

THE THIRD SPACE: THE MEETING OF JEW AND CHRISTIAN IN THE ACT OF
REMEMBERING, RESTORING AND RECONCILING - A CASE STUDY OF THE
MATZEVAH FOUNDATION

The Research Protocol
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Objectives

Due to the long-standing tensions resulting from the Shoah (Holocaust) and the remaining gulf that separates Jews and Christians concerning the person of Jesus Christ, a complex and difficult relationship exists between these two religious faith groups. Consequently, Jews and Christians struggle to engage each other in meaningful dialogue that could possibly lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.

The purpose of this study is to describe the process of how acts of loving-kindness (mercy) as demonstrated and encountered through the work of The Matzevah Foundation in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, have influenced dialogue (or lack thereof) among Jews and Christians. The study will explore mercy as the language of dialogue, and the organization that I lead, The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) will illustrate that dialogue. Mercy may be operationalized and understood in terms of what Scott Peck considers “loving acts” (as cited in, Johnson, 2012, p. 127); loving acts may be corroborated by humane orientation, concern for others or compassion, charity and altruism.

In order to explore how those involved and those affected by the work of The Matzevah Foundation have developed in their relationship to one another, I will pursue the following research questions:

How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

In what ways do Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

Background and Rationale

Even though Jews and Christians share a common religious heritage, they have struggled to interact with one another from the time of Christ to the present day. Tragic historical events

such as the Christian persecution of Jews, pogroms, anti-Semitism, and the Shoah (Holocaust) have functioned to impede and strain their interaction. Institutionally several efforts have been made primarily since the Second World War to address past conflicts and injustices as a means to work towards reconciliation and attempt to heal the deep wounds of inter-religious conflict that have existed between these two groups for centuries. Consequently, some progress has been made towards improving Jewish-Christian relations and some movement has occurred towards political reconciliation. Despite these gains institutionally and politically not much progress has been made towards genuine forgiveness and reconciliation, which according to the literature seems at best remote and theoretically impossible. Could more be done towards addressing the gap in Jewish and Christian interaction? How can we do more to change the existing assumptions that exist in the Christian and Jewish communities regarding the “other?”

The impetus of my work with The Matzevah Foundation is to bridge the gap in the broken relationship that exists clearly between Jew and Christian. As a Christian, I am attempting to be a bridge builder and develop a practical and ongoing dialogue with the Jewish community by leading TMF and its volunteers to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. It is my assumption that the work of TMF could create a unique space in which Jew and Christian may experience each other differently. This space could foster genuine interaction allowing Jew and Christian to dialogue in such a way that it allows them to set aside old paradigms and consider new possibilities of how they relate to one another. These new possibilities of interaction could possibly lead towards forgiveness, and eventually reconciliation albeit on a more personal and grassroots level.

In the review of the literature, I have encountered a deficiency in the research that directly addresses a means of dealing with the conflicts and the challenges to dialogue that

currently exists among Jew and Christian. Consequently, the academic research may be summarized and categorized in four major sections. The first category will be the history, conflict, and difficulty, which has existed among Jews and Christians for centuries and reached its zenith in the Shoah or Holocaust ((Bauer, 2001; Zimmerman, 2003). How have Jews and Christians worked to overcome the conflict will comprise the second division of the literature review (Karpen, 2002; O'Keefe, 2010; Volf, 2000; Waller, 2007). The third section considers the shared moral values could function as a basis for working toward forgiveness and reconciliation (Melé & Sánchez-Runde, 2013; Telushkin, 2009; Wolf, 2010). The final section of the literature review will address several academic theories/models which deal with dialogue, racism, liminal space, transformative learning, and the transformation of perspective or assumptions (Auton-Cuff & Gruenhagen, 2014; Baskin & Enright, 2004; Isaacs, 1999; Kolb, 2015; Lehrer, 2013; Mezirow, 1978).

This study will explore a means to address and possibly overcome the evil of the Shoah and its deep-rooted influence on Jewish and Christian relations, especially in the realm of dialogue. Research will explore how mercy or acts of loving-kindness positively or negatively influences Jewish-Christian dialogue. This study will be of potential value to the Jewish and Christian communities in terms of determining and outlining potential steps in facilitating Jewish and Christian dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation. In terms of real dialogue this study will demonstrate potentially how to move beyond formal interfaith dialogue to a more organic interpersonal dialogue which could possibly embrace forgiveness and reconciliation. The study should originate findings that may be transferable to other fields of study dealing with interpersonal conflict, trauma, or other acts of injustice.

Procedures

This study will be conducted as a qualitative case study of the work of the Matzevah Foundation employing a purposeful sampling method which will select specific people who have interacted with or who have had contact with The Matzevah Foundation and its work in Poland or in the United States over the past ten years.

Research Design

This study will be conducted as a qualitative case study of the work of TMF. I believe the case study method of inquiry is best because it involves the study of a case – The Matzevah Foundation and its work within the framework of “real-life, contemporary context or setting,” which is defined “within a bounded system” such as “time and place” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Through inquiry of the interaction of Jew and Christian within the construct [third space or liminal space] of the work of TMF. I will seek to understand how *gemilut chesed* or acts of loving-kindness (mercy) influence attitudes and create mutual bridges of understanding as the underpinning for dialogue. Principally I will be studying the responses of people individually and corporately to open-ended questions about their experience in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland.

The research site will be the work of TMF and consequentially, I will provide a brief historical synopsis of TMF. Since 2005, a group of Baptist Christians has been working with the Jewish Community of Poland in restoring Jewish cemeteries, which are known in Hebrew as *Beit Chaim* – “the house of the living” and are considered to holy places by the Jewish community. TMF grew out of this relationship, advancing it today as a non-profit, public charity, which primarily serves the Jewish community of Poland and cooperates with the global Jewish community of Polish origins to care for and restore Jewish Cemeteries in Poland. The vision of

TMF is to remember and honor the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries and reconciling Jews and Christians through participating in a common mitzvah. Stated simply we remember, restore and reconcile. The mission of the Matzevah Foundation is twofold. Firstly, it mobilizes human and financial resources to care for and preserve the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries. Secondly, it will educate the public regarding anti-Semitism and the history of Polish Jews prior to, during, and following the Shoah in Poland.

Sample

Qualitative research relies upon the purposeful selection of the participants; Patton (1990, 2001) terms the selection of the research sample in this manner purposeful, while Merriam (1998, 2009) views this selection as purposive sampling (cited in, Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). The rationale behind these concepts is to select “information-rich cases, with the objective or yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). Furthermore, Creswell (2012) reminds us that qualitative researchers are to “develop and in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” and for this reason, it is best for the researcher to select purposefully individuals and sites to be studied (p. 206). Consequently, I will select specific participants primarily for this study using Patton’s criterion as to whether or not participants are “information rich” (cited in, Creswell, 2012, p. 206) and have knowledge of and experience with the work of TMF in the United States or Poland.

The work of TMF embraces a diverse group of adult volunteers including Polish Jews, Jews of Polish descent, Polish Catholics and Evangelicals, US Evangelical Christians and secular or non-believing people. Project participants are not just American but are international residing not only in Poland but are from countries such as Germany, Austria, the Ukraine and Israel. TMF also works with community and governmental leaders in Poland and has developed collaborative

partnerships with Jewish institutions in the United States and Poland. What connects this diverse group of people primarily is the work of caring for a neglected Jewish cemetery in Poland. Typically volunteers are involved in intensive week of work in which they experience first-hand the loss of the Shoah by cleaning or removing debris and restoring some aspect of the Jewish cemetery. Usually, volunteers spend free time together, such as going for coffee, or in structured seminars where difficult issues are explored.

Participants in this study will therefore have had or will have had interaction with the work of TMF. I will use the following criteria for selecting participants:

1. Have an association with TMF [long/short] – these will be TMF board members, advisory board members or volunteers
2. Religious [Jew/Christian/Neutral]
3. People, who are interested, willing to participate in the study
4. Available for interviews/focus groups [in Poland and or the US]

Detailed Study Procedures

Data collection will involve developing unique perspectives of the case that I am studying (TMF). Primarily my data collection will rely upon employing to sampling strategies: maximal variation sampling and homogeneous sampling. According to Creswell (2012), maximum variation sampling presents “multiple perspectives of individuals to represent the complexity of our world;” likewise, it is a sampling strategy that allows researchers to explore differences “on some characteristic or trait” amongst individuals and sites (pp. 207-208). What I find appealing in the use of the maximum variation strategy is that it allows me to develop numerous perspectives of how participants view acts of loving-kindness (mercy) as experienced in the work of TMF. Individual participants “differ on some characteristic or trait” (Creswell,

2012, pp. 207-208) and in my case study, I will purposefully select Jewish, Christian, and somewhat neutral participants (may be neutrally religious or secular). The trait (or characteristic) of interest to me is the primarily religious views of the participants, and to what degree does that particular religious viewpoint factor into the participant's understanding of love of neighbor, mercy or caring compassionately for others?

An alternative sampling strategy for my case study could be that of homogeneous sampling, which focuses upon the selection of participants "because they possess a similar trait or characteristic" (Creswell, 2012, p. 208). The participants in my study are derived primarily from the Jewish and Christian communities. According to Creswell (2013) selecting participants based on the homogeneous sampling method "facilitates group interviewing" (p. 158). I am planning to conduct one focus group that will be comprised of three to four people (male and female), who are Christians and Jews, and who have interacted with the work of TMF for at least three years.

Sources of Data

Sources of data for this case study will be derived from direct observations of participants, interviews (focus group and individual), participant-observation, and documents/artifacts such as printed articles, TMF board minutes, photographs, TMF webpage, emails and lastly personal reflective journals of select individuals, who have participated in Jewish cemetery restoration projects.

Concerning focus group and individual interviews, TMF conducts its Jewish cemetery restoration projects during the summer months in Poland. Participants in the project will be residing locally in dorms, hotels, or hostels and for this reason will be accessible. Therefore, if permission for conducting my study is granted, I plan to conduct the focus group interview in

Poland during a Jewish cemetery restoration project in 2016. The focus group will be comprised of adult participants, who have worked in Jewish cemetery restoration projects previously and have been closely associated with the work of TMF for at least three years. I will select four people to participate in the focus group (one or two members of the TMF board, one Polish Christian volunteer, and one or two Polish-Jewish participants). The focus group interview will last no longer than an hour and a half.

For individual interviews, I will select adults, who have had contact, or who have on-going contact with me and the work of TMF. These individuals will be selected from the following groupings:

1. Jewish perspective (American rabbi and a female Jewish journalist)
2. Polish-Jewish perspective (secular Jews living in Warsaw and Jewish student of Polish descent)
3. Polish-Christian perspective (Polish Catholic and a Polish Evangelical Christian)
4. Christian perspective (members of the Board of Directors or members of the Advisory Board of TMF)

If permission is granted, individual interviews will be conducted during 2016 in Poland, the United States and possibly Israel. Each interview will last no longer than an hour and for the most part will be conducted face-to-face, while some maybe conducted via Skype.

Data Collection Procedures

Since I am the CEO and President of The Matzevah Foundation, I have direct access to the Board of Directors. I have had informal board approval to conduct research of TMF since my entrance into the Andrews University's PhD program. Most recently at our March 2015 Board Meeting, I acquainted them with the fact that I am nearing the completion of my dissertation

proposal and if permissions are secured, I hope to begin research soon. I presented my dissertation prospectus and asked them to consider approving my research request. Once I begin the formal institutional review board (IRB) process with Andrews University, I will secure formal permission from the board to conduct research of TMF and its participants in the US and Poland.

Recording information

I have designed and developed an interview protocol for the interview process for both individual and focus group interviews. I will use these protocols to record my notes; however, to be more thorough and accurate, I plan to use a digital audio recorder for the focus group and interviews as a means to collect data. Consequently, I have prepared consent forms for potential participants to consider prior to participating in my study.

Data Storage

The storage (and protection) of data cannot be emphasized enough in qualitative research. Large amounts of data in the form of notes, documents, recordings, transcripts, etc. will be generated and must be stored and protected for three years. According to Davidson (1996), the key practice that must be kept in view for qualitative researchers is that of backing up collected data frequently (cited in, Creswell, 2013, p. 175). Creswell provides several principles regarding data storage that are pertinent for consideration. Other than backing up data, he recommends that quality materials be used to record the data, researchers develop a “master list” of materials collected, protect anonymity of participants, and develop a visual means to locate and identify data (Creswell, 2013, p. 175).

In view of these principles, all recordings must be stored for three years and will be password protected. I plan to use highly quality SD cards for storing video and audio recordings. I will transfer audio and visual recordings to local storage on an external hard drive, which will be backed up continuously. I also plan to copy and store this type of data in a folder using a cloud service such as DropBox. All other types of data (documents, photographs, field notes, transcripts, etc.) will be treated in the same manner meaning that all data locally will be stored and backed up locally along with cloud based storage. The only other issue that I envision presently is that of the transcription of interviews.

Internal Validity

Regarding the validity of the study, Creswell (2013) addresses validity or validation along with the evaluation of a qualitative study and states that there are many different perspectives of validity, pointing to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Eisner (1991), Lather (1993), Wolcott (1994b), Angen (2000), Whittenmore, Chase, and Mandle (2001), and Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), and Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011). Furthermore, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) adhere to quantitative equivalents for validation and argue that qualitative inquiry has been criticized by the scientific community for not adhering “to canons of reliability and validation” (p. 31). On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba establish “trustworthiness” for an inquiry by using naturalistic research equivalents “such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” as substitutes for “internal validation, external validation, reliability and objectivity” (cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 246).

Validation Strategies

Creswell (2013) defines validation in qualitative research as “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 249-250). I will employ several validation strategies as a means to increase the trustworthiness of my study. First of all, Creswell (2013) points the “prolonged engagement and persistent observation” of the researcher in the field as a validation strategy (p. 250). Such field based considerations allow the qualitative researcher to build trust, learn culture and determine the validity of information. I have been involved in Jewish cemetery restoration projects for more than ten years. I have gained a great deal of trust and credibility with both the Polish and Jewish communities in Poland. I speak Polish well (some would say, “fluently”) and I understand the culture perfectly. Both of these attributes allow me to check for any distortions that may emerge from my involvement or with the involvement of the participants.

Secondly, I will use triangulation, which is a practice in which researchers use “multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). According to Golafshani (2003) triangulation is a means by which researchers may test “the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings” (p. 603). Furthermore, Patton (2001) points out that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods” – different types of “methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (cited in, Golafshani, 2003, p. 603). Barbour (1998) challenges this concept because it causes problems related to philosophical assumptions in “terms of theoretical frameworks we bring to bear on our research” (cited in, Golafshani, 2003, p. 603). It is my plan to corroborate the evidence by providing multiple sources of data, two primary methods of data collection,

member checking, and auditing just to name a few (some of these concepts will be discussed further in the next paragraph).

Thirdly, I will employ “peer review or debriefing,” which ensures “a check of the research.” Regarding conducting a peer review, Pyczak (2013) suggests that qualitative researchers seek an independent analysis by “two or more individuals” (p. 111), while Galvan (2013) advises qualitative researchers consult “outside experts as a peer review” (p. 58). Moreover, Pyczak advises that researchers should consult independent experts such as an “auditor,” who will be able to provide feedback as a means to “ensure trustworthiness” (pp. 112-113). Creswell (2013) relays that “external audits” provide for an auditor, someone, who is independent and “an external consultant,” who will “examine both the process and the product of the account assessing their accuracy” (p. 252). The use of external consultants or experts will ensure more dependable or credible results, which will raise the level of confidence in the study. At this point, I plan to seek outside input as a means to verify my results. More than likely, I will ask my leadership and learning group to do a peer review with me in order to corroborate themes discovered in my analysis of the data.

Fourthly, I plan to use “member checking,” which seeks participant feedback and as such, I will be better able to ensure “the credibility of the findings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Likewise, Galvan (2013) indicates that member checking occurs when participants or members of the study check the accuracy of the results; by allowing member checking the researcher will ensure “that the results reflect the realities as perceived by the participants” (p. 58). Lastly, Creswell (2013) suggestst that by providing “rich, thick description,” researchers may ensure that the readers of the study may “make decisions regarding transferability” due to the fact that the author of the study provides a detailed description of the “participants or setting under study,” allowing for

findings to “be transferred” to other circumstances “because of shared characteristics” (p. 252). In light of this fact, Galvan (2013) suggests that qualitative researchers should provide demographic information regarding the participants, so that they may be seen by the readers, which allows the readers to “make judgements on the adequacy of the sample” (p. 60). Consequently, I plan to include descriptive statistics concerning the demographics of the participants; these will include: age, gender, religious preference or religious identity, ethnicity, and nationality.

The Reasearcher’s Personal Bias

Creswell (2013) indicates that researchers need to be “clarifying” their bias and thereby inform the reader of the researcher’s views or positions, biases or assumptions (p. 251). I take this to mean that every researcher makes judgments regarding what he or she considers being important or not; identifying personal bias, as well as, the bias of others is also important. At times honestly, I struggle with my own bias in what I am doing. I know that I am a follower of Christ, but I am also a public servant, who leads a public charity. I must express my personal bias, but I must not allow it to hamper my exploration and research regarding what I have been doing with the global Jewish community of Polish heritage. I believe that all researchers, who are interested in cross-cultural dialogue, should consider their own biases.

Expanding somewhat on the point of personal bias in conducting this study, I recognize that I will be the primary research instrument, who will be primarily analyzing my interactions with the Jewish community as a Christian. I am researching my case, and my story, with which I have been intimately involved in cooperation with the Jewish community since 2004. In a sense, I am embedded into this reality, like a journalist embedded in a military operation. My purpose is to question, observe, collect data, develop themes, analyze and report. My report should bring

understanding to the matter of Jewish-Christian interaction at the level of bettering or improving human relations, or even more so improving Jewish-Christian dialogue with regards to long-standing conflict and mutual distrust. In order to arrive at such an outcome, I must listen to, study, and understand the Jewish perspective. Hopefully my research will achieve this goal. By so doing, I believe that the Jewish community might better understand that some Christians really do care, that they are not anti-Semitic, and that they simply do not wish by their actions to convert them to Christianity.

With these concepts of validity in mind, I believe that I will be able to ensure the credibility or trustworthiness of the findings of my study as they relate to determining whether or not acts of loving-kindness, as seen in the work of TMF, narrow the gap between Jews and Christians allowing them to engage in meaningful dialogue possibly leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) highlights the complexity of textual analysis and the analysis of “other forms of data” involved in qualitative inquiries (p. 179). He outlines what is involved with data analysis by comparing it and interconnected “spiral of activities” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 179; 182-188), which involve:

1. Organizing data
2. Conducting a preliminary read-through of the database
3. Coding and organizing themes
4. Representing the data
5. Forming an interpretation of the data

In the case study approach of particular interest to me in the process of data analysis is the concept of coding: “coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information,” then the researcher seeks “evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). What coding really means is a narrowing down of data or refining and thereby removes unnecessary or superfluous data. At this point, I lack an experiential understanding of what coding is; nevertheless I understand the basic tenants of coding and wish to employ this method of data analysis to my research inquiry. An analysis of a case study begins with crafting “a detailed description of the case and its setting;” in case study research, Stake (as cited in, Creswell, 2013, p. 199) calls for four types of interpretation and data analysis:

1. In categorical aggregation the researcher looks “for a collection of instances from the data.”
2. Direct interpretation relates to a researcher addressing only “a single instance” and deconstructing and reconstructing the data so that it is more meaningful.
3. Patterns are determined by the researcher in which he or she “looks for correspondence between two or more categories.”
4. Naturalistic generalizations emerge from the data as the researcher analyzes it providing “generalizations that people can learn from the case.”

I plan to use the QSR NVivo program (<http://www.qsrinternational.com>), which assists researchers “analyze, manage, shape and analyze qualitative data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 204).

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