

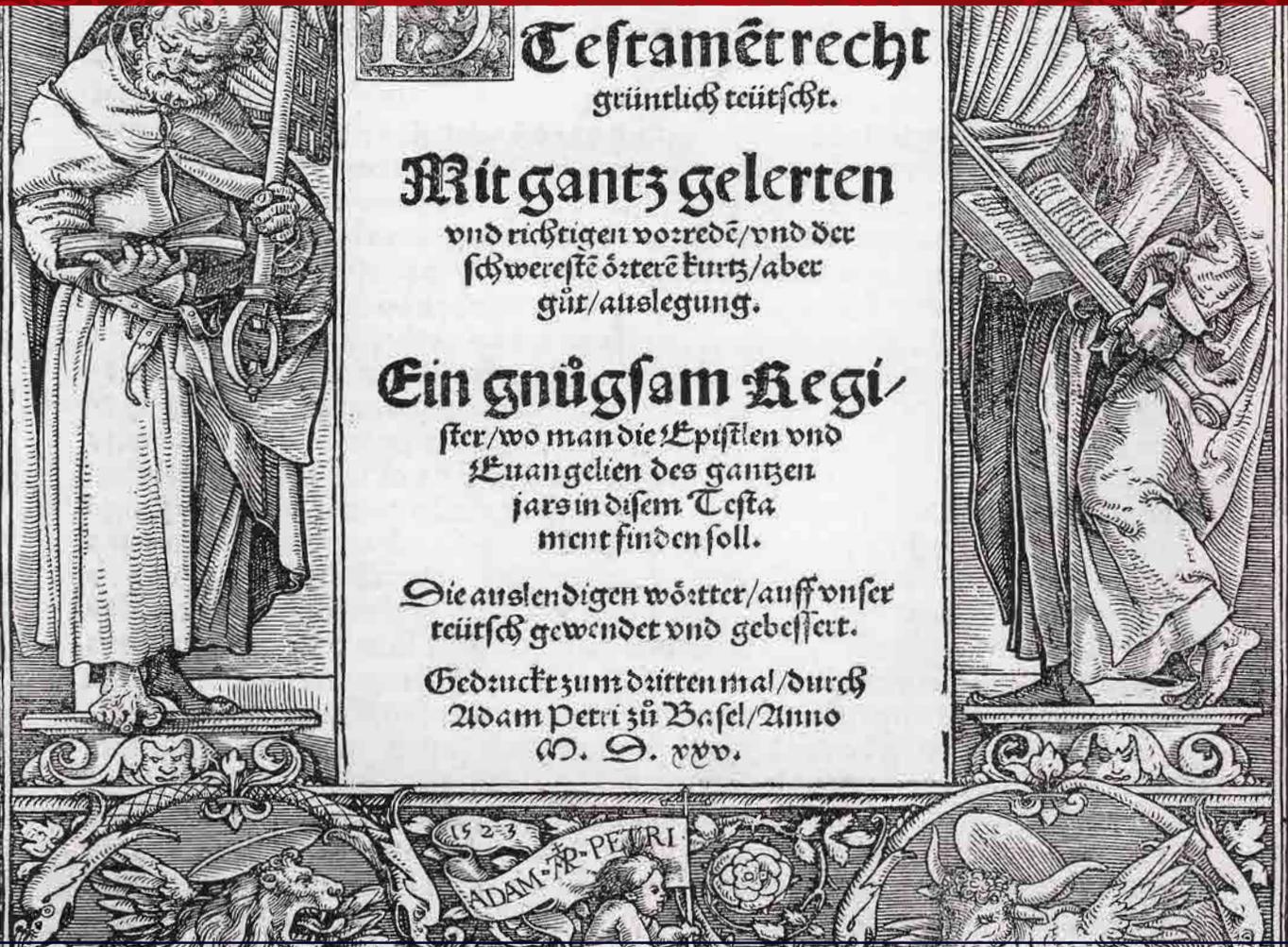


Issue 78, 2017



# MISHKAN

*A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People*



**T**estamentrecht  
gründlich teütsch.

**M**it gantz gelerten  
vnd richtigen vorredē/vnd der  
schwerestē örterē kurtz/aber  
güt/auslegung.

**E**in gnügsam Regi-  
ster/wo man die Epistlen vnd  
Euangelien des gantzen  
jars in disem Testa-  
ment finden soll.

Die auslendigen wörter/auff vnser  
teütsch gewendet vnd gebessert.

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# MISHKAN

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# MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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## 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.

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. Messianic Jews are asking how one can abhor many of Luther's 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, December 2017

# Martin Luther and the *Toledot Yeshu* Tradition

Antti Laato

Luther's attitude towards the Jews is a topic that has frequently been discussed in popular presentations, the media, and newspapers, a great amount of material in his writings demonstrating his hostility towards them.<sup>1</sup> While some positive statements about the Jews occur in his earlier works, he is regularly condemned for the anti-Jewish texts he wrote at the end of his life.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of these, he is often labeled an anti-Semite. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the Nazi regime used his anti-Jewish works in its propaganda against the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

The label is nonetheless problematic. While the Nazis wanted to kill all Jews including those who had converted to Christianity, much evidence suggests that Luther would have accepted Jewish converts.<sup>4</sup> It is thus better to distinguish Luther's anti-Jewish sentiment from Nazi anti-Semitism. The term "anti-Jewish" (not anti-Semitic) is also used in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* article when it refers to Luther's problematic works against Jews.<sup>5</sup>

How to explain Luther's anti-Jewish sentiments, especially in his later years has been a difficult problem. For example, the above-mentioned article in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* does not contain any clear explanation for the change in his attitude: "Although appreciating Luther's apparent kindness toward them, the Jews resisted his message. Whether through irritation at their refusal to accept his truth or for some other reason, Luther grew increasingly hostile toward the Jews."<sup>6</sup>

Recently, Thomas Kaufmann has contextualized Luther's anti-Jewish tirades in the social framework of a Christian Europe in which anti-Jewish statements were generally popular. He also associates them with his fear that Judaism prevented Christians from properly understanding Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Another important work is that of Ingemar Öberg (written in Swedish) where he points out that Luther's anti-Jewish texts in fact end with an exhortation to pray for the Jews.<sup>8</sup>

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion of the subject by examining

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<sup>1</sup> For a selection of Luther's texts on the Jews, see, for example B. Schramm and K. I. Stjerna, eds., *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The most important of his anti-Jewish works are the *Letter Against the Sabbatarians* (1538), *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543]), and *The Ineffable Name* (1543).

<sup>3</sup> See recently, C. J. Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> As we shall see below, he also exhorted his readers to pray for the Jews in some of his later writings.

<sup>5</sup> J.E. Heller & M. Ansbache, "Luther, Martin", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 13 ed. by M. Berenbaum & F. Skolnik, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 271-272.

<sup>6</sup> S.v. "Luther, Martin," *EJ* 13: 271–72.

<sup>7</sup> T. Kaufmann, *Luthers "Judenschriften": Ein Beitrag zu ihrer historischen Kontextualisierung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); idem, *Luthers Juden* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> I. Öberg, *Luther och Världsmissionen* (Åbo: Abo Akad, 1991), 426–556.

the influence of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition upon Luther's writings.<sup>9</sup> These stories parody the Gospels' account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.<sup>10</sup> While the various accounts are not textually related (no Ur-text being reconstructable), they address similar themes. The earliest versions appear to date to the Byzantine period.<sup>11</sup> According to Meerson and Schäfer, the first clear example of the existence of a written version of *Toledot Yeshu* appears in Agobard's (ca. 769–840 CE) reference to a Jewish story about Jesus.<sup>12</sup> While they acknowledge that some evidence exists of Jewish counter-arguments against Jesus in patristic literature, they argue that none of these contains any details to prove that a written version of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition existed.<sup>13</sup>

According to the *Toledot Yeshu*, Miriam was an adulteress, Jesus thus being a bastard (*mamzer*, and even *bar niddâ*). The early Yemenite version recounts how Jesus stole the Ineffable Name from the Temple, using it to perform miracles. This story became popular in many later versions of the *Toledot Yeshu*. The tradition also relates how Jesus led his disciples astray. When he was condemned to death, he attempted to escape but was eventually captured and executed. After his death, his body disappeared, his disciples thus beginning to declare that he had risen from the dead. When his body was found, they refused to recant their beliefs.

Some of the objections to Jesus recall those recorded in the Gospels (cf. Matt 12:22–32, 27:62–66, 28:11–15). Others accord with talmudic traditions—Jesus

<sup>9</sup> For the various versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition, see now P. Meerson and P. Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, 2 vols., TSAJ 159 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> For the counter-narrative genre in Jewish sources, see A. Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 22–49; D. Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*," *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–45. For the use of parody in late antiquity Jewish texts, see H. M. Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (TSAJ 139, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), esp. on pp. 137–212. Christians did not always recognize Jewish intellectual irony. This circumstance is exemplified in Isak Profiat Duran's letter 'Al Tehi ka-'Avotekha (Do not Become like Your Fathers) to his friend David En-Bonet Bon-Giorno, who had converted to Christianity in Spain 1391 after being convinced by the arguments put forward by Pablo de Santa Maria (Paul Burgos [ca.1350–1435]). Unused to the genre, medieval Christians adduced Duran's lauding of his friend's decision to convert and his acceptance of Christian ideas as evidence of his own Christian conviction: see F. E. Talmage, ed., *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York: KTAV, 1975), 119–23; S. Krauss and W. Horbury, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy From the Earliest Times to 1789. Vol. I: History*, TSAJ 56, ed. W. Horbury (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck, 1995), 211.

<sup>11</sup> S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: Calvary, 1902); P. Schäfer, M. Meerson, and Y. Deutsch, eds. *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited*, TSAJ 143 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); H. Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 23/172 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 483–84.

<sup>12</sup> Resembling the text preserved in Aramaic documents from the Cairo Geniza, this corresponds to the tradition of the Early Oriental A in Group I. See also P. Schäfer, "Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited*, ed. P. Schäfer, M. Meerson, and Y. Deutsch, TSAJ 143 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 27–48.

<sup>13</sup> See, however, A. Laato, "A Cold Case Reopened: A Jewish Source on Christianity Used by Celsus and the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature—From Counter-Exegetical Arguments to Full-Blown Counter-Story," forthcoming in *Studia Patristica* 94.

being called the son of Pandira or Pantira, for example (cf. t. Hullin 2:24; b. Shabb. 104b). As Origen's *Contra Celsum* demonstrates, this claim was also known by pagan philosophers.<sup>14</sup>

Designed for a Jewish audience, the *Toledot Yeshu* literature sought to warn Jews against falling for the heresies the Christian Church had adopted on the basis of the Hebrew Bible. The Christian community responded by adducing it as an example of Jewish perfidy and duplicity. Let us now examine its possible influence upon Luther's anti-Jewish writings.

Luther's most well-known anti-Jewish writing is *Against the Jews and their Lies* (1543).<sup>15</sup> This opens as follows:

I had made up my mind to write no more either about the Jews or against them. But since I learned that those miserable and accursed people do not cease to lure to themselves even us, that is, the Christians, I have published this little book, so that I might be found among those who opposed such poisonous activities of the Jews and who warned the Christians to be on their guard against them. I would not have believed that a Christian could be duped by the Jews into taking their exile and wretchedness upon himself. However, the devil is the god of the world, and wherever God's word is absent he has an easy task, not only with the weak but also with the strong. May God help us. Amen. Grace and peace in the Lord. Dear sir and good friend, I have received a treatise in which a Jew engages in dialog with a Christian. He dares to pervert the scriptural passages which we cite in testimony to our faith, concerning our Lord Christ and Mary his mother, and to interpret them quite differently. With this argument he thinks he can destroy the basis of our faith.<sup>16</sup>

Here, Luther refers to a Jewish text that polemicizes against Jesus and Mary, without identifying it explicitly. Later, he cites the Jewish argument that Jesus

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<sup>14</sup> See further A. Laato, "Celsus, *Toledot Yeshu*, and Early Traces of Apology for the Virgin Birth of Jesus," in *Jewish Studies in the Nordic Countries Today*, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 27, ed. B. Dahla and R. Illman (Åbo: Donner Institute 2016) 61–80; idem, "A Cold Case Reopened."

<sup>15</sup> Hereafter WA. Worth noting is the article of Sherman who explains reasons for publishing Luther's work in English. See F. Sherman, "Luther and the Jews: An American Perspective," in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Münster 1997—Vorträge aus dem Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum*, Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 2, ed. F. Siegert and J. U. Kalms (Münster: LIT, 1998), 210–17.

<sup>16</sup> *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 47 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 137. Original: Jch hatte mir wol furgenommen, nichts mehr, weder von den [3] Jueden noch wider die Jueden zuschreiben. Aber weil ich erfahren, [4] das die Elenden, heillosten leute nicht auffhoeren, auch [5] uns, das ist die Christen, an sich zu locken, Hab ich dis [6] Buechlin lassen ausgehen, Damit ich unter denen erfunden [7] werde, die solchem gifftigen furnemen der Jueden widerstand gethan und die [8] Christen gewarnet haben, sich fur den Jueden zu hueten. Jch hette nicht gemeint, [9] das ein Christen solt von den Jueden sich lassen nerren, in jr Elend und [10] jamer zu treten. Aber der Teuffel ist der Welt Gott, Und wo Gottes wort [11] nicht ist, hat er gut machen, nicht allein bey den schwachen, Sondern auch [12] bey den starcken. Gott helffe uns, Amen. [13] ... [14] [Bl. Aij] Gnnade und Friede im HErrn. Lieber Herr und Guter Freund, [15] *Jch habe eine Schrifft empfangen*, darinnen ein Juede mit einem [16] Christen gesprech hat, der sich unterstehet, die sprueche der Schrifft [17] (So wir fueren *fur unsern Glauben, von unserm Herrn Christo und Maria, [18] seiner mutter*) zuverkeren und weit anders zudeuten, Damit er meinet, unsers [19] glaubens Grund umbzustossen.

was the bastard son of the prostitute Mary (“Darnach heissen sie jn ein Hurkind und seine Mutter Maria eine Hure, den sie mit einem Schmid im Ehebruch gehabt”) (WA 53:514). The source from which Luther cited can be inferred from a passage in *The Ineffable Name* (WA 53), composed later in the same year 1543:

In my most recent booklet I promised to write more about the lies and blasphemies that the frenzied, miserable Jews perpetrate about their *Shem Hamphoras*, about which Porchetus writes in his book, *Victoria*. Herewith, I intend to have done just that, in order to honor our faith and to oppose the Devil’s lies of the Jews. I do this so that anyone who wants to become a Jew might see what kinds of beautiful articles they have to believe and adhere to if they want to be among the damned Jews. As I pointed out in my previous booklet, it is not my intention to write against the Jews, as if I hoped to convert them. Therefore I did not call that book *Against the Jews*, but rather *On the Jews and their Lies*, so that we Germans might know from history what a Jew is, and thus warn our Christians about them, as one would warn about the Devil himself, and also to strengthen and honor our faith. I do not write to convert the Jews, for that is about as possible as converting the Devil.<sup>17</sup>

Luther refers here to an earlier work and then gives a more detailed explanation of what angers him so greatly. He then cites a long quotation from the version of the *Toledot Yeshu* published by Porchetus Salvaticis in 1303 as *Victoria Porcheti adversus impios Hebreos (Victory over the Ungodly Hebrews)*.<sup>18</sup> Herein, Porchetus provides a Latin translation of the text of Raymundus Martini’s *Pugio fidei* (1278), seeking to demonstrate the true nature of the Jews so that all Christians may know and be warned.<sup>19</sup> Luther’s lengthy quotation of Porchetus’

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<sup>17</sup> Schramm & Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*, 178–79. Original: Im nehesten Buechlin hab ich verheissen, ich wolt hinnach [3] lassen lauffen, was die rasenden, elenden Jueden von jhrem [4] Schem Hamphoras liegen und lestern, wie davon schreibt [5] Purchetus in seinem Buch, Victoria genant. Das wil ich [6] hiemit also gethan haben, unserm glauben zu ehren und den [7] Teuffels luegen der Jueden zu wider, Das auch die, so Jueden werden wollen, [8] sehen muegen, was sie fur schoene Artickel bey den verdampften Jueden gleuben [9] und halten muessen. Denn wie ich jnn jhenem Buechlin bedingt, ist mein [10] meinung nicht, wider die Jueden zu schreiben, als hoffet ich sie zu bekeren, [11] hab darumb dasselb buch nicht wollen nennen: Widder die Jueden, Sondern: [12] Von den Jueden und jren luegen, Das wir Deutschen historien weise auch [13] wissen moechten, was ein Juede sey, unser Christen fur jhnen, als fur den [14] Teuffeln selbs, zu warnen, unsern glauben zu stercken und zu ehren, [15] nicht die Jueden zu bekeren, Welchs eben so mueglich ist, als den Teuffel zu [16] bekeren.

<sup>18</sup> See B. Callsen, F. P. Knapp, M. Niesner, and M. Przybilski, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu—Toldot Jeschu: Die älteste lateinische Übersetzung in den Falsitates Judeorum von Thomas Ebendorfer*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 39 (Vienna/Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), 16. An edition of Porchetus’ work was published in Paris in 1520 – during Luther’s lifetime: see H. Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (13.-20. Jh.)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1994), 356–57.

<sup>19</sup> For Raymundus Martini’s texts, see *Pugio Fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos cum Observationibus Josephi de Voisin et Introductione Jo. Benedicti Carpozovi Leipzig 1687* (repr. by Gregg Press, 1967). For an overview of his anti-Jewish scheme, see J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); R. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith* (Berkeley: University

text makes it clear that this is where he drew his inspiration for the title *The Ineffable Name*.<sup>20</sup>

It came to pass that when Helena, the Queen, ruled the whole land of Israel, Jesus the Nazarene came to Jerusalem, and found the stone in the temple of the Lord, on which the Ark of the Lord was set. On this stone was written: *Shem Hamphoras* [the Ineffable Name]. Whoever learned the alphabets of the name and understood them was able to do whatever he wishes.<sup>21</sup>

The second part of the title of this work—*Of the Lineage of Christ*—reflects Luther's interest in defending Christian doctrine against Jewish polemics against Mary and Jesus. He thus emphasizes, for example, that the Jewish wise men called Jesus a bastard ("Die Weisen sagen, ich sey ein Hurkind"), Jesus seeking desperately to apply Isa 7:14 to himself.<sup>22</sup>

These repeated references to the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition explain why Luther began *On the Jews and their Lies* by countering blasphemous Jewish claims against Jesus and his mother. Further evidence of the impact this text had on Luther in his later years can be found in a sermon he delivered in Eisleben in 1546, a few weeks before his death. Here, too, he addresses Jewish assertions regarding Mary and Jesus:

Otherwise it will not work, for they have gone too far. They are our open enemies; they do not cease to blaspheme our Lord Christ; they call the Virgin Mary a whore and Christ, the child of a whore. Us they call changelings and abortions, and if they could kill us all, they would gladly do so. And they often do, especially those claiming to be doctors, even if they do help on occasion, for it is the Devil who lends his help and seal. They are also practitioners of medicine used in Italy, where poison is administered to kill someone in an hour, a month, a year, even ten or twenty years. This is the art they have mastered.<sup>23</sup>

We have seen that in his anti-Jewish texts Luther presents views which closely correspond to the claims made in the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition. Nevertheless, we must engage in a detailed systematic study of the arguments Luther makes and

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of California Press, 1989); R. S. Harvey, "Raymundus Martini and the *Pugio Fidei*: The Life and Work of a Medieval Controversialist" (MA thesis, University College London, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> See the translation of Luther as well as Porchetus' Latin text in Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 98-107.

<sup>21</sup> Original: Es ist geschehen zur zeit Halani, der Koenigin, die uber das gantze [8] Land Jsrael herschet, Da kam Jhesus Ha Notzri gen Jerusalem und [9] fand im Tempel des Herrn den Stein, darauff vorzeiten die Lade des Herrn [10] gesetzt war. Auff demselbigen stein war geschrieben: *Schem Hamphoras*. Wer [11] desselben Namen Buchstaben lernet und verstund, der kund thun, was er wolt.

<sup>22</sup> WA 53:582b.

<sup>23</sup> WA 51:195-196. See the translation in Schramm and Stjerna, *Martin Luther*, 201. Original: Anders wird nicht draus, denn sie machens zu gros, Sie sind unsere [29] oeffentliche Feinde, hoeren nicht auff unsern Herrn Christum zu lestern, *Heissen [30] die Jungfraw Maria eine Hure, Christum ein Hurenkind*, Uns heissen sie [31] Wechselbelge oder mahlkelber, und wenn sie uns kondten alle toedten, so theten [32] sie es gerne, Und thuns auch offft, sonderlich, die sich vor ertzte ausgeben, ob [33] sie gleich je zu zeiten helffen, Denn der Teufel hilffts doch zu letzt versiegeln, [34] So koennen sie die Ertzney auch, so man in Welschland kan, da man einem [35] eine giffit bey bringet, davon er in einer stund, in einem Monat, in einem [36] Jar, ja in zehen oder zwentzig jaren sterben mus, Die Kunst koennen sie.

rhetorics he uses in his anti-Jewish works. One of the pillars of his theological thought is God's omnipotence and the danger of hardening one's heart when opposing His word. Luther treats this subject at length in *De servo arbitrio* (*On Un-free Will, or Concerning Bound Choice*) (1525), using Pharaoh as a prime example.<sup>24</sup> Herein, he argues that such hardening forms part of God's mysterious providence, knowledge of it being concealed from human beings. At the same time, he appeals to 1 Tim 2:4 in support of the view that God wishes to save all His creatures. Apparently recognizing that his comments about the Jews were inconsistent with this theology, he concludes both his anti-Jewish writings from 1543 with an exhortation to Christians to pray for them:

So long an essay, dear sir and good friend, you have elicited from me with your booklet in which a Jew demonstrates his skill in a debate with an absent Christian. He would not, thank God, do this in my presence! My essay, I hope, will furnish a Christian (who in any case has no desire to become a Jew) with enough material not only to defend himself against the blind, venomous Jews, but also to become the foe of the Jews' malice, lying, and cursing, and to understand not only that their belief is false but that they are surely possessed by all devils. May Christ, our dear Lord, convert them mercifully and preserve us steadfastly and immovably in the knowledge of him, which is eternal life. Amen (*Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen*, WA 53:552).<sup>25</sup>

Let me end here so that I never would have anything to do with the Jews without speaking that I would write about them or against them. They have received now enough. Those who want to return let God give his mercy upon them so that they (or at least some of them) together with us would confess and praise God Father our Creator, with our Lord Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit forever. Amen (*Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*, WA 53:648).<sup>26</sup>

In his last sermon in Eisleben, he makes the same plea:

Therefore, do not be troubled for them, for they do nothing else among you than to blaspheme our dear Lord Christ abominably and to seek after our body, life, honor, and property. Yet we want to exercise Christian love toward them and

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<sup>24</sup> *De servo arbitrio* was typical of its time, medieval theologians holding human free will and God's omnipotence (determinism) in logical tension. This topic was discussed also in medieval Jewish philosophy: see C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 47 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 305-306. Original: So viel schreibens, lieber Herr und guter Freund, habt jr mir ausgezwungen mit ewrem Buechlin, da ein Juede seine kunst wider einen abwesenden Christen im Gesprech beweiset. Mir solt ers, Gott lob, gegenwertig nicht thun. So hat auch hierin (hoffe ich) ein Christ, der sonst nicht lust hat ein Juede zu werden, so viel, das er sich der blinden, gifftigen Jueden nicht allein wol erwehren kan, Sondern auch der Jueden bosheit, luegen, fluchen mus feind werden und greiffen, das jr glaube nicht allein falsch, sondern sie gewislich mit allen Teufeln besessen sind. *Christus, unser lieber Herr, bekere sie barmhertziglich und erhalte uns in seiner erkenntnis, welche das ewige Leben ist, fest und unbeweglich. AMEN.*

<sup>26</sup> Original: Hie wil ichs lassen und mit den Jueden nicht mehr zu thun haben, noch weiter von jnen oder wider sie schreiben, Sie habens gnug. Welche sich bekeren wollen, Da gebe Gott seine gnade zu, das sie (doch etliche) mit uns erkennen und loben Gott den Vater, unsern Schepffer, sampt unserm Herrn Jhesu Christo und dem heiligen Geist, jnn ewigkeit. Amen.

pray for them to convert and receive the Lord, whom they should properly honor more than we do. If anyone refuses to do this, let there be no doubt that he is an incorrigible Jew who will not cease to blaspheme Christ, to suck you dry, and (if he can) to kill you.<sup>27</sup>

In both his anti-Jewish works and his last words, Luther thus pleads for Christian intercession on behalf of the Jews.

This brief survey clearly evinces Luther's familiarity at the end of his life with the Jewish *Toledot Yeshu* tradition. While the topic requires more extensive, in-depth exploration, we can assume that this text does not account for all his anti-Jewish sentiments.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, it cannot be used to excuse Luther. It is nonetheless a significant historical detail that contributes to our understanding of Luther in his historical time frame.

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<sup>27</sup> Schramm & Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*, 201. Original: [37] DArumb seid unverworren mit jnen als mit denen, die da nichts anders [38] bey euch thuen, denn das sie unsern lieben HErrn Jhesum Christum grewlich [39] lestern, stehen uns nach leib, leben, ehre und gut. *Noch wollen wir die Christliche [40] liebe an jnen uben und vor sie bitten, das sie sich bekeren, den Herrn [41] annemen*, den sie vor uns billich ehren solten, Welcher solchs nicht thun wil, [1] Dr] da setze es in keinen zweivel, das der ein verboester Juede ist, der nicht ablassen [2] [Bl. Sijj] wird Christum zu lestern, dich aus zu saugen und (wo er kan) zu [3] toedten.

<sup>28</sup> For this, see in the future Jarmo Juntumaa's doctoral dissertation (under my supervision).

# The Reformation and the Jewish People: Culpable Heritage and Belated Renewal<sup>1</sup>

Ulrich Laepple

## I. Theological repentance

In the second of his 95 theses, Martin Luther asserts: “Christian repentance must encompass the whole life.” This includes theology. Although the criterion for theological repentance is the Bible, we sometimes need dramatic events to open our eyes to discover that historical theological and denominational traditions are obstructing our view.

One of the most influential pioneers of Christian-Jewish relations in Germany was Hans-Joachim Kraus.<sup>2</sup> In his *Rückkehr zu Israel*—“Returning to Israel”—he presents a good deal of his lifelong theological thinking, including the rather surprising statement: “Two events have thrown Christendom into a deep crisis: the extermination of the Jews in Europe and the establishment of the State of Israel.”<sup>3</sup>

Why should these constitute a crisis for Christendom rather than Israel? Each in its own way demonstrates the end of a Christian theology that, over many centuries, shaped itself in direct opposition to Judaism, the Torah, and the Jewish people. Beginning with the *adversus Judaeos* literature of the second century, Christian doctrine has configured itself in antithesis to everything Jewish. This anti-Judaism proved to be the precursor of the racist anti-Semitism that climaxed in the Holocaust. The Holocaust thus exposed the false direction Christendom took almost from its inception.

How and why has the establishment of the State of Israel contributed to this crisis, however? To the surprise of mainline churches and theologies, the establishment of the Jewish homeland and the vital Jewish life that has flourished within it has brought to light a simple but theologically neglected truth: Am Israel chai!—“The people of Israel live!” Although they had been scattered, forgotten, or hidden, they never vanished, surviving the atrocities of the Middle Ages and the Nazi death camps—which Martin Buber perceived as embodying the “eclipse of God.” They have been always there—and today have their own State!

## II. What has all this to do with Luther and the Reformation?

### 1. *Imagine Luther in Nazi Germany*

Although Luther had no premonition of either the Holocaust or the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper originally delivered at the LCJE conference in Berlin, 15 August, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> See [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans-Joachim\\_Kraus](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans-Joachim_Kraus).

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Rückkehr zu Israel: Beiträge zum christlich-jüdischen Dialog* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1991), 6.

the State of Israel, let us try for a moment to imagine him as having witnessed both. In the light of the advice he gave the civil authorities in his treatise *On the Jews and Their Lies* in 1543, he may well have not opposed the measures taken by the Nazis from 1933 through to the *Reichspogromnacht* in 1938.<sup>4</sup> While it is commonly alleged that the Nazis promoted his later writings, if he had seen the outcome of all this in 1945 and become aware of the murder of 6 million Jews, he might have said: “This is not what I wanted”—just as he responded when confronted with the slaughter of thousands during the peasant revolts in 1526, during which he had encouraged and even incited state violence and oppression.

With respect to the State of Israel, he would most probably have denied and rejected the common current belief that its establishment constitutes a “sign of the faithfulness of the God of Israel towards his Chosen People.”<sup>5</sup> Applying his Augustinian hermeneutics, he would likely have argued that worldly things—such as an earthly Land—must not be mixed with spiritual truths. An earthly Messiah and kingdom being anathema in his eyes, like many of his followers today, he denounced the Jewish people’s ongoing vocation and eschatological relevance.

## 2. “Law and Gospel” as a hermeneutical key

Like many scholars, I am convinced that the anti-Jewish outbursts in Luther’s later writings reflect deeply-rooted aspects of his theology.<sup>6</sup> Let me demonstrate this by examining one of its central features, which lies at the basis of much contemporary mainstream Protestant theology—the dialectic between “Law” and Gospel.” While “Law” demands obedience to God’s ethical will, the “Gospel” promises forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The expression “Law and Gospel” is thus frequently used as a guiding principle in homiletics and pastoral care.

For Luther, however, “Law” is almost synonymous with guilt and sin. “Convicting” people, it is directly linked to God’s curse and wrath, from which people can only be freed by the justifying and gracious gospel of Christ. The Gospel, in other words, is pointless without the Law: where there is no sin, there is no need of forgiveness.

Does this view of the Law—in dogmatic terms, the *usus elencticus legis* (the convicting use and character of the law)—cover all its biblical aspects, however? While it is one feature in Paul’s mind (Gal 3:19–25; Rom 3:20), it does not represent the whole biblical truth. Psalms like Psalm 19 and 119 praise God and

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Harvey summarizes Luther’s 1543 statements as follows: 1) Burn down synagogues; 2) Destroy Jewish homes; 3) Confiscate prayer books and talmudic writings; 4) Forbid rabbis from teaching; 5) Abolish safe conduct for Jews; 6) Prohibit Jewish usury; 7) Impose manual labour on the Jews (*Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Lies* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017], 84). He concludes: “Luther’s unmistakable intention was that the religious and social substructure of Jewish life in German Protestant lands be destroyed and that Jews would be forced to leave as a result” (ibid).

<sup>5</sup> These are the words of the well-known resolution of the Rhenish Church of 1980 (thesis 2.3): see [www.ekir.de/www/service/2509.php](http://www.ekir.de/www/service/2509.php) (German).

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014); Matthias Morgenstern, *Martin Luther: Von den Juden und ihren Lügen—Neu bearbeitet und kommentiert* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2016); Harvey, *Luther and the Jews*; et al.

rejoice in the good gift of the Torah. Psalm 1 states: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked ... but his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night.” In this context, I recall the words of Orthodox Rabbi Ehrenberg of Berlin, who said to me with brightly shining eyes: “Oh, the Torah has such a wonderful power.” Who would dare contradict him or see reason to correct him on a biblical basis?<sup>7</sup>

Luther often appears to have regarded Moses as the personal enemy of the Christian faith, an opponent of grace and justification—and thus synonymous with God’s curse and wrath. Rather than being an antinomian, however, Paul does not speak against the Law (Rom 3:31). He is proud of his Jewish heritage, often quoting the Torah, and living—in Jewish contexts at least—according to it (cf. Acts 21:17–26; 1 Cor 9:20). We are all familiar with Rom 9:1–5 and his list of the privileges of the Jewish people, especially the covenant and the Torah. His strict critical arguments against the Torah are motivated more by its use by those who demanded circumcision a necessity of salvation for Gentiles. For Jews, however, the covenant and Torah are twins—as Paul also maintains. If you remove the Torah, you destroy the covenant and the whole history of the Jewish people.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. “A damned people”

Unfortunately, this is precisely what Luther did, employing a very striking logic: If the Torah—the Law—transpires to be a curse yet lies at the heart of the Jewish faith, then, living “under the law,” Jews must be accursed. He thus claims that the Jews as a people are the living example of God’s wrath and curse. He underlines this with what he regards as historical proof: they have lost their Temple; they have lived in exile for almost 1,500 years; no one wants them; everybody is against them. Do we need any further proof that this constitutes a punishment for a terrible sin—namely our Lord’s crucifixion?<sup>9</sup> From calling them a “poor people” in his first treatise (1523), he then goes on to designate them in his later writings as “damned.”

Whether as “poor” or “damned,” however, they remain for him the corporate manifestation of God’s wrath and curse. Only by forsaking Judaism and converting to Christianity can they be saved from this deplorable state. Those who refuse to do remain under God’s wrath, requiring the authorities to adopt measures of “sharp mercy” (what a strange expression!) towards them. In other words: none!

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ps. 119:105: “Thy word (the law!) is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

<sup>8</sup> Taking Paul’s criticism of the Torah out of its historical context and making it into an absolute turns him into an anti-Jewish apostle—which he never was. For an excellent outline of Pauline teaching and practice, see Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 71ff.

<sup>9</sup> See Luther’s introduction to *On the Jews and Their Lies*, 4f. Unfortunately, he fails to perceive that in making this argument he falls back upon a *theologia gloriae* that he firmly elsewhere denied, forsaking the *theologia crucis* that he so fiercely advocated in general.

#### 4. *Disinheritance*

Luther was not a Marcionite, however, but a biblical scholar who interpreted the whole Bible. Much of his biblical exegesis, especially on the Psalms, is wonderful and beautiful. The Christological lenses through which he read the “Old Testament,” however, led him to interpret everything good he found there to be for the Church’s benefit. All the bad things thus related solely to the Jews (or to the Christians as a warning not to receive the same punishment). Not only did he thus disinherit them but he also stole the Tanach from them. A fundamental biblical insight got lost in this process—the validity of the covenant of the people of Israel from Abraham up until their final salvation (Rom 11:26). In the face of this covenantal history, we must acknowledge: This covenant, with all its dramatic history until the end, stands and will stand as the mark of God’s faithfulness—not His wrath. While there *is* a broken covenant, judgement, and wrath, as Paul elaborates in such moving words in Romans 9–11, mercy prevails over judgment (Rom 11:25ff, 32f). Luther thus not only “paganizes” the Jewish people by denying them all their prerogatives but also demonizes them to promote the Church. This is blatant supersessionism.

#### 5. *The effects upon contemporary theology*

The Lutheran concept of “Law and Gospel”—which in Luther’s thought implies Jewish disinheritance—was influential right through the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Adolf von Harnack, Emanuel Hirsch, and Paul Althaus. It thus affected virtually all Protestant Christianity. In a more radical, Marcionite form—i.e., the complete rejection of the “Old Testament”—it became the theology of the “Deutsche Christen” in Nazi Germany.<sup>10</sup>

Yet it can also be presented in a much more “innocent” and subtle fashion. On visiting a Lutheran church once, the pastor proudly pointed out its windows to me. “On the left-hand side,” he told me, “on the northern side, there are the windows with the stories of the Old Testament. But on the southern side, to the right, where the light comes in, you see the New Testament stories.” Needless to say, the left-hand side windows were in the shadow most of the day.<sup>11</sup> I took a deep breath. What was he telling me? That Israel was and is without light, without any insight of who God is and what Israel and the Jewish faith stand for?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A Lutheran theologian at the theological faculty of the Humboldt-University in Berlin recently also caused a great uproar when he suggested that the Church should remove the “Old Testament” from the biblical canon: see [www.theologie.hu-berlin.de/de/professuren/professuren/st/AT](http://www.theologie.hu-berlin.de/de/professuren/professuren/st/AT).

<sup>11</sup> The biblical metaphors in Rom 11:13ff are not “shadow” and “light”—platonic concepts—but “root,” “trunk,” and “branches”—organic images!

<sup>12</sup> The fact that Jesus’ coming is an eschatological event that “fulfills the Law and the prophets” (Matt 5:17) led the New Testament writers to a “multi-dimensional” use of the Hebrew Bible. As holy and authoritative, they adopted it partially as normative, ignoring other parts and interpreting specific traditions in a new, sometimes idiosyncratic fashion. While Jesus’ advent as Messiah could be only depicted in the powerful light of Israel’s history and holy scriptures and their categories, these were insufficient. The “Old Testament” was thus simultaneously confirmed and limited.

Does not our inheritance as Christians come from what God has done on the “left-hand side”—the Hebrew Bible? Is not salvation “from the Jews” (John 4:22)? Do our basic ethical principles not derive from that side, too—the Ten Commandments? Do we not find sheer grace and justification by faith also on the left-hand side—God’s eternal love, mercy, and forgiveness: “Bless the LORD who forgives all iniquity, who heals all your diseases who redeems you, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (Ps 103:4)? Do we not get deeply-moving examples of prayer that we use in our services with joy and thankfulness from that “side”? Do we not learn from them the language of grief and lament in affliction as much as that of gratitude and praise? Millions of people find comfort in the words of Psalm 23: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me.”

We must never forget that the Psalms first constituted the prayer book of the Jewish people before they became a Christian book. The Jewish people endured the atrocities of the Middle Ages with the words of these psalms on their lips and, later, on the way to the gas chambers. Some of my Messianic friends sometimes call those Jews “unbelievers” because they do not believe in Yeshua. I think this is not only hurtful but simply untrue. Adopting this view disinherits the Jews anew by adopting an unjustified attitude of superiority.

### III. The Reformed Branch of the Reformation

Finally, let me take a look at the Reformed branch of the Reformation. The French Christians who were persecuted by the Catholic Church—Calvin and the Huguenots—adopted a very different attitude towards the Jewish people. While the Lutheran Reformation came about with the help of the state authorities, thereby creating a “marriage between throne and altar”—an intimacy that frequently compromised clear witness to the Gospel—those who suffered expulsion regarded themselves as sharing a common destiny with the wandering and homeless Jewish people. Calvin knew that such suffering was a sign of election rather than rejection. He refused to separate the Jewish people from Jesus Christ and thus the Jewish people from the other “wandering people of God”—the Church. For him, the Jewish people remained the “first born” in the *familia Dei*. He also clearly saw that Jer 31:31–34 refers to the “house of Israel” and the “house of Judah,” the “new covenant” therefore not being the sole inheritance of the Church.<sup>13</sup> As Hans-Joachim Kraus notes, Calvin is here the “voice of one crying in the wilderness”—a lone yet vigorous objector to mainstream theological tradition, in line with his oft-expressed view that God’s covenant with Israel is eternal persistence and will never be annulled.<sup>14</sup> While Calvin’s Israelology remained within the classical superior/inferior framework, he knew better than Luther that the two peoples—the Jews and the Church—are theologically one in God’s household despite their historical and theological separation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Kraus, *Rückkehr zu Israel*, 189–99.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 193.

<sup>15</sup> See Calvin’s astonishing statement: “Who, then, will presume to represent the Jews as destitute of Christ, when we know that they were parties to the Gospel covenant, which has its

#### IV. Final Remarks

Mark Kinzer, a prominent American Messianic Jew, draws a striking Christological conclusion from this “togetherness.” Isaiah 40ff speaks of the people of Israel as the “Servant of God.” In the New Testament, the “Servant of God” is Yeshua. Does this not suggest a union in which both—Israel and “their” (as well as our) Yeshua—belong together in the inseparable, mysterious way at which Marc Chagall intimates in his famous painting “White Crucifixion”?<sup>16</sup> I believe these facts point to the need to continue our theological investigation and exploration into how the two people of God belong together and what separates them from each other. Above all, we must seek out what they testify and witness of one another in the light of the One God who is theirs and has become ours. This is even more true, as Mark Kinzer observes, in light of the fact that “the (apparent) Jewish no to Yeshua has not expelled his Messianic presence from Israel, and the (actual) Christian no to the Jewish people and Judaism has not expelled Israel’s presence from the church’s inner sanctum.”<sup>17</sup>

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only foundation in Christ? Who will presume to make them aliens to the benefit of gratuitous salvation, when we know that they were instructed in the doctrine of justification by faith?” [German: “Wer will sich aber erkühnen, die Kenntnis Christi den Juden abzusprechen, mit denen doch der Bund des Evangeliums geschlossen worden ist, dessen einziger Grund Christus ist? Wer will sie von der Wohltat des uns aus Gnaden zukommenden Heils ausschließen, da ihnen doch die Lehre von der Glaubensgerechtigkeit zuteil geworden ist?”] (*Institutio* II, 10,4): <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/calvin-institutes-christianity/book2/chapter-10.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 228f.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 233.

# The Lutheran Church and the Jewish People in Denmark

Kurt Ettrup Larsen

## The Background

Long before any Jew set foot on Danish soil, Danes were familiar with the Jews from the Bible and medieval European anti-Semitic texts. In 1516, the first anti-Jewish text was printed in Danish, claiming that the Jews were exploiting the Christians, that they belonged to a false religion, and that they should be expelled from the country and their books burned. The Danish king invited Jews into his kingdom for economic reasons in 1620, issuing licenses to them and making it possible for them to live in Norway and Denmark. The Lutheran State Church was opposed to this policy, theologians being convinced that kingdoms could only exist if everyone shared the same religion. Bishop Jesper Brochmann went so far as to consider the acceptance of non-Lutheran inhabitants as a sin. The king's absolute power and mercantile interests won the day, however, Jews being allowed to travel as merchants and settle in Denmark (1673). In 1682, a synagogue was built in the free town of Fredericia and a Jewish congregation was established in Copenhagen in 1684.

The Danish Lutheran Reformers did not follow Luther in his tirades against the Jews. Hans Tausen, the leading Danish Reformer, called the Jews damned because of their unbelief—just like the Catholics. In his view, even evangelicals are guilty of ingratitude. He nevertheless hoped that in the future the Jews would convert to Christ. The pietistic revival in Germany introduced a more positive view of the future, its proponents believing that if the Church and individual Christians were renewed they would be better witnesses to the Jews. The leading pietist, P. J. Spener, wanted to establish mission work among the Jews, as well as making living conditions for the community better, thereby making it easier for them to become Christians. This movement led to the founding of an orphanage in Copenhagen that also served as the home for various Jewish missionary organizations—for a community of 282! Operating with royal permission, they baptized almost a hundred Jews in the coming decades.

During the Enlightenment (1750–1830), new and more secular views of state affairs began to emerge, the close link between state and religion diminishing. The number of Jews continued to grow, until by 1800 the Jewish community numbered around 2,000—two percent of the population. The king acting as their protector, tolerance towards them increased. In 1783, they were allowed to graduate from the University of Copenhagen and in 1802 to buy rural estates. In 1814, they enjoyed virtually equal rights in Denmark. While anti-Semitism still reared its ugly head, a new awareness of the need to share the gospel with the Jews had arisen.

## The Church and the Jews

In 1849, Denmark instituted a democratic constitution guaranteeing complete freedom of religion. The Lutheran Church was now only one amongst many

churches and organized religions. In 1900, however, 99 percent of population remained loyal to the National Lutheran church. Within this, a para-church mission organization—the Danish Mission Society—was formed to bring the gospel to the Jews. One of its chairmen, Christian Kalkar, was the son of a rabbi who became a believer in Jesus and dedicated himself to mission work. In the 1880s, another para-church organization was established—the Danish Israel Mission. A group of Christian women in Copenhagen arranged meetings for the Jews in the city, visited their homes, and supported mission work amongst Jews abroad. In the wake of the influx of Jews fleeing to Denmark from Eastern Europe in the early 1900s, the Danish Israel Mission began working amongst them as well, helping them materially and sharing their faith with them. A number of Jews were baptized and a Jewish-Christian society was formed. While the synagogue in Copenhagen opposed the latter, the Jewish community appreciated the Danish Israel Mission's fight against anti-Semitism.

In 1900, there were less than 4,000 Jews in Denmark, almost all of whom lived in Copenhagen. Their dwindling numbers due to assimilation were augmented by the Eastern European immigrants. These differed from the Old Danish Jewish families in numerous ways. As refugees from pogroms, they were very aware of their Jewish identity. They thus formed Jewish societies and sent their children to Jewish schools. The “old Jews” feared the “new Jews” would destroy the status the Jewish community had achieved in Danish society over long decades. Funds were also an issue. While the Jewish community sought to help the refugees, they did not want to risk their own economic status. Although they had a strong tradition of helping their co-religionists, their resources were limited. This ambiguous attitude extended to the German refugees who began arriving after 1933, the “Old Jews” being the subject of criticism in much the same way as Christian Danes for failing to extend a welcoming hand to the forced immigrants.

### **The 1930s**

In the 1930s, anti-Semitism was rare in Denmark. Although some writers expressed anti-Semitic views, they were isolated individuals, no responsible people defending such a position. The Jews of Copenhagen were highly respected and feelings ran high in the face of the rumours of the way Jews were being treated in Germany. King Christian X, for example, was scheduled to attend a Jewish service in the big synagogue of Copenhagen on its centenary anniversary in 1933. The leaders of Jewish community let the king know that they would understand if he felt he could not attend under the circumstances. He replied that Hitler's policies made it doubly important for him to do so!

At the same time, however, Danish immigration laws prevented Jews from finding refuge in Denmark. While Jews could still enter Denmark in 1933/1934, work permits were difficult to obtain. Jews thus had to support themselves or be supported by family, friends, or Jewish committees. This policy not only meant that they did not become a burden on the state but also discouraged them from settling in the country. Later on, the borders became increasingly difficult to cross. Jews from Germany were not regarded as political refugees. In some cases, the Danish government even sent refugees back to Germany knowing

they might end up in concentration camps. In the 1930s, the idea of the Holocaust was unimaginable, even the Nazis not making the extermination of Jews their goal until 1942.

The immigration policy—supported by almost all political groups—was a result of the same depression that had helped Hitler rise to power in Germany. The government worked hard to maintain the economy, leaving it with little extra energy to help refugees. The Social-Democratic party and labour unions did not want immigrants who would compete for Danish jobs. The conservative and liberal parties were afraid that many Jewish immigrants would foster anti-Semitism and drive people into the arms of the right-wing political parties. The Danish government dared not open its doors to more Jews than other countries were accepting. While Germany wanted to get rid of its Jewish citizens, the Poles thought that they had too many, England would not allow them to enter Palestine, and other countries adopted similar immigration restrictions. Hundreds of Jews thus tried to get into Denmark in vain, thousands of others not even bothering to try. In this respect, Denmark was neither better nor worse than other countries and must acknowledge its responsibility for failing to prevent the Holocaust.

### **The German Occupation**

In April 1940, Germany invaded Denmark. Initially, they allowed the Danish government and parliament to continue ruling. No measures were taken against the Jews, who sought to survive by keeping a low profile. When the Danish government resigned in 1943, however, they found themselves in a very difficult situation. On October 2, 1943, the occupation forces conducted an *aktion* to deport Danish Jewish. Forewarned, almost all of them succeeded in making it to independent Sweden, many of them being helped by Lutheran pastors. The following Sunday, a letter formulated by the Bishop of Copenhagen regarding the persecution of the Jews was read aloud across the country. The congregations rose in their pews in response to his exhortation:

Wherever Jews are persecuted for racial or religious reasons, it is the duty of the Christian church to protest. First: we will never be able to forget that the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem from the Virgin Mary according to God's promises to Israel, his peculiar people ... despite our different religious persuasion, we will fight for the right of our Jewish brothers and sisters to maintain the same freedom that we estimate higher than life ... our conscience binds us to insist on justice and protest against all offences. Under these circumstances, we will obey the principle of putting God before the people.

Known as the Pastoral Letter of the Danish bishops, it was not supported by all the bishops, some of whom regarded it as an un-Danish act. One of the bishops delivered a shorter version to his diocese. It was nonetheless a clear indication that the Lutheran Church stood behind the Jewish community. After its members had been deported, city officials removed the Torah scrolls from the synagogue and hid them in the basement of a church until they could be returned to the community after the liberation in May 1945.

## Pastor Christian Bartholdy

In order to illustrate the attitude of Danish Christians to the Jews during the 1930s, let us take the case of Christian Bartholdy (1889–1976), a Lutheran pastor who served in various parishes for 40 years and was well known publicly for his involvement in many of the largest para-church organizations.

In his preaching during this period, Bartholdy made reference to the Jews as a way of prompting a revival amongst his audiences. Not believing in salvation without faith in Jesus Christ, he remained theologically anti-Jewish. Convinced that Danish parishioners who said no to Jesus would be unhappy and suffer perdition, he warned them that they faced the same fate of homelessness and persecution as the Jews, both falling under God's chastisement for rejecting His grace. Christians were also accessories to Jesus' crucifixion, however, the Jews thus not being totally culpable: "Those who feel that they are in a position to despise the Jews are themselves the most disgusting example of a Jew: A Pharisee." Such religious sentiments could lead to passivity in the face of the persecution of the Jews.

In 1937, Bartholdy wrote an article in which he stated that Nazism and other examples of the confusion of the times could serve as preparation for the long-awaited coming of Christ. Perceiving Nazi persecution as divine judgment or an eschatological sign meant that the German regime should not be resisted. Bartholdy thus did not protest against the measures taken against the Jews in Germany during the 1930s. Others did, however. The leaders of the Danish Israel Mission spoke publicly against anti-Semitism, as did theology professors at the University of Copenhagen. Living in the countryside, far removed from the Jewish community, Bartholdy generally remained silent. In 1939, however, he publicly opposed the German Evangelical Church's refusal to baptize Jews. Here, too, his motivation was religious rather than humanitarian, however: in his view, Nazi racism was the complete antithesis of the doctrine that all baptism makes all people equal.

At the end of 1941, the Danish government signed the Anti-Comintern Treaty with Germany, making the future of the Jews in the country even less secure. Bartholdy wrote a series of articles in the widely circulated magazine he edited, *Indre Missions Tidende*, entitled: "The Jewish problem in the light of the word." Herein, he argued that Denmark was a Christian country where Christian faith and Christian ethics were—or should be—the foundation and cohesive factor. The existence of another religious group therein was thus problematic. At most, the Jews could hope to be treated as guests. Like many others during this period, he spoke of the "Jewish Problem," believing that this would grow worse when Denmark returned to its Christian roots and the Jews assimilated. Although he characterized Danish Jews as crafty and devious—perhaps proving to the isolated members of the Nazi party in Denmark that the country did in fact have a "Jewish Problem"—his attitude was based more on xenophobia than racism or anti-Semitism. He was a parish pastor not a politician.

Some of his other articles seemed to point in another direction, however. He opposed Martin Luther's hatred of the Jews, believing them to fall under God's mercy like anyone else. The "Jewish Problem" could thus be resolved by Christian compassion. While the Jews were currently under divine judgment because of their apostasy, they still had a special place in divine history.

Although fated to be oppressed, this did not give people free license to persecute them. Through his magazine, he kept his readers aware of the developments in Germany, speaking out against them in very clear terms: “Where hatred towards the Jews can exist in a Christian country, then you live in an apostate Christianity.”

Although Bartholdy supported the idea of mission work amongst the Jews in 1942, his primary interest lay elsewhere. Being a people as well as a religion, the conversion of individual Jews was not the final expectation. Ultimately, the whole nation would convert. As God’s peculiar people, they had a special role within salvation history— even though they did not know Christ at the moment. In the articles he wrote during 1941/1942, he confessed that he had not always spoken properly about the Jews. Now, he wished to openly confront the hatred they were experiencing, rejecting the view that Christians could look down upon them.

He was reprimanded for this opinion by the government, the Foreign Office in Copenhagen being worried about their relationship with the German occupying forces and thus asking the Secretary of the Church to rein Bartholdy in via his bishop. The bishop complied, also seeking to maintain good relations with the German authorities. Bartholdy was fearless, however, announcing his intention to protest against the persecutions of the Jews as long as he had breath; neither his bishop nor the Secretary of the Church would prevent him from speaking out. A Danish doctor who had helped Jews reach Palestine wanted to send them Bartholdy’s articles. Professor Flemming Hvidberg describes them in the following words: “He addressed the question of the Jews, he defended the Jews in direct language, and was rewarded by a strong warning from the governmental Ministry of the Church.”

### **Bartholdy’s Assistance to the Jews**

Like other Lutheran pastors and congregational members, Bartholdy played a role in the rescue of the Jews. At that time, he was serving as a pastor in Haslev, a small town on the south side of the island of Sjaelland. Some of the Jews who fled from Copenhagen to Sweden passed through Haslev. Two of those in need of a place to hide were told by their Jewish adviser to contact Bartholdy. The Meyerheim brothers thus stayed with him until their ship was ready to sail. While such aid might have not been available in all Christian countries or in every period of church history, the Jews expected help from pastors like Bartholdy and do not appear to have been let down.

### **Bartholdy and Zionism after World War II**

The Holocaust, the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 sparked an interest in Zionism and its theological perspectives in Bartholdy. As he noted, “The history of Israel is the key to world history.” Up until 1945, only small groups within the Danish church had shown any interest in Zionism—particularly those with links to the Anglo-Saxon holiness movement. After 1945, more and more began looking at the Jewish people and their return to their historic land in a theological and eschatological light. The Karmel movement formed in 1946, which later changed its name to “The Word and Israel,” set itself the goal of providing Jews with a biblical

understanding of Christ and Christians with a biblical understanding of the Jews and their homeland. Its members believed the establishment of the State to be a fulfilment of prophecy. In general, they sought to make Danish Lutherans more aware of eschatology and the millennium. In doing so, they differed from the Danish Israel Mission, whose focus lay on missionizing amongst the Jews wherever they lived.

Bartholdy supported the Karmel movement/“The Word and Israel,” teaching at their conference in 1949 and declaring himself in agreement with its theology. By now, he had come to regard mission work amongst the Jews as a millennium event, this being the point in time when the people as a whole would convert through the work of Jesus-believing Jews. The millennium was thus closely related to the fate of the Jewish people. According to Bartholdy, the world was divided into three groups: the Church, the world, and the Jews. God’s final judgment would thus come in three steps, the Jews only ruling during the Kingdom of Glory.

For the rest of his life, Bartholdy perceived the State of Israel as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and the contemporary history of Jerusalem and Israel as God’s footprints in history. He argued that the Jews had a theological right to rule the country because of the promise in Rom 11:25 that “all Israel shall be saved,” cautiously propounding that they would regain their land by converting to Christ.

Becoming a staunch supporter of the State of Israel, he put all his efforts towards raising financial aid for poor Jews therein in 1950. In this, he was like virtually all the other influential church leaders in Denmark, support for Israel during this period becoming something of a “national pastime.” An outspoken Danish opponent of Zionism and the State of Israel, Alfred Nielsen—a missionary in Syria—complained that he no longer had access to Danish newspapers or church magazines.

In his support of Israel, Bartholdy was quite typical of the Danish church of his and the following generation. Although only a minority actively supported the Israel Mission and “The Word and Israel” and the Danish Lutheran church has no tradition of speaking out as it did in the Pastoral Letter of 1943, those who did speak about the Jews and the State of Israel were highly supportive. The Jews of Denmark are highly respected, the chief rabbi participating in official events at the highest levels of Danish society. In the 1980s, however, support of the State of Israel began to wane, some groups, even within the church, advocating the Palestinian cause.

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## A Reflection on Luther by a Jewish Believer in Jesus

Yoel Ben David

As a child in a traditional Jewish family in Britain, I went to synagogue and sat in “cheder” every weekend, learning the prayers and Torah portion for my bar mitzvah. I still remember the aged brown paper of the prayer books and the walk from my home to the synagogue in Hove. Other than nostalgia, it is difficult to say how much I learnt, however. Why did I not take much away? Why do I not feel loyalty to the path I was taught? I believe it was because I was raised in an individualistic society where I learned from a young age that life is about me.

While in synagogue and at home I was told about my connection to my Jewish heritage, at school I was never identified as a part of a collective or held responsible for a whole people’s reputation. Television was the same as school, the hero always being the one who threw off the shackles of peer pressure or resisting the world’s attempt to hold him back. I thought of my life in terms of what should I do, what I wanted to study, what job I could choose to do. A New York Times article on “The Age of Individualism” describes this millennial culture as “postpatriotic, postfamilial and disaffiliated.”<sup>1</sup> I may be older than millennials but this certainly reflects the way I thought as a young man.

My Jewish mother always represented the other side of the cultural coin in our family. She has always seen herself as a representative of her community—i.e., the Jewish people and Israel. Like many of her generation who are of North African origin, she struggles with people who choose a path without considering how this may affect their family or community. To the community-oriented person, electing to live a life considered taboo is not a bad but a selfish decision. When I became a believer in Jesus, no one discussed whether or not what I believed was true. I was simply looked at in bewilderment and asked how I could do such a thing to my people and family.

When I began exploring my newly inherited history as a follower of Jesus, however, I became aware of some of the more positive aspects of individualism. Ever since I encountered Luther as a young believer in Jesus, I have been perturbed by the little regard we Westerners—and even Jewish believers in Jesus—pay to Luther. He stood as a lone figure and defied the Roman Church. In his defense, he not only appealed to Scripture but also to reason—i.e., his personal reading of the Bible. He needed to be convinced of God’s grace as an individual rather than conform to the will of the majority. In so doing, he launched a movement that prompted nations, churches, and individuals to seek Messiah outside the magisterium.

The breakdown of the Roman Church in Europe made way not only for secularism but all sorts of thinkers who abandoned their own traditions and espoused new ones. The intellectual integrity of individuals seeking their place on the spectrum of thought has opened the door for Jews to find out about Jesus for themselves. Perhaps one of the reasons why Luther’s influence upon Jewish history is disregarded is because we focus our attention upon his tirades against the Jewish community. We also need to acknowledge his ability to go beyond the Establishment and show that faith can—and should—be a matter of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/douthat-the-age-of-individualism.html>.

individual choice.

The same issue arises in regard to congregations. Do we encourage them to assert their individuality and think innovatively and creatively, or—like the controlling cardinals of the sixteenth century—do we demand that they adhere to established forms of worship in addition to biblical truths?

All of this is not to say that Luther was a twenty-first-century Westerner. His initial goal was not to divide the church; nor did he seek to remake things in his own image. He recognized the importance of the established liturgy and traditions deriving from Scripture and the apostles. Let us therefore join Luther 500 years on from the day on which he threw off the shackles that bound his world and seek God's renewal for our lives, families, and churches. Here is a Collect (a short prayer) you may consider praying with me for this purpose:

Almighty God, who changes the hearts of kings and renews the faith of priests, call us your servants to follow you with brave hearts and humble minds like your servant Martin Luther, through the grace given to him and us by your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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 (Victory Against the Impious Hebrews)*.<sup>2</sup> I shall then discuss the Jewish kabbalistic numerology therein, which Luther adopted from Anton Margaritha's *Der ganz judisch glaub (The Whole Jewish Belief)*.<sup>3</sup> I shall conclude with some comments on Thomas Kaufmann's thesis that Thomas Münster's *Messias Christianorum et Iudaeorum Hebraice & Latine (The Messiah of the Christians and Jews written in Hebrew and Latin)* profoundly influenced Luther's most well-known writings on the Jews.<sup>4</sup>

## 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 some text from part 1 of Chapter 11.<sup>5</sup> 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 Tetragrammaton (*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

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's most important so-called anti-Jewish writings are *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523), *Against the Sabbatarians* (1538), *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), *The Tetragrammaton* (1543), and *Of the last words of David* (1543). See Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 12; Prof. Antti Laato's article, "Toledot Yeshu and Martin Luther" in this edition of *Mishkan*.

<sup>2</sup> WA 53, 610–48. The second part of the text, *Of the Lineage of Christ*, deals with Jesus' lineage from the house of David. See Yaacov Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Yeshu")*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 53, 288–89, 302. Porchetus' book—copied from Raymundo Martinus' *Pugio Fidei* (1290)—was written in 1303 but only published in Germany in 1520. See WA 53, 581a–586a (German) and 582b–586b (Latin).

<sup>3</sup> Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 174–75. Antonius Margaritha's grandfather was a rabbi who converted to Christianity, serving as the president of the rabbinic tribunal of Prague at the end of the 1400s. Margaritha's book was published in Germany in 1530.

<sup>4</sup> WA 53, 580–609; Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 97, 114. Kaufmann suggests that Sebastian Münster's *Messias Christianorum et Iudaeorum Hebraice & Latin* (1539) served him as a central source.

<sup>5</sup> WA 53, 580a–586a: "Aus dem Elfften Capitel im ersten teil des Buches Durcheti" (Luther's own translation into German).

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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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

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<sup>6</sup> WA 53, 587: "Te Deum laudamus singen. Das kundte er (ein Engel) nicht leiden, Und ist ein Teuffel worden, der nu mt seinem Engelischen ruessel frisst und mit lust frisst, was der Jueden unter und oeber maul speiet und spruetzt, Ja, das ist seine Galrede worden, darin er sicch weidet, wie eine Saw hinter dem Zaun ..."

<sup>7</sup> WA 53, 587.

<sup>8</sup> WA 53, 588–89: "Auch thetten mir selbs die drey Jueden, so bey mir waren." He also undoubtedly remembered that on the basis of these visitors it had later been apparent that they referred to Jesus by the name "Thola"—hanged. See too Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 90. This name used by the Jews also enraged Luther when he wrote *Against the Sabbatarians* in 1538: see WA 50, 309. Karl Drescher refers in the introduction to his text to Luther's after-dinner speeches (WATR) during this period.

turned into a comic figure who sails on millstones and flies around.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

The story thus 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

### 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.<sup>13</sup> For Luther, it evinces that God has truly abandoned them.<sup>14</sup> Margaritha presents the kabbalistic system developed by

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<sup>9</sup> WA, 53, 588–89.

<sup>10</sup> "Toledot Yeshu"—descriptions of references to Jesus as a bastard, as well as the Jewish response to Luther's *Von Juden und ihren Lügen* claiming that Jesus cannot be shown to descend from the lineage of David, appear to be the two principal catalysts for Luther's decision to pen the second part of *The Tetragrammaton—Of the Lineage of Christ*. Earlier, he had had to defend himself via *That Jesus was Born a Jew* (1523) against the opposite accusation, the Catholic prince Ferdinand Nürnberg alleging that Luther heretically asserted that Christ was of the seed of Abraham—this precluding the virgin birth and Jesus' status as the son of God (WA 11, 307). See also Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 29–30.

<sup>11</sup> The *Toledot Yeshu* text—one, if not the, principal reasons why Luther wanted to continue his anti-Jewish writings even after the Jews' blindness and superstitions had been revealed. Jesus' divinity and the trinity had to be proven once again to German Christians in his text *Of the Last Words of David*.

<sup>12</sup> The elements in Porchetus' text (and my synopsis) are: stealing the Name, finding disciples, truth revealed, miracles, first trial, request, envoys, Yehudah learning the Name, second trial, flying contest, flagellation, and execution: see *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 1:31.

<sup>13</sup> WA 53, 594–98. According to Kaufmann (*Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 114), Luther's presentation of kabbalistic numerological calculations is based upon the texts in Margaritha's book. Porchetus also adduces numerology.

<sup>14</sup> In *On the Jews and Their Lies*, Luther refers almost twenty times to Nicolaus de Lyra's claim that proof of God's abandoning of the Jews lies in the fact that they have been exiled from their land for almost 1500 years (WA 53, 413). Lyra's most fundamental works are *Postilla* (Commentary) and *Pulcherrimae quaestiones Iudaicam perfidiam in catholica fide improbantur*. A Franciscan of Jewish heritage, Lyra (ca. 1270 – 1349) was the medieval exegete most often cited by Luther—who also cites the medieval exegete Burgos (Burgensis) and his work *Additiones and Scrutinium scripturarum*, however: see Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 51–55, 173.

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).<sup>15</sup> The number of angels can therefore increase dramatically, despite the fact that the total of their numerical names remains 216 (3 x 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 l 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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

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<sup>15</sup> WA 53, 598.

<sup>16</sup> WA 53, 598.

<sup>17</sup> WA 53, 598–99.

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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?<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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

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<sup>18</sup> WA 53, 599.

<sup>19</sup> WA 53, 600–1. Such Judensau pictures were common in European churches: see <https://www.change.org/p/remove-the-wittenberg-judensau>.

<sup>20</sup> WA 53, 601.

<sup>21</sup> WA 53, 602–3. See also *ibid*, 53, 598.

ever punished them.”<sup>22</sup>

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.’”<sup>23</sup>

He then inquires how things could be otherwise when the Jews lack the word of God to lighten their darkness.<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup>

## 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.<sup>26</sup> What was the text Luther read and who was the “good friend” to whom he dedicated his piece—Schlick or someone else?<sup>27</sup>

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*.<sup>28</sup> Herein, Luther’s

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<sup>22</sup> WA 53, 605: “Ach mein Gott, Mein lieber Schoepffer und Vater, du wirst mir gnediglich zu gut halten, das ich von deiner Goettlichen ewigen Maiestet so schendlich mus reden wider deine verfluchte feinde, Teuffel und Juden. Du weisst, das ichs thu aus brunst meines glaubens und ehren deiner Goettlichen Maiestet, Denn es gehet mir durch leib und leben. Aber recht ist dein Gericht, ‘Iustus es Domine.’ Ja, so sollen Jueden und sonst niemand gestrafft warden...”

<sup>23</sup> WA 53, 605–6: “Es ist geschehen, das du haben woltest.”

<sup>24</sup> WA 53, 609: Luther is referring here to Psalm 119 and 2 Pet 1:19.

<sup>25</sup> WA 53, 609: “Es ist der Zorn Gottes uber sie komen, wie sie verdienet haben.”

<sup>26</sup> WA 53, 414 (Drescher’s text “Von Juden und ihren Lügen” in the Introduction).

<sup>27</sup> In his previous text—*Wider die Sabbather*—his “good friend” had been Count Schlick; Kaufmann (*Luthers “Judenschriften,”* 97) suggests that here it was Sebastian Münster.

<sup>28</sup> Kaufmann, *Luthers “Judenschriften,”* 97–99.

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.<sup>29</sup> In his explication of Matthew and the forward to *Biblia Hebraica*, Münster comments widely upon the explanations given by the medieval *Sefer Nizahon*, Kimhi, Rashi, and other Talmudists.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 96–110. Luther also had personal, political, and ecclesiastical reasons. In his analysis, Kaufman adduces the following factors: 1) Criticism by colleagues, against which *On the Jews and their Lies* had been largely directed, had damaged Luther and Münster's common goal of limiting Jewish influence; 2) these objections had also interfered with the relations between the cities and the churches of Wittenberg and Basel; 3) Luther had previously ensured that these were good; 4) Luther and Philipp Melanchton were busy writing introductions to the German translation of the Koran they hoped would be ready for publication shortly in Basel which was met with mixed reactions in the city.

<sup>30</sup> WA 53, 495. Sebastian Münster's book reinforced in Luther's mind what he had read in Porchetus' and Lyra's texts. He had previously made note of the rabbis' explanations, concluding that they had begun misrepresenting the interpretations given by Rabbi Akiba and Haggai and Daniel and Genesis 49—on the basis of which Akiba followed Bar Koziba/Kokhba. For the *Biblia Hebraica*, see Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 97. Although Münster only published his principal grammar work in 1542, he had already issued a Hebrew language Bible (*Biblia Hebraica latina planeque nova*) in 1534/35 and the Gospel according to Matthew (*Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum in Lingua Hebraica*) in 1537. Münster's knowledge and help had been invaluable to Luther in his retranslation of the Bible. For *Sefer Nizahon*, see Stephen Burnett, "A Dialogue of the Deaf: Hebrew Pedagogy and Anti-Jewish Polemic in Sebastian Münster's *Messiahs of the Christians and the Jews* (1529/39)": <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=classicsfacpub>, p. 175. According to Burnett, this (written at the end of the 1200s/beginning of the 1300s) "was one of the most aggressive and pugnacious anti-Christian polemics." He also argues that Münster borrowed texts from the *Books of Faith*, Rabbi David Kimhi's biblical commentaries, and Nahmanides' *Vikkuah*.

<sup>31</sup> Paris (1240), Barcelona (1263), and Tortosa (1413/14): see <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5226-disputations>.

<sup>32</sup> Kaufmann, *Luther's "Judenschriften,"* 125; Burnett, "A Dialogue of the Deaf," 180. This was the opinion Margaritha stated in his book, according to which Jewish rabbi and kabbalist Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi (1460/70) maintained that friendly relations with the Jews meant

## Conclusion

In this article, I have 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: Rebel 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 Augustinus and medieval theology.

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something entirely different to the Jewish community than to Christians, the former regarding it as a sign of the approaching eschaton.

# The Secret of the Reformation

Armin Bachor

## 1. Introduction

First of all, I am not the one to say what the secret of the Reformation is. Anyone who thinks he can spell this out has obviously not fully understood the Reformation's basic implications. I want to avoid that. Secondly, as I take you through some of my personal reflections on the Reformation, I am well aware of the fact that we can only look at a small portion of it. Since I was raised in my early years of faith in the sphere of Lutheran Pietism and later on "theologized" (socialized) in the context of more Lutheran theology, I feel more comfortable talking about features of the Lutheran Reformation. So forgive my "sectarian" approach.

Let us now dive into the adventure. Why has the Reformation become such a powerful event—one we still talk about 500 years later? Somehow, the Reformation changed the world.

## 2. Get a friend and change the world—The principle of complementary ministry

While Martin Luther had a lot of enemies, he also had some patrons and companions in both ecclesiastical and political circles. He only had one intimate friend, however—Philipp Melanchthon (Schwarzerd—black earth).<sup>1</sup> I shall refer to him here as Philipp. His dearest friend, I will call Martin. Despite their intimacy, the two men were very different in character. In the preface to Melanchthon's Commentary on Galatians (1529), Martin wrote of Philipp thus:

I had to fight with rabble and devils, for which reason my books are very warlike. I am the rough pioneer who must break the road; but Master Philipp comes along softly and gently, sows and waters heartily, since God has richly endowed him with gifts.<sup>2</sup>

Martin was the warrior, Philipp the peacemaker. Martin exemplified strength of faith and revolutionary vision. Philipp was the incarnation of caution and temperance—moderate, conscientious, and irenic. When, once in a while, Martin Luther mixed things up, Philipp restructured the chaos, reshaped thought and theology, and recreated order—re-formed things. While the two shared a common goal, they took slightly different—to my mind complementary—hermeneutical approaches to Scriptures.

This divergence comes across clearly in a letter Martin wrote Philipp in June 1530:

To your great anxiety by which you are made weak, I am a cordial foe; for the cause is not ours. It is your philosophy, and not your theology, which tortures you so, as though you could accomplish anything by your useless anxieties. So far as the public cause is concerned, I am well content and satisfied; for I know that it is right and true, and, what is more, it is the cause of Christ and God himself. For that reason, I am merely a spectator. If we fall, Christ will

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<sup>1</sup> "Philip Melanchthon": [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip\\_Melanchthon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Melanchthon) (accessed 20.7.2017).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

likewise fall; and if he falls, I would rather fall with Christ than stand with the emperor.<sup>3</sup>

Martin was a powerful preacher to the people, Philipp a thoughtful teacher of scholars. Philipp systematized Luther's ideas, defending them in public, and formulated them so that they could become the basis for religious education. Philipp became the "Teacher of Germany." Even today, the curriculum of many liberal arts programs draws on his ideas.<sup>4</sup>

One of the secrets of the Reformation was this powerful complementary ministry of these two men. God called Martin, gifted him, and sent him. At his side, he placed Philipp. This follows a biblical model. Moses was God's "microphone," Aaron the loudspeaker who broadcasted the message to the people. David had Jonathan and Naomi Ruth. In the New Testament, God gave Paul Barnabas—Paul the speaker and Barnabas the moderator.

If you feel that God is asking you to help change the world—and we should all feel like this in some sense—pray for a friend at your side. Do you want to change our world today? Get a friend and change the world.

### **3. Let the light shine—Re-discovering the gospel**

The centuries of the Middle or "Dark" Ages were indeed bleak. Common people received no education, the vast majority not being able to read or write. There was basically no Bible—nor any sermons in a language ordinary people could follow and understand. One beacon stood out in this darkness: Judaism and the synagogue. Judaism had the Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew language, the source of revelation and truth, and the basis for faith and ethics. The synagogue was a torch of intellectual illumination and spiritual formation.

In the synagogue, ordinary people—not just select celebrities who went into the monasteries and were educated by the Church—could gain an education and learn to read and write. While the Jewish people had been humiliated and suppressed by the Church for many centuries, "as the elect and dearly loved people" (Rom 11:28)—because "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29)—Judaism remained the only place of true enlightenment for ordinary people during the Dark Ages. Some people in the Church appreciated this.

In 1517, biblical truth—the gospel—was not widely known or visible, having been covered over by Church tradition and superstition. Augustine's theology of grace had been replaced by Aristotelian scholasticism. Nor was the Bible available in a language ordinary people could read and understand. Martin Luther did not invent or discover the gospel—he just re-discovered it. As a theology professor, he was overwhelmed by its power as he turned in faith to God, who accepted him in Christ alone. Luther was gripped by grace. He experienced the power of grace for spiritual liberation personally—and then proclaimed it publicly. The rediscovery of the pure gospel sparked in him an urge to make it known to others.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, "An Affirmation of our Lutheran Identity and Heritage," Concordia College, New York: <https://campussuite-storage.s3.amazonaws.com/prod/11171/ce306d10-1ca3-11e6-b537-22000bd8490f/1300120/9eb6c691-657f-11e7-99ef-124f7febbf4a/file/OurIdentity.pdf> (accessed 7.7.2017).

Despite the authority—in a sense, divine inspiration—of the Latin Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible), Philipp Melanchthon advised Luther to translate the New and “Old” Testaments into German, serving as his principal assistant with regard to the “Old Testament.” As the Jewish Virtual Library notes:

To translate the Old Testament, Luther needed help. He consulted Jewish scholars, and the great Christian savant Melanchthon was particularly helpful. Luther made wide use of the commentaries of Nicholas de Lyra, a French scholar who drew heavily on the commentary of Rashi, “whom he transcribes almost word for word. So frequently did Luther draw from de Lyra that a well-known couplet asserts, “Si Lyra non Lyrasset, Luther non saltasset” (Had Lyra not played, Luther could not have danced).<sup>5</sup>

In order to translate the Bible, Luther drew on Jewish sources, sensing the value of this beacon of intellectual illumination and spiritual formation. In translating the Bible, he uncovered and brought to light the plain gospel so that everyone could know about it. Over approximately a decade, his translation of the complete Bible was reprinted eighty times. One tenth of all German households had at least a printed New Testament in the German language. Church doctrine and teaching could now be checked against the Scriptures, and lies about the Jewish people and anti-Judaic polemic detected and repudiated by the plain statements of the Bible. The German Bible was the unbiased judge that stands witness even against Luther’s own growing anti-Judaic misconceptions and polemic against the Jews. Luther’s rediscovery of the gospel created another beacon of light and hope at the end of the Dark Ages.

#### **4. *Euangelion* and evangelism—Luther, the gospel, and the Jewish people**

Rom 1:16-17 are often referred to as the “Reformation verses”:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, “The righteous by faith will live.”

These two verses wonderfully interweave the nature and purpose of the gospel (Greek: *euangelion*) on the one hand and the challenge to proclaim it (*evangelism*) on the other hand. It is not always easy to distinguish these two aspects, however—the message of the gospel and the evangelistic mandate. The power of the gospel does not derive from my evangelism. The power is inherent in the gospel itself. Luther also knew that the gospel is not only for the Greek—non-Jews. He was challenged by his own reformation discovery to change his attitude towards the Jewish people. In his day, no Jews lived in smaller cities such as Wittenberg. He thus only met a few Jewish people—and never visited a synagogue. As he was rediscovering the gospel, however, he also rediscovered the Jews as a distinct people, loved and elected by God and called to embrace the gospel of the Messiah.

A few years after his personal gospel encounter, Luther shocked Christianity with the notion that “Jesus was a Jew.” While this fact was known, it wasn’t

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<sup>5</sup> “Luther’s Translation of the Bible”: The Book of the People of the Book under Judaic Treasures: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/luther-s-translation-of-the-bible-judaic-treasures> (accessed 20.6.2017); “Nicholas of Lyra”: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas\\_of\\_Lyra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_of_Lyra) (accessed 25.6.2017).

“politically correct” to talk about it in the Catholic Church. In his 1523 essay, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, Luther challenged Pope and pulpit to reconsider the fate of the Jewish people under the rule of the oppressive Catholic Church:

They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings ... When they baptize them they show them nothing of Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and mockery ... If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles ... When we are inclined to boast of our position [as Christians] we should remember that we are but Gentiles, while the Jews are of the lineage of Christ. We are aliens and in-laws; they are blood relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord. Therefore, if one is to boast of flesh and blood the Jews are actually nearer to Christ than we are ... If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life.<sup>6</sup>

In the second part of this treatise, Luther sets out to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, emphasizing that God has honored the Jews by giving them the Torah and prophecy as He did to no other nation. At the end of his life, Luther even recommended a pedagogically-laddered preaching of the gospel: the Jews should first be made known to the man Jesus as the true Messiah. Later, they should be taught that Jesus is also the true God, thus overcoming their prejudice that God cannot be man.

Jakob Gipher—a Rabbi probably baptized in 1519 as a consequence of Luther’s sermons, then teaching Hebrew in Wittenberg—supported Luther’s booklet *Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*.<sup>7</sup> Both men sought to integrate the Jews into society in order to convert them more successfully.

Luther did not see any inherent positive spiritual or cultural value in Judaism or the Jewish people themselves, continuing to cling to the Augustinian notion that the Jewish people played a “negative role” in relation to the Church’s “positive position.”<sup>8</sup> His fervent desire was that they would hear the Gospel

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.uni-due.de/collcart/es/sem/s6/txt09\\_1.htm](https://www.uni-due.de/collcart/es/sem/s6/txt09_1.htm) (accessed 25.6.2017); see also Walter I. Brandt, ed., *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 45:199-229; “Martin Luther and antisemitism”: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_and\\_antisemitism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_and_antisemitism) (accessed 25.6.2017); Ray Pritz in: *Mishkan*, Issue 50-51/2007 „...And the Children Struggled“ - The Church and the Jews through History, 92-98.

<sup>7</sup> Bileam Lukas Matondo Comtesse, *Daß Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei (1523)—Eine Analyse der soziokulturellen und theologischen Einflüsse auf die erste “Judenschrift” Martin Luthers* (Mainz: Hauptseminararbeit, 2013): [http://www.glk.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/B\\_Comtesse-DassJesusChristuseingeborenerJudesei1523.pdf](http://www.glk.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/B_Comtesse-DassJesusChristuseingeborenerJudesei1523.pdf) (accessed 25.6.2017); “Martin Luther und die Juden”: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_und\\_die\\_Juden](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_und_die_Juden) (accessed 25.6.2017).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Gottheil and Louis Ginzberg, “Augustin”: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2136-augustine>; Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA, “Einführung in “Augustins (Judenpredigt) (Aduersus Iudaeos)”: <http://www.augustinus.de/projekte-des-zaf/epistulae-projekt/11-startseite-nachrichten/2-beispiel-einer-nachricht> (accessed 5.8.2017); Martin Rothgangel, “Von der Diagnose zur

clearly proclaimed in his essay and, by reading it, be moved to convert to Christianity. He also wanted the truth of the Reformation to be proved biblically correct—thus refuting Catholic doctrine—by successful evangelism. This excessive expectation contributed to his later disappointment and radical change of heart in regard to the Jewish people.

In this way he put his own “missionary motives” before the gospel, without considering how these might restrain the “power of the gospel” itself. Luther confused *euangelion* with evangelism—the gospel message with his desire for evangelistic results. In his zeal, he once again impeded the inherent power of the *euangelion*, hindering its working within the Jewish people. Luther missed the opportunity to put his own evangelistic motives into a wider biblical perspective.

The apostle Paul knew something of the secret behind the hardening of the hearts of his people and the minimal results his own reasoning in Jewish synagogues would effect: “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Seeing that I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I could provoke my people to jealousy and save *some* of them” (Rom 11:13). Paul was deeply cognizant—not least from his own life—of God’s loving patience towards His chosen people. He thus exemplified this attitude in his own ministry towards them. By regularly visiting the synagogue, he had become aware that he might only save *some* of his own people.

## Conclusion

In the spirit of the Lutheran Reformation:

### **1. Get a friend and change the world—Team up for change!**

We will not change our world all alone—or even in a team. Take on the challenge of a personal complementary ministry! Pray for a close companion to stand beside you.

### **2. Let the light shine—Communicate the gospel in new ways!**

Be gripped anew by grace alone! Find new ways and channels to communicate the true and pure light of the gospel!

### **3. *Euangelion* and evangelism—God is able!**

Avoid confusing the power of the gospel with your well-meaning motives and actions as you reach out to the Jewish people. The gospel itself should always be clearly separated from evangelistic motives. The gospel has power—not our methods to communicate it. Let us always keep in mind the Scripture: “And even they [the Jews who still reject their Messiah]—if they do not continue in their unbelief—will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Rom 11:23). God is able! *Elohim yakhol* (in Hebrew)! God has the unrivaled patience and enduring and prevailing power to reach the hearts of His own chosen people.

Elohim yakhol! God is able—this is the secret of the Reformation!

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Therapie, Christliche Identität ohne Antijudaismus”: <http://www.theo-web.de/zeitschrift/ausgabe-2002-02/rothgangel2.pdf> (accessed 5.8.2017).

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## Book Reviews

Rich A. Robinson

Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism*. Trans. Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Richard S. Harvey, *Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Lies*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017.

Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism: Against His Better Judgment*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

As I write, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation will soon be upon us. Among the abundance of volumes devoted to various Reformation topics, three books—two recent, a third a few years older—do an outstanding job of exploring the subject of Luther and the Jews. The cover art of Kaufmann's and Harvey's books draws from the same classic portrait of Luther, both volumes also sharing similar titles. While it is easy to mistake one for the other at first glance, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* comes from the pen of Thomas Kaufmann, on the Faculty of Theology at the Georg-August-Universität at Göttingen, while *Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Lies* is written by Richard S. Harvey, one of two senior researchers on the staff of the mission agency Jews for Jesus (this reviewer being the other) and Associate Lecturer at All Nations Christian College. The late Eric W. Gritsch, born in Austria, was an American Lutheran theologian and educator.

Kaufmann's *Luther's Jews* is a scholarly account of Luther's relationship with the Jewish people—or at least his *conception* of them, for he knew few personally. The title underscores the lack of objectivity in Luther's outlook: "Luther's Jews are a conglomerate of ill-defined fears, calculated publishing projects, and targeted use of biblical traditions, and also of resentment, cultural traditions, and sheer fantasy—in other words, a phantom" (Kindle edition, location 256). They are therefore *his* Jews, not *the* Jews—a distinction with lasting repercussions.

Six chapters successively treat the Jews in their life on the "fringes" of medieval German society, Luther's early theological views regarding them, his role in altering societal attitudes for the better towards them ("better" clearly being a relative term in this context!), the changes in the 1520s and 1530s that sent the pendulum swinging in the other direction, and his late "vicious" writings, particularly *On the Jews and Their Lies*. The final chapter treats the reception

history of Luther's Jewish writings—how people read Luther and acted upon this reading—from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. The conclusion is followed by notes, sources, bibliography, and an index. 15 illustrations are also included.

There are several takeaways. One is the continuity—or lack thereof—between Luther's earlier and later writings. Of the latter, *On the Jews and Their Lies* has become Exhibit A of Luther's attitude. A typical modern understanding of Luther runs something like this: he started out friendly to the Jews, hopeful of their conversion. When his hopes failed to materialize, he became bitter and resentful, unleashing unprecedented fury against them. In other words, a friendly early Luther and an anti-Semitic later Luther—various reasons being adduced to account for the change.

Reality is never so cut and dried, however. As Kaufmann evinces, Luther was a product of his age, harboring the same deeply corrosive views of Jews as others: an obstinate people who deliberately refused to believe in Jesus, were unable to understand their own Scriptures, and were devious and harmful to Christian society, wishing for the destruction of Christians, etc.

Luther certainly shifted his position, moving from a degree of toleration—albeit not in the modern sense of *tolerance*—to a programmatic manifesto calling for the burning of synagogues, the expulsion of Jews from Christian countries, etc. His early position stemmed in part from his criticism of the Catholic Church. A relatively positive view of Jews and others added force to his polemic against the latter, whose behavior had prevented the Jews from converting. Even in his earlier work, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*, Kaufmann argues, however, “we cannot escape the impression that even this text was read as a rule as an exegetical tract directed against the Jews” (2272). Crucially, Luther argued for a policy of relative lenience “until I can see what effect I have had” (1114). His early “openness” was a social experiment, one influenced by people such as Justus Jonas. Underlying it was a poisoned view of the Jewish people that only became fully explicit later on. Interestingly, *On the Jews and Their Lies* transpired to be the “least successful of all Luther's Jewish writing” (2191), having little impact on practical policy toward the Jews.

A second takeaway relates to whether Luther was anti-Judaic or anti-Semitic. In the medieval world, that distinction was irrelevant. As Kaufmann notes, religion was inseparable from other aspects of medieval life. Luther's outlook was thus undoubtedly “rooted in a religiously motivated anti-Judaism, but insofar as it attributed particular negative characteristics such as deviousness, the lust to kill, and love of money to Jews as Jews it went beyond anti-Judaism” (676).

A third important takeaway concerns the “reception” of Luther's views regarding the Jews. Sixteenth-century Lutheran theologians such as Johannes Mathesius argued for a continuity between the earlier and later Luther. Nikolaus Selnecker, in contrast, believed Luther to exhibit an “anti-Semitic, proto-racist view of the Jews based on the ‘immutability’ of their ‘essential nature’” (2310). He also believed Luther's harsher later writings had been suppressed: “Selnecker, however, made loyalty to Luther's and Melanchthon's hostility to the Jews a defining element in the construction of Lutheran identity” (2318).

The Pietist movement brought Luther's early views to the fore, the changing

social and cultural needs turning Luther into the “father of modern toleration towards the Jews” (2418). This approach continued through the eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth. Some Jewish scholars—such as Ludwig Geiger and Samuel Krauss—also sought to “reclaim” Luther while not ignoring his harsher writings. The Nazi movement, however, championed Luther as an anti-Semite who underpinned its racial-purity doctrine, entirely neglecting the theological foundations of his thought. Like Jesus himself, Luther has thus frequently been molded into the exemplar *du jour* for prevailing cultural currents.

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Richard Harvey’s *Luther and the Jews* is part primer, part personal journey, and part call to action. The author is a Jewish believer in Yeshua living in Europe, with all that entails. Active in conferences hosting Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews and in forums bringing together Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Jewish believers in—as well as the author of several papers on these subjects—the 500th anniversary of the Reformation prompted him to examine Jewish-German relationships in the light of Martin Luther’s views.

The first chapter describes Luther’s life and biography. Chapter 2 outlines the history of the Jewish people in broad strokes, including that of the Messianic Jewish movement. Harvey also gives a personal account of his family’s experience during the Holocaust.

Entitled “Luther’s Lies about the Jews,” Chapter 3 actually serves to set the background for a discussion of the subject. Like Kaufmann, Harvey rejects the distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Briefly surveying the alleged anti-Semitic texts in the New Testament, he then introduces the reader to Christian supersessionism, thereby setting the historical context for understanding Luther. Harvey points out that *On the Jews and Their Lies* really contains the “lies about the Jews” Luther propounded.

Chapter 4 analyzes Luther’s texts themselves. As throughout much of the book, Harvey approaches the subject from a personal perspective. Not believing that Luther can be absolved of responsibility for his works, he notes—with Kaufmann—that his writings in relation to the Jews went hand in hand with his polemic against Rome. He looks at four of Luther’s works—*That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*, *Against the Sabbatarians*, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and *The Last Words of David*. While the first work is frequently adduced as evidence of Luther’s early philo-Semitism, it is in fact neither pro-Jewish nor representative of a position Luther later abandoned. Despite his recommendation that the Jews be treated kindly, Luther’s contempt of them demonstrates how deeply embedded he was in the worldview of his day. On numerous occasions in *Against the Sabbatarians* he refers to the “1,500 years of exile” as proof of God’s judgment on the Jews, blaming them—without any evidence—of influencing Christians towards keeping the Sabbath instead of Sunday.

Harvey finds *On the Jews and Their Lies* perplexing and disturbing. Although the belief that Jews should live “where there are no Christians” was not uncommon in an age when their expulsion was a real possibility, Luther goes on to say: “Let them think of their fatherland; then they need no longer wail and lie

before God against us that we are holding them captive” (1458). Here, ironically—and for all the wrong reasons—Luther sounds like a proto-Zionist!

This chapter ends with a summary of Luther’s five “lies” concerning the Jews and a prayer of forgiveness—in anticipation of the later call to look for ways to heal the wounds of the past.

Chapter 5 offers some proposals—more suggestive than programmatic—for overcoming the past via reconciliation. This must include repentance, the righting of past wrongs, and appropriate reparation and restitution. Here, Harvey seeks to highlight Luther’s positive aspects: the deeper understanding he has given us of Jesus and God’s purposes, his demonstration of the way in which Jesus fulfills the “Old Testament” promises, and the instruction he gives Christians through his catechisms. At the end of the day, however, he argues that none of these positive points mitigate his anti-Jewish attitudes, and Harvey then provides a longer list of the “lies” he told about them and quoting extensively from positive Lutheran responses.

As a concrete step, he suggests that the *Judensau*—“Jew-Pig”—sculpture on the façade of the Wittenberg church that depicts a rabbi looking under a sow’s tail (representing study of the Talmud) and the Jews as suckling piglets be removed. Here, he inserts the text of a petition for just such an act. He also notes, however, that some people would keep it in place as a historical testimony of sorts—albeit suitably annotated—to encourage a “culture of remembrance” (1866). (As I write, Americans are similarly discussing the fate of the statues of notable Confederate figures).

Chapter 6 offers a number of counter-histories, imagining what might have happened if Luther had written in a different vein, as a way of building “a future based on the imagined past” (2088). The conclusion is followed by a list of further reading and resources, and—in an unexpected creative touch—Harvey’s impassioned poetic lamentation over the *Judensau*. Set to music, this is available online. *Luther and the Jews* thus provides a much-needed Messianic Jew perspective on the great reformer.

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Eric Gritsch’s *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism* deals, over three chapters, with the nature of anti-Semitism, the evidence supporting the claim of Luther’s anti-Semitism, and finally the “after-effects” of his writings. The chapter on anti-Semitism is particularly helpful. While some elements of the inventory of Christian anti-Semitism will be familiar to readers, Gritsch places the phenomenon in a broader context. He notes that Rom 11:25–27, for example, “stumped” Luther because his anti-Semitism prevented him from grasping Paul’s view of Jewish-Christian relations. According to Gritsch, this was against his “better judgment.” On occasion, Luther took a more pastoral attitude towards the Jewish people, despite his underlying anti-Semitic attitude. Gritsch thus seems more inclined to attribute Luther’s changing attitudes to failed attempts at evangelization rather than to Kaufmann’s argument that Luther’s early openness was a “social experiment.”

According to Gritsch, Luther failed to heed his own principles—advocating, for example, against any speculation regarding the “hidden God”—the “mystery” to

which Paul refers in Rom 11:25. Rather than attempting to explain the anti-Semitism prevalent in his day, he thus maintained that it reflected God's own hatred of the Jews. Hereby, he violated his own principle, going against his "better judgment."

The "after-effects" of Luther's anti-Semitism, Gritsch posits, were initially rather minimal among Christians, the Muslims being the primary target of Christian enmity. In the late sixteenth century, however, Luther was increasingly read as an anti-Semite. The eighteenth-century Pietists ignored his anti-Semitic attitudes, painting Luther in a pro-Jewish light, while during the later stages of the Enlightenment his anti-Semitic writings were not even discussed. Eventually, Luther came to be represented as friendly and philo-Semitic in his youth and an anti-Semite in his old age (a view all three books discussed here reject).

This chapter is particularly helpful in offering a lengthy discussion of how Luther's anti-Semitism was "received" by two scholars—the Lutheran Walther Bienert and the Dutch Reformed Heiko Oberman. While Bienert sought to justify Luther, Oberman asserts that he believed them to be God's "measuring instrument"—i.e., the barometer of the extent to which evil prevailed in the world between Jesus' first and second comings. In other words, in their self-righteousness they mirror the same sin found among Christians.

Gritsch's book is a counterpart to Kaufmann's. Its numerous primary quotes may make some readers unversed in Luther's thought feel as though they are losing the forest for the trees. Luther's thought and personality are complex. Although embedded in his own time, he was unmistakably his own person. While Kaufmann delineates the nature of Luther's anti-Semitism more synthetically, Gritsch introduces us to Luther firsthand, also providing an excellent historical treatment of anti-Semitism. Readers must decide for themselves whether Luther's anti-Semitism was indeed "against his better judgment" or more thoroughly embedded in his life and theology than this phrase appears to indicate.

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The three authors do not interact much with one another. Kaufmann does not mention Gritsch and the latter only cites Kaufmann in the bibliography. Harvey mentions both bibliographically, adding that Gritsch offers "a defense of Luther's anti-Judaism (in my view unsuccessful)." In my opinion, Gritsch does not so much *defend* Luther's views as argue that they contradict some of his own expressed principles—one of the major points of contention. We would have benefitted from a panel discussion between all three authors!

If you are "new" to Martin Luther and his anti-Semitism, pick up Richard Harvey's book first. This expresses his heart and desire for concrete steps to be taken—for, although he does not explicitly remind us of this verse, "faith [and "words"?] without works is dead." Then turn to Thomas Kaufmann, who will take you deeper and shed light on the effects of Luther's views on future generations. Gritsch serves as a counterpart to Kaufmann. Each book citing historical events and episodes not covered by the others, the three complement one another. Two provide a historical assessment of the past by Lutheran scholars, the other a personal yet scholarly response from a Messianic Jew ultimately oriented

toward the present and future. Inasmuch as the issue of anti-Semitism does not constitute the whole Martin Luther story, those who want a fuller picture should also pick up a general biography.

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## ***From the Israeli Scene***

*Who is a Jew? Is a child's Jewish status conferred on them via the Jewishness of their father – or of their mother?*

Elisabeth E. Levy

When we moved back to Israel four years ago, our youngest daughter started in Ulpan (Hebrew language school). She could speak Hebrew, but she also needed to learn to read and write the language. She was familiar with both Christian and Jewish tradition from growing up in Norway in our home. I am a Gentile and my husband is Jewish. She'd always felt more attracted to Judaism and Israel than to Norway and Christianity, so moving to Israel was a great excitement for her.

She had her Bat-Mitzvah (literally, “daughter of the Commandment”, the coming-of-age ceremony that marks a young woman's passage as a Jewish adult) in Israel and was looking forward to live in her Jewish homeland. I carefully tried to explain to her that according to today's Orthodox Judaism, she was not considered Jewish because she had a Jewish father. The Orthodox believe Jewishness is passed down through the mother's line.

It was in Ulpan when she had her first experience of hearing, “You are not Jewish!” My husband and I had taught her at home to respond: “Ruth was not Jewish either and she became the mother of King David.” Gentile Ruth's words to her Jewish mother-in-law still resonate today: “Your God will be my God and your people will be my people.” (Ruth 1:16)

“Ruth converted and you should do the same,” the teacher told my daughter. Of course, there was no Orthodox institution in Ruth's day overseeing an official religious conversion process.

According to the Bible, a Jew is a person who has a Jewish father. According to rabbinic tradition, a person is Jewish if he or she has a Jewish mother. The question today is which of the two traditions, the biblical one or the rabbinical one, should be normative.

For most Jewish believers in Jesus, the Bible is their guide to how they'll answer that question. Rabbinic tradition does not have the same authority. It means that a person is considered Jewish via their father's bloodline. But today's Orthodox Judaism reads the Bible through the lens of rabbinical tradition. This tradition takes precedence over what the Bible says. In today's Israel only the Karaite Jews, who number about 10,000 people, reject rabbinical tradition and rely solely on what Scripture says.

There is no doubt that rabbinical tradition expounded in the Mishnah and the Talmud preserve cultural background which can help moderns better understand the Bible. However, tradition should never have authority over what is written in God's Word. Because the rabbis gave authority to tradition, they could then make the Bible say almost anything they wanted. Over time, the Bible became secondary and rabbinic tradition became the first and absolute

authority.

For the Messianic community, the question of the authority of rabbinic tradition remains a challenge. The Bible, both the New and the Old Testament, is the foundation. But the Messianic community grapples with how much place rabbinic tradition should have in their practice.

This question works itself out in many ways, including the question of Jewish identity. Should we define who is a Jew according to the Bible as the Messianic communities and the Karaites do, or should we follow rabbinic definition? And how should we consider the relatively new term “secular Jew”. Two hundred years ago, all Jews were religious. There were no other categories. Can a person today be secular and still be considered Jewish? Will the definition of who a Jew is also include secular Jews and Messianic Jews?

Maybe Ruth's words could be a lighthouse to follow also today: “Your God will be my God and your people will be my people.”

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