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BOGDAN BIALEK, "Kielce Way: Spirituality, Dialogue, Reconciliation"

Kielce makes a unique mark on Polish-Jewish history. In that place on July 4th, 1946, one year after the end of World War II horrors, the "Pogrom" took place. "Pogrom" is a name given to a mass murder of Jewish citizens of Kielce, a murder that was committed by their Polish neighbors. 42 Jews, miraculously saved from the Holocaust, were killed. The name of one victim is still unknown, therefore is referred to by a concentration camp number. Before that event, in 1942 the Germans and their helpers murdered almost the whole Jewish community of Kielce - namely 20,000 people. Kielce makes a unique mark on Polish-Jewish present. It is probably the only city in Poland, in which neither anti-Semitic, racist actions nor graffiti have occurred for years. Neither have any acts of desecration of Jewish memorabilia nor commemoration sites happened. It is in Kielce, where the citizens managed to confront the painful past and many acts of Polish-Jewish and Polish-Jewish-German reconciliation took place. [...]

The Pogrom

A year after the Extermination a great tragedy happened in Kielce. An inscription on a common grave in the Jewish Cemetery in Pakosz district has it: "On July 4, 1946 a mob, which included a number of soldiers and militiamen, attacked fellow Jewish residents of Kielce - people who had had survived the Holocaust and extermination camps. The communist city authorities remained passive; and so did the local people. Some of the attackers were driven by a belief in a rumor of a ritual murder. 42 people were brutally murdered and more than 80 were wounded. After this atrocity, the exodus of Polish Jews started, many of them migrated to the Land of Israel". These few sentences cannot show the scope of this tragedy, as it cannot be expressed in words. Among the murdered there were a pregnant woman and children. The name of one victim is still unknown, thus is referred to by a concentration camp number. Various people took part in the atrocity: passers-by, men and women, an organized group of workers from Ludwików Steelworks, militiamen, soldiers and Security Service. In the trains that were going through Kielce and nearby, groups of civilians and railmen were robbing Jewish passengers and killed some of them. After the Pogrom, a hostile crowd gathered near the St. Alexander's Hospital, to which the injured were taken. Two days later, most of the wounded were transported to Łódź city. On July 8th, the victims' funeral took place, many people attended the ceremony. Next day, a hasty trial started for twelve people accused of taking part in the murder. After three days, nine of them were sentenced to death and executed. From September to December 1946, the trials of militiamen and soldiers were held - they received mild sentences or were acquitted. The chief officers of Kielce Citizens' Militia and Security Service, who were accused of no countermeasures, were among the acquitted. [...]

Taming the memory

Katarzyna Gromadzka, Joanna Sacharczuk and Emilia Żyłkiewicz, scientists from the Chair of Intercultural Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at University of Białystok, proved that even a substantial knowledge about Judaism does not correlate with the openness to the others, especially to Jews. [...] the research clearly shows that the knowledge alone could not reduce the distance, nor change the vista, nor attitudes. Those results were similar to these obtained in a survey conducted by journalists from Kielce edition of "Gazeta Wyborcza" newspaper. At the beginning of 1990s students of Kielce secondary schools were asked about the Pogrom. Almost all students knew about the Pogrom and majority of them were able to explain the possible causes of the event rationally. [...]