

Christian/Jewish German/Jewish Healing in the Soul

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The title of my talk is Christian/Jewish German/Jewish Healing in the Soul. What I mean by soul in this context, is the soul of Christians and the soul of the Germans. In view of the suffering of the Jewish people during the Nazi era, I am addressing this issue specifically in terms of its impact on the souls of Germans, as distinguished from Christians in general.

The Chosen and the Rejected

In the souls of both Christians and Jews, the concept of God's chosen people plays a central role. The Christians took over this image from the Jews, and subsequently identified themselves as the new chosen people. As a result, they viewed the Jewish people as a rejected people, abandoned by God. The image of a chosen people necessarily attributes to God that he prefers one group of people above others, and elevates this group over all other peoples and empowers them to rule over them in his name.

How could such an image of God find a place in our souls? Can we even talk about God here? Such a God, who chooses and abandons, is frightening, because even those chosen live in fear of being cast out at any time. These are images which come from the depths of the soul—first from the soul of each individual, and then from the great depths of that soul shared by the larger group. The images of being chosen and abandoned arise from this common soul, and are elevated to a heavenly status where they appear to lie above us as something godly, something to be feared. Those who consider themselves chosen, identify themselves with a God who selects and rejects, and so they, too, select and reject others. In this process, they also become fearsome in the eyes of those they reject.

But what happens when other groups and other peoples also act in accordance with similar inner images? The result is clear in religious wars. Such groups are neither aware of themselves nor of any others as individual persons. Both sides behave as if possessed by a collective madness.

But in the Christian soul, there is an additional factor: Christians believe in the same God as Jews. So, Christians, in the name of the God of the Jews, see the Jewish people as rejected and robbed of their rights by this common God. The terrible dimensions such a presumption can assume was demonstrated in our time by the Nazi attempt to destroy the Jewish people as a whole.

One might raise the objection here that the Nazi leaders and the Nazi movement were not Christian in any sense of the word. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded on this point, because the Nazi sense of being chosen reflected an essentially Christian characteristic. The "Führer" felt called by providence to lead the new chosen people—in this case the image of the superior race—to world dominance and, along the way, to eliminate the previous chosen people. As distorted and blind as this may seem to us now, National Socialism, together with a large portion of the German people, drew energy for the Second World War primarily from this sense of mission. The atrocities at their hands, were, essentially, performed in the service of a godly judgment.

This sense of mission was not overcome with the collapse of the Third Reich. We see it even now in the movements of left and right wing radicals. These movements demonstrate a similar sense of mission, and as a consequence, often a blind readiness to use violence against others.

Jesus, the Christ

Still, the opposition of the old and new chosen people cannot alone explain the aversion of many Christians to the Jewish people, nor the cruelty of the pogroms and deportations. There is yet another root which seems to me to be the most important of all. This has to do with the irreconcilable difference between Jesus, the man of Nazareth, and the belief in his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God.

For the early Christians, Jesus as a man quickly faded into the background. The image of the ascended Christ was imposed on Jesus the man until he dimmed and became unrecognizable. This allows Christians to repress the painful reality that Jesus on the cross felt abandoned by God, that the God in which he had believed did not

appear.

Eli Wiesel, the noted Jewish author, reports a public hanging of a child in a concentration camp. Looking at this atrocity, someone asked, "Where is God, here?" Eli Wiesel answered, "That's him hanging there."

As Jesus on the cross cried out loudly, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" someone might also have asked, "Where is God, here?" The answer would have been the same, "That's him hanging there."

The disciples couldn't bear the reality of their Jesus abandoned by his God. They fled from it through the belief in his resurrection and through the belief in Jesus as the Christ sitting at the right hand of God and in his second coming to judge the living and the dead. And yet, the man, Jesus and his human fate have not been erased by this belief in the resurrection. It lives on in the image of the Jew. Judaism, in the soul of Christians, primarily represents Jesus the man, whom the Christian, believing in the resurrection from the dead and ascendance to the right hand of the Father dares not see. Christians are afraid to face their God-forsaken Jesus, and their fear makes them nasty. So, just as they turn away from Jesus the man, so do they turn against the Jews as a manifestation of the Jesus they fear, and against the God of Jesus and the Jews, whom they also fear. This is the picture I get when I look at what happens in the souls of many Christians. I'll give you an example:

An incident occurred during a course in group dynamics for very active Christians. The participants were all theologians and served in high positions in their respective churches. The group leader suggested putting an empty chair in the middle of the group, and the group members were to imagine Jesus sitting on this chair. Each person could say something to him. One participant immediately put a chair in the centre and the others began to speak to Jesus. The hatred towards Jesus erupting from the speakers was unbelievable. At one point, a participant even ran into the kitchen to get a knife, with which he then stabbed the chair. When it was over, everyone was stunned at what had come up from the depths of their soul, and they felt terribly ashamed. The group leader, who had been deemed non-Christian by these dedicated Christians, said: "I find no guilt in this man."

If I picture Jews during their persecution in the Third Reich, and allow this image to work in me—I see them being herded together, and sent to their death. I imagine them complying without resistance, gentle and humble, and I see Jesus in them. Jesus, the man; Jesus, the Jew. **The victims of the Holocaust were in a role conspicuously like the Christian Jesus facing the Jews. As a people, and in their behaviour, and in their fate, they embodied the behaviour and the fate of the Christian Jesus facing the Councilors and Pilot. This time, the Christians were the brutes and the Jews exemplified the characteristics of Jesus.

The Same God

To return to the idea of God's "choosing", I'd like to say something about the beginnings of religion in the soul, and about what happens in the souls of Christians when they become Christians, and in the souls of Jews, when they become Jews.

A child is born into a particular family, has particular parents, within a particular extended family. The child has a particular culture, is part of a particular people, and a particular religion. The child cannot choose any of these things.

If the child takes this life as it comes to him or her, without qualifications—if the child takes this life, with everything that includes in this family—the family fate, the possibilities, the limits; the joy and the suffering—then the child is open, not only to these parents, not only to this people, not only to this particular culture, not only to this particular religion; but this child is open to God and to whatever it is that we may sense beyond this name. Taking life in this way is a religious act, it is the religious act.

Someone born into a Jewish family cannot do anything else, and may not do anything else except to begin the path to God in a Jewish way. It is the only possible way open to this person, and, therefore, the only right way. The same is true for a Christian on the Christian path. Whatever the differences in beliefs between the Christians and the Jews, they are the same when it comes to this essential religious act. This movement is independent of the contents of their religions and cannot and may not ever be relinquished, even should the person adopt a different religion later. I'll give you an example.

There was once a young man in a course who was looking for help because he felt cut off from life. It emerged that his grandfather had been born a Jew, but this young man considered himself Christian, not Jewish. When we set up a constellation of his family, I put in five representatives next to his grandfather to represent victims of

the Holocaust. The grandfather's representative spontaneously laid his head on the shoulder of the representative nearest him. After a while, he said: "This is my place." When the young man was asked to say to his grandfather, "I am also a Jew, and I remain a Jew", he could only manage to say it with great anxiety and trembling. However, once he was able to say that, he felt his own weight, for the first time in his life.

What was truly religious in this case? His identification with Christianity, or his return to his Jewish roots? The most basic religious act was his acknowledgement, "I am a Jew and I remain a Jew."

A tree cannot choose the place it grows. Yet, the place where its seed fell to earth is the right place for that tree. The same thing is true for us. The place where the parents are is the only possible place for each human being, and, therefore, the right place. Each person belongs to a people, has a language, a race, a religion, and a culture which are the only ones possible, and therefore, the right ones. When an individual agrees in the deepest sense to humbly take this from that which is greater than all individuals, and when the individual then develops appropriately, given whatever is possible, then he or she feels equal to everyone else. At the same time comes the recognition that this superior force, whatever we choose to call it, must look at us all the same. No matter how different the peoples of the world may be, they are all the same before this greatness.

Germans and Jews

Given this background, one has to ask, "How can Christians, above all the Germans, handle their guilt towards the Jews? What can they do and what must they do, to overcome this guilt and give the Jewish people a worthy place within themselves? And, how can the Jewish people handle the guilt of the Christians and the Germans?"

I have had some experiences in various courses, which indicate how a reconciliation may be possible between victims and perpetrators, and, in a larger sense, between Germans and Jews. One of the most dramatic was an experience during a course in Bern. A man set up a constellation of his present family, and then at the end he said he had to add something important—he was Jewish. I responded by setting up seven representatives of Holocaust victims, and behind them, seven representatives for the dead perpetrators. I asked the seven victims' representatives to turn and look into the eyes of the perpetrators. After that, I did nothing more. I left their movements entirely up to them, as they developed.

Some of the perpetrators collapsed, writhing on the floor and sobbing loudly in pain and shame. The victims turned to the perpetrators and looked at them. They helped those who were on the floor to get up, held them in their arms and comforted them. Finally, there was an indescribable love which emerged between them. One of the perpetrators was completely rigid and couldn't move in any way. I put in another person to represent the perpetrator behind the perpetrator. The first representative leaned back against this new representative and was able to relax somewhat. The man said later that he had felt like a finger on a giant hand, totally at its mercy. This was also reported by the others in this constellation. All of them, victims as well as perpetrators, felt directed but also carried by some greater force, a force whose effects were not clear.

After this constellation, I asked all the participants to send me a report of what they had experienced during the constellation. One representative of a perpetrator wrote to me:

"As you placed the seven of us behind the seven victims, I was overcome by a very strange, unpleasant feeling. I intuitively anticipated something bad, even though it wasn't yet clear to me at that time who we were representing. When you said that we were the perpetrators a cold chill ran up my spine. When the victims turned and I looked at the man opposite me, all the energy drained out of my body. I have never felt such shame in my life. I just looked at him and kept getting smaller as he kept getting bigger. I wanted nothing more than to disappear into a hole in the ground, preferably a mouse hole deep into the earth. Inside I was screaming " NO, NO, NO, this can't be true." I felt a need to apologize, but at the same time an inner voice told me that there was no way to apologize, nothing could be glossed over, I had to carry it all myself. The only word that I managed to get out was "please," at which point my victim took me in his arms. Without his support I would have fallen to the floor in shame. In his arms, my inner voice kept saying, "I don't deserve this, I don't deserve this at all, to be held by him." Luckily, I was able to let my tears flow. Otherwise the whole thing would have been unbearable. After my victim had let me go again, I felt somewhat better. I could vaguely feel the floor beneath my feet and could breathe a bit more freely. At the same time I was aware that he was only the first victim, and there were still many more victims on my conscience. Not just two or three— no, dozens or even hundreds! I strongly felt the need to look each of these victims in the eye, and so to find my own inner peace.

"As you put the super-perpetrator behind us, it was immediately clear to me that I alone had to carry the responsibility for everything I had done. There wouldn't be any relief from this perpetrator in the background. I

also felt very strongly that it would have been much better to have been standing on the other side and not to have taken on this insane guilt.

"My need to look at the next victim got more intense, but in fact, the next eye contact literally threw me to the ground. I couldn't stand up any more and I wept bitterly on the floor. I was totally gone. I was only aware of your faraway voice saying, "Now come slowly back" at a great distance, and the coming back was very slow. There was still too much left undone for me, too many victims not looked at. There was still a powerful urge to bring order into this unfinished business.

"After the constellation it took me at least an hour to get fully back into myself again and to feel my full strength.

"For me it was truly one of the most difficult roles I've ever experienced in a family constellation. It was also strange the way in which crystal clear thoughts emerged in my awareness. For example, that it is impossible to push the responsibility for your own actions off onto someone else, even if I was only a small cog in the machine. After such an experience, you know there is nothing more to discuss, to argue about, or to explain. It simply is how it is."

In a constellation like this, it also becomes clear that there are no groups, in the sense of these are the victims and those are the perpetrators. There are only the individual victims and individual perpetrators. Each individual perpetrator must face the individual victims and each individual victim must face the individual perpetrators.

What becomes clear is that there is no peace for the dead victims until the dead perpetrators have taken their place next to them—until the dead perpetrators have been taken in by their victims. And, there is no peace for the perpetrators until they have lain next to their victims as equals.

If this does not take place, if it is not allowed to happen, the perpetrators will be represented by someone in a later generation. For example, as long as the perpetrators from the last war are denied a place in the souls of the Germans, they will be represented by right wing radicals. In constellations of Jewish families where there are descendents of victims of the Holocaust, I've often seen a child identified with one of those perpetrators. There is no real alternative to a reconciliation, even with the perpetrators.

In these constellations, it is also clear that entanglements are only resolved between those who are actually affected, that is, between a specific perpetrator and a specific victim. No one else can step in on their behalf, no one else has the right, the task, or the power to do so. In the constellations, the representatives of the dead victims and the dead perpetrators do not want the living interfering in their affairs. They want the living to stay out of things and they want life to go on, without being limited or burdened with memories of them. From the viewpoint of these representatives of dead people, life belongs to the living, who are free to take it.

I have a fantasy about this in terms of what effect it would have on the souls of Christians if they were to imagine Jesus dead, meeting in the realm of the dead all those who betrayed him, judged him, and executed him. When we look at them as human beings, equal as well in the face of the greater powers which control their destinies, then we have to give them our respect, although this may be a repellent thought for many of us. Above all, we have to honour and respect the greater power behind them and behind us all, as a fathomless mystery. To submit to this mystery in this way—that is something truly religious, and human.

I did an exercise, once, in this connection, with a Jewish woman in whose family many had been murdered. She felt called upon to reconcile the living and the dead. I had her close her eyes and go in her imagination into the realm of the dead. She stood among the six million victims of the Holocaust and looked forwards, backwards, to the left and to the right. Around the edge of this mass of six million dead, lay the dead perpetrators. Then, they all stood up, the dead victims and the dead perpetrators, and all turned towards the horizon to the east. There they saw a white light and they all bowed down before this light. The woman also bowed down with all the dead, and when she was finished she withdrew slowly, leaving the dead in memory before that which appeared on the horizon, but yet remained hidden. Then she turned from the dead and faced life again.

Recompense

Sometimes the living need to face the dead, to look at them and be looked at by them—primarily, those who are guilty in respect to the dead, but also those who have gained some advantage from the terrible fate of their Jewish neighbours. In many constellations what has emerged is that those individuals who had been wronged, affected the individual souls of those who had wronged them, or the souls of those who had benefited from those wrongs, and the souls of their descendents as well. This influence continued until the wrong was acknowledged

and faced, until the victim was acknowledged as a person of equal value, respected and mourned. When this was done, the cleft could be sealed, and the terrible effects of the wrongs ceased.

In conclusion, I'll tell you a story which will take you on a journey of the soul if you wish to come along.

(Story from To the Heart)

The Turning Point

A man was born into his family, in his homeland, into his culture. Even as a child he was told of the teacher and master, whose example was to be followed, and he felt a deep yearning to follow this man and become like him.

He joined others who thought the same way and practiced a strict discipline for many years, following this example, until he became like the master, and thought and spoke and felt and desired just as the master.

Still, he felt something was missing. So, he set out on a long journey, to seek the loneliest places and perhaps cross the ultimate boundary. He passed by an old garden, long since abandoned, where only wild roses still bloomed, and where fruit from the huge trees fell unnoticed to the ground because there was no one who wanted it. On the other side of this garden began the desert.

Soon he was surrounded by an unknown emptiness. It seemed to him that every direction was the same, and the images which sometimes appeared before him also proved to be empty. He roamed on as he felt driven, and when he had long since given up trusting his senses, he saw a spring in front of him. It bubbled out of the earth and the water soaked quickly back into the soil. As far as the water reached, however, the desert was transformed into a paradise.

As he looked around, he saw two strangers approaching. They had done just as he himself had done, and had followed the example of their master until they were like him. They, too, had made a long journey through the loneliness of the desert in hopes of crossing the final boundary. They had found, as he, the spring. All together they bent down to drink of the same water, and each believed himself to be almost at his goal. They said their names: "I have become Gautama, the Buddha."—"I have become Jesus, the Christ."—"I have become Mohammed, the Prophet."

The night descended and above them, just as before, shone the stars, still unreachably remote and still. They were all silent, and one of the three knew he was closer to his master than ever before. It was as if he had a sense, for an instant, of how it had been for him as he had known helplessness, futility, and humility. And how he must have felt, too, as he knew guilt.

The next morning he turned back and escaped out of the desert. Once again he passed by the abandoned garden and continued until he came to the garden which was his own. At his gate stood an old man, as if he had been waiting for him. The old man spoke. "One who has found his way back from such a distance as you, loves the moist earth. He knows that all that grows also dies, and when it is finished, it nourishes." The man answered, "Yes. I agree to the laws of the Earth." And he began to husband his garden.