**Conclusion**

In his 1632 address to the Protestant deputies at the Election Sejm, Jerzy Ossoliński stated, “your faith is likened to a newcomer from afar. The Catholic faith, in contrast, was and remains the lady of the house, accommodating guests in her own home. You have a right, therefore, only to what was granted to you out of sheer benevolence.”[[1]](#footnote-1) These words adequately summed up the new reality that had been crystallizing in Poland since the beginning of the 17th century. They expressed a new mode of tolerance, which, as a result of the counter-Reformation’s gradual gains, supplanted religious pluralism[[2]](#footnote-2) with a reluctant willingness to “tolerate” (tolerować) minorities.[[3]](#footnote-3) This new approach incorporated tenets of Justus Lipsius’ political philosophy, which argued that religious homogeneity was a precondition for unity and peace.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Catholicism had established itself as the ruling religion. To keep the peace, it was willing to tolerate religious minorities so long as they did not harm the kingdom. This approach did not allow for “burning stakes” – that is, it did not espouse religious coercion – but it also did not promote equal rights for the adherers of different faiths. The state’s integrity became a guiding principle that stipulated the prevalence of one religion, protected by a ruler whose primary responsibility was to prevent religiously motivated violence and warfare. The religious equality prescribed in the Warsaw Confederation became a temporary necessary evil (*male necessarium*) in the reality of the 16th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, an unavoidable interim phase towards the ultimate ascendancy of Catholicism in the public sphere. It was to give way to a new practice of tolerance, whereby the Catholics would minimize the collective rights of religious minorities and establish the rights of individuals in the hopes of bringing about their swift, painless conversion. In contrast to other European states, Catholicism in Poland had “learned something” and distanced itself from pro-monarchical propaganda. On the contrary, it opposed absolutism and promoted freedom, unity, and other interests of the nobility.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Protestants, on the other hand, transformed from a political minority to a religious community with specific, severely curtailed privileges.

Towards the middle of the 17th century, in the context of increasing decentralization, the Catholic Church emerged as the only strong state-wide institution.[[6]](#footnote-6) As it grew stronger, “Catholicism became less and less tolerant,”[[7]](#footnote-7) with the “granted tolerance” approach further confining the rights of minorities to a minimum. The Swedish Deluge fast turned into a religious war waged to protect Catholicism against a Protestant invasion, unleashing xenophobic tendencies against minorities, who came to be seen as traitors. King John II Casimir Vasa (1648-1668), who had declared the Holy Virgin queen of Poland, accepted the Jesuit narrative that the war with Sweden had been a form of divine punishment for tolerating the Polish Brethren, and swore to expel all radical sects (1656). True to his word, he outlawed the Polish Brethren in 1658, turning Poland from an asylum for heretics to a fortress (antemurale) of European Christianity and the bulwark of Catholicism.[[8]](#footnote-8) In 1668, conversion to a non-Catholic faith became prohibited, and as of 1683 non-Catholics were longer eligible for noble titles. Over the first half of the 18th century Protestant representatives ceased to be nominated for the assembly (1718), and Protestants and Orthodox Christians alike lost the right to serve in the Tribunal or to hold senior noble positions (urzędy ziemskie). As put by Kaplan, “by the eighteenth century, Catholicism seemed to most Poles the only religion compatible with patriotism and loyalty.”[[9]](#footnote-9) “The Reformation Episode”[[10]](#footnote-10) in Poland had ended and tolerance had diminished to merely restraining from state-led persecution – in which form it persisted throughout the 18th century.[[11]](#footnote-11)

This paradigm shift affected, in turn, interreligious coexistence and the treatment of Jews.[[12]](#footnote-12) As long as the political system remained intact, anti-Jewish state legislation was avoided, and coexistence was maintained. Due to their economic significance and to the fact that they did not pose a direct threat to the Church’s growing political clout,[[13]](#footnote-13) Jews continued to live among Christians and to employ the same post-conflict coping mechanisms. These underwent significant changes only following *Gzerot Takh ve-Tat* (The Evil Decrees of 1648-49), which had impressed upon the Jews’ that their situation in Poland had changed irreversibly.[[14]](#footnote-14) After being forced to escape Narol due to the pogroms of the Chmielnitsky Uprising, R. Moshe Katz described Poland in a penitential prayer:

Poland the gentle, ancient in Torah and scholarship,

Ever since the day that Ephraim separated himself from Judah

Sealed in Torah study;

But now exiled and disdained, bereaved and barren.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Bearing in mind that the Jewish victims of that uprising were less numerous than contemporary reports indicate, and that Jewish life saw a speedier recovery than previously thought, it nevertheless remains clear that “the psychological impact of *Gzerot Takh ve-Tat* was particularly devastating.”[[16]](#footnote-16) As a means of coping with the extent of the shock, new coping strategies were developed. Both ritual and liturgy remained an integral part of the process, whereby Jews exercised their religious freedom as enshrined in legal privileges. In addition to appealing to state apparatus, rituals and prayer formed part of the *Nekome Nehmen* (literally “taking revenge”) process, which included faith in God’s wrath, vengeance by means of memory and commemoration, and retaliation through political channels for the sake of achieving justice and compensation. This was complemented by the new literary genre of historical songs, along with the production of chronicles – a practice that dated back to *Gzerot Tatnó* (the 1096 Rhineland massacres), but most likely had not been used in the context of local riots. Literary works of this kind were incorporated into coping strategies and, alongside ritual and liturgy, helped frame the events and give them meaning. They helped preserve and communicate the initial memory as a means of creating a space for reconciliation and re-establishing coexistence. Nevertheless, these literary genres were not a radically innovative form of commemoration. While ritual and liturgy drew on religious tradition, public recitation, and universal imagery, the literary medium included more case-specific, historical information (also when compared to medieval chronicles). It adapted coping principles – such as the ideal of dying in God’s name (*Kiddush Hashem*) – to a contemporary context. While liturgy referred to the events spiritually and symbolically, historical writing grounded them in reality. Thus, for example, Natan Nata Hannover, the author of *Yeven metsulah* (1653), applied existing coping principles, creating “the paradigmatic Jewish response to the Cossack threat.”[[17]](#footnote-17) He forwent historical accuracy and convoluted wordings for the sake of creating an accessible rendition that promoted “a more resolute image of martyrdom […], one that could serve as a model of Polish Jewry’s response to the events of 1648-1649 and, by association, bring all Jewish victims of Chmielnicki within the Ashkenazic ideal of martyrdom.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Historical writing incorporated traditional religious values, reinforced religious ideals, and wove the events into a legacy of *Gzerot,* thus giving meaning to both the victims and the survivors’ suffering within the context of coexistence. In this way, it addressed the coping challenges, following shock waves that resonated throughout the country, and facilitated a new form of erudition and dissemination in the age of the printing press. Moreover, this new genre provided a platform of expression for individuals that transcended beyond the different aspects of “revenge” (*Nekome Nehmen*) described above. It reflected the changes undergone by Polish society with respect to tolerance and the treatment of Jews, at a time that saw several royal cities acquire the right not to tolerate Jews (de non tolerandis Iudaeis); the clergy preaching against Jews as the enemies of Christ and a detriment to Christians and their livelihood;[[19]](#footnote-19) and the announcement of king John II Casimir that he would desist from his plan to expel the Jews for treason on the condition that they pay a substantial amount of money (1657).[[20]](#footnote-20)

Within the communities, this newly adapted coping strategy also seeked to address new internal needs within Jewish society, which now faced the emergence of more and more subversive forces and a crisis of faith. This generation was already beginning to see Poland in a new light – no longer as a refuge, but as yet another land in which the Jews were subjected to dual status, reminiscent of the biblical verse – “Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I the Lord am their God.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

It is possible that precisely the incorporation of historical writing and the emergence of a new, more expansive coping paradigm in response to the changing face of Polish tolerance played a role in shaping the mentality of Eastern European Jewry.[[22]](#footnote-22) The integration of literature into post-Reformation coping strategies set the stage for dealing with interreligious crises for generations to come, up until the creation of the modern-era political apparatus. It charted the mental path to reconciliation and thus also helped shape future coexistence and interreligious communication in the wake of *Gzerot Takh ve-Tat.* Within this new paradigm, Jews were not a passive observer. If only as a reaction, they initiated courses of action that enabled them to recover from the shock and achieve reconciliation that would lay the foundation for future coexistence. They proactively exercised their rights and made use of state apparatus in order to ensure stability in the context of ethno-religious heterogeneity.

The strategies of Jews and Protestants for coping with Catholic assaults, in terms of achieving relative stability and translating declaratory tolerance into practice, do not just shed light on the mechanisms of reconciliation, but also on the inherent limitations of contemporary tolerance. They demonstrate how the Reformation aroused the spirit of persecution,[[23]](#footnote-23) with prejudice and persecutory impulses emerging also among minorities. No collaboration was forged between the Jews and the Protestants following friction with the same Catholic assailant. The Jews may have played a minor role in the pragmatic Protestant demand for religious pluralism and tolerance towards Protestant denominations, while the Jews were in turn affected both by the spread of the Reformation and by the Protestant polemic against the transubstantiation doctrine. Overall, however, religious and hierarchical lines were not crossed, and no interreligious alliance of minorities was formed against the Catholic majority. There were ties between Jews and Protestants, just as there were many different constellations, inclusive and exclusive, between the majority and specific minorities. These were most likely derived, however, from day-to-day needs and the capacity of different parties to utilize existing mechanisms for their purposes.

In post-Reformation Cracow and across the Commonwealth, despite the heterogeneity of the population, it was too early for religious freedom and tolerance to develop as we understand them today. And yet it was not too early for interfaith coexistence in which prejudice and tolerance existed side by side. Beyond them, and at the heart of this coexistence, there was not just the lack of state persecution, but a shared, ethnically heterogenous economic and administrative environment, along with different reconciliation mechanisms supporting the maintenance of the status-quo. Driven by the common desire for harmony and economic prosperity, and backed by different types of checks and arrangements, the force of day-to-day normalcy shaped post-conflict solutions and helped moderate innate religious intolerance, enable the practicalities of toleration, and reestablish coexistence. Most significantly, these mechanisms helped avoid religious warfare and bring about a bloodless transition from “a haven for heretics” to the “bulwark of Catholicism,” enabling the continuation of the status-quo even after violent pogroms had shaken the image of a “paradise for Jews” to the core.

1. Jerzy Ossoliński (1595-1650), Polish noble of many titles and offices. Known as a talented speaker. He opposed Protestants and demanded to limit their rights. Supported the election of John II Casimir. His important works include: *Orationes* (1647), *Mercurius Sarmatiae* (1716). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Wajsblum, *Ex regestro arianismi. Szkice z dziejów upadku protestantyzmu w Małopolsce* (Kraków, 1939-1947), 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Knoll, “Religious Toleration,” 31. See also the discussion on tolerance in Frick, *Kin, Kith, & Neighbors,* 414-416 and Feliks Gross, *Tolerancja i pluralism*, trans. E. Balcerek (Warsaw, 1992), 7, 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Justus Lipsius (Joest Lips, 1547-1606), Flemish humanist and philologist. Known as one of the founders of Neostoicism. For more information see: Jan Papy, “Justus Lipsius,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/justus-lipsius/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tazbir, *Prace wybrane. Państwo bez stosów*, 200-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jacob Goldberg, “The Changes in the Attitude of Polish Society toward the Jews in the 18th Century,” *Polin* 1 (1986), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Goldberg, “The Changes,” 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Janusz Tazbir*, Polskie przedmurze chrześcijańskiej Europy. Mity a rzeczywistość historyczna* (Warsaw, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith,* 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A term coined for this period by Waclaw Urban in his book *Epizod reformacyjny* (Cracow, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. S. Salmonowicz, “Geneza i treść uchwał konfederacji warszawskiej,” *OiRP* 19 (1974): 18-23;

    J. Tazbir*, Reformacja w Polsce, Szkice o ludziach i doktrynie* (Warsaw, 1993), 247-260. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See for example: Goldberg, “The Changes in the Attitude,” 35-48. You should be consistent with the short title you use [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Teter, “Jews in the Legislation,”106. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gershon Bacon and Moshe Rosman, “Kehila ‘nivheret’ be-metzuka: Yahadut Polin bi’-ikvot Gzerot takh vetat,” in Shmuel Almog and Michael Heyd, eds., *Ra’ayon ha-behirah be-Israel u-be-amim: Kovetz ma’amarim* (Jerusalem, 1991), 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. R. Moshe Katz of Narol as translated, *Jewish Poland-Legends of Origin: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles*, trans. Haya Bar Itzhak (Wayne State University Press, 2018), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Shaul Stampfer, “What Actually Happened to the Jews of Ukraine in 1648?” *Jewish History* 17, 2 (2003), 207-227. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Edward Fram, “Creating a Tale of Martyrdom in Tulczyn, 1648,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory. Essays in Honor of Yosef Haim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach et al. (Hanover and London, 1998), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Fram, “Creating a Tale,” 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For many examples see: Magda Teter, [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Jakub Goldberg and Adam Kaźmierczyk, *Sejm Czterech Ziem: Źródła* (Warsaw, 2011), 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Leviticus 26, 44. See also Adam Teller, “In the Land of their Enemies? On the Duality of Jewish Existence in 18th Century Poland,” *Polin* 19 (2007): 431-446. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Adam Teller examines the extent and the manner of influence of literature on the formation of Eastern European Jewish identity, but a more in-depth study is required in order to determine the role of this new coping strategy in shaping this identity and coexistence generally. See Teller, "Jewish Literary Responses," 17-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Roland H. Bainton “The Struggle for Religious Liberty,” reprinted in his *Studies for the Reformation* (Boston, 1963), 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)