more complex. Father Chrostowski thinks that "for many Jews the best formula is that of *Christian anti-Semitism* because they got used to it, in the first place, and, secondly, because it allows persisting with their long-lasting convictions"²⁶. One can come across the opinion that owing to the distinction the "Catholic Church is able to claim that Christianity has never been anti-Semitic nor has it paved the way for Nazism and Shoah since the Church has never accepted racism of which anti-Semitism is an example. Nonetheless, this reasoning in the light of historical and social facts does not sound convincing to numerous researchers of anti-Semitism. In modern times, the followers of Judaism are almost exclusively ethnic Jews and thus any aversion to their religion is practically tantamount to the aversion towards the nation"²⁷. This attitude is somewhat controversial. The identification of the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation is rather pointless. It could just as well

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 61.

²⁵ Op. cit.

²⁶ Op. cit.

²⁷ (<http://www.polityka.pl/historia254099,1,antysemityzm.read>) – 29.06. 2011.

mean that the aversion to Catholicism is practically directed against the Poles the vast majority of whom are Catholics. This thesis can work in relation to the Middle Ages when it was Judaism that constituted the criterion of Jewishness. This is no longer true today. Many contemporary Jews do not share their ancestors' beliefs and even claim to be atheists²⁸.

Both in collective consciousness and amongst the historians there exist two stereotypes concerning Polish-Jewish relations: Jew-backed communism and Polish national anti-Semitism. According to Chodakiewicz, both are far from the truth. "The myth of Jew-backed communism ignores the pluralism in the Jewish community and the latter renders the Poles repugnant and makes light of the participation of Jews in the communist movement"²⁹. What the Poles consider to be the most offensive and unfair, however, are not so much the accusations of anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism or anti-Zionism, as the worldwide conviction about the Polish nation being the most anti-Semitic in the world. "An average Frenchman on being asked which country makes him/her think of anti-Semitism would certainly reply: Poland. For decades we have been unable to get rid of this terrible stigma. Each swastika seen at a village bus-stop is perceived by the West as a symptom of an incurable disease... A truly dangerous anti-Semitism comes into being in France, for instance, with the synagogues being set on fire and the Jewish cemeteries regularly devastated. This results, among others, from a growing number of immigrants of Arabic-origin who in doing so give vent to both their hatred to Israel and to their personal frustration"³⁰.

Each person and each community not only want to exist and develop in accordance with their own identity but have an undeniable right to act like this. The differences between them have always existed and will continue to exist. In the pluralist world arguments and disputes are unavoidable. Protecting one's own interests should not, however, overshadow the fact that we are all human beings endowed with the right to life, dignity and freedom. Coexistence may appear as condemnation to some and as destiny for others. For everyone, however, it is a challenge. This existential situation requires our mutual tolerance seen as respecting beliefs or behaviour of others especially when these happen to be different from our own. This cannot occur at the expense of losing one's own identity. Hence tolerance is not a call for a non-Jew for a complete acceptance or rejection of everything that is Jewish. The art of living entails a skilful oscillation between alienation and acceptance. This polarity is a measure of humanity in our mutual relations.

²⁸ In Israel itself 20% of the Jews consider themselves to be lay – non-religious.

²⁹ M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918-1955...*, p. 471.

³⁰ <http://7dni.wordpress.com/2006/11/21/antysemityzm-w-polsce-i-na-swiecie/> – 29.06.2011.

Summary

ANTISEMITISM IN POLAND FROM A NON-JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

This article concerns the problem of the social withdrawal of the Jews in other communities both now and in the past. The life in the diaspora brought about a certain amount of tension conditioned by economic, political, social, moral, national or religious factors. At times the Jews and the Christians in Poland co-existed in spite of one another, but also with and beside one another. There emerged various attitudes of non-Jews towards the Jews customarily called anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, anti-Jewishness as well as anti-Zionism. All the aforementioned phenomena have common grounds: such was the price of constructing, protecting, preserving and developing one's identity in a strange community. There are, however, essential differences between these phenomena and this is usually forgotten. Consequently, any attempt at subsuming all of them under the term 'anti-Semitism' is unfounded and unjustifiable. The presentation aims first and foremost at characterising the above phenomena and particularly the differences and similarities between them as this affects their proper understanding and evaluation.

Streszczenie

ANTYSEMITYZM W POLSCE Z PERSPEKTYWY NIE-ŻYDOWSKIEJ

Przedmiotem artykułu jest problem obcości Żydów wśród innych społeczności zarówno w przeszłości, jak i w czasach współczesnych. Na skutek rozproszenia Żydów wśród innych narodów pojawiały się napięcia, które uwarunkowane były sprawami ekonomicznymi, politycznymi, społecznymi, obyczajowymi, narodowymi oraz religijnymi. W przeszłości żydzi i chrześcijanie w Polsce żyli ze sobą, wbrew sobie, ale też ze sobą i obok siebie. Wyłoniły się formy odniesienia nie-Żydów do Żydów, które określamy mianem antysemityzmu, antyjudaizmu, antyżydowskości oraz antysyjonizmu. Wszystkie wymienione fenomeny mają wspólny fundament: taka była cena zbudowania, ustrzeżenia, zachowania i rozwijania własnej tożsamości w obcym środowisku. Zjawiska te jednak różnią się między sobą w sposób istotny, o czym na ogół się zapomina. Nieuzasadnione jest zatem ich utożsamianie lub określanie ich wszystkich antysemityzmem. W prezentacji chodzi przede wszystkim o charakterystykę powyższych postaw, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem podobieństw i różnic, co ma wpływ na ich zrozumienie i ocenę.