

---

# The Position of Martin Luther toward Jews and Judaism: Historical, Social, and Theological Avenues\*

*Isaac Kalimi / Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz  
and the University of Chicago*

From the first glance, a reading of the works of Martin Luther (1483–1546) reflects a great inconsistency in his approach toward Jews. On the one hand, particularly in the early stage of his career as a protestant reformer, Luther explicitly condemned the church's history of oppressing Jews and called for a constructive engagement with them (Luther's so-called Judeophilia, *Judenfreundlichkeit*).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, more dominant especially—but not exclusively—in the later stage of his career, Luther made several poisoned assertions and accusations against the Jews as a collective and penned three violent anti-Semitic manifestos with many false allegations (Luther's Judeophobia, *Judenfeindlichkeit*).<sup>2</sup> Is this dual attitude toward Jews just a coincidence, simply because people change, and are there bundles of contradiction? If so, what caused the dramatic upside-down change of it? Is it due to some specific historical or personal event(s) that took place between 1523, when Luther published his relative friendly work *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (*Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*),<sup>3</sup> in which he overlooks typical

\* In blessed memory of Martin Helzle z"l (August 17, 1961–August 15, 2022), a fine scholar and a true friend for all seasons. (הבל על דאבדין ולא משתכחין (סנהדרין קיא, ע"א).

<sup>1</sup> All the translations in this article are mine, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Although the term “anti-Semitism” was coined later, in 1879 by F. Wilhelm A. Marr, the phenomenon already existed a long time before. Thus, use of the term “anti-Semite/Semitic” regarding Luther's approach toward Jews is not an anachronism: Luther's hatred was not only on biblical-theological bases but also based on race-ethnicity. His descriptions of Jews as a collective “bloodthirsty nation” or as an ethnic group of “liars” are definitely not in the category of biblical-theological but rather race-ethnic (see Sec. IV). Furthermore, Luther's letter to his wife dated February 1, 1546, stating that his dizziness might be because he had passed by a Jewish area (see Sec. II) shows that he attributed metaphysical power to Jews who wish to harm non-Jews and also took them as scapegoats for his personal problems, as an anti-Semite does.

<sup>3</sup> *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* is included in *WA*, 11:309–36. Here and throughout, except where otherwise noted, all references to Luther's works are cited as *WA*, according to Martin Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesam(m)tausgabe*, 121 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009). The

*The Journal of Religion*, volume 103, number 4, October 2023.

© 2023 The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. Published by The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.1086/727124>

## The Journal of Religion

charges against Jews (e.g., killing God's son, ritual murder) and criticizes the brutal Christian oppression of them and called for their integration in Christian society, and twenty years later, in 1543, when he published his three poisonous manifestos? Or was there never a genuine change in Luther's view of Jews and Judaism during his entire career or even lifetime? Was it just a tactical approach in the earlier stage of his career for a limited time, when he took advantage of the horrible situation of the Jews in order to achieve religious, political, and perhaps some other goals as well? In other words, Luther's antipathy toward Jews and abhorrence of Judaism were overriding through the course of his entire career/life, and it never genuinely changed, certainly not regarding Judaism (or so-called *rabbinisch-talmudisches Judentum*). His performance and conduct reflect two sides of one and the same coin in order to achieve his goal(s): he used a friendly method for a short time, attempting to accomplish a specific purpose(s) with Jews, but when he failed, he attempted to achieve the same purpose(s) in an unfriendly and harsh method, even harsher than that of any pope in church history. If so, what is/are this/those purpose(s) and to which extent did he achieve them, if any?

The relationship between Luther and the Jews has been considerably debated—in this or other forms—by theologians and historians.<sup>4</sup> This article revisits that theme and Luther's attitude toward Jews and Judaism, focusing on Luther's various writings on these subjects and placing them in their broader context. That is to say, the aim is to engage with a wide range of Luther's works and sources from his time, including some rarely explored Jewish responses to Luther, in order to shed a new light on his approach toward Jews and Judaism from different perspectives, all in their historical, social, and theological setting of late Middle Ages Europe. The article reexamines the various sources and brings a unique perspective. It argues that this issue stood in the center of Luther's theological worldview from the very beginning of his career until his last day and was an integral part of his whole reformation. As a reformer, Luther wished to reform—or to solve—what later on, in modern times, was called the Jewish Question (*Judenfrage*), in one way or another. His temporary Judeophilia was a chain in his overall reformation and was just one side of the coin, and it did not stem from his humanistic, moral, and ethical values but rather from his intended religious, political, and social (and perhaps also economical) agenda. He wished to take advantage of the miserable situation in which the Jews stayed, and to convert them to Christianity, and thus to erase the Jewish Question and Judaism once and forever. Because the traditional Christian oppression of the Jews did not achieve this goal, he attempted a restricted friendly approach for a while.

---

citations from Luther's writings are given here in their preserved original spelling and grammar, with only occasional clarifications according to modern German conventions.

<sup>4</sup> See the survey by Andreas Pangritz, *Theologie und Antisemitismus: Das Beispiel Martin Luthers* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2017), 49–195.

## The Position of Martin Luther

When this did not work out as he desired, he not only turned back to the traditional church oppressive approaches but adopted an even more extreme Judeophobic and anti-Semitic one, in order to pressure the Jews as much as possible and bring them to their very end. That is, they must either give up their “false” and “heretic” Judaism, accept Jesus as Messiah, and convert or simply perish and disappear as society gets rid of them.

This article presents, for the first time straightforwardly, a range of key factors for Luther’s Judeophobia, being his dominant attitude all along, and for his obsessiveness to achieve his goal: “cross or expulsion, agony, and death!” This approach in fact has never been offered before in the scholarship. Moreover, this article argues that Luther’s Judeophobia was rooted in his reading of the Old and New Testaments and in the Christian anti-Jewish tradition, education, and fundamental theological worldview on Jews and Judaism that he chose to escalate much further. Luther’s fears of “Jewish magics” and the persuasive power and influence of Judaism and Hebraism that may harm Christianity just added to this. Furthermore, the article claims that Luther’s Judeophilia is as an outcome of his practical religious and church-political agenda and another side of his rebellion against the pope. These explications of Luther’s attitudes, as well as the consideration of the conversion of the Jews as an integral part of Luther’s worldview and an essential substance that was interweaved in Luther’s religious thought and his all-inclusive reformation, are an original contribution of this article.

This article offers many fresh insights; it also suggests a fresh and comprehensive analysis of several sources that challenge some common assumptions of church historians and theologians. In contrast to the latter, which have been stated especially in Germany in light of the horrors of twentieth-century German history, it shows that Luther’s Judeophobic assertions, tracts, and acts cannot be apologetically explained or excused as if they stemmed from his physical, psychological, or emotional difficulties that he may have had in a stage of his life. It questions some scholars’ efforts to explain Luther’s anti-Semitic assertions and manifestos as part of the norms of his contemporary sixteenth-century European Christian society, as if he was just a “son of his time.” To reveal the distinctiveness of Luther’s attitude toward Jews, the article necessarily presents a brief consideration of the attitudes of several of his contemporary influential thinkers, theologians, and reformers toward the Jews, some of them being Luther’s close colleagues and friends. It maintains that Luther’s disappointment by the Jews’ refusal to accept Christianity in its new form was not the only cause for his destructive approach toward them but just a turning point of his overall strategy. Luther never accepted or respected Jews and Judaism as they are.

This article demonstrates that some decisions of theologians were immersed in political concerns. Thus, in many cases Luther acted as a politician rather than as a responsible theologian and religious leader who attempts to advance morality, ethics, humanism, and brotherhood. The Augustinian

## The Journal of Religion

monk, who in 1517 wished to reform the church, came to be immersed in hatred and vigorous violence that was first directed toward Pope Leo X (1513–21) personally, as well as toward the papal institution as such, and then toward invalid children (see the appendix), German peasants, Turks (as an ethnic-Islamic hostile group and all Muslims with them), and particularly the “heretical” Jews as a whole, whenever and wherever they were. The article reveals that the courageous reformer and talented theologian and translator was also a believer in superstitions. It also reinforces that Luther’s anti-Jewish writings were a source of inspiration for the German Nazis—a point that has already been admitted in the scholarship. Indeed, the relevance of this study stems from the fact that Luther was and still is the role model for many followers of the Protestant Church’s attitude toward Judaism. It represents the reformer Luther without idealization or bias and prejudice; it describes not only his positive sides as reformer, biblical interpreter, and translator but also his negative ones, particularly toward Jews and Judaism. As such, it fits him in the framework where every human being belongs: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccles. 7:20; cf. 1 Kings 8:46).

### I. LUTHER’S POSITION TOWARD JEWS AND JUDAISM AND HIS “JUDEOPHILIA”

#### A. *Luther’s Motivation to Engage with Jews*

Luther’s religious reformation in the German territories that began in 1517 took place twenty-five years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, about twenty years after their forced conversion and expulsion from Portugal (1497),<sup>5</sup> and only eleven years after the newly converted Jews of Lisbon were condemned as being heretics, slaughtered, and burned in April 1506.<sup>6</sup> The German Jews were aware of these tragic events that befell their brothers and sisters in the Iberian Peninsula while they were struggling for their own enormous religious, social, and economic difficulties that put their very existence in question. To mention just some events, in 1492, twenty-seven Jews were burned alive at the gate of the city of Sternberg (Mecklenburg). In 1499 the Jews of Nuremberg were expelled from the city. In 1510 the Jewish community of Brandenburg was blamed for the crime of blood libel, which caused the burning of thirty-eight Jews. One should add to this list the expulsion of the Jews of Regensburg in 1519 and the expulsion of the Jews from

<sup>5</sup> Compare Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson, “The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1971): 239–326, esp. 255–56.

<sup>6</sup> See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah*, Hebrew Union College Annual Supplements 1 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 6–34.

Rothenburg ob der Tauber only one year later.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, on April 4, 1519, Georg, Herzog of Bavaria, who was the Bishop of Speyer (1515–29), ordered the isolation of the Jews in his diocese, because “they are not human beings, but dogs.”<sup>8</sup> The horrifying situation of the Jews also reflects from the statement of the German jurist Ulrich Zasius (1461–1535) “that it was permissible to baptize Jewish children against the will of their parents.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, several medieval artistic works testify to the mocking, persecution, torturing, and burning of the Jews by Christian societies.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in his 1523 work, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, Luther himself testifies that popes treat the Jews as if they were dogs and not as human beings and forbid them to work among Christians and to have social interaction with them (see immediately below).

Against this background of those gloomy days appears a young Augustinian monk, theologian, and church reformer, Martin Luther, who condemns the Christian history of isolation, domination, and oppression of Jews. In his *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, he shows that Jesus and Jews are actually from the same root, calls the latter “brothers of our Lord,”<sup>11</sup> and describes the intolerable treatment of them by Christians: “The way our fools, the Papists, bishops, sophists, and monks, the big ass-heads, have before now dealt with the Jews, a good Christian might actually have become a Jew. If I had been a Jew and had seen such mugs and blockheads rule and teach the Christian faith, I should rather have turned into a pig than become a Christian. They treat the Jews as if they were dogs and not human beings.”<sup>12</sup>

Luther goes on to suggest treating the Jews in the same manner as any Christian:

I would advise and beg everyone to deal kindly with the Jews and to instruct them in the Scriptures. In such cases we could expect them to come over to us. If, however, we

<sup>7</sup> See also the survey by Heiko A. Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus: Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation* (Berlin: Severin & Siedler, 1981), 126–34.

<sup>8</sup> “Keine Menschen, sondern Hunde”; see Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus*, 127 and 167 n. 6.

<sup>9</sup> See Chava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *The Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim*, Studies in European Judaism 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 13.

<sup>10</sup> For example, both (i) the supposed killing of the Christian boy Simon of Trent (Italian: Simonino di Trento; Tyrol, Italy) by a Jew in 1475 resulting in the death of eight Jews and (ii) the burnings of Jews in Deggendorf (in 1338) and Sternberg (in 1492) are illustrated as woodcuts by Michael Wolgemut (1434–1519) in Hartmann Schedel’s *Schedelsche Weltchronik* (Nuremberg, 1493).

<sup>11</sup> See WA, 11:314, lines 25–28; and the detailed discussion by Isaac Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther: Biblical Interpretation in the Shadow of Judeophobia,” *Journal of Religion* 100 (2020): 42–74, esp. 55–56. For the German version, see Kalimi, “Martin Luther, die Juden und Esther: Bibelinterpretation im Schatten der Judenfeindschaft,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 71 (2019): 357–94.

<sup>12</sup> See WA, 11:314, lines 28–30, and 315, lines 1–3: “Denn unsere narren die Papste, Bischoff, Sophisten und Munche, die groben Esels köpffe haben bis her also mit den Juden gefahren, das, wer ein gutter Christ were gewetzen, hette wol mocht ein Jude werden. Und wenn ich ein Jude gewesen were und hette solche tolpell und knebel gesehen den Christen glauben, regirn und lehren, so were ich ehe eine saw worden denn ein Christen. Denn sie haben mit den Juden gehandelt als weren es hunde und nicht menschen.”

## The Journal of Religion

use brute force and slander them, saying that they need the blood of Christians to get rid of the stench, and treat them like dogs, what good can we expect from them? Finally, how can we expect them to improve if we forbid them to work among us and have social intercourse with us and so force them into interest [from money lending]? If we wish to make them better, we must deal with them not according to the law of the Pope, but according to the law of Christian charity. We must receive them kindly and allow them to compete with us in earning a living, so that they may have a good reason to be with us and among us and have an opportunity to witness Christian life and doctrine. Then if some remain stubborn, what of it? Not every one of us is a good Christian.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, Luther's condemnation and fresh suggestion were a shining star in the darkest night for the German Jews, an incredible inspiration and wide-ranging shift to a new hopeful era. The two Jews who visited Luther in Worms in April 1521 (see Sec. I.B.2) serve as an example for this point. Ulrich Oelschläger properly notes that "[it] shows that Jews pinned great hopes on Luther's appearance, [they] took an initiative and sought contact with him in whatever way they could, desired to confront his interpretation of Scripture with their own, expecting a tolerance that was not granted to them."<sup>14</sup>

But why did the Christian monk and religious reformer all of a sudden wish to change radically the traditional church position toward the "heretical" Jews, who were labeled through centuries as the killers of God's son, prophets, and other innocent divine messengers; steadily refused to accept Jesus as Messiah; interpreted the common Scripture—Hebrew Bible/Old Testament—differently; and even challenged the church's Christological/allegorical interpretation?<sup>15</sup> Did Luther's new attitude stem from his humanistic, moral,

<sup>13</sup> See WA, 11:307–36, esp. 336, lines 22–34: "Darumb were meyn bitt und rad, das man seuberlich mit yhn [= ihnen; d.h., Juden] umgieng und aus der schrift sie ununterrichtet, so mochten yhr ettliche herbey komen. Aber nu wyr sie nur mit gewalt treyben und gehen mit lügen teydingen [= verleumden] umb, geben yhn schuld, sie müssen Christen blutt haben, das sie nicht stincken, und weys nicht wes des narren wercks mehr ist, das man sie gleich für hunde hellt, Was sollten wyr guttis an yhn schaffen? Item das man yhn verbeutt, uttter uns tzu erbeytten, hantieren und andere menschliche gemeynschaft tzu haben, damit man sie tzu wuchern treybt, wie sollt sie das bessern? Will man yhn helffen, so mus man nicht des Bapsts, sonder Christlicher liebe gesetz an yhn uben und sie freuntlich annehmen, mit lassen werben und erbeytten, da mit sie ursach und raum gewinnen, bey und umb uns tzu seyn, unser Christlich lere und leben tzu horen und sehen. Ob ettliche hallstarrig sind, was ligt dran? sind wyr doch auch nicht alle gutte Christen." Luther writes similarly in his commentary on Psalm 14; see WA, 5:429, lines 7–9, 12–14; see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 57.

<sup>14</sup> Ulrich Oelschläger, *Luther in Worms: Der Reichstag im April 1521* (Worms: Worms Verlag, 2020), 121: "[Es] zeigt, dass Juden mit dem Auftreten Luthers große Hoffnungen verbanden, die Initiative ergriffen und wie auch immer Kontakt mit ihm suchten, seine Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift mit ihrer konfrontieren wollten, wohl Toleranz erwarteten, die ihnen aber nicht gewährt wurde."

<sup>15</sup> On the Jewish reaction to the Christian allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, see Isaac Kalimi, *Fighting over the Bible: Jewish Interpretation and Polemic from Temple to Talmud and Beyond*, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 105–6; and the examples discussed by Isaac Kalimi, "The Centrality and Interpretation of Psalms in

and ethical principles per se?<sup>16</sup> Or was it perhaps the spirit of the Renaissance, of religious liberty, open-minded humanism, and tolerance toward others—simply accepting them as they are—that he wished to spread out? Or did it simply come from his genuine empathy toward the unfortunate people of Jesus who contributed the Scriptures? On the one hand, a careful scrutiny of Luther’s writings, assertions, and activities during his entire career or even life cannot prove any of these presumptions. On the other hand, it shows that Luther’s new initiative most likely stemmed, first and foremost, from his ultimate political program and religious goals, which were missionary in their essence, that is, to take advantage of the desperate Jews and attempt to attract them to his newly reformed church and in acting friendly toward them to increase further the polemic against the Roman Church. In other words, Luther took a new direction toward the old and unsolved Jewish Question in Christian society in order to achieve the goal that all the popes failed to achieve over hundreds of years by oppression and cruelty, namely, associating the people of Jesus with the religion of Jesus. Thus, for instance, Luther blamed the Kölner theologians who “want to convert the Jews by violence and slander; but God resists them.”<sup>17</sup> Luther simply took advantage of the historical reality of his time, place, and circumstances, when the hopeless and helpless Jews were struggling for their survival in the muddy social situation of the German territories (and of Europe), in order to cause them to give up their ancient ancestral religious and cultural heritage and join Christianity.

### *B. Theological Contextualization of Luther’s Position on the Jewish Question*

1. “*Biblical Israel*” versus “*Talmudic Jews*.”—For an appropriate comprehension of Luther’s position on the Jewish Question, some preliminary clarifications about the Jewish-Christian relationship should be expressed. The key approach of Christianity to Jews is well summarized in the Epistle to the Romans: Israel’s rejection is not final. It is compared to a tree: “if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.” Indeed, “as regarded by the Gospel they [i.e., Israelites/Jews] are enemies of God for your [i.e., Gentiles] sake; but as regarded by election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors” (Rom. 11:16, 28). It is believed that sooner or later the Jews will recognize

---

Judaism prior to and during Medieval Times: Approaches, Authorship, Genre, and Polemics,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 23 (2020): 229–59, esp. 239–40 (Midrash Psalms, *Shocheh Tov*), 248–49 (Rashi), 253–57 (David Kimchi).

<sup>16</sup> It is worthwhile to stress that W. Schwarz, “Studies in Luther’s Attitude towards Humanism,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1955): 66–76, deals with Luther’s use of the Hebrew material that was published by Reuchlin and by Erasmus in his lectures on certain psalms. However, he does not discuss Luther’s humanistic principles as such.

<sup>17</sup> WA, 56, no. 436, pp. 13–14: “Mit Gewalt und mit Schmähreden wollen sie die Juden bekehren; Gott aber moege ihnen widerstehen.”

## The Journal of Religion

Jesus as Christ/Messiah and will have salvation as well. Thus, since its earliest times, Christianity considers Judaism as the rival religion, which is developed from the common sacred text, the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, and tirelessly struggles against it and its bearers—the Jews. It adopted the “rejection-replacement theology” that considers Christians the “True Israel” (*Whare Israel*), “Israel in the Spirit” (*Israel nach dem Geist*), and the continuity of the “Biblical Israel.” Christians are holding the “religion of spirit” and “true religion” and are following Jesus and therefore are gloriously flourishing, while the “Talmudic Jews” are just “Israel in the flesh” (*Israel nach dem Fleisch*), the “biological” descendants and “heretical” ones who are keeping the “religion of laws” and “false religion” and deny Jesus as Christ and even put him to death. Therefore, they were rejected and afflicted by God: their city—Jerusalem—and their temple were destroyed, and they lost their homeland and sovereignty and were exiled. Now they are under ongoing misery, being neglected and humbled and staying in a ghostly alive/dead situation among the foreign nations. Their stubbornness and rebelliousness against God’s will and his Christ caused the curses of Lev. 26:14–41 and Deut. 28:15–69 to befall them.<sup>18</sup> The curses in Psalms 109 were interpreted three times by Luther in a Christological method (in 1513/1515, 1526, and 1533), as the curses of Jesus on Judas Iscariot, on all Jews, and on Judaism.<sup>19</sup> Mercy and a respective reconciliation will only be given to them through *ad Christum conversis* (“conversion to Christ”).<sup>20</sup> The awful situation of the Jews had a double function: as a live divine punishment of the Jews who sinned and kept their stubbornness and refused to accept Christ and as a warning to Christians about what would happen to them if they would betray their religion.<sup>21</sup>

2. *The “Correct” Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.*—An interpretation and translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament plays a significant role in the relationship between Jews and Christians. In contrast to his contemporary theologian, Erasmus of Rotterdam (see Sec. III.F.2 below), and Marcion of Sinope (Asia Minor, ca. 85–160 CE), who were ready to exclude the whole Old Testament from the Christian Scriptures,<sup>22</sup> Luther

<sup>18</sup> Thus, e.g., the German Protestant reformer from Strasbourg, Martin Bucer (1491–1551), stated that the Jews must be treated according to the verses of Deut. 28:43–44; see Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim*, 344.

<sup>19</sup> See in detail Secs. IV and V.

<sup>20</sup> WA, 14:738, lines 21–22, 26–27.

<sup>21</sup> Compare Thomas Kaufmann, *Luthers “Judenschriften,”* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 6.

<sup>22</sup> On Marcion, see the classical work by Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott, Texte und Untersuchungen* 45 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1921); Barbara Aland, “Marcion (ca. 85–160)/Marcioniten,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 22:89–101; Gerhard May, “Markion/Markioniten,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 5:834–36. On excluding the Old Testament, see D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 45–47; Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 200; Heikki Räisänen, “Marcion and the Origins of Christian



stresses the importance of it for the Christian theology. He considered the New Testament to be older than the Old Testament, since it was “promised from the beginning of the world, yes, ‘before the time of world.’”<sup>23</sup> He stresses on several occasions that “the revelation and knowledge of his Son [i.e., Jesus] is through the whole Scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments; all is about the Son.”<sup>24</sup> According to Luther, because the Jews rejected Christ, they lost the key to understand, interpret, and translate the Old Testament. Luther could not comprehend how the Jews are not able to see the allusions and promises (*Verheißungen*) of Christ in the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup> In fact, this understanding of the Scripture is already attributed to Jesus himself: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me” (John 5:39, RSV). Consequently, the Jews walk like the blind in darkness. A “correct” reading of the Bible will open their eyes and minds to admit the truth of Jesus and Christianity.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, for Jews the validity of all the Mosaic Laws is eternal, while the Christians consider them as part of the Old Covenant with Jews and for Jews only, and with the appearance of Jesus Christ the laws ceased and are irrelevant for the Gentile Christians, except some universal or “natural” laws such as “do not murder” (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).<sup>27</sup>

Particularly for Protestant reformers such as Luther (and Calvin), who moved the Bible and its interpretation to the center of the Christian belief and presented it as the ultimate authority in the Christian life while challenging the pope’s sole authority to interpret it (see immediately below), Jewish biblical interpretation could undermine their Christian theologian’s

---

Anti-Judaism,” *Temenos* 33 (1997): 121–35; Hildegard König, “Marcion of Sinope,” in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 398–400.

<sup>23</sup> WA, 14:602, lines 34–36; see Isaac Kalimi, *The Book of Esther between Judaism and Christianity: The Biblical Story, Self-Identification, and Antisemitic Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 260–61.

<sup>24</sup> “Die offenbarung und erkenntnis seines Sons, durch die ganze Schrifft Alts und Newen Testaments, Alles gehets auff den Son” (= “[D]ie Offenbarung und Erkenntnis seines Sohnes durch die ganze Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments: alles geht auf den Sohn”); *Von den letzten Worten Davids*, WA, 54:88; cf. *Tischreden*, WA, 5, no. 5585. For additional sources, see Hans Eger, *Luther und seine Bibel* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1934), 13–16. It is no wonder therefore that the Protestant Old Testament scholar Otto Procksch states straightforwardly, in the first line of his 787-page *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1950), that “All theology is Christology” (*Alle Theologie ist Christologie*; p. 1, italics added).

<sup>25</sup> *Tischreden*, WA, 5, no. 5324; cf. Nicole de Laharpe, “Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden,” in *Christen und Juden im Reformationszeitalter*, ed. Rolf Decot and Matthieu Arnold (Mainz: von Zabern, 2006), 1–14, esp. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Compare de Laharpe, “Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden,” 9. In fact, many European cathedrals illustrated well the “blindness” of the Jews by contrasting *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*, where the latter is represented as one with closed or blindfolded eyes; see Kalimi, *Book of Esther*, 245.

<sup>27</sup> For Luther’s perception of the Mosaic Laws, see Brooks Schramm, “Like a Sow Entering a Synagogue,” in *Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies*, ed. Kirsi I. Stjerna and Brooks Schramm (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 250–59, esp. 253–59 and references there to the original texts in WA, 16.

## The Journal of Religion

authority. Therefore, Luther never tires of showing his deep animosity toward rabbis and of warning those in his audience who read them to do it with keen criticism.<sup>28</sup> He violently criticizes the Jewish interpretation of the Bible and considers it a falsification of God's word, as "Jewish blindness" (*Judenblindheit*) and as a conglomerate of "lies" (*Lügen*) and rejects it absolutely, calling the Jews "perverters of Holy Scripture."

In his *Von den letzten Worten Davids* (*On the Last Words of David*) Luther defends a Christological reading of 2 Sam. 23:1–7 against Jewish readings of the passage and expresses his view about the Jews and their Scripture interpretation, in general, and about how the Christians should act: "These false and unknown Jews and Israelites . . . who have interpreted no writings of the prophets, who have perverted everything, who have done nothing in the open but underhandedly and clandestinely, like children of darkness, that is, of the devil, have practiced nothing but blasphemy, cursing, murder and lies against the True Jews and Israel [i.e., Christians], that is, against the apostles and prophets. And they continue this daily and thereby prove that they are not Israel or Abraham's children but venomous and devilish foes of the True Israel and Abraham's children and in addition despoilers, robbers, and perverters of Holy Scripture. Therefore, it behooves us to recover Scripture from them as from public thieves wherever grammar warrants this and harmonizes with the New Testament."<sup>29</sup>

It is true that Jews interpreted the Torah more than any other book. However, in light of several Jewish commentaries on prophets or some prophetic books (e.g., by Rashi, Abraham ibn Ezra, David Kimchi, Isaac Abarbanel), Luther's assertion that the Jews "have interpreted no writings of the prophets" is inaccurate.

Although Luther states that he does not want to quarrel with or to learn from the Jews how to interpret the Bible, "because they blaspheme our faith so poisonously,"<sup>30</sup> he still disputes the Jewish interpretation of several biblical texts in his *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*, in *Brief wider die Sabbater* (*Letter against the Sabbatarians*), as well as in *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (*On the Jews and Their Lies*) and in some discussions with Jews.<sup>31</sup> Another reformer,

<sup>28</sup> Compare Reinhold Lewin, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland während des Reformationszeitalters*, Neue Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche 10 (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1911; republished with an introduction and bibliographical additions by Karsten Krampitz, Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 2018), 99; de Laharpe, "Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden," 10.

<sup>29</sup> WA, 54:16–100, at 93, lines 14–24; English translation from Martin H. Bertram, "Treatise on the Last Words of David: 2 Samuel 23:1–7," in *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), 344. For the original German text and further discussion of this document, see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 63–64.

<sup>30</sup> WA, 53:419, lines 16–18: "weil sie so giftig [= giftig] unsern Glauben lestern [= lästern]."

<sup>31</sup> *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* is republished in WA, 53:417–552 (with an introduction on 412–16); on this work, see Rene Süß, *Luthers Theologisch Testament: Over de Joden en hun leugens* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2006).

Martin Bucer, asserts that “it would be appropriate to expel the Jews totally from the Christian state. . . . [However,] if it is decided to tolerate them, the following conditions have to be laid down.” As the first condition he lists: “Jews will have to swear not to curse the Christians and to follow only the teaching of the Torah and the Prophets and not those perverse fabrications of the Talmud.”<sup>32</sup>

Until Luther’s time, ecclesial interpretation demanded *scriptura et traditio*, which means studying the “Scripture and the Tradition [of the church]” together. While allegorical/Christological interpretation is common to Catholics and Lutherans, Luther insisted on interpreting Scripture (the New as well as the Old Testaments) alone and in its own right (*sola scriptura*).<sup>33</sup> Although Luther wished to limit the allegorical approach only to Christ, especially in the prophetic texts of the Old Testament,<sup>34</sup> this issue still was (and is) the greatest obstacle between Jews and Christians. Each of them rejects the biblical interpretation of the other and considers it as a mistaken approach. Luther took any opportunity he had, even with a small group of Jews, to convince them that the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament is the only true one, rather than their false rabbinic tradition. For example, in April 1521 two Jews visited him in Worms, and he attempted to convince them to accept Jesus as the Messiah, based on the Septuagint version of Isa. 7:14 in which the word העלמה (“the young woman,” even a married one, as reflected in Prov. 30:19–20) is translated ἡ παρθένος (“the virgin”).<sup>35</sup> In 1525 Luther tried to convince three Jews who came to ask for his recommendation that his Christological interpretation of Jer. 23:5–6 is the only accurate one and that the Jewish interpretation is false.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “Talmud” is used here as an inclusive name for the rabbinic literature and interpretation as a whole. On this and other demands of Bucer, see Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim*, 344.

<sup>33</sup> This attitude of Luther to Scripture and his rejection of the pope’s supreme authority to interpret the Bible brought some Protestants and Jews (at least those who strived to interpret biblical text according its simple meaning—*peshat*) a bit closer in understanding some texts of the common Scripture. See also Thomas Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2015), 66–67, with examples. However, the gap between the Jewish and Christian interpretations—even between their allegorical interpretations—is huge, and as such it is an obstacle between the two religions; see Kalimi, *Fighting over the Bible*, 90–145.

<sup>34</sup> See in particular his *Lectures on Psalms*, WA, 10:7 (for a full citation of the text, see Sec. V below), and *Lectures on Genesis*, WA, 42, esp. 173–74, 367–77. For discussion, see Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. E. W. Gritsch and R. C. Gritsch, ed. V. I. Gruhn, 2nd ed. (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1997), 87–101.

<sup>35</sup> This episode is told in Nikolaus Selnecker’s *Historia Lutheri* (1574). Some scholars doubt the historicity of it; see Oelschläger, *Luther in Worms*, 121–22, 166–67, and the references listed there.

<sup>36</sup> See WA, 20:569, lines 8–16; 25:185, lines 24–32; 50:313, lines 5–14. Compare Reinhard Schwarz, *Luther, Die Kirche in Ihrer Geschichte* 3, no. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 215; Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Martin Luther und die Juden,” in *Interesse am Judentum: Die Franz-Delitzsch-Vorlesungen, 1989–2008*, ed. J. Cornelis de Vos and Folker Siegert, Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 23 (Münster: Lit, 2008), 262–81, esp. 269 n. 48; Oelschläger, *Luther in Worms*, 120–22.

## The Journal of Religion

### C. *The Place of the Jewish Question in Luther's Worldview and Reformation*

The place of Jews and Judaism in Luther's life, thinking, and writing cannot be overestimated. He published no less than five extended works regarding Jews and about 200 Table-Talks (*Tischreden*) that deal somehow with Jews and Judaism.<sup>37</sup> He also made numerous assertions about them in his sermons, theological texts, biblical commentaries (e.g., on Psalms, Malachi), and official and private letters.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, his scholarly activities as lecturer, translator, and interpreter of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament caused him to study Hebrew and to be in touch with Jewish scholars (see Sec. I.E). In fact, Luther was engaged with Jews and Judaism all his life, including his very last days. Thus, converting the Jews was not just another trivial issue in Luther's worldview but rather a fundamental issue that was interweaved in his religious thought and reformation, as it is in Ecclesiastical theology in general. He discussed this matter in his last sermon on February 15, 1546, literally days before his death (there is a question as to whether he died the night of February 17 or early morning of February 18).<sup>39</sup>

Apparently, for Luther an inclusive reformation of the church should also involve the Jews, with whom the church shares at least two-thirds of its major Holy Scripture—the Old Testament, from which Christianity grew and Jesus the Jew and his adherents inherited and received its core sacred writings (the Old and the New Testaments). He probably wished for the final dismissal of the hated rival and the challenging religion of the Jews in order to end the everlasting conflict with it over the fundamental subjects regarding the covenant, “True Israel,” biblical interpretation and rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by his own people. If Jews became Christians, all these matters would be solved at once. Then they both, Jews as well as Christians, would be the “True Israel” who continued the Biblical Israel, who inherited the covenant and the divine blessings and the prophetic legacy. They all will be one chosen people of God and read and interpret the Scripture using the same method. The Jewish biblical interpretation that forcefully challenged the church dogmas and allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament would cease once and forever,<sup>40</sup> and Christological interpretation of biblical texts (e.g., Gen. 49:10; Isa. 7:14; Jer. 23:5–6, 31:30–33; Mal. 4:1 [MT 3:19], 4:4 [MT 3:22]; Psalms 2, 109; Dan. 11:14) would be acceptable to all. There would be no more Jewish

<sup>37</sup> The five extended works are *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* (1523), *Brief wider die Sabbater* (1538), *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen, Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*, and *Von den letzten Worten Davids* (the last three were published in Wittenberg, 1543). On the Table-Talks, see de Laharpe, “Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden,” 2.

<sup>38</sup> Many citations from these materials are scattered throughout and discussed in this article.

<sup>39</sup> See in detail Sec. III; Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 64–66.

<sup>40</sup> For examples of this phenomenon in Jewish Bible interpretation, see Kalimi, *Fighting over the Bible*, 99–110, and “Centrality and Interpretation of Psalms,” 239–40, 248–49, 253–57. Therefore, Jewish Bible commentaries were subject to Christian censorship; see, in detail, Kalimi, “Centrality and Interpretation of Psalms,” 248–49, 256.

cursing of the Christians and blaspheming and defamation of Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary—something Luther repeatedly blamed the Jews for.<sup>41</sup> Most probably Luther was convinced that taking a friendly approach toward the Jews in their miserable situation, at the time they were in special need of any sign of hope and inspiration, is an opportunity to fulfill the long-awaited longing of the church to convert them effectively. Luther's ambition was also based on historical realism, when "Jewish apostasy was a serious and not uncommon phenomenon in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany, and affected a wide range of Jews, even if the most notorious cases seem to have come from a particular group of Jews."<sup>42</sup>

The Protestant reformer states his intention to convert the Jews explicitly already in the early stage of his writings.<sup>43</sup> For instance, in his *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, which was published in 1523, Luther strives to show through some texts from the Old Testament, which he interprets Christologically, that Jesus himself was born a Jew from Abraham's seeds, and thus Luther states his hope that "I will attract some of the Jews to the Christian faith."<sup>44</sup> In the same writing, Luther stresses: "I hope that if the Jews are treated kindly and are instructed neatly through the Bible, many of them will become real Christians and come back to the ancestral faith of the prophets and patriarchs."<sup>45</sup> Seemingly, Luther believed that his reformation of the church would be completed only by the conversion of Jews, and thus Christianity would finally fulfill its goal.

### D. The Jewish Question as a Part of the Struggle with Rome

Luther had another implicit religious-political motivation to convert the Jews, namely, to unite all German speakers—Jews as well as Christians—under the

<sup>41</sup> For the sources and discussion, see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 65–66.

<sup>42</sup> See Dean Phillip Bell, *Sacred Communities: Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany*, Studies in Central European Histories 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 215, and, on 213–23, several examples of Jews who switched to Christianity.

<sup>43</sup> See the primary sources and discussion by Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 53–58.

<sup>44</sup> See *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*, WA, 11:314, lines 25–28: "Darum will ich aus der schrift ertzelen, die ursachn, die mich bewegen, zu glauben, dass Christus eyn Jude sey von eyner jungfrawen geporn, ob ich villeicht auch der Juden etliche mocht zum Christen glauben reizen." See the discussion by Wilhelm Maurer, "Die Zeit der Reformation," in *Kirche und Synagoge: Handbuch zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden—Darstellung mit Quellen*, ed. Karl Heinrich Regenstorf and Siegfried von Kortzfleisch (Stuttgart: Klett, 1968), 1:363–452, esp. 388–89.

<sup>45</sup> See WA, 11:315, lines 14–16: "Ich hoff, wenn man mit den Juden freundlich handelt und aus der heyligen Schrift sie säuberlich unterweytzet, es sollten ihr viel rechte Christen werden, und widder zu yhrer Väter, der Propheten und Patriarchen Glauben treten." Also compare the conclusion on p. 336, lines 22–35, and the account of the conversion of a Jew named Bernhard (birth name: Jakob Gipher) that was added to an early Latin translation of *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* and was intended to encourage other Jews to follow his lead; see Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 63–64, 67.

## The Journal of Religion

umbrella of Reformed Christianity, both standing united against the pope and papal institution.<sup>46</sup> Showing an unhostile approach toward Jews, even temporarily, was another face of Luther's rebellion against the pope, who maintained a hostile attitude toward them over centuries. Indeed, Luther expresses this straightforwardly: "If we wish to make them (i.e., Jews) better, we must deal with them not according to the law of the Pope, but according to the law of Christian charity. We must receive them kindly and allow them to compete with us in earning a living, so that they may have a good reason to be with us and among us, and have an opportunity to witness Christian life and doctrine."<sup>47</sup> He desired to contrast his kind conduct toward Jews with the unkind one of the pope's church, in order to achieve another triumph of his reformation: the conversion of the Jews, a mission that all popes failed to achieve by their brutal oppression of Jews over many centuries.<sup>48</sup> He hoped that the Jews would stand on his side in struggle with the church, which oppressed and depressed them so badly and for such a long time.

### *E. Why Specifically Luther?*

Luther's dealing with Jews in a reasonable manner—even for a limited time and missionary purposes—was innovative and pioneering in the Christian world of early sixteenth-century Europe. Was it also unique in church history? How did he actually conceive of such an idea? Why among all the Christian theologians of all time did Luther take such a positive approach toward Jews? It seems that Luther's fresh approach was due to his educational background and his eventual scholarly activities as a translator, interpreter, and teacher of the Bible.

*1. Augustinian Monk.*—For missionary purposes, already the church father Augustine of Hippo (354–430) asked not to persecute the Jews but rather let them survive but not flourish. He urged his Christian fellows that "whether the Jews receive these divine testimonies with joy or with indignation, nevertheless, when we can, let us proclaim them with great love for the Jews,"

<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, historically speaking, Luther never achieved this goal, and in fact his formation deepened even more the separation between the newly reformed Christians and those who chose to stay loyal to the pope in Rome, such as in Austria, Bavaria, and the Rhineland. Furthermore, the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) and its horrible suffering and approximately 4.5–8 million deaths was one of the outcomes of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics. Also, Luther's attitude toward Jews deepened the separation between the Jews and Christians more than it was earlier.

<sup>47</sup> See *WA*, 11:307–36, esp. 336, lines 22–34; for the original German version, see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 56–57 n. 56.

<sup>48</sup> Did Luther wish to have the Jews on his side also for economic reasons, hoping that the Jewish finance would fuel the engines of his reformation and it would be expanded much faster and wider? There is no available source to confirm this, but it is not inconceivable.

## The Position of Martin Luther

so they might confirm the truth of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> As a former Augustinian monk, Luther may have been influenced by Augustine's position toward Jews. However, in contrast to Augustine's unlimited and unconditional position, Luther limited his positive view toward Jews for a certain amount of time and under a definite condition.

2. *Luther's Education and Activities.*—Luther studied, taught, and translated the Old Testament from its original languages Hebrew and Aramaic into German (completed in 1534), rather than from its Greek (Septuagint) or Latin (Vulgate) versions, whose translators he considered not to be good Hebraists (and those of the Septuagint he deemed ignorant). He recognized the importance of the Hebrew language and considered it as a key tool for the understanding of Scripture. In his *Tischrede* of August 9, 1532, Luther declares:

Without that language [i.e., Hebrew] one can never comprehend the Scripture. Even the New Testament, though written in Greek, is replete with Hebraisms. It was, therefore, correctly stated that the Hebrews drank from the springs, and the Greeks from rivulets, while the Latins imbibed from puddles. I am not a Hebraist with respect to grammar, nor do I wish to be one, for I cannot stand being tied down to rules. I would rather translate it freely, for even if one has a talent for languages, he cannot fully reproduce the meaning from one language to another. Accurate interpretation is a special gift of God.<sup>50</sup>

This approach to Hebrew led Luther (as well as some other Christian theologians) to make efforts to learn the language and to collaborate with Jewish scholars. Occasionally he asked for their help in Hebrew grammatical and linguistic matters and argued with them about how to interpret and translate a word, idiom, verse, or paragraph. Thus, he learned to appreciate them to some extent.

## II. LUTHER'S JUDEOPHOBIA

As seen in his different sources, Luther described the Jews in harsh terms before the publication of his encouraging piece *That Jesus Christ Was Born a*

<sup>49</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *In Answer to the Jews* 10 (sec. 15), trans. M. Liguori, in *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, Fathers of the Church 27 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 385–414, on 414. On Augustine's view toward the Jews, see, e.g., Paula Fredriksen, "Excaecati Occulta Iustitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 299–324, and *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> See *Tischreden*, WA, 3, no. 3271b, 243–44, esp. 244, lines 9–16: "Si iunior essem, huic linguae me applicarem, sine qua sacrae scripturae nulla cognitio esse potest. Nam novum testamentum, quamvis Graece scriptum, plenum tamen nest Hebraismis. Ideo recte dixerunt Hebraeos bibere ex fontibus, Graecos ex rivulis et Latinos ex lacunis. Ego nullus sum Hebraeus grammatica et regulariter, quia nullis patior me vinculis constringi, sed libere versor. Etiam si quis linguarum dona habeat, attamen non statim potest in aliam linguam transferre. Das ist ein sonderliche Gottesgabe, interpretari." See also Lewin, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden*, 75–76, 91–92; Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 13:221.

## The Journal of Religion

*Jew*, during the time of his Judeophilia, and then ever after, in fact until his last days. Nevertheless, at some point in his career as a reformer, Luther intensified his attack on Jews in a frequent, consistent, and very hateful way. The longer he lived, the more harshly he voiced poisoned assertions against the Jews and their religion and culture. He acted openly against the Jews by all means, whenever and wherever he could. This approach is evident in his letters, Table-Talks, sermons, theological texts, and commentaries. It peaked in his final years, particularly in 1543, when he published three racist and anti-Semitic manifestos: *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, and *Von den letzten Worten Davids*. In the latter, Luther directs the nastiest epithets and accusations against the Jewish people and their beliefs, including detailed practical guidelines about how to diminish the Jews and their religion and culture from society violently, even about how to deny their presence in the German territories. Let us turn our attention to this matter in some detail.

In contrast to his statements in 1523's *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, where he blamed the Roman Catholic Church and the Christian society for the Jews' miserable situation, now Luther holds the Jews themselves responsible for their agony: "They themselves are to be blamed for their persecution and expulsion; they should give the explanations why they were expelled 1,500 years, a people without a king, without law, without a prophet, and without a temple. They cannot name any other cause rather than their sins."<sup>51</sup> By "their sins" Luther probably hints at Jewish rejection of Christ and Christianity. Indeed, in a Table-Talk from the 1530s, Luther states that "most of the Jews have blasphemed God and strangled the pious prophets. So, the dear forefathers and patriarchs had blasphemers in their houses."<sup>52</sup> Further, now Luther talks differently regarding the conversion of the Jews: "Whenever I find another good Jew to baptize, I will drag him up the bridge by hand, hang a stone on his neck and throw him into the Elbe."<sup>53</sup>

In *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, Luther attacks the Jews in several ways. He insults them with malicious stories. For instance, he recounts: "Here at Wittenberg, in our parish church, there is a sow carved into the stone under which lie young pigs and Jews who are suckling; behind the sow stands a rabbi who is lifting up the right leg of the sow, raising the behind of the sow, bowing down and looking into the Talmud under the sow with great effort, as if he wanted

<sup>51</sup> *Tischreden*, WA, 4, no. 4402, 296: "An ihrer Vertreibung und Verfolgung sind sie selber schuld; sollen sie doch die Gründe nennen, warum sie 1500 Jahre vertrieben sind, ein Volk ohne König, ohne Gesetz, ohne Prophet, ohne Tempel. Sie können keine andere Ursache nennen als ihre Sünden." See also WA, 3, no. 82, pp. 25–26; no. 221, pp. 23–24; WA, 4, no. 468, pp. 34–36.

<sup>52</sup> See *Tischreden*, WA, 2, no. 1743, 200: "Der mehrer Theil der Jüden haben Gott gelästert, die frommen Propheten erwürget. Also haben die lieben Erzväter und Patriarchen in ihren Häusern Lästerey gehabt."

<sup>53</sup> See *Tischreden*, WA, 2, no. 2634a, 566: "Wen ich mehr ein frumen Juden wird finden zu tauffen, wil [= will] ich ihn zu hand auff die brücke füren, ein Stein an den hals hencken [= hängen] und in die Elbe werffen [= werfen]."





FIG. 1.—Jew-Sow (*Judensau*) in the Church of Wittenberg. (Source: WA, 53:600.)

to read and see something most difficult and exceptional; no doubt they gained their *Schem Hamphoras* from that place” (see fig. 1).<sup>54</sup>

In *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, Luther once again demonizes the Jews by describing them as “devils.” He accuses them of still considering the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament unfulfilled, of failing to recognize the real Messiah Jesus, and of murdering him. I refer further to this work and its Judeophobic assertions in Section III.

In his third manifesto, Luther suggests a Christological reading of 2 Sam. 23:1–7 and uses it against the Jews:

These false and unknown Jews or Israelites, who have wrought no miracle in these 1,500 years, who have interpreted no writings of the prophets, who have perverted everything, who have done nothing in the open but underhandedly and clandestinely, like children of darkness, that is, of the devil, have practiced nothing but blasphemy, cursing, murder and lies against the True Jews and Israel, that is, against the apostles and prophets. And they continue this daily and thus prove that they are not Israel’s or Abraham’s seed but venomous and devilish foes of the true Israel and Abraham’s children and in addition despoilers, robbers, and perverters of Holy Scripture. Therefore,

<sup>54</sup> “Es ist hie zu Wittenberg an unser Pfarrkirchen eine Saw jnn stein gehawen, da ligen junge Ferckel und Jüden unter, die saugen, Hinder der Saw stehet ein Rabin, der hebt der Saw das rechte bein empor, und mit seiner lincken hand zeucht er den pirtzel uber sich, bückt und kuckt mit grossen vleis der Saw unter dem pirtzel jnn den Thalmud hinein, als wolt er etwas scharffes und sonderlichs lesen und ersehen. Dasselsher haben sie gewislich jr Schem Hamphoras.” For the German text and an illustration, see WA, 53:600, lines 26–35; for the English translation, see Gerhard Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology: Martin Luther’s Anti-Jewish “Vom Schem Hamphoras,” Previously Unpublished in English, and Other Milestones in Church Doctrine Concerning Judaism* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 182–83. Images of Jew-Sow (*Judensau*) were carved on the outside walls of many European cathedrals (or as woodcuts inside of them), such as at Brandenburg, Bamberg, Cologne, Erfurt, Magdeburg, Nürnberg, Regensburg, Freising, Colmar, and Uppsala, and were in a painting on the old bridge tower of Frankfurt am Main.

## The Journal of Religion

it behooves us to recover Scripture from them as from public thieves wherever grammar warrants this and harmonizes with the New Testament.<sup>55</sup>

The anti-Jewish assertions and actions of Luther continued until the very last days of his life. In his final letters to his wife, Katharina von Bora (*die Lutherin*; 1499–1552), on February 1 and 7, 1546, Luther holds the Jews responsible for his illness and dizziness because he passed by their residential area in a village near Eisleben (today: Lutherstadt-Eisleben). Accordingly, he planned to expel all the Jews from that area. On February 1, he writes to her:

I have been weak on my way near Eisleben, which was my fault. But if you [= Katharina] had been here you would have said, it was the Jews or their God's fault.<sup>56</sup> We had to pass through a village near Eisleben, where many Jews live; maybe they blew so harshly towards me. In this hour there are more than fifty Jews living here in the town of Eisleben. And it is true that when I was near the village, such a very cold wind came through the back of my cart on my head under my hat, as if it tried to freeze my brain. This may have helped a bit to make me dizzy.<sup>57</sup>

Luther continues and concludes: "When the main issues are resolved, I must start to expel the Jews." He also states how he is going to implement this.<sup>58</sup> How serious Luther considered these issues emerges also from his letter of February 7, 1546, to his wife, where he repeats his plan and associates Jews with devils: "I think that hell and the whole world must be free of all devils,

<sup>55</sup> "[Sollten wir glauben] den falschen unbekandten Jüden oder Israeliten, die diese 1500. jar kein wunder gethan, kein Schrifft der Propheten ausgelegt, alles verkeret und im liecht öffentlich nichts gethan, Sondern in jrem winckel meuchlinges wie die Kinder des finsternis, das ist des Teuffels, eitel lestern, fluchen, morden und liegen wider die rechten Jüden und Israel (das ist, wider die Apostel und Propheten) geübet haben, und noch üben teglich, damit sie uber weiset, das sie nicht Israel, noch Abrahams samen, Sondern gifttüge, Teufelische feinde sind, des rechten Israels und Abrahams kinder, dazu der Heiligen schrift diebe, reuber und verkerer. Darum man als von öffentlichen dieben wider nehmen sol die Schrifft, wo es die Grammatica gerne gibt und sich mit dem Newen Testament reimet." *Von den letzten Worten Davids*, WA, 54:16–100, at 93, lines 14–24; English translation from Bertram, "Treatise on the Last Words of David," 344. Mark Edwards states that this work of Luther is not really an anti-Jewish treatise per se but rather a work of exegesis with a few anti-Jewish comments. But his claim that "the few critical asides in the treatise are aimed at rabbinic exegesis and not at contemporary Jews in general" (Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–46* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983], 134) is not accurate, in light of the depiction of "false . . . Jews or Israelites" as blasphemers, murderers, liars, and robbers, as cited above.

<sup>56</sup> This could imply that Katharina von Bora was even more anti-Jewish than her husband, or it could simply be that Luther is projecting his own prejudice onto her, which is a common phenomenon.

<sup>57</sup> "Ich bin ia schwach gewesen auff dem weg hart vor Eisleben. Das war meine schuld. Aber wenn du [= Katharina] werest da gewest, so hettestu gesagt, Es were der Juden oder ires Gottes schuld gewest. Denn wir musten durch ein Dorff hart vor Eisleben, da viel Juden innen wonen; vielleicht haben sie mich so hart angeblasen. So sind hie in der Stat Eisleben itz diese Stund uber funffzig Juden wohnhaftig. Und war ists, do [= da/als] ich bey dem Dorff fuhr, gieng mir ein solcher kalter wind hinden zum Wagen ein auff meinen Kopff, Durchs Barret, als wolt mirs das Hirn zu eis machen. Solchs mag mir zum Schwindel etwas geholffen haben." See *Briefwechsel*, WA, 11:275–76, Brief no. 4195, lines 4–12.

<sup>58</sup> "Wenn die Heuptsachen geschlichtet weren, so mus ich mich dran legen, die Juden zuvertreiben"; see *Briefwechsel*, WA, 11:276, lines 16–17.

who perhaps could have come all here to Eisleben on my account, so bad and harsh are things here. So are there also Jews here, about fifty, in one house, as I wrote to you before.”<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Luther gave his very last sermon on February 15, 1546, that is, just two or three days before his death, on February 17 or 18. Here he describes Jews as Christians’ enemies, accuses them of defaming and mocking the core saints of Christianity, and attributes to Jews a homicidal character: “The Jews are our public enemies. They never stop defaming our Lord Christ, calling the Virgin Mary a whore and Jesus Christ the son of a whore. . . . If they could, they would gladly kill us all.”<sup>60</sup> In this sermon, Luther attempts once again to promote his mission to convert the Jews: “Still we wish to practice Christian love toward them and ask them to convert, [and] accept the Lord. . . . When the Jews wish to convert to us and give up their heresy and whatever else they have done to us, we will gladly forgive them, but if not, we will not tolerate nor suffer that they should be in our midst.”<sup>61</sup>

### III. THE RATIONALE BEHIND LUTHER’S JUDEOPHOBIA

How can Luther’s harsh Judeophobia—which is the complete opposite of his Judeophilia—be explained? What were the key rationales for such an extreme upside-down behavior of the protestant reformer and theologian toward Jews? Here follows a critical survey of several explanations offered by scholarship (items A–F), while my own approach will be followed in Sections IV and V.

#### A. A Socioreligious Explanation

An anonymous contemporary Jewish source recounts that Luther’s opponents blamed him for becoming a Judeophile, connected to Jews, and even following some of their beliefs. Luther reacted to those accusations by turning in the opposite direction and showing an extreme animosity toward Jews, as if he wished to say: “Look, I am not only not pro-Jews and Judaism but rather

<sup>59</sup> “Ich denke, das die Helle und gantze Welt musse itzt ledig sein von allen teuffeln, die villeicht alle umb meinen willen hie Zu Eisleben Zu sammenkomen sind, So fest und hart stehet die Sache. So sind auch hie Jüden, bey fuffzig ynn einem hause, wie ich dir zuuor geschrieben”; see *Briefwechsel*, WA, 11:286–87, Brief no. 4201, lines 13–16. For reference to original sources, citation, discussion, and bibliography, see Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 58–66.

<sup>60</sup> “Sie sind unsere öffentliche Feinde, hören nicht auff unsern HErrn Christum zu lestern, Heissen [= nennen] die Jungfraw Maria eine Hure, Christum ein Hurenkind. . . . und wenn sie uns konden alle tödten, so theten sie es gerne.” WA, 51:195, lines 28–32.

<sup>61</sup> WA, 51:195, lines 39–49; 196, lines 14–17: “Noch wollen wir die Christliche liebe an inen uben und vor sie bitten, das sie sich bekeren, den HErrn [*sic*] annemen. . . . Wollen sich die Jüden zu uns bekeren und von iren lesterung, und was sie uns sonst gethan haben, auffhören, so wollen wir es inen gerne vergeben, Wo aber nicht, so sollen wir sie auch bey uns nicht dulden noch leiden.” On this sermon and its conclusion, cf. Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus*, 157–58.

## The Journal of Religion

much tougher against them than the pope in Rome!” In other words, with his Judeophobia, Luther attempted to remove the “stain” of Judeophilia from himself and even came to use it as a sociopolitical instrument in order to have them on his side by inflaming the German Christians, many of whom were immersed with anti-Jewishness anyhow:<sup>62</sup>

הוא וסייעתא אמר שלא לתת עול קשה על היהודי' ולנהוג עמהם דרך כבוד ואהבה ולקרב אותם. והביא ראיה ועשה ספר—ישו ממשפחת הישראל. והיו מליני' עליו שהוא קצת ישראל. לבש חרטה ולהוציא עצמו מן החשד—לפי שהיו מליזי' עליו ואומרי' שדעתו נוטה אחר אמונת ישראלי'—וכשמעו כל זאת הפך דבריו וכתב לכל העמים להרע. . . . ואם יאמר מה שעשה קודם עשה כדי להמשיכם בדברי ריצוי אל אמנתם. ומאחר שאין פונים אליו והיו קשי עורף ולא שמעו בקלו היה מוציא דיבה. . . . וכל מה שהיה יכול למצוא עלילות ושקרים ועשה מהם ספרים ונתן שם וכינוי לישראל וקרא להם סבטני'ר, הוא שבת, פי' ששומרי' את השבת.<sup>63</sup>

He [= Luther] and his followers said not to put a heavy yoke on the Jews and treat them respectfully and attract them. He wrote a book where he proves that Jesus has a Jewish [lit. Israeli] origin. . . . *But there were people who blamed him for being a bit Jewish. [Then] he regretted and [attempted] to get himself out of suspicion—because there were [people] who defamed him and said that his mind inclined to the Jewish faith. When he heard all this, he changed his words and wrote to all the nations to worsen [the destiny of the Jews]. . . .* And he had said that what he had done earlier was in order to convert them to their faith [= Christianity]. And because they [i.e., the Jews] did not listen to him, for they were stubborn [lit. stiff-necked], he wrote defamations . . . and about whatever he could find of libels and lies and wrote books against them and gave them and Israel names and nicknames and called them “Sabbater,” that is a Sabbath, because they keep the day of Sabbath. (Italics mine)

This fragmentary source reflects how some contemporary Jews attempted to explain the contradictory behavior of Luther. His opponents probably did not understand his tactically positive approach toward the Jews and charged him for being a Judeophile. However, it is hard to believe that Luther changed his entire behavior toward that group of people due to some rumors and false accusations of his opponents. Because of a lack of knowledge of the Christian theological approach toward Jews and its decisive place in Luther's worldview, the author of this source inaccurately considers the unwillingness of the Jews to be converted as a secondary cause for Luther's anti-Jewishness (see Sec. V).

Because of the “mildness of tone,” Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson dates this source after 1539 (after the composition of *Brief wider die Sabbater* that is mentioned in the source) but before 1543 (publication of *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen, Vom Schem Hamphoras, and Von den letzten Worten Davids*).<sup>64</sup> However, as Ben-Sasson himself admits, the phrase that Luther “wrote

<sup>62</sup> That anti-Semitism/anti-Jewishness plays a certain role in the propaganda or agenda of some religious leaders and politicians is well known from European history through centuries and actually until today.

<sup>63</sup> Manuscript Mich. 121 (Bodleian Library, Oxford), fol. 270r.

<sup>64</sup> See Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson, “Jewish-Christian Disputation in the Setting of Humanism and Reformation in the German Empire,” *Harvard Theological Review* 59 (1966): 369–90, esp. 385–87.

books against them” may refer to those manifestos of 1543.<sup>65</sup> If so, it means that this source was not written before but sometime in 1543 or a bit after.

### *B. An Emotional Explanation: Disappointment*

Since the publications of Ludwig Feilchenfeld in 1898 and of Reinhold Lewin in 1911, scholars have argued that the “dramatic shift” in Luther’s approach toward the Jews was due to the latter’s refusal to accept the reformed Christian faith despite the reformer’s exceptional friendly stance toward them.<sup>66</sup> In other words, Luther’s harsh wrath turned against the Jews because of his disappointment about the Jewish reaction to his suggestion to convert. Then the frustrated reformer completely changed his behavior toward the Jews, turned back to the traditional church policy, and even sharpened his rhetoric.<sup>67</sup>

Although there is a grain of truth in this argument, the gap between Luther’s disappointment and his becoming a radical anti-Semite is too deep.<sup>68</sup> Luther’s efforts to convert Jews stands in a long line of Christian supersessionist approaches, which in simple words is this: We hold the true and better religion than yours, the false religion, so, give up yours and join us. Luther expected the Jews not just to accept Jesus as the Messiah, with all that means, but simultaneously he expected them to reject their entire traditional biblical interpretation and its cultural background.<sup>69</sup> But his wishes were naive from the very beginning, since the conversion would have amounted to religious and cultural suicide on the part of the Jews. Thus, it should not be surprising that only an insignificant number of them responded in favor of his appeals. The vast majority of Jews were thankful for Luther’s new approach toward them but

<sup>65</sup> Ben-Sasson, “Jewish-Christian Disputation,” 386 n. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Ludwig Feilchenfeld, *Rabbi Josel von Rosheim: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland im Reformationszeitalter* (Strassburg: Heitz, 1898), esp. 120–21; Lewin, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden*, 37–50. See also Aarne Siirala, “Martin Luther and the Jews: A Theological Analysis,” *Face to Face: An Interreligious Bulletin* 10 (1983): 11–21, esp. 13–14.

<sup>67</sup> From a comparative-historical viewpoint, there is a close analogy in the major lines of Luther’s behavior toward the Jews and the earlier (friendly) and later (terrible) approach of the Arabian religious founder, Muhammad, to the Jews of Arabia several centuries earlier, in the first half of the seventh century. However, in contrast to Luther who did not physically attack the Jews, Muhammad slaughtered them. On Muhammad and his relationship with the Jews of Arabia, see, e.g., J. Kenie and M. Plesner, “Mohammad,” in *Encyclopedia Hebraica* (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Publishing Company, 1970), 22:1010–16, esp. 1012–13, 1014, 1015; Shlomo D. Goitein, “Mohammad,” in *Studies in the History of the Arabs and Islam*, ed. Hava Lazarus Yafeh (Tel Aviv: Reshafim, 1975), 27–81, esp. 60–78; Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. 2, *Middle Ages* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969), 31–32 (all in Hebrew); Gordon D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse under Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 78–96; Johan Bouman, *Der Koran und die Juden: Geschichte einer Tragödie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 56–92, esp. 73–92.

<sup>68</sup> For all the evidence for Luther’s anti-Semitism, see in detail Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 60–66.

<sup>69</sup> Thus, one finds a frequent concern among Luther’s writings regarding “incomplete” or “insincere” conversion, meaning Jews who allowed themselves to be baptized but continued to consider themselves Jews or to think like Jews, which Luther considered not only illegitimate but dangerous. See the examples discussed by Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 64–66.

## The Journal of Religion

refused to give up their own religious and cultural heritage. Also, probably, they preferred to stay on the side of their protector, Kaiser Karl V (1500–1558), who was and continued to be with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Jews' rightful refusal of a collective conversion—that is, cultural suicide—is not a reason to destroy them and their heritage by any means, spiritually as well as physically. In fact, why should the Jews give up their own ancient and very rich religious, cultural, and spiritual tradition, for whose preservation they have paid an enormously substantial price over centuries? How could it happen that the towering scholar and prolific theologian, who is usually regarded among Protestants as one of the greatest religious thinkers since Jesus Christ,<sup>70</sup> could write such hateful and violent manifestos—not one or two but three of them—against the homeless and politically powerless Jews, while disrespecting one of the central theological principles of his own religion, that is, love, even love for an enemy (e.g., Lev. 19:18; Matt. 5: 43–48; Rom. 12:14, 20)? Accordingly, some scholars turned to search for additional reasons, particularly in Luther's biography, that may be able to clarify his extreme antagonism toward Jews.

### *C. A Physical Explanation: Frustration of an Old and Sick Man*

Since the publication of Luther's first biography by Johann Mathesius (of Rochlitz, 1504–65), many scholars have joined him and repeatedly argued—with or without referring to him—that Luther spread anti-Semitism when he was already an old, weak, and sick man.<sup>71</sup> However, Luther's statements cannot be excused by this apologetic argument. Note that in 1524–25 Luther was neither old nor sick or weak when he made similar remarks about the poor German peasants who revolted against the oppression of the princes. In a letter to the Prince of Saxony (Wittenberg, August 26, 1524), Luther advises: "Let the spirits collide. . . . We will suffer and watch that you fight with words . . . but keep the fists still."<sup>72</sup> However, some months later, in May

<sup>70</sup> For this point, see Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther: Vom Mönch zum Feind des Papstes* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013), 58–69.

<sup>71</sup> See Johann Mathesius, *Dr. Martin Luthers Leben: In siebenzehn Predigten dargestellt*, 2nd ed. (1566; Berlin: Evangelischen Bücher-Verein, 1883), 283, 288; Joachim Rogge, "Luthers Stellung zu den Juden," *Luther—Zeitschrift der Luther-Gesellschaft* 40 (1969): 13–24, esp. 18; Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles*, 6–19; Martin Stöhr, "Martin Luther und die Juden," in *Die Juden und Martin Luther—Martin Luther und die Juden: Geschichte, Wirkungsgeschichte, Herausforderung*, ed. Heinz Kremers, Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, and Bertold Klappert (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985), 89–108, esp. 107 n. 65; Eric W. Gritsch, "The Jews in Reformation Theology," in *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*, ed. Marvin Perry and Fredrick M. Schweitzer (Bern: Lang, 1994), 197–213, esp. 199; Gerhard Olaf Forde, "Luther and the Jews," *Lutheran Quarterly* 27 (2013): 125–42, esp. 132–37.

<sup>72</sup> "Man lasse die Geister aufeinanderprallen. . . . Wir wollen gerne leiden und zusehen, dass ihr mit dem Wort fechtet. . . ., aber die Faust haltet stille!" See Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, ed., *Dr. Martin Luthers Briefe, Sendschreiben und Bedenken* (Berlin: Reimer, 1826), 2:547; Kurt Aland, ed., *Luther Deutsch: Die Werke Martin Luthers in neuer Auswahl für die Gegenwart*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 7:149–61, esp. 158–59.

1525, he urged just the opposite. When the peasants demanded the princes offer them some reduction of taxes and housing rent, fishing privileges, and the like, Luther—who was himself a son of a peasant—neither supported the demands of this oppressed society nor begged for a peaceful compromise. Under the guise of supporting law and order in a heavy-handed ruler, Luther firmly stood behind the aggressive princes and urged them to crush the peasants’ rebellion ruthlessly, ignoring their just demands, as if this was the only way to handle the crisis. He described the peasants as follows: “A great fire that burns and consumes the land. . . . They should be smitten, destroyed, and stabbed, secretly or openly, wherever possible, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, harmful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as a mad dog that must be killed; if you would not attack and kill the rebel first, he will attack you and the whole country with you.”<sup>73</sup>

As a matter of fact, on May 14–15, 1525, the Thuringian peasants’ army was destroyed in the battle near Frankenhausen, and about six thousand peasants were slaughtered by their oppressors. During the peasants’ revolt, altogether about 100,000 farmers were killed in the German territories.<sup>74</sup> Yet, in May 1525 Luther was age 42 and—as far as we know—in good health and without experience of any personal trauma or tragedy but rather the opposite: on July 13 of that year, he married Katharina von Bora. Still, in contrast to Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525), Luther played the shrewd politician and took the side of the strong party—the German princes—rather than the side of justice, morality, and humanity (or, what he calls “Christian charity”) that the peasants were entitled to.<sup>75</sup>

Besides, even as early as 1514 (i.e., at age 31), 1521, and 1526 (i.e., at ages 38 and 43, very close to the time and age when he made his comments about the peasants in 1525), as well as in one of his sermons in 1531, at age 48, Luther uttered anti-Judaic statements, although not yet calling for official measures

<sup>73</sup> See WA, 18:344–61, at 358, lines 10–18: “denn auffrur [= Aufruhr] ist nicht ey[n] [= ein] schlechter mord, sondern wie ey[n] gro[ß]e[n] Feu[e]r, das[s] ey[n] land anzundet und verwüestet, also bringt auffrur [= Aufruhr] mit sich ey[n] land vol[ll] mords, blutvergiessen und macht widwen [= Witwen] und weysen [= Waisen] und verstoret [= zerstöret] alles, wie das allergrösst ungluck. Drumb sol[ll] hie[r] zuschmeyssen [= zu schmeißen], würgen und stechen, heymlich odder öffentlich, wer da kann[n] und gedencken [= bedenken], das[s] nicht[s] giftiger[e]s, schedlicher[e]s, teufflischer[e]s seyn kann[n], denn ey[n] auffrurischer [= aufrührerischer] mensch, gleich als wenn man eynen tolln Hund todschlahen [= totschiagen] mus[s], schlegstu [= schlägst du] [ihn] nicht, so schlegt er dich und [d]ein ganz[es] land mit dyr.”

<sup>74</sup> See Gerhard Brendler, *Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 288.

<sup>75</sup> For the original source of the phrase “Christian charity” and its context, see Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 56, and n. 56. Also, it is worth noting that by acting so Luther set up double standards: one for the forceful princes who oppressed the unfortunate German peasants and were entitled—according to Luther—to kill indiscriminately to protect themselves from the peasants, and another for the Jews, who could be slaughtered but had no right to fight to protect themselves from the national annihilation of Haman (Esth. 3:8–14) or the persecutions of Antiochus IV (as recounted in 2 Maccabees). On this issue, see in detail Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 71–73.

## The Journal of Religion

against them.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, in 1536 Luther refused to meet with Josel (Joseph) of Rosheim, the Advocate of the Jewish Communities in the Holy Roman Empire and Poland, to discuss possible help in cancellation of the decree regarding the expulsion of the Jews from Saxony.<sup>77</sup> On the contrary, Luther supported and prompted the expulsion that finally took place in 1537. In 1536 and 1537 he was—as far as is known—neither severely sick nor too old (he was 53 and 54 years old, respectively), and nobody from his close family passed away. Thus, Luther's anti-Jewish assertions and activities are not the result of his advanced age, because he already did similar things in his much earlier years.

### *D. Psychological Explanation: Traumatic Experience*

Some scholars, such as Thomas Kaufmann, point to Luther's personal trauma that may explain the change of his opinion about Jews. Such an experience was the death of his thirteen-year-old daughter Magdalena on September 20, 1542.<sup>78</sup> Admittedly, Luther's most despicable works against Jews were written shortly after the death of Magdalena. He wrote *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* between October and December 1542, although it was published in January 1543. Even though at that point Luther was in emotional distress, this still cannot account for his anti-Semitism and cannot be used to excuse or justify turning the entire Jewish people into a scapegoat and pouring so much hatred on so many innocent people. Many individuals have faced and face terrible personal catastrophes and tragedies at all times and in all places without turning to violence, particularly to violence against a person or people who had nothing whatsoever to do with the catastrophe they had experienced. The prolonged illness and premature death of Luther's daughter was apparently painful, but surely it was not the fault of Jews, and they could not be condemned and punished for it.

### *E. A Religious Explanation: "Matters in the Light of Scripture"*

Armas K. E. Holmio claims that Luther's animosity toward Jews reflects the fact that he "was a deeply religious character who sought always to evaluate matters in the light of Scripture, according to the way in which its word

<sup>76</sup> Regarding 1521, see Sec. III.C above; for original sources and bibliography regarding 1526 and 1531, see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 58–66.

<sup>77</sup> Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim*, 35, 236–37.

<sup>78</sup> See Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 106–40. Kaufmann emphasizes the connection between the death of Luther's daughter and his harshest anti-Judaic writings, although he notes other contributing factors as well, such as Luther's reading of the book by the baptized Jew Antonius Margarithas, *Der gantz jüdisch glaub* (Augsburg: Steiner, 1530), which warned of anti-Christian practices and teachings purportedly common among the Jews; see Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 90–93, 111–12, and *Luthers "Judenschriften,"* 174–75.



had enlightened him in each instance.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Wilhelm Maurer and Aarne Siirala claim that Luther’s destructive attitude toward Jews was nothing more than the result of his Christian reading of the Bible and his Christian theology. Luther emphasized God’s wrath against Jewish people for rejecting Jesus as a Messiah and denying Christianity. Therefore, Jews must be oppressed, humbled, and suffer unless they accept Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

It is true that Luther’s feeling toward Jews was related to the Christian reading of the Bible and Christian theology (see Secs. I.A, I.B, and IV). Nevertheless, these scholars ignore the fact that the Bible also includes many positive statements concerning the Israelites/Jews and their future. Luther therefore had a choice: to emphasize the negative sayings in the Bible—particularly the New Testament—about the Pharisees/Jews (while ignoring or being unaware of the historical-polemical context of those sayings) or to follow the noble biblical characters and positive sayings about the Israelites/Jews, especially the ones in the Old Testament (while interpreting them in their own setting and plain/simple meaning rather than Christologically). Luther chose the former rather than the latter. Moreover, the biblical ethical statements concerning the obligation to treat any foreigner (גֵר) with good manners (e.g., Exod. 22:20, 23:9; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19; Isa. 14:1) was not taken seriously into Christians’ and Luther’s consideration. Thus, he continued the historical Christian theology that attributes all the positive sayings in the Bible to Christians—the True Israel—and all the negative sayings to the Talmudic Jews.

Furthermore, while those negative aspects of the Christian tradition regarding the Jews certainly contributed a great deal to Luther’s anti-Judaism, they existed many centuries before Luther.<sup>81</sup> All those were there many centuries before Luther. They cannot fully explain his racial statements and his anti-Semitism as expressed in his *Brief wider die Sabbater* in 1538 and in his three manifestos that were published in 1543 (see Sec. IV). These horrendous assertions by Luther go far beyond the anti-Jewish statements known from any Christian writings before him or from several of Luther’s contemporary theologians and reformers.<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, since Luther himself condemned such evil stances toward Jews in the earlier stages of his career as a reformer,<sup>83</sup> he can hardly be excused as

<sup>79</sup> Armas K. E. Holmio, *The Lutheran Reformation and the Jews: The Birth of the Protestant Jewish Mission* (Hancock, MI: Finnish Lutheran Book Concern, 1949), 109–10, at 109.

<sup>80</sup> See Wilhelm Maurer, *Kirche und Synagoge: Motive und Formen der Auseinandersetzung der Kirche mit dem Judentum im Laufe der Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953), 39–51, 88–104, and “Die Zeit der Reformation,” 1:375–88, esp. 376–77; Siirala, “Martin Luther and the Jews,” 14–15.

<sup>81</sup> See in detail Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 58–66; Ben-Zion Degani, “Die Formulierung und Propagierung des jüdischen Stereotyps in der Zeit vor der Reformation und sein Einfluß auf den jungen Luther,” in Kremers, Siegele-Wenschkewitz, and Klappert, *Die Juden und Martin Luther*, 3–44, with many examples.

<sup>82</sup> See Sec. III.F. For additional primary sources on this issue, see Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 58–66.

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., WA, 11:314, lines 28–30; 315, lines 1–3; 336, lines 22–34; and the discussion in Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 55–58.

## The Journal of Religion

being unaware of their harm, injustice, and horrible consequences. On the contrary, if he had held to his own standards, Luther would have had to condemn himself. For example, we can take his own words on the Papists and paraphrase them to be about himself—"Luther against Luther": "I should rather have turned into a pig than become a Christian [like Luther]. [He] treat[s] the Jews as if they were dogs and not human beings."<sup>84</sup>

Holmio also asserts that "even if Luther had . . . experienced some unpleasantness at the hands of some individual Jew *it would have been contrary to his honest and generous nature* to punish the whole nation because of it."<sup>85</sup> It is hard to understand this statement, especially in light of Luther's repeated attacks on all the Jews and all the Turks and the Papists as undifferentiated groups and after his assertions regarding the German peasants in 1525 (see Sec. III.C). Besides, where did Holmio find this "honest and generous nature" of Luther?

### F. A Historical Explanation: "A Child of His Time"

A historian, any historian, must describe an event, institution, character, or idea within its own historical setting, time, and place. Now, are Luther's anti-Semitic statements typical for his contemporary intellectual and theological elite society in late medieval Europe? Was Luther indeed a "son of his time" (*ein Kind seiner Zeit*)? Holmio argues that "the anti-Semitic feeling in the Church which had continued for centuries before him [i.e., Luther] and continued for centuries after him, was, nevertheless, a common inheritance of such nature that he could never quite free himself of it."<sup>86</sup> Thus, claims Holmio, Luther should not be blamed for sharing the prejudices and standards of his time and place.<sup>87</sup> It is true that the anti-Judaism and anti-Semitic feeling in the church existed before and after Luther. Also, hatred of the Jews was not new to sixteenth-century Germany. However, it never reached such a climax as in Luther's case. Also, Luther had a choice: he could take a different direction, as he himself offered in his *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. Moreover, the comparison of Luther's position toward Jews with some of his contemporary influential thinkers, theologians, and reformers demonstrates the inaccuracy of such an argument.

1. *Johannes Reuchlin*.—The great humanist, philosopher, and Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin (Pforzheim, 1455–1522, Stuttgart), whom Johann Wolfgang

<sup>84</sup> For the original citation, see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 56 n. 53.

<sup>85</sup> Holmio, *Lutheran Reformation and the Jews*, 109, emphasis added.

<sup>86</sup> Holmio, *Lutheran Reformation and the Jews*, 107–8.

<sup>87</sup> Rogge, "Luthers Stellung zu den Juden," 15–16, 18 argued similarly: "Here [in his last sermon of February 15, 1546] the reformer is entirely a child of his time" (*Der Reformator ist hier ganz und gar ein Kind seiner Zeit*). See also p. 20: "Luther's exegetical position was influenced more unconsciously than consciously by a lot of contemporary anti-Semitism" (*So kommt Luther von seiner exegetischen Position her, in die mehr unbewusst als bewusst vieles von zeitgenössischem Antisemitismus eingeflossen sein mag*).

von Goethe defines as a sign of “marvel in his time,”<sup>88</sup> was without doubt a Judeophile. In the course of the so-called Jewish Books Controversy (*Judenbücherstreit*), in contrast to Johannes Pfefferkorn,<sup>89</sup> who wished to ban Jewish writings and burn them, Reuchlin composed a tract in which he praises and protects the Jewish Scriptures and literature, saying “do not burn what you do not know” (*verbrennt nicht, was ihr nicht kennt*; 1510). Later, Luther criticized Reuchlin, stating that he cleanses the Jews of their blasphemies and thus makes the Scriptures and God himself a liar.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, the position of Reuchlin stands totally in opposition to that of Luther, who suggests burning Jewish synagogues, schools, prayer books, and Talmuds to ashes.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Luther would have preferred that the books of Esther and 2 Maccabees had never existed at all.<sup>92</sup> Ironically, at an earlier stage of his career, Luther wished to be compared to Reuchlin.<sup>93</sup>

2. *Erasmus of Rotterdam*.—The well-known Dutch Renaissance scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam (Gerrit Gerritszoon; ca. 1466–1536), who is considered the forerunner of humanism, hated Jews and their religion and culture and thought them—as they were thought by the church for a long time—to be the rejected people of God. He described the Jews as “envious, stubborn, ungrateful, corrupt, impious, superstitious, arrogant, malicious, suspicious, slanderous, coarse and stupid, savage, rabid, jealous and of a hopelessly base nature.”<sup>94</sup> In contrast to Luther, who wished to convert Jews, Erasmus was so

<sup>88</sup> “Reuchlin! Wer will sich ihm vergleichen, zu seiner Zeit ein Wunderzeichen” (Reuchlin! Who will compare himself to him, a marvel in his time). *Goethes Werke*, ed. Ludwig Geiger (Berlin: Grote, 1890), 3:241.

<sup>89</sup> Johannes Pfefferkorn (born 1469 and died sometime between 1521 and 1523–24) was a German Jew whose original name was Josef. He converted to Catholic Christianity and then preached and wrote against Jews and Judaism. See, e.g., Guido Kisch, *Erasmus’ Stellung zu Juden und Judentum*, Philosophie und Geschichte 83/84 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1969), 16; Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 52.

<sup>90</sup> *Briefwechsel*, WA, 1, no. 9, 23.

<sup>91</sup> See *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, WA, 53:523–26. See also 536–39, and Sec. V below.

<sup>92</sup> “Ich bin dem Buch [= 2. Makkabäer] und Esther so feind, dass ich wollte, sie wären gar nicht vorhanden; denn sie judenzen zu sehr, und haben viel heidnische Unart”; *Tischreden*, WA, 1:208, lines 30–31. See Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” esp. 47–48. It is worth mentioning that generations of biblical scholars and theologians followed Luther’s antagonism toward the canonical book of Esther and loaded on it their own anti-Jewish agenda. See Kalimi, *Book of Esther*, 289–324.

<sup>93</sup> See *Briefwechsel*, WA, 1:574; 2:6, 679; 6:183–84, 192; 8:69.

<sup>94</sup> See Kisch, *Erasmus’ Stellung zu Juden und Judentum*, 7–8, 12, 16–18, 28, and references there to primary and secondary literature. According to Kisch (37–38), Erasmus “remained stuck in the ‘mood’ and prejudices of the time throughout [his] life in [his] attitude towards Jews and Judaism” (*beide* [i.e., *Erasmus und Zasius*] *verharren in ihrer Einstellung zu juden und judentum lebenslang in der “Stimmung” und in der Vorurteilen der Zeit*). See also Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology*, 51–53, esp. 52–53. Oberman stresses that Erasmus strived to establish a renewed Europe while humanizing society and the church through education that was based on the humanized sources of wisdom. Nonetheless, “a renewed Europe was for him also a Christian Europe without Jews.” See Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus*, 207–8, at 207. Shimon Markish, *Erasmus and the Jews*

## The Journal of Religion

disgusted by them that he did not find them worthy of conversion. On November 2, 1517, he wrote: "I rather want to be dead if that one [i.e., Johannes Pfefferkorn] be baptized with no other intention than to bring destruction over the Christians and, when added to our ranks, to infect all of Christianity with his Jewish poison."<sup>95</sup> Therefore, Erasmus was immersed not only in Judeophobia in the religious and theological sense of the word but also in racial hatred. For him, a converted Jew could "infect all of Christianity with his Jewish poison."<sup>96</sup> He blamed the Jews, stating that "the violence stemming from the rebellions of the peasants in Germany came about because the participants were largely Jews, 'who hate Christ.'"<sup>97</sup> Thus, Christians were fighting against Christians, and Jews were blamed for it. This absurdity was the logic of the "humanist" Erasmus, who praised France for being free of heretical Jews.<sup>98</sup>

While Luther wished that the books of Esther and 2 Maccabees did not exist at all (see n. 92), like Marcion of Sinope, Erasmus was ready to "destroy the entire Old Testament [rather] than let the harmony of Christianity be disturbed because of the books of the Jews."<sup>99</sup> Because the Old Testament was already an integral part of the Christian Bible, Erasmus could not eliminate it. Instead, he suggested that "the Christian Church should not put so much emphasis on the Old Testament!"<sup>100</sup> Erasmus simply did not know or completely ignored that the New Testament—or at least a big part of it—was also composed by Jews and still retains a Jewish literary heritage. He was unaware that it would be very difficult—if not impossible—to understand the New Testament without knowledge of the Old Testament. Erasmus felt disgust at the Jews but forgot that Jesus and his adherents were Jews, a historical fact that was recognized even by Luther. His humanism and tolerance

---

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), is of the opinion that Erasmus followed "just" the traditional Christian negative position toward Jews.

<sup>95</sup> "Ich will des Todes sein, wenn sich jener [i.e., Pfefferkorn] mit keiner anderen Absicht taufen ließ, als umso größeres Verderben gegen die Christen zu stiften und, in unsere Reihen aufgenommen, die gesamte Christenheit mit seinem jüdischen Gift anzustecken" (E III, 117–18, 24–56); see Kisch, *Erasmus' Stellung zu Juden und Judentum*, 16.

<sup>96</sup> He says this would happen if the conversion were not sincere, which might imply that the problem was not necessarily with Jews themselves but whether he was convinced this (particular) conversion was sincere.

<sup>97</sup> Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology*, 51; cf. Kisch, *Erasmus' Stellung zu Juden und Judentum*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> The final and complete expulsion of the Jews from France took place in 1394, per the decree of King Charles VI.

<sup>99</sup> "Ich würde es vorziehen, sogar das ganze Alte Testament zu vernichten, als wegen der Judenbücher die Eintracht der Christenheit stören zu lassen, wenn nur das Neue Testament unversehrt erhalten bleibt"; from a letter that Erasmus sent from Leuven to Johannes Caesarius, November 3, 1517 (E III, 127, 35–36); see Kisch, *Erasmus' Stellung zu Juden und Judentum*, 35–36. The question of the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible has never ceased; see Isaac Kalimi, "Episoden aus dem Neuen Testament und ihr Ursprung in der Hebräischen Bibel/dem Alten Testament," *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* 36 (2011): 93–110, esp. 93–94, 110, with further references to bibliography.

<sup>100</sup> "Auch sollte die christliche Kirche nicht so großen Wert auf das Alte Testament legen!" This is a citation from a letter that Erasmus sent to his friend Wolfgang Capito, Leuven, March 13, 1518 (E III, 253, 19–25); see Kisch, *Erasmus' Stellung zu Juden und Judentum*, 7.

ceased when he turned to Jews and Judaism while ignoring the basic humanistic values of the Old and New Testaments. Nevertheless, despite his huge animosity to Jews, in some points being even worse than Luther, Erasmus never called for the kind of concrete discriminatory and violent measures against Jews that Luther did.

3. *Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli*.—Like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were reformers in their own right and established different Christian reform movements in central and western Europe. The contact of the Swiss reformer Huldrych (or Ulrich) Zwingli (Zürich, 1484–1531) with Jews was limited to his physician, Moshe of Winterthur, and his usage of the biblical commentary of the baptized Jew Nicholas of Lyra (French: Nicolas de Lyre [Normandy]; ca. 1270–1349), who drew extensively from the rabbinic material and especially from Rashi’s commentary on the Torah.<sup>101</sup> Like Luther, Zwingli learned some Hebrew from the students of Johannes Reuchlin, and as he states in his introduction to the book of Isaiah, he even liked the language a great deal.<sup>102</sup> Similar to Luther and most other Christians, Zwingli described the Jews as unappreciative, faithless, and “erring unbelieving Jews” (*irrende, ungläubige Juden*).<sup>103</sup> He considered the rejection of Christ as the greatest sin of the Jews, who have suffered exile ever since as a divine punishment.<sup>104</sup>

As much as is known from the sources, unlike his contemporaries, Luther and Erasmus, Zwingli did not develop a broad antagonism toward Jews and Judaism. Although similar to Luther he hoped for their eventual conversion, this never turned into harsh hostility as it did for Luther. In his 1523 treatise, *Of Divine and Human Justice (Von göttlicher und menschlicher Gerechtigkeit)*, Zwingli rejected the legitimacy of lending money at interest (a practice he primarily associated with the Jews) but stated that if the practice is permitted, the Jews must not be treated unfairly, and if it is outlawed, it must not lead to additional suffering for them.<sup>105</sup> Although the terms “usurers” (*Wucherer*) and “Jews” became almost synonyms in medieval Europe, “Nowhere does Zwingli call for

<sup>101</sup> See Carl Siegfried, “Raschi’s Einfluss auf Nicolaus von Lira und Luther in der Auslegung der Genesis,” *Archiv für wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1869–72), 1:428–56, 2:39–65. For the biography and work of Zwingli, see Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

<sup>102</sup> See Ulrich Zwingli, *Huldrici Zwinglii Opera*, ed. M. Schuler and J. Schulthess (Zürich: Schulthess & Höhn, 1835), 5:547–48.

<sup>103</sup> See Emil Egli and George Finsler, eds., *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke*, Corpus Reformatorum 84 (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1908), 2:201; in contemporary German: *Huldrych Zwingli: Schriften*, ed. Samuel Lutz and Thomas Brunnschweiler (Zürich: Theologischer, 1995), 2:237.

<sup>104</sup> See Achim Detmers, *Reformation und Judentum*, Judentum und Christentum 7 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 155–60. See also Edwin Künzli, “Zwinglis Stellung zu den Juden,” in *Festgabe Leonhard von Muralt zum siebzigsten Geburtstag, 17. Mai 1970: Überreicht von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. M. Haas and R. Hauswirth (Zürich: Berichthaus, 1970), 309–18, esp. 313–16.

<sup>105</sup> See Egli and Finsler, *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke*, 2:458–525, esp. 520–21; in contemporary German: Lutz and Brunnschweiler, *Huldrych Zwingli*, 1:155–213, esp. 208–9.

## The Journal of Religion

the expulsion of the Jews. Therefore, the demand that ‘Jews and usurers’ should not be tolerated, should not be interpreted [to mean] that the Jews should be thrown out.”<sup>106</sup> Zwingli never repeated the common medieval Christian accusations against the Jews—such as well poisoning or ritual murder—and he considered the present treatment of the Jews by the authorities to be unjust. In this, Zwingli resembles Luther’s early approach toward the Jews, but for Zwingli, this was unconditional, never limited in time and never changed into hostility, as it did for Luther.<sup>107</sup>

4. *John Calvin.*—In contrast to Luther, but like Zwingli, John Calvin (Geneva, 1509–64) did not have many contacts with Jews because he resided in cities in France and Switzerland where no Jews were allowed to live due to a royal ban.<sup>108</sup> Jews were not permitted to reside in Strasbourg, but they could trade in and pass through the city. Thus, it is possible that Calvin encountered Jews when he resided there from 1539 to 1541.

In his commentary on the book of Daniel (dated 1561), Calvin declares: “I have often spoken to many Jews, [but] never noticed a drop of piety, a grain of truth or mental power [with them]. In fact, I have never discovered any real common sense in any Jew.”<sup>109</sup> This statement reveals Calvin’s prejudice. Nevertheless, Salo W. Baron saying that “Judaism as a religious tradition necessarily loomed large in Calvin’s mind, as it did in that of other religious reformers,” is evident in Calvin’s writings, where he refers several times to Jews and Judaism.<sup>110</sup> For example, in his introduction to the French translation of the Bible by Olivetan (Neuchatel, 1535), Calvin dedicated a special prologue to Jewish readers, probably for a missionary purpose. Here he speaks respectfully about “the people of the Sinai Covenant,” who “have the fear of the Lord.”<sup>111</sup> However, in Calvin’s theology, including this prologue, the “Israelite”/“Judahite” and the “Jews” of the Old Testament are identified with the Jewish-Christians of the New Testament who followed Jesus as the Messiah and not the contemporary Jews.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> “Nirgends ruft Zwingli zur Vertreibung der Juden auf. Darum ist die Forderung ‘Juden und Wucherer’ nicht länger zu dulden, nicht dahin zu interpretieren, dass die Juden ausgestossen werden sollen”; Künzli, “Zwinglis Stellung zu den Juden,” 310.

<sup>107</sup> For more on this issue, consult Hans-Martin Kirn, “Ulrich Zwingli, the Jews, and Judaism,” in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett, *Studies in Central European Histories* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 171–95.

<sup>108</sup> For Calvin’s biography, see Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>109</sup> See Achim Detmers, “‘Oft habe ich mit vielen Juden gesprochen’: Calvins Verhältnis zum Judentum,” in Decot and Arnold, *Christen und Juden im Reformationszeitalter*, 23–41, at 27, and the original Latin text and bibliographical reference in n. 20.

<sup>110</sup> Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:281.

<sup>111</sup> See Gottfried W. Locher, “Calvin spricht zu den Juden,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 23 (1967): 180–96, esp. 188.

<sup>112</sup> See Achim Detmers, “Calvin, the Jews, and Judaism,” in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 201; G. Sujin Pak, “The Protestant Reformation and the Jews: Excavating Contexts, Unearthing Logic,” *Religion* 8 (2017): 1–13, 4, and there a list of primary and secondary literature.

## The Position of Martin Luther

In his commentaries Calvin often attacks the Jewish biblical interpreters and calls them “foolish,” among other insults. Thus, in his commentary on Genesis, he makes no less than fifty-two critical comments regarding Jews. For instance, he expounds on Gen 1:26–27 as follows: “And the Jews are verie fond [presumably in the sense of “naive”], in fei[g]ning that God communicated his worde with the earth or with angels. . . . But it is well that their doggish wickedness is joined with so great blockish dul[l]nesse, that they may betray their foolishnesse even to children. Therefore, Christians doe verie aptly affirme upon this testimonie, that there are no persons in God, and that God calleth unto him no foreigne person.”<sup>113</sup>

Calvin generally treats the Jewish interpreters as a group and dismisses them as being blind for failing to recognize Christ in the Old Testament.<sup>114</sup> He calls the prominent Jewish biblical commentator Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508) a “charlatan” and “dog.”<sup>115</sup> Even though Calvin should not be excused for his evil remarks, one still must consider them within their context as rhetoric of an interpretive-theological debate and maybe also as a result of his fear that Jewish interpretation could challenge his authority as a scriptural exegete. Calvin also made a positive remark, such as in his comment on Ps. 112:5, where he refers to David Kimchi (ca. 1160–1235) as “the most correct interpreter among the rabbis,”<sup>116</sup> although in his commentary on Psalms, Kimchi strongly polemicizes against Christian theologians and their allegorical interpretation.<sup>117</sup>

Like the young Luther, in 1535 the young Calvin—approximately twenty-six years old—also wished to fulfill the long-awaited desire of the church to convert the Jews to Christianity.<sup>118</sup> Calvin considered the Jews’ refusal to adopt Christianity, even in its reformed model, as a sign of their wickedness, ungratefulness, and rebelliousness. In his commentary on Rom. 11:28–32,

<sup>113</sup> See Thomas Tymme, *A commentarie of Iohn Caluine, upon the First Booke of Moses called Genesis: Translated out of Latine into English* (London: Middleton, 1578), 42. There is a modern English translation online that translates Calvin’s statements here in a rather harsh manner, e.g., “The Jews make themselves altogether ridiculous, in pretending that God held communication with the earth or with angels. . . . But it is well that their canine wickedness has been joined with a stupidity so great, that they betray their folly to children. Christians, therefore, properly contend, from this testimony, that there exists a plurality of Persons in the God-head” (“Commentary on Genesis—Volume 1,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.pdf>). Compare Salo W. Baron, “John Calvin and the Jews,” in *Harry Austryn Wolfson: Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, ed. Saul Lieberman (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 1:141–63, esp. 149–52, and *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:459–60 n. 93.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Haroutunian, *Calvin: Commentaries*, Library of Christian Classics 23 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 23.

<sup>115</sup> See Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:286.

<sup>116</sup> Haroutunian, *Calvin: Commentaries*, 23.

<sup>117</sup> See Kalimi, “Centrality and Interpretation of Psalms,” 252–57.

<sup>118</sup> See John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostles to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 257. See also Locher, “Calvin spricht zu den Juden,” 187–90.

## The Journal of Religion

Calvin asserted that the Jews' "*greatest crime* consisted in their lack of faith [in Jesus]."<sup>119</sup> And in his commentary on Jer. 19:9, Calvin wrote, "If we compare the Jews with other nations, surely their impiety, ingratitude, and rebelliousness *exceeded the crimes of all other nations.*"<sup>120</sup>

In 1563, just about a year before his death, Calvin composed a special work, *On the Questions and Objections of the Jews: A Response from John Calvin (ad quaestiones et obiecta Judaei cuiusdam responsio Joannis Calvini)*.<sup>121</sup> In this work, which was never published, Calvin refers to the Jews as "impure dogs, pigs, beasts, ungrateful people, liars,"<sup>122</sup> as well as "the children of the devil."<sup>123</sup> Thus, despite the absence of Jews in France and the Swiss Cantons at that time, Calvin antagonized Jews and Judaism, at least in theological sphere.<sup>124</sup> Did Calvin become hostile to Jews because of their unwillingness to give up their old faith and accept his newly reformed Christianity? The answer to this question is likely yes. Calvin's antipathy toward Jews stemmed, first and foremost, from his Christian anti-Jewish theological perspectives.

Hence, on some points Calvin was close to Luther's approach toward Jews and Judaism: He followed the traditional Christian accusations toward them, polemicized against Jewish biblical interpretations, and wished to convert them. He possibly referred to them respectfully in his early career, but in his later years he became hostile because they refused to convert. Nonetheless, Calvin did not go as far as Luther's assertions and accusations did, and he did not propose concrete violent measures how to eliminate the Jews, as did Luther. Perhaps there was no need to call for burning Jewish schools and synagogues, to take their properties and expel them from the land, because Jews already were forbidden to live in the Swiss Cantons and in France.<sup>125</sup>

5. *Philip Melanchthon*.—Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) was a nephew of Johannes Reuchlin, who taught him Hebrew. Melanchthon became a close

<sup>119</sup> See Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:286–87, 460 n. 94 (italics mine) with references. For Calvin's attitude toward usury and his anti-Jewish sermon regarding this issue, see the sources and discussion by Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:276–88, 461 n. 96.

<sup>120</sup> See Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:287 (italics mine).

<sup>121</sup> See Mary Sweetland Laver, "Calvin, Jews, and Intra-Christian Polemics" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1987), 229–61.

<sup>122</sup> See Achim Detmers, "Zu den Fragen und Einwürfen irgendeines Juden: Einleitung und Übersetzung zu Calvins 'ad quaestiones et obiecta Judaei cuiusdam,'" in *Calvin-Studienausgabe*, vol. 4, *Reformatorsche Klärungen*, ed. E. Busch et al. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 357–405, and "Oft habe ich mit vielen Juden gesprochen," 41.

<sup>123</sup> See J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay, "Calvin und die Juden: Eine offene Frage?" *Zwingliana* 19 (1993): 183–94, at 191.

<sup>124</sup> Contra Johannes Wallmann, "Luther on Jews and Islam," in *Creative Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Benjamin Uffenheimer and Henning Graf Reventlow, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 59 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 149–60, esp. 151–52.

<sup>125</sup> Contra Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:291. On different views regarding Calvin's attitude toward Jews, see the survey and bibliographical references by Sujin Pak, "Protestant Reformation and the Jews," 3.



## The Position of Martin Luther

fellow and foremost assistant of Luther, until Luther's last days. As such Melanchthon was influenced by his master's anti-Semitism. However, he was a bit more moderate than Luther.<sup>126</sup> Thus, at a meeting of Protestant princes in Frankfurt am Main in 1539, it was Melanchthon who publicly uncovered the falseness of the 1510 Brandenburg blood libel, which caused the burning of 38 innocent Jews, although this was a part of his attack on the Catholic Church falsifying evidence and sending innocent people to death.<sup>127</sup>

6. *Justus Jonas*.—Justus Jonas (1493–1555) was a Lutheran theologian and reformer, professor, and hymn writer. He assisted Luther with the translation of the Bible into German language and translated some of his writings into Latin. Jonas accompanied Luther in his final moments and delivered the eulogy for him. Despite being a student and close follower of Luther, Jonas remained himself, holding a markedly different and positive approach toward Jews, and did not follow Luther's anti-Semitism.<sup>128</sup> Thus, in his translation of *Brief wider die Sabbater* into Latin (1539), Jonas distorted Luther's views, which resulted in a pro-Jewish viewpoint.<sup>129</sup> Kaufmann notes that Jonas thought Luther's *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* important and translated it into Latin (1543).<sup>130</sup> However, it is not clear whether he was asked by Luther to do so or it was his own initiative. In any case, Jonas's sermon on Judas Iscariot in the same year contained no anti-Jewish remarks.<sup>131</sup>

7. *Andreas Osiander and Others*.—The humanist, theologian, and Hebraist Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) served as a Hebrew tutor at the Augustinian monastery in Nuremberg and, since 1549, as a professor of Hebrew at the University of Königsberg. Osiander was a colleague of Luther and one of the most influential Lutheran reformers of the sixteenth century. He not only maintained Judeophilia, but he also distanced himself from Luther's anti-Semitic writings and even spoke out in defense of the Jews. In May 1529 the Jews of Pezinok (Hungary) were blamed for a ritual murder. They were imprisoned and tortured until they "confessed" the crime, and thirty men,

<sup>126</sup> On Melanchthon, see, e.g., Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (New York: Abingdon, 1958); Michael Rogness, *Philip Melanchthon: Reformer without Honor* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969); Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:229–34; Martin H. Jung, *Philipp Melanchthon und seine Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010). For a comprehensive literature, see Helmut Claus, *Melanchthon-Bibliographie, 1510–1560*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte 87 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2014), vols. 1–4.

<sup>127</sup> See Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim*, 31–32, 108–9. See also Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melanchthon and the Jews: A Reappraisal," in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 105–35.

<sup>128</sup> Compare Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus*, 210–11, esp. 211.

<sup>129</sup> On Justus Jonas, see also Kaufmann, *Luthers "Judenschriften"*, 159–60, and the additional bibliography listed there.

<sup>130</sup> Kaufmann, *Luthers "Judenschriften"*, 160.

<sup>131</sup> Kaufmann, *Luthers "Judenschriften"*, 160.

## The Journal of Religion

women, and children were burned, while those who were under age ten were forced to baptize and adopt Christianity. In the same year Osiander wrote an anonymous tract in which he rejects the Pezinok blood libel charge and systematically refutes the charge of Jewish ritual murder of Christian children.<sup>132</sup> The tract that was published in 1540 was criticized by Johannes Eck (who condemned Osiander as a protector of “bloodthirsty Jews”) and prohibited by Martin Luther. In the same year, the corpse of a child was found in Sappfeld (near Eichstätt, Bavaria), and the Jews were blamed for killing him and using his blood for ritual purposes. Osiander defended the Jews and prevented their persecution. Furthermore, in his letter of 1544 to Elia/Elijah Levita, Osiander condemned Luther’s anti-Jewish tract *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* (*On the Shem Hamephoras* [i.e., the Tetragrammaton] *and the Image of Christ*).<sup>133</sup> Thus, in contrast to Luther, who stained the Jews with blood libel in his *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*,<sup>134</sup> Osiander defended the innocent Jews against false accusations.<sup>135</sup>

There were some other Christian scholars who studied Hebrew and the Old Testament in its original languages (Hebraists) and who became pro-Jewish. This includes scholars such as the Italian philosopher and theologian Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), Sebastian Münster (1488–1552), Urbanus Rhegius (or Urban Rieger, 1489–1541), as well as Miguel (Michael) Servetus (1511–53).<sup>136</sup>

*Interim Summary.*—It is true that Luther was not the only Christian theologian, religious leader, and reformer in sixteenth-century Europe who uttered anti-Jewish sentiments and demonstrated hostility toward Jews and Judaism. Luther’s Judeophobic assertions against the Jews and their religion have some parallels with other contemporary theologians, thinkers, and reformers. However, Luther’s anti-Jewishness, anti-Semitism, and racism are unique and unparalleled by any of those contemporary theologians and reformers, particularly Johannes Reuchlin, Ulrich Zwingli, Justus Jonas, Andreas Osiander, and others, and also not fully compatible with that of Philip Melancthon, John Calvin, or even Erasmus of Rotterdam. There were some other theologians and reformers who did not attack the Jews and even spoke out in defense of

<sup>132</sup> Moritz Stern, *Schrift über die Blutbeschuldigung von Andreas Osiander, Reformator und Prediger in Nürnberg, gedruckt 1540* (Kiel: Fiencke, 1893).

<sup>133</sup> For this book, see WA, 53:579–648. For an English translation, see Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology*.

<sup>134</sup> See WA, 53:522, lines 8–17; and the citation and discussion by Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 69 and n. 107.

<sup>135</sup> For main evidence and discussion, see Joy M. Kammerling, *Andreas Osiander and the Jews of Nuremberg: A Reformation Pastor and Jewish Toleration in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, 1995), and “Andreas Osiander, the Jews, and Judaism,” in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 219–47.

<sup>136</sup> On Hebraists, see, e.g., Stephan G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660): Authors, Books, and Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See also Sec. VI, no. 3.

them. Reuchlin, Zwingli, Jonas, and Osiander demonstrate that one can be a good Christian in the late medieval time without being a Judeophobe but rather the opposite. Indeed, Luther did not invent anti-Judaism. However, he spread hatred against the pope, German peasants, Turks, and above all Jews and Judaism. He led his followers in a negative direction, escalated the animosity much more than the historical church, and firmly deepened, fueled, and inflamed it, and thus he brought it to peaks that were never seen before—actions that had disastrous consequences (see Secs. V and VIII). Thus, scholarly justification of Luther's extreme Judeophobia ultimately attempts to excuse the inexcusable, as if he were "a son of his time," which is historically inaccurate and therefore does not explain anything.

#### IV. "CROSS OR EXPULSION AND DEATH": THE KEY FACTOR FOR LUTHER'S JUDEOPHOBIA

Luther expressed anti-Jewish assertions already in 1513 or 1515 (it is uncertain which year it was), 1514, and 1521, that is, before the publication of his 1523 positive work, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. In his first lecture on Psalms 109, in 1513/1515, he writes on the curses that are mentioned in this psalm: "Christ prays for punishment for his traitor Judas, who was the leader of those who caught Jesus . . . and *for the Jews* [i.e., as a collective ethnic group]." <sup>137</sup> In his letter of February 1514 to Georg Spalatin, the secretary and personal chaplain to Friedrich III der Weise, Elector of Saxony, Luther states that "it is prophesied by all prophets that *the Jews* [again, as a collective] *curse and blaspheme* God and their king Jesus/Christ; and anyone who does not perceive and understand this, has truly understood nothing of theology" (italics mine). <sup>138</sup> In the 1521 postil (*postilla*, i.e., a comment or a short homily) he goes further and characterizes all the Jews as potential murderers (probably alluding to the Christian accusations of Jews as ritual murderers and well poisoners). <sup>139</sup> Most of the postil is focused on urging his Christian audience not to reject God's word, and he concludes it by anticipating that the Jews as well one day will be freed from their present "blindness" and be saved. <sup>140</sup>

<sup>137</sup> "Christus betet um Strafe für seinen Verräter Judas, der der Anführer derer war, die Jesus fingen . . . , und für die Juden." See *D Martin Luthers Psalmen-Auslegung*, vol. 3, *Psalmen 91–150*, ed. Erwin Mülhaupt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 170–92, at 171 (italics mine), and cf. *WA*, 4, 217–21.

<sup>138</sup> *Briefwechsel*, *WA*, 1, no. 7, 23, lines 33–36: "Von allen Propheten ist geweissagt, daß die Juden Gott und ihren König Jesus schmähen und lästern werden ["Hoc tandem concludo, cum per omnes prophetas praedictum sit Iudaeos Deum et regem suum Christum maledicturos et blasphematos"]; und wer das nicht wahrnimmt und versteht, der hat wahrlich noch nichts von der Theologie verstanden."

<sup>139</sup> Compare his *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, *WA*, 53:520, lines 11–13; 521, lines 9–11; 522, lines 14–15.

<sup>140</sup> *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 11, *Kirchen-Postille, Evangelien-Teil*, 2nd ed., ed. J. G. Walch (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1987), 217–19.

## The Journal of Religion

In his *Lectures on Minor Prophets (Dodekapropheton)* that carried out at the University of Wittenberg from circa March 1524 to early spring 1526, that is, just about one to three years after the publication of his 1523 *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, Luther describes the book of Malachi, as follows:

A summary of this prophet is that he makes the synagogue passé and describes it as a thing of contempt—like an old woman now about to be deserted. Therefore, almost all the words which are here spoken in the name of the Lord echo a sort of disgust. The Lord has had enough and is, as it were, disgusted by their ceremonies which He wanted to preserve up to the time of Elijah. But they themselves preserved them for their own gain and profit, not with a sincere heart but with a greedy one, giving no glory to God.<sup>141</sup>

In 1526 he writes once again on the curses in Psalm 109, but this time he is a bit sharper: “David made the psalm in the spirit of Christ who speaks it against Judas, the traitor, and *against the whole of Judaism*, and sins, as it will happen to them” (italics mine).<sup>142</sup> Finally, in 1533 he escalates his rhetoric even more and writes: “The 109th psalm is a prayer psalm that Christ prays against his traitor Judas *and his crucifiers, the Jews*. He complains about them violently and foretells them *how they will perish and how they must be perished horribly by God’s wrath, as we see it all fulfilled before our eyes*” (italics mine).<sup>143</sup> Thus, already at the early stage of his career, before, around, and during the Judeophilia stage, at the time that he took to appease the Jews (although we do not know exactly how long it endured), and afterward—until the end of his life—in all these periods Luther uttered anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic assertions. This includes the years 1513/1515, 1514, 1521, 1524–26, 1526, 1531, 1533, 1536, 1537, 1538, 1539, 1540 (as he banned Osiander’s pro-Jewish writing), 1542–43, and 1546.<sup>144</sup> De Laharpe stresses that from circa 1531 to 1546 one can expect to find in Luther’s Table-Talks only a “wrathful Jew hater” (*zornentbrannte Judenhasser*).<sup>145</sup> Therefore it seems that Luther never detached himself completely from the Christian animosity against Jews. He just changed his rhetoric on the surface for a restricted time in order to obtain his goals—above all converting the Jews—but the fundamental theological guidelines and beliefs that lie behind his approach toward Jews and Judaism never changed genuinely.

<sup>141</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Minor Prophets*, in *Luther’s Work*, trans. R. J. Dinda (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1975), 18:392, on Mal. 1:1.

<sup>142</sup> “David hat den Psalm im Geist von Christus gemacht, welcher ihn gegen Judas, den Verräter, und gegen das ganz Judentum spricht und versündigt, wie es denselben gehen werde.” Mühlhaupt, *D Martin Luthers Psalmen-Auslegung*, 175; cf. WA, 19:595–615.

<sup>143</sup> “Der 109. Psalm ist ein Betpsalm, den Christus betet wider seinen Verräter Judas und seine Kreuziger, die Juden. Über die klagt er heftig und weissagt ihnen, wie sie untergehen und druch Gottes Zorn verstoht greulich verderben müssen, wie wir das alles erfüllt vor Augen sehen.” Mühlhaupt, *D Martin Luthers Psalmen-Auslegung*, 171; cf. WA, 38:54, lines 23–27.

<sup>144</sup> See above Sec. III.F, no. 7; for reference to original sources, citation, and bibliography regarding 1526 and 1531 and others, see Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 58–66.

<sup>145</sup> De Laharpe, “Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden,” 7.

He was too tied up with the church's anti-Judaism and could not fully unchain himself from it.

Seemingly, Luther's Judeophilia was deliberately planned from the very beginning. It was meant for a limited time and was conditional in its nature, and even then he did not stop completely his harsh assertions against the Jews. It was a tactical approach while taking advantage of the unfortunate situation of Jews with the intention of achieving religious, political, and other targets, as he stressed on different occasions: "until I see what I have accomplished."<sup>146</sup> During that time he wished to accomplish, first and foremost, his ultimate missionary goal: to convert the Jews to Christianity. Without saying it, he gave the Jews a choice: to join to the newly reformed "true religion" and enjoy the possibility of being integrated into Christian society or continue to keep their own "false religion" but then be treated by the well-known traditional church oppressions. The unwillingness of Jews to be converted (except for some individuals here and there) disappointed Luther, as already noted by scholars. In the moment he admitted that the Jews' refusal to convert was conclusive, he ended his limited short-lived Judeophilia and reverted to the traditional hostility of the church toward them.<sup>147</sup> Obviously, he was always convinced that the Jews only had the choice of either accepting Christianity and integrating in the surrounding society or being humbled and oppressed. However, as discussed above (Sec. III.B), the factor of the disappointment as such does not explain Luther's radical Judeophobia and anti-Semitism.

The conversion of Jews was integrated in Luther's reformation in general, his failure to convert them was also a partial failure of his reformation. The disappointment and anger caused by this led him to act even tougher against the "heretic" Jews. Now Luther did not simply want to go back to the well-known anti-Jewish policy of the church as it was but rather to replace it by more Judeophobia and a harder pressure on them. In other words, the Jewish refusal brought Luther not only back to the church's historical hostile policy toward Jews but even far beyond it. He increased his hatred by various methods. He stopped supporting the Jews altogether and even pushed the princes

<sup>146</sup> "Hie[r] will ichs dis mall lassen bleyben, bis ich sehe, was ich gewirckt habe." See WA, 11:336, line 35; cf. WA, 51:195, lines 28–32; 53:579, lines 9–16, 21–22; 600, lines 26–35; *Briefwechsel*, WA, 8:89–91, esp. 89–90, lines 2–13. See also the sources and the discussion by Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 55–61.

<sup>147</sup> The phenomenon of showing friendship in order to achieve something that later turns upside down when it is not achieved is well outlined in *Abot* 5:16: "Whenever love depends upon something and it passes, then the love passes-away, too. But if love does not depend upon some ulterior interest, then the love will never pass-away" (כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטל) (דבר בטלה אהבה, ושאינה תלויה בדבר אינה בטלה לעולם). The rabbis illustrated their saying by examples: "What is an example of the love which depended upon some interest (or material advantage)? That of Amnon for Tamar. And what is an example of the love which did not depend upon some ulterior interest? That of David and Jonathan" (איזו היא אהבה תלויה בדבר זו אהבת אמנון) (ותמר, ושאינה תלויה בדבר זו אהבת דוד ויהונתן). Nonetheless, the most remarkable instance of the love that did not depend on an ulterior interest is that of Job, who shows the unconditional love of God in good and in bad situations. See Job 1:1–2:10, esp. 2:10.

## The Journal of Religion

to expel them.<sup>148</sup> He frequently and consistently spread hateful assertions and raised his anti-Semitism to an extreme level that had never existed before, not even in the worst version of the popes' Judeophobic policies. The purpose was clear: to push the Jews as hard as possible until they accepted the church religion or to abolish them culturally and physically until, in his own words, they "sprawl down on the floor and stay there unable to move" (see citation in n. 155). This was, in fact, a renewed version of 1096's "Cross or Death" of the Crusaders in Rhineland or following the paradigm of "cross or expulsion" that took place in Spain and Portugal (1492, 1497) in Luther's own time. The Jews had to choose either to become Christians—which culturally means disappearance but physical existence—or to vanish in both ways, physically and culturally. They would not be allowed to continue as before and as it was during Luther's "friendly" break or even before it. They cannot continue challenging Christianity by their very physical existence and by their "lies" and "false" biblical interpretations and as a revival religion.

Luther blamed the Jews for their unwillingness to accept Jesus as Messiah because of their "stubbornness," a familiar label in church rhetoric through generations. In a religious context this term means a resistance against God's will and disobeying his commandments. The punishment for such a sin is the inability to receive divine blessing, humiliation, and destruction.<sup>149</sup> As a first-rate biblical scholar, Luther most likely was aware of this concept, and it had an influence on the train of his thoughts concerning the "stubborn" Jews. Nonetheless, he concluded that it is impractical to convert them, although he never gave up his hope.

In *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, Luther asserts that "to convert the Jews . . . is about as possible as converting the devil. . . .<sup>150</sup> For a Jew or a Jewish heart is so stock, stone, iron, devil hard, that it cannot be moved by any means."<sup>151</sup> Here Luther

<sup>148</sup> See Luther's letter of June 11, 1537, to Josel of Rosheim, *Briefwechsel*, WA, 8:89–91, esp. 89–90, lines 2–13; Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 59–60.

<sup>149</sup> See, e.g., Exod. 33:5; Deut. 9:27; Judg. 2:19; Isa. 48:4; Jer. 5:3–5, 7:24–26, 9:12–15, 16:12, 18:12; Zech. 7:11–14; Ps. 78:8, 95:8; Neh. 9:29; 2 Chron. 30:8.

<sup>150</sup> Luther's belief in the devil (*Teufel*) was very realistic and naive. The roots of this accusation stem from verses such as John 8:31–59, esp. 8:44, "You are from your father the devil." On Luther's views of the devil and their cultural background, see Heiko A. Oberman, *Martin Luther: Mensch zwischen Teufel und Gott* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), esp. 11–21, 260–84.

<sup>151</sup> In order to set the quotation in its context, I cite it more completely here: "Because, as I stipulated in a pamphlet, it is not my idea to write against the Jews, as if I hoped to convert them; therefore I did not wish to call that pamphlet *Against the Jews*, but instead *On the Jews and Their Lies*, so that we Germans may know from historical evidence what a Jew is so that we can warn our Christians against them as we warn against the devil himself in order to strengthen and honor our belief; [the intent is] not to convert the Jews, which is about as possible as converting the devil. . . . For a Jew or a Jewish heart is so stock, stone, iron, devil hard, that it cannot be moved by any means" (Denn wie ich jnn jhenem Büchlin bedingt, ist mein meinung nicht, wider die Jüden zu schreiben, als hoffet ich sie zu bekeren, hab darumb dasselb buch nicht wollen nennen: Widder die Jüden, Sondern: *Von den Jüden und jren lügen*, Das wir Deutschen historien weise auch wissen möchten, was ein Jüde sey, unser Christen für jhnen, als für den Teuffeln selbs,

packs the Jews together with devils, Turks, and “all the godless who misuse God’s name continually and violate the commandment.”<sup>152</sup> Although the rhetoric is shocking in its harshness, it did not come from nowhere: already in 1526 Luther was willing to say that Satan stood at the right hand of the Jews.<sup>153</sup> In *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* he states: “We are now speaking not *with the Jews*, but rather *about the Jews* and about their actions” (italics mine).<sup>154</sup> He also made a similar statement in his letter of December 31, 1539. But here he makes clear that the Jewish Question can find its solution either by converting—which is impossible—or by humiliating and oppressing them until they would be eliminated: “I cannot convert the Jews. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not succeed in doing so either; but I can shut their mouths so that there will be nothing for them to do but sprawl down on the floor and stay there, being unable to move.”<sup>155</sup>

In his three manifestos that were published in 1543, Luther straightforwardly expresses his ethnic anti-Semitism and makes clear how he is going to shut the mouths of the Jews. In the first two manifestos, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* and *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*, Luther calls the Jews “devils” (*Teufel*, which symbolizes in Christianity—and not only there—the enemy of God and all evil on the earth),<sup>156</sup> “disgusting bugs,” and “a pest in the heart of our territories.”<sup>157</sup> Everybody knows what should be done with a devil, a pest, and with bugs—they should be eliminated. In *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* Luther also defines the Jews as “bloodthirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom.”<sup>158</sup> He suggests in seven harsh proposals to the German authorities how to handle

---

zu warnen, unsern glauben zu stercken und zu ehren, nicht *die Juden zu bekeren*, Welchs eben so möglich ist, als den Teuffel zu bekeren. . . . Denn ein Jüde odder [= oder] Jüdisch hertz ist so stock, stein, eisen, Teuffel hart, das mit keiner Weise zu bewegen ist). For the German, see WA, 53:579, lines 9–16, 21–22 (italics mine); for another English translation, see Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology*, 166–67.

<sup>152</sup> “Was helfen sie den Teuffel, Türcken, Jüden und alle Gottlosen, so solcher Buchstaben, auch Gottes Namens, ohne unterlas misbrauchen, wider das ander Gebot?” WA, 53:592, lines 1–3; cf. Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology*, 175, 233.

<sup>153</sup> See WA, 19:599, lines 10–11.

<sup>154</sup> “Wir reden j[et]zt nicht mit den Jüden, Sondern von den Jüden und von jrem thun, das unser Deutschen auch wissen mügen.” WA, 53:419, lines 19–21; cf. 449, lines 35–36: “since as I said above, I do not wish to dispute with them [= the Jews]” (denn ich droben gesagt, ich wolle mit i[h]nen nicht disputiren). This is miscited as p. 519 by Stöhr, “Martin Luther und die Juden,” 100.

<sup>155</sup> “Ich kann die Juden nicht bekehren; unser Herr Jesus Christus hat es auch nicht vermocht. Aber ich kann ihnen ihren Schnabel schließen, so daß ihnen nichts anderes übrigbleibt, als auf dem Boden ausgestreckt bleiben zu müssen.” For the quotation, see Léon Poliakov, *Geschichte des Antisemitismus*, trans. R. Pfisterer (Worms: Heintz, 1978), 2:125; and the discussion by Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 60–61.

<sup>156</sup> See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 11, 34.

<sup>157</sup> “ekelhaftes Ungeziefer” and “ein Plage im Herzen unseres Landes.” For details, see Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 62, 67, and n. 98.

<sup>158</sup> WA, 53:520.

## The Journal of Religion

them: “exercise a sharp mercy against these miserable people. . . . Burn their synagogues and schools, prayer books and Talmuds (‘and do not leave a page’), forbid everything that I have explained above (religious services and teachings), force them to work, and handle them with all mercilessness, as Moses did in the wilderness and struck three thousand dead so that the whole house must not be spoiled.”<sup>159</sup> He also calls for erasing their house and for their expulsion from the German territories.<sup>160</sup> As we saw above (Sec. I.B.2), in *Von den letzten Worten Davids*, Luther calls the Jews children of darkness and devils and accuses them of practicing “nothing but blasphemy, cursing, murder and lies against the True Jews and Israel [= Christians], that is, against the apostles and prophets,” and he calls them “perverters of Holy Scripture.”

Moreover, even in his very last sermon on February 15, 1546, two or three days before his death, on February 17 or 18, Luther describes the Jews as the Christians’ enemies, accuses them of defaming the core figures of Christianity, and ascribes a homicidal character to the Jews. This offensive language surely inflamed hatred against the Jews. However, in the same breath Luther gives the Jews the alternative between acceptance of Christianity and integration or expulsion/disappearance from society: “The Jews are our public enemies. They never stop defaming our Lord Christ, calling the Virgin Mary a whore and Jesus Christ the son of a whore. . . . If they could, they would gladly kill us all. Still, we wish to practice Christian love towards them and ask them to convert, [and] accept the Lord. . . . If the Jews wish to convert to us and give up their heresy and whatever else they have done to us, we will gladly forgive them, but if not, we will not tolerate nor suffer that they should be in our midst.”<sup>161</sup> Luther’s plan to expel the Jews from the German territories was not a theoretical one. As mentioned above (Sec. III.C), he not only refused to prevent the expulsion of the Jews of Saxony in 1536–37 but also advocated for it. In his Table-Talk of summer–autumn 1542, Luther suggests that the Jews blaspheme Mary.<sup>162</sup> In his letters of February 1 and 7 of 1546 to his wife, Katharina von Bora, he associates the Jews with the devil and talks about expelling them from Eisleben.<sup>163</sup> Given her awareness of all these assertions, suggestions, and deeds, I wonder how Nicole de Laharpe could state that Luther had “a certain sympathy, yes, a solidarity with the Jewish people” and even

<sup>159</sup> WA, 53:541, lines 26, 30–33: “das sie eine scharffe Barmhertzigkeit wolten gegen diese elende Leute uben. . . . Verbrenne ir Synagogen, Verbiete alles, was ich droben erzelet habe, Zwinge sie zur arbeit, Und gehe mit inen umb nach aller unbarmhertzigkeit, wie Mose thet in der Wüsten und schlug drey tausent tod, das nicht der gantze hauffe verderben muste”; see also 536, lines 23–29; 537, lines 26–30.

<sup>160</sup> Luther probably envisioned something similar to their expulsion from England (1290), France (1394), Spain (1492), and Portugal (1497). See also Sec. I.A.

<sup>161</sup> WA, 51:195, lines 28–32, 39–49; 196, lines 14–17.

<sup>162</sup> *Tischreden*, WA, 5, no. 5462; cf. de Laharpe, “Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden,” 11.

<sup>163</sup> See n. 57 above and, in detail, Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 64–65.



## The Position of Martin Luther

a “real solidarity with the Jewish people that goes much further than normal sympathy for fellow human beings in an emergency.”<sup>164</sup> Perhaps, mistakenly she considered only Luther’s “positive” assertions while ignoring his massive negative ones.

### V. ADDITIONAL FACTORS FOR LUTHER’S JUDEOPHOBIA

Alongside the key factor detailed above, which in my opinion lies at the root of Luther’s anti-Semitism, there are four additional factors that may contribute to comprehending his zealous Judeophobia: (1) Some comments by Luther about Jews and his behavior toward them are parallel to his behavior and comments about the German peasants. His conduct toward Jews, on the one hand, and toward the German peasants, on the other, reflect a violent element in his personality. This is also evidenced by Luther’s harsh condemnations of the pope, Turks, and Tatars.<sup>165</sup> In fact, in many of his references to the Jews he puts them together with the Turks, Tatars, pope, or Muhammad, for example, “Turk, Pope, Jews,” who are all alike, “the whole evil host of the world and the devil,” and a dismissal of “Jews, Mohammad, Turks, and Tatars . . . with their spoonful or nutshell of brain.”<sup>166</sup>

(2) Luther’s siding with the German princes and dukes reveals a self-serving socioeconomic adherence to the strong party who would support him and his reformation, even at the cost of violating justice, morality, and biblical ethics, including the slaughter of many thousands of peasants and the suppression of the Jews by burning their synagogues, houses, and books, as well as expelling them from the German territories. He was a shrewd politician who was ready to do everything in order to advance his goals, by peaceful means for a limited period or by brutal violence and mass bloodshed and the suffering of innocent people. In other words, the goal justifies the means: if nasty behavior toward Jews can push them to convert or to disappear, then it is fine. If thousands of dead peasants would bring Luther closer to the German princes, that is fine as well.

(3) Despite the horrible discrimination and persecution the Jewish people suffered over centuries, they still exist and to some extent were even influential in foreign societies. In addition, some Christian scholars who studied the Hebrew language and the Old Testament in its original languages (Hebraists) became pro-Jewish, such as Johannes Reuchlin, Pico della Mirandola, Sebastian Münster (who taught Hebrew in Basel and translated the Bible into Latin

<sup>164</sup> See de Laharpe, “Die Juden in Luthers Tischreden,” 12: “eine gewisse Sympathie, ja eine Solidarität mit dem jüdischen Volk . . . echte(n) Solidarität mit dem jüdischen Volk, die viel weiter geht als die normale Sympathie für Mitmenschen in einer Notsituation.”

<sup>165</sup> See Mark U. Edwards Jr., “Luther’s Last Battles,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48 (1984): 125–40, esp. 126–27.

<sup>166</sup> “Türke, Papst, Juden und der ganze böse hauffe der welt,” *On the Last Words of David*, WA, 54:37, lines 33–34; Bertram, “Treatise on the Last Words of David,” 278, 292; see also n. 67 above.

## The Journal of Religion

including notes from rabbinic commentators), Luther's fellow reformer Andreas Osiander, as well as Miguel (Michael) Servetus. The latter cited medieval Jewish exegetes and thinkers not only to interpret difficult biblical texts but also to reevaluate Christian theological dogmas. Thus, he denied the Christian explanation of Isa. 7:14 as a prediction of Jesus's birth and even invoked the testimony of Jews against the Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>167</sup> Also, as mentioned above, in his comment on Ps. 112:5 John Calvin praises David Kimchi's exegesis. Apparently, Luther was afraid that the Jews would influence or even dominate Christian scholars and society and, to some extent, even challenge Christianity and his reformed church. In his *Brief wider die Sabbater* (1538), Luther blamed the Jews for converting Christians to Judaism and influencing them to follow the Jewish laws such as the Sabbath and circumcision.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, in winter 1542, just before the publication of his manifestos against Jews, Luther spoke at a Table-Talk as follows: "Oh, the Hebrews—I mean also those of ours—who Judaize it too much; that is why I also meant them in the book I wrote against Jews."<sup>169</sup> Moreover, in his letter of December 3, 1543, to John Frederick I, the Elector of Saxony, Luther asserted that "many Hebraists are more rabbinic than Christian" because they do not look for Jesus in the Old Testament.<sup>170</sup> That means, they reject the allegorical and Christological interpretation of the Old Testament as a prediction of Jesus. In other words, Luther was afraid that studying Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible can undermine the authority of the Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. This is similar to the church policy against the study of Hebrew because they were afraid that it could undermine the authority of the Vulgate and the Christian doctrine that is based on it. Furthermore, in his *Lectures on Psalms*, Luther stresses, "Every prophecy and prophet must be understood as referring to Christ the Lord," and complains that "there are some [Christians] who interpret many psalms not prophetically [regarding Jesus], but rather historically, and [by doing] so they justify the Hebrews' rabbis, who are falsifiers and inventors of the vanities of the Jews."<sup>171</sup>

<sup>167</sup> On Miguel Servetus, see Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 13:281–83; Roland H. Bainton, *Michael Servet, 1511–1553* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1960).

<sup>168</sup> WA, 50:312–37; cf. Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 100–105, also 90–93, 111–12.

<sup>169</sup> "O, die Hebräer—ich sag auch von den unsern—judenzen sehr; drum habe ich sie auch in dem Buch, das ich gegen Juden geschrieben habe, auch gemeint." See Martin Luther, *Tischreden in der Mathesischen Sammlung: Aus einer Handschrift der Leipziger Stadtbibliothek*, ed. E. Kroker (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblodt, 1903), 588.

<sup>170</sup> "Denn viel Ebreisten sind, die mehr Rabinisch denn Christisch sind." *Briefwechsel*, WA, 10:457–61, at 461, lines 13–14; *M. Luther, Briefwechsel*, ed. E. L. Enders et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Schriften-Niederlage des Evangelischen Vereins, 1884), 15:274–75.

<sup>171</sup> "Jede Prophezeiung und jeder Prophet muss so verstanden werden, dass sie sich auf Christus, den Herrn, beziehen . . . Einige erklären viele Psalmen nicht prophetisch sondern historisch, indem sie bestimmten hebräischen Rabbinern folgen, die Fälscher und Erfinder der Eitelkeiten der Juden sind." WA, 10:7. See also *Lectures on Genesis*, WA, 42:173–74, 367–77.

## The Position of Martin Luther

Undeniably, not every Christian scholar who studied Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible necessarily became a Judeophile. Luther himself studied Hebrew and taught the Old Testament throughout most of his academic career, and many Hebrew Bible texts were a central topic of his Table-Talks and sermons; he even wrote commentaries on Old Testament books, such as Genesis and Psalms, and introductions to most other books. He also held lectures on Isaiah and the Twelve Minor Prophets, translated the entire Hebrew Bible/Old Testament into German and still did not become rabbinic but rather was a Judeophobe. The reason for this is because Luther made a clear-cut distinction between Biblical Israel, whom he admired and to whom Christians considered themselves to be the legitimate heir and continuation, and the “blind” Talmudic/heretical Jews, whom he despised and whose biblical interpretation he considered as “lies.”

Nonetheless, those Hebraists and some other Christians who followed the early Jewish-Christians and kept some Jewish laws did not lead Luther to change his position toward the Jews in a positive way.<sup>172</sup> Rather, they caused him to sharpen his negative fundamental-theological attitude toward them, which he always kept.<sup>173</sup> Luther’s anti-Semitic assertions regarding Judaism and the Jewish people and their character, as well as his dismissal of not only rabbinic literature and Jewish biblical interpretation but also some of their biblical literary heritage (such as Esther and 2 Maccabees), reflect his general ignorance of Jewish culture, religion, moral values, and ethics, which particularly contributed so much to Christianity and Western culture.<sup>174</sup> Instead of appreciating all of this, Luther targeted it as a threat to Christian culture and wished to silence it.

<sup>172</sup> See Forde, “Luther and the Jews,” 128; cf. Sujin Pak, “Protestant Reformation and the Jews,” 3.

<sup>173</sup> One can argue similarly regarding the Jewish blasphemy that Luther refers to in his publications of 1543, that is, that the Jews defame the Virgin Mary and her son, Jesus. In contrast to the scholars who are listed in the previous note, I find it hard to believe that although the cases were well known from the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 43a, 67a, 104b, 107b), Luther became aware of them just a few years before his death. See Kalimi, “Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther,” 66.

<sup>174</sup> This includes numerous sources regarding ethical and moral values, such as in Gen. 18: 19, 23; Lev. 19:16–19, 32–36; Deut. 25:13–16; Mic. 6:8; and Babylonian Talmud, *Sabbath* 133b. There are many studies on the essence of Judaism; see, e.g., Leon Roth, “Judaism: The Elements,” *Judaism* 7 (1958): 3–13. Indeed, later on several leaders and thinkers admitted this fact. See, e.g., the letter of former president John Adams (1797–1801) to then president Thomas Jefferson, in February 1809: “I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize man than any other nations.” See *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 9, *Letters and State Papers, 1799–1811*, ed. C. F. Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), 609–10. In September 1898, the American writer Mark Twain (1835–1910) stated: “If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. . . . His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.” See Mark Twain, “Concerning the Jews: The Essay,” quoted in *The National Jewish Post and Observer*, June 6, 1984.

## The Journal of Religion

(4) Luther considered himself one of God's messengers and often described himself as a prophet.<sup>175</sup> Did he fear that he would be killed by the Jews as well, whether directly or through some kind of supernatural or magical power? Let us keep in mind that for Luther, who believed in the devil and described the Jews as devils, this was a plausible fear. Luther also believed in a mysterious evil power of Jews and their willingness to hurt him physically. Often, he asserts that the Jews wish to kill all Christians. Note that the Jews were also blamed for making a secret pact with the Turks, serving them as spies and by magical practices.<sup>176</sup> These irrational issues are reflected in his letter of February 1, 1546, where he complained to Katharina von Bora that his sickness and dizziness might be due to having passed by a Jewish neighborhood near Eisleben.<sup>177</sup>

### VI. THE FOUNDATIONS OF LUTHER'S JUDEOPHOBIA

The bases of Luther's destructive anti-Jewish views stem essentially from and are built on the Christian main sacred texts, theological dogmas, and biblical interpretation by which he was educated, grew up, lived, and acted. Luther built on these and added to them his own sharp anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic assertions and methods. Anti-Jewish offensiveness appears already in the New Testament. It is followed and developed by the church fathers, theologians, and exegetes throughout the centuries and launched in Christian writings, beliefs, and opinions through centuries. Verses such as in Matt. 23: 34–37 certainly had a serious effect on a pious Christian believer like Luther: "Therefore, I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the innocent bloodshed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. . . . O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones the messengers sent to her!"<sup>178</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Later on, Luther is considered "the prophet of the Germans" (*der Prophet der Deutschen*). See, e.g., Leppin, *Martin Luther*, 58–69. Leppin compares Luther to the biblical prophets who were engaged in the mission of God and struggled against powerful rulers (58). See also Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 386, 440 n. 59; Norbert Mecklenburg, *Der Prophet der Deutschen: Martin Luther im Spiegel der Literatur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2016). Similarly, John Calvin viewed himself as a prophet and divine messenger of his time.

<sup>176</sup> See Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*, 61–64, esp. 63; on Luther's (and his contemporaries') belief in the devil and its influence, see Oberman, *Martin Luther*, 11–21, 260–84.

<sup>177</sup> See *Briefwechsel*, WA, 11:275–76; and see Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 65 and n. 89.

<sup>178</sup> For the English translation, see the New Revised Standard Version. These verses are connected to the story of Zechariah, who was stoned and killed in Jerusalem's Temple courtyard (2 Chr. 24:20–22), as related in Matt. 23:35. See the detailed discussion by Isaac Kalimi, "The Story about the Murder of the Prophet Zechariah in the Gospels and Its Relation to Chronicles," *Revue Biblique* 116 (2009): 246–61, "Murder in Jerusalem Temple: The Chronicler's Story of Zechariah—Literary and Theological Features, Historical Credibility and Impact," *Revue Biblique* 117 (2010): 200–209, and *Das Chronikbuch und Seine Chronik: Zur Entstehung und Rezeption eines biblischen Buches*, Fuldaer Studien 17 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2013), 74–76.

Luther not only translated these verses into German in the framework of his Bible translation but also wrote a postil on them in 1521,<sup>179</sup> and between 1538 and 1539 he devoted seventeen sermons to Matthew 23.<sup>180</sup> For example, in the early postil, he asks why Jesus should say that the blood of all the righteous from Abel onward should come upon the Jews, even if they were certainly not responsible for all those deaths. He answers that this reflects the *Jewish character* in general: “It is a people, a nature, a race; as the fathers so also the children.”<sup>181</sup> In a sermon on September 21, 1539, he focused on Matt. 23:34 and addressed it directly to the Jews: “You Jews should be the first to whom they [= the apostles, evangelists, and others] were sent, because the Messiah was promised to you. But you will fulfill the measure of your fathers; they struck the prophets, therefore *your house should be laid waste*” (italics mine).<sup>182</sup> Here as well, the sermon as a whole is primarily focused on condemning Christians (esp. Catholic leaders and monks) for rejecting the prophets’ and apostles’ values and encouraging his listeners not to do the same, but it does not include a similar hope for eventual Jewish conversion, as the postil did.

One of the nastiest (and perhaps also the earliest) anti-Jewish statements in the New Testament is 1 Thess. 2:14–16, which was uttered either by Paul himself (ca. 50 CE) or by a later Christian interpolator who “updated” Paul’s letter, sometime after 70 CE: “You [= the Thessalonians] have fared like the congregations in Judea, God’s people in Christ Jesus. You have been treated by your countrymen as they are treated by *the Jews*, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, *the Jews* who are *neglectful of God’s will* and *enemies of their fellowmen*. . . . All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, for the wrath has come upon them at last” (italics mine).<sup>183</sup> Although Luther did not dedicate any sermons or commentaries to this text, he certainly knew it. In one of his earliest publications, *Operationes in Psalmos*, he cites part of 1 Thess. 2:16 to accuse the Jews, both in Paul’s day and his own, of attempting to prevent the salvation of the Gentiles.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Walch, *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, 11:205–19; WA, 10:270–89.

<sup>180</sup> *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, vol. 7, *Auslegung des Neuen Testaments*, 2nd ed., ed. J. G. Walsh (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1987), 1127–270.

<sup>181</sup> Walch, *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, 11:208–9: “Es ist Ein Volk, Eine Art, Ein Geschlecht; wie die Väter, so auch die Kinder.” WA, 10:275.

<sup>182</sup> Walch, *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, 7:1228–37, at 1229: “Ihr Juden sollt die ersten sein, zu welchen sie sollen gesandt werden; den euch ist der Messias verheisen. Aber ihr werdet das Maß eurer Väter erfüllen; sie haben die Propheten erschlagen, darum soll ihr Haus wüste werden.”

<sup>183</sup> See Isaac Kalimi, “The Task of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Theology: Between Judaism and Christianity,” in *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, Jewish and Christian Heritage 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), esp. 115–17.

<sup>184</sup> WA, 5:426, lines 1–8; *Grammatica Theologica: Studien zu Luthers Operationes in Psalmos*, trans. S. Raeder, Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 51 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), 200–201: “So schreibt der Apostel über die Juden an die Thessalonicher, sie hätten zu verhindern gesucht, daß die Apostel den Heiden sagten, wodurch sie selig werden sollten [2 Thess. 2:16a]. Eben das tun in unserem Zeitalter die Aufspürer der häretischen Verkehrtheit (haereticae pravitatis inquisitores), die gottlosesten Unterdrücker der Wahrheit, mit dem Ihrigen.” He repeats the same idea in a 1523 letter (WA, 12:148, lines 4–7), while a letter from 1522 alludes to the verse to compare God’s wrath against the Catholics to that which Paul says about the Jews (WA, 8:677, lines 17–18).

Another example is John 8:44, in which, as part of a dispute between Jesus and certain “Jews,” he states: “You are from your father, the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” Between September 1531 and March 1532 Luther preached thirteen sermons on John 8:1–41; he did not specifically discuss 8:44, but it was certainly known to him.<sup>185</sup>

As a Christian theologian and translator of the New Testament, Luther was undoubtedly aware of and influenced by these and other texts (to say nothing about the statements of several church fathers).<sup>186</sup> These became part and parcel of his theological view of Jews that accompanied him throughout his whole life. Those texts were stated in the heat of rhetoric and disputations between isolated early small Jewish-Christian and Christian communities and normative Jews and those texts ascribed to Jesus. In fact, it is hard to imagine that Jesus, who preached about love, even about love for an enemy (e.g., Matt. 5: 43–48; Rom. 12:14, 20), stated such hurtful things about his own people and culture. They can and should be explained in their sociohistorical and polemical context of their time and place, as several scholars attempt to put them.<sup>187</sup> However, they were understood and used by Luther (and others) literally and fundamentally. They were read as blanket condemnations of all the Jews as a collective ethnic group, although they were expressed in the course of a sharp dispute between small groups of Jews. Furthermore, Luther stretched their lines and made them more extreme, more anti-Semitic, and stigmatized and demonized all Jews as liars, sons of the devil, a “bloodthirsty”

<sup>185</sup> Dr. Martin Luthers *Sämmtliche Schriften*, vol. 8, *Auslegung des Neuen Testaments*, 2nd ed., ed. J. G. Walch (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1987), 124–255.

<sup>186</sup> On these issues see, e.g., Siirala, “Martin Luther and the Jews,” 11–12; Robert Michael, “Antisemitism and the Church Fathers,” in Perry and Schweitzer, *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries*, 101–30, and further secondary literature on p. 130; Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 87–118.

<sup>187</sup> For example, Köstenberger notes that this kind of rhetoric is also found in other Jewish texts of the period, such as Jubilees 15:33, 1QS 1:10 and 1QM; see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 266. Brown remarks that also according to Matthew, Jesus makes similar statements about some of his opponents, although not about “the Jews” in general (e.g., Matt. 13:38–39, 23:15); see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 1:364. Smith states, “Although there were serious differences and debates between them, no such hostility dominated the relationship between the historical Jesus and other Jews. Here we see rather the reflection of the mortal tension between the Johannine community and the Jews who had rejected their claims.” See D. Moody Smith, *John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 186–87. Moloney affirms that “the Jews” in the Fourth Gospel never are the Jewish people as such. The term reflects the Christological polemic that led to the breakdown between the Johannine community and the local synagogue.” Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 282, citing E. Gräber, “Die Juden als Teufelsöhne, in Joh 8,37–47,” in *Der Alte Bund im Neuen: Exegetische Studien zur Israelfrage im Neuen Testament*, Wissenschaftlicher Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 35 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 154–67; cf. Felix Porsch, “Ihr habt den Teufel zum Vater’ (Joh 8,44),” *BiKi* 44 (1989): 50–57.

## The Position of Martin Luther

nation, and the killers of innocent prophets and God's messengers,<sup>188</sup> which climaxed in their rejection of Jesus as Christ and crucifying him. Luther took some individual Jewish murderers and liars as representatives of the national character of all the Jews. He describes the devil himself as a liar and a murderer and compares the Jews to him.<sup>189</sup> As stated above, in *Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen* Luther offered practical solutions and implementations for the Jewish Question, that is, burning their books, synagogues, and houses and enslaving them or expelling them from German territories.

### VII. THE IMPACT OF LUTHER'S JUDEOPHOBIA

The harshness and ruthlessness of the language that Luther has used against the Jews and Judaism is unmatched in any Christian culture or in German history until the first half of the twentieth century. This church reformer, towering theologian, and Bible translator and interpreter—the one who is considered as a German prophet and the teacher of the German nation—has had an immense influence on generations of Christians.<sup>190</sup> To cite Plutarch (*Moralia* 1:10a), “a word is a deed's shadow.” Thus, Luther's offensive words against the Jews and Judaism became evil actions of Jew haters during the time.

Indeed, the historical impact of Luther's Judeophobia and anti-Semitism, particularly on German and Jewish societies and cultures, should be carefully scrutinized in a comprehensive self-standing study. Although this task is not the scope of this study and it is not my intention to draw a direct link between Luther and the Holocaust, still it is impossible to excuse him completely and inevitable to refer to his impact on German National Socialism and the performance of his anti-Semitic heritage. Anti-Semitism was part of the National Socialist Party's policy from the 1920s, and that policy was put into practice from 1933 to 1945. Even though the National Socialist Party was a secular movement that was immersed in racial anti-Semitism, it still considered Luther—as Luther considered himself—the prophet of the Germans and used Luther's religious and racist anti-Semitism for its own anti-Jewish propaganda. Luther's anti-Semitic writings played an important role in Nazi propaganda and were in fact a model for Hitler's Final Solution (*Endlösung*). There are clear-cut parallels between Luther's—but not any other sixteenth-century reformers'—suggestions on how to oppress the Jews and the Nazis' performance of them. Luther's statements were systematically and completely implemented by the Nazis, over much of Europe and North Africa. It was no coincidence that on the anniversary of Luther's birthday (November 10,

<sup>188</sup> See, e.g., Matt. 5:12; Luke 11:47–51, 13:34; 16:31; Acts 7:52; Heb. 11:36–37.

<sup>189</sup> Sometimes he associates the devil also with the pope or Catholics (e.g., WA, 30.3:279; 54:234, lines 2–3) or Thomas Müntzer or the peasant's rebellion (WA, 18:357).

<sup>190</sup> Johann Gottlieb Herder considered Luther “as Ecclesiastes, as preachers and teachers of the German nation” (*als Ecclesiastes, als Prediger und Lehrer der deutschen Nation*). See *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913), 17:87–88.

## The Journal of Religion

1483) the Nazis initiated their purge of German Jews.<sup>191</sup> On the so-called *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass, but in fact *Reichspogromnacht*, Night of Pogrom), early evening of November 9 that continued into the night of November 10, 1938, the Nazis destroyed thousands of synagogues, Jewish houses, cemeteries, and businesses and imprisoned and murdered numerous Jews. The choice to burn synagogues and round up the Jews just on that anniversary was most likely deliberately modeled on Luther's proposals. There is much evidence for a connection between the *Reichspogromnacht* and Luther's practical anti-Semitic advice in his *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*. For example, two weeks after the *Reichspogromnacht*, Martin Sasse, the Lutheran Landesbishop of Thuringia, published a manifesto named *Martin Luther über die Juden—Weg mit ihnen!* (*Martin Luther regarding the Jews—Away with Them!*), which introduces a summary of the worst statements from Luther's *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* with this statement: "On the 10th of November 1938, on Luther's birthday, the synagogues are burning in Germany. . . . At this hour the voice of the man must be heard, who as the German prophet of the 16th century once began as a friend of the Jews due to ignorance, but who was driven by his conscience, experience and by reality to become the greatest anti-Semite of his time, the one who warned his people about the Jews."<sup>192</sup> In November 1938, a German official asserted that "the wicked Nazis have simply carried out the instruction of Luther. The synagogues have been burnt, just as the father of Protestantism required."<sup>193</sup> In April 29, 1946, the chief editor of the anti-Semitic paper *Der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher, referred during the Nuremberg process to Martin Luther, who asserted even worse about the Jews.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, there was a dramatic Luther renaissance in the Third Reich.<sup>195</sup> Thus, for example, in 1939 Heinrich Bornkamm, who served as the war theologian and president of the Evangelical League to the "Führer,"

<sup>191</sup> The official justification given by the Nazis was (as Goebbels's diary attests) the assassination of German diplomat to France, Ernst vom Rath, by the Polish-Jewish Herschel Feibel Grynszpan. See Peter Longerich, *The Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.

<sup>192</sup> See Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther," 71 and n. 118. Hartmut Lehmann, "Luther und die Juden: Stolpersteine auf dem Weg zur Fünfhundertjahrfeier der Reformation 2017," in *Martin Luther im Widerstreit der Konfessionen: Historische und theologische Perspektiven*, ed. Christian Danz and Jan-Heiner Tück (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2017), 428–42, esp. 428–31, 436–37, 439–40, and additional references there.

<sup>193</sup> Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 177.

<sup>194</sup> On this issue, see Peter F. Wiener, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor* (London: Hutchinson, 1945); William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960); Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know: The History of Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Museum*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 8; Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Antisemitism: Against His Better Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), xi.

<sup>195</sup> See Mecklenburg, *Der Prophet der Deutschen*, 158–63. Mecklenburg (162) asserts this with reference to Lenz in 1917 (Max Lenz, *Luther und der deutsche Geist* [Hamburg: Broschek, 1917]) and Ritter in 1941 (Gerhard Ritter, "Luther und der deutsche Geist" [1941], in his *Die Weltwirkung der Reformation* [Leipzig, 1942; repr., Munich: Beck, 2017], 70–101).



## The Position of Martin Luther

asked Evangelical Christians for “obedience and willingness to make sacrifices.”<sup>196</sup> Bornkamm wrote several articles “that tie Luther and the German spirit together one with the other” (tiefes, verborgenes Wurzelgeflecht, das Luther und das deutsche Wesen miteinander verbindet). He finds a direct line between the state thinking of Luther, Bismarck, and Hitler. According to Bornkamm, the German people learned their attitude toward war from Luther, who considered it as “an event that itself is divine.” Bornkamm stressed that the “National Socialist ideas” prove in their “authenticity for us Germans that it extends to the deepest sources of the Reformation.” He ends with the sentence from Ritter’s Luther biography: “He [= Luther] is us: the eternal German.”<sup>197</sup>

Certainly, the main lines of Luther’s attitude toward the Jews were theological—for good or bad—and especially in his later writings are all colored with the ethnic-racist characterization of the Jews as a whole. The German Nazis looked to Luther’s anti-Semitic legacy and infused into it their own particular racist agenda. They used it to implement Luther’s practical advice and justified it by their own plans to persecute the Jews. Luther wished to convert the Jews to the Christian religion and to integrate them into society or to oppress them very intensively and lead to their very end. The Nazis, however, did not even leave a place for conversion. They persecuted not only the current Jews but all those who were converted to Christianity three generations earlier, for they have “non-pure Aryan blood.” Thus, the Motherland of the Reformation was empty of Jews, and Luther’s dream to create Germany and German society without Jews was fulfilled in the so-called Third Reich, although not for a long time.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

A variety of factors contributed to Luther’s portrayals of Jews over the course of his career: from a somewhat conditional positive approach for a limited time to a totally negative, anti-Semitic, and anthropophobic one. This article critically reviews some earlier explanations on these issues in the scholarship and reveals their narrowness, insufficiency, or apologetic tendency. It suggests several fresh clarifications about Luther’s early positive approach (his Judeophilia) and about his negative approach (his Judeophobia). It demonstrates that Luther’s sympathetic behavior toward the Jews does not stem from his humanism or moral values, but it rather was an outcome of his religious, practical, and political agenda. It was just another side of his rebellion against the Roman Church and the pope: he wished to unite all German speakers

<sup>196</sup> “Gehorsam und Opferbereitschaft.” See Günter Brakelmann, *Kirche im Krieg* (Munich: Kaiser, 1979), 132–33.

<sup>197</sup> “Er ist wir selber: der ewige Deutsche”; see Gerhard Ritter, *Luther: Gestalt und Symbol* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1925), 151. See also Heinrich Bornkamm, “Volk und Rasse bei Martin Luther,” in *Volk, Staat, Kirche* (Giessen: Topelmann, 1933), 5–19; Günter Brakelmann, “Luthers Bedeutung für die deutsche Kultur,” *Die Wartburg* 32 (1933): 355–62; Hans Preus, *Martin Luther: Der Prophet* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1933); Günter Brakelmann, *Luther und der deutsche Geist* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934), 4, 9, 11–13, 20.

## The Journal of Religion

under the umbrella of one strong newly reformed Christianity. Further, he attempted to achieve the conversion of the Jews by positive methods, something the popes failed to achieve by violence and brutality. Perhaps he also hoped to accomplish some economic advantages that could grease the wheels of the reformation with Jewish financial assistance. Luther's scholarly activities of teaching, preaching, writing, and translating the Hebrew Bible and studying Hebrew, his new measures for the study of Scriptures, and his being a former Augustinian monk influenced by Augustine's attitude toward Jews (for missionary purposes) contributed to keep this approach, although for just a short period and conditionally.

Luther's Judeophobia and anti-Semitism cannot be dismissed due to his being weak, old, and ill or experiencing personal trauma. They rather had been a factor in Luther's theological education, thought, and personal character for a long time, independent of physical or spiritual difficulties at the end of his life. The comparison of Luther with several of his contemporary reformers and theologians discloses that his harsh anti-Jewishness cannot be dismissed as a typical feature of his place and time. Some of Luther's negative assertions about Jews have parallels with other contemporary reformers, theologians, and thinkers. However, there are essential unparalleled accusations, brutal advice, anti-Semitic assertions, and acts that are unique to him. Besides, there were others who behaved differently, and some of them even protected the Jews.

The church's oppression of Jews did not lead to their acceptance of Christianity. In 1523 Luther attempted to achieve this goal peacefully and gave it some time. His failure to convert the Jews took him not only back to the traditional awful oppression policy of the church but also to a harsher and more terrible version of it. Luther accentuated and aggravated the well-known church methods even more. A great deal of Luther's antagonism toward Jews and Judaism was always there, before and during his "friendly" time and much more forcefully and cruelly after it, in fact until his last day on earth. There was no genuine modification of Luther's basic extreme position toward Jews in his entire life. His antipathy to Judaism and his anti-Jewishness accompanied him almost always.

Luther's negative approach to Jews and Judaism is the result of not a single but rather several factors that were combined. His reading of the Christian Scriptures—the Old as well as the New Testaments—and traditional Christian anti-Jewish theology seem to be at the root, joined by several additional causes: Luther's political agenda to use Jews as scapegoats in order to appease his audience; his aggressive personal character; his disappointment with the Jewish refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah; his fear of a religious-spiritual influence of Jewish literature and biblical interpretation on Christian scholars, considering it as a threat to Christianity; and his irrational horror of "Jewish mystical power" hurting him. Luther's ignorance of Jewish literature, religion, and culture may add to this package. His anti-Semitic manifestos reflect much broader and deeper factors that came to a climax toward the end of his career but did

## The Position of Martin Luther

not begin there. These manifestos had disastrous consequences and are the prehistory of the systematic annihilation of a large number of European and some North African Jews in the twentieth century. As a theologian and reformer of his stature, Luther had another choice: he could have reformed and advanced religious tolerance and humanism in the European society and could have led his followers in a positive direction as shown by his own positive writings about Jews. Luther failed to turn a new and constructive historical page between the sister religions. All in all, the Reformation was not a time of progress or religious liberty for Jews but an inflammation of hatred against them by its founder.

### APPENDIX

#### *Martin Luther's Attitude toward Handicapped Children*

Luther considered children with physical and/or mental handicaps worthless and felt that it is better to get rid of them. For example, there was a twelve-year-old invalid child in Dessau who assaulted Luther. He described the child as one who “eats, shits, and pees, and when he is attacked, he screams.” Luther said to the Princes of Anhalt: “If I were a prince or a lord, I would take this child and throw him into the water, into the Moldau [river], which flows near Dessau. I want to risk the homicide on it!” But the Princes of Anhalt rejected his suggestion. Then Luther asked Christians to pray that God will take the child, and in the following year the child died.<sup>198</sup> Another Table-Talk from the years 1531–35 states:

There was a debate and exchange about the wonderful, strange, monstrous births that women sometimes get, D. M. L. [= Doctor Martinus Luther] said about a woman who gave birth to a child who looked like a rat mouse, who had been running around and wanted to go under the bench into a mouse hole crawl. . . . But when someone said he could not believe it; “Yes,” said D. M. L., “you do not know yet what the powers of the mind are!” And when someone asked: “Would one also baptize such monsters and beasts?” he said: “No, because I consider them only for unreasonable animals that have nothing but life and can stir and move like other beasts.” When another asked further: “Do they also have a soul?” he said: “I do not know; I did not ask God about it.”<sup>199</sup>

<sup>198</sup> See *Tischreden*, WA, 5, no. 5207, 8–9: “Vor acht Jahren war zu Dessau eines, das ich Doctor Martinus Luther gesehen und angegriffen hab, welches zwölf Jahr alt war . . . , es wäre ein recht Kind. Desselbige thät nichts, denn daß es nur fraß. . . . Es fraß, schiß und seichte, und wenn mans angriff, so schrie es. . . . Da sagte ich [i.e., Luther] zu den Fürsten zu Anhalt: Wenn ich da Fürst oder Herr wäre, so wollte ich mit diesem Kinde in das Wasser, in die Molda, so bei Dessau fleußt, und wollte das homicidium dran wagen! . . . Aber der Kurfürst zu Sachsen, so mit zu Dessau war, und die Fürsten zu Anhalt wollten mir nicht folgen. Da sprach ich: So sollten sie in der Kirchen die Christen ein Vater Unser beten lassen, daß der liebe Gott den Teufel wegnehme. Das thäte man täglich zu Dessau; da starb das selbige Wechselkind im andern Jahre darnach.”

<sup>199</sup> See *Tischreden*, WA, 1, no. 323, 133–34: “Da von wunderbarlichen, seltsamen, ungeheuren Geburten, so von Weibern bisweilen kommen, disputiert und geredt ward, sagte D. M. L. von einem Weibe, das ein Kind wie eine Rattenmaus zur Welt gebracht, die war umher gelaufen und hätte unter der Bank in ein Mäuseloch wollen kriechen. . . . Da aber einer sagte, er könnit es nicht gläuben; ‘Ja’, sprach D. M. L., ‘Du weisst noch nicht, was die Kräfte des Gemüths sind!’ Und da einer fragte: ‘ob man auch solche Monstra und Ungeheure sollte täufen?’ sagte er: ‘Nein, denn ich halte es nur für unvernünftige Thiere, die nichts denn das Leben haben und sich regen und bewegen können wie andere Bestien.’ Da ein Ander weiter fragte: ‘Ob sie auch ein Seele hätten?’ sprach er: ‘Ich weiss nicht; ich habe Gott nicht drüm gefragt.’” See also *Tischreden*, WA, 4, no. 4513, 357–58.