



Yeshua, the Ecclesia and ... Auschwitz

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It was a funny feeling. Well, not quite *funny* (nothing's funny about Auschwitz). *Uncomfortable*, that's a better word. Or maybe even that's too weak, too flaccid, to explain.

To explain what? My feelings as a Jew—who lost Polish relatives in the gas chambers—preaching in a church within twenty miles of those gas chambers, that's what. Or let me be more precise. As a Jew *who believes in Jesus* preaching in a church within twenty miles of those gas chambers.

As I stood behind the pulpit, I told the congregation just how uncomfortable I felt preaching about this same Jesus whom many of those who murdered my people believed in too. The irony was painful: a Jew, who believes in Jesus, preaching to Gentiles who believed in Jesus, while not far away and not that long ago many Gentiles who also believed

in the same Jesus, who might have even “worshiped” in the church that I now stood in, were stuffing Jews in gas chambers and then burning their bodies in ovens?

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Talk about a dilemma.

And my dilemma is this, to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and yet have nothing but disrespect, even outright disdain, for the church that has professed his name for almost 1500 years. It's hard to image a Jew, any Jew, be-

liever in Jesus or no believer, feeling differently. Jesus is one thing; individual Christians throughout history are one thing; but the church and institutions that have carried his name are another thing, completely.

I have learned to make the distinction, that is, between Jesus and the organizations that have identified themselves by him. I've had to. If not, how could I profess his name without somehow validating the abominations that have attended it? It's only by separating the Yeshua of *Eretz Yisrael* from the *Ecclesia* that I have been able to believe in him and his redemptive act. This is Occam's Razor cutting to the bone.

Of course, the claims of anti-Semitism in the New Testament are ludicrous. The criteria used to judge the Greek Scriptures anti-Semitic would, if applied to them, put the Hebrew prophets in the same class as Julius

Streicher, Joseph Goebbels, Martin Luther, and so forth. If John, Jesus, and Paul are anti-Semites, then so are Isaiah, Malachi, and Jeremiah.

But there's no denying that the church, founded upon those writings, that of the New Testament, has been a septic font of anti-Semitism for centuries. What did those Gentiles who believed in Jesus learn in Sunday School that allowed them to murder Jews? What did their preachers, priests, and teachers tell them? How did they interpret the writings and saying of Jews like Jesus, Paul, Peter, and Mark in order to justify burning their children centuries later? What kind of exegesis led to Auschwitz?

The question that needs to be asked is this: why has corporate

Christianity tended to produce corporate wretches? It's one thing to have vile folks walk into a church (that's expected); but to have them leave worse because their villainy's now absolved by a conscience confirmed in the certainty of terminal truth? How does one explain those who have murdered, raped, and pillaged in the name of Jesus? Or what about those God-fearing, church-going Protestants in the American south who loved the Lord Jesus but wouldn't share their toilets with a Black? Or the folks who shoved Jews in gas chambers on Monday through Saturday but rested from their works on Sunday? From the Crusades to the Inquisition, from the Ku Klux Klan to the most Orthodox fascists, why has corporate Christianity provided the vehicle,

the incentive, and the rationale for so much evil? And why has much of what's been noxious been nurtured in the cold, lurid womb of the church, which served for centuries as the intellectual, cultural and moral dungeon of the West?

Good questions, all. And though they always linger in my mind, how could they not come to the forefront as I stood in a church and preached about Jesus . . . Auschwitz less than a half-hour drive away?

The Two Garments

A Midrash

Rabbi Yudan in the name of R. Schmu'el b. R. Nehemiah said: "The matter may be compared to a king who had an undergarment. He instructed his servant: 'Fold it, shake it out, be careful about it.' The servant said: 'My lord, O King, among all the garments that you have, why do you give such special instructions only about this one?' The king answered: 'It is because this is the one that I keep closest to my body.'"

Rabbi R. Abin said: "The matter may also be compared to a king who had a purple cloak. He instructed his servant, saying: 'Fold it, shake it out, be careful about it.' The servant said: 'My lord, O King, among all the garments that you have, why are you so concerned about this one?' The king answered: 'That is the one that I wear on my coronation day.'" (Levit. R. II: IV)