

Heroes of the Holocaust: Messianic Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto

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Introduction

For many years I believed that there was a little information available for the modern researcher describing the situation of the Jewish believers (Messianic Jews, Hebrew Christians etc.) within the Warsaw Ghetto. The following brief and profound statement by Rabbi Dan Cohen Sherbock in his book entitled Messianic Judaism sums up my research findings as well,

Following the Holocaust, missions to the Jewish people ceased to function in those cities where the Jewish population had been largely eliminated. In Warsaw, for example, only a few hundred Jews survived the war; most of the workers stationed there escaped before the outbreak of the war, while others died in the Warsaw Ghetto or in one of several Concentration camps.¹

But, is this really all we can know? The answer is yes and no. There is still very little known about the life and testimony of Jewish believers in the Warsaw Ghetto – especially those who did not identify with the Catholic Church. However, there is more than I realized available for consideration if we include the Catholic Jewish Christians into our study.

On a more personal note, I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the subject of Missions to the Jews during the first half of the 20th century, which included a considerable section on Holocaust related studies. However, I delimited my research to Protestant Jewish missions and did not study the Catholic missions to the Jews or the activities of various parishes, priests and Jewish Catholics during the time period. I have since discovered that the Catholic voice must be heard if we are to understand the plight of the Jewish believer in Jesus within the Warsaw Ghetto as so much of the extant material and records we have available to us today comes from Catholic sources. And it is this material that

¹ Cohn-Sherbock, Dan Messianic Judaism, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000, London, New York, printed in the UK by Biddles Ltd. P. 46

helps us better understand the overall role that Jewish believers in Jesus played in the tragedy of the Warsaw Ghetto – for both Catholic and non-Catholic believers.

The concern that many have in including Catholics is not necessarily because of religious doctrine but because of the presumption of nominalism and therefore a skewed picture of Messianic faith in the Ghetto. Once it is understood that though there was certainly nominalism, syncretistic *religio-nationalism* and multi-generational believers who may not have had an adult “conversion” experience, the value of the Catholic witness is still both credible and important. We must also remember that there were also many instances of nominalism among Jewish Protestant believers and especially in the case of their children, who came to faith through the Jewish missions or local Evangelical churches.

The purpose of this essay is to introduce the modern Messianic movement to the Jewish believers of the Warsaw Ghetto; their unique testimony and witness and contributions to both Jewish life and to the Church. These Messianic Jews were *unlikely and involuntary* heroes, but a dynamic part of our legacy that if known and recognized could provide some critical lessons and inspiration for a new generation of Messianic Jews.

The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Evangelism

The Holocaust was the most significant challenge to the survival of the Jewish people since the Babylonian Captivity. A number of other threats reshaped the Jewish community including; the Crusades, Expulsions, Pogroms, and the ongoing conflicts related to the establishment of the modern state of Israel, but the reduction of Jewish population and destruction of Jewish life engendered by the Holocaust is incomparable with any other modern trauma brought upon the Jewish people.

The impact of this tragedy on the general Jewish population was massive as was it’s impact on the community of Jewish followers of Jesus who had enjoyed a thriving community in the various countries effected by the Holocaust. The numbers of Jewish believers living in Europe prior to the Holocaust numbered in the hundred’s of thousands, and most were either killed or moved to other parts of the globe. This created a twenty year plus decline in the Messianic movement. ²

The ensuing shift of Jewish life and culture from Europe to North America was just one further example of the impact the Holocaust had on Messianic Jewish life and has shaped

² Some question whether or not the movement of Jewish believers in Europe should be considered Messianic as they seemed to be more attached to the Gentile church and expression of the faith. This is a study outside the scope of this current chapter, however it should be noted that these Jewish believers met in their own communities and Bible studies and their services were primarily in Yiddish or Ladino. If one accepts a more sociological and ethnic understanding of Jewish identity (as Hitler did), then clearly this movement was quite Jewish in it’s own way.

a new and distinctive community identity.³

We still live in the shadow of the Holocaust and our current movement cannot be understood without developing a deeper understanding of what transpired amongst our spiritual forefather before, during and after the Holocaust. For many years we have heard passionate and sincere advocates of the modern Messianic movement, which we can date as initiating in the late 1960's, heralding our movement as the long-awaited beginning of the "end times" and that there are now more Messianic Jews than there were at any other time in history – including the First Century.

I do not wish to debate numbers (though I suspect there may have been more Jewish believers in Jesus in the years immediately preceding the Holocaust than today), but rather to emphasize the dramatic importance of what God accomplished through the Jewish believers who endured, survived and in rare cases, survived the Holocaust.

The achievements and witness of Jewish believers during the Holocaust and especially in the Warsaw Ghetto are essentially unknown to most present-day Jewish believers. We stand on the shoulders of these heroes of the Holocaust – the Jewish believers of the Warsaw Ghetto - and their story must be told.

The Sources for Information

I am especially grateful for the monumental and informative book written by Peter F. Dembowski⁴ entitled, *Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto*,⁵ which is perhaps the best source of information in English regarding Jewish believers in the Warsaw

³ This Messianic movement is morphing again as the Russian Messianic movement continues to expand and institutions are developing and as the focal point of the modern Messianic movement newcomers more Israel-Centric.

⁴ Distinguished Service Professor (Emeritus) in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago. Born and raised in Warsaw, Poland, Dembowski was involved in the underground activities of the Polish Home Army and participated in the Polish uprising. He was twice a prisoner of the Germans—first at the infamous prison known as Pawiak, where comrades bribed corrupt Gestapo officials to win his freedom, and later at Stalag XB Sandbostel, where he remained until the prison was liberated by the British. Upon liberation, Dembowski joined the Polish Army in the West. For his war service, he was decorated twice with the Polish Cross of Valor and the Silver Service Cross with Swords.

Ghetto. Clearly this was a labor of love and devotion in the case of Dembowski who lived through these terrible events himself.

According to Dembowski, there are very limited primary sources for studying the role of the Jewish Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto and not much has been written by others and therefore even the secondary resources are minimal. He mentions an article by the modern Jewish historian, Havi Ben Sasson where he summarizes the challenge to find available resources to study.

Until Havi Ben Sasson's recent article—"Christians in the Ghetto"⁶ – an informative and bibliographic rich introductory study written by a staff member of the International School for Teaching the Holocaust, Yad Vashem—there were no works in English⁷ specifically treating the presence of Christian Jews in the Warsaw ghetto.⁸

Dr. Todd Endelman, the William Haber Professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Michigan, who has written extensively on the subject of "Jewish Converts to Christianity, published an article in 1997, entitled, Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis, in the Journal of Jewish Social Studies, New

⁶ Ben-Sasson, Havi. 2003. "Christians in the Ghetto: All Saints Church, Birth of the Holy Virgin Church, and the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto." *Yad Vashem Studies* 31:153-73

⁷ Dembowski also suggests the following additional resources: Marian Malowist, "Assimilationists and Neophytes at the Time of War—Operations in the Closed Jewish Quarter", written in Polish and composed shortly before the summer of 1942 by a Jewish believer who later became a professor of history at the University of Warsaw. He translated his essay and it is included in a collection of documents taken from the Ringleblum Archives. In addition, he lists additional works written after the war, in Polish; Iwona Stefanczyk "Christian Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto" (1997), Ruta Sakowska "The Christians in the Ghetto", (1993), pages 138–140, Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, "Catholic Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto" (2001), pages 620–624 and Marian Fuks "Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto", included in From the History of the Great Catastrophe of the Jewish People (1996), pages 63–67. Fuks, according to Dembowski is a descendent of "baptized Jews".

⁸ Dembowski adds, *There are some documents available English and in Polish, many of them preserved in the Jewish Historical Institute and Warsaw. Many of these documents, written in Polish touring Yiddish, or frequently Yiddish, translated into Polish, edited and published with important comments and annotations, but some of them still remain unpublished. Some Warsaw wartime documents contain specific information about Christian Jews, who are also mentioned quite often in the rich Polish postwar literature concerning the saving and hiding the Jews who managed to find themselves outside the ghetto. Much of this information is scattered throughout the Jewish and non-Jewish literature.*

Series, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 28-59. He is also the former director of the Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies and writes from a more mainstream Jewish perspective.

Emmanuel Ringleblum, whose role as the Ghetto's chief historian wrote what is called the *Togbukh fun varsherver geto* (Journal from the Warsaw Ghetto). Ringleblum hid the Journal with accompanying source documents from the Nazi in milk cans, which were discovered in 1948. He generally took a more traditionally negative and harsher view of the Jewish believers for a variety of reasons.

Another key source for information about Jewish believers and in particular the Catholic Jews may be found in the book entitled, The Story of a Life, written by Dr. Ludwik Hirszfeld and published in 2010 in English, translated by Marta A. Balinska. This volume, also called, *Historia* and was penned in 1943-44, during the time Hirszfeld was hiding in the Polish countryside, having escaped the Ghetto immediately before the Aktion.

According to Dembowski, the nine most important chapters in this book of the thirty one chapters, are those which describe the life of the author, as a Christian Jew in the Ghetto. It is unique as it is a rare biographical work by a Jewish Christian.⁹

Additional first hand reports such as those of *Judenrut* leader, Adam Czerniakow¹⁰, Chaim Aron Kaplan¹¹, Stefan Ernsr¹² and others especially found in Turkow's, *That How it Was*¹³.

Though I greatly appreciate Dembowski's work, he writes within a narrow frame of reference resulting from his Catholic orientation and lack of assumed familiarity with the Jewish missions community and other Protestant communities. He mentions five key sources for information, other than the books and diaries listed above which could lead one to a better understanding of the Jewish believers in the Warsaw Ghetto. He summarizes his view of the sources; "German documents. Personal diaries, documents

⁹ <http://www.amazon.com/Ludwik-Hirszfeld-Rochester-Studies-Medical/dp/158046338X>

¹⁰ See CIWG, pp 35-37

¹¹ IBID pp. 37-38

¹² IBID pp. 38

¹³ IBID pp.41

written in the ghetto that are not yet compiled, memoirs of survivors written after the events, critical commentaries written by historians utilizing the above materials".¹⁴

Unfortunately, he does not take into consideration the Journals of the Jewish Mission Agencies, the documents of the International Missionary Council's International Christian Approach to the Jews, including meetings held during this time and a number of other articles, biographies and various materials that described the activities of the Jewish believers who were either Protestant or who identified with the Jewish Mission agencies working in Warsaw at the time.¹⁵

And yet, he is quite right when it comes to primary source documents. There are very few and most of the Mission reports were secondary resources, written after the Ghetto was destroyed. One important outcome of writing this essay is the recognition that a further combing of the Mission and Protestant resources must be attempted to glean further information about the role and activities of the non-Catholic Jewish believers in the Ghetto.

The Jews of Post World War I Poland

Prior to World War I, two and one-third million Jewish people dwelt in Austria-Hungary.¹⁶ More than a million were scattered throughout the Polish province of

¹⁴ IBID pp.41

¹⁵ Journals of the British Jews Society, the Churches Ministry Among the Jews, the American Board of Missions to the Jews and the records of the Polish Baptist, Reformed and Presbyterian churches to simply identify a few.

¹⁶ The Jews of Poland

The Jews settled in Poland in the middle of the 14th century. They had been blamed for the Black Plague and fled the violent mobs of peasants and townspeople who attacked them, particularly in the Germanic-speaking areas of Europe. Kasimir the Great (1333-1370) offered them the possibility of settlement in Poland and the offer was accepted.

The Jewish people retained much of the Medieval German language, which became the foundation for the Yiddish language – commonly spoken by the Jews of Poland. The Jewish people of Poland suffered under various Pogroms, nonetheless the Jewish population, culture, religious, social and political institutions all grew throughout Poland.

Poland was divided into three parts in 1795 during a period of peace: part went to Russia, part to Austria and part to Germany. From this point on it is difficult to speak about the Jews of Poland without speaking about the Jews of Russia, Austria, or Germany

(Prussia). It was only after the First World War that the Polish people regained their independence.¹⁶

About one million Jews remained in Galicia, also known as Austrian Poland with major centers in Krakow and Lemberg (later Lvov). In Russian Poland, there were three million Jews; its major center was Warsaw.¹⁶ Initially, most of the Russian Polish Jews were poor but eventually became part of the middle class. In Russian Poland, the Jews came under the sway of the Czar, which brought tremendous hardship at a later date.

The Pale of Settlement

The Pale of Settlement, a restrictive settlement area for the Jews began as early as 1791 but was eventually decreed by law (1843). The boundary line extended from the Baltic town of Memel and followed the course of the Dnieper until it approached the Black Sea. Its western boundary was the western center of Poland, including the Crimea.

Samuel Wilkinson,¹⁶ in an article entitled “The Jews in Russia,” gave some interesting details about the Pale of Settlement. He wrote,

Gradually the Pale of Settlement was formed, taking clear shape in 1843. This was the zone within which Jews alone had the right of residence. This Pale remains still the prison within which Russia’s Jewish population is confined. It consists of fifteen provinces or governments, originally Polish in the Kingdom of Poland, the whole embracing nearly all Western Russia and extending from Riga in the north to Odessa in the south, covering 313,608 square miles exclusive of Poland. The whole of the territory, the Pale and Poland and Russia together contains a population of 36,678,120 by the latest census of which 4,923,949 are Jews.¹⁶

Pogroms and the May Laws

After Alexander II was assassinated in 1888, Alexander III became Czar and was a proponent of the thesis: “One Czar, one faith, one language, one law.” This intensified the tensions between the Jews and the Russian people and inevitably fed the fires of intolerance and racial hatred. It also precipitated a growing cycle of extensive pogroms¹⁶, which ravaged the Jewish population and led to a series of terrible Pogroms.

Along with the pogroms, the rather harsh May Laws enacted to govern the Jews on May 3, 1882 caused considerable misery and forced masses of Russian-Polish Jews to emigrate.

The Jewish situation in Poland and its sister country, Russia, was intolerable. Those Jews that could leave either country did all they could to emigrate. Unfortunately most Jews viewed Poland as a Christian country and could hardly be blamed for regarding the

Galicia. When war broke out between Germany and Russia, more than 800,000 Jews were resident in the German empire. The bulk had settled in the east, living in Prussia and in the Polish province of Posen. It was in this Jewish Pale — the eastern war zone bordering Russia — that the countryside “was utterly devastated by the ravishes of the huge contending armies.”¹⁷ The Jews were caught in the midst of the battles of World War I simply because of geographic reasons.

The post-war reemergence of Poland as a sovereign state included eleven million non-Polish people: six million Ukrainians and White Russians, one million Germans and more than three million Jews.¹⁸

It is said that the struggle with the Communists destroyed sixty-five percent of Poland’s resources. The Poles had little leadership and only a small middle class. The Jews filled in this gap. According to an International Missionary Council report, Jews represented ten percent of the population and held or controlled about sixty-one percent of the total trade and commerce of the country (1937:4). They also constituted a majority in the total membership of both the medical and the legal professions (1937:5). All of these factors may have caused the Poles to be jealous of the Jews.

The new map of Europe included the addition of considerable land to Poland. With the rise of Polish nationalism, a militant anti-Semitism overtook the Polish people and increasingly threatened the security of the Jewish people. In 1923, the government instituted a “cold pogrom,” a policy of systematically eliminating Jews from the economic life of the country (1958:357).

Discrimination against the Jews was now widely practiced. There was a numerus clausus adopted by the medical faculty in Krakow, beginning in 1922. By autumn of 1925, one hundred new students were admitted, of whom only thirteen were Jews, but there were more than 400 Jewish applicants.

Christian populace with hostility. This decisively affected missionary work among them throughout this period.

¹⁷ The Hebrews have been among the greatest sufferers in the great European war. Over a half million of them are actually fighting against each other in opposing armies. The Jewish settlements in Galicia, Lithuania and Poland, including portions of Austria, Germany and Russia, are being devastated by the bloody battles. It is estimated that nearly two million Jews have been driven from their homes and reduced to terrible misery in consequence of the war. Besides this, the Jews in Palestine and Armenia are suffering from famine and oppression and deportation (MRW 1915:1).

¹⁸ “By these transfers of territory, it may be estimated that the Jewish population of the new Republic of Poland approached three million” (BWC 1927:159).

The Nazi Invasion and the Construction of the Warsaw Ghetto

Dr. Todd Endelman provides a good description of the growth of Warsaw's Jewish community.

Although Russian control arrested the development of a modern political system in Poland, the Polish capital became, nonetheless, a dynamic commercial-industrial center. This, along with the relaxation of restrictions on Jewish residence, encouraged Jewish migration to a city that earlier was of little importance in Polish Jewish life. Its Jewish population grew from 16,000 in 1816 to 41,000 in 1856 and then skyrocketed to 337,000 on the eve of World War I." Even by mid-century, Warsaw Jewry was the largest in the world. Stratified in both economic and religio-cultural terms, it was subject to a range of secularizing, assimilatory pressures similar to but not identical with those that influenced communities farther to the west.¹⁹

The Nazis invaded Poland in 1939 and within a short time, anti Jewish regulations were published and implemented, leading to the construction of what would become known as the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazis also built Ghettos in other cities within Poland with large Jewish populations such as Lodz and Vilna.²⁰

The following brief paragraph from the web based, *Teachers Guide to the Holocaust*, provides a very brief overview of the basic facts regarding the Warsaw Ghetto.²¹

Established in November 1940, it was surrounded by wall²² and contained nearly 500,000 Jews. About 45,000 Jews died there in 1941 alone, as a result of overcrowding, hard labor, lack of sanitation, insufficient food, starvation, and disease. During 1942, most of the ghetto residents were deported to Treblinka, leaving about 60,000 Jews in the ghetto.²³ A revolt took place in April 1943 when the Germans, commanded by General Jürgen Stroop, attempted to raze the ghetto

¹⁹ Endelman, p.30. Also see <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Warsaw>

²⁰ <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/ghettos.htm>

²¹ <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/ghettos.htm>

²² (<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/gallery/G1941W1.htm#22058>

<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/gallery/G1941W2.htm>)

²³ <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/ghettos.htm>

and deport the remaining inhabitants to Treblinka.²⁴ The defense forces, commanded by Mordecai Anielewicz, included all Jewish political parties. The bitter fighting lasted twenty-eight days and ended with the destruction of the ghetto.²⁵

The following might be a helpful summary of the four stages of the Warsaw Ghetto,

1. October 1939–November 1940: the gradual isolation and gathering of the Jewish population.
2. November 1940–July 1942: the ghetto was sealed off from the “Other Side”.
3. July 22, 1942–September 15, 1942: the “resettlement”, which is also referred to by its German euphemism, *the Aktion*, the transport to the capture of like a concentration camp and the liquidation of more than 300,000 Jewish people
4. October 1942–1943: The Jewish resistance *uprising* by the remaining Jewish population in the Ghetto, followed by the total destruction of the ghetto.²⁶

Emmanuel Ringelblum in his Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto describes a further detailed timeline of the Ghetto.²⁷

An Overview of Jewish Missions in Poland Before the War

The Rev. Martin Parsons, a missionary to the Jewish people with CMJ, provided a thumbnail sketch of Jewish missions in Poland, two years prior to the Nazi invasion in a paper presented to the meeting of the International Missionary Council Christian Approach to the Jews (a precursor to the LCJE) meeting in Vienna during 1937. He wrote:

The American Board of Missions (Chosen People Ministries today) has a center in Warsaw on the east of the river. They have room for some inquirers, in addition to general evangelistic work. The Mildmay Mission (Messianic Testimony today) has a hall in the Jewish quarter in Warsaw and their work mainly touches poorer Jews. The American European Fellowship is in Warsaw and works particularly among children. They have a villa at Radoso, which is

²⁴ (<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/gallery/G1941WGU.HTM>)

<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/gallery/WGU2.htm>)

²⁵ <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/ghettos.htm>

²⁶ CIWG pp. 43

²⁷ Ringelblum, Emmanuel: Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto pp. 348-360. Also see http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Ringelblum_Emanuel

used in the Summer for children's work. The Bethel Mission in Lodz has an evangelistic center and a colony. In addition, in Poland there is one Pentecostal evangelist, one member of the Open Brethren, one member of the Closed Brethren and a few private evangelists living by faith. The four missions in Warsaw work together in close cooperation. The shape of this is in the form of monthly-united prayer meetings and monthly evangelistic meetings. In Lvov there is active cooperation between the Church Mission to the Jews (CMJ) and the Danish Mission (DIM) with their joint monthly evangelistic meeting²⁸

Further reports from the well-known magazine of the day, the *Missionary Review of the World*, demonstrated that Poland had a considerable missionary presence prior to the invasion. CMJ had stations in Warsaw and Lemberg. In both centers many modern young Jews were being reached through English classes in addition to the regular program of evangelistic work, colportage and itineration. The Swedish Friends of Israel had evangelistic centers in Lodz and Vilna. The British Jews Society (CWI today) had a station in Krakow and was reaching whole districts in surrounding neighborhoods through colporteurs. In Lvov, the Danish Mission (DIM) had an evangelistic center. The Barbican Mission (CWI today) had an evangelistic and medical center in Bialostok and substations at Vilna, Lublin, Grodno, Rovno and Brzesc.

The missions to the Jews established works in those cities where there were large populations of Jewish people; including Warsaw, Lvov, Lublin, Vilna, Bialostok, Lodz and Krakow, where the well known missionary to the Jewish people Victor Buksbazen served for many years. The missionaries itinerated to other cities and villages, which had smaller Jewish populations.

The missions to the Jews generally followed the traditional mission center approach. The center usually included a building with a hall for gospel preaching, a reading room for Bible study and discussion, as well as residences for missionaries and new believers who were immigrants or were forced from their homes for their faith. In some instances, there was medical and educational work at these centers.

They also distributed tracts, held street meetings, and did personal visitation and Scripture distribution. Many of them had children's meetings. Uniquely, Leon Rosenberg maintained an orphanage in Lodz that was successful, along with medical, educational and other mercy ministries. Other missionaries were effective in reaching the poor among the Jewish community.

All of the missions conducted regular meetings for the Jewish holidays as well as weekly services and Bible studies. Unbelievers were invited to these meetings and many became believers. In Poland, however, the mercy ministries of medical work, education and poverty relief were less utilized than in some of the other European countries.

²⁸ IMCCAJ Vienna Conference 1937

Many of the missionaries were trained outside of Poland—either in America, Great Britain or Europe—and then sent to Poland. J. I. Landsmann, however, established a credible CMJ missionary training school in Warsaw, which was significant in its ministry. A number of other mission societies serving in Poland sent their missionaries to be trained at this school, including Jakób Jocz and the aforementioned Victor Buksbazen. The school, unfortunately, was closed after Landsmann's death in 1935. But in view of the upcoming Nazi terror, it would not have lasted much longer.

Three Jewish believers especially gave superb field leadership to the efforts of CMJ in Poland: H. C. Carpenter, Paul Levertoff, and J. I. Landsmann. Martin Parsons²⁹ took the helm in 1927, after Carpenter's retirement, and led the work up until the Nazi invasion. Many effective missionaries served with CMJ during this period, not the least of which was Bazyli Jocz, father of Jakób³⁰. CMJ built Emmanuel Hall in 1927, which became a showcase for messianic believers in Warsaw.

An Overview of Jewish Missions in Poland During World War II

The Nazis invaded Poland in 1939. Already conditions among the Jews were terrible, but after the invasion the Final Solution arrived in Poland like a raging storm from hell. Jews and missionaries to the Jews were rounded up, taken to concentration camps or killed. The actual bombing of Poland itself also did severe damage to the country. Chaos was everywhere and the work of the mission's ground to a full halt from which it would never recover.

According to an early report from the International Missionary Council Christian Approach to the Jews (IMCCAJ),

Thousands of executions are reported. Hundreds of thousands are in concentration camps and compulsory labor camps. Three and a half million Jews are exposed to the worst vindictiveness of the Nazis. Two hundred thousand more from all parts of the Reich form a terrible ghetto at Lublin where destitution and plague are adding to their miseries.

Here many native missionaries have been cut off by the war and the work of all British societies has been discontinued. The Danish Mission at Lvov has also been brought to an end. It is not known whether the American Board is still able to work. Some missionaries from the small Baltic states are also among the refugees.

²⁹ http://www.parsonsfamily.co.uk/martin_autobiography/poland.php

³⁰ <http://www.ha-gefen.org.il/en/aalphabetic%20presentation/c13760/159845.php> and <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+legacy+of+Jakob+Jocz.-a014377469>

All the missionary activities in German territories formerly carried on by British Societies have been presumed at an end. Extensive work in Poland has been suspended, including that of the Church Mission to the Jews, the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews, the MMJ and the Barbican Mission (IMCCAJ 1940:1).

According to an early report from CMJ in Poland, most of the missionaries appeared to have been cut off and it became impossible to continue to send them financial assistance. Discrimination against the families of missionaries as well as against the missionaries themselves became widespread.

The sad note was reported by the LJS about Mr. and Mrs. Bazyli Jocz: "All the mission workers escaped from Warsaw but Mr. and Mrs. Jocz who with their son Paul and his wife remain in Lvov and suffer great hardship. Rev. R. Allison escaped from Lvov and is assisting the missionary in Bucharest" (1940:1).

The Warsaw facility of CMJ was destroyed in a Nazi bombing raid:

Four bombs fell on the mission premises of the Church Mission to Jews in Warsaw, which were destroyed together with the residences of the missionaries. Property valued at £20,000 was lost. R. Allison, the missionary at Lvov, escaped to Romania just before the Russian entry and no organized missionary work is being carried out there (1940:1).

The IMCCAJ report continued to assess the damage to missionary activity, including in Poland.³¹

One report from the IMCCAJ noted that four missionaries from the MMJ had been cut off in Poland and no word had been heard from them, including N. Sendyk and Rachmiel Frydland at Warsaw, P. Nowach at Przemyśl, J. Ellenbogen at Lvov (1940:2).

³¹ The British Society has closed down its work in Krakow and given up its share of the work in Vilna. The Church of Scotland Mission at Prague was temporarily suspended shortly after the annexation of Bohemia by Germany in March 1939. The mission has been placed in the care of the Church of the Czech Brethren. The Mildmay Mission had work in Copenhagen which has been discontinued. The overrunning of Holland by Germany will probably bring the work of the Church Mission to the Jews at the Hague to an end. In addition, the considerable work of Danish, Norwegian and Dutch Societies are all affected, but reports are not available. One example is the Norwegian Mission in Jassy, Romania where rents and rates are now being paid by the Church Mission to the Jews (1940:1).

Rachmiel Frydland³² went on to escape from the ravages of the Holocaust in Poland. He told his story in a moving book, Joy Cometh in the Morning. After his escape, Frydland would become one of the significant missionaries to the Jews in this century.

British societies in Poland suffered heavy material losses through aerial bombardments, and most of their work and that of the Danish work at Lvov was abruptly suspended.³³ Stevens writes of CMJ, “During World War II, the mission premises were seriously damaged, and the work was never able to begin again”.³⁴

Word of what was really going on reached the American press, including the Christian press. The MRW followed the events closely and provided the following report midway through the war:

At the beginning of the year it was reported that there were one and one third million Jews in eleven-ghettos in Poland (Warsaw, Lodz, Lvov, Byalostok, Ottowak, Lublin, Czestochowa, Kielce, Vochnia, Deblin and Krakow). Reports state that 165,000 had died from starvation and epidemics in the ghettos and that many of those in the ghetto were being transferred to unknown destinations farther east, and it was believed in Jewish circles that they were being sent to their death.³⁵

Missions to the Jews died in Poland along with more than 800,000 Jewish people. The largest of the open and active fields of labor among the Jewish people for the sake of the gospel was over; the war marked the end of a people and the end of an age.

The Jewish Believers and the Warsaw Ghetto

³² One of the reasons that Rachmiel Frydland was unique among missionaries to the Jews in the United States was because he was the last of that “dying breed” from Europe. Frydland was not atypical of many of the other Hebrew Christians or converts in Warsaw and Poland at the time. What made him unique was that he survived the Holocaust. Besides all of his other good qualities, he was appreciated for his Talmudic learning. The level of Talmudic learning that he brought to the early stages of the subsequent post-war renewal movement in Jewish missions in the United States was something that was already widespread during the 1930s and 1940s in Poland before the merciless onslaught of Hitler’s troops.

³³ International Review of Missions, 1941, p.94

³⁴ Stevens p. 91.

³⁵ International Review of Missions, 1943, p.65

There were two major groups of Jewish believers in the Warsaw ghetto; Catholics and Protestants. I realize that this description sounds harsh to many. We wish we could divide the Jewish believers between Catholics, Protestants and Messianic Jews, but for the most part the group we would call Messianic would identify as Protestants as the influence of the Catholic church was profound in Poland. You either were or were not Catholic; unless you were Jewish and involved with one of the Mission agencies.

There is no question that the Jewish people, who were involved with the Jewish mission in Poland and Warsaw in particular, which may have been thousands, were treated as non-Catholic. They often had a very deep sense of Jewish identity as did a considerable number of the Catholic believers.

Dembowski explains how he determined the number of Jewish believers who lived in the Warsaw ghetto at its height and suggests that the amount is somewhere between 5 and 6,000 Jewish Christians – the majority of who were Catholic. He mentions a report that was written in the Jewish Gazette (viewed as a Nazi controlled publication) that states the amount was somewhere around 2,000 - according to a 1939 census. However, this would mean that many of the Jewish Christians who were ordered into the Ghetto after 1939 would not have been counted.

The most reliable number, according to Dembowski, gleaned from the research of contemporary Roman Catholic historians; Zdzislaw Kroll and Tadeusz Karolak was actually approximately 5,000.

Demobwski states that, “there were 5,200 Christians in the ghetto, most of them Roman Catholic”. This number, it seems, is based on oral tradition, of and the registries of the three Ghetto parishes, though their documents which had been destroyed needed to be recreated after the war. The well-regarded Mary Burg³⁶ and Rev. Czarnecki affirm numbers in these ranges as well. In addition, Philip Friedman, a Jewish historian of the Warsaw ghetto asserts in this study, first published in 1957 “in Warsaw, more than 6,000 baptized Jews were ordered by the Nazis to move into the ghetto, where they establish their own churches. Food parcels were sent out to them by the Caritas and several priests moved in to minister to their spiritual needs.”³⁷

We are able to get some insight into the life of the Jewish believers in the Ghetto through a brief statement by Rachmiel Frydland who writes,

In late 1944, by hiding in cemeteries, deserted churches, and the homes of fearful friends, I was one of the few surviving Jews in Warsaw outside the ghetto. In that enclosure were 5,000 Jews, the last of Warsaw's original 500,000. By God's

³⁶ The Diary of Mary Berg : Growing up in the Warsaw Ghetto

³⁷ Friedman, Phillip. Their Brothers Keepers. Demobowski p. 66-67

enabling, I secretly slipped into the ghetto and was able to speak comfort to a few of the Jewish believers still alive. Other Jewish brethren heard the message and believed in Messiah Jesus. My friends in the ghetto insisted that I leave. They said that if God had preserved me thus far, I would be a witness to the woes they now experienced. At the end of the war, I could tell the story of their suffering. I was probably one of the last to leave the ghetto. It was only shortly afterward that the Germans obliterated the entire Jewish area.³⁸

Frydland was one of the most well-known Messianic Jewish survivors of the Holocaust whose first-hand testimony provided information about the life of the Jewish believers in Warsaw before and to some degree during the war. Frydland eventually travelled to England, Israel and then the United States to serve the Messiah in a variety of capacities. He tells the story briefly of his path to survival.

Time seemed to drag slowly. There were nights when a Christian family would risk their lives by sheltering a Jew. Once, in the shop of a Christian undertaker, I slept in a coffin. There were other times when a barn provided my shelter. In all that time there was the assurance that God wanted me to live. As long as He wanted it, I was ready. And finally, the day came when I was no longer hunted and condemned for being a Jew. In January of 1945, Russian troops entered Warsaw and the automatic death sentence for Jews was lifted.³⁹

Jewish Believers: Catholic, Protestant and Mission Related

Endelman's intent in this excellent article is to demonstrate that though still a minority, many thousands of Jewish people "converted" to Christianity from the late 19th century all the way through the Warsaw Ghetto. He tries to demonstrate and does a fairly good job doing so, that "conversion", especially in Poland, was pervasive throughout all strategies of Jewish life; from the poorest to the wealthiest and from the common workman to be both well-educated professional.

His research is in actuality a response to another Polish scholar, Jeske-Choinski, whom he deemed anti-Semitic and yet this objective research not only the numbers of Jewish believers: in the 19th and early 20th century, but also detailed gender, ages and occupations. Whereas some in the Jewish community believed the numbers gathered by this "one anti-Semitic" researcher, Adelman actually believe that the June numbers of Jewish "converts" Christianity was larger, because this other individual did not take into consideration the work of missions and basically focused on baptismal records of mainline Catholic and Protestant Jewish "converts". From CMJ and some of the other Jewish missions.

³⁸ <http://www.messianicassociation.org/bio-frydland.htm>

³⁹ IBID

Endelman writes,

There is no evidence that Jeske-Choinski's anti-Semitism significantly distorted how he collected and recorded baptismal data. No critic has ever suggested that he fabricated cases of conversion or their details. In fact, the problem is the opposite: the number of conversions in Warsaw was greater than the number he recorded. In addition to those he omitted inadvertently due to defective records and those he was paid to omit, it seems that he did not include those baptized by Anglican missionaries, agents of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, probably because he did not have access to their records. The London Society's mission was the oldest, the most active, and the best funded in nineteenth-century Poland. Between 1821, when the London Society established a station in Warsaw, and 1854, when the government closed it and expelled its agents, it baptized 361 Jews. Later, following its re-establishment, it baptized another 354 Jews between 1874 and 1898. In all, from its establishment to 1907, the London Society's agents in Warsaw converted 949 Jews. Its influence, however, was greater than these numbers suggest, since an unknown number of Jews whom it succeeded and instructed chose to be baptized in Lutheran or Calvinist churches.⁴⁰

However, as Dr. Endelman so often concludes⁴¹, the rationale for conversion is usually spiritually and authentic as those who became Christians did so in order to escape persecution and develop a better life.⁴² However, he does affirm the growing number of Jewish believers in Jesus, those who converted to Catholicism, Protestantism and also through the work of the Jewish missions in Poland, especially CMJ.

According to Endelman there were 445,000 Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto at its height and approximately 2,000 "Christians of Jewish origin". He describes the community as enjoying some degree of community and social privilege as a result of their *conversion*.

Among the 445,000 Jews crowded into the Warsaw ghetto at its peak were two thousand Christians of Jewish origin.' In the hastily constructed world of the

⁴⁰ Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis, published in the Journal of Jewish Social Studies, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), p. 32

⁴¹ Apostasy in the Modern World

⁴² Patterns of apostasy uncover the depths of desperation and despair, the loss of hope in a better future, along with the spread of indifference to and alienation from traditional loyalties and customs. Such patterns also indicate those within the community on whom discrimination and exclusion weighed most heavily, thus reminding us that anti-Semitism, however much the rhetorical plaything of politicians and publicists, embittered the lives of flesh-and-blood Jews in concrete ways specific to their social status. (Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis, published in the Journal of Jewish Social Studies, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), p. 53,

ghetto, they occupied an unusual niche. By the racial standards of the German occupation, of course, they were Jews, like the ghetto's other inhabitants, and in the end shared their fate. However, before the summer 1942 mass deportations ended the "normal" life of the ghetto, they enjoyed a privileged social position. Wealthier and better educated, on the whole, than most Warsaw Jews, they moved rapidly into high-ranking positions in the ghetto administration. The most prominent was Jozef Szerynski (ne Sheinkman), a colonel in the Polish police before the war, whom Adam Czerniakow appointed as the first commander of the ghetto police force. Szerynski in turn, surrounded himself with other converts. Baptized Jews were also conspicuous as hospital administrators and as heads of clinics and other public health units.⁴³

He further mentions that the children of the "converts" were allowed to play in the gardens of the two key Catholic churches within the Ghetto and take advantage of the soup kitchens they sponsored as well as other forms of aid.⁴⁴ He further mentions the response of the Jewish mainstream who regarded the "converts" with suspicion and jealousy because they believed that these "Converts" were all disloyal as Jews and "sold out" for Christian benefits. Endelman does make a distinction between long time converts and short-term ones and also does distinguish between a few of those who became Christians seemingly because of religious conviction.

He includes among them the well-known medical researcher and Catholic *convert*, Ludwik Hirszfild.⁴⁵

He writes,

⁴³ IBID p.28

⁴⁴ IBID p.29

⁴⁵ Ludwik Hirszfild (1884-1954), one of the most prominent serologists of the twentieth century, established the nomenclature and the inheritance of blood groups, and opened the field of human population genetics. He also carried out ground-breaking research in the genetics of disease and immunology. Following World War II, he founded Poland's first Institute of Immunology in Wroclaw, which now bears his name. His autobiographical memoir, *The Story of One Life*, first published in Poland in 1946, immediately became a bestseller and has been reedited several times since. It is an outstanding account of a Holocaust survivor and a writer capable of depicting the uniqueness and the tragedy of countless individuals caught up in the nightmare of 1939-45. He recalls his time as a physician in the Serbian army in 1915 and his satisfaction as one of the scientific elite who rebuilt Poland after the Treaty of Versailles; in so doing the contrast between the world before and the world after World War II could not be starker. Hirszfild escaped from the Warsaw ghetto in 1943; he hid the manuscript for this book, and retrieved it only after the war. (google.com/books/about/Ludwik_Hirszfild). Also see http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hirszfild_Ludwik

A few became Christians from conviction. The bacteriologist Ludwik Hirszfeld, who had converted before the war, recalled Jewish students of his who asked him to serve as godfather at their ghetto baptisms. He asked himself what motivated them, since changing their religion did not change their legal position in any way. His answer, whether correct or not, was that the charm of the religion of love was pulling them, the religion of the nation to which they felt they belonged. In the case of Tadeusz Endelman, a young lawyer and friend of Hirszfeld who was baptized in July 1942, knowing that deportation awaited him, it is clear that religious consolation was his only object.⁴⁶

The Way other Jews in the Ghetto Viewed the Jewish Believers

One of the most eye-opening chapters of Dembowski's book looks at the Jewish Christians through the eyes of the Jewish community. Within the Jewish community of the Ghetto, as it was representative of the mainstream Polish Jewish community prior to the war, were Orthodox Jews, assimilated or assimilationist Jews and the Jewish Christians usually described by the Yiddish word *menkhes*.

An assimilated Jew was proficient language in the Polish and comfortable with Polish culture but maintained a strong connection to the Jewish community. This individual would be similar to a secular/cultural Jew today who is not religious, but still identifies with the greater Jewish community. The assimilationist on the other hand, was both comfortable with Polish language and culture, but had rejected a relationship with the Jewish community. This individual could very well identify with the national religion of Poland–Catholicism, but not necessarily.

On the other hand, the Jewish Christian, called a *menkhes*, usually identified with the assimilationist is understood to have rejected their connection within Jewish community.

There is little discussion among historians that the Jewish Christians were not a well-known group within Polish Jewish society and within the Warsaw Ghetto. The Jewish Christians sometimes took on important roles in the Ghetto for a variety of reasons. Czerniakow, the leader of the Judenrat and a secular Jew hired a number of Jewish Christians as sometimes, because they had become Christians many years before, had experience in various positions that *non-converted* Jews were not able to hold in Polish society. Czerniakow was at times accused of giving the Jewish Christians the better jobs, but his defense was that he did not care if the *menkhes* were Christians or Jews, but rather that they were productive parts of the Ghetto community and his job was to find the most effective people to do the work that needed to be done.

⁴⁶ His memoirs, Ludwik Hirszfeld: The Story of One Life, Ludwik Hirszfeld, Marta A. Balińska, William Howard Schneider, published in 2010 is available through the University of Rochester Press.

The Jewish believers, especially the Catholics, were also accused of receiving greater advantages within the ghetto because of their religious faith such as; the opportunity to use the church gardens of the 2 main parishes within the ghetto, to sometimes live in Parish housing, to have their children go to Catholic schools, and to receive aid from the Catholic charities Association – CARITAS. When the Jewish believers allegedly accepted these types of privileges, it caused the “non-Christian” Jewish residents of the ghetto to be even angrier at the Jewish Christians and they were before for the usual religious and historical reasons.

Certainly, religious Jews complained, especially about the *menkhes* being placed in leadership positions; such as on the *Judunrut*.

Dembowski describes the role of the Christian Jews through the pen of Stanislaw Adler, an assimilated Jew and lawyer prior to the Ghetto. Adler escaped the Ghetto and wrote his memoirs, which were published in the United States. His comments on the choice of Mieczylslaw Adam Ettinger as the Disciplinary Magistrate for the *Judunrut* is quite telling as to the common attitudes held by the Jewish community regarding the *menkhes*.

Dembowski quotes Adler,

Ettinger was considered to be the most outstanding expert in Poland. From a legal point of view, no objection could be raised... Nevertheless, the real storm exploded in the Jewish Council over his candidacy. His adversaries had basic objections. They maintained that a baptized Jews should not—as in Ettinger’s case—in this most tragic period for he Jewish people under German occupation, be appointed to such an important post. The First Magistrate, they claimed should be the exponent of the “highest ethics” that could be held by an employee of the Jewish self-governing institution and not by an individual who had committed the act of changing religion for reasons which, under the circumstances, were considered to be opportunistic. The storm caused by Ettinger's nomination did not subside for a long time.⁴⁷

Dembowski comments on Adler regarding Ettinger’s “opportunistic” conversion.

There is no reason to assume that Ettinger's conversion was opportunistic. To know that he was a member of the All Saints parish council, a position rarely sought or obtained by nominal Christians. Adler’s feelings on the matter of the employment of converts on the is express in a later entry.⁴⁸

The question of engaging baptized Jews for positions on the Jewish Council continued to be the theme of discussion not so much among the non-Christian

⁴⁷ Dembowski p.90

⁴⁸ IBID p. 90

Jews as among the neophytes themselves. Within the Jewish Councils domain there was no animosity or antagonism directed towards baptized persons who's forced sojourn in the Ghetto had bound them to the fate of the rest of the Ghetto population; on the contrary, they provoked universal compassion for their difficult situation. As far as I know, baptized Jews never encountered obstacles in obtaining Jewish Council post after the Quarters borders were closed. The best proof of this is the fact that some of the most important posts what held by the neophytes.⁴⁹

Adler goes on to list some of those important “Christian” officials; Col. Jozef Szerynski, head of the police, and some of his hand-picked assistance Ettinger, Ludwik Hirszfeld, chairman of the Health Council for infectious diseases, Dr. Mieczyslaw Kon, director of the Health Heparment; major Dr. Tadeusz Ganz, medical officer in the Polish army, commissioned to direct the battle against epidemics, Gomulinski, director of the Supply Office, Czarnecki, one of directors of the Fuel commission, Capt. Jerry Landau director of the Health Center; Dr. Jozeph Stein director of the Czyste hospital; Dr. Wilhelm Szenwic, department head in the Czyste hospital and Dr. Stanislaw Tylbor, deputy head of the General Secretariat, “as well as a legion of localizations occupied by the neophytes.”⁵⁰

In summary, however, even though the Jewish Christians held critical roles in the operation of the Ghetto they were still viewed with disdain by both the religious and the socialist ideologues in the Ghetto, including Ringelblum who appointed one of the members of his Oneg Shabbat (the secret code name for his group of writers and researchers), Marian Malowist to keep track of the “converts”. According to Dembowski,

Malowist gives a history of the situation before the war, underscoring the fact that only rarely did the assimilationist and Christian Jews support the cause of the Jewish people. As with most Jews writing in the Ghetto, he presents baptism as a materialistic or sociopolitical choice. He simply does not consider the question of religious belief. He further classifies the assimilationist and neophytes according to their attitude towards Jews.⁵¹

It is intriguing however, that even though Malowist stresses the mercenary nature of conversions, according to Dembowski—he does make mention of meeting a real Christian—Calvinist:

An intelligent man used to speak in a judicious manner about the Christian idea. He used to invoke the example of the Gospel. He spoke of the motivation behind

⁴⁹ IBID

⁵⁰ IBID

⁵¹ IBID p. 94

his conversion without denying that he ever ceased being a Jew. He contended that Judaism had become warped and distorted which makes Jews practice their religion in a mechanical way. One has to carry one's God in the heart—he said—and not keep him outside in the world. This he documented by mentioning the absence of commercial ethics on the part of Jewish merchants. Generally, these merchants were the target of a sharp reaction against Jews, the part of converts in the assimilationist.⁵²

According to Dembowski, Malowist agreed with this negative appraisal of Jewish merchants but points out their behavior resulted from age long persecutions without his approval he cites this Christians doubts about the sincerity of his brothers.⁵³

It is too bad that in this instance of his meeting a believer – perhaps Protestant or even part of one of the Jewish missions (note the identity statement), that he casts the man as also saying something negative against his own people. But, this does demonstrate that there were other types of believers, aside from Catholic believers in the Ghetto.

Generally speaking though, the menkhes; Catholic, Protestant or Catholic were viewed negatively by the mainstream Jewish Ghetto community and in particular, the more dominant Socialist leadership in the Ghetto, who were also philosophical materialists, did not see any validity to a spiritual conversion.

Significant Jewish Believers in the Ghetto and their Contributions

One of the most moving chapter of Dembowski's book is entitled Christian voices, where he charts the lives and testimonies of believers—mostly Catholic—want to live through all or part of the terror of the Warsaw ghetto. He mentions a number of individuals whose dedication to the gospel impacted the lives of others in the ghetto. He mentions the priest, Rev. Marceli Godlewski, was the pastor of the All Saints Church, which was damaged in 1939, and destroyed in 1944.

It seems that the priest lives in the ghetto and saved a number of Jewish people by either helping them escape or allowing them to live in the parish facility, preserving their lives for time and then helped a number of them escape. One of the most well-known Jewish escapees Dr. Louis Christof Zaleski—Zamenhof, was the grandson of the founder of Esperanto. It is good to mention the work of Godlewski as he was a significant pastoral influence among the Catholic Jewish believers in the ghetto.⁵⁴

⁵² IBID

⁵³ IBID

⁵⁴ IBID p. 107

According to Dembowski, the Jewish believing Catholics experience quite a bit of persecution among the Jewish people and he illustrates this on the lives of a few Jewish believers including Alina Wald escape the ghetto and eventually served as a professor at the University of Warsaw. Her memoirs were some of the very few that were written and found after the war.⁵⁵

According to Dembowski there are very few extent memoirs of ghetto life by Protestants.⁵⁶ and yet the three memoirs penned by Christian Jews; Zaleski–Zamenhof, Wald and Marianowicz during these days provide much of the testimony of the Jewish Christian experience in the Ghetto.⁵⁷

However, the most significant testimony invoice of the Catholic Jewish believer in the Warsaw Get up with that of Dr. Ludwick Hirszfeld, author of the book *The Story of a Life*, which is sometimes referred to as the *Historia*.

Dembowski provides an excellent overview of Hirszfeld’s life and says, “Herzfeld is the most knowledgeable informant about the by. in the Ghetto about many aspects of the daily life of the ghetto dwellers.”⁵⁸ The book is an autobiography written soon after his escape from the Ghetto and provides a very detailed description of his life and that of others as well as providing some testimony of his faith. Dembowski points us to one critical paragraph where it still discusses the rationale for why his fellow Jews “speak about the assimilationist and the Congress in the same breath”.⁵⁹

My destiny has been strange. I come from a totally assimilated family, spent my life in the company of liberal Poles and assimilated Jews, and I have never discovered any essential difference between these two. Next, I looked for a year and a half in the greatest concentration of Jews in the world, at a time when they

⁵⁵ IBID p. 108-109

⁵⁶ He does mention a book entitled, *The Strictly Prohibited Life*, written in 1995 by Antoni Marianowicz (original name is Kazimierz Jerzy Berman). Marianowicz was raised in nominal Reformed–Evangelical church, having no Jewish identity at all as his family were Christians who for more than three generations. His Jewishness still meant little to him, even after his ghetto experience, but after the 1968 anti-Jewish campaign in Poland he wrote his book according to Dembowski, “as was an old man fully aware of his Christian faith, his Jewish origins and the meaning of both in contemporary Poland”. IBID p.111-115

⁵⁷ IBID 115)

⁵⁸ IBID 114

⁵⁹ IBID 116

were forced to organize something like their own state.⁶⁰ And then I lived as an authentic Aryan in an aristocratic conservative milieu of landowners. All sorts of problems, which I never fully appreciated appeared to me in all their complexity. The problems of the Eastern Jews had formally always seemed thinking me to be very similar to the problems of the Jews in the West, where the Jews had wished to join the nations among whom they had lived. They did not wish to become a separate nation, only a separate religious community.⁶¹

He poignantly describes his life in the Ghetto, as previously he had been a well-respected scientist who had served as a medical doctor in the Polish army in Yugoslavia where at he began his lifetime work of determining and describing blood types. Most scientists would agree that he was the one responsible for naming the various types/categories of blood we commonly use today. So, as an assimilated Jew and a well-known scientist, he was used to being treated with respect and honor and therefore the Ghetto was a harsh reminder of his heritage. He writes,

I am now one of the crowd of the unfortunate and so are my wife and my daughter. Only recently, we walked in the park of the Pasteur Institute in Gareches, and we rested on the bench once occupied by Pasteur himself. I was probably thinking then that, thanks to my past efforts, I was making it possible for my daughter to reach the summit of scientific achievements accessible to great minds (at that time she was studying medicine in France...and dies immediately after they escaped the Ghetto of tuberculosis) And instead I led this child to Grzybowski square. Poor child! I brought her up in the Polish traditions, I taught her to love that country. Now a foreigner has chased us out of our home and told us that we have no right to walk on Polish soil. And now I see that my daughter can grasp neither where she is, nor what this new world wants of her.⁶²

Herzfeld began what amounted to the first two years of medical school training in the Ghetto, although he was focusing on eradicating the place of typhus which was killing so many in the Ghetto. His role, which was significant in the Ghetto was also challenged by many as demonstrated by the following description of his first lecture.

The chairman (Czerniakow) is present, evidently to present prevent any demonstration against me by the Jewish nationalists. At the door, a woman doctor, and Jewish nationalist, urges the boycott of my lecture. My first words are a call to maintain dignity. Our enemy wishes to deprive us, Poles and Jews, of

⁶⁰ Note that Hirszfeld usually speaks of the Jewish people in the third person.

⁶¹ IBID 117

⁶² IBID 119

everything that represents science or art. *It is possible that we shall perish but let us perish with dignity.*⁶³ (Historia, 2000 page 295)

There is no question that Herszfeld viewed himself as a Pole, embracing the national religion of Poland - Catholicism and fully blamed the atrocities of the Warsaw Ghetto on the Nazis. He had a difficult time attributing overt and ongoing anti-Semitism to the Poles. Therefore, his faith was somewhat of an amalgamation of religious nationalism, rooted and grounded in Jewish ethnicity. Very complicated indeed!

On the other hand, Herszfeld did see a distinction between those who were Christians by faith and those who were more nominal and *converted* to survive. This can be seen in the way he distinguishes between the baptized:

On Sunday all the Christians, not only the Catholics, attended Mass. Everybody was there: doctors, lawyers, those whose baptism was an expression of faith, those for whom it was a Polish national symbol, and those who, at a certain moment, accepted their baptism to further their own self-interest. But all felt the need to gather at least once a week in the church and to participate in the service.⁶⁴ (Historia, p.362-363).

Dembowski refers us to a reflection by Herzfeld about the motivation one of his fellow Christians in receiving baptism. He writes,

There were many people who were baptized in the Quarter—old and young, sometimes whole families. Some of my students were among them, men and women, and I was often asked to be the godfather. What motives drove them to the baptism? They never received any benefits from it. The change of faith did not entail any change in their legal status. No, they were attracted to it by the appeal of a religion of love. They were attracted by the religion of the nation to which they felt they belonged. They were attracted to the religion to which there was no room, or least there should not be any room, for hate. Jews are so weary of the atmosphere of universal antipathy. Antipathy for what reasons?⁶⁵ (2000, page 364)

Herzfeld adds, building a case against those who claim that every baptism was sought for material benefit. He writes:

Standing ready for baptism is my student. She has a Semitic nose and thick lips. I see in her eyes the deep longing for human sympathy, a sympathy which she wishes to repay from the fullness of her heart. Strong men will come, those who

⁶³ IBID 122

⁶⁴ IBID 126-127

⁶⁵ IBID 129

occupy the higher social strata, those priests of the new religion. They will take the little Jewish girl by the hand and they will protect her from hate, they will allow her to be good. After all, Christianity became powerful when it extended the rights of equality and human dignity to those who suffered and were disdained. Equality before God and perhaps before... men. For it is terribly painful to live with the undeserved mark of Cain. And only a religion of love can and should remove this Mark. Such were probably the thoughts that animated this girl when she was being baptized.⁶⁶

Herszfeld's Faith

Dembowski offers a beautiful quote from the writings of Herszfeld to try and help us see inside the man's soul in order to understand core of his faith.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to men. Grzybowski Square and Twarda Street disappear. The excited and feverish crowd of the poor also disappears. We are immersed in the coldness and atmosphere of the place of worship. There is a throng of us they are lost in prayers. We can no longer see the killers and the haters—we are in the company of the enraptured. We are united in a sentiment of higher communion.⁶⁷

Herszfeld also comments on this phrase on the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". He writes in his autobiography about this passage and suggests "it is a question asked of God, followed by God's answer:

What is wrong with you my son?—Why should I love those monstrous man?—For no reason. Love is a state of the spirit. Everybody possesses it, but sometimes in a dimmed and muffled state. But, it is as much an instinct as the hunger for life, as the joy of living. Love is a delight as much as a rapture amid the starry silence and the transport of joy of the dancing stars. There are no small things here—everything emanates from the spirit." A heavenly music is heard. And in this harmony the soul bends down sobbing in humiliation. And it embraces the world in rapture, it floats in oblivion. Horrible people, horrible things disappear: all resonates with the Great Harmony.⁶⁸ (Page 363)

⁶⁶ IBID 129

⁶⁷ IBID 127

⁶⁸ IBID 128, Historia, 364–265

He adds “the Mass is over. “We end the service and return to Earth, but our souls have been invigorated by the coolness of the life-giving sources”.⁶⁹ (364)

The Question of Authenticity

One of the critical discussions involved the authenticity of the “conversion” of the Jewish believers. The issue of authenticity cut the heart of the motivation of those Jews in the Ghetto who turned to Jesus or embraced Christianity. This creates an opportunity to divide between those Jewish people who had accepted Jesus and were part of churches or the Jewish Missions well before the Nazi invasion or the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto. According to the records of various Jewish mission and churches, there were many “conversions” in the time period immediately preceding the Holocaust and these continued throughout 1939 and all the way till 1941 and the destruction of the Ghetto. Warsaw was actually a hotbed of Messianic activity and there were more than a dozen Jewish missions active in this city of almost one million Jewish people prior to the war.

It would be helpful to create three groups of Jewish believers. Those who professed faith in Jesus in the years prior to the Nazi invasion, those who became believers within a few years of the event and then those who became believers during the early years just prior to the creation of the Ghetto and those who became Christians in the Ghetto itself.

There is no doubt that the “baptized Jews”, as they were often called were a significant presence in the Ghetto. Leaders of the Ghetto including Emmanuel Ringlebaum and --- mention the “converted” Jews in their writings. Ringlebaum was a well known Jewish historian prior to the Holocaust and was one of founding fathers of YIVO. He led the anti Judenruut faction of more Liberal Jews in the Ghetto and though he was not especially religious, his views regarding the “converts” were as harsh in many ways as those of the more Orthodox.

He mentions the “Converted” Jews in his diary that was discovered in 19---and is especially suspicious of their motives. He does not particularly distinguish between those Jewish believers who were Catholic or Protestant or between those who had professed Christianity for many years before the Nazi invasion of Poland and the establishment of the Ghetto. We point out the privilege they enjoyed which is reported by Dembowski in his book Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Ringlebaum points out in his Diaries of Ghetto life that the Jewish “converts” lifestyles clearly indicated their inauthentic motives for “conversion”. This reflects the common Jewish opinion of Jewish believers in Jesus. There are other voices however, who would question Ringlebaum’s conclusions.

Endelman’s intent in this excellent article is to demonstrate that though still a minority, many thousands of Jewish people “converted” to Christianity from the late 19th century

⁶⁹ IBID 128

all the way through the Warsaw Ghetto. He tries to demonstrate and does a fairly good job doing so, that “conversion”, especially in Poland, was pervasive throughout all strategies of Jewish life; from the poorest to the wealthiest and from the common workman to be both well-educated professional.

His research is in actuality a response to another Polish scholar, Jeske-Choinski, whom he deemed anti-Semitic and yet this objective research not only the numbers of Jewish believers: in the 19th and early 20th century, but also detailed gender, ages and occupations. Whereas some in the Jewish community believed the numbers gathered by this “one anti-Semitic” researcher, Adelman actually believe that the June numbers of Jewish “converts” Christianity was larger, because this other individual did not take into consideration the work of missions and basically focused on baptismal records of mainline Catholic and Protestant Jewish “converts”. From CMJ and some of the other Jewish missions.

Endelman writes,

There is no evidence that Jeske-Choinski's anti-Semitism significantly distorted how he collected and recorded baptismal data. No critic has ever suggested that he fabricated cases of conversion or their details. In fact, the problem is the opposite: the number of conversions in Warsaw was greater than the number he recorded. In addition to those he omitted inadvertently due too defective records and those he was paid to omit, it seems that he did not include those baptized by Anglican missionaries, agents of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, probably because he did not have access to their records. The London Society's mission was the oldest, the most active, and the best funded in nineteenth-century Poland. Between 1821, when the London Society established a station in Warsaw, and 1854, when the government closed it and expelled its agents, it baptized 361 Jews. Later, following its re-establishment, it baptized another 354 Jews between 1874 and 1898. In all, from its establishment to 1907, the London Society's agents in Warsaw converted 949 Jews. Its influence, however, was greater than these numbers suggest, since an unknown number of Jews whom it succored and instructed chose to be baptized in Lutheran or Calvinist churches.⁷⁰

However, as Dr. Endelman so often concludes⁷¹, the rationale for conversion is usually spiritually and authentic as those who became Christians did so in order to escape persecution and develop a better life.⁷² However, he does affirm the growing number of

⁷⁰ Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis, published in the *Journal of Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), p. 32

⁷¹ *Apostasy in the Modern World*

⁷² Patterns of apostasy uncover the depths of desperation and despair, the loss of hope in a better future, along with the spread of indifference to and alienation from traditional

Jewish believers in Jesus, those who converted to Catholicism, Protestantism and also through the work of the Jewish missions in Poland, especially CMJ.

Conclusion

I was especially moved by a quote recorded by Dembowski taken from the last sermons of Rev. Czarnecki in July 1942 just before the *Aktion*. This pastor remained in the Ghetto until the very last moment and makes the following comments in his final sermon:

Here is my last day in the ghetto and the last Sunday Mass in the church: it was an enormous crowd, such as has never before seen in the church. I started the holy mass without singing and without organ music. I read the gospel according to St. Luke: 19:41–44, prescribed for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost; “As Jesus drew near and came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said, ‘If you had only recognized on this the day the way of peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you,—because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation; I read this vision of the destruction of Jerusalem with great difficulty. There was so much crying and clamoring in the church that I did not need to preach, even if I could. Jesus himself had spoken personally, movingly, and powerfully.”⁷³ (Czarnecki, 1981 page 211)

The example as well of Irena Sendler, a Polish Catholic social worker who save thousands of Jewish children by smuggling them out of the Ghetto also showed the love that some non-Jewish Christians had for the Jewish people.⁷⁴ The work of Polish Christians in recuing and hiding Jewish people is also detailed in the book entitled, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, by Nechama Tec.⁷⁵

loyalties and customs. Such patterns also indicate those within the community on whom discrimination and exclusion weighed most heavily, thus reminding us that anti-Semitism, however much the rhetorical plaything of politicians and publicists, embittered the lives of flesh-and-blood Jews in concrete ways specific to their social status. (Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis, published in the *Journal of Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), p. 53,

⁷³ IBID 131

⁷⁴ See *Mother of the Children of the Holocaust: The Irena Sendler Story*, by Anna Mieszkowska, and movie of the same name directed by John Kent Harrison

⁷⁵ Tec, Nechama. *Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland. When Light Pierced the Darkness*. Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1986.

According to Peter F. Dembowski,

Nothing more is to be found about the Christians in the Warsaw ghetto after the great *Aktion*. A proper ending of this sad history of the two Roman Catholic parishes in the Warsaw ghetto is to be found not only in the sympathetic farewell offered by a Jewish friend, but also in the poetic expression of the postwar writer Hanna Krall.

In her Polish short story “Salvation”, we read: “When the Germans cleared the church of all the Christian Jews, there was only one Jew left of the church: the crucified Jesus... Jesus came down from the cross and called (to the painting) of his mother: ‘Mame, kim...’. This means Yiddish: ‘Come Mama.’ She (came down and) went to the Umschlagplatz”. (Dembowski p. 133, quoting Krall 1995, p. 54. Interestingly, in a note from her book, according to Dembowski, “Krall, who was not herself religious, cites these lines as one of the numerous, poignant Jewish-Christian anecdotes told in the Ghetto.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205896.pdf,
http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205896.pdf,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8O4gO4OhoAI&feature=related>