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**Interim Report, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2009**

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

**LEADING INSTITUTION**

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## Initial situation and project progress

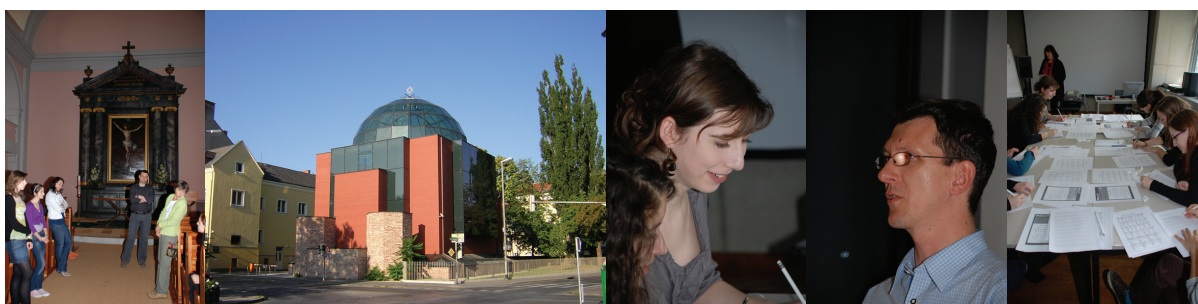
So far, in Austria and in particular in Styria, the history of Christians who were persecuted as “Jews” on account of the “Nuremberg Laws” has been investigated only incompletely. The project aims at researching the fate of those members of the protestant church “Heilandskirche” (“church of the Savior”) in Graz who were persecuted as “Jews” during National Socialism. At the same time, the history of persecution will be embedded in a greater historical context of the history of the “Heilandskirche” as well as the history of the Jewish Community of Graz since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Beside the general social and political developments, the history of anti-Semitism, German nationalism and conversion will be focus of attention. Conversion has always been a constant companion of the Jewish Community, above all during the time of emancipation.

When carrying out research into the questions raised above, on the one hand historical slitting and sheeting is taken into consideration. On the other hand biographical case studies provide an insight into the prevailing world and everyday life of people at that time and thus constitute the necessary depth analysis. The project aims at presenting a traveling exhibition in the rooms of the “Heilandskirche” as well as an exhibition catalogue in June 2010.

Aside from the learning of working techniques, the first year of the project was dedicated to carrying out basic research in libraries and archives. In special workshops the pupils acquired basic work skills for carrying out historical research. What is the structure of libraries and archives? How can I carry out research in these institutions and which information may I gain from sources looked at with a critical eye? Which archives and libraries are relevant to the project? Besides, in the workshops the pupils were also trained in reading old handwritings (e. g. matriculation registers) as well as in basics of Oral History, the way of carrying out interviews and analyzing them. These introducing units were completed by visits to archives and libraries.

Aside from the learning of working techniques, the first year of the project was dedicated to carrying out literary research and sourcing in libraries and archives. Afterwards, the literature was read and discussed in groups. The archives visited were the archive of the “Heilandskirche”, the archive of the Jewish Community (esp. matriculation registers), the Styrian Provincial Archives and the Austrian State Archives. Moreover, the newspapers of the “Heilandskirche” (“Säemann”/“Sower”, “Grazer Kirchenbote”/“Graz church courier”) and of the Jewish Community (“Grazer Israelitischer Gemeindebote”/“Graz Israelite community courier”, “Mitteilungen der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Graz”/“Announcements of the Graz Israelite community”) were went through and analyzed.

As a first interim result it can be recorded that the collection of literature and source material with regard to the general developments of the “Heilandskirche” as well as the Jewish Community of Graz is now completed. Besides, the names of all converts that were persecuted due to the “Nuremberg Laws” could be found out. We will proceed as follows: investigation of selected biographies and implementation of the exhibition and catalogue concept.



## Interim results

For several months, there was much rejoicing at the “Anschluss” (union) of Austria and Germany in 1938 which is also clearly visible when reading the newspapers of the protestant community at that time. They show full-page illustrations and homage poems as well as the express request for voting “YES” at the referendum on April 10<sup>th</sup> in 1938, and the demand for singing the “Deutschlandlied” (German national anthem) beside the “Horst-Wessel-Lied” (“Horst Wessel Song”) at the feast service on the occasion of the referendum. The “Heilandskirche” also voluntarily gave up its protestant school system in 1938 which resulted in the incapability to resume it after 1945. However, after a first phase of enthusiasm soon disillusionment was experienced. The community was not only affected by statutory prohibitions which restricted the cultural and religious activities of the “Heilandskirche” (such as the prohibition of “Der Säemann”/“The sower”) but also lost more than 2.000 members within a few years. These members mainly turned away from church because of their National Socialist beliefs.


The National Socialist seizure of power meant for the so called “Judenchristen” (“Jewchristians”) that they were now – as were the Jews – exposed to the National Socialist injustice-laws and thus persecuted. Due to the limited sources there are no secured data on the number of people persecuted as “Judenchristen” in Styria. According to the census in May 1939, 597 Jews, 357 “Mischlinge 1. Grades” (“individuals of mixed race of the first degree”) and 307 “Mischlinge 2. Grades” (“individuals of mixed race of the second degree”) were living in the Reichsgau (Reich district) of Styria in mid-1939. Of these 1.261 victims of persecution 337 people professed themselves Jews and were thus so called “Glaubensjuden” (“faithjews”). 199 people were members of a protestant church, 652 were Roman Catholic, 11 members of other churches. 36 people declared themselves “gottgläubig” (“believing in God”), 19 were “without faith” and of 7 people no information were found.

From March 1938 onwards, the fate of the “Judenchristen” of the “Heilandskirche” as well as all the other people persecuted as being “Jewish” could be manifold. It ranged from surviving in “protected marriages” (Brücklmeier family, stamp factory owner) and escape (Joseph Otto Lämmel, head of the Styrian Writers’ Association) to deportation and death in concentration camps (Franz Öhler, owner of the department store “Kastner & Öhler”). However, all of them were exposed to everyday discrimination.

So far, no evidence could be found of support or help given to these people by the “Heilandskirche”. Presumably, “Judenchristen” from Graz turned to the “Swedish Mission” in Vienna for help. However, in 1938/1939, the “Säemann” (“Sower”) published many articles which dealt with the “Jewish Question” and the “Racial Question” in a National Socialist portent.







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