



Issue 77, 2017

MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People



Testamēt recht
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Mit gantz gelerten

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Gedruckt zum dritten mal/durch
Adam Petri zu Basel/Anno
M. D. xxv.



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MISHKAN

Published by

The Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, in cooperation with Jews for Jesus, the Danish Israel Mission, AMZI Focus Israel and Chosen People Ministries.

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ISSN 0792-2474

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MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

ISSUE 77 / 2017

www.caspari.com

Introduction

Dear readers,

This year (2017) we are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. In commemoration of this event, both *Mishkan* issues this year are devoted to topics related to Luther/Lutherans and the Jewish people. For the past 70 years, these relations in general and Luther's writings in particular have been critically analyzed and numerous declarations issued by various Lutheran church gatherings (Stockholm 1983, Driebergen 1990, Cluj-Klausenberg 2004). Our hope in these two issues is to go beyond modern stereotypes to the real past, seeking to discover what was actually written, in what context, and what we can learn from these sources.

One key to understanding the original context of Luther's writings is to make a distinction between the terms "anti-Semitism" and "anti-Judaism." "Anti-Judaism" is an old theological term that denigrates the religion called Judaism and its followers. While "anti-Semitism" is just as old, the term itself was only coined in the nineteenth century to define rejection of the Jewish people regardless of their religion.

The difference between the two concepts is particularly clear in the context of Jewish Christians, the Reformation being a good example. In his anti-Judaic writings, Luther urges Christians to protect and provide for the needs of Jewish converts thrown out of synagogues regarded as dead by their families. Luther's contemporary, Erasmus of Rotterdam, on the other hand, was very suspicious of Jewish Christians because of their past (see "The Wrath of a Disappointed Lover").

While anti-Semitism existed before Christianity, the official theology of traditional Christian churches has been anti-Judaic rather than anti-Semitic. The wider emergence of anti-Semitism required the general rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century in order to shift the center of human identity from religion to ethnicity.

Some of Luther's writings have been used for anti-Semitic purposes, especially in Nazi Germany, even though they actually belong to the anti-Judaic tradition of the old churches. Lutheran declarations (see above) have thus denounced these texts and expressed regret for their later usage by anti-Semites out of context. Anti-Semitism in all its forms has been condemned and Lutheran churches are urged to re-evaluate the anti-Judaic influences in their teaching. Notably, the Lutheran faith has never been tied to all Luther's writings, deriving only from certain confessional books (roughly half of which he himself wrote) and his chief works. Some of his other writings have never carried much weight in the Lutheran world, many being forgotten for centuries and only revived in the infamous booklets distributed by the Nazis.

Luther nevertheless remains a controversial figure, especially for Jewish believers in Jesus. "A Messianic Jew looks at Luther" examines this issue, asking how one can abhor many of his statements at the same time as being in great debt to him on account of others. Could this controversy within one man be perceived more clearly in light of his theological emphasis that a Christian is at the same time both righteous and a sinner?

Our hope is that these two editions of *Mishkan* will deepen an understanding of Luther's controversial writings, their context, and their potential contribution to the relations between Protestant (especially Lutheran) Christians and Messianic Jews.

Caspari Center Staff
Jerusalem, July 2017

Luther's Legacy and the Jewish People

Ole Christian Kvarme

Although Lutherans have received a rich heritage from Martin Luther, some aspects of this legacy have left a dark shadow, especially in regard to the Jewish people and Jewish traditions. As we mark 2017 as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in our church, we must also deal with these less salubrious aspects.

Anchoring himself in a renewed reading of Scripture, Martin Luther was radical and innovative both with regard to faith and Church tradition. At the beginning of his ministry, it seemed as though these characteristics would also mark his relationship with the Jews as well. In his 1523 work, *That Jesus Was Born a Jew*, he refers to the Jews with respect, attempting to convince them that Jesus the Jew is their Messiah. Attacking contemporary society's and the Pontificate's dealings with the Jews, he argues that they have been treated "as if they were dogs rather than human beings" and shown "nothing of Christian doctrine or life." Herein, he clearly states that the Jews are part of Christ's people, the recipients of Scripture, and our brothers, sharing God's promises.

This work circulated widely, giving hope for a new time for the Jews across Europe. As we know now, these hopes did not come to fruition. Almost two decades later, Luther wrote more several pieces in which he vehemently attacks against the Jews, the most well known of these being *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543). Herein, he states that the Jews are under God's wrath, serving as a dreadful example to us. As children of the devil, bloodthirsty, and hardened, vindictive murderers, their schools and synagogues should be burnt to the ground, their homes torn down, their members put in camps, their Scriptures taken from them, and all prohibited from teaching. He vindicated these views as a form of "sharp mercy to see whether we might save at least a few from the glowing flames."

How can the same man who spoke so positively about the Jews in 1523 only two decades later have become such a vulgar Jew hater? Although he was deeply disappointed that the Jews did not convert in the Lutheran countryside, in his commentaries on various biblical books, in both his early and late life, he consistently contrasts Jewish belief and tradition with evangelical faith in Christ. All his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible promotes the view that the Jews in the "Old Testament" are ungodly people standing under God's wrath while the Church and those who take God's word and grace seriously stand under God's blessing.

Rather than relating solely to Jesus as the key to the right understanding of Scripture as a whole, this attitude rests on a stark differentiation between Jews and Christians, predicated on the belief that Jews must convert. While they were thus the objects of Christian mission, Luther displayed little concern for the living Jewish community, also exhibiting little knowledge of Jewish faith, customs, and traditions.

Other reformers did not welcome Luther's anti-Jewish writings, either ignoring or rejecting them, numerous reformers and German humanists evincing a growing resistance towards anti-Semitic attitudes. Unfortunately, this

did not prevent Luther's defamation of the Jews from exerting a deep impact upon the Lutheran Church and European history. Today, we are aware that this legacy directly contributed to the Holocaust. While an episcopal meeting of Norwegian bishops recently commemorated 70 years since the deportation of Norwegian Jews (most of whom perished in Auschwitz) and determined the need for deeper recognition of the passivity church leaders displayed during WWII, we must do more than this. We must confront Luther's legacy by becoming aware of how we speak of Jews and the Jewish elements in the Gospel in our preaching and teaching. Although Luther's dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity is neither historically nor theologically sound, it is still preached in our churches today. Neither Jesus nor the early Church would recognize themselves in this approach!

It is far too easy to describe Jesus, his disciples, and those who came to faith in him as "our own," all those who did not accept the gospel being "Jews." Jesus and his disciples were Jews who identified themselves with their people and traditions—both in the Hebrew Bible and first-century Judaism. Yes, something new happened when Jesus revealed himself as Messiah and the early Church became a community bridging ethnic affiliation. This new focus on Gentiles eventually resulted in the Jewish people being pushed aside into the dark. But the Jewish people and their traditions remain a people-group among others, and the New Testament writings are permeated with hope for both the Jewish people and all others who have faith in a God who is compassionate and merciful as both Creator and Savior.

This does not mean that we should ignore the difference between our faith in God and the synagogue, especially with our confession of Jesus as Messiah and faith in the triune God. But we must acknowledge that Jesus and the early congregation, including Paul, emphasized continuity with regard to the fulfillment of the Law, Prophets, and Writings, and hope for the Jewish people.

We therefore want to encourage fellow ministry workers in the Church, especially those responsible for preaching and teaching, to renew their work with the Jews and communicate the message of the gospel in light of this continuity. To do this, we need to become familiar with Jewish traditions, recognize the common ground the Church shares with the Synagogue, and appreciate the life and significance of the Jewish people.

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Three Sources of Inspiration behind Luther's Anti-Jewish Writings

Jarmo Juntumaa

In this paper, I shall focus on Luther's anti-Jewish writings, seeking to trace the texts and sources of inspiration behind them. In particular, I shall examine the role three sources played in the formation of Luther's thought, letting Luther speak for himself in order to understand his meaning and feelings. I shall concentrate on the first part of the *Schemhamphoras* (*The Tetragrammaton*), where Luther borrows a lengthy article from Salvagus Porchetus' *Victoria adversus impios Hebraeos*. I shall then discuss the Jewish kabbalistic numerology therein, which Luther adopted from Anton Margaritha's *Der ganz judisch glaub*. I shall conclude with some comments on Thomas Kaufmann's thesis that Thomas Münster's *Messias Christianorum et Iudaeorum Hebraice & Latine* profoundly influenced Luther's most well-known writings on the Jews.

Salvagus Porchetus

A Carthusian monk who lived in Genoa at the turn of the thirteenth century, Porchetus wrote a treatise against the Jews, from which Luther took text from Chapter 11, part 1. The following is a short synopsis of Porchetus' material. During the reign of Queen Helene, Jesus ha-Notzri (Jesus) came to Jerusalem and found the ark of the covenant bearing the *Schemhamphoras* (Luther: *Schemhamphoras*), which bestows upon the one who pronounces whatever he wishes. Although the entrance of the temple is guarded by two dogs, Jesus enters, writes the name on a parchment paper, and hides it under the skin on his leg. On the way out, the dogs bark so fiercely that he forgets the name. Upon arriving home, he retrieves it, beckons 310 young Israelites, and proclaims himself to be the Messiah rather than the bastard the wise have scorned him as.

When his disciples demand a sign, he raises a paralyzed man and heals a leper. Amazed, the wise in Israel have him brought before Queen Helene. When Jesus says that he also possesses the power to revive the dead and asks for an opportunity to do so, the queen gives him permission in the presence of her envoys. The latter bear witness to the event and the queen begins believing in Jesus. Jesus then leaves for Galilee. When the wise hear that he has made clay birds fly and sailed on millstones, they accuse him of witchcraft, once again demanding that he appear before the queen. They also summon Judas Iscariot, who knows the ineffable Name for God as well. When Jesus sees that he is encircled, he declares: "I want to go to heaven," spreads his arms, and ascends. Judas Iscariot flies after him and after a struggle they both fall to the ground. The Israelites cover Jesus with a cloth, hit him with sticks, and command him to identify who struck him. When Jesus fails to respond, they take him out to be hanged, with the queen's permission. The tree branches not being sturdy enough to hold his weight because Jesus has cursed them, they then find a sturdy cabbage stem from inside the temple courtyard upon which they hang him.

Luther's commentary and critique are stormy and emotional, employing both physical and corporal images. The zenith of the Jewish holy place has been reached: the fallen angel, unable to withstand the continuous celestial praise of God, now hungrily devours the offerings, gladly receiving everything that the Jews utter from their mouths or intimate parts. Just as the pig wallows in the sty, Satan has found his battlefield in their bitter words.

Luther first criticizes the texts as historically unreliable. Queen Helene did not live during the time of Jesus, nor did she engage in such activities. He also mocks the ancient dogs guarding the entrance of the temple. He casts doubt on the possibility of growing a cabbage tree capable of producing a hundred pounds of seeds in the temple courtyard. He also condemns the Jews for blindly obeying the Rabbis and believing all the lies their teachers feed them, accepting that right is left and left is right, if they say so. He recalls having met three Jews twenty years previously who had talked in the same manner.

Luther thus regards the whole account as a piece of distortion and ridicule. Jesus is shamelessly called a bastard, and twistedly and sardonically described first as a genuine healer, as per the New Testament, and then immediately turned into a comic figure who sails on millstones and flies around. Most insulting in his eyes is Jesus' portrayal as a magician who does tricks. He takes umbrage at the way in which Jesus' divinity and resurrection are refuted and repudiated. Jesus' falling together with Judas Iscariot shows that, rather than possessing power or special abilities, he simply lost a duel. He was thus an imposter, those Christians who believe in him being deceived, gullible, and liars.

The story, then, denigrates Christian faith in Jesus, showing Jesus not only to be an ordinary man but an evil and deceitful fraud. Like the *Toledot Yeshu*, it focuses solely upon his human life, either omitting the extraordinary nature of his birth and resurrection from the dead or adducing them to scorn or discredit him. It is thus a prime example of the ridicule, scorn, evil, and crookedness of the Jews, demonstrating their blindness and disbelief. Such unscrupulous distortion upsets Luther, for whom it smacks of an attempt to desecrate Jesus.

Anton Margaritha

Anton Margaritha's *Der ganz judisch glaub* (*The Whole Jewish Faith*) reveals the incredible "secret doctrines" the Jews hold in order to highlight their lost state and spiritual blindness. For Luther, it evinces that God has truly abandoned them. Margaritha presents the kabbalistic system developed by the Rabbis, based upon the three verses that recount the crossing of the Red Sea:

And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and the darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. (Exod 14:19–21 [KJV])

These three verses are divided into three lines, each of which contains 72

Hebrew letters. The first letter of the first line, the last letter of the second line, and the first letter of the third line form a new three-letter word—the name of one of the 72 angels. This name is then assigned a numerical value, gained by adding the sum of each letter. If in Latin the first three-letter name was LII, it would thus equal 52. This process yields the numerical name of one of the 72 angels, who is known both as 52 and LII.

Together, the names of the 72 angels constitute the power of the Tetragrammaton in kabbalistic thought—the “ineffable name” that functions as a key or code. These numerical and three-letter words enable the identification of additional angels, requiring new words to describe God and His power and attributes that also possess a numerical value (based upon the letters 52 in this example). The number of angels can therefore increase dramatically, despite the fact that the total of their numerical names remains 216 (3×72). The number of angels thus appears to be almost infinite, depending upon how many new words are needed to describe either God or a divine quality or work whose letters yield the same numerical value.

The angels’ three-letter names becoming part of a new word or sentence, when we make an utterance about God we are at the same time pronouncing the name of an angel who links us to the divine power. As an example, Luther gives the sentence: “G o t t e s I I e b e I s t s g a r.” While German-speaking Christians would be very familiar with this, according to the kabbalistic system it also contains an angel’s name. When all 72 angels are adduced, we are connected to the divinity in its fullness. Hereby, God becomes a vehicle for human activity. In other words, one has access to His “ineffable name.”

Luther is upset and disturbed by the evil core that lies at the heart of such superstition. Just as it is possible to embed the name of an angel in a sentence about God, so it is possible to embed the opposite—i.e., Satan’s name. This system thus makes it possible to connect to both the higher good and the higher evil. When these sentences are used as part of a prayer, we are connected to the angelic powers embedded in them. Luther contends that when a Rabbi who has been initiated into this system prays on the streets, a passing German Christian may thus be completely ignorant of the fact that he is cursing him.

In the next 5–6 pages, Luther vents his anger with almost the same intensity as he had two months earlier in writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Once again, he employs the whole scale of verbal, theological, and allegorical vocabulary available to him. The relatively mild scorn he poured onto the ancient dogs guarding the doors of the temple in Porchetus’ text now becomes a torrent, *The Tetragrammaton* being equivalent to 100,000 ancient dogs barking ten times louder. He wonders how is it possible that the “heirs of royal blood and circumcised saints” have not been able to use that magnificent skill for 1500 years. Why did they send Judas Iscariot rather than going themselves? Have they forgotten their skills? No, of course not. In reality, they never possessed any. Everything has been a lie. The place where they obtained their skills is manifest on the wall of the castle church of Wittenberg, which portrays a Rabbi lifting the leg of a pig with his right hand and its tail with his left hand, eagerly examining what kind of “Talmud” is to be found there. Who commissioned this picture? He who knows where this doctrine and wisdom come from, who comes from the same place—a pig’s rectum.

This picture also inspired Luther to engage upon a satirical game at the expense of the Hebrew words. The Tetragrammaton is the evil that has contaminated the Jews, in reality meaning “that what comes from the ass.” Satan having taken the Jews into his kingdom, they have no option but to tell fairytales, lie, ridicule, and curse. They have become captives in the Roman gaol which they had thought to represent freedom. But if the prison in which they believed themselves kept is the fault of the Christians, are Christians their gaolers?

Luther then inquires how the Jews can be so absurdly wrong about the ineffable name, concluding that it is as though they maintain: “I have a donkey which throws me gold coins.” *Inter alia*, he argues that:

- 1) They have turned God into their servant instead of worshiping Him;
- 2) They study letters, but their hearts are not involved in the endeavor;
- 3) They seek to cast spells on the heathen through their superstitions—which we Christians (*verfluchte Gojm*) are in their eyes—in order to bring us over to their side;
- 4) While they curse us as heathen and accuse us of worshiping many gods, they themselves worship the angels of 72 lies—equivalent to 72,000 devils—and call this monotheism. In making this part of their worship service, they have turned it into idolatry;
- 5) They mock God in an unprecedented manner. By using the Tetragrammaton, anyone—including Judas—can use this power to perform any miracle.

After this enraged critique, Luther becomes so exhausted that he cries to God in his prayers, sighing and complaining that he has to condemn the Jews in such harsh terms: “But you, God, know that I talk in such a manner because of my faith and in honor of you, my Lord. You, my Lord, always do what is right. You did the right thing when you punished the Jews more harshly than anyone has ever punished them.”

Seeking to justify his opinion after this prayer, he warns the princes and lords against protecting the Jews. Although they have received their punishment, Christians must distance themselves from everything that advances their cause. Emphasizing that they knew these things but chose to do nothing, he urges them to cry out in the future in the same way as they did at the beginning: “Let his blood come upon us and upon our children” (Matt 27:25); “let them cry out: ‘That which you, Lord, wanted, has taken place.’”

He then inquires how things could be otherwise when the Jews lack the word of God to lighten their darkness. He asks his readers to examine their own experience: Have we, under the Pope’s leadership, not lost the word of God, exchanging it for human doctrines, darkness, lies, and conflicts? We have worship services, purgatory, worship of the saints, monkhood, and our own deeds. Just like the followers of the Pope, the Jews also live in darkness with circumcision and the laws of Moses—only meant to exist until the coming of the Messiah. Even when the law of Moses was still valid, they did not obey it, killing the prophets. Now it is no longer binding, they seek to obey it and kill both the Messiah and the Christians. “They have the wrath of God upon them and they have deserved it.”

Sebastian Münster

Although Porchetus' history of the Jews and Margaritha's explication of the doctrine of the ineffable name of God appear to have inspired much of Luther's anti-Jewish venom, his most famous Jewish text, *On the Jews and Their Lies*—written before *The Tetragrammaton*—is much longer and more vehement. Can this be attributed solely to the *Toledot Yeshu*?

Less than half a year before he wrote *On the Jews and Their Lies*—in the spring of 1542—the Bohemian Count of Falkenau, Wolf Schlick, had forwarded to Luther a Jewish response to his *Against the Sabbatarians*. Researchers are perplexed by Luther's silence in this relation to this rebuttal. Apart from the references at the beginning and end, he only mentions it once elsewhere. What was the text Luther read and who was the "good friend" to whom he dedicated his piece—Schlick or someone else?

In his book, *Luthers "Judenschriften"*, Thomas Kaufmann concludes that *On the Jews and Their Lies* cannot be regarded as a response to such a text, arguing instead that it appears to have been prompted by Sebastian Münster's 1539 *Messias Christianorum et Iudaeorum Hebraice & Latine*. Herein, Luther's Hebraist colleague from Basel has a Jew and a Christian engage in a dialogue about the pros and cons of the Christian faith.

Why would Luther not wish to identify Münster? Was there something about his name that was so dangerous or secret that he sought to conceal it? Kaufmann contends that while Münster criticized the Jewish rabbis in a similar vein to Luther's tirades, Luther was disturbed by his use of rabbinical tradition and treatment of it as equal with Christian tradition. In his explication of Matthew and the forward to *Biblia Hebraica*, Münster comments widely upon the explanations given by the medieval *Sefer Nizzahon*, Kimhi, Rashi, and other Talmudists. Although Münster possessed all the necessary knowledge for translating the Bible, he failed to make use of it. Why? Luther's answer is that, despite the title of his book, Münster understood nothing of the Hebrew Bible's announcements of the Messiah. Nor did the style of Münster's dialogue differ, in his view, from the medieval debates—which had been going on for centuries. This false interaction based upon the assumption of equality was useless and needed to cease. Negotiation with the devil was impossible. It was necessary to protect oneself against cunning schemes. The process upon which Luther embarked in the early 1530s, steadily becoming ever more heated, now reached its peak. Henceforth, Christians had one only task—to study their own faith and remain steadfast in it. The time for interaction between Christians and Jews was past.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined three books I believe played a central role in all Luther's critical anti-Jewish writings. Analysis of them at the grass roots level, on the basis of Luther's own texts, reveals how they reflect his anger and fear. While the so-called *Toledot Yeshu* appears to take center stage in this process, many other factors also lie behind Luther's reaction to the events of his time, his texts in general thus requiring explication in the light of their context. As we celebrate the Reformation this year, we are blessed with numerous new books that give us more insight into "Luther and the Jews." Heinz Shilling's *Martin Luther: Rebell in einer Zeit des Umbruchs* focuses on the political and social

aspects of Luther's time. Lyndal Roper's *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* discusses Luther as a person, and Ilmari Karimies' *In Your Light We See the Light* explores Luther's links with Augustus and medieval theology.

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A Messianic Jew looks at Luther

Richard Harvey

For five years now, I've been burdened by Luther's writings and impact on the Jewish people. I have visited Wittenberg three times to protest at the continued offence of the *Judensau* (Jew-Pig) sculpture on the wall of the Stadtkirche where Luther preached.¹ I am writing two books, *Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Lies* and *Luther and the Messianic Jews: Strange Theological Bedfellows*. One—written on a popular level—addresses the impact of Luther's legacy of Christian anti-Judaism, which influenced the anti-Semitic genocidal program adopted by the Nazi party and culminated in the Holocaust. The other book seeks to bring Lutheran and Messianic Jewish scholars together to engage with each other's differing theological views and traditions.

I grew up in the UK, where the Protestant Reformation resulted in the formation of the Church of England. Like the Lutheran Church around the world, the Anglican Church combines elements of Catholic and Reformed tradition. When I became a believer in Yeshua, my early years of discipleship were within a Protestant evangelical context, in which the works of Luther, his classic statements of the doctrines of justification by faith, the supremacy of Scripture, and the need for personal faith were taught as fundamental to the life of a believer.²

When I began studying theology in the 1970s, E. P. Sanders' book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* had prompted a revolution in Pauline studies.³ Herein, Sanders questioned the "Lutheran reading of Paul" as setting the law found in the Old Testament against the gospel and grace revealed in the New. My New Testament teacher, John Ziesler, was in regular conversation with Sanders as we worked through the Greek text of Romans in class. I realized that this "New Perspective on Paul" was good news for Jewish believers in Yeshua like myself, who often felt forced to choose between Torah and Messiah, being accused of legalism and "going back under the law" if we chose to be Torah-observant as Jesus-believing Jews.

As part of the Messianic Jewish movement, I was involved in the London Messianic Congregation in the 1980s. Much of Messianic Jewish theology was a reaction to the anti-Jewish elements embedded in Christian theology, particularly in relation to the doctrine of supersessionism—the belief that the Church had replaced the Jewish people to become the "new" or "true" Israel—and the "teaching of contempt" according to which, because of their rejection of

¹ See "Fjern Wittenbergs jødesvin": https://www.change.org/p/fjerne-wittenberg-j%C3%B8desvin?source_location=topic_page (Danish); "Remove the Wittenberg Judensau": <https://www.change.org/p/remove-the-wittenberg-judensau> (English/German) (accessed 30.5.2017).

² See "But I'm Jewish: A Jew for Jesus Tells His Story": <https://www.dropbox.com/s/d6n6hni23m95n7x/BIJ%20harvey.pdf?dl=0> (accessed 30.5.2017).

³ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977).

Yeshua and crime of deicide, the Jews deserved exile and continuing punishment.⁴

My encounter with Martin Luther brought into sharp focus Luther's place in the tradition of Christian anti-Judaism and popular anti-Semitism in a way that challenged my own faith perspective, my ability to forgive him and those who took his name for the sufferings they inflicted on my people, and my desire for Lutherans, Jews, and Jewish Christians to become reconciled.

I was staggered to read Luther's anti-Jewish writings. His constant litany of abuse, insult, hatred, and hostility against Jews and Judaism is shocking and unacceptable. His vicious, obscene, and inflammatory language is inexcusable. His mixing of racial and religious hatred, claim to base his views on Scripture and the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, and murderous threats and poisonous accusations and libels against the Jewish people are probably amongst the worst examples of Christian anti-Judaism you could (not) wish to find—including mocking Jewish respect for the sacred name of God and argument that the Talmud issues from a pig's anus.⁵

No wonder his works were praised and republished by the Nazis, who claimed he would be proud of their actions on Kristallnacht (1939) and appealed to him for justification of their actions in their defense at Nuremberg (1945).⁶ Asserting that the Jews should be thrown out of Germany, their property confiscated, books burnt, synagogues destroyed, and members given no safety, he backed up his inflammatory language with repeated attempts to persuade German leaders to carry out this program. His theological anti-Judaism and social and political anti-Semitism can neither be disentangled nor excused.

Two commonly-believed myths exist about Luther's views on the Jewish people. While neither are correct, both have been used to justify Luther's inexcusable attitude towards the Jewish people. The first is that Luther started off his ministry with a positive attitude to the Jewish people, believing that, if treated considerately, they would become true believers in Yeshua and aid him in his struggles against the Roman Catholic Church.⁷ The second is Luther repented of his Jew hatred on his deathbed.⁸

⁴ For a survey of Messianic Jewish theology, see Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster/Authentic Media, 2000).

⁵ "On the Ineffable Name and on the Lineage of Christ" (1543): <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/966540> (accessed 30.5.2017).

⁶ Richard Harvey, "On November 10, 1938, on Luther's birthday, the synagogues are burning in Germany": <https://messianicjewishhistory.wordpress.com/2014/11/10/otdimjh-on-november-10-1938-on-luthers-birthday-the-synagogues-are-burning-in-germany/>. In his defense statement on 29 April 1945, Julius Streicher, founder and publisher of the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, stated: "Dr. Martin Luther would very probably sit in my place in the defendants' dock today if this book had been taken into consideration by the prosecution. In the book *The Jews and Their Lies*, Dr. Martin Luther writes that the Jews are a serpent's brood and one should burn down their synagogues and destroy them ...": <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-29-46.asp>.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of Luther's revised view—or lack thereof—see Prof. Dr. Thomas Kaufmann, "Luther and the Jews": https://www.luther2017.de/fileadmin/luther2017/material/Reden__Predigten_und_Diskussionsbeitraege/Lecture_thomas_kaufmann_luther_jews.pdf (accessed 30.5.2017).

⁸ Luther's imagined repentance is based on distorted and inaccurate accounts of his deathbed confession, his possible return to the Roman Catholic church, and wishful thinking, persisting as an "urban myth" without academic evidence: see Richard Harvey, "Luther's

While Luther's early works, especially *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, contain some positive statements regarding the way in which Jews should be treated, the means of persuasion he advised included sanctions and violence. In his earliest writings—such as his lectures on the Psalms and Genesis—he also adopts an anti-Jewish polemic inherited from Augustine, who believed that the Jews were condemned to be “reluctant witnesses” of the truth of Christianity by their rejection of Yeshua, their punishment being a constant “wandering” within Christendom.

While Luther did confess his sins on his death bed, he continued to express his hatred and fear of the Jews in his sermons, right up to a few days before he died. The Jews attacking and seeking to kill *him*, in his mind, he uttered vitriolic condemnations against them and admonished his audiences and wife against consorting with them both in public and private.

Strains of theological anti-Judaism and popular anti-Semitism run throughout Luther's life and works.⁹ The Jewish interpretation of Scripture as handed down by rabbinic tradition denying that Yeshua is Messiah, he believed it must be opposed by his own method of translating, exegeting, and applying Scripture. In *On the Jews and their Lies*, he thus engaged in a 65,000-word tirade against the Jewish people and their scriptural hermeneutics, in particular their understanding of the Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible, which he seeks to demonstrate have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Their exile from their land for the past 1500 years served him as further proof of God's condemnation and judgment upon them.

So what is my Messianic Jewish perspective on Luther? First, it recognizes all the good that Luther did: his bold and faithful proclamation of the Gospel, his willingness to stand against the abuses and evils of the Church of his day, his contribution to the development of the Reformation and the modern world, his translation of the Bible into the vernacular, his influence on the formation of the modern world and nation state, and his development of popular Christian life and culture.

Second, it offers forgiveness. For my people, Luther's anti-Judaism cannot and should not be separated from the later anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust, the genocidal murder of 6 million of my people, and 6 million others (communists, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, the disabled and mentally ill, travelers, and others). My people still suffer from multi-generational post-traumatic stress that has unfortunate and unintended consequences—such as the victimized becoming the victimizer, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, another tortuous and complex subject.

So reconciliation, first between German Christians and Messianic Jews, and then more widely between Jews and Lutherans, is greatly needed. Sadly, I have observed little of this, finding that many Lutherans simply do not understand how Jewish people and Jewish believers in Yeshua feel. This grieves me greatly, as I would like my family (most of who do not believe in

deathbed repentance”:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/8tfdbgxxjr9h2wa/LUTHER%E2%80%99S%20DEATHBED%20REPENTANCE.docx?dl=0> (accessed 30.5.2017).

⁹ See in particular Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) and Kirsi I. Stjerna and Brooks Schramm, eds., *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

Yeshua) to hear genuinely good news from Lutherans—or at least an expression of regret, note of apology, and willingness to do something to put matters right. Whilst many Lutheran institutions have expressed regret and remorse and distanced themselves from Luther's writings on the Jews, few have gone beyond conference statements and the removal of anti-Jewish elements from catechetical materials and liturgy to the taking of practical action such as the removal of the Wittenberg Judensau.¹⁰

I daily pray the prayer of forgiveness in the Jewish prayer book that closely echoes Yeshua's words on the cross: "Father forgive them, they know not what they do":

I hereby forgive anyone who has angered or provoked me or sinned against me, physically or financially or by failing to give me due respect, or in any other matter relating to me, involuntarily or willingly, inadvertently or deliberately, whether in word or deed: let no one incur punishment because of me.¹¹

Third, it calls for repentance and the fruits of repentance. After five hundred years of Luther's anti-Judaism and thousands of years of Christian anti-Semitism, Lutherans need to go out of their way to show the love of Yeshua to his people Israel. Although I am waiting for that to happen, I have yet to see evidence of it. One very powerful symbol of Luther's anti-Judaism, the Wittenberg Judensau, should be removed with a public act of repentance, and placed in a study centre rather than left on the wall of a church building dedicated to the worship of God.

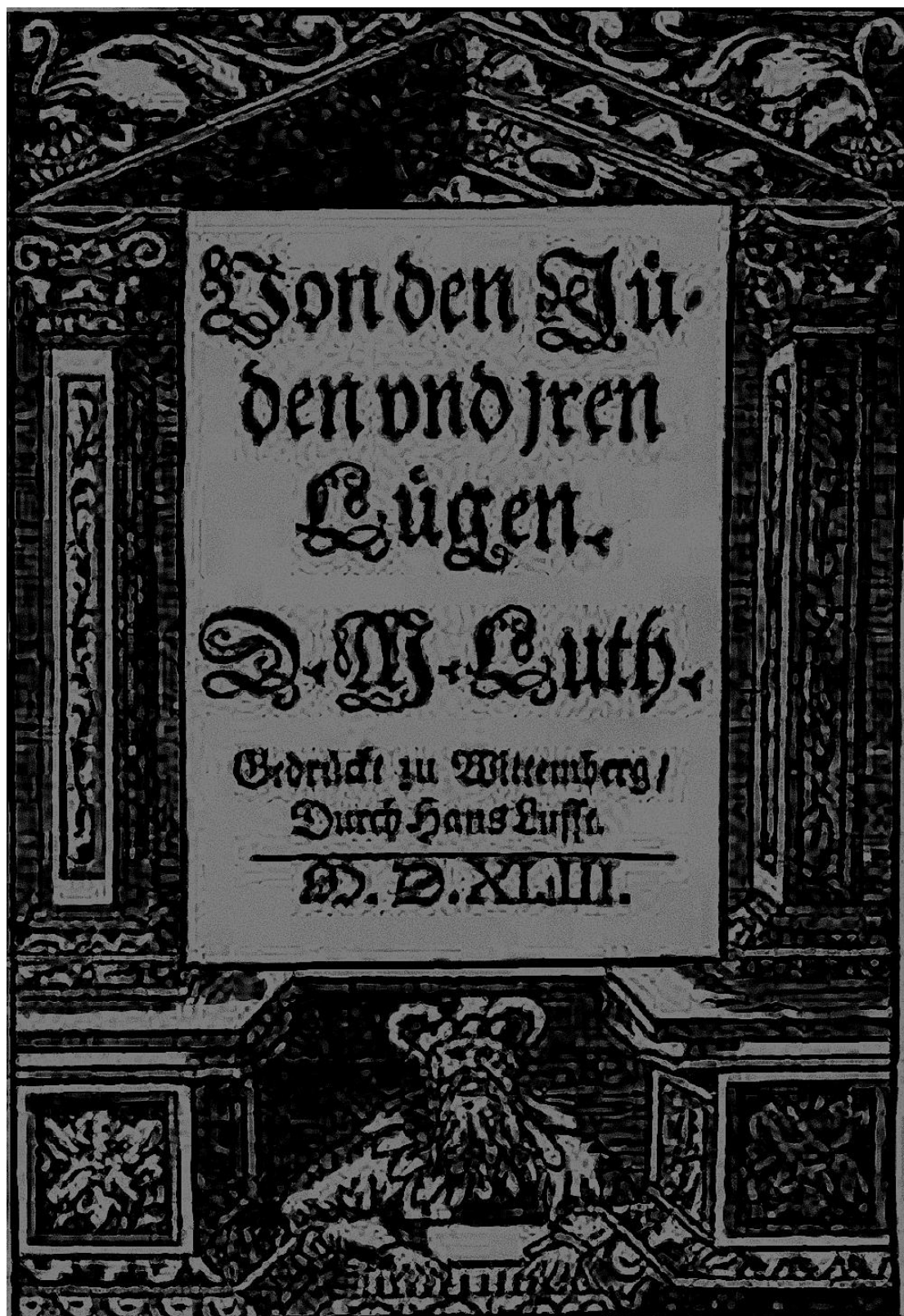
I am waiting for Lutherans, both as church bodies and individuals, to show the fruits and action of repentance. While many expressions of regret and remorse have been made over the years for the sufferings of the Jewish people, actual acts of repentance, requests for forgiveness, and demonstrations of a new heart, attitude, and actions to restore relations between Jews and Lutherans are few and far between.

Fourth, it looks for the reconciliation that only Yeshua can bring. Messianic Jews and Lutherans have one thing in common—we both believe in Yeshua, the Son of God who took on Jewish flesh, who died on the cross and rose again from the dead to reconcile us to God and one another. Being called to be God's ambassadors of reconciliation to the world, we must begin with the divided peoples, ethnicities, and histories within the *ekklesia*, the Body of Christ. When I get to heaven, I look forward to embracing Martin Luther and thanking him for blessing me. I hope he, too, will embrace me with tears of repentance in his eyes, and we shall be truly reconciled together in the love and fellowship of the God of Israel and all nations.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Statements from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Consultation*, Stockholm, 1983; *Report of the Assembly Committee on the Church and the Jewish People*, 1984; *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism Today. A Contribution to the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Consultation of the Lutheran World Federation*, Dobogókő, Hungary, 2001 (appendices in *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations? A Lutheran Contribution to Christian-Jewish Dialogue with a Focus on Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism today* (Documentation No. 48) January, 2003: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dts-doc48-jewish-full.pdf> (accessed 30.5.2017).

¹¹ *The Koren Sacks Siddur* (Jerusalem: Koren Siddur, 2009), 294–95.

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The Wrath of a Disappointed Lover: On Luther's Attitude Toward the Jews

Knut Alfsvåg

Introduction

Martin Luther is one of the most influential thinkers in the history of the Christian Church. 500 years ago this year, he published his 95 theses on indulgence, which launched one of the most remarkable revival movements in European history. Understanding the causes and significance of the events surrounding the Reformation remains relevant even today, Luther shared the Renaissance fascination with historical sources, becoming one of the sixteenth century's leading Christian experts on the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. He had a keen interest in the people of the Bible as both historical and contemporary realities. The strange ambiguity in his writings on the Jews has made the topic "Luther and the Jews" a controversial and hotly debated issue, however.¹ At the same time as exhibiting a respectful tolerance toward the Jewish people, he also shamelessly vilifies them, denigrating them with such a vehemence and rhetorical force that the Nazis enlisted him in support of their extreme anti-Semitism.

Is Luther's thinking concerning the Jews systematic? Or is he a Christian equally confused and angered by the consistent Jewish rejection of the gospel of Christ so that his writings on this topic are nothing but a haphazard collection of incoherent thoughts? This question is exacerbated by Luther's position within German, European, and ecclesiastical history. His personality looms large, even contemporary discussions of the relation between Jews and the more or less secularized Christian West, including the political issues of the Middle East, are colored by our understanding of Luther's position in relation to the Jews.

In the following, I shall address Luther's most important writings on this topic in their historical context. How did Luther's predecessors and contemporaries view the Jews and what are the main characteristics of his early approach? What caused the apparent shift in his position? Did Luther's theological evaluation of the Jewish people change or do the strict measures against the Jews he promoted in his later years derive from other factors? Despite being aware of how our approach to this particular part of our past is shaped by more recent history, I shall not go beyond a discussion of the historical sources.²

¹ For a representative sample of the literature, see Ingemar Öberg, *Luther and World Mission: A Historical and Systematic Study*, trans. Dean Apel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 326–34; Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism: Against his Better Judgement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 120–37; Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Richard Harvey, *Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Dark Side of Luther's Legacy* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2017).

² In the German context, the pursuit of a historical understanding is very easily perceived as a form of excuse, the Luther inheritance forming part of a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions: see Matthias Morgenstern, "Erwägungen zu einem Dokument der Schande," in

Historical Background

In the early-medieval period, the European Church was relatively tolerant toward the Jews. Pope Gregory (in office between 590 and 604) defended religious freedom for Jews and their right to synagogue worship, maintaining that all human beings shared the responsibility for Jesus' death.³ This changed with the Crusades, however. Although primarily directed against the Moslems, even the Jews came under attack during this period. The fourth Lateran Council in 1215 decreed that Moslems and Jews living in Europe should wear special clothes to avoid contact with Christians. Church authorities and laypeople alike vilified the Jews as exclusively responsible for killing Jesus, stereotyped accusations becoming common: Jews killed Christian children and drank their blood, stole the Eucharistic bread for the sake of performing blasphemous rites, and caused the Black Death in 1348.⁴

The late-medieval period saw the power of the Church threatened by the rise of national and local authorities. Jews were one of the primary victims of this development, to the extent that they were expelled from England, France, and Spain. In Italy and Germany, however, they remained an important cultural force, the Renaissance interest in the literary works of antiquity—including the Bible—drawing Jews and Christian scholars interested in studying the Hebrew language together.⁵ This formed the background for the so-called Pfefferkorn controversy in Germany. A Jew who converted to Christianity in 1504 and then became a Jewish missionary, Pfefferkorn recommended the burning of all Jewish books (apart from the Bible). Universities sceptical of the literary ideals of Renaissance humanism supported this measure, which in time came to serve as a vehicle for criticizing Christian scholars interested in Jewish culture and the Hebrew language. The main target of this critique was Johannes Reuchlin, the leading Christian Hebraist of the time and grand-uncle of the later Greek professor at the University of Wittenberg, Philipp Melanchthon.⁶

Asked for his opinion regarding the matter, Luther—at this time (1514) a scholar familiar with Renaissance philology serving as Professor of biblical exegesis at Wittenberg—unambivalently sided with Reuchlin and the Christian Hebraists, believing the burning of books to be an unacceptable missiological strategy.⁷ The Pope not sharing this opinion, he condemned Reuchlin to silence in 1520, due in part to anti-Judaism and in part to anti-humanism—biblical philology having become an important element in the theological renewal being advocated by the Wittenberg Bible Professor.⁸

Luther's later great opponent, Erasmus of Rotterdam, leader of the German Renaissance humanists, had no sympathy for the opponents of Reuchlin. His defense of Reuchlin is nevertheless tainted with a strong anti-Jewish sentiment of which there is no trace in Luther. Erasmus maintains that

Luther, Von den Juden und ihren Lügen, ed. Matthias Morgenstern (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2016), 251–76, 253.

³ Vidar Haanes, "Antisemittisme i humanismens tidsalder," *Tidsskrift for teologi og kirke* 76 (2005), 26–45, 27.

⁴ Ibid, 28; Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism*, 18–22.

⁵ Haanes, "Antisemittisme i humanismens tidsalder," 29.

⁶ Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism*, 23–24.

⁷ Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 336.

⁸ Haanes, "Antisemittisme i humanismens tidsalder," 30–33.

as a former Jew, Pfefferkorn could not be considered trustworthy, his advice thus being inapposite. Differing from Reuchlin and Luther, Erasmus—who never learned Hebrew—exhibited no interest in Jewish philology as a tool for exegeting the Christian Bible.⁹

Luther's Hope for the Conversion of the Jews

Luther started his academic career by lecturing on the Psalms (1513–1515). While he criticizes the Jews for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah herein, he does not adopt the common anti-Jewish stereotypes of his day or hold the Jews responsible for Jesus' crucifixion. Although he is aware of and comments on the hope for their eschatological conversion in Rom 11:23–26, he seems to regard this as referring to the conversion of a small remnant.¹⁰

In his lectures on Romans (1515–1516), Luther condemns the Jews for trusting in their election and obedience to the law. This is, however, not a sin peculiar to the Jews; in Luther's view (and arguably also Paul's), those who do not believe in justification in Christ disregard the divine plan for salvation and trust their own works. In this respect, Luther makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. This principle remains a central element in Luther's evaluation of the Jews: in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, they demonstrate greater trust in their own ideas about God and His election more than in the realities of divine revelation.

Luther nevertheless accepts Paul's teaching that the election of the Jews stands firm, albeit not as an election to salvation independent of belief in Christ. Reading Rom 11:23–26 as alluding to eschatological conversion, he does not insist that it applies to all individuals past and present.¹¹ Not believing that the Church replaces Israel, however, he considers the task of preaching to the Jews important, citing Paul's attitude in Rom 9:1–5 as an example. Christians should therefore avoid cursing and slandering the Jews.¹²

The Reformation breakthrough gave Luther new hope for the conversion of the Jews. As the chosen people of God, Luther contends they are to be given the opportunity to hear the gospel in a way that appeals to them. Christians must therefore address them with humility and prayer, avoiding prompting them to wrath and irritation. In his commentary on the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55)—which ends with Mary's reminder to God of His faithfulness toward Israel based on his promises to Abraham—written while in Wartburg in 1521, Luther maintains that through Christ this is a promise for the entire world. Still constituting the foundation of the hope for the conversion of the Jews, however, Christians must avoid behaving in ways that counteract the fulfilment of this hope in their dealings with the Jews.¹³

In 1523, Luther published the first writing he devoted entirely to the Jews. Entitled *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, it was prompted by accusations

⁹ Haanes, "Antisemitisme i humanismens tidsalder," 35–36; Thomas Kaufmann, *Luthers "Judenschriften": Ein Beitrag zu ihrer historischen Kontextualisierung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 180–81; Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism*, 24.

¹⁰ Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 336–37; Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 49–50.

¹¹ See Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 338–39; Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism*, 38–42.

¹² Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 339–40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 340–45.

that he rejected the virgin birth and Mary's status as *semper virgo*.¹⁴ Encountering no difficulties in refuting the accusation, he then proceeds to discuss the fact that Jews may be reluctant to accept the story of the virgin birth with its implied understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. In preaching to the Jews, one should therefore avoid starting with this issue, rather focusing on Jesus' Jewishness as portrayed in the Gospels. The ability to evince that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible nevertheless remains important. In this context, Luther discusses the passages he finds the most relevant—Gen 49:10 and Dan 9:24–27—seeking to refute the rabbinic interpretation of these texts. In his view, the date of the coming of the Messiah could not be endlessly postponed, extending to a period long after the Jews had been dispersed from the Promised Land.¹⁵ He does not criticize Jews for righteousness based on works, however.

This work demonstrates Luther's awareness of the problems of contextualization and the need to address the Jews respectfully, politely, and competently. The booklet was received very favourably by the Jewish communities.¹⁶ He nonetheless has no doubt that Jesus is the only way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. His critique of Christian harshness toward the Jews is motivated by his missiological agenda, exhibiting no traces of a "two ways" theology. While Jesus is the only Savior, Luther acknowledges and highlights Paul's statement that the Gospel is "to the Jew first" (Rom 1:16).

As is well known, Luther's expectations that the Jews would convert *en masse* were not fulfilled. His writings from the latter half of the 1520s and 1530s are pervaded by a critical tone—in part theological, emphasizing the Jews' blindness and stubbornness in their rejection of the message of the prophets and Jesus as the Messiah, and in part populist, accusing them of usury and greed. He does not target the Jews specifically, however, often classifying them—together with Turks, Gentiles, and false Christians (papists and enthusiasts)—as those far from God's grace. He also draws a parallel between papist and rabbinic biblical interpretation, regarding both as attempts to avoid facing the core of the biblical revelation.¹⁷ Although not totally despairing of the conversion of the Jews or other opponents of the gospel, he is considerably more pessimistic of the salvation of the former here than in *That Christ Was Born a Jew*.¹⁸

In the 1530s, the legal status of the Jews was an issue of debate in Germany. Luther maintained that they should be tolerated as long as they did not publicly voice their blasphemous religious opinions.¹⁹ While this view differs sharply from the modern concept of religious freedom, during this period politicians and intellectuals believed political stability to be dependent upon

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. Böhlaus, 1883–1990) (WA), 11:314–36 = Martin Luther, *Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958–1967), 45:199–229 (LW). For good summaries of the content, see Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 349–59; Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 67–73; for the historical context, see also idem, *Luthers "Judenschriften"*, 13–42.

¹⁵ Luther interprets Gen 49:10 as stating that Judah will be a sovereign country until the Messiah comes: see Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 354.

¹⁶ Haanes, "Antisemitisme i humanismens tidsalder," 37.

¹⁷ Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 37.

¹⁸ Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 359–66.

¹⁹ Ibid, 366.

religious unity. During the 1520s and 1530s, Luther was thus more tolerant than many of his contemporaries—befitting a figure condemned by ecclesial and political authorities alike for his theological convictions.

Rather than waiting quietly for the occasional polite Christian missionary to turn up, seeking to convert them, members of the Jewish community became increasingly self-confident, at times quite successfully promoting the Jewish religion among Christians.²⁰ In 1537, the spokesperson for the Jews in Germany, Josel von Rosheim, asked Luther to plead their case before the Prince of Saxony. While the Jews appear not to have forgotten Luther's exhortations for tolerance, he himself appears to have done so. Despite replying politely—addressing Rosheim as “my dear Josel”—he declines the request on the grounds that the Jews have exploited Christian goodwill and tolerance for proselytizing purposes and perpetually reject God's revelation. Just as they opposed the prophets during the biblical period, they have now been rejecting Christ and his representatives for 1500 years.²¹

Luther's Anti-Jewish Polemics

In 1538, Luther was asked to publish his theological objections against the Jews as a counter-strategy to their proselytizing efforts. This gave rise to the tract *Against the Sabbatarians*.²² Herein, Luther interprets the Jews' existence without the Temple, priests, and a king for 1500 years as divine punishment, asserting that they should ask themselves what they have done to incur God's wrath. Although the Sages maintained that the cause was their worship of the golden calf, Luther begged to differ, arguing that God had kept His promise and led them to the Promised Land despite their idolatry in the desert (66–69), also promising them a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). A good reason must exist to explain why this, as they themselves believe, has not been fulfilled (69–70). In biblical times, divine punishment was always followed by divine blessings. The blessings having been absent for 1500 years, the logical conclusion must be that the Jews are under God's wrath because of what they did 1500 years ago when they rejected Jesus as the Messiah (70–78).

Luther does not contend that the Jews are being punished by God because they crucified Jesus, however, always associating their status with their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. While the validity of this as an adequate starting point for an evaluation of Judaism is disputable, the vast majority of the Jewish people have in fact rejected Jesus as Messiah.

In this tract, Luther also addresses the question of the eternity of the Torah. While the Sages interpret Deut 18:15 as teaching that the time of the Law will end when the Messiah comes, by Luther's day the Temple had been destroyed and the cultus not practiced for 1500 years. Even the Jews must thus acknowledge that the time of the law has come to an end and been replaced by the time of the Messiah (79–80). God is eternal—not biblical law (82).

While Luther undoubtedly addresses the Jews far more polemically in *Against the Sabbatarians* than in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, the latter nonetheless also remains within the bounds of theological argumentation. Although his desire to avoid antagonizing the Jews and his hope of winning

²⁰ Ibid, 367.

²¹ See *WA Briefwechsel*, 8:89–90; Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 371.

²² *WA* 50:312–37; *LW* 47:65–98; Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 373–81.

them over are clearer in Luther's earlier work, both are the work of a theologian and biblical scholar defending his Christ-centered interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and seeking to convince his readers of its validity and cogency.

In 1542, a Jewish refutation of *Against the Sabbatarians* was published, prompting Luther's now (in)famous *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543).²³ Here, while Luther still believes the Jews to be God's chosen people, he is also convinced that their sin and disbelief mean that they lie under His wrath like the Gentiles. The fact that they are the descendants of Abraham is of no help to them any longer (140–76). On the contrary, they must be considered God's opponents, who can only be met with the power of the word of God—i.e., the fact that the Messianic promises are fulfilled in Christ and therefore cannot refer to Jewish history. Luther defends his view that Gen 49:10 is incompatible with the 1500 years of diaspora (178–96), also exegeting 2 Sam 7:5–12, 23:2–5, Psalm 89, Jer 33:17–26, Hag 2:7–10, and his earlier understanding of Dan 9:24–27 (196–254).²⁴ Rather than following the strategy Jesus adopts in Matthew 11, where he insists that his *modus operandi* corresponds to the Messianic pattern, Luther's interest lies in refuting the Jewish claim that the Messianic promises will be fulfilled in another who is yet to appear. For Luther, this is incompatible with what we know of the history of the Jews and the more than 1500 years that have passed since they governed themselves in their own country.²⁵

Luther regards the Jewish claim that the Christian doctrines of the trinity and incarnation are incompatible with the monotheism of the Hebrew Bible as bordering on blasphemy, the Jews surely knowing that the confession of divine unity in Deut 6:4 is as central for Christians as for Jews (289). In their polemics against Christians, however, the Jews went beyond these assertions, calling Jesus a magician and Mary a whore (256–60).²⁶ He refers to the curse against Christians in the Jewish Sabbath liturgy (264), but while adducing the accusations that Jews have poisoned wells and kidnapped children, does not insist that these are true (264). He is also critical of Jews who earn their living by usury (270).²⁷

For Luther, Jewish slandering of Christians is a sure sign that the Jews lie under God's wrath (291), such activity constituting a form of blasphemy that

²³ WA 53:417–552. The German text has recently been re-edited as Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen: Neu bearbeitet und kommentiert von Matthias Morgenstern* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2016) = LW 47:137–306 (page numbers in the following refer to the English edition). Öberg (*Luther and World Mission*, 382–420) provides both a summary and an extensive discussion of many of the issues related to this book. For a shorter summary, see also Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 124–34.

²⁴ The interpretation of 2 Samuel 23 is also the topic of Luther's last polemical writing against the Jews, *On the Last Words of David* (WA 54:28–100): see Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 136.

²⁵ Morgenstern ("Erwägungen," 261) draws attention to the fact that Luther interprets the Bible here as a polemics against others rather than as a liberating gospel.

²⁶ For the primary sources relating to Jewish slandering of Christians, see Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 401; Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, nn. 729, 744, 756. According to Morgenstern ("Erwägungen," 259), however, Luther gives these quotations a significance they may not bear in their original context.

²⁷ Luther has *Birkat haminim* in mind here, a "benediction" for the destruction of heretics. According to Morgenstern (Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, 188 n. 779), however, this belongs to a part of the *Amidah*/Eighteen Benedictions not recited on the Sabbath.

should not be tolerated in a Christian country. He thus advocates that Christian princes expel the Jews from their lands and their synagogues treated in the way the prophets recommended in relation to idolatrous temples— i.e., burned “in honor of our Lord and of Christendom.”²⁸ If they do not distance themselves from the sins of the Jews in this way, Christians may themselves be burdened with the guilt induced by these sins (268). While he also maintains that Rabbis should not be allowed to teach and Jews in general to travel (269), he does not seek to suppress their religious activities *per se*. In fact, in some ways he is a precursor of the Christian Zionist movement, recommending that they move to the land of their ancestors where they can worship freely without burdening Christians with their lies and blasphemy (288).

The primary purpose of *On the Jews and Their Lies* is to preach the Gospel and convince the Jews of Jesus’ messiahship, however. Here, his argument closely resembles that in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, even if “polemic and severity have a tendency to bubble up between the positive statements.”²⁹ Although he has few expectations of success, as a Christian preacher he cannot but proclaim Jesus as the manifestation of divine grace and Savior of all, both Jews and Gentiles. He concludes with a prayer for the conversion of the Jews directed to the only one who has the power to fulfil it: “May Christ, our dear Lord, convert them mercifully and preserve us steadfastly and immovably in the knowledge of him, which is eternal life. Amen” (306).

On the Jews and Their Lies is generally regarded as the most problematic of Luther’s books concerning the Jews. This is due both to its theological argumentation and the extent to which Luther makes use of anti-Jewish stereotypes. In my view, the principal difficulty it poses is not Luther’s defense of a Christian and Christocentric reading of the Hebrew Bible or his prayer for the conversion of the Jews—principles adopted by the apostles and thus par for the course for a Christian theologian and church leader—but the fact that he does not appeal to the sanction of the divine word and the authority it provides to demand that fellow human beings also obey it. He rather claims to know that the word of God condemns others—in such a way as to let himself and his fellow Christians off the hook. Departing from the law/gospel hermeneutics of a theologian of the cross, he thus allows himself the liberty of propagating a rather heavy dose of “theology of glory.” For all his heavy-handed polemics, Luther usually avoids this by showing at least some awareness of the hypocrisy Jesus refers to in the parable of the mote in one’s eye (Matt 7:3). Much of what he writes in *On the Jews and Their Lies* ignores this axiom. The book is devoted to the divine condemnation of the Jews rather than the law-gospel dialectic with respect to humanity—including the Jews. This fact is exacerbated by Luther’s relaxing of his customary strict documentation of what he attacks. The result is both merciless and indefensible.

A few months after the publication of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, the smaller tract *On the Tetragrammaton and the Generations of Christ* saw the light of day.³⁰ Luther is very critical of Jewish speculations concerning the name of God and its Hebrew renderings, which, once again, he interprets as a sign

²⁸ “... unserm Herrn und der Christenheit zu ehren” (WA 53:523).

²⁹ Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 413.

³⁰ WA 53:579–648. To the best of my knowledge, no English translation of this work exists. Page numbers in the following refer to the WA edition.

that the Jews lie under God's wrath (600–609).³¹ In the second part, Luther addresses the Jewish claim that Mary was not a descendant of David. The New Testament solves this problem by stating that Mary's betrothal and marriage with Joseph mean that her son belongs to the house of David. The genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 thus follow Joseph's lineage. Not satisfied with this answer, Luther claims that Rom 1:3 together with Gal 4:4 attests to Mary's Davidic ancestry as well (612). Here, he thus returns to his earlier practice of refuting Jewish claims on the basis of biblical exegesis. While he makes no recommendations for harsh political measures against the Jews, this work is rife with polemical slander.³²

Luther and the Jews: A Critical Assessment

The Christian Church has a long history of anti-Jewish polemics. While Luther undoubtedly forms part of this tradition, assessing his precise place in it is not an easy task.³³ The fact that his writings were adduced by the proponents of the worst ethnocide against Jews ever committed inextricably links his name with the Holocaust. Neither the grounds of his criticism of the Jews nor the measures he recommended employing against them bear the slightest resemblance to the atrocities committed by the Nazis, however.³⁴ The events of the twentieth century must thus be excluded from any historical evaluation of his position.³⁵ He nevertheless mixes theologically relevant arguments with polemical slander in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish the wheat from the chaff—as is also true of his writings against papists, enthusiasts, and Turks. Luther does not always conform to his own advice in the Catechism, where he tells us to “interpret everything they [our neighbours] do in the best possible light.”³⁶

If we “turn the other cheek” and seek to give him the benefit of the doubt, can we assess his complicated relationship with the Jews in a way that is both fair and strict? Hardly any doubt exists that Luther's main objection against the Jews is the fact that they did not accept Jesus as Messiah. For Luther, Jesus' messiahship and the perception of the story of his life, death and resurrection as the revelation of divine grace is the key to the understanding of God, the world, and human beings. The central tenet of the Christian faith as proclaimed by the New Testament and Christian creedal statements, Luther put his extensive biblical scholarship to work in defending and maintaining this position against Jewish exegetical traditions. The consistent Jewish rejection of this faith

³¹ Morgenstern (“Erwägungen,” 263–64) suggests that Luther's reflections on the Tetragrammaton are influenced by rabbinic discussions. This is certainly a possibility as far as Luther's philological competence is concerned.

³² Kaufmann (*Luthers Juden*, 134) refers to this as “die wüteste and sprachlich schmutzigste Schrift, die Luther je geschrieben [hat]” (the worst and linguistically dirtiest thing Luther ever wrote).

³³ Oversimplifications such as “Luther's anti-Semitism” (cf. Gritsch) or “Luther's anti-Judaism” should thus be avoided.

³⁴ As Kaufmann (*Luthers Juden*, 12) demonstrates, the Nazi compilations of anti-Semitic quotations from Luther's works evince absolutely no understanding of what Luther actually seeks to say. The same is true of the Norwegian Nazi translation of *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

³⁵ See the objection to this argument in n. 2, however.

³⁶ See Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 353; Morgenstern, “Erwägungen,” 260.

both saddened and angered him, causing him to oscillate between finding it a challenge to Christian witness and a sign that the Jews lie under the wrath of God. The former point of view led him to champion a compassion and understanding for the need for contextualization that compares favourably with the attitude exhibited by most of his contemporaries, also giving the Jews of his day cause for gratitude. At the same time, however, he believed that this view entitled him to add his own invectives, not pausing to reflect on the fact that if the Jews were indeed under divine wrath his personal judgment was irrelevant. At times, he thus allowed himself to dip his pen into the deep well of unfounded traditional anti-Jewish sentiments.

The theological problem was compounded by political issues. In this context, Luther's view is predicated upon the concept of *corpus Christianorum*, according which the existence of another faith within Christendom is an anomaly that can only be tolerated as long as the Christian faith is not openly challenged. This principle is a general one, applying not only to the Jews but also to Christians who refused to learn the Catechism.³⁷ To measure this attitude by the yardstick of modern religious pluralism is anachronistic; Luther did not live in a liberal democracy and would not have understood the concept. He nevertheless upheld the axiom that force is inappropriate in matters of faith—whether the target is a lazy Christian or unbelieving Jew. Although this fact does not justify the harshness of the measures he recommends in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, it may help us understand some of the reasons behind it.

In the early 1520s, Luther was optimistic that the gospel would prevail and Christendom would be renewed. Just as Rome's walls were crumbling, so the Jewish ones might follow suit. This stance allowed him to earnestly hope for their conversion, inspired by Paul's zeal for his fellow Jews in Romans. The Jews resisted both his missiological approach and his exegetical arguments, however, meeting Christians with slanderous polemics of their own. Maintaining his theological convictions, his zeal for their conversion gave way to an anger over their stubbornness that was at variance with some of his most deeply-held theological convictions.³⁸ Never one to hide his lamp under a basket, he gave voice to this position with a venom that today may send a chill down the spine of even the most hardened of his readers.

Even the great reformer himself was thus dependent on salvation by grace, his attitude toward the Jews certainly not bringing him any merit of his own or in Christ.

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³⁷ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 348–49.

³⁸ For the consistency in Luther's attitude toward the Jews, see Kaufmann, *Luthers "Judenschriften"*, 128.

Book Review

Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016)

Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2017)

Rich Robinson

We have here a pair of timely books, both featuring the name Gerald McDermott, Anglican Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School. The edited volume is a collection of scholarly essays; the authored one is a popular and personal statement. Both make the case that the people of Israel, as well as the land of Israel, need to be seriously reckoned with in Christian theology and that such a reckoning cannot be confined to dispensationalism.

To the academic work first. *The New Christian Zionism* is an important argument both for the very existence of the State of Israel and the theological place of that state in God's plan. Its importance lies in large measure in going beyond the scholarly "near obsession with dispensationalism" (Kindle edition, location 650) when it comes to discussions of Israel and Zionism. As stated in the Introduction, "the purpose of these prudential arguments—political and legal and moral—is to undergird a new *theological* argument for the twenty-first century" (ibid, 88 [original emphasis]).

In the Introduction, McDermott, an Anglican, lays out what the New Christian Zionism (NCZ) is not and what it is. As emphasized several times throughout the book, NCZ is not connected with traditional dispensationalism. This is stressed not to denigrate dispensationalism but to give a fresh start to the discussion, in which the point at issue runs counter to the views of many non-Zionists. The argument is that *both* the people *and* the land of Israel are central in the biblical narrative. Ultimately, any prudential arguments—and the book will offer several—are a foundation for the theological arguments to be made.

The Introduction also highlights what NCZ is *not*. It is not dispensationalism, as stated earlier; nor is it an outgrowth of nineteenth-century nationalisms (in which case it would merely be a recent political movement). Nor is it something propounded only by Christians as opposed to Jews, nor is it the theft of Arab land, nor is it racism/apartheid as many have suggested, nor is it a call for a theocracy. The chapter ends with two striking images: NCZ is put in opposition to a "geographical-docetic" view, anti-Zionism being called "ecclesiology and eschatology without incarnation" (ibid, 380). The rest of the book unpacks these remarkable assertions.

The book is then divided into several parts. **Part One** is historical, comprising two chapters by McDermott. Chapter 1 gives a history of supersessionism, beginning with an overview of the centrality of Israel in various strands of the New Testament, then continuing to the changes beginning in the second century and onwards, including the period of the medieval Reformers. Although this history is well known by many, some will be surprised to learn that seventeenth/eighteenth-century deists also espoused

negative views of Judaism, influencing thinkers such as Voltaire, Kant, and Schleiermacher. While recent work on Paul and the historical Jesus has led to a re-embracing of the place of the Jewish people in God's purposes, this significantly makes no reference to the land.

In this first chapter, almost in passing McDermott mentions some key differences between the Old Christian Zionism (OCZ) and NCZ: Israel is essential not only to eschatology (OCZ) but also to soteriology (NCZ)—not just *where* Christians will be (OCZ) but what they *are* (NCZ). I would have liked to have seen this placed in the introductory chapter where the distinctive features of NCZ are presented.

Chapter 2 presents a history of Christian Zionism (CZ). The big message here is that CZ predates dispensationalism by centuries. Well-known critics of (Christian) Zionism—Gary Burge, Stephen Sizer, and Timothy P. Weber—are critiqued and to an extent also Robert O. Smith, the work of Donald Lewis being cited in contrast. Useful charts correlate the occurrences of “covenant” and “land” in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. This is followed by a chronological history: the New Testament period and early and medieval Christianity up until the major change that occurred with Origen and Augustine and later on Luther and Calvin (although exceptions continued in this period as well).

In the sixteenth century, a confluence of social factors led to Great Britain's embrace of what ultimately became Zionism, not least because English Christians held to a sense of their own election, making it possible to segue into seeing a role for elected Israel within history.

The seventeenth century saw the rise of Puritanism, a number of Puritan authors understanding the Bible to speak of the Jews' literal return to Zion. Increase Mather, incidentally, was one of the first to place the restoration to the land before a national conversion took place.

Postmillennialists of the eighteenth century, including Jonathan Edwards, continued to argue that the Jews would return physically to the land, their nineteenth-century counterparts following suit. Even Karl Barth was sympathetic. All this evidence is well marshaled against the “near obsession” with dispensationalism that modern critics of CZ share.

Part Two examines the relevant biblical material, with chapters on methodology, Matthew, Luke-Acts, and Paul. Craig Blaising's chapter on biblical hermeneutics presents four criteria by which hermeneutical systems can be evaluated: comprehensiveness, congruency, consistency, and coherence. Readings of a narrative are generated from textual clues. Blaising first addresses texts used by supersessionists and the latter's points of failure, then NT texts that explicitly relate to Israel and its covenant promises, particularly those in Luke-Acts and Romans 9–11. Finally, he discusses the pre-consummate nature of the current return to the Land, which is of a piece with previous non-consummate returns, all of which are part of God's particular providence over Israel rather than His general providence. The development of a holistic narrative approach to the canon is in stark contrast with old-school dispensational arguments which often argued merely (and many would say, naively), for a “literal” reading of the texts.

Joel Willitts examines Zionism in Matthew, presenting a persuasive case for regarding the land as constituting one of Matthew's central theological concerns. He builds his case on the basis of seven criteria: 1) Matthew's Jewish (i.e., OT and Second Temple) context; 2) the geographical orientation revealed

in his narrative structure; 3) his Davidic messianism, which serves as a “controlling figure” in the Gospel; 4) his “turfed” kingdom, including arguments for translating *ge* as *land* (of Israel) rather than *earth*; 5) his positive posture towards Jerusalem and the Temple; 6) his atonement theology (drawing on Catherine Sider Hamilton and, for me, the most fascinating aspect of this chapter: the idea that innocent blood shed in the land, running as a theme in Matthew and other Jewish literature, leads to both judgment of exile and restoration); and 7) his eschatology, Matthean theology of restoration presupposing Gentile inclusion as well.

Mark Kinzer addresses the question vis-à-vis Luke-Acts. *Contra* Gary Burge (whom he cites on various occasions), he contends that numerous textual clues show us that Luke-Acts is centered on Jerusalem, particularly the dual aspect of its impending judgment yet eventual restoration. His closely-argued textual analysis includes an assessment of features unique to Luke’s gospel, an analysis of structural elements in Luke-Acts, and mutually-reinforcing intertextual clues in various passages. Paul’s three-fold “going to the Gentiles” is shown to indicate a time when Israel has not collectively said “yes” to Jesus and hence only a partial fulfillment of salvation for “Israel and the nations” can take place. Ultimately, however, Israel will also return to faith and bring about the full prophetic fulfillment in a physical restoration of the kingdom centered in Jerusalem. This reading also takes account of the fact that Acts ends in Rome.

David Rudolph tackles the place of the land in Paul. First, he addresses arguments against particularity in Paul: that the land has been universalized in Christ, Jewish identity is a matter of indifference in Christ, and that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Then—using the acronym GUCCI, which brought a much-needed smile to my face in this book full of close arguments—he discusses the arguments in favor of particularity, namely, the gifts, uniqueness, and calling of Israel, the confirmation of the promises to Israel, and the irevocability of Israel’s election. Much time is spent in Romans, as well as other passages. Of particular interest to me were remarks on Rom 4:13 (which may well refer to Abraham inheriting the people rather than the land) and comparison with Second Temple Jewish texts. Moving in a similar circle of thought as Paul, the latter expressly include a future place for the land alongside their universalism.

Part Three addresses theology and the ensuing implications. These four chapters relate to theology and the churches (Mark Tooley), theology and politics (Robert Benne); theology and law (Robert Nicholson), and theology and morality (Shadi Khalloul).

Tooley provides us with a needed “tour” of the responses of mainline Protestant to Zionism and CZ. Much of this discussion relates to the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA and its predecessors), some attention being paid to the UCC, Methodists, and other denominations. “Preserving a robust Christian Zionism among evangelicals and others requires understanding what killed it in institutional mainline Protestantism” (ibid, 3128). This is a very useful chronological survey that gives an idea of the sea changes that have taken place in these denominations—from pro-Israel to guardedly “balanced” or anti (although some have also rejected proposed BDS measures). The influence of liberation theology is usefully explained, as also the difference between harder (mainline) and softer (evangelical) critiques of

Zionism. In this chapter, I found some of the subheadings confusing: for instance, “Christian Realism” is used without explaining that the term is associated with Reinhold Niebuhr. While the final section is entitled “Avoiding the Mainline Protestant Trajectory,” it is more descriptive and suggestive than programmatic. I had hoped for a more vigorous explanation of what evangelicals can actually do to avoid going the mainline route. The history presented in this chapter is nevertheless vital “raw material” for moving forward.

Benne’s chapter on Reinhold Niebuhr is outstanding. Although Niebuhr may not be familiar to North American evangelicals, he is a figure critical in the story of CZ. In agreement with Niebuhr, Benne lets the early-twentieth-century American theological speak for himself before adding his own thoughts. He introduces us to Niebuhr’s support for Zionism and his philosophy of “realism” in the political realm which, in a Christian context, becomes “Christian realism.” This philosophy is related to Israel, particularly in the State’s democratic aspects. He then complements Niebuhr’s thought with a theological justification for CZ. Although Niebuhr did not fully embrace the liberal and/or dispensationalist CZ of his day, Benne suggests that he might well have supported the form outlined in this book. This is a fine introduction to Niebuhr’s thought in relation to Zionism and Israel.

Nicholson’s excellent chapter orients readers who may not know much about the ins and outs of international law to the subject. After discussing the nature of international law—frequently misunderstood by those who appeal to it—he analyses the case of the Palestinian territories, addressing the UN resolutions in general and the infamous Resolution 242 in particular. This chapter provides a much-needed perspective.

Khalloul’s personal perspective as an “Israeli Christian of Aramean descent” (ibid, 4592) is supplemented by a history of the Arameans, a discussion of the theological reasons why this community supports Israel, and a positive and vigorous argument for Israel’s “remarkable” civil rights record with respect to its minorities (ibid, 4780).

Part Four is really the “so what?” of the book. Darrell Bock summarizes each of the contributions before offering some points for future direction. The latter include the need for CZ to strive for balance in its position, a call for better theological work moving forward, recognition of CZ as less nationalistic than some claim and/or perceive, the imperative of focusing more on the hope of reconciliation and “nondiscriminatory” justice, and the importance of articulating Israel’s “international and legal right” to her own territory and sovereign nationhood. Of special interest is Bock’s championing of the digital and visual advocacy of CZ in light of the shift away from reading. He also notes that public conferences and private discussions will be necessary to further the cause of NCZ.

In his concluding chapter, McDermott contends that NCZ should change translation and exegesis, alter our understanding of historical theology (e.g., the impact of supersession on past theology), challenge systematic theology to make a place for Israel and the land, help reflection on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and influence Jewish-Christian dialogue. After unpacking these points at length, he then offers five propositions: a) Israel shows us who we are and who God is; b) sacred history is not over; c) eschatological fulfillment is both revealed and hidden; d) this fulfillment is not in its final stage; and e) Israel and the church are integrally joined.

This book is vital reading and a measured and crucial contribution to a discussion too often marked by the proverbial heat rather than light. I close by making a few observations. Firstly (and from my North American vantage point), as several of the contributors point out the church has lost sight of the larger narrative of Scripture. A typical church service today, particularly among newer congregations, tends to give sermons on topical issues, ignoring a more holistic biblical education or perhaps leaving it to small groups—a dicey proposition. As a result, the Jewish people and Israel are off the radar in many cases, the theological attention paid to Jews and Israel in God’s plan thus coming out of left field for many. Somehow, the church needs to be encouraged to embrace the larger narrative. This failing is ironic given the postmodern emphasis upon story and narrative (granted that in non-Christian circles, this usually means personal or community narrative, for there is no overarching metanarrative).

For churches that still retain a strong denominational identity, recognition of their denomination’s past involvement in Jewish missions could be a starting place. Although support for Jewish evangelization is not the same as support for modern Israel, it can nevertheless provide a context in which the latter can take root. Similarly, interest could be reinforced in urban areas, where many Christians have Jewish friends and coworkers.

Secondly, it is important to include non-North American viewpoints in future discussions, only one chapter not representing this perspective in this collection (Khalloul).

InterVarsity Press should be commended for publishing this book after putting out two of Stephen Sizer’s volumes, which take a very different approach. Hereby, it has restored some balance to the conversation.

* * *

McDermott has also provided us with a shorter, more accessible book that is part personal chronicle and part popular-level argument for the recovery of a non-dispensational Christian Zionism.

The Introduction takes us on the author’s own journey from replacement theology to Christian Zionism. Much of the rest of the book is a briefer recap of material treated in greater depth in *The New Christian Zionism*. Chapter 1 traces the supersessionist majority viewpoint down through church history, Chapter 2 asking whether the New Testament in fact teaches that the church is the New Israel. Chapter 3—provocatively entitled “Those Who Got It Right”—tracks the opposing minority viewpoint through church history. Chapters 4 and 5 look at the Old and New Testament respectively, building a positive case for what they say about Israel the people and Israel the land, focusing on God’s covenant with the Jewish people. Chapter 6 and 7 deal with political issues (the Palestinians and international law) and theological objections, the latter also looking at the book of Hebrews (not covered in the edited volume). In the “so what?” Chapter 8, McDermott takes his senior pastor Mark Graham’s own journey as the framework, suggesting how a renewed understanding of Christian Zionism can affect our reading of the Bible and history, how we approach theology, and how we view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—matters dealt with at more length in the collection. In the concluding chapter (Chapter 9), McDermott offers six proposals for how this new understanding can shape Christian faith, five of which he discussed in the earlier book. The sixth is that

“the history of the Jews shows us the mystery of iniquity”—i.e., the history of anti-Semitism shows us the depth of human sin without our ever being able to quite explain it.

Herein, we catch additional glimpses of McDermott’s exegesis and theology. Of particular interest is his analysis of the expression the “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16— neither the church nor (as some have argued) Jewish believers in Jesus but the totality of (largely) nonbelieving Israel, or Israel including Gentiles as “associate members” (i.e., godfearers) (Chapter 2), his assertion that both Jesus and Paul in fact affirmed and observed the Law (although he does not address the issues of whether Jewish believers today should keep the Law, however that may be defined (Chapter 5), his understanding of the “new” covenant as a “renewal” of the existing covenant (Chapter 7), and his questioning of whether, if Christian anti-Semitism prevented Jews from seeing Christ, Jesus could have found another way to reveal himself to them such that they “confessed with their lips and believed in their hearts” (Chapter 9).

Israel Matters provides a good lay-level introduction to (non-dispensational) Christian Zionism in the context of the author’s personal discoveries. I am not sure whether its briefer format will help change the thinking of those who do not share (or are not open to) McDermott’s viewpoint; *The New Christian Zionism* may well in fact prove to be the more go-to book, with its more in-depth discussion and broader perspective. At the least, however, *Israel Matters* should provoke a healthy conversation and function as an entrée to the more academic book. Read them both!

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From the Israeli Scene

David Serner

This year, Israel celebrates its massive victory in 1967 with concerts, parades, and speeches full of flamboyant language. Jerusalem is unified. The eternal city is finally under Jewish control. It has been 50 years filled with joy and controversy. Jerusalem Day is a dichotomous event. On one side, there is the great joy of victory and celebration over the fact that Jews now have unrestricted access to the Western Wall. A sign at the entrance of the Kotel plaza announces to visitors that here they can experience the “everlasting presence of God” dwelling herein. Jerusalem Day is an opportunity to celebrate being a Jew irrespective of which government is in power. On the other hand, it stirs up emotions and scorn for the defeated—together with the recognition that all is not well in Jerusalem despite the fact that it is under Jewish administration once again.

It is no secret that 1967 was a defining year in the Middle East. It is a continuing marker for the relationship between Israel, the Palestinians, other Arab countries, and the international community. Although the victory did not resolve the tense conflict, it laid the groundwork for the current situation with the infamous triple “No” given by the Arab League in September of that same year. Former General Shlomo Gazit (the first Israeli leader of the civil administration in the West Bank after the Six Day War) recently said that the military does not possess the solution. The security forces and the military cannot take fundamental strategic decisions. When the politicians do not provide clear direction as to how a situation should be resolved, the security forces can only ensure that the State endures; it cannot solve the situation. This was true of 1967 and remains true today.

Ephraim Kishon’s book *So Sorry We Won!*, published in 1967, still captures the unsettled attitude in the Land. After the great victory, one well-known Israeli Messianic leader explained that the believers in the Land had a feeling of “wow,” being certain that Messiah must return soon in light of the amazing things that were occurring. A great sense of euphoria pervaded the body of believers, many holding out high expectations as to what might follow soon. To a large extent, this feeling has been replaced by a great “ow.” The euphoria and hope have been confronted by reality. While there is still hope that the Messiah will return, it is now due to the fact that things have become more difficult and challenging.

Some local Messianic leaders wonder if wielding power over a people who do not wish to be ruled by Jews negatively impacts not only the ruled people group but also the ruling people, creating an unhealthy distance. The next generation of Messianic believers is also imbued with hope, however. They form an integral part of Israeli society and demonstrate a strong devotion to their faith in Yeshua and their congregations alike. Some Arabic-speaking Christian leaders have also expressed hope, recognizing that there are good and faithful people on every side. When Arab-speaking believers are invited to celebrate Shabbat and accept the invitation, they embrace fellow believers rather than a system.

While the solution seems far off and the conflict as entrenched as ever as we reflect on the last 50 years, we can nevertheless celebrate Jerusalem as embodying the hope for salvation in our Messiah. As described in Rev 21:23–24, Jerusalem is a foreshadowing of our future redemption: “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.”