

"Towards a second Jerusalem Council". A meeting in Wengen

Report by Martin Hoegger - www.hoegger.org

What place do Jews who recognise Jesus as the Messiah of Israel have in the Church?

The Toward Jerusalem Council II (TJCII) initiative aims to answer this question.

Delegated by the Focolare Movement, Chantal and I went to Wengen on 22 May to take part in a meeting organised by TJCII, which was attended by around a hundred people.

Mendelssohn and the « Wedding March »

This encounter began in the Reformed Church of this village at the foot of the Jungfrau... with Felix Mendelssohn's Wedding March! Mendelssohn often visited Wengen, where he wrote several works. A path and a monument evoke his memory. Mendelssohn was in fact a "messianic Jew", Mendel being a very common Jewish name. The musician had indeed had a personal encounter with Jesus.

Why have chosen the "wedding march"? Because TJCII speaks of the union of Christ with his bride, says **Martin Bühlmann**,

Leader Emeritus of the Vineyard Movement in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and a member of the TJCII international committee. It's about the "Wedding of the Lamb" for which his bride, the Church, must prepare according to the Book of Revelation (19:7).

He notes that this movement brings together a great diversity of people from different churches and countries. In Wengen there are Catholics, Orthodox, Reformed, Anglicans, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Messianics from Israel, Palestine, Syria, Europe, Japan, the USA and Africa.



"It's a miracle, and the reason for this miracle is that we consider not our own charisms but those of our brothers and sisters as superior to our own, and in particular those of our Jewish brothers and sisters who recognise Jesus as their Messiah", he says.

What holds them together is love for Christ and the confidence that he will return more quickly if we are united in love.

Markus Neurohr, the Swiss coordinator, then presents an olive tree, which is the symbol of TJCII. The olive tree represents the Jewish people to whom we have been grafted, according to the text of Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 11.

Martin Bühlmann and Markus Neurohr holding an olive tree, symbol of TJCII.



Discovering Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah

Rabbi **Marty Waldman**, founder, and director of TJCII, tells the story of his maternal and paternal families, both decimated by the Nazis in Poland. His father and mother miraculously escaped the concentration camps and made their way to the United States after the war. M. Waldman grew up in a family where he was made to understand that Jews and Christians had nothing in common, because the latter had exterminated them.

Let's listen to him:

"For me, it was an absolute miracle to believe in Jesus. Nothing predisposed me to it. The Holy Spirit spoke to me through circumstances. When I started to read the Gospels, I felt a strength come over me and I started to cry. I understood that Jesus was real and jeux. I went from a relationship of hatred to a real relationship with him. Then I heard a voice from heaven say to me: "Marty, you've just returned to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". I then understood that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews".



Mr Waldman explaining his family history.

The meaning of a second Council of Jerusalem

To explain the meaning of a second Council of Jerusalem, Mr Waldman recalls the purpose of the first Council. In the early days, most of the Church was made up of Jews. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Council of Jerusalem had decided not to impose circumcision and other Jewish laws on believers from paganism. (Chapter 15).



Subsequently, however, the Jewish part of the Church was downgraded and, for 1700 years, the Church took decisions without and against the Jews and persecuted them.

However, our time is marked by two miracles. Firstly, the return of the Jews to the land of their ancestors, after almost 2000 years of dispersion.

Then, the return of the sons of Israel to Messiah Yeshua. Of course, throughout history there have been individual Jewish believers like Mendelssohn, but there was no community of believing Jews as there is today.

Yeshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus and means "God saves". Every time we read the word salvation in the Bible, we think of the name Jesus. He is the one who will "save his people", as the angel Gabriel says (Matthew 1:21).

Following his encounter with Yeshua, M. Waldman became a rabbi and then president of the Union of Messianic Jews of the United States. At a meeting of this association, the presence of God was so strong that he understood that God was calling him to create a movement to invite the Church to welcome the Jewish part of the Body of Christ. That was 27 years ago.

The aim of the second Council of Jerusalem (the date of which has not yet been fixed) is to reveal the "new man" referred to in the letter to the Ephesians: "He wanted to create in (Christ) one new man out of the Jew and Gentile, establishing peace and reconciling them both to God in one body through the cross" (2:15-16).



Growing the seed of unity

During lunch in the *Jungfraublick* hotel, and then in the early afternoon, discussion groups were formed. Chantal and I took part in the French-speaking group.

The day was concluded by Martin Bühlmann, who stressed the importance of unity:

"It is important for Messianic Jews to know that Christians welcome them. In the New Testament, unity is essential. We are very different, but we must welcome each other, in a profound sense, and walk together. May this seed of unity sown today grow in our hearts!"

And he concludes with this prayer: *"Come Holy Spirit, fill us with your presence and lead us together on the way of Yeshua so that the Father may be glorified!"*

TJCII and the Catholic Church

Two members of the TJCII committee were unable to attend the Wengen meeting. They were Israeli rabbi **Dan Juster** (Tikkun Global) and **Johannes Fichtenbauer**, archdeacon of the Catholic diocese of Vienna. That same day they met **Pope Francis** at the Vatican to inform him about the TJCII initiative.

For several years now there has been an official (or "semi-official") dialogue between the Catholic Church and Messianic Judaism, co-chaired by Cardinal **Christoph Schönborn** (Vienna) and Messianic theologian **Mark Kinzer**. The book „*Searching Her Own Mystery. Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church*“ (Cascade Books, 2015) reports on this.

This dialogue arose from TJCII when its representatives in 1997 met Cardinal **Joseph Ratzinger** and Cardinal **George Cottier**, Papal Theologian. The dialogue however, does not claim the TJCII name.

During that meeting, Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict 16, said that the appearance of the messianic Jews is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit and an "eschatological sign".¹

"The Jerusalem Summit"

From 16-19 October 2023 an important meeting will take place in Jerusalem. Perhaps it would be a good idea for the Focolare Movement to be represented? It seems to me that a new field is opening here for the movement and that it would be a good thing to explore it further, as far as possible.

<https://mail.tjcii.ch/newsreader-f/tjcii-jerusalem-summit-2023-2.html>

¹ Cf James Earle Patrick, *Jesus, King of Jews? Messianic Judaism, Jewish Christians, and Theology beyond Supersessionism*, TJCII, Vienna, 2021, p. 9

Ecumenical challenges of TJCII

It seems to me that the Reformed theologian **Thomas Torrance** made clear what is at stake in welcoming the "*Ecclesia ex circumcisione*" for the Church's journey towards unity, with this simple sentence:

"The deepest schism of the one people of God is the schism between the Christian Church and the Jewish Church, not between Eastern and Western Christianity, or Roman and Protestant Christianity. The bitter separation between the Catholic Church and the synagogue, which arose after the revolt of Bar Kochba in the 2nd century A.D., was one of the greatest tragedies of all Western civilisation... Only by healing this split in a profound reconciliation will all the other divisions with which we are struggling in the ecumenical movement finally be overcome".²

About TJCII

- The website - <https://www.tjcii.org> - "We believe in one Messiah, one body and the restoration of the Messianic Jewish community", says the home page.
- TJCII in Switzerland: <https://www.tjcii.ch/home-f.html>
- A series of films about TJCII: "**One new man**".

<https://www.rabbittrailproductions.com/onenewmanseries>

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² Thomas Torrance, "The divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History". In : *The Witness of the Jews to God*, David Torrance, ed, Hansel Press, Edinburgh, p. 92