

To begin with, Martin Luther's institutional legacy—the Lutheran Church—was only one of several institutional embodiments of the Protestant Reformation; in fact, in the broader European context, it was by no means the most significant one, with Calvinism being able to lay claims to primacy of importance. Indeed, even in Germany Lutheranism never ruled supreme, since Catholicism continued to be, through political developments and vicissitudes, a vital force. Prussia, that growing reality in German affairs from the late seventeenth century onward, was considerably influenced by the Calvinist tradition. Moreover, until German unification under Bismarck, "Germany" was anything but a homogeneous entity. It was an artificial whole, politically no less than culturally, with strong elements of particularism, notably in Prussia, Bavaria, and Austria. None of these embodied a Lutheran ethos. Importantly, however, Lutheranism in nineteenth-century Germany participated in the surge of Germanic nationalism, which saw the Protestant Reformation as the epitome of the German spirit and Luther as the quintessential German.

The question of Luther's historical impact must also be related to the development in countries, other than Germany, where Lutheranism ruled supreme. Did Luther's anti-Judaism cast its shadow also over the Scandinavian countries and their political and cultural systems, instigating intense anti-Semitism in Northern Europe? One would be hard pressed to provide a positive answer. The seedbed of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism was Catholic Austria rather than Lutheran Scandinavia, a reality that suggests that more was involved in the late nineteenth century than Luther's theological influence.

What is more, the impact of the Christian religion on European society since the sixteenth century must be seen in the context of the dramatic theological and intellectual changes that occurred over the years, particularly since the eighteenth century. Christianity in 1600 differed dramatically from Christianity two hundred or three hundred years later. Two crucial developments influenced the change. Chronologically, one occurred in the seventeenth, the other in the eighteenth century. The former related to what is called the "Age of Confessionalism," that is, that period in European History in which emerging autocracy succeeded in combining even more political power (including that over the church) in the hands of the

ruler.³⁸ Clearly, the legacy of Martin Luther and the Reformation was reinterpreted to sustain such enhancement of political power.

The second element, the Enlightenment, challenged—even though it did not completely remove—a great many of the traditional Christian dogmas on which the edifice of anti-Semitism had been built. The influence of the Enlightenment on the dissolution of traditional Christian dogma was, of course, truly revolutionary. To a considerable extent, theological orthodoxy vanished—and with it the most blatant traditional points of disagreement between Judaism and Christianity. The questioning of Jesus' divinity, the repudiation of his miracles, and his new role as a purveyor of universal religious truth, removed a great deal of the traditional *scandalon* that had hovered over Jewish-Christian relations, even though Enlightenment Christianity still included the foil of the superstitious religion of the Old Testament. Lessing's fable of the three rings, representing the three world religions, heralded the possibility of a new chapter in Jewish-Christian relations, for, according to the fable, the three rings were identical in appearance, even though one was genuine and the two others were not. No one could know, therefore, which of the three was authentic. The classic Christian claims of theological superiority were dismissed as empirically irrelevant.

At the same time there were other elements of importance for the relationship of synagogue and church. German Pietism offered a new approach to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in that it bestowed little importance on theological doctrine or even on the role of Israel in salvation history. The individual's acceptance of Jesus as savior was the most importance point of the Christian religion. What mattered, in other words, were conversion and the individual's religious experience. To hate Jews was unchristian. The positive qualities of the Jewish religion were praised.³⁹

In this context Lutheranism underwent change, as the staunchly theological Luther and his fierce pronouncements

³⁸H. Schilling, "The Reformation and the Rise of the Early Modern State," in J. D. Tracy, ed., *Luther and the Modern State in Germany* (Kirkville, Mo., 1986) p. 21: "public opinion is wrong in blaming Luther and the Lutheran Reformation for the faults of German political life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."

³⁹Maurer, *Kirche und Synagoge*, p. 56.

(including those against the Jews) were found in many ways an embarrassment. One preferred to see Luther as the discoverer of freedom of conscience against the tyranny of the Dark Ages, as the exponent of the enlightened conscience, of toleration, of a universal religion of moral precepts.

The opening of the ghettos in the eighteenth century had exposed the Jewish tradition to very much the same Enlightenment currents, even as in the seventeenth century Spinoza's biblical criticism had affected both Christian and Jewish theology. Thus, both religions underwent change and, in so doing, tended to become more alike. Enlightenment Christianity and Enlightenment Judaism became more alike and increasingly indistinguishable.

This process continued into the nineteenth century, despite the conservative anti-Enlightenment reaction during the early decades of that century. Reform Judaism emerged in Germany, prompting, for example, the synagogue in Augsburg to abolish the observation of the ceremonial law in 1875. Jewish conversions to Christianity could easily be seen as a move from one affirmation of ethical monotheism to another.⁴⁰

By 1900 Christianity had been deeply modified for almost two centuries. Luther and the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century were seen through the eyes of the Enlightenment. This was the case even among those whose theological orientation was (in the language of the day) "positive," that is, conservative. Immanuel Kant and the ideals of the *Bildungsbürgertum* dominated the German scene.

At the same time, two new developments began to make themselves noticed. Although unrelated to each other, they converged to bear on our topic. One was the rise of modern anti-Semitism; the other the rise of modern Luther scholarship. The latter meant a rigorous analysis of primary sources and an appreciation of Luther's theological affirmations. At least initially the image of Luther as German liberator from foreign influences lingered on. Moreover, those facets of Luther's

⁴⁰ A more detailed account of the history of the Jews in Europe in the nineteenth century needs to point out the slowness of the process of legal equality for Jews: the persistence of pogroms not only in Russia but Germany. See, for example, H. G. Kirchhoff, "Judenhas und Judentum: das Programm des Jahres 1834 in der Stadt Neuss," *Almanach für den Kreis Neuss* (1985) 15-28. There was a conservative Jewish reaction against modernism. Neither, however, significantly alter the picture.

thought that had been ignored because they did not harmonize with the Enlightenment perspective were given attention. Thus, Heinrich Graetz, author of a monumental *Geschichte der Juden*, took note of Luther's tirades against the Jews and condemned them vigorously.⁴¹

Among the complex causes for the surge of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism, one is relevant to our topic. Emancipated Jews tended to be liberal since the ideology of liberalism had profoundly affected them. Its ideals had opened the gates of the ghetto and provided steady assimilation of Jews into the larger society. These Jews stood on the other end of the spectrum from those who bewailed the shortcomings of modernity and took a decidedly conservative stance. Not surprisingly, most Protestant leaders in Germany were politically conservative.⁴² Pointedly, the *Realenzyklopädie für Theologie und Kirche* noted around the turn of the century that "one felt the Jews' undue importance, sensed the racial difference, and resented their aggressiveness."⁴³

Parenthetically we might note that the religious histories of both Germany and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century manifested a clash between "modernist" Christianity and a conservative reaction. In both places the attack upon Christian modernism was not confined to theology, but embraced an attack upon modern civilization as well. In North America the clash led to the emergence of Fundamentalism, with its affirmation of Americanism and America's manifest destiny as features relevant to our topic.⁴⁴ In Germany the clash led to a similar development through the affirmation of a German destiny and the denunciation of all those who were thought to be culprits of modern perversity. The political activities of the Prussian court chaplain (and rabid anti-Semite) Adolf Stöcker serve as telling illustration for the late nineteenth-century German situation. Interestingly enough, Stöcker's anti-Semitism had no recourse to Luther nor did he accuse labor

⁴¹ (2d and 4th eds. 1900-09). See also I. Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism 1870-1914* (New York, 1972) p. 70.

⁴² D. R. Borg, "Volkskirche, 'Christian State,' and the Weimar Republic," *Church History* 35 (1966) 186.

⁴³ *Realenzyklopädie für Theologie und Kirche* 9:510.

⁴⁴ See G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York, 1980).

unions and socialism—the evils of the modern world—of being Jewish, even as the Jews were not denounced as the negative element in society.⁴⁵ There were probably few outright anti-Semitic clergy in Lutheran ranks, but many, being conservative as well as nationalist in orientation, made the easy identification of liberalism, democracy, labor unions, and socialism as essentially Jewish. In turn, Martin Luther became the progenitor of German values against foreign perversion, and his hostile pronouncements against things foreign were readily quoted.⁴⁶ The recent study of Robert P. Erickson on the German theologians Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emmanuel Hirsch, all of whom embraced in one way or another Nazi notions, points out the import of this conservative mentality.⁴⁷

All the same, a comprehensive assessment of nineteenth-century German Protestantism, published by the eminent church historian Reinhold Seeberg in 1900, included a lengthy section on the emancipation of women and the challenges connected with it, but said nothing about Jewish-Christian relations, a telling indication that the author did not see this issue to be important.⁴⁸ On the other hand, there are also clear indications that in this context Luther was viewed as star witness for anti-Semitism, prompting a concerned Lutheran pastor, Eduard Lamparter, to identify Luther, together with Adolf Stöcker, as the foremost negative influence in this regard.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Adolf von Harnack, the eminent figure in German Protestantism at the turn of the century, had no place for the semitic roots of Christianity and argued that the Old Testament should be removed from the Christian Bible, a theological rationale that could be easily turned into the general prejudice that Judaism was inferior.⁵⁰

⁴⁵See G. B. Ginzler, "Martin Luther: 'Kronzeuge des Antisemitismus,'" in Kremers, *Die Juden und Martin Luther*, p. 190.

⁴⁶Two examples may suffice: K. O. v. d. Bacht, *Luther als Judenfeind* (Berlin, 1931), and E. Vogelsang, *Luthers Kampf gegen die Juden* (Tübingen, 1933), the latter particularly important because Vogelsang was an insightful Luther scholar. E. Schaeffer, *Luther und die Juden* (Berlin, 1917), stressed Luther's positive views of Jews.

⁴⁷R. P. Erickson, *Theologians under Hitler* (New Haven, 1985).

⁴⁸R. Seeberg, *Die Kirche Deutschlands im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1903).

⁴⁹E. Lamparter, *Evangelische Kirche und Judentum. Ein Beitrag zum christlichen Verständnis von Judentum und Antisemitismus* (Stuttgart, 1928) p. 17.

⁵⁰H. J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (Neunkirchen, 1956) p. 351.

Religion and Society

In recent years historians have paid increasing attention to the convergence of popular religion, superstition, and folklore in the creation of the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the time). Thereby, historians focus on what in general parlance is called the "common man," in other words the reading habits, the value systems, the intellectual principles of the common people in a society. Such intellectual history "from below" deals with sources different from those relied upon in traditional intellectual history. It takes, for example, the enormous popularity of the novels of Karl May in late nineteenth-century Germany as an indication that those books shaped German society as much as did the official Christian religion, which the people had already begun to desert.

In this context it becomes clear that a popular anti-Semitism existed in late nineteenth-century Germany and that it was nurtured, both formally and informally, by a number of sources. Clearly, the Christian religion was one of those. That the "Jews" had murdered the savior could be heard from pulpits each Easter season, and certainly not from only Lutheran living across the street had the same appellation as did the "Jews" of the New Testament. Thus, language provided kinship across the centuries and condoned the concept of collective guilt.

The topic "Luther and the Jews" thus takes us to the question of the influence of religion in the emergence of modern consciousness. Did the legacy of negative Christian—specifically Lutheran—attitudes toward the Jews contribute to the emergence of blatant anti-Semitism at the beginning of the twentieth century? Was there, despite the changed environment of four centuries, a tradition of theological anti-Judaism enunciated by Luther and the Lutheran tradition? Does the path from Wittenberg lead to Auschwitz?⁵¹

Lutheranism and the Lutheran church in Germany were unprepared for the challenge of Nazi racial ideology. Part of the explanation lies in the way nineteenth-century theological

⁵¹See U. Tal, *Christians and Jews in the Second Reich (1870-1914)* (Jerusalem, 1969 [in Hebrew]).

DISCUSSION

BEKER: Oberman's recent book links apocalyptic with anti-Semitism. But you seemed dubious about this, Dr. Hillebrand. Could you explain how, for Oberman, Luther's apocalyptic world-view, coupled with the conviction of the end of the world, found expression in anti-Jewish sentiment?

HILLEBRAND: Oberman starts with the statement that Luther's attitude toward the Jews is a central problem or issue in his theology. Secondly, in comparison with the key group of Luther's contemporaries, most notably Reuchlin and Erasmus, Luther is more warmly disposed toward Jews than they are. By immediately focusing on Luther's "The Jews and their Lies" treatise, one does not appropriate what historically is important, namely, the larger matrix of Luther's contemporaries as well as the whole of Luther's observations. And then Oberman identifies the Calvinist tradition—a sort of urban reformation—as a key source for the emergence and formulation of principles of toleration which, by the eighteenth century, did significantly change the place of Jews in European society. The argument is that the Reformation in its totality was in fact a new and positive chapter in Jewish-Christian relations, even though Luther may not have been as forceful and lagged behind the Calvinist tradition. The eschatological part of Oberman's argument runs this way: Luther was convinced that the last days were at hand; the gospel had been fully restored, and the Jews remained—in these last days—stubborn about accepting this gospel. All this is related to his sense that salvation history was now at the sixth day, now about at the end.

BEKER: What does that mean, the sixth day?

HILLEBRAND: Luther's view of history saw all of history moving in 1,000-year stages, which, in allusion to the creation story, he called "days." There were to be six of these. And during the sixth sequence of 1,000 years will take place the second coming of Christ.

SIKER: You give the four standard reasons for explaining Luther's change. Do you think one is any more telling than the others?

HILLEBRAND: The first one. I do believe that there is a change over time in Luther. And the change has to do, first of all, with a clear diminishing of his interest in or optimism about Jewish conversion. The attitude is different. That 1542 tract on "The Jews and Their Lies" was not addressed to Jews; the "Jesus Christ was Born a Jew" treatise of 1523, however, was. The later tract was addressed to Christians and was to solidify their faith against counter-proselytizing.

SIKER: Is there much evidence that counter-proselytizing was a major problem in the beginning of the Reformation churches?

HILLEBRAND: I don't think so, and the scholarly consensus would agree with that. But Luther talks as if it was a major issue. There is an intriguing analogy to the Anabaptist threat, because the evidence is that in general the Anabaptists were a small, fringe group. And while Luther didn't want to pay as much attention to them as he paid to Catholics and to Jews, still he talked as if—certainly after Muenster in 1535—there were Anabaptist revolutionaries behind every bush and that political authorities had to guard themselves because otherwise there would be a revolutionary upheaval of society.

SIKER: Why do you think Luther exaggerated that so much?

BEKER: For political reasons.

HILLEBRAND: You might say that Luther always tended to exaggerate. But political reasons were crucial in as much as Luther felt that he had to rebut all those who threatened the cause of reform and weakened it against the Catholics. Let me get back to my point, which I think is pivotal for understanding Luther. And that is that he was so convinced, so profoundly convinced, that his premise on the simplicity and clarity of Scripture was correct that anything he perceived as a challenge to that premise sent him into an emotional tailspin.

BEKER: That's very interesting. I was wondering, in a similar vein, when he heaps together Catholics, pope, Anabaptists, Turks, and Jews, whether they are all in the same pot. I was wondering to what extent the Peasant's War was really a terrific challenge to Luther's own standing—and to what extent the Peasant's War was befriended by the left-wingers? I would have thought that, perhaps for the sake of his immediate politi-

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ical security from the princes, he made not just a theological judgment but also a political judgment with respect to the Peasant War, which he perceived as a real threat to him personally. And then he threw all these other groups in the same pot. Wouldn't this hostility towards the right-wingers be deflected and spilled over against the Jews? Weren't they all part of the same waterfall, so to speak? So he lumps all these groups together—Catholics, pope, Anabaptists, Turks, and Jews. These vitriolic comments against the Jews, are they simply part of the generally vitriolic relationship that constituted a challenge to him, not so much the Jews themselves as perhaps the left-wingers?

HILLERBRAND: I think each one of them is in fact *pars pro toto*, and the common denominator is a form of religion that is law and not grace. And there was, therefore, in Luther's eyes, kinship between Jews and Anabaptists, between Anabaptists and Catholics, and even between Anabaptists and Turks. I think that's it. It's no coincidence that during the last years of Luther's life he made these terribly obscene pronouncements not merely against one group but against all of them. There is the tract concerning "the papacy founded by the devil," with its terribly obscene woodcuts. In fact, Luther was more ruthless with respect to the treatment of the Anabaptists, in saying they should be hanged because they were revolutionaries. When asked about similarly ruthless comments or suggestions to the authorities about what they should do with Jews, he went no farther than expulsion, which was the standard way of dealing with Jews at the time. It is all cut from the same cloth.

Getting back to some of the comments made earlier, I interpret Luther in the context of his sense of ultimate failure, not externally. Externally he had political support; the churches had been officially recognized which preached the gospel the way he had interpreted it. But in terms of what he had thought, namely, that once the gospel of grace were put on the table everybody would join ranks—that had not taken place. And I think Luther could not deal with it.

CHARLESWORTH: Dr. Hillerbrand, I have two questions. First, is it an irony of history that when Germany under Bismarck was unified, and when the focus on Luther became more clear, his anti-Jewish statements were then put in a wider

context, and that these phenomena may have given rise to a growing anti-Judaism in Germany?

HILLERBRAND: I would put it a little differently. First of all, German anti-Semitism in the Bismarck period is relatively pale as compared to that in Austria and France, not to mention Poland late in the nineteenth century. That raises some rather interesting questions. In German anti-Semitism, Luther played a minor role. It was the Luther who was seen as the epitome of things German rather than the Luther who wrote some tracts against the Jews that was important. What happened was that there was greater scholarly preoccupation with Luther, in the course of which sources became available that had not been available before. And by the time of the outbreak of World War I, there was clear recognition of Luther's anti-Semitic frankness. So we don't have to wait until 1933 for this explicit recognition of Luther's role. In fact, there is, one might say, a type of latent progression from the turn of the century to 1933 in how Luther is viewed. There were some Lutheran clergy who in 1917 established a society for the understanding of Judaism, with very pro-Jewish concerns. Still, when, nurtured by quite different sources, anti-Semitism became a political reality for Germany, Lutheranism simply could not deal with it.

CHARLESWORTH: That touches on my second question. In light of the perception of Luther's revolting anti-Jewish statements, have Lutherans had more trouble coming to grips with the question of the Jew, or has that recognition been more of a catalyst? Do Lutherans in light of Luther have more difficulty than Methodists in light of Wesley in coming to grips with the ramifications and perplexities of being Christian?

HILLERBRAND: There is a dual legacy. Frankly, this question occurred to me in writing the paper: what do Swedish or Finnish Lutherans think and feel about this? The problem becomes intense when you talk about Germany because it involves a twofold burden, namely, a progenitor whose shadow falls so formidable on the religious side, but also the other shadow of being German, that is, being part of a society that allowed this awful thing to happen. So, the answer is that, beginning with a reinterpretation of *Romans* 8, Lutherans—

and certainly German Lutherans—have been in a state of reflective penance since 1945. But they assuredly were not between 1933 and 1945. You know that even the Confessing Church had a great deal of negative legacy to work through.

BEKER: I think it's a mistake to look at Germany in a vacuum. I think that the measures taken, of course, were horrendous. But the soil for what happened in Germany was spread very widely over western Europe. Although the Dutch were very pro-Jewish, still the whole rise of the National Socialist Party in Holland was preceded by a very heavily anti-Jewish climate. I just want to ask, would it be correct to say in retrospect that the Holocaust happened not simply in a German vacuum in an otherwise pro-Jewish climate but in a general anti-Jewish climate moving through western Europe—France, Belgium, Holland, and so on?

HILLERBRAND: In my judgment, much water went over the dam between 1540 and 1900. And, more basically, I am doubtful about how influential theological ideas are in society, anyhow. But, be that as it may, it is clear that when disaster began in Germany in the late 1920s, the Lutheran church had nothing with which to meet the challenge.

PRIEST: I would agree with you that theological ideas don't play much of a role, but they are, in my judgment, a powerful force for legitimating conclusions arrived at on other grounds, but then sanctified for those people who still take religion seriously.

HILLERBRAND: I would say in that sense Luther, as "the German" speaking against foreigners, is probably a greater influence for our topic and a greater legitimizing force than Luther the explicit "anti-Semite."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Salient Christian-Jewish Issues of Today: A Christian Exploration¹

A. Roy Eckardt

Christian antisemitism did not arise by the importation of ideas foreign to Christianity through some historical accident. Christian antisemitism grew out of the Christian Bible, i.e., the New Testament, as it was understood and interpreted by Christians over centuries. The roots of Christian antisemitism need be traced no further than Christianity itself; Christians have been antisemitic because they have been Christians. They thought of themselves as the people of God, the true Israel, who had been faithful to the inheritance of ancient Israel. Judaism, in the Christian view, had no reason to exist once Christianity came on the scene. We must learn, I think, to live with the unpleasant fact that antisemitism is part of what it has meant historically to be a Christian, and is still part of what it means to be Christian.

—Robert L. Wilken²

The post-Rosenzweig Jewish "return into history" must be matched, on the Catholic side, with a Catholic return into history. . . . Any purely realized eschatology (including those informing purely incarnationist theologies) can maintain itself only at the price of ignoring two central realities: first, the clear presence of the eschatological "not yet" in the New Testament itself, and second, the stark negativity of the radical not yet in our age disclosed in all its horror by the Holocaust.

—David Tracy³