

Waiting For The Pope To Meet The Jewish Community Representatives In Warsaw



This is me among Catholic bishops and the representatives of the Jewish community in Poland. The photo was taken in Warsaw in the 1990s. Starting from the left, the first next to the Bishop is me, the second is Mr. Wildstein, the Jewish community leader in Warsaw, the third is Konstanty Gebert, the journalist, the fourth is Stanislaw Krajewski, the Jewish community activist, the sixth is Szymon Szurmiej, the director of the Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. That was probably in 1991, during one of the Pope's [John Paul II] visits to Warsaw. The Pope expressed his wish to meet with the Jewish community. At the time, a so-called Coordination Committee uniting several Jewish organizations was in existence. I was then the acting chairman of the Jewish Historical Institute Association and was chairing, under a rotation system, the Committee, which also included the JSCS and the Jewish religious community. I was tremendously impressed by his kindness of heart and direct manner. We felt that we were dealing with an individual of outstanding importance in the history of the papacy. He greeted us as if we had known each other. He even invited me to take a seat next to him. The main substance of my speech, besides words of recognition for the Pope, who had taken a positive stance toward the Jews, included a request to undertake an effort for the diplomatic recognition of Israel. The Pope is a just man, like a tzaddik. And in the view of the sages of the Talmud and the cabalists, a just man stands higher than angels in the hierarchy of saintliness and importance. Angels only sing songs of praise and carry out directives, while a tzaddik, Hasid, or a just man, at times gets even a chance to change God's judgment, for his pleas, made in direct dialogue, may be granted. An angel gets the order to come down to earth to protect that man, whereas the tzaddik does it by his own will and his own inclination, and for this reason he stands higher than the angel in the hierarchy of importance. Since the Pope's visit, this Judeo-Christian dialogue has become more visible in Poland, and there is an extraordinary need for it. The accumulation of stereotypes has been far greater in Poland than elsewhere. For example, the issue of the involvement of Poles in saving Jews has surfaced recently. And in fact, there used to be a

stereotype that during the wartime the Poles were blackmailers and anti-Semites, and no mention was made of just Poles. Even the just among the Poles did not flaunt what they had done.