

"Jewish Disciples of Jesus & the Wounds of Memory:  
Source of Healing or Continued Trauma?"  
*A paper prepared for the Helsinki Consultation, Krakow, June 2017*  
by  
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To the question posed as the basis of this conference, "Jewish Disciples of Jesus & the Wounds of Memory: Source of Healing or Continued Trauma?" there can be no definitive answer. The question requires deep reflection and is often fraught with suffering. A multiplicity of responses are possible. The response this paper will suggest is that Jewish disciples of Jesus are uniquely placed to be a source of healing within the complex dynamic of contemporary Jewish Christian relations.

As Jews and Christians reach out and engage with one another today, there are many "wounds of memory" in their shared history; the sharpest wound of memory is the memory of the holocaust. Elie Weisel has famously stated; *"The Holocaust cannot be described, it cannot be communicated, it is unexplainable. To me it is a mystical event. I have the feeling almost of sin when I speak about it."*<sup>1</sup> and *"If I could communicate what I have to say through not publishing, I would do it. If I could, to use a poetic image, communicate a Silence through silence I would do so. But I cannot."*<sup>2</sup> These words should give us cause to carefully consider anything we, who were not witnesses to the events, might say.

Questions of memory, its essence and meaning have been debated in the literature of memory from the times of Aristotle and Plato. Throughout the ages, philosophers and theologians have contemplated the essence, meaning and mystery of memory. Today memory is being analyzed and dissected on many

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<sup>1</sup> Reichek, Morton A., *"Elie Wiesel: Out of the Night,"* in Present Tense, Spring 1976, p.42.

<sup>2</sup> Cargas, Harry James; *Harry James Cargas In Conversation with Elie Wiesel*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1976) p.5.

tables, among others, of brain science, sociology and deconstructionist philosophy.

Remembering and memory play a central role in both Judaism and Christianity. The pivotal event of Jewish history is the exodus from Egypt. God's command to the people of Israel was a command for a twofold remembering. As a people, we are to "remember" (זכור) that God alone brought us out of Egypt; and to also "remember" that we were once slaves in Egypt. *"The traditional Jew sees his or her history through the lens of memory for which all events are cyclical recurrences of ancient archetypes."*<sup>3</sup> Each year at Passover we celebrate and remember as if we ourselves were present and participant in the events. As the Passover celebration comes to a close, we also remember the promise of future restoration with the words "next year in Jerusalem." These two foundational "rememberings" lay the base for all subsequent relationships with man and God and man with man. It is only in Israel that the command to remember is a religious obligation for the people as a community.<sup>4</sup>

In Christian tradition Jesus gave his disciples the command to "remember" him in his Passion, in the sacrament of Eucharist. This is an active, participatory remembering of his suffering, death and resurrection; as with bread and wine we physically take his life into our own bodies. Today we remember Jesus as crucified and risen with the wounds of his death still present in his resurrected body. We remember him both wounded and transformed.

Christians and Jews share the same framework of sacred memory in their remembrance of Exodus and Passion. Miroslav Volf identifies common elements within the framework as: identity, community, the future, and God.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> Biale, David; *Power-Passivity-and-the-Legacy-of-the-Holocaust*; <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Power-Passivity-and-the-Legacy-of-the-Holocaust.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Deut. 32:7, Isaiah 44:21, Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18

<sup>5</sup> Volf, Miroslav; *The End of Memory -remembering rightly in a violent world*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), p. 97

the Exodus, individual Israelites (Jews) are united as a community with a common identity - Israel, the people of God who have a future in the promised land in which God will be their theocratic sovereign. In the Passion, individual followers of Jesus are united in the suffering, resurrected Christ and brought into a new community, the ecclesia - the body of Messiah, which lives out its mandate in the Kingdom of God on earth until his heavenly Kingdom is fully realized with God as its sovereign King.

Our narrative histories are the stories we tell ourselves that enable us to make sense of and give meaning to the world and our place within it. Each one carries within himself his own personal history (narrative) as well as the narrative of his people/society/ethnos. At the very least, Jewish followers of Jesus carry the narrative of Israel and Jewishness together with the biblical narrative of what it means to be a “follower of Jesus.” The dual narrative of a Jewish follower of Jesus embraces the sometimes antithetical narrative of both Judaism and Christianity. Both communities have experienced trauma and carry deep wounds of memory. *“The task of history is not to deny the past or to encourage forgetting, but, quite the opposite, to integrate each event, no matter how catastrophic, into the whole; to put trauma into perspective and make it possible to remember without being overwhelmed.”*<sup>6</sup>

Many Jewish followers of Jesus reside in a middle space that spans and encompasses both the Jewish and the Christian experience. This space is by no means comfortable and can be an excruciating domicile. For many, the phrase “Jewish followers of Jesus” is a contradiction in terms.<sup>7</sup> For the one who occupies this space, his sense of himself as both a Jew and a follower of Jesus bring with it internal conflict along with frequent misunderstanding and rejection from either, or both, of the two communities that are primary elements of his identity. For the Jew, the decision to embrace faith in Jesus is often taken

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<sup>6</sup> op. cit. Baile

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.jcrelations.net/What\\_about\\_Christian\\_Jews\\_or\\_Jewish\\_Christians.2353.0.html?id=814](http://www.jcrelations.net/What_about_Christian_Jews_or_Jewish_Christians.2353.0.html?id=814)  
retrieved May 25, 2017

under internal duress and rarely reflects an exclusive undivided choice to leave one community and join another. Many personal narratives of Jewish followers of Jesus eloquently testify to this painful, personal reality which is often experienced as a wound. Peoplehood and belonging are essential to one's sense of integrated identity. When they are perceived to be in conflict they can become a source of unsettledness and suffering.

The majority of Jewish followers of Jesus in today's world have made the choice to primarily identify themselves with one or the other of the two faith communities. According to the records of different mission societies, during the 19th century at least 250,000 Jews became followers of Jesus and identified themselves as Christians.<sup>8</sup> The Pew Research Center data shows that as of 2013 approximately 1.6 million adult American Jews identified themselves as Christians, most of whom were Protestants.<sup>9</sup> According to the same research, the majority of those Jews who identified themselves as Christian (1.6 million) were raised as Jews or are Jews by ancestry. A study done in 2012 shows that 17% of Jews in Russia identify themselves as Christians.<sup>10</sup> As of the year 2000, the number of Hebrew Catholics who are affiliated with Hebrew Catholic organizations was estimated at 10,000; the majority of whom live in the United States and Israel but are also located in Canada, Europe, Central and South America.<sup>11</sup> In 2012, worldwide estimates of Messianic Jews who have chosen to integrate their identities along a spectrum of Jewish/Christian orthopraxy totaled 350,000. In the United States they numbered between 175,000 and 250,000 members. In Israel their numbers were estimated between 10,000 and

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<sup>8</sup> Gundry, Stanley N; Goldberg, Louis, *How Jewish is Christianity?: 2 views on the Messianic movement* (Books), Google, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> "How many Jews are there in the United States?"

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/02/how-many-jews-are-there-in-the-united-states/>  
"A PORTRAIT OF JEWISH AMERICANS: Chapter 1: Population Estimates".

<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-1-population-estimates/>

"American-Jewish Population Rises to 6.8 Million". <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/news/.premium-1.549713>

<sup>10</sup> [Arena - Atlas of Religions and Nationalities in Russia](#). Sreda.org, <http://sreda.org/en/arena>

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_Catholics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Catholics)

20,000.<sup>12</sup> Numbers of Messianic Jews in Europe and South America were not available. These figures make it clear that the phenomena is neither temporary nor marginal.

The Jewish follower of Jesus embodies in himself the paradox of the open wounds and trauma of Jewish suffering that are at the same time contiguous with the healing he receives as a follower of Jesus. These two states of the paradox exist simultaneously within his dual identity as being equally part of the people Israel and a member of the body of Christ. This dual corporate identity dwells deeply at some level in the soul of every Jewish follower of Jesus. Like memory, for some it is experienced as a pain that can be submerged or deferred; an ache in the soul that can be surmounted but remains as a deeply buried undercurrent. For others, it is a persistent, pulsing pain that gives no rest and resides close to the surface of consciousness. For those who choose not to identify solely with one community, but to remain on the boundary, the internal integration of their identity is an involved and often lengthy process. The holocaust remains a dark shadow in our corporate history whether we are Jews, Christians or Jewish followers of Jesus. This shadow, experienced as a still unhealed wound often exacerbates the internal conflicts of the Jewish follower of Jesus and the ongoing process of Jewish Christian relations after the holocaust.

The Nazi holocaust is moving inexorably into the realm of memory as the generation that personally experienced it is passing out of this life. After the holocaust, we are left with memory that holds many yet unhealed wounds and persistent trauma into the third generation together with the sometimes realized potential of healing. The microcosm of the individual soul of the Jewish follower of Jesus in essence embodies the parameters of the macrocosm of Jewish Christian relations. It is also a mirror of the process of rapprochement

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<sup>12</sup> Posner, Sarah; *Kosher Jesus: Messianic Jews in the Holy Land*, in *The Atlantic*, November 29, 2012  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/kosher-jesus-messianic-jews-in-the-holy-land/265670/>

that is occurring in the field of Jewish Christian relations. The memories and reflections of the individual journeys of many Jewish followers of Jesus, beset with intense struggle, provide a paradigm that reflects one response to the question of this paper.

In the centuries since the rise of Christianity, Jewish Christian relations have gone through many permutations. The holocaust was a shattering event in that history. Jewish Christian relations are multifaceted and, at their heart, the wounds, the trauma as well as healing are consistently a part of the interaction and discussion. Today, with the events of the holocaust still prominent in our memories, the title of Gershon Greenburg's article, *The Holocaust as a Source for Jewish Christian Bonding*<sup>13</sup>, is provocative. Greenburg identifies several features of what he calls "ingredients of Jewish Christian unity." Against the background of rabbinic commentary and Christian theology, he identifies and discusses the themes of Akedah (sacrifice of Isaac), physical suffering/sacred death, love, and crucifixion as key themes that can serve to unite Jews and Christians. These issues all occupy a place within Judaism and Christianity. Whilst he is not speaking of the often bifurcated soul of the Jewish follower of Jesus, his observations can be applied to the individual Jewish follower of Jesus as well as to the complex dynamic of Jewish Christian relations. The example of Karl Stern illustrates the struggle of a Jew who, during the period of the holocaust, went through a lengthy process that led him to become a Jewish follower of Jesus.

Karl Stern, a well known German Jewish convert to Catholicism, once remarked that "*World War II was unintelligible in the larger scheme of things unless it is seen in light of the passion of Christ.*"<sup>14</sup> Stern was a prominent Freudian psychoanalyst who lived during the holocaust and lost most of his

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<sup>13</sup> Greenberg, Gershon; *The Holocaust as a Source for Jewish-Christian Bonding*; Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations, American University, Volume 4 (2009) <http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol4>

<sup>14</sup> Stern, Karl, *The Pillar of Fire*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), p. 228.

family in the concentration camps of the Nazi regime. He left for England in early 1935 and eventually settled with his family in Montreal, Canada where he became a distinguished professor of psychiatry. His autobiography, *Pillar of Fire*, in which he chronicles his embrace of Catholicism, was highly praised and cited as being deeply moving by prominent Christians such as Thomas Merton, Reinhold Niebuhr, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Day and others.<sup>15</sup>

Raised as a secular Jew in pre-war Germany he found himself drawn to Christianity but it was many years before, in 1943, he made the final commitment to become a Catholic. His journey to become a follower of Jesus was one of intense spiritual turmoil. He was trained as a Freudian and studied under Carl Jung's disciples, while at the same time struggling with his drawing to Jesus in the highly academic atmosphere of German intellectualism. He had dialogued with prominent Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber, attended Zionist gatherings and Orthodox torah studies. After his decision to become a Catholic, he recalled the last time he attended a gathering of his Jewish compatriots who were preparing to move to Palestine, “*Should I ever forget thee, oh Jerusalem [...].’ Oh, how I should like to be able to see them all once more, my friends of those days, and tell them a story of a journey which seemed to have taken me infinitely far away from them, but in reality has led me right in their midst.*”<sup>16</sup>

Like many in pre-World War II Germany, Stern questioned the meaning of individual life.

*“I used to think, that God had become man, and that His life and death had a personal meaning to every single person among all those millions of existences spent in the stench of slums, in a horizonless world, in the suffocating anguish of enmities, sickness and dying—if it were true, it would be something tremendously worth living for. To think that someone knocked on all those*

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<sup>15</sup> Burston, Daniel; *A Forgotten Freudian-The Passion of Karl Stern*, (London: Karnac Books Ltd.,2016), p. 83

<sup>16</sup> Stern. 1951, p. 189

*millions of dark doors, beckoning and promising to each in an altogether unique way. Christ challenged not only the apparent chaos of history but the meaninglessness of personal existence.*”<sup>17</sup>

Stern was plagued by what he identified as a “traitor complex” both before and after his decision to become a follower of Jesus. Stern was a psychiatrist, trained in depth analysis of his inner life and motivations and having escaped the holocaust while so many of his family and his Jewish community perished, like many survivors he experienced a deep seated guilt at his own survival. This is a well documented phenomena in holocaust survivor research. Additionally, being perceived as one who has abandoned his community and moved to another, the persecutor community, is seen as a betrayal of one’s origins and identity.

Stern’s journey to become a Jewish follower of Jesus has been compared to the conversions of two of his contemporaries;<sup>18</sup> Edith Stein, a student and colleague of Husserl and Heidegger, who perished in Auschwitz in 1942 and was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1998 and Eugenio Israel Zolli, the chief Rabbi of Rome who was sheltered during World War II by Pope Pius XII, and converted to Catholicism in 1945. Each one of these prominent Jews went through profound spiritual turmoil before they became followers of Jesus and all three of them wrote extensive accounts of their spiritual journeys. Basing his analysis on their first person accounts, Father David Neuhaus has identified similar patterns in their accounts of conversion.

*“Neuhaus argues that most converts from Judaism undergo a discernable three-stage process. The first is characterized by “a personal sense of sinfulness or unfulfilment,” a realization that ‘sin is everywhere and can only*

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 208

<sup>18</sup> Neuhaus, David; (1988). *Jewish conversion to the Catholic Church*. Pastoral Psychology, 37 (1): p. 38–52, cited by Burstein, 2016, p. 197



*be redeemed by a radical change of life.’ The second stage is characterized by a ‘persistent pursuit of the numinous’ or a sense of transcendence, and the third is characterized by a sense of ‘happiness, fulfillment and higher control.’ (Neuhaus, 1988, pp. 42–43).”<sup>19</sup>*

Neuhaus further notes that after a decision has been made to become a (Catholic) follower of Jesus there are several ways one can express his changed relationship to his community of origin. The way taken by Stern, Zolli and Stein entailed a formation of a “*sophisticated theological rationale to explain the Jewish role in history, and the reasons for the Jews’ continued suffering and persecution. . . (that) represent a compromise between frank condemnation and a vigorous affirmation of their former faith’s validity.*”<sup>20</sup> The end point being an eschatological perspective of redemption when Jews will again be united as the chosen people within the Church. In this framework, historic Christian persecution of Jews and the events of the holocaust are reframed within a system that will bring about their ultimate redemption.<sup>21</sup>

The history of Jewish Christian relations since the holocaust has progressed greatly yet wounds of memory remain. To envision a comprehensive healing of those wounds is beyond the scope of this paper. The position taken here is that the Jewish follower of Jesus is in a unique position to be a healing bridge within the current dialogue due to his simultaneous placement within both communities. He embodies the tensions and the suffering of both communities as they continue to engage with one another. The question is indeed one of memory. How, in what framework, does one remember? In what frameworks do Christians and Jews remember? They share a sacred history that has many parallels.

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<sup>19</sup> Burstein, 2016, p. 197

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 198

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.199

Memory has many permutations. Tzvetan Todorov recommends that we move beyond the literal remembrance and employ exemplary memory that “*pushes us beyond the concern for our own well-being by helping us learn lessons from the past so as to apply them in new situations.*”<sup>22</sup> We can remember literally or exemplarily, or we can remember in the paradigm of our common sacred history as we look to the future. Wounds, even if they are healed remain as scars, whether in memory or in the flesh. As we remember the wounds of the past our struggle is to remember rightly. Volf captures the essence of remembering rightly for the individual and the community. “Whatever ‘rightly’ ends up meaning, it cannot refer just to what is right for the wronged person as an individual. It must mean also what is right for those who have wronged that individual and for the larger community.”<sup>23</sup>

The particular role of the Jewish follower of Jesus is that he embodies the pain and the potential for healing memory’s wounds for both communities since he is an integral part of each of them. For this to be realized is a journey into the past with an eschatological hope for healing. In a speech remembering Kristallnacht fifty years after the fact Elie Wiesel said, “*We remember Auschwitz and all that it symbolizes because we believe that, in spite of the past and its horrors, the world is worthy of salvation; and salvation, like redemption, can be found only in memory.*”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Todorov, Tzvetan “*The Abuses of Memory*,” *Common Knowledge* 5, no. 1 (1996): p.14 cited in Volf, 2016

<sup>23</sup> Volf, 2006, p. 11

<sup>24</sup> Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit, 1990), cited in Volf, 2006, p. 201