

Waldemar Chrostowski, *Między Synagogą a Kościołem. Dzieje św. Pawła*, Wydawnictwo M, Apostolicum, Kraków–Ząbki 2015, 500 pp.

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Much has been written about the life and work of Paul of Tarsus. However, the topic of the relationship of the nascent Church to the Synagogue seen through the eyes of the Apostle to the Nations has so far not been the subject of much scholarship in Poland. Most biographies of St. Paul focus solely on an analysis of the changes that took place in early Christianity, omitting the important aspect of Jewish policies towards Judeo-Christians and Christian pagans as well as the attitude towards Paul's innovative evangelization. This book by Rev. Prof. Waldemar Chrostowski, a theologian and Biblical scholar known for his contributions to Catholic-Jewish dialogue and the first Pole to receive the Ratzinger Prize, is devoted to a detailed exegesis of the attitudes of the Synagogue and the Church towards Paul's teaching.

At the very beginning of the reviewed work, Chrostowski notes that the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles are his main sources. He notes that publications that ignore the New Testament books are “useless, harmful, gossipy, and pointless.” When writing about his research methodology, he notes that he does not engage in detailed philological, sociological, and psychological analyses; he also does not plan on proving the historicity of the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles.¹ The author openly says that he writes from a Christian point-of-view and does not reject the impact of Paul's visions as a decisive factor in his later fate: “A hermeneutic principle that a priori assumes that what is spiritual does not exist or has no real impact on our lives is unacceptable. Such an assumption precludes all meaningful dealings with spiritual and religious matters.”² According to him, basing his work on the

1 W. Chrostowski, *Między Synagogą a Kościołem. Dzieje św. Pawła*, Kraków–Ząbki 2015, p. 15.

2 *Ibidem*, p. 373. Rev. Chrostowski criticizes the marginalization of the episode of Paul's becoming blinded by scholars who deny the impact of religious experiences and interpreted it as caused by purely medical phenomena, such as epilepsy (*ibidem*, p. 46.).

inspired works does not make his work less academically rigorous: “The life, fate, and writings of Paul of Tarsus are a fundament that secures us against becoming prone to political and theological correctness as well as falsely conceived tolerance and resignation from integral faith in Jesus as the Messiah and God.”³ Denying the Christian-Jewish political-religious conflict or not referring to essential aspects concerning the persecutions of Paul’s Church by the Jews makes the image of the Christianization of Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy not only incomplete, but it also leads to a false account of the events during Paul’s missionary travels and imprisonment.⁴

The book’s layout is similar to that of other biographies of Paul. The narrative begins with the saint’s earliest years as well as the geopolitical-social and religious background of the Levant at the time and Paul’s experience as a Pharisee. Next, Chrostowski moves to Paul’s conversion and missionary activity, ending the book with Paul’s martyrdom in Rome. St. Paul’s missionary travels make up the greater share of the book; thus it is worth noting the unique way in which the author describes them. When describing Paul’s travels, Rev. Prof. Chrostowski presents transportation in antiquity in detail, taking into account the topography, climate conditions, traits of the societies living in these areas, culture, and trade treaties (which the Apostle to the Nations made use of in his nautical and terrestrial journeys), which would later have an impact on the spread of the Christian faith in Asia Minor, Greece,

3 Ibidem, p. 16.

4 The German scholar Joachim Gnilka mentions the persecution of Paul by the Synagogue cautiously. Instead, he blames the Roman authorities and unspecified citizens hostile to the new faith for persecuting the Apostle to the Nations (see: J. Gnilka, *Paweł z Tarsu. Apostoł i świadek*, przekł. W. Szymona, Kraków 2001, p. 115). What is more, he accuses the proconsul Gallio of anti-Semitism because of his unwillingness to resolve the dispute between the Jewish Diaspora and Paul, ignoring the intentions of the persecutors and the Roman judiciary’s principle of not interfering in religious matters (ibidem, p. 171; for more on Paul’s prosecution before Gallio, see: Richard Dillon, *1 List do Tessaloniczan*, [w:] *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, red. nauk. wyd. oryg. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, red. nauk. wyd. pol. W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2001, p. 1232; B. Winter, *Rehabilitating Gallio and his judgement in Acts 18:14–15*, „Tyndale Bulletin” 57 (2006) No. 2, p. 304–307). Rev. Chrostowski is a strong opponent of the “whitewashing” of the Sanhedrin in the latest literature, which instead blames Rome for sentencing Jesus to death and takes great pains to questioning the historical participation of Jews in the Lord’s Passion (Waldemar Chrostowski, *Między Synagogą a Kościołem*, op. cit., p. 33). Despite Chrostowski’s rationale that not all Jews can be blamed for Christ’s death, only those who directly participated in sentencing Him to death on the Cross, some commentators and Church authorities accuse Chrostowski of anti-Semitism for his critical conception of Christian-Jewish dialogue (Marcin Stanowiec, *Życiński sekuje ks. prof. Chrostowskiego*, <http://www.kosciol.pl/article.php/20090402022212574>, 25.04.2017).

and Macedonia.⁵ There are many interesting elements in Rev. Chrostowski's work, which makes it all the more attractive to the reader. He describes the history of cities from the earliest centuries up to modern times,⁶ often noting the digs of Polish archaeologists in the places where Paul stayed.⁷ It is worth adding that the author presents this information in an accessible way, explaining basic concepts related to ancient history and theology, thanks to which his book can also be recommended to lay readers interested in Paul of Tarsus' works. Worthy of praise is his noting of physical oceanography: the direction in which the winds blew, the periods when boats sailed in the Mediterranean Sea, and the nomenclature used by Luke the Evangelist in the Acts of the Apostles.⁸ *Między Synagogą a Kościołem* contains a psychological analysis of Paul of Tarsus' difficult nature, which according to the author was felt by his travel companions during his missions.⁹ Rev. Chrostowski also makes several references to St. Paul's alleged anti-feminism, completely rejecting these charges and emphasizing the barriers and culture shock experienced by the Apostle to the Nations experienced when teaching in the West, where the customs regarding women were increasingly liberal, emphasizing the enormous (and perhaps even leading) role of women in the first Christian communities.¹⁰

The most important part of the publication, however, is the chapters related to St. Paul's evangelizing pedagogy, which presents the attitude of the former persecutor to pagan Christians who did not belong to the Synagogue and were raised in pagan culture and worship as well as the attitude of Jews towards Paul's works of Christianization, which were first undertaken in the Diaspora's synagogues. The author refers to the policy of the Catholic Church at the time, making use of the tools used by Paul in order to evangelize non-Christian peoples, at the same time presenting the legacy of the teaching of the Apostle to the Nations in today's world. Paul "does not condemn nor mock the pagans or their beliefs. [...] This is one of the oldest catecheses containing the most important elements of Christian theology of the pagan religions,

5 W. Chrostowski, *Między Synagogą a Kościołem*, op. cit., p. 78 i 94.

6 *Ibidem*, p. 62

7 Archaeological works were undertaken in Cyprus by Prof. Kazimierz Michałowski in 1965 and Dr. Henryk Meyza in 2008 (*ibidem*, p. 98).

8 *Ibidem*, p. 323 i 437.

9 The conflict between Barnabas and John Mark during the second missionary journey (*ibidem*, p. 164) and the unexplained causes of their break with Silas in Corinth (*ibidem*, p. 241).

10 *Ibidem*, p. 271.

constituting a New Testament supplement to the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra aetate* about the Church's attitude towards non-Christian religions."¹¹ Paul is aware of the differences between the candidates to be Judeo-Christians and pagan Christians. In his teaching, he uses metaphors and references to ancient culture that were accessible to pagans not originating in Jewish circles, which helps him in preaching the new faith not only to the pagans, but also to convince the participants of the Council of Jerusalem to waive the requirement for non-Jews to observe the Mosaic Law."¹² Paul's successes in evangelizing the pagans were not matched by attempts at converting the Jews. According to the author, Paul's countrymen were the apostle's main persecutors, although they were always the first addressees of his teaching.¹³ Despite initial interest in Christianity, hostility grew not only between the pagan Christians and Jews but within the Diaspora itself: the Judeo-Christians and the Jews who were faithful to the religion of their ancestors, and were ready to collaborate with the pagans in persecuting their countrymen in the name of defending the Jewish community, tradition, and group interests.¹⁴ Rev. Prof. Chrostowski strongly opposes theories blaming solely Christians for the worsening relations between Christians and Jews, which "are supported by true, alleged, exaggerated, or imagined cases originating in the history of the co-existence of the two groups in later centuries, thus affecting the earliest period of the shaping of Christianity. Becoming prone to this tendency, which is dictated by concerns of political correctness, leads to a complete falsification of the situation up to 70 AD."¹⁵ Rev. Chrostowski emphasizes that constantly trying to blame the Christians leads to absurd situations, such as treating the First Epistle to the Thessalonians as anti-Semitic and suggesting its removal from the canon of sacred books.¹⁶

Rev. Chrostowski's work fills a gap in the literature on the topic of Christian-Jewish relations in the teaching of Paul of Tarsus. I consider it to be a work that makes an important contribution to Polish research dealing with the history of early Christianity, allowing us to understand the intentions and changes in Christian and Jewish societies and the causes and later growth

11 Ibidem, p. 126.

12 Ibidem, p. 327.

13 D. H. Stern, *Komentarz żydowski do Nowego Testamentu*, Warszawa 2004, p. 504.

14 W. Chrostowski, *Między Synagogą a Kościołem*, op. cit., p. 59.

15 Ibidem, p. 317.

16 Ibidem, p. 207.

of conflicts between these two groups. This book is recommended for both scholars and lay readers who want to increase their knowledge on this topic. Despite the conscious decision to not include references to the literature on the subject and a bibliography consisting of barely forty works selected by the author, I am disappointed by the lack of an academic method, which would certainly make this work even more valuable (perhaps the author wanted to prevent his book from achieving such a length that it would have to consist of two volumes). Praiseworthy are the legible and precise maps presenting the Holy Land in Paul's time, the missionary journeys, and the travel to Rome. Despite these minor shortcomings, this is a very well-written text. The author's unique view of the conflict between the Church and Synagogue will certainly appeal to many readers.