

500 YEARS REFORMATION

LUTHER2017

The Reformation and the Jews

An Orientation

Written on Behalf of
the Scientific Advisory Board
for the Reformation Jubilee 2017



I.

The anniversary in 2017 is not about Luther but about the Reformation. In contrast to earlier celebrations, when Luther anniversaries narrowly focused on Luther and German history, even then inappropriately so, the perspective of 2017 focuses on the European, indeed the global dimension of the Reformation, including its societal consequences. The notion of a contrast between German and English-American Protestantism, advanced as late as the mid 20th century, according to which there were two different worlds of Protestantism, one molded by Luther and the other by John Calvin (Lutheran Scandinavia tended to be ignored), is a thing of the past. Free Church Protestantism as it developed, at least in part, from elements of the „Left Wing“ of the Reformation has come to be increasingly seen as an integral part of the broader Reformation matrix. On the other hand, Protestantism and Catholicism in most places around the globe no longer face each other as worlds apart as had been the case for centuries. The cause of this change of things has not merely been the ecumenical movement and the commonly experienced challenge of a highly secularized western society. Rather, of incisive importance has been that the Reformation, some 500 years ago, fundamentally effected all sides, not only the different branches of the steadily expanding Protestantism but Roman Catholicism as well.

Indeed, the Reformation was a fundamental turn, for it affected nothing less than the foundations of western society, namely, the idea and reality of the one Christian world, led by the papacy, on the one hand, and secular authority, with the emperor at the pinnacle, on the other hand, i.e., the vision

of the *corpus christianum* which embraced the ecclesiastical, social, cultural, political spheres of society in one harmonious body. A development rooted in the victory over pagan religion in late Antiquity and subsequently defended within the Christian community against the challenge of heresy, this ecclesiastical-secular *corpus christianum* was, despite various tensions and shifts, for more than a thousand years both ideal and daily reality. Yet the whole concept, already weakened by a variety of political, economic, and social forces in the late Middle Ages, broke apart in the course of the Reformation. In a process replete with tensions, initiated in that era, but playing out over a long period of time, the *corpus christianum* was first replaced by a tolerated co-existence of several Christian traditions and finally, after the Enlightenment, by the principal of tolerance itself with all religions and ideologies permitted in a state which was no longer Christian, but neutral.

With his assertion that heretics were not to be executed („to burn heretics is against the Holy Spirit“), Martin Luther questioned the traditional notion of the ecclesiastical-secular *corpus christianum*. Indeed, this was one of the reasons for his excommunication. With his challenge to let differing convictions „burst upon each other“ so that truth could emerge in free discussion, Luther proposed an alternate route, a route without the use of force, to deal with diverse religious opinion. His steadily repeated notion that faith is brought about by God in man’s interior, and is in no way politically enforceable, offered the theological justification for those principles and maxims. In his reflections on the „two regiments“ of God – the spiritual regiment exercised solely by the word of the gospel through which humans are made into faithful Christians, and the radically different secular regiment that uses force, through which God cares for social order, peace, and justice – Luther developed this notion into a theological-political conception. Through his appearance before the highest secular representative of Christendom, the emperor, in Worms 1521, he became its symbol. Luther’s impulses, advanced entirely in the early years of the Reformation, were affirmed by all branches of the Reformation movement. Although other Reformers subsequently further elucidated the new direction in somewhat

different ways, they all shared the same challenge to the traditional vision of the *corpus christianum* implicit therein.

Of course, this proved to be only one side of the story. As the Reformation spread and became institutionalized, the Reformers and the secular rulers in German and European lands that had turned Protestant, for their part, also embraced the ideal of a Christian society kept in right doctrine and praxis jointly by church and secular authority – but only now in the narrower context of individual territories and on the basis of the protestant confession. The Reformation principle which advocated freedom of faith from political power was affirmed only in a limited fashion. It was realized mainly among some groups of the Anabaptist and spiritualist „Left Wing“ whose adherents were themselves persecuted by the mainstream Protestant churches as politically dangerous. The impulses of the early Reformation became only gradually effective; more extended developments and additional influences were necessary before they began to determine comprehensively the ecclesiastical and political conditions in Protestant Europe.

The theologian and philosopher Ernst Troeltsch summarized this ambiguity in his statement that Protestantism initially remained deeply medieval in its general lines and manifestations. “The significant modernity undeniably entailed in it comes fully to the fore only when the first ... form of Protestantism is broken to pieces.” This is particularly true for the vision and realization of a Christian society. And at no other point did this ambiguity find a more poignant expression than in the Christian relations with Jews. Ever since the formation of the ecclesiastical-secular *corpus christianum* the Jews represented the special case which could not be integrated into this corpus and could only be dealt with through various ways of separation: confinement to a life with diminished legal status on the margin of society, or, as in many regions in Europe since the late Middle Ages, expulsion. In the early years of the Reformation, when Luther incisively questioned the *corpus christianum* model, he offered an unheard of demand for how the majority of society should deal with Jews: Jews should have the right to live side by side with Christians, without any limitation.

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Later, however, when the formation of Protestant church structures and communities was at issue, the Reformers, Luther in the first place, voiced demands as to how Christians should relate to Jews that echoed the most restrictive and most destructive practices of the Middle Ages. Now Luther required that Jews must be expelled from Protestant territories of the Empire or, at the very least, their religious infrastructure had to be destroyed while at the same time they must be reduced to a slave-like status. Thus, Jews continued to be seen as aliens that could not be part of a Christian society.

It was Prussian-North German Pietism that questioned once more, and with greater practical consequences, the notion of a congruence of the Christian religion and society. Programmatically, the Pietists turned to the Luther of the early years of the Reformation. Among them and in some strands of the German Enlightenment the impulses bore fruit which Luther had in those years enunciated. For almost two centuries the dominant Protestant discourse in Germany about Jews followed these impulses. In the nineteenth century, however, the anti-Judaic recommendations of the old Luther were remembered in 'voelkisch' [race-based]-anti-semitic circles, who merged them with their own notions and so understood them not as a religious, but as a racial program. This development reached its climax in the appropriation of Luther by Nazi anti-Semitism. Increasingly, Protestant theologians participated in this new construal. At the same time, Protestant critics of the National Socialist Jewish policy, occasionally in Germany (e.g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer), but mainly in Lutheran northern Europe, oriented themselves on the Luther of the early Reformation.

The connection between racial anti-Semitism and parts of German Protestantism, thus, was in a special way a German phenomenon and belongs to a particular chapter of German history. For the German evangelical churches, however, it is the nadir of their history. In the last several decades these churches have acknowledged their share in the history of German guilt, of which the return to Luther's late writings has been part. These writings are seen nowadays – as was the case for a long period in earlier

centuries – as altogether irreconcilable with Luther’s own theology and the New Testament. Through the affirmation of the religious neutrality of the body politic with equal rights for all religious associations, especially Judaism, the evangelical churches in Germany contribute to the strengthening of the institutional barriers that will make permanently impossible legal deprivation and persecution of Jews.

II.

The very fact that Martin Luther was utilized by the Third Reich for Nazi Anti-Semitism renders his anti-Judaic pronouncements a burden which will for the foreseeable future be connected with his name. Even though the 2017 anniversary is about the Reformation in its entirety, given Luther's significance as instigator and theological trailblazer of the Reformation, his anti-Jewish pronouncements cannot be ignored when commemorating this event. In the interest of historical clarification, which the *Wissenschaftliche Beirat* considers as crucial for how this topic is to be treated, a more detailed analysis of the previous brief comments with particular reference to Martin Luther will here follow. This will be done in two sections: the understanding and historical contextualisation of Luther's programmatic pronouncements about the Christian relations with Jews (Section A) and the reception of these pronouncements in subsequent history (Section B)

A) Luther's programmatic pronouncements about Christian relations with Jews: A contrary understanding of the relationship of religion and the public square.

1. Martin Luther twice commented in programmatic writings (alongside a multitude of theological reflections and ad hoc comments) on how a society, characterized by an overwhelming Christian majority, should relate

to Jews: I) in the early years of the Reformation (*Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei /That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* 1523); and II) three years before his death (*Von den Juden und ihren Luegen/ Concerning the Jews and their Lies* 1543). The decisive difference between these two treatises lies in their contradictory conceptions of the relationship between religion and the body politic.

2. One cannot understand Luther's pronouncements without understanding the historical presuppositions which were in Luther's day fundamentally different from those operative today. Whereas contemporary western democracies and their religious pluralism embrace an ideological neutrality for the body politic, from Late Antiquity well into modern times the Christian world affirmed the ideal of religious homogeneity of all people which categorically rejected other religions as well as Christian heresies. To assure such homogeneity was the joint responsibility of church and state, the one by means of doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline, the other by means of Law and government power.

3. However, one exception was granted by the laws of the church and of a Roman Empire that increasingly saw itself as Christian, namely, Jews enjoyed the benefit of residency, exercise of their religion, and self-rule. Jews, therefore, had a different status than did heretics for whom the death penalty was mandatory. But they possessed neither economic nor political equality. Both their legal rights as well as their civic restrictions grew out of religious considerations. The arguments for their rights were that Jews were adherents of the Old Testament which had prophesized the coming of the Christ as savior for them and for the whole world, and that according to Sacred Scripture there will be Jews until the Second Coming of Christ. The various restrictions imposed on them were justified as appropriate because of their stubborn rejection and even crucifixion of Christ, despite the clear and unmistakable testimony of their own Scripture.

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4. Repeatedly, these limited legal rights of Jews were enjoined by popes and bishops, emperors and other rulers. However, the range of the rights granted to them as well as of the restrictions imposed on them the by letter of the law and actual practice was considerable. From the time of the first crusade onward (1096-1099), there were increasingly expulsions, pogroms, and new legal deprivations of Jews. In the late Middle Ages, the situation worsened through a whole set of horror stories, such as the allegation of Jewish poisoning of wells, desecration of the host, blood libel for ritualistic purposes, together with the charge of usury based on the Jewish involvement in the world of finance, since Jews had few other means of earning a livelihood. Step by step Jews were expelled from west European countries. By the year 1500 Jews were no longer living in England, France, Switzerland, Spain, and Portugal. In the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation Jews continued to be tolerated but even there many territories and free cities had expelled Jews as well. The rights afforded them in both canon and civil law had thereby become largely obsolete.

5. One must keep an eye on these ideological-mental and *realpolitik* presuppositions when one reflects on the attitude of the Reformers and their contemporaries towards Jews. On all sides – Humanists, Reformers, reform theologians loyal to the pope resp. Counter Reformers – Christians shared the conviction that Jewish salvation as well was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. There was also the shared conviction that the Christological interpretation of Old Testament prophecies was self-evident so that the Jewish rejection was the result of stubbornness and intellectual blindness. Jewish refusal to acknowledge the messiahship of Jesus, his divine sonship, and the divine Trinity appeared to them to be blaspheming the one true God. Thus the prince of humanists, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/67-1536), wrote: “In their synagogues the Jews incessantly blaspheme the Son of God, and their blasphemy reflects on God the Father. They sneer at the cross of Christ, and to be called Christian in their eyes is worse than to be called a thief and a murderer” (1523). Similarly, Johann Eck (1486-1543), Luther’s

most renowned antagonist, combined this charge with the demand that the punishment stipulated for blasphemy in the Old Testament be imposed – death at the stake together with the burning of all writings in which such blasphemy was found (1541).

6. Equally universally shared was the ideal of a homogeneous Christian body politic, in which Jews were bound to be considered an alien entity. For some, expulsion offered the proper solution, as it had been done in numerous European countries. Erasmus for one praised France for being so lucky as to have freed itself from this “plague.” And he wished the same for the Holy Roman Empire (1517). Others found themselves obligated, by virtue of the laws of the Empire or of the church to concede the right of residency. This was emphatically underlined by the famous Hebraicist Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), reluctantly by Eck who in line with simultaneous papal pronouncements was willing to concede legal residency only under slave-like conditions, i.e., the exclusion of virtually all vocations. Instead of being involved in finance that had enslaved Christians, Jews should be obligated to engage in despicable and heavy corporal labor.

7. Against the background of these presuppositions, taken for granted by his contemporaries, the treatise published by Martin Luther in the early years of the Reformation (1523) about how to relate to Jews was nothing short of revolutionary. *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew* demanded the admission of Jews to all vocations, the possibility of living unhindered among Christians, which according to another of his writings from the same time included the possibility of marriage between Christians and Jews. Luther demanded a just and friendly intercourse with Jews. He strongly criticized their social isolation. Usury was interpreted as the result of the exclusion of Jews from the trades. Other allegations, such as those of ritual murder, were declared to be fairy tales. Luther’s demand for unhindered co-existence was incisive, without thereby lessening the existing religious differences.

Luther did underline their status as chosen people, and instead of accusing the Jews of having killed Jesus, he emphasized Jesus' ethnic kinship with them. Yet, he did not depart from his conviction that Jesus Christ was the savior of the Jews as well and that they could discern this from an unbiased examination of their own Scriptures.

8. With his critique of the treatment of the Jews of his time, Luther meant to confront the Roman church. It was responsible for the universal suppression and defamation of the Jews. Thereby the Christian faith had been presented in an altogether repulsive way so that it was no surprise that Jews showed no intention of accepting the Christian faith: "Had I been a Jew und had seen how such fools and vulgar sort govern and teach the Christian faith, I would have become a sow rather than a Christian." According to Luther, one consequence of the Reformation which had just begun was that on the basis of the rediscovered and now properly proclaimed gospel Jews had to be treated differently. Thus, the Christian faith would present itself to them in a more credible manner and the possibility might increase that some Jews might convert to the Christian faith.

9. This argumentation, very much reflective of the openness of the early Reformation, might suggest that Luther simply aimed at a new and more successful strategy of Christianizing the Jews. But although he hoped "to entice" some Jews to Christianity with a more creditable presentation of the gospel, his arguments were more than a conversion strategy. For Luther not only did not anticipate a large, let alone universal, missionary success. He also stated that there would be no problem if merely a few Jews converted while others remained "stubborn." After all, not all adherents of the majority religion were "good Christians." This meant that the notion of an all-encompassing Christian-orthodox community was in principle challenged. Without leveling the difference between true and erroneous religion, it is assumed that as a rule true and false believers no less than good and bad Christians will live side by side in a single community. Only God would be able to change this. Thereby Luther brings to bear the potential of tolerating

religious antagonism within civic communities, which was entailed in his conceptualization of the two regiments of God which he developed during the same months. He concludes that Jews should not only, as according to traditional law, have a claim of living as fellow residents of lower rank, but have the possibility of unhindered societal integration. Luther's closing remark, that he would revisit after some time what he had triggered with his treatise, shows that he himself saw the daring ramifications in his questioning of the mono-religious community.

10. The explosive power found in *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* may be seen in the reaction of Luther's contemporaries. Jews noted the social and anticlerical proposals of the treatise with astonishment and emotion. Counter-Reformation critics expected, in view of the alleged fundamental errors in Luther's treatise, no less than divine wrath to come upon Christendom. Indeed, they included Luther's turn towards the Jews in their indictments of him, and insisted that, therefore, antichristian defamations by Jews would increase. As a consequence of Luther's writing, the charge of blood libel and ritual murder was no longer put forward in Protestant territories and cities. While John Eck devoted an entire treatise to argue the truth of such allegations against Protestant scepticism, Luther's declaration that these charges were fairy tales had a lasting effect in all places where his influence could be felt.

11. Yet, the societal potential of the treatise *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew* was never realized. In none of the areas that became Protestant did the publication of the treatise improve the legal and political conditions of the Jews, and where their situation improved, this did not grow out of the support of the Protestant theologians. An integration of Jews along the lines of Luther's demands took place in none of those Protestant territories in which Jews still resided. Rarely were Jews readmitted to territories where they had been forced to leave. When in 1539 the leading Protestant

territorial power, Hesse, allowed Jews to settle, it was against the views of the Hessian evangelical theologians who insisted that they should be expelled. The influential Strasburg reformer Martin Bucer (1491-1551), from whom a brief had been requested by the Hessian landgrave, supported their toleration but along the lines of the most restrictive medieval practices. Jews who had become the financial masters of Christians should occupy the lowliest place in society so that (quoting from Deut. 28:43) they were the “tail and not the head.” This meant inter alia the obligation to attend evangelistic sermons; the ban of the Talmud; the prohibition of any defamation of Christ or Christianity; exclusion from financial activities, trade and every honorable occupation; the obligation to perform heavy manual labor such as mining and fortification as well as dirty despicable activities, such as cleaning toilets. Yet the best solution, according to Bucer as well, would be not to tolerate Jews altogether and keep society all-Christian. Therefore, he concluded that authorities who had expelled Jews were not to be chided (1538).

12. One of the territories of the Empire where such expulsion took place was the other eminent Protestant power, Electoral Saxony. Here the process of gradual Jewish expulsion had begun in the fifteenth century reaching its culmination with the expulsion mandate of 1535 and the withdrawal of legal protection in individual cases in 1539. Luther was familiar with the policy of his territorial ruler. Indeed, he affirmed it and in the end reinforced it. In 1537, after the expulsion, Jews plead with him to intervene. Undoubtedly on the basis of his treatise *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, they asked that Jews at least be given the right of passage through Electoral Saxony. Luther refused. Some years later, he himself demanded either the end of all legal protection and the reduction of Jews to misery which would have made their existence among Christians de facto impossible or the wholesale expulsion of Jews from all Protestant territories following the precedent of Western Europe like neighboring Bohemia which was expelling its Jews. Governments should burn their synagogues, destroy their houses, destroy

their religious books, prohibit their religious teaching and public worship, even their use of the name of God in the presence of Christians. The right of free passage was to be ended, involvement in finance prohibited, their property confiscated and compulsory manual labor imposed. Yet best would be the radical solution that “we are separated and they are dismissed from our lands; they must strive for their fatherland.” These were Luther’s “counsels” in his 1543 writing *Concerning the Jews and their Lies*.

13. Luther’s 1543 proposals about relations with Jews constituted a radical revision of his demands of 1523. His rejection of the notion of a Christian commonwealth as political ideal was rescinded. This return to the traditional model which can be shown in other areas, too, demonstrates the altered situation of the Reformation in Germany which had evolved from small, slowly organizing conventicles to large ecclesiastical institutions. As the German Reformation was institutionalized, it was made to fit into the territorial schema well known from the Middle Ages, where church and political authority had ensured an all-encompassing Christian community. In other words, the ideal of *corpus christianum* was transferred to the individual territories of the Holy Roman Empire. Since the pluralism brought about by the Reformation had rendered continuation of the vision of a single political religious community for the whole of the empire impossible, this vision was pursued in the individual territories even more pointedly. Luther’s 1523 notion that a group such as the Jews who so fundamentally questioned the Christian faith could nonetheless be part of the community became moot. Indeed, even the claim that they could live on the margin of society, as the traditional law had allowed, was now rejected. The persistent realization of a Christian society seemed possible only if the radical Jewish policy of the powers inside and outside of the Empire was followed, namely, separation by expulsion, just as dissenting Christian groupings were so separated.

14. The proposals Luther made in 1543 about Jews came from someone who played a leading role in the institutionalization of the Reformation. They indicated the extent to which he could by now envision the survival

and flourishing of the Reformation only in a society where all affirmed the proper teaching and religious practice of the Christian community, now of course of the Protestant community. Any exception to this religious homogeneity was seen as a fraught with danger. Luther's concern about this perceived threat also found expression in his exegetical judgments, making up by far the greatest part of *Concerning the Jews and their Lies*. His pointed rejection of the Jewish interpretation of their own Scriptures as "lies" was intended to convince his Protestant fellow-Christians that no alternatives existed to the Christian interpretation. Protestant Christians were to be immunized against the Jewish interpretation which would endanger their eternal life. For the same reason, Luther's polemic also addressed the exegesis proposed by some Christian hebraicists who did not share his Christological interpretation of Old Testament passages. This concern about the threat of the religious alternative may also be seen in his charge that Jews were proselytizing Christians. With the exception of a few isolated cases, there is really no conclusive evidence of such proselytization. But this scenario was enough to make Luther feel constrained to correct his previously held views as to how Christians had to relate to Jews.

15. The return to the ideal of a homogeneous Christian society is most poignantly found in the central argument with which Luther justified his "counsels." A truly Christian society had to expel the Jews in its midst or at least severely restrict their lives because they were blasphemers. Jews did not only reject Christ - what was universally known and had been presupposed by Luther in his 1523 treatise as a matter of course. But they did more. What he had not known at the time, he claims to know in 1543 from the shocking experience of a blasphemous Jewish denunciation of Christ and especially on the basis of anti-Jewish writings of Jewish converts: The Jews also pronounced public defamation, "lies", against Christ, the Triune God, and Mary, the Mother of God. Public blasphemy in the midst of Christian society went beyond the possibility of toleration. Not only did Imperial law call upon the authorities to intervene whenever blasphemy existed. The Old

Testament strongly insisted on a merciless intervention because otherwise all the land would fall into perdition (Deut. 13:13-19; Exod. 32:25-28). Thus, the charge of “blasphemy” turned into a challenge for Protestant rulers. The issue was not to make Jews into Christians. Luther did not change his conviction that faith cannot be externally compelled; consequently, he did not support the common notion of forcing Jews to listen to Christian sermons. Rather, the issue was to keep them from blasphemy in the midst of Christians. Therefore, it was necessary to deprive them from all places and means of public exercise of their religion: “For such blasphemy, daily performed before our ears in public synagogues, books and manners, can in no way be tolerated by us Christians in our own land, houses and regiment. Or else we must lose God Father and his dear Son along with the Jews and because of the Jews.” But the Christians’ dilemma was not resolved even with these radical measures. Even if Jews were deprived of all opportunities of a public blasphemy of Christ, Jews, because they were Jews, would continue to do so in their hearts. Since the Christians knew this, the inner blasphemy of the Jews was, in fact, a public matter. For Christians knowingly to tolerate such behaviour was to be participants in the sin as well (I Tim. 5:22). Given this perspective, it is only consistent that Luther recommended the expulsion of Jews to places where there were no Christians as the only effective solution: “The Jews must go to their fatherland. That is the most obvious and best counsel which safeguards the interest of both parties in this case.”

16. We may ignore the question whether the “blasphemies” ascribed to Jews were authentic in specific cases. That Jews polemicized against Christian cardinal teachings can be supported by Jewish sources. As the Jewish historian Alex Bein wrote, it is self-evident that the questioning of Jesus’ messiahship and of the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas inevitably entailed an understanding of Jesus and God which degraded them according to the Christian understanding. The same held true also in the opposite direction. Already in 1523 Luther could have visualized this reality which is inevitable where different religions coexist. The “blasphemies” which he

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later claimed to have learned and which became part of his 1543 polemic, in fact, changed the situation only gradually. In the end, the difference given with being Jewish as such sufficed to affirm his indictment. What had really changed was Luther's attitude towards the ideal of the orthodox Christian society. Luther did not only appropriate this ideal but supported it biblically with reference to the theocratic model of the Old Testament. The Old Testament requirement of a religiously homogeneous people of God which ever since late Antiquity had been used against heresy was now employed against Judaism. Not for nothing did Luther's anti-Judaic "counsels" draw on, even in detail, the Old Testament prescriptions about dealing with false religion. Here are the roots of Luther's frequently cited proposal to burn down the synagogues (Deut. 13:17, cf. nr.5 above) – a totally impractical recommendation in view of urban architectural patterns of the time. Luther the proponent of a separation of belief and politics had fallen back into archaic concepts from the history of religion. The advocate of a theologically guided selective reading of Scriptures regressed to a biblical fundamentalism. Not surprisingly, then, without any scruple, Luther used in *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* additional arguments which he had rejected in 1523, namely, the charge of usury and medieval horror stories. Those who endangered the uniform space of the Christian universe were capable of anything.

17. Luther did not include his anti-Jewish proposals of 1543 among the foundational principles of Reformation self-understanding; rather he accepted different opinions of other evangelical theologians who continued to orient themselves on his 1523 treatise. Neither were the Protestant rulers in the mood to let their policy be unreservedly determined by *Concerning the Jews and their Lies*. Luther's insistence on a complete expulsion of Jews was not followed by most, his "counsels" by none of the protestant territories and cities.

B) The Reception of Luther's programmatic pronouncements about relations with Jews: A Story of Ruptures and Diversity

18. The Lutheran theologians of the post-Reformation Confessional Age (Lutheran Orthodoxy) oriented themselves almost entirely on Luther's treatise *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* and accordingly argued that Jews should not be allowed in Protestant territories. Luther's treatise was not only part of the edition of Luther's collected writings but also was published separately several times until 1616. In a few instances Jews were able to prevent its republication.

19. Toward the end of the seventeenth century North German-Prussian Pietism brought an incisive change in the reception of Luther's 1543 treatise that was to dominate the discourse for over 200 years. The change was initiated by Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), the founder of this reform movement as far as Lutheranism was concerned. On the basis of Luther's treatise *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, Spener called for esteem and love toward Jews. If Spener's critique of Luther's *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* was merely implicit, that of other Pietist theologians was explicit. There were no more separate printings. This re-orientation found expression in a host of theological briefs friendly to Jewish concerns, especially those issued by the Pietist Theological Faculty of Halle. They endorsed an active Jewish presence in Protestant territories, including Jewish worship and the building of synagogues, and they defended Jews against all sorts of religious accusations. Jewish communities who had become embroiled in difficulties began to approach the Theological Faculty at Halle for support. At the root of the Pietists' new attitude toward Jews was that they, unlike Luther and the Lutheran-Orthodox theologians, anticipated a universal conversion of Jews to Christ, based on Romans 11: 25f.

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20. The rejection of *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* continued even after the influence of Pietism had begun to wane. In church and society at large the treatise was all but forgotten. Among the few theologians, who in the latter eighteenth and then in the nineteenth century were familiar with the treatise as it was found in the editions of Luther's complete writings, *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* evoked an utterly negative response, regardless of the theological orientation of the theologian. Since the image of Luther at that time was wholly based on his early Reformation work, he was seen as the protagonist of freedom, enlightenment, and learning. He was, thus, also esteemed by Jews. Even when familiar with his anti-Judaic tract *Concerning the Jews and their Lies*, Jews generally paid little attention to it, but emphasized Luther's overall importance.

21. A second turn in the reception history occurred after World War I. To be sure, incipient beginnings may be found in the nineteenth century, especially in so-called "voelkisch" circles, where collections of quotes from *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* were compiled. In a few instances Protestant theologians were involved in these endeavors. What furthered the dissemination of Luther's anti-Judaic pronouncements, especially in the form of excerpts from that treatise, and positive references to it, was the massive appropriation of Luther by German nationalism since the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The more this nationalism took on the colors of racial anti-Semitism, the more importance was bestowed on Luther's anti-Judaic pronouncements. As a result, a redefinition took place. The theological arguments, constitutive for Luther's views, no longer played a role. His comments were now interpreted in a racial manner.

22. This reinterpretation happened increasingly during the Weimar Republic and especially in Nazi Germany. Periodically, those appealing to *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* to justify their racial ideology charged that the Protestant churches had withheld the treatise from the populace. By failing

for centuries to have it reprinted they had caused it be forgotten and become irrelevant. To remedy this situation, *voelkisch*, ecclesiastical, and Nazi groups published *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* in popular editions, i.e., shortened versions in which the theological passages (constituting the bulk of the original treatise) had been deleted.

23. Protestant theologians and church leaders participated in the effort to disseminate Luther's anti-Judaic writing. However, the so-called German Christians referred to it relatively little. The nadir of this reception history was the infamous pamphlet by the German Christian bishop of Thuringia, Martin Sasse (1890-1942) who a few weeks after *Krystallnacht* 1938 celebrated the burning of the synagogues with the comment that now was realized what Luther had called for in 1543.

24. Thus within a few years in a complete reversal of the development since the late seventeenth century, the tract *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* had been relegated to the background. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) cited this treatise in support of Jews represented a vanishing minority. It is difficult to say what role the treatise *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* played in the widespread anti-Semitism among German Protestants. The sources of their anti-Semitism lie elsewhere. Yet Luther's hostility to Jews may well have confirmed German Protestants in their anti-Semitism and dulled their sensitivity to its deadly consequences.

25. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* noted a hundred years ago that because of Luther's divergent statements about the proper treatment of Jews both anti-Semites and philo-Semites have invoked him. This statement was written before millions of Jews were murdered and anti-Semitism acquired a completely new dimension. On the one hand, the unfathomable crime of the "Final Solution" cannot be traced back to *Concerning the Jews and their*

Lies, for the final objective of Luther's treatise was not mass murder but expulsion, and its arguments were not racial politics but religious. Hence, that Nazis and German Christians made appeals to its text is beside the point. On the other hand, *Concerning the Jews and their Lies* was useful for Nazi propaganda because it, too, demonizes the Jews and insists that governments should create lands without them. An anniversary of the Reformation which reflects on the full range of the heritage left by this historical turning point cannot keep silent about such a burdensome legacy.

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500 YEARS OF
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