

A Trip of Tears - A Holy Pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem - Part 1

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A Personal Testimony of Reconciliation by Angelika Selle

The presence and spirit of True Father and Jesus could be felt with us during the entire trip, following our every step along the way in anxious anticipation of what was going to happen next, praying that we would accomplish our mission.

As our group merged together from different parts of the country at Newark International Airport, great excitement and anticipation was in the air, so that another fellow air traveler, a Christian lady, asked me what this interracial group was up to and where we were going. When I told her that we were about to go to Rome and Israel in order to bury the cross and seek peace and reconciliation with our Jewish brother and sisters, she was in awe and moved to tears. She said, "I wish I could be a part of this." Before we departed, we prayed together for the success of the trip.

After arriving in Rome, our bus took us onto the paths of Saint Peter on the first day and Saint Paul on the next. Just to be able to stand on the ground where they stood and sense their powerful spirit of serving Christ at the cost of their very lives was deeply moving.

One of the authentic sites was the prison into which Peter and Paul had been thrown, where they baptized many people. When praying down there in the dungeon and dipping my hand into the water in a round basin in the stone floor, I could feel their powerful spirit of determination and fire to witness to their beloved Jesus.

We also saw beautiful artwork and architecture of the Roman Catholic basilicas. While I was standing in the middle of the Sistine Chapel, looking at the frescoes of the Old and New Testament, I began to pray. Suddenly, it seemed as if the history of restoration came alive and the people - Moses and the saints - depicted there on the walls wanted to connect with me and say: "Please finish our work... "

As the days went by, our group of 131 became closer and closer, like a family. As I got to know many of the clergy during our walks, mealtimes, and on the bus, each of them had a story to tell as to how they came to be on this trip. One thing they all had in common, though, was a deep desire to reconcile with our Jewish brothers and sisters. I saw many of the lady pastors in constant prayer and also filled with eagerness to take care of others.

In my case, being from a German and Roman Catholic background, I never had dreamed of such an amazing opportunity to go to Israel for the sake of reconciliation with my Jewish brothers and sisters on their soil.

Every morning after hoondokhae and in the evening, we were educated in the ways our Jewish brothers and sisters feel, think about, and perceive Christians and Jesus, and we were made aware how to approach them and how not to. Coming to understand about Judaism, especially through the presentations of Dr. Andrew Wilson, a Jewish Unificationist professor at UTS, I could see that it would take nothing short of a miracle for Jewish rabbis to consider Jesus as the Messiah.

For the last two thousand years, Jews have been accused by Christians of having nailed Jesus to the cross. For that deed, the Jews were persecuted, killed, disowned, and shunned by Christians. Thus, for Jews, the cross truly became a symbol of accusation and hate.

The only possible way for them to open their minds to Jesus, whom they don't even mention or talk about, would be if we could introduce to them the real Jesus who had come to build the Kingdom and have a family - if we would focus on his teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, rather than on his suffering.

It became clear that in order to heal our relationship there needed to be humility, love, mutual repentance, and forgiveness. If we Christians could truly embody the love of Christ so Jews could feel it, there was a chance for change.

I did have a lot of hope that that would happen, because our group consisted foremost of African -

American pastors representing the black race, which also has gone through tremendous suffering, due to slavery, segregation, and discrimination, thus bringing with them a common base of heart as a foundation for a relationship with Jewish people. In addition, as a substantial gesture of reconciliation, all the clergy who had come on this trip had taken down their crosses, the symbol of horror and division between Jews and Christians.



We had no idea what the reaction of our Jewish brothers and sisters would be and how they would respond in such a short time to a different way of looking at Jesus. But we were firm in our resolve to love and embrace them, no matter what. And we knew that only the Spirit of God and the spirit of Jesus himself could truly speak to their hearts.

Off we went to the Holy Land. After having gone through extensive scrutiny in the airports in both Rome and Tel Aviv, we finally boarded the buses that would bring us directly to Jerusalem. Our tour guide greeted us with the words, "Welcome home This is your homeland" And indeed it felt like coming home, home to the land in which Jesus grew up, preached, walked and taught. It still seemed unreal that we were actually there.

Just driving through the rocky but gently rolling hills from the airport to Jerusalem at dusk with the full moon above us gave me the feeling I had gone back in history. The small towns we passed looked just like the pictures in a Bible. All of the towns looked the same because, by governmental decree, everyone who builds a house in Israel has to utilize the native limestone, which is available in abundance. The hills reminded me of Korea, the homeland of our True Parents. Our hotel overlooked the city of Jerusalem, which, by the time we arrived was radiant in the morning light - a city on a hill, a sight to behold.

Before retiring, I prayed in tears with two of my sisters on the balcony, stretching out our arms to embrace the city over which Jesus had lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ..." In this place where Jews, Christians, and Muslims live together under great tension, we had come to plant a seed of true peace. "Here we are, Jesus" Tears came to our eyes. We wanted so much to be his representatives

On the first full day, the first site we visited was the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. The purpose of the visit was to remember what had happened to the Jewish people. I knew that this would be spiritually and emotionally very difficult for me, being originally from Germany. Yet at the same time, I knew that was one reason God had allowed me to be part of this pilgrimage, to repent and reconcile on behalf of my people for the atrocious past. As I had expected, just seeing the life-sized pictures of the concentration camps, the naked men and women as they got ready to go into the gas chambers, and so on, filled me with agony but also rage and tears. How could any human being do this to another? And we were talking about millions of Jews killed throughout Europe. I could barely walk through the museum. I knew I had to do something while in Israel to restore this past, even on a small level.

That evening during testimony time, I became filled with emotion and felt moved to go up on stage. I asked my Jewish brother, Dr. Andrew Wilson, to join me there. Then I began to repent on behalf of the German people and the Roman Catholics for the horrible things they had done in the name of Jesus to our Jewish brothers and sisters. I noted specific points, such as the burning of their synagogues, treating them as less than human and taking their possessions. It was hard to speak as I was choked up with tears, and I fell on my knees. My brother took my hands, asked me to stand, and, without letting me finish my long list, said, "I forgive you, I forgive you"

There was one more thing, however, I felt I had to do. I spontaneously took off my jewelry and gave it to him as an offering - a symbol of all the beautiful and precious things that Germans and other anti-Semites had taken from the Jewish people. Dr. Wilson received it, and I went back to my seat weeping. Many pastors came over to me.



Potter's Field, where a cross was taken for burial as an act of reconciliation with the Jewish people

The principle of repentance and forgiveness is an integral part of reconciliation. I know that, without the Holy Spirit and without my involvement and training in reconciliation over the last five years, I could not have done that in public. Credit must be given to our Washington D.C. Church's Racial Reconciliation Group and to Revs. Joe and Debbie Taylor (an African-American couple) and Brenda Miller (a white sister), who showed me how to repent.

My spirit felt truly liberated after that. The next day, when I met Dr. Wilson over breakfast, he also expressed gratitude. He told me he had never experienced anything like that and that it had moved him and his ancestors deeply. Then he said he had never realized how much pain the German people must be bearing because of their guilt, and that the Jewish people need to love the Germans more and forgive them.

A few days later, we went to the Sea of Galilee. It must have taken Jesus several days to travel all the way there, even on a donkey. We passed the road to Jerusalem, Jericho, the Mount of Temptation, and came finally to the Jordan River.

How narrow the river is where Jesus was baptized After we stopped and went down to the River Jordan, many of the pastors baptized each other; a few even were fully immersed. Around the Sea of Galilee, nothing much has changed for two thousand years, and it is easy to imagine Jesus living and teaching in this area.

We all stepped on a boat that would take us across the sea. While motoring slowly along and enjoying the gentle breeze, ministers from virtually every state in America took turns singing beautiful songs from the heart. Seeing my black brothers and sisters so joyfully singing songs of Jesus, the man from Galilee, I was overcome with deep emotion. A beautiful serene spirit surrounded us. Here we all were on a boat. Images of slave ships came into my heart and mind. Now these people who had suffered so much were the first to come here as Jesus' true family.

The next day was the day we all had been waiting and preparing for. It was the day our True Parents were paying a price for. The night before, we attended a lecture on the parallels of human history, delivered by Rev. Michael Jenkins and another on the purpose of Jesus' coming, and on exchanging the cross for a crown. Simultaneously, Frank Kaufmann and Taj Hamad coached our Jewish brothers and sisters for the day of reconciliation.

No one could know what the next day would bring. All we could do was leave the outcome in God's hands.

More than 130 Christian pastors and leaders visited first Rome and then Israel between May 12 and 19, 2003. They went with the purpose of healing the division between the Christian faith and Judaism. Angelika Selle, who is involved with interfaith work in the Washington, D.C. area, was one of our members who joined the group.