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Interreligious dialogue in the Polish lands in the 18th century? The case of Dov Ber of Bolechov

Dialog międzyreligijny na ziemiach polskich w osiemnastym wieku? Przypadek Dowa Bera z Bolechowa

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Abstract: Dov Ber of Bolechov (1723-1805), Jewish wine merchant and polyglot, known for his dispute with the Frankists in Lwów (Lemberg) in 1759, left the Hebrew manuscripts of his two main works: זכרונות ר' דוב מבוֹלֶחוב (*The Memoirs of Dov Ber of Bolechov*) and דברי בינה (*Understanding Words*). In the former work he describes his life story and the story of his family but also the history of Jews in Eastern Galicia, writing also about important events from the history of Poland, and his description as an outside observer seems to be reliable. In the latter work Dov Ber reveals his attitude towards other religions, especially towards Christianity, and the defence of Rabbinic Judaism and its main book Talmud, or more precisely, of the complete reliability of the Oral Torah, is the leitmotif of *Divre binah*. Can we speak of religious dialogue in the 18th century?

The purpose of the paper is to present Christian-Jewish relations in the Polish lands, in particular in Eastern Galicia in the 18th century from a Jewish perspective in the description of Dov Ber of Bolechov.
Keywords: Christianity, Dov Ber of Bolechov, Interreligious Relations, Judaism

Abstrakt: Dow Ber z Bolechowa (1723-1805), żydowski handlarz winem i poliglota, znany z dysputy z frankistami we Lwowie w 1759 roku, pozostawił po sobie w formie rękopisów hebrajskich dwa główne dzieła: זכרונות ר' דוב מבוֹלֶחוב (*Pamiętniki r' Dowa z Bolechowa*) i דברי בינה (*Słowa rozumu*). W pierwszym z nich opisuje dzieje własne i jego rodziny, ale też dzieje Żydów w Galicji Wschodniej, przytaczając także ważne wydarzenia z historii Polski, a jego opis jako postronnego obserwatora wydaje się być wiarygodny. W drugim dziele Dow Ber ujawnia swój stosunek do innych religii, a przede wszystkim do chrześcijaństwa, a obrona judaizmu rabinicznego i jego głównego dzieła – Talmudu, a ściślej mówiąc zupełnej niezawodności Tory Ustnej, stanowi motyw przewodni *Divre bina*. Czy można mówić o dialogu międzyreligijnym w osiemnastym wieku?

Celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie relacji chrześcijańsko-żydowskich na ziemiach polskich, a w szczególności w Galicji Wschodniej w XVIII wieku z żydowskiej perspektywy w opisie Dowa Bera z Bolechowa.

Słowa kluczowe: chrześcijaństwo, Dow Ber z Bolechowa, judaizm, relacje międzyreligijne

The aim of this article, as stated in the summary, is to present Christian-Jewish relations based on Dov Ber of Bolechov's "Words of Understanding" (*Divre binah*) and more specifically, his critique of Christianity and defense of Judaism (that is, countering the Christian charges against the Jewish religion). Both *The Memoirs of Dov Ber of Bolechov* (*Zikhronot Reb Dov mi-Bolechov*) and *Words of Understanding* (*Divre binah*) are important Hebrew language manuscripts (pre-revival of this language) from the 18th century and invaluable sources for historical research, especially of Jewish history in Poland. *Words of Understanding* in particular is useful for studies in the field of philosophical sciences,

religious studies, history of religion and the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in the eighteenth century.

The Memoirs of Dov Ber of Bolechow is in the public domain, which is how a new edition was prepared (Marcinkowski 2006) and a Polish translation published (Marcinkowski 1994a). The author of this article also wrote several articles based on *The Memoirs of Dov Ber of Bolechow* (Marcinkowski 1993-2013a) which are listed in the bibliography. *Words of Understanding*, however, had been considered lost for many years. It was not found again until the 21st century. The most recent studies of this work are already available (Hundert 2009; Marcinkowski 2015; 2019; 2020).

In *Words of Understanding* Dov Ber focuses on a number of main themes through which he externalizes his attitude to the Enlightenment, Hasidism, above all to Christianity, the defense of rabbinic Judaism and its main work, the Talmud, or more precisely the complete reliability of the Oral Torah.

Already on the second page of his work, the author states his purpose in writing which is to oppose what he states are the deceitful words of Christians:

“And so may the Lord give me knowledge and understanding so that I [may] understand and enlighten [others] through my words! Let He who stimulate[s] my thoughts strengthen me, let me gain energy, gird my hips and prepare me sufficiently! Do not keep me from talking about You and describing all Your actions in this work, lest my lips be silent about the unholy lie against our religion”¹.

From the very first pages the defense of Judaism and, in particular, of the Oral Torah becomes the main message of his work. Throughout his life, Dov Ber frequently was faced with accusations against Judaism. First, he heard them as a young boy in his father's inn, a place which was open to all visitors regardless of their nationality and religion. Later [again] while trading wines which he imported from Hungary, stored in monastery cellars in Lvov and sold to the nobility and clergy. He writes that he heard offensive words every day including [such offenses] that the Jews had lost their ancient wisdom:

“In glorious and non-glorious matters to God who led me through my life! In all the adventures that I have experienced in the days [and] years of my life with all my soul and strength! Until now, the Lord supports me in His mercy and in my old age His grace has not left me. Now I am sitting in my house, the seat of His holy commune, and I am not short of anything. I said, “It is time to do to the Lord what His Law has taught us, some of what we have learned from childhood in Gemara, Rashi's commentary and in Tosafot from the teachers and rabbis (blessed be their memory), our masters in difficult and troubled times. Their smell has not survived in us, and their taste has changed in our mouths.

¹ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:
[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 2.

Most days of my life I was travelling to trade Hungarian wine in the holy commune of Lvov in the streets of the goyim and uncircumcised courtyards, [including to the] the priests. The Christians there envied us. Indeed, every day they opened their mouths unlawfully against us and with haughtiness, contempt, and arrogance shouted at us saying, "You have no reason to come back here or to walk with your head held high! [And] in matters of faith you have already lost your ancient wisdom! There is no man among you who knows anything about God's wisdom or the natural [law]! You all err! You only have the Talmud left to mislead you and fool you!" Such things are what they said to us excessively and deceitfully. According to Christians, their faith is lawful.

For this reason they hate us even more than all idolaters...².

From the fall of Egypt, Dov Ber deduces and foretells that "all those who cultivate false beliefs will perish":

"Israel had the Egyptians [as enemies], but they were lost with their idolaters forever. The Lord did not bring them back again or set other goyim to serve them. That is why there is no mention of them and all the enemies of the Lord who cultivate false beliefs will perish. Yes, for nearly two thousand years, Christians, the disciples of Jesus, (the son of Joseph from the city of Nazareth³), have also lost their way. That is why they are named after the city as Christians"⁴.

Dov Ber writes that the Christians forced the Jews out and appropriated the right to the Holy Torah. They adopted only a part of it, not respecting the entire Oral Tradition handed down to Moses at Sinai:

"Their hearts were filled with anger against our wise men (blessed be their memory), to slander [them] until they drove them out or separated themselves from the people of Israel (may she be set free). They abandoned their traditions and severed their bonds, mingled among the goyim and learned their speech with their priestly leaders in order to reveal unto them and teach them some of the commandments of the Holy Torah that had been [only] among us and hidden from all goyim. We received it written, spoken to Moses from the mouth of God. Like a royal daughter in honorable robes, most of her adornments make up tradition. At Mount Sinai our fathers listened to the voice of the Lord speaking during the thunder. The Ten Commandments, from which all the commandments of the Torah are derived, were written by Moses and passed on to our fathers with oral commentary to teach them the nature and quality of the irrevocable [establishment]

² Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 3.

³ Dov Ber uses the name Notzer. Today, Nazareth is called Natzeret in Hebrew. Both names come from the same root *n-tz-r*, which in the active conjugation *Qal* means 'to guard, to watch', and in intensive conjugation *Piel* means 'to baptize'. Hence the name *notzrim* means 'Christians' or *natzrut* means 'Christianity'.

⁴ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 4.

commandments [for eternal] terms and times as stated in Gemara, while the king's daughter's garments with the jewels and adornments are the Oral Torah. With the permission of the Lord, I will explain this below in a meaningful manner, similar to what I took from King Saul. These Christians seized only the Written Torah itself, the Prophets and the Scriptures. They seized them slavishly without understanding and without familiarizing themselves with the beautiful commentaries and many authentic messages of Tradition. They explain some verses to themselves making skewed claims about their salvation to strengthen their faith. They have written many books in their own language and printed them so that whoever reads them might despise the religion of the sons of Israel and their Torah⁵.

Dov Ber learned foreign languages, which at that time was not welcome in the Jewish community and could even be punished. Such happened to Solomon Majmon, a man thirty years younger, born in Nyasvizh around 1754, who later became a well-known Jewish philosopher. Dov Ber was in a better position as it was his father who supported his learning of the Polish language. Nevertheless, he was also accused of compromising the Jewish religion and had to stop his education as he mentions in his memoirs:

And then I was already learning how to write and speak the Polish language. I was doing it to fulfill the will of my venerable father, (blessed be his memory), who wanted me to learn this as well. So he had an uncircumcised Polish teacher in his home who taught me writing and speaking from the very beginning. In a short time I learned it properly, not only writing in the Polish language but I also understood much of the grammar and vocabulary of the Latin language. But when my first wife left me, some members of our branch started slandering me and doubting my faith saying that I was learning [Polish], God forbid, not for the sake of heaven. Therefore, I had to forsake these teachings. I have meanwhile devoted myself entirely to the study of our holy Torah (Manuscript, *Zikhronot*, p. 39A, *Memoirs*, p. 37).

It seems obvious that Dov Ber's father was an enlightened man who, at the same time of his involvement in the wine trade, saw the need to learn foreign languages as a tool for facilitating relations with strangers. From the texts in Dov Ber's memoirs it can be concluded that the motivation to explore foreign languages also stemmed from the desire to enlighten his nation, which he put first, then secondly to defend Judaism. There he has an enlightenment rather than an apologetic goal:

“If God permits my writing to be printed, it will surely be a source of great enlightenment for all our Jewish scholars. I assure my sons and my descendants in particular that if they devote themselves with dedication to reading these books by the English author Humphrey⁶, that is, both the German edition and the Hebrew translation of this book which

⁵ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 4-5.

⁶ This is a book by H. Prideaux (Prideaux 1717-1718) and a translation into German (Prideaux 1726) which was probably used by Dov Ber.

I have translated from German, they will certainly learn much from them. [This Humphrey] knew not only the Holy Book, but also many worldly topics; stories unknown to the Jews. And we Jews must know everything so that the biblical saying may come true in us: "Because this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations"⁷.

Even though our wise men (blessed be their memory) expounded on this verse from our Holy Torah, they also taught that it is good to additionally supplement the Torah with worldly knowledge and that it is to the benefit of every intelligent and educated Jew if he learns the history of the peoples of the world. At times, this will enable him to properly answer questions directed against the Jewish religion and faith as has happened to me several times in my disputes with the nobility and the clergy. In most cases, I found the right answer and, as everyone knows, my answer was always convincing (Manuscript of *Zikhronot*, p. 75A; Marcinkowski, 1997 b, 183-190).

The text found in *Words of Understanding* already clearly proves that learning foreign languages, in addition to facilitating business contacts and enlightening one's own nation, was primarily to defend Judaism:

Ever since my childhood, growing up in my father's home at the inn which was [open] to all the nationalities which passed through this region, knowing that everyone was coming to find respite for their souls by eating, drinking and sleeping, they [took delight], above all, in conversations against the Oral Torah and against the Jewish community and faith.

And the sons of Israel were offended, yet not offended. They listened to the curses and did not respond because there was no man among us who spoke the teaching in their language. Even though our answer was victorious at times, it was hardly noticed. From an early age I understood the meaning of their statements. Let a Jew give a sufficient response victoriously to their doubts as well as against their faith, but that it would be in an educated way and in their language. From then on, I was overwhelmed by a passionate desire and a decision in my heart and thoughts to force myself with all my strength to get to know and learn their language fully so that I too could read their various books of contemporary and ancient authors. After an arduous effort [devoting every] spare moment and [at the cost of] rest, I got to the bottom of their grammar and learned their vocabulary. Even so, I was afraid to read their books as a child because they are loathsome in the eyes of my people and we call them unfit [to read]⁸.

Dov Ber was afraid to read them until he came across a commentary to *Pirke Avot* entitled *Yehuda's Bread (Lekhem Yehuda)* by Yehuda ben Shemuel Lerma⁹. From the following

⁷ Link to the original manuscript of *Diore binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689..](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689..)

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

⁹ Sixteenth-century Jewish scholar, born in Spain and active in Italy. He wrote a commentary on *Pirke Avot*, called *Lekhem Yehuda*.

comment, Dov Ber found the motivation to [continue] diligently learning the Polish language:

“When I saw the commentary on Rabbi Elazar's opinion: “Be zealous in studying the Torah. Know how to reply to a heretic” the language of the commentary, as was written, [has resulted in such that] I [have become] zealous in my word; quick and diligent. Let it be a matter of habit, constancy and respect, just like keeping an eye on the door every day. Such an understanding allows us to explain in our Mishnah the understanding of what he said above, [namely], that the best way [to act] which will [cause] a man to [willingly] adhere is a good heart. [H]e explained the understanding of 'a good heart' by saying that one will have a wise heart and [be] prudent, quick-hearted and firm in discussion only when that person continuously studies with great zeal and constant persistence. [T]o this he says, 'Be zealous in studying the Torah' and then 'Know how to answer a heretic'. He did not mean this as a warning, that man should not put himself solely on the heights of intellect and mental acuity in teaching the Torah, but that he should also know what a heretic, who denies the principles of Torah and mocks the words of the sages, has to say about them. Find the source of their mistakes from their books and you will find the right answer to them¹⁰.

Continuing his reflections on *Yehuda's Bread*, Dov Ber quotes the comments of such sages as Maimonides, Abrabanel¹¹ and Yitzhak ben [Moshe] Arama¹² referring to the fragment of the Mishnah from the treatise *Pirke Avot*, which says:

Rabbi Elazar [ben Arakh] said, “Be zealous in your Torah study and know what answer to give to a heretic. Also, know in front of whom you are working because your employer is trustworthy and will pay you for what you do” (*Pirke Avot* 2:14).

The Mishnah uses the term *apikoros* to describe a heretic which is evidently taken from Greek and comes from the name of Epicurus, a Greek philosopher from the 4th century BC who denied the existence of God. Epicurus preached that nothing should be taken on faith until one has experienced it and known it. It should be clarified here that in the understanding of the Mishnah, a heretic is one who publicly and maliciously proclaims heresy, that is, denies the existence of God and His unity, renounces the Oral Torah and transgresses the Divine Law.

After studying the aforementioned comments by the eminent scholars, Dov Ber concluded that total dedication to studying the Torah is not required but [rather] a practical knowledge of it [is needed] in order to be able to respond to heretics. For this purpose, he wrote that it is very helpful to read Christian books:

¹⁰ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 6.

¹¹ Isaac Abrabanel (also known as Abravanel) Don Itzhak ben Yehudah, born in Lisbon in 1437, died in 1508 in Venice – philosopher, rabbi, and Jewish theologian.

¹² Jewish scholar and Talmud commentator living in Spain in the 15th century.

“You need to become educated in matters regarding the understanding of [other] nations so that you may fend off a heretic and oppose him [on the basis [of your knowledge]] and have an answer in the event of any difficulties and the like... Even though you will learn the views of the nations so that you will be able to respond to [the heretics], be careful that none of these [new] beliefs penetrate your heart and remember that the One whom you serve knows the most hidden part of your heart. It was He who said, “Know before whom you are doing your work. Worthy of blessings is [he] who turns his heart to the faith of the Remnant of Israel.” until now these are the words of Rambam (blessed be his memory) (of Maimonides) explained by Rabbi Yitzhak Abrabanel”¹³.

Referring to the Sanhedrin 38b treatise of the Babylonian Talmud, Dov Ber distinguishes a foreign heretic from an Isrealite heretic, the later whom he considers to be the greater wicked:

“Do not change Rabbi Elazar's opinion to mean [that his words were] only regarding a foreign heretic. They were also about a heretic of [Israel] which has been said is an even greater wicked one. Rabbi Jochanan said: Wherever heretics have denied the faith, the right answer was there. Rabbi Yitzhak ben [Moshe] Aram, the author of the book *Aqedat Yitzchak* (*Binding of Isaac*), also explained that the reason for this [is] in the fact that a heretic among [foreign] nations did not see the light of the Torah. Therefore he deserves mercy and to be spoken to indulgently in a learned language in order to bring him into the circles of righteousness that there might be [some] hope for him. Even though the Jewish heretic already knows the ways of the Torah and the way of repentance, he is not worthy to be spoken to because of 'you will not throw a log to the blind'. It will only add iniquity to his sin. When arguing with him, [he may] become furious and curse his Lord and God, so it would be better to let him be”¹⁴.

Dov Ber considered Christian books to be full of lies and absurdities:

“When I wanted and undertook, to the best of my ability, to learn about all their books, sources and foundations of the traditions of [different] nations, indeed, [I saw] many with my own eyes[.] I read and found most, if not all, of them lying and absurd, full of offensive words and absurd nonsense. They tell miracles and wonders that their people saw with their own eyes in every generation which they explain in such a way that it is difficult for even a stranger to believe, and even more so us sons of Israel, who believe [as] the sons of believers and know the Lord from true messages and from of our holy fathers mentioned above, and neither of us can indulge in the slightest indulgence that these false beliefs enter easily into his heart”¹⁵.

¹³ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), pp. 7-8.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 6.

¹⁵ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 10.

Reading Christian books made Dov Ber determined to undertake the defense of Judaism:

“After the Lord made me aware of all this, I decided in my heart to undertake this underappreciated task, maybe His Name will be sanctified through me, (blessed be His name), profaned by the goyim for several hundred years. Those uncircumcised profane the Name [of the Lord] of Heaven, cast aspersion, slander and insult the books of the Talmud, the true traditions and the holy words of the sages, (may their memories be blessed), which have been [passed on] orally from generation to generation, [coming] from the mouth of the servant of the Lord our teacher Moses, from the mouth of God [whose] voice on Mount Sinai was heard by our fathers gifted with the Decalogue from which comes the 613 Commandments (*Taryag Mitzvot*) written down with all the oral commandments. All of them were given orally by our fathers on Mount Sinai and after the destruction of the second temple our Teacher, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, (blessed be his memory), had to also begin writing The Mishnah which had existed for several thousand years as an oral tradition”¹⁶.

The author of the manuscript defends the Oral Torah against accusations, emphasizing its complete reliability. For him it is a given certainty when he accuses other monotheistic religions, including Christianity, of being irrational and relying on false assumptions. Dov Ber externalizes his negative attitude towards other religions. Here is what he writes about Christianity and Islam:

“The same is true of other inquiries of our wise men, (blessed be their memories), who wrote down for us established, true messages [which came] from the mouths of our holy fathers, [passed down] from mouth to mouth, testimonies of truth from the first man, true oral transmissions from father to son and not like those goyim sons of Edom or believers of the Christian religion or the sons of Ishmael or the religion of Muhammad. [These] consider themselves to know the Law because the Christians have [it] in their Bible[in their] version of the Mosaic Law and the Prophets but it is incorrect and false from beginning to end because they took it over from various nations, copied in many languages by their counterfeiting priests for a long time, nearly two thousand years, and each person forged it until it was all cunningly forged by their hands and robbed of all commentary and true transmission. In the same way, the Ishmaelites, the sect of the aforementioned Muhammad, have some of the Torah in their Koran, equally falsified and confused with the lying teachings of Muhammad their false prophet. Long ago, Jesus and Muhammad departed from the principles of the religion of Israel”¹⁷ (*Divre binah*, p. 9).

Elsewhere, *Divre binah* speaks of Zoroastrianism:

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁷ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 9.

Gehazi, a disciple of the prophet Elisha, when subjected to the numerous anathemas mentioned above withdrew from Eretz Israel with his three sons and went to a place unknown[. In this way] they came to Persia and Media and there he gave fire worshipers the foundation for dualistic faith[. H]e also gave them the Book of Commandments for this faith, as explained further, [and] all his deeds and ordinances which I have rewritten from the books of [different] nations and foreign tongues into our holy tongue for the inspection of the children of Israel (*Divre binah*, p. 10).

Similarly in *Zikhronot*:

... the people of Hungary come from these nations believing in two spirits because the countries from which the Hungarians came are close to Media and Persia[. Then] this faith was established there. Its founder was Gehazi, a disciple and servant of the prophet Elisha, who was driven out by his master for accepting a gift from Naaman, the commander of the armies of the king of Aram, as a token of gratitude for being cured of leprosy by the prophet Elisha as explained in the second book of Kings chapter five, verse twenty-four. After being driven out by his master, Gehazi chose a place where no one knew him. And I copied from [non-Jewish] books all that Gehazi did regarding religion, how he made followers and what they learned from him. When this faith spread, the Greeks called [its followers] "magieren" and the Hungarians call themselves Magyars. So it must be that the Hungarian people came from the countries where this faith was practiced, as I saw in the uncircumcised Hungarian that the fire never went out for, according to what Gehazi established, the fire must burn constantly. The Greeks called Gehazi Zoroaster¹⁸ (Manuscript of *Zikhronot*, p. 74B, *Memoirs*, pp. 88-89).

And about Christianity itself:

"Yet these slanderous books mirror the Christians themselves who appropriated the Mosaic Torah and testify that Jesus of Nazareth himself declared that he had come to fulfill the Law of Moses and do not nullify it, God forbid! Such is explained in various parts of their books mentioned above. Matthew, chapter five, verse 17¹⁹.

Here begins a sharp polemic, not to exaggerate by saying a religious struggle, which testifies to the lack of dialogue and understanding in the 18th century. Dov Ber lists the authors of polemical texts, both Christian (e.g. Fr. Gaudenty Pikulski, (Pikulski 1760²⁰)) and

¹⁸ Greek Ζωροάστρης also called Zoroaster or Zarathustra. Hence the name of the religion Zoroastrianism.

¹⁹ From the New Testament: "Think not that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17; Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*: [http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 10.

²⁰ It was probably Dov Ber of Bolechow who uttered the following words quoted by Fr. Gaudenty Pikulski: "We want Christ to be the true Messiah and the Prophecies to be fulfilled; however, he will propose to Mathew in Chapter 5 verse 17 that: He has not come to corrupt (Mosaic) law, but to fulfill it. Why, you Catholics do not obey the Mosaic Law, you do not respect Sabbath, but Sundays: either then your Christ spoke these words with an imaginary heart, or you don't listen to God, do or to your Christ. Thus did one Jew in Lvov speak to me." (pp. 435-436). Dov Ber took part as a translator and

Jewish, who referred to the book by Fr. Pikulski (Itzchak son of r. Abraham, author of the text *Strengthening the Faith*, Lipman author of the book *Victory*, Tuvya (Tobi) author of *Maase Tuvya (The Work of Tobias)*.

With reference to the above-mentioned book *Strengthening the Faith*, Dov Ber paraphrases the Greek name *Evangelion*, calling the New Testament in Hebrew און גליון, which can be read as *Aven Gilyon* or *On Gilayon*, meaning "false reflection", "false roll" or "false version" ²¹. Next he writes:

"At the same time, many wise and highly educated men rose up among the *goyim* who knew much of the old and ancient scriptures. Thanks to their knowledge they wrote much against idolaters and the most against Christians. They denied all narratives of their deeds saying emphatically that all the wonderful stories contained in their new law, which they called false revelation, are [too] far-fetched to be believed because they have been made against nature. A similar [opinion was expressed] by our wise men (blessed be their memories) saying that miracles do not happen contrary to the laws of nature. And now that the basis of their faith is denied, all the absurdities of their claims will probably be [lost] like the bloodletting lie"²².

The author of the manuscript also refers to the harmful opinion against the Jews regarding ritual murder and claims that the suppression of such suspicions saved the Talmud:

"Regardless of this, for many centuries in the insanity and the lies that are among them, [these] priests made up that supposedly Jews could not eat matzah during the Passover without the blood of Christians. That is why their children are kidnapped and slaughtered in order to bleed their blood and eat it with matzah on the first (!) Night of Passover. And they explain it with the preposterous and very bizarre claim that the blood of a Christian child shed in vain will redeem the Jews for the blood of Jesus of Nazareth which was [also] shed in vain in Jerusalem"²³.

In some way, we too in our time, thanks to the mercy of Heaven, have been saved from these wickedness and libelous slander [directed] against us and against the holy books of the Talmud which the priests judged in their books and which have survived thanks to God's immeasurable providence on us. Until today we have in our possession the entire Talmud with all its comments just as it was of old from ancient times with all the power of

representative of the Jewish side in a dispute with the Frankists in Lvov in 1759, convened by the Bishop of Lvov. Hence, probably the desire to find the right answer to the Christian accusations is so clearly visible in *Divre binah*.

²¹ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 11.

²² Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 16.

²³ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 12.

the Law, and it will not depart from our lips and from the mouths of our offspring from now and forever.

Also from then, after the last answer of the rabbi, a scholar of great light, our teacher and master, Chaim Katz Rapaport (blessed be his memory), judge of the holy commune of Lvov and the surrounding district (may the Lord protect and save them) [after his answers] to their last persistent and brutal attacks on the Books of the Talmud. It was then that the priest's superior became famous for his lie about the bloodletting of Jews, which could be felt from the mumbling words of their own informers. After printing the respected rabbi's answer, a scholar of great light, mentioned above in the year 520 according to a shortened count (1760), to the book *Złość Żydowska [Jewish Anger]* in Polish. All the Polish goyim knew and learned that [accusing] the Jews of bleeding [Christian] blood was a lie from the beginning. Since then, thank God, no more such slander has been heard in Poland. On the contrary, it is their faith to shame the goyim²⁴.

Dov Ber also raises the issue of accusing the Jews of paying for the profanation of the Eucharist:

“And more similar cases are raised, that the Jews are supposedly to pay for the desecration of bread from their temple for great money in order to revile and insult their faith. Christians [do it] themselves when they believe that this bread is the body of Jesus their redeemer. And because of absurd deeds, lying slander and similar suspicions in the thousand and several hundred years since the establishment of priests in this idolatry for this faith of theirs, in countries and kingdoms in parts of Europe they were killed and put to death in various ways and subjected to severe and painful torments for our grave sins because of their origin, many tens of thousands of great scholars, exquisite rabbis and [spiritual] leaders among the holy sons of Israel suffered severe torment and various sufferings from these merciless goyim so that they died”²⁵.

The author of the manuscript brings to mind the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Polish lands, referring to the conscious and voluntary choice of Poland:

“The sons of Israel did not change their clothes during their exile in Germanic lands for a thousand years or even longer until they left the cities of these lands, mostly of their own free will, and chose for themselves the Polish Land, our country, a dry land, desolate and devoid of any beautiful materials like gold or silver. The sons of Israel brought here all [that is] good; numerous treasures reconciling princes, lords and royal courtiers in the holy commune of Krakow. Then there was no king in Poland, only twelve voivodes ruled. They welcomed the Jews [who] showed them all their wealth [and they] got thirty million Polish zlotys from them on the terms that I will tell you about below. The condition was clear, that

²⁴ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 15-16.

²⁵ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 12.

the Jews would forever keep the pattern of the clothes in which they came here. They have continued in this way until our day so the sons of Israel have not mingled with the goyim in this land, not only in terms of clothing, but also in language. They avoided conversations [even] in special situations, because they used the Germanic language among themselves without any expression in Russian or Polish”²⁶.

In the above fragment, Dov Ber of Bolechow emphasizes the preservation of Jewish traditions as observed, among others, by distinctive clothing. We know from his memoirs that he himself tried to introduce elements of Polish traditions:

And I earned a good name on my own [right away] at the beginning when I made my stepson, a six-year-old boy in Tish'a Beav, a wonderful wooden saber modeled on the iron saber of the noble lords called the karabela. While reading Lamentations most people were not as interested in its content as much as they admired how I had made the saber (Manuscript of *Zikhrnot*, pp. 40B-41A, *Memoirs*, p. 40).

At the end is a topic, although not directly related to religion but indirectly because it speaks of relations between nations and about how Jews perceived their neighbors. We note here a very positive accent for Poland and Poles with a fragment stating that evil came from outside:

“However, when some of the sons of Israel settled in many places in the lands of Podolia and Ukraine hidden behind Polish lands there began the evil of beating their inhabitants as a result of the uprising of the Cossack people who in each generation plundered, murdered and killed several tens of thousands of the sons of Israel. Therefore, no serious or respected man from the sons of Israel settled there. If so, it was only one of the poor simpletons who had no respect in the old communities. Encouraged by local magnates, they went to new places where they settled and built houses, synagogues for prayer and schools to study the Torah. In this way they proceeded and studied the Holy Torah, Gemara, Rashi and Tosafot's commentaries, the clever and sharp *pilpul*, [the entire] Bible and the Mishna with all the comments in six orders, as well as other biblical commentaries containing teachings for the reverently taken over which, for all these many days, were in the possession of the elders and the disciples of the sages who extended their days after their arrival there. They worshiped the Lord according to the customs of the Jewish communities they came from. And then another generation came who did not see or know [any longer] the customs of the sons of Israel as they were in the old communities. They departed from many [traditions] that Israel had as well as from the faith itself. They did not follow these customs”²⁷(Marcinkowski 2013b, 320-322).

²⁶ Link to the original manuscript of *Divre binah*:

[http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#\\$FL32405689](http://beta.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000043898/NLI#$FL32405689), p. 18.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

The two recently cited fragments of Divre binah's text clearly indicate that Jews, expelled from various countries, voluntarily came to Poland where they found peace and survival. This is confirmed by the fact that in the 18th century the majority of Jews from all over the world lived in Poland (Tomaszewski 1990: 7). There they could live and develop safely in accordance with the etymology of the Hebrew name of Poland expressed in two words: *Polin* or *Polanyah*. The first term פולין *Polin* in Hebrew means 'rest here', 'sleep here' and the second, פולנייה *Polanyah*, means 'here the Lord has rested' or 'the Lord has stayed here'.

The purpose of this article, as stated in the introduction, is to present Christian-Jewish relations in Poland, particularly in Eastern Galicia, in the 18th century from the Jewish perspective in the description of Dov Ber of Bolechow. To complete the picture of Christian-Jewish relations at that time, I will use the study of Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century by professor Gershon Hundert of McGill University in Canada.

Relations between the Church and Jews in the eighteenth century were complex. "The political situation in the Republic of Poland at that time was conducive to strengthening the feeling that 'Polishness' and 'Catholicism' are identical concepts" (Hundert 2007: 85). An important role was played by the encyclical *A Quo Primum* by Pope Benedict XIV of June 14, 1751, published in Latin, translated into Polish and then reprinted many times. In it, the Pope sharply criticized the policy of the magnates from whom Jews rented taverns and villages. He considered it unacceptable that a Jew should give orders to a Christian official who, in the event of disobedience, could lose his position or impose a fine or even flogging on Christians. The Pope condemned the practice of Christians giving loans to Jewish *kehillas* (Hundert, 2007, p. 89). In an encyclical addressed to the bishops of the Kingdom of Poland, the Pope discussed the situation of Jews in Poland: The Jews of this Kingdom can profitably trade in alcohol and wine. They were also commissioned to seek public income. The hams, taverns, fields and villages are entrusted to them on lease, thanks to which they have power over Christian villagers and inhuman power, and by order they are forced to work, travel and serfdom, and even worse, they punish them, often with rods. This means that the unhappy peasants, being under the authority of the Jew, must obey him as the subjects of the master.

Benedict XIV spoke out against the use of violence against Jews and their expulsion as long as they kept their place in society and followed the proper status of "servants rejected by the Lord, whose death they have criminally plotted. And let them know that this act condemned them to the service of those whom Christ's death had made free" (from: Hundert, 2007, p. 90) The Pope, on the other hand, demanded that Jews be deprived of public office and power over the Christian population. At the same time, he assured about the support:

We promise you that when it is necessary we will carry out this task with the clergy who belong to your authority thanks to whom this scandal and disgrace may be removed from the noble Kingdom of Poland.

"The papal encyclical presents some of the most important elements of the social and legal position of Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian state in the 18th century which were under the influence of the Church. These included issues of canon law and synodal statutes, the protection of Jews by magnates, the size and economic potential of the Jewish community and extensive economic ties between church institutions on the one hand and Jews and Jewish communities on the other" (Hundert 2007: 91-92). The separation of Christians from the Jews and the limitation of mutual contacts were the subject of Polish synodal statutes and bishops' pastoral letters in the 18th century which proves that, in reality, these contacts were lively and multilateral (Hundert, 2007, p. 92). A Christian who was in contact with Jews, talking to them and taking part in joint meals, wedding ceremonies and Jewish dances, was to be excommunicated (ibidem, p. 93). Despite the deepening of the feeling of alienation between Christians and Jews, laws prohibiting relationships were rarely enforced in practice. (Hundert 2007: 94) Attempts at the missionary activity of the Church cannot be omitted here as evidenced by a letter from Franciszek Kobielski, the bishop of Łuck and Brzeg, addressed to Jews in 1741 where he ordered them to adopt 'the true faith'. It was the only such case since no other bishops wrote a pastoral letter to Jews (Hundert, 2007, p. 98). The influence of the Catholic Church on Jews is evidenced by the fact of three Jewish legations to the Vatican in 1754, 1758 and 1761, financed by the Jewish Szym *Vaad Arba Aratzot*, the Szym of Four Lands. The result of these missions was the publication by Cardinal Ganganelli (later Pope Clement XIV) of a trial condemning the accusations of ritual murder (Węgrzynek, 2001, p. 319-326).

In conclusion, it should be noted that despite the friendly land on which the Jews settled, the times in which they lived in Poland were not conducive to religious dialogue. Suspicion, distrust and mutual accusations testify to the lack of interreligious dialogue and understanding which did not prevent Dov Ber of Bolechow, a Jewish wine merchant, from storing his wine in monastery cellars in Lvov.

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