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The “Heilandskirche” of Graz during
National Socialism in consideration of
its members persecuted as “Jews”

LEADING INSTITUTION

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SCIENTIFIC CO-OPERATION PARTNER

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SCHOOLS INVOLVED

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Austrian Federal Ministry of
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“So that we children were brought up in a consistent Christian surrounding.“

The “Heilandskirche“ of Graz and its “Judenchristen“ from 1880 to 1955

With the annexation (“Anschluss”) of Austria to Nazi-Germany in March 1938 anti-Semitism, which was up to this time especially present in newspapers and other public media, became crucial reality in everyday life. From this time on, Jews were confronted with various arrangements of persecution and repression by the National Socialists. Furthermore, the Jewish population was now openly opposed to a hostile non-Jewish society. Being Jewish was no longer an act of self-determination, but was rather based on the racial “Nuremberg Laws” (“Nürnberger Rassengesetze”).

In this way, many persons who had left the Jewish religion/faith, even those who converted some decades ago, were made by the National Socialists to “Jews”. They were labelled as “Judenchristen” or “Geltungsjuden” and were persecuted by the Nazi regime in the same way as members of the Jewish communities.

The reasons why Jews converted to the Protestant Church in a predominant catholic society were manifold. Main causes are political or cultural motives, religious beliefs and the anti-Semitic pressure. Another motivation was marriage that caused a conversion from the Jewish religion/faith to the Protestant Church. But in many cases it is not possible to reconstruct the reasons, because anti-Semitic pressure and National Socialism caused that the Jewish family heritage was suppressed. In that sense, conversion was seen as a kind of “stain” and was concealed in the same as the history of persecution.

Another reason for concealing the Jewish origins was that the Christian Churches turned away from their “Jewish-Christian” (“judenchristliche”) members and only gave sparsely help to them during National Socialism.



Exhibition and Catalogue – Results of a Research Project

The exhibition and the book *“So that we children were brought up in a consistent Christian surrounding.” – The “Heilandskirche“ of Graz and its “Judenchristen“ from 1880 to 1955* is dealing with the history of conversion and the faith of the “Jewish-Christian” (“judenchristlichen”) members of the “Heilandskirche”.


“The history is embedded in the general history of the Jewish community and the Protestant Church Graz – ‘Heilandskirche’ up from the 19th century. Both have various similarities and interferences. Central for the research project was the individual faith of the victims of the Nazi-persecution during and after the National Socialist era and also how the Protestant Churches dealt with their history after 1945.”

Dr. Gerald Lamprecht
 Center for Jewish Studies

“Two years – a long period, especially for teenagers but also for me as a teacher who accompanied them in this project. It was quite impressive to see how intense the teenagers dealt with this dark chapter of history. They had to read and analyse long and complex texts. But some of the research questions turned out to be a kind of deadlock: The sources from the archives would not give answers and interviewees would not want to talk any longer. Therefore, other ways had to be found to achieve new findings. It was a pleasure to participate in the project which gave insight to academic research. Last but not least, this project also provided orientation for a future career choice.”

Mag.^a Regina Fendl-Wittenbrink
 BG/BRG Kirchengasse





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