

Introduction to the Conference **by Jean-Paul Rempp**

Welcome to the Conference

After all these months of preparation, my joy is great to welcome you all to this Ninth European LCJE Conference in Krakow!

There are exactly eighty-four of us gathering for this event. There are among us people coming from: - may I ask you, please, to stand up when I mention the country in which you are working for the Lord –

- ❖ Bulgaria
- ❖ Denmark
- ❖ Finland
- ❖ France
- ❖ Germany
- ❖ Hungary
- ❖ Ireland
- ❖ Italy
- ❖ (The) Netherlands
- ❖ Norway
- ❖ Romania
- ❖ Russia
- ❖ Slovakia
- ❖ Ukraine
- ❖ United Kingdom.

Some of you come from very far indeed, for instance

- ❖ Our brother who comes specially from the United States of America,
- ❖ And our brother from the Færoe Islands.

We have other “special” invited guests, from Israel. Yes, it is the first time our Israeli brothers have been invited to this European LCJE Conference, and we are very thankful to the Lord that they can be with us, here in Krakow.

Last but not least, there are also our brothers and sisters from Poland, who made a very special effort to represent the Polish Evangelical Protestantism.

I wish to express my very special thanks to Pawel Gumpert, who is a Lutheran Minister and a leader with ProChrist in Poland. He has been my contact in this country, and helped me over the last two years to prepare all the logistics for this conference. We are sorry that he cannot be with us from the very beginning of our gathering, since he has other important obligations in another conference. But he will join us from Wednesday onwards, and also for the Tour.

Having said that, at a time when a national tragedy has struck this country last April, not far from Katyn, I wish to say to our Polish brothers and sisters, on behalf of you all: Dear beloved in the Lord, be assured of our compassion and our Christian love for you; be assured also of our prayers for the Polish society and Authorities of your country.

We are also all aware that we had to postpone this Conference, originally planned for April, because of the lack of flights during the Iceland volcano eruption.

The Lord manifested His grace to us by doing two miracles:

- The first in that we were finally able to postpone this Conference in Krakow to November,
- the second by bringing more participants this time than the first!

Now I hand over to Gustav Cieslar, Poland's Baptist Union Chairman. He will welcome us to Poland. His wife Hanya is going to read his text.

Why this conference in Poland. Perspectives

When the question was raised as to where this Conference should take place, requests were put in for France. But since both last meetings of LCJE CEOs were organized there, as well as a European LCJE Conference in 2001, thoughts were quickly directed towards more Eastern countries. The final choice of Poland and Krakow came up rapidly too, mainly for two reasons:

- The first one is that -as already mentioned- I had a close contact in Krakow, a colleague I knew from ProChrist, Pawel Gumpert,
- The second is because of what Poland represents in Jewish History. It is not just by chance that a Tour to Auschwitz has been proposed in the program, even if it is optional.

As far as the content of the Conference is concerned, it seemed important to several among us that we should not only inform you about the needs and the accomplished, or current, work, but also about the possibilities of cooperation in Europe, including Israel.

As for the theological content, three topics came strongly to mind for our reflection:

- The Uniqueness of Christ in Jewish Evangelism, this topic being always relevant.
- The Christian Theology in the Post-Shoah Era. Could we at all bypass this topic at a conference in Poland?!
- Finally: Anti-Semitism, this topic having been requested particularly by our Israeli brethren. Truly, and unfortunately, anti-semitism and its consequences on Evangelism also remain relevant, which no-one would deny.

The richness of the topics, as well as the diversity of the contributions (never before have so many different countries been represented at an LCJE Conference) should allow us, by the grace of God, to progress together in the work the Lord has set on all our hearts.

Speaking of the richness of the contributions, I would like to insist on the symbolic aspect which the meeting together of Polish and Israeli believers represents in our framework. We had wished anyway to give a special place to Israel in this Conference; you will have noticed that in the program. But we also look forward to the thoughts our Polish brothers and sisters will bring to those matters. While preparing for this Conference, I read or dipped into, with great interest, several books about Poland, such as *Histoire des Juifs en Pologne, du 16^e siècle à nos jours*, (History of Jews in Poland, from 16th century to our days) by Daniel Tollet,¹ *Une Histoire des Juifs de Pologne, Religion, Culture, Politique*, (A History of Polish Jews, Religion, Culture, Politics) by Henri Mincezls,² or the general research survey called *Juifs et Polonais 1938-2008* (Jews and Poles 1938-2008), under the direction of Jean-Charles

¹ Paris, PUF, 1992

² Paris, Découvertes, 2006

Szurek and Annette Wieviorka³. These made fascinating reading, but I am still convinced that nothing can replace the Polish Evangelical Christians' specific contribution on matters addressed in this Conference.

In any case, may the Lord grant us His Grace throughout this whole Conference! May it be a blessing to each and every one of us, as well as to each Church and organization we represent. May it have a spiritual impact not only in this land of Poland, but also in Israel, as well as enhancing progress for the Kingdom of God in the world, with His help! To God be all the Glory!

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³ Albin Michel, 2009