



‘Religions and Ideologies,
Polish Perspectives and beyond.’

International Council of Christians and Jews
in cooperation with the
Faculty for International and Political Studies
of the Jagiellonian University Cracow.
2011 Conference, July 3-6.

Opening word by Father Jan Novak
Tuesday July 5
Center for Dialogue and Prayer, Oswiecim

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, good to see you.

It is my privilege to welcome you – ICCJ participants, to the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Oswiecim. It is good that you have come. It is here that we encounter the many challenges of Auschwitz.

“These words come to my mind and enter my heart as I find myself in this place in which a special victory was won through faith...” and gives rise to love of God and of one’s neighbor. “Oswiecim is such a reckoning... It is impossible to merely visit it. It is necessary on this occasion to think with fear of how far hatred can go”, how far man’s destruction of man can go, how far cruelty can go. Oswiecim as a testimony of war prevails. “I have come to pray with all of you who have come here today... I have come and I kneel on this Golgotha of the modern world, on these tombs largely nameless like the great tomb of the Unknown Soldier” (Quotations from Pope John Paul II in Auschwitz-Birkenau 1979).

“At Auschwitz-Birkenau humanity walked through a ‘valley of darkness’. And so here in this place I would like to end with a prayer of trust – with one of the Psalms of Israel which is also a prayer of Christians: ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... I fear no evil for you are with me: your rod, your staff... I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.’(Ps 23:1-4.6).” (Pope Benedict XVI in Auschwitz-Birkenau 2006).

I would like to tell you a little bit about the Centre. It was founded in 1992 by Cardinal Macharski in Krakow in co-operation with the bishops of Europe, as well as with the representatives of Jewish organizations. It was from within a time of tension that our Centre was born. Some of you will remember this. The tension has long since past and no longer

remains but it was a painful moment in Jewish Christian relations. Our Centre was one of two buildings which was the outcome of those times – a Centre for Dialogue, Prayer, education and reflection as well as a new monastery for the Carmelite nuns.

The aim of the Centre is to create a place for reflection, education, sharing and prayer for all those who are moved by what happened during WWII. The house is open to everyone. We welcome people from all over the world.

We have guest house accommodation and all is ready for you. We work in close cooperation with Museum Auschwitz, the Jewish Heritage Centre in the town of Oswiecim, the Youth Meeting House, and other local organizations as well. We plan the programmes for groups and individuals who come. Most stay from 3 to 5 days here. We have peace groups, interfaith groups, schools, colleges and universities. We organize some retreats, seminars, and conferences and occasionally it is possible to create some partnerships among conference participants from different countries.

I would like to thank you for coming and we hope to see you again in the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer.

Dear friends you are blessed because you are serving God.

The Lord of peace, the Lord, be with you this day!