

Church History

Martin Luther and "The Jews" A Reappraisal

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The most prominent figure of the German Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther was a truly remarkable man. Whether we speak of his posting of the ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg, his refusal to recant his teachings before Charles V at Worms, his marriage to Katharina von Bora in an age of clerical celibacy, or his translation of the New Testament into German, Luther was a genuine trailblazer. Yet, unknown to many Protestants - in some cases explained away - is Luther's complex, but deeply troubling engagement with the Jewish people.

Others have tended to exaggerate Luther's influence through an uncritical reading of history. Erroneously claiming that Luther "called for the destruction of world Jewry", Alan Dershowitz opined, "It is shocking that Luther's ignoble name is still honored rather than forever cursed by mainstream Protestant churches." [1] This sad state of affairs led the late Reformation historian Heiko Oberman to lament that many would have us choose between "two Luthers" - one, the "bold Reformer, the liberating theologian, the powerfully eloquent German"; the other, an "anti-Semite" who "wrote mainly about Jews," and "preached hatred." [2] Such a choice is, of course, unnecessary.

Sadly, the history of Christianity has indeed been riddled by varying degrees of antisemitism, leading to oppression, marginalization, and - as in the Crusades and the Holocaust - even murder of Jews. [3] While Luther certainly did not invent antisemitism, one cannot discuss the question of Christian antisemitism without reference to him. He wrote at least five treatises on the subject of "the Jews" [4]. One in particular has fueled the greatest discussion of the reformer's attitude toward Jews.

On the Jews and Their Lies has been variously defended, debased, and nuanced by historians and theologians in post-Holocaust literature concerning Nazi Germany, Christian antisemitism, and Jewish-Christian relations. [5] While another article on the subject could appear redundant, I hope that this contribution will impart some new appreciation for the intrinsic theological and historical realities of the treatise.

"Luther's deeply troubling engagement with the Jewish people is unknown to many Protestants"

I will view Luther's polemic against the Jewish people here in its medieval and sixteenth century German intellectual-theological context with an eye to social and political developments. I seek to answer whether this treatise can be said to contain anti-Judaic elements, antisemitic elements, or both. It would be helpful, at first, to entertain an important preliminary discussion regarding terminology.

One needs only to survey the literature briefly to see the divergent opinions on just what constitutes "antisemitism". Heiko Oberman distinguished between "antisemitism" as racially motivated hatred and "anti-Judaism" as hatred motivated by theological conviction. Even so, he recognized the "crossovers and points of transgression" between the two. [6]

Nineteenth-century French Jewish intellectual and early Zionist Bernard Lazare maintained that the term "antisemitism" may only be applied to pre-nineteenth century events and attitudes anachronistically, given that the term originated in nineteenth century Germany. [7] He generally used the term "anti-Judaism" to

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describe theologically based hatred for Jews as it existed in the late medieval and Reformation periods.[8] He usually employed the terms “modern anti-Semitism” and “ethnological anti-Semitism” to denote the form that primarily encompasses racial and/or nationalistic overtones.[9]

The late medievalist Gavin Langmuir offered perhaps the most helpful definition of “antisemitism” in recent years, despite having to contend with the term’s bedeviled past. The term is “thoroughly contaminated with the erroneous presuppositions of the racists.” Yet, neither theories of “racism” nor “ethnic prejudice” provide us with that which is distinguishably unusual about anti-Jewish hostility.

He defined it most succinctly when he said, “Antisemitism ... both in its origins and in its recent most horrible manifestation, is the hostility aroused by irrational thinking about ‘Jews.’”[10] It is *irrational* thought that characterizes antisemitism; *nonrational* thought characterizes anti-Judaism.[11] Nonrational thought, characterized by nonrational symbols, lies in fact at the heart of religion according to Langmuir. The “nonrational symbol system” of the “Cross”, for example, is only “valid” for the Christians who espouse it. Thus, he avoided characterizing religious thought as irrational.

The distinction between anti-Judaism as “theological” hostility and antisemitism as “racial” or “ethnic” hostility is not empirically demonstrable and thus should be discarded in favor of his characterization. “Empirical distinctions can be drawn” if religious phenomena are construed in the manner in which he has argued.[12] Yet, nonrational thinking is not in conflict with rational thinking and can – and does – utilize it in a “subordinate capacity.”[13] I find this aspect of Langmuir’s framework of antisemitism[14] to be both helpful and convincing because the “theological” versus “racial” distinction is extremely difficult to maintain in light of Luther’s chief writings on Jews and Judaism, which intertwine the nonrational and the irrational.

Historical Context

Christians and Jews in the Late Medieval Context

During the late medieval period, Christians accused Jews of a myriad of crimes and religious offenses. One example of such an accusation is the charge that they blasphemed the Virgin Mary and Jesus. *The Quiver of the Catholic Faith* was a late fifteenth century “manual for condemning Jews” which included the charge that blaspheming the Virgin is “typically Jewish.” A particularly “ferocious” German version of the text was widely circulated in Nuremberg in 1513. [15]

The late medieval Christian also viewed the Jew as a usurer, with the terms “Jew” and “usurer” becoming “synonymous” by the late twelfth century.[16] Léon Poliakov detailed the medieval history of Jewish usury, a story which entwines their marginalization in society and – in the case of the Holy Roman Empire – their economic worth to the German emperors.[17] Josel of Rosheim, protector of German Jewry during Luther’s time, struggled throughout his career with the thorny issue of actual and supposed Jewish usury – which seldom went unpunished – and hypocritical Christian usury, which often was overlooked by the authorities.[18]

Jews also supposedly profaned the sacred host of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Fantastic charges abounded that they stole and pierced communion wafers, causing the blood of Christ to miraculously flow out. The claim that Jews purportedly kidnapped Christian children and drained their blood for use in the Passover liturgy (ritual murder) was commonplace in medieval Europe.[19]

Christians and Jews in the Sixteenth Century

In order to put Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* in some immediate religious context, it is helpful to see what other Christian figures were saying about Jews just prior to 1543. In 1529, Andreas Osiander authored a tract[20], published anonymously in 1540, that systematically and forcefully refuted the charge of Jewish ritual murder of Christian children. Osiander was a Christian Hebraist who engaged in the study of Cabbala and had a thorough knowledge of rabbinic literature and the Talmud. He argued that it is “inconceivable that the Jews should murder children and make use of their blood” when their own Kosher laws forbade them even to eat the meat of animals containing blood. The treatise appeared just as the investigation of one such supposed murder at Tittingen was ongoing.[21]

Enraged by Osiander’s defense of the Jewish community and called upon by the

Bishop of Eichstätt to rebut it, Johannes Eck, Catholic theologian and Luther's nemesis, wrote what amounts to a lengthy retort to Osiander and a denigration of Judaism. It has been described as "a compendium of every horror story medieval anti-Jewish polemic could encompass."^[22] In *Refutation of a Jew-Book*, Eck based his passionate argument of the historical reality of Jewish ritual murder on his own personal experience. According to Eck, he had actually "placed his own fingers in the wound of a child who had died four weeks before at the hand of the Jews of Waldkirch in the Breisgau in 1503."^[23] The book also includes a call for "new and more stringent laws" against Jews^[24] and strong condemnation of usury.

Justus Jonas, Luther's close friend and confidant, took a strikingly different view than his mentor on "the Jews." In fact, he went so far as to distort Luther's position when he translated *Against the Sabbatarians* into Latin. What resulted was a rather pro-Jewish viewpoint that was in marked contrast to Luther's increasingly harsh anti-Jewish stance.^[25]

While medieval Christian theologians ^[26] influenced Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies*, perhaps the most direct contemporary influence on Luther's treatise is Anthonius Margaritha's *The Whole Jewish Faith*.^[27] Margaritha was from a prominent Jewish family, the grandson of a distinguished Talmudic scholar. He converted to Christianity and was baptized in 1522.^[28]

The Whole Jewish Faith was first published in 1530. A third edition of the work was published a year later, just twelve years prior to the publication of *On the Jews and Their Lies*. This edition, argues Stern, exerted "a powerful influence on Luther."^[29] The treatise contains the accusations that Jews commit blasphemy against Jesus and Mary, are guilty of usury and theft, and that they wish to violently overthrow Christian authorities.^[30] That Luther approvingly appealed to the treatise multiple times in *On the Jews* and even encouraged his readers to read it for themselves is evidence that it exerted a fairly significant influence on the reformer. ^[31]

What may we conclude regarding the actions and writings of these figures in sixteenth century Germany? When we approach Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies*, we must recognize that with respect to both Catholic and Protestant views about Jews in Germany in the late 1530's and early 1540's, the air was highly charged. There was a flurry of propaganda on the subject from every side of the issue. The responses of Eck, Osiander, Jonas, and Margaritha demonstrate the decided diversity of views on the matter in the sixteenth century. A fair analysis of "Luther and the Jews" must take into account what these contemporaries were saying about Jews.^[32]

Luther's Writings about Jews

While Luther wrote five treatises concerning "the Jews", his commentaries, sermons, and "table talk" also contain material about them.^[33] I realize that I cannot say everything there is to say about "Luther on the Jews" in an article of this size. Thus, I will focus here upon *On the Jews and Their Lies*. I want first, however, to set this work in the context of some of his other treatises about "the Jews."

That Jesus Christ was born a Jew (1523)

Luther's earliest known treatise relating to Jews and Judaism was occasioned by the rumor that he was teaching that Mary was not a virgin either before or after Jesus was born. This was a very serious charge in the religious climate of the early years of the Protestant Reformation.^[34] Luther's twofold purpose was to show that according to Scripture "Christ was born a Jew of a virgin" and that he "might perhaps also win some Jews to the Christian faith."^[35]

I will make but a few brief observations about the content of the treatise. First, it is in the main a biblical and theological treatment of a religious issue. As such, its main source of argumentation is nonrational in nature. He argues extensively from his understanding of Scripture, for example, that "the Jews" cannot deny that Isaiah (7:14) was speaking of a *virgin* being pregnant and that "Christ was a genuine Jew of Abraham's seed."^[36]

Second, there are seeds of philosemitism that regrettably do not grow into full form in those later works. "The Jews" in fact are "blood relatives" of Christ. Christians should deal kindly and gently with them – the Apostles, after all, were Jews who

dealt with Gentiles in a “brotherly fashion.” Christians “must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love.”[37] He further recognizes that Christians are not the moral superiors of Jews. “If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.”[38]

"Luther recognizes that Christians are not the moral superiors of Jews."

Thirdly, the venom of the “later Luther” is clearly absent here. Absent are the typical medieval accusations of host profanation, ritual murder, and usury. There are no crude or scatological references. This is not to suggest that direct confrontation is lacking in the work. The Jews are wrong, for example, about both Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ and the Genesis 49 prophecy that the sceptre (i.e., kingship) would depart from Judah when the Shiloh (i.e., Messiah) comes.[39] They, in fact, are guilty of crucifying Jesus.[40] Yet, never in this work does Luther descend into the depths of (irrational) antisemitism.

Against the Sabbatarians (1538)

Fifteen years after Luther wrote *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, he composed this open letter to his “good friend” Count Wolf Schlick. The member of a prominent Moravian family, Count Schlick reported that many Christians in Bohemia and Moravia were developing “Sabbatarian tendencies.”[41] Just what these inclinations were is not perfectly clear, but they no doubt involved the observance of the Jewish Sabbath. What is important for our purposes is that Luther blamed them primarily on Jews, and this is where he directed most of his attacks.[42]

Luther’s arguments against Jews in this treatise contain elements that are found in his other tracts about them. They have not kept covenant, they have sinned, rejected the Messiah; they are in exile and - most tellingly – they do not reside in “the land” and no longer possess the temple.[43] While there are “reasonable” and “obdurate” Jews, as a whole they “are given to babbling and lying.”[44] This rather mild slander is one indication of the gradual increase in harshness of tone towards the Jews to which I have previously referred. The argumentation is very similar to the earlier tract, but the tenor has become decidedly less sympathetic.

On the Jews and their Lies (1543)

The immediate occasion for the controversial tract was a May 1542 request from his friend Count Schlick to refute a Jewish apologetic pamphlet, which the Count enclosed together with his request.[45] While at the end of *Against the Sabbatarians* Luther hinted that he might write such a treatise as this[46], he begins here by saying, “I had made up my mind to write no more either about the Jews or against them.”[47] It is difficult to say to what degree the contents of the aforementioned Jewish apologetic pamphlet influenced Luther to change his mind.

The treatise is rather lengthy (approximately one-hundred-thirty-five pages in the original text). Thus, it will be useful to briefly outline it.[48] It falls into four major parts. In the first section, Luther describes and decries the “false boasts” of the Jews. In the second part, Luther presents debate on the exegesis of significant and relevant biblical passages. In the third section, Luther repeats the supposed Jewish blasphemies against Jesus and Mary. In the fourth and most infamous part of the treatise, Luther makes recommendations to church and state authorities for actions against the Jewish people.

My first observation about the tract is its scathing tone. This is most readily seen in Luther’s deprecating, sometimes crude language[49] and in his scornful sarcasm. Luther in places calls “the Jews” “a defiled bride, yes, an incorrigible whore and an evil slut”, a “whoring and murderous people”[50], and “bloodthirsty bloodhounds and murders of all Christendom.”[51] While the Gentiles give them everything they have, including “land and people”, still they “curse, spit on, and malign” the *Goyim*. [52] While Luther is aware of the objection that Jews of biblical times and Jews of his day are to be distinguished from each other[53], he frequently applies Scripture’s condemnation of the Jews of biblical times to Jews who are his contemporaries.

Indeed, he often intermingles Scriptural deprecation with typical late medieval pejoratives. In one illustrative example, he says that they are “stiff-necked, disobedient, prophet-murderers, arrogant, usurers, and filled with every vice, as

the whole of Scripture and their present conduct bear out.” In fact, Luther’s “incorrigible” Jewish contemporaries are more “conceited” than “David and other pious Jews” of biblical times.[54] Further, he argues “that their *present* exile must be due to a more heinous sin than idolatry, the murder of the prophets, etc. – namely, the crucifixion of the Messiah.”[55]

Second, we observe the myriad of accusations that he levels at them. They are guilty of stealing and of usury. Three Jews with whom he had met “called Christ a *tola*, that is, a hanged highwayman.” Their Talmud says that it is no sin for a Jew to kill a Gentile.[56] They curse Christians in their synagogues.[57] They practice witchcraft, “conjuring signs, figures, and the tetragrammaton of the name, that is, with idolatry, envy, and conceit.”[58]

They defame Christ and Mary in various manners, calling Jesus a “sorcerer and a tool of the devil”, denigrating his name through Cabbalistic numerology, even calling him a “whore’s son.” [59] A “malicious rabbi” has supposedly called Mary a “dung heap.” They have been “accused” of poisoning wells, kidnapping and piercing children, “hacking them in pieces”, and using the blood of Christian children (i.e. in ritual fashion) to “cool their wrath”.[60] Luther strongly implies that these “accusations” may be true, despite Jewish denials:

“Whether it is true or not, I do know that they do not lack the complete, full, and ready will to do such things either secretly or openly where possible. This you can assuredly expect from them, and you must govern yourself accordingly.”[61]

Nearly all of these accusations were common in medieval antisemitic rhetoric.[62]

One final observation about the tract is its most widely known aspect, its anti-Jewish social programme. Luther makes seven severe recommendations concerning “the Jews.” Their synagogues and schools should be burned to the ground, their houses should be “razed and destroyed”; their “prayer books and Talmudic writings” should be confiscated; their rabbis should be “forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb”; they should be denied safe-conduct on the highways; usury should be prohibited to them and their gold, silver, and cash should be taken from them; finally, they should be subjected to harsh labor.[63] To the ears of post-Holocaust readers, these words are deeply troublesome and chilling.

Typical Interpretations of Luther "On the Jews"

Luther’s Diatribes as “Theological” Anti-Judaism

Heiko Oberman described late medieval and Reformation Germany as “a religious world that viewed truth as indivisible, banned deviation as error, and dreaded patent heresy as blasphemy fatal to a life with God.”[64] How, then, did he portray Luther’s anti-Jewish treatises? The “motive” for these treatises was “to reclaim the Scriptures in their entirety from the perversities they were suffering at the hands of the Jews ...” Like German theologian Wilhelm Maurer before him[65], he believed that Luther was guilty of a primarily *theological* anti-Judaism. While Luther was not a conscious antisemite, nor did he think in “racial categories”, he nevertheless left no room for Jews as Jews.

Thus, his opposition to Judaism “in effect became opposition to Jews”; this was a view that allowed the image of the Jew to enter the service of “racial” antisemitism. [66] Oberman is not prepared to call Luther’s vitriol antisemitic. He chooses instead to label it as anti-Judaic, but recognizes in it an image of the unconverted Jew that would serve modern “racial” anti-Semitism quite well.

Luther’s Diatribes as the Product of Old Age, Sickness, or Disappointment

Mark U. Edwards’s analysis of Luther’s series of serious physical illnesses during the latter part of his life is enlightening. Over the course of his life, he experienced hemorrhoids, heart congestion, fainting spells, dizziness, an “open, flowing ulcer on his leg” and severe constipation. During the last fifteen years of his life, he lived through “more frequent and more serious illnesses” including uric acid stones, which caused him “great agony.”[67]

Luther also struggled with all sorts of mental anxieties. Edwards lists as symptoms Luther’s “frequent bouts of depression”, his “death-wish”, his “vulgar and scatological language”, his “outbursts of rage and vilification”, and his “visions of and contests with the devil.”[68] He questions, however, applying the term “mental

imbalance" to a sixteenth-century man with a "biblically-based view of the world" that was hardly unusual. Further, Luther's later polemics contain lucid, "persuasive exposition of doctrine and exegesis of Scripture."^[69] Nevertheless, he speculates that Luther was neurotic, while rejecting the notion that he was psychotic.^[70]

Edwards also elucidates a view of Luther's harshness that accords with the literary evidence. "The trend towards greater harshness was relatively gradual and extended over a number of years ..."^[71] As I noted earlier, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523) was indeed philosemitic (especially for its era), *Against the Sabbatarians* (1538) was mildly slanderous of Jews^[72], and *On the Jews and Their Lies* was quite virulent in tone.

The question naturally arises as to *why* Luther became harsher and harsher. Nevertheless, close examination of Luther's thinking about Jews over the span of his lifetime might reveal that there is less of a distinction between the "old Luther" and the "young Luther" than this increasingly harsh tone might intimate.^[73] Further, to attribute to this apparent change in tone any number of causes – sickness, old age, disappointment with the lack of Jewish conversions – is tempting, but perhaps should be call for further research rather than the typical speculation that occurs in the historiographical literature.^[74] As Edwards rightly notes elsewhere, Luther consciously used "vulgarity and violence" for effect, and they are typical of his polemic against not only Jews, but "Turks" (Muslims) and Roman Catholics as well.^[75]

Conclusion

Upon beginning, I asked whether Luther's *On the Jews and their Lies* could be said to contain "anti-Judaic" elements, "antisemitic" elements, or both. I believe I have shown that this infamous treatise contains *both* anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Acceptance of the now-commonplace division of "theological anti-Judaism" from "racial antisemitism" has led many a historian - and many a theologian - to the erroneous conclusion that Luther's vitriol is almost solely "theological" in nature.

Whether one construes the biblical-exegetical portions of Luther's polemic as theological or nonrational, one is still faced with the prospect that at the very least the socio-political recommendations of the last section of the treatise rise to the level of antisemitism. The antisemitism of the treatise, however, is not limited to these severe recommendations. For Luther the sixteenth century Jew was in reality indistinguishable from the biblical era Jew. In fact, he was worse. He blasphemed Christ and Mary, slandered Christians, stole, practiced usury, and may have even murdered Christian children to use their blood in their rituals.

In saying all of this, I am not contending that the sole or even the primary impetus of Luther's antisemitism is "racial" in the modern sense of the term. Luther did not think in terms of biology when he criticized Jewish behavior. There is no doubt that a large portion of *On the Jews* is dedicated to biblical-theological argumentation. Yet, even these religious arguments are not free from typical medieval slander. To depict his vitriol as "theological" anti-Judaism is reductionistic and does not suit all of the evidence. Further, the emphasis on *discontinuities* between late medieval/early modern anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism, while perhaps necessary to draw important distinctions about the manner of thinking about Jews in changing historical situations, nevertheless often conceals the *continuities* of thought that in fact traverse both periods.

Next, let us consider how much bearing Luther's late medieval context played in shaping the antisemitism of *On the Jews*. Luther saw the Jewish people as eschatological enemies of God; in his mind, they were in league with the devil, the Turks, and the "papists." There is no question, either, as to whether Margaritha's *The Whole Jewish Faith* exerted some influence on Luther's view of "the Jews."

"Luther saw the Jewish people as eschatological enemies of God; in his mind, they were in league with the devil, the Turks, and the 'papists.'"

While I agree with much of Oberman's approach – particularly his portrayal of

Luther in his late medieval context -- and conclude that Luther did not rely solely upon Jewish ritual murder or usury to make his case against the Jewish people, he nonetheless did significantly buttress his “theological” (i.e. nonrational) polemic with such irrational late medieval rhetoric. We must not attempt to diminish the force of such speech, interspersed as it is between much larger blocks of text that are essentially biblical and theological in nature. Simply because the quantity of such rhetoric is significantly less than the biblical rhetoric, one should not conclude that the impact of the antisemitic slander was somehow lost on his audience.

If we accept the view of antisemitism which I have espoused here, how does this affect our understanding of the nature of Luther’s anti-Jewish diatribes? Clearly, if we adopt the strict “theological anti-Judaism” vs. “racial antisemitism” rubric, then we are left with no choice but to *either* centre our answer in his theology because he was a theologian who lived prior to the advent of nineteenth century biological notions of race *or* to anachronistically project modern notions about race onto his view of the Jewish people. Neither of these two answers, I think, deals with the question either historically or holistically. Luther’s “theology of the Jews” included both nonrational anti-Judaic and irrational antisemitic components.

While it has been customary for many Protestants especially to rebut the charge that Luther’s polemic is antisemitic on the grounds of its theological nature, his frustration with the lack of Jewish conversions, or his failing health in old age, such approaches are in my view overly speculative and apologetic. For some in the Jewish community and elsewhere, Luther is seen primarily as the prototypical modern antisemite. Surely this too is not an accurate picture of Luther’s vast body of work and practically ignores the theological content of even his anti-Jewish works.

If Protestant Christians are to sincerely proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all peoples, including Jews, such an enterprise must be entered into with full knowledge of the horrendous mistakes – indeed sins - of Christian forebears, including Luther’s. They cannot breezily dissociate themselves from their Christian past when it saves them embarrassment and shame to do so. Protestant Christians also believe that Jesus died for *sinners*. Public acknowledgement and confession of such sins can serve as an example of integrity and humility to others and be a means to make the Good News of Christianity attractive to them.^[76]

Footnotes

1. ^[1] Alan Dershowitz, *Chutzpah* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991) 107, in Carter Lindberg, “Tainted Greatness: Luther’s Attitudes toward Judaism and Their Historical Reception”, *Tainted Greatness: Antisemitism and Cultural Heroes*, ed. Nancy A. Harrowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) 15.

^[2] Heiko Oberman, *The Roots of Antisemitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. James I. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 94.

^[3] See, e.g., Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, 4 Vols. (London: Routledge/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974-1985); Christopher R. Browning, “Background” in *The Origins of the Final Solution: the Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy 1939-1942* (London: Arrow Books, 2005) 1-11.

^[4] *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew, Against the Sabbatarians, On the Jews and Their Lies, On the Ineffable Name and on the Lineage of Christ, and On the Last Words of David*. I put the phrase “the Jews” in quotes because of its generally negative usage by those, including Luther, who have an unreal image in mind, rather than real Jews, when they speak about Jewish people. See, e.g., Betsy Halpern Amaru, “Martin Luther and Jewish Mirrors”, *Jewish Social Studies* 46 (1984): 95-102.

^[5] See, e.g., Mark U. Edwards, “Toward an Understanding of Luther’s Attacks on the Jews” in *Christians, Jews, and Other Worlds: Patterns of Conflict and Accommodation*, ed. Phillip F. Gallagher (London: University Press of America, 1988) 1-19. Eric W. Gritsch argued that Luther was “not an anti-Semite in the racist sense. His arguments against Jews were theological, not biological.” See “Was Luther Anti-Semitic?”, *Christian History* 1993, Vol. 12 Issue 3, 38-39.

^[6] Oberman, *Roots*, 22.

^[7] Lazare, *Antisemitism: Its History and Causes*, trans. not identified. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 8, 116-117.

^[8] *Ibid.*, chapters 5-7.

- [9] Ibid., 95, 116, 118.
- [10] Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990) 275.
- [11] Ibid., 105-107, 130, 276.
- [12] Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 276.
- [13] Ibid., 152. Aquinas is cited as an excellent example of this kind of thinking.
- [14] Langmuir also helpfully discussed two types of antisemitism, xenophobic and "chimeric", in "Prolegomena to any Present Analysis of Hostility Against Jews", *Social Science Information* 15 (1976): 689-727. The equation of the term "Jew" with "usurer" might be considered an example of the xenophobic variety, while ritual murder of children would fall under the chimeric category (see *Christians and Jews in the Late Medieval Context*). For this short article, however, I will discuss antisemitism solely in terms of its relationship to rationality.
- [15] Oberman, *Roots*, 84-85.
- [16] Andrew Colin Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200 - 1600*, ed. Heiko Oberman. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) 47-48.
- [17] Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. I: From Roman Times to the Court Jews*, (London: Routledge, 1974) 73-83.
- [18] Selma Stern, *Josel Of Rosheim -- Commander Of Jewry in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*, trans. Gertrude Hirschler (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965) 32-35.
- [19] See, e.g., R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).
- [20] Oberman translated the lengthy title as *Whether It be True and Credible That the Jews Secretly Strangulate Christian Children and Make Use of Their Blood*. See *Roots*, 35.
- [21] Stern, *Josel*, 180-183.
- [22] Steven Rowan, "Luther, Bucer, and Eck on the Jews", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985) 86.
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] Stern, *Josel*, 183.
- [25] Oberman, *Roots*, 48-49. There is in fact no evidence that Luther and Jonas ever reconciled their disparate views on the "Jewish question."
- [26] E.g., Nicholas of Lyra and Paul of Burgos. Bertram's Introduction to Luther, "On the Jews", 131; Luther, "On the Jews", 138.
- [27] Bertram, Introduction to "On the Jews", 130.
- [28] Stern, *Josel*, 98-99.
- [29] Ibid., 103.
- [30] Ibid., 98-99.
- [31] See e.g., Luther, *The Christian in Society IV, Luther's Works*, Vol. 47, ed. Franklin Sherman, trans. Martin H. Bertram. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) (Hereafter, LW 47) 257.
- [32] Oberman, *Roots*, 72.
- [33] See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Luther's Correspondence, Vol. II*, ed. and trans. Preserved Smith (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1918) 185 - 187; Luther, "Lectures on Romans, 1516" in *Lectures on Romans*, Luther's Works, Vol. 25, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Jacob A. O. Preus. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972) 380.
- [34] Walther I. Brandt, Introduction to Martin Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew" in *The Christian in Society II, Luther's Works*, Vol. 45, ed. and trans. Walther I. Brandt. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962) (Hereafter LW 45) 197-198.
- [35] Martin Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew", LW 45: 200.
- [36] Ibid., 213, 228.
- [37] LW 45: 229.
- [38] Ibid.
- [39] Ibid., 214.

[40] Ibid., 228.

[41] Bertram's Introduction to Luther, "Against the Sabbatarians: Letter to a Good Friend", LW 47: 59.

[42] Ibid., 59-61.

[43] "Against the Sabbatarians", LW 47: 65-70, 80, 96-97.

[44] Ibid., 78.

[45] Bertram's Introduction to Luther, "On the Jews", LW 47: 133. In a footnote, Bertram also notes that the pamphlet is no longer extant.

[46] Luther, LW 47: 97 – 98.

[47] Ibid., 137.

[48] What follows is a summary of Bertram's outline, Introduction to "On the Jews", LW 47: 133-135.

[49] For a helpful view of Luther's use of scatological language, see Heiko Oberman, "Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology in the 'Old' Luther", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988) : 435-450.

[50] LW 47 : 166, 167. Luther's use of the image of "whore" and "slut" for the Jews is in fact a Jewish, Old Testament prophetic pejorative for the Israelites in times of waywardness. See, e.g., the book of Hosea. It is also perhaps an ironic jab at them, since they supposedly call the Virgin Mary the same.

[51] Martin Luther, "Von den Juden und ihren Lügen" ("On the Jews and their Lies") in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 53. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1919-1920) 520.

[52] LW 47: 255.

[53] Ibid., 166-167.

[54] Ibid., 167.

[55] Ibid., 226. Emphasis mine.

[56] LW 47: 226.

[57] Ibid., 228. The cursing of Christians is probably a reference to the "twelfth benediction of the 'Amidah' prayer against the Christians" used during the early years of Christianity. For discussion of the plight of Judaism in sixteenth century Europe, see Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1971): 239, 260-270.

[58] Ibid., 242. While medieval Jews did spread "scurrilous stories" about Christians, the kind of tales that Luther and Margaritha attribute to them are highly dubious. Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 282.

[59] Ibid., 256-260. "The Jews" are even purported to believe that Mary conceived Jesus during her "menstrual uncleanness", implying that Jesus is thus insane or a demon.

[60] Ibid., 261, 217.

[61] Ibid., 217.

[62] See, e.g., Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 131-136.

[63] LW 47 : 268-272.

[64] Oberman, *Roots*, 25.

[65] Wilhelm Maurer, "Luthers Stellung zur Judenfrage" ("Luther's Position on the Jewish Question") in *Kirche und Synagoge. Motive und Formen der Auseinandersetzung der Kirche mit dem Judentum im Laufe der Geschichte. (Church and Synagogue. Motifs and Forms of the Debate of the Church with Judaism in the Course of History.)* (Stuttgart, 1953).

[66] Oberman, *Roots*, 50.

[67] Mark U. Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531- 46* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) 9.

[68] Ibid., 15. Contra Edwards, Oberman contended that Luther used scatological language throughout his entire career; that this kind of crudity had "absolutely nothing to do with disappointment or senility in the last years of life." See "Teufelsdreck", 444.

[69] Ibid., 17-19.

[70] Ibid., 8-9.

[71] Ibid., 17.

[72] Ibid., 125. Edwards here calls *Against the Sabbatarians* his first “major attack on the Jews.”

[73] Maurer, for example, argued that Luther’s theological view of Jews underwent little change during his lifetime. „Luthers Stellung“, 42-43.

[74] Oberman, for example, believed that Edwards bought into a misleading form of psychohistory regarding the “old” Luther. See “Teufelsdreck”, 438.

[75] Edwards, “Luther’s Attacks on the Jews”, 11. Luther viewed Jews, “Turks”, the pope and “papists” as part of a “great coalition” of eschatological enemies of God. See Oberman, *Roots*, 104, 105, 109.

[76] Titus 2: 1-10.



About the Author

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