

# To Die for the Faith

I was traveling to Berlin, seething with anger. I'd failed to secure a seat in second class and been forced to go first class, having paid a lot more than I was prepared to. On top of that, the train was running late. I was in no mood to engage in conversation with the people sharing my compartment. They were a married couple, a little older than I was, and they spoke what seemed to me a funny kind of English. I could hardly make out a word they were saying, but this didn't bother me, as I had no interest in their talk.

We were coming up to the town of Rzepin. The woman told her husband this must be the German border. I understood at least this much and thought I should set her straight, since the border was still 20 kilometers away. Thus, we were drawn into conversation. We traded information about ourselves, our work, and even touched on a bit of politics. They told me they lived in Canada (hence their funny English) and that they were Jewish. The woman had been born in Poland. Her family was forced to leave the country in the infamous year of 1969. Now, after many years, she and her husband had come to visit Poland. They told me they had enjoyed the visit very much.

On my mentioning that Poland was enjoying a renewed interest in Judaism, they both laughed. "We're secular Jews" they told me. "We're not at all interested in Judaism, so why should it interest the Poles." I tried to explain that I was also one of those interested, since Judaism lay at the root of the Christian faith. Everything Jesus taught was based on Jewish realities and the Jewish way of looking at things. A knowledge of Judaism was very helpful in understanding our faith. We began discussing Christianity; they seemed to be quite conversant with it. On many points we agreed. For example, we agreed that Jews who accepted Jesus always remained Jews, unlike pagans who had to break with paganism. For all practical purposes, the early Jewish Christians were no different from their



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fellows, who attended the synagogue, observed the commandments, and prayed in the Temple. The one difference was that they believed Jesus had risen from the dead.

On this point we were agreed. But then the couple told me that Jesus could not have risen. They tried to explain the disappearance of His body in other ways. I told them: "Imagine that we are Jews of those times. We keep the commandments. We're the same in every respect. The only difference is that I claim to have seen Jesus

risen from the dead. You may believe me, or you may not. We continue living together, side by side, and you notice that I base everything in my life on the fact of the Risen Jesus, even though I behave just like you. Then the authorities order me to stop telling people that I had seen the Risen Jesus. I react to this calmly. 'Since I did see Him,' I say, 'I cannot say that I did not.' They threaten to kill me, but I tell them this would not change the fact that I had seen Him. What's more, because I had seen the Risen Jesus, I wasn't at all afraid of death, since I was sure that I too would rise from the dead. And for this they kill me. You may take this to heart, or you may not. But the fact of history remains that, of the twelve Apostles, all except John were put to death precisely because they claimed they had seen Jesus after His death."

The husband agreed that mine was an interesting point of view, worthy of consideration. But his wife replied heatedly that the readiness of the early Jewish Christians to die proved they were brainwashed fanatics. Only a sick person would die for an idea. They began talking among themselves, citing examples of religious and atheistic fanaticism, and comparing them with the situation I had presented. Meanwhile, the train pulled into Berlin Zoo Station, and we had to part. I had just time enough to add that, for my part, I had come up with no other explanation for the Apostles' behavior, and that therefore I had come to the conclusion that they must really have seen the Risen Jesus. That was why I was still a Christian.

The Bible says: "*Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the blood of His righteous ones.*" The blood of Christ washes away our sins and the blood of the Apostles confirms that their witness to the Gospel was sincere and true. If they had been bent on serving their own interests, they would not have sacrificed their lives for something they knew was untrue.