

Proposal

Title – Martin Luther’s Attitude toward the Jews and Its Alleged Effects on Adolf Hitler

Program of Study – Master of Divinity: Church History Cognate

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Martin Luther’s supposed shift of opinion of the Jewish people, and what impact—if any—his later and seemingly harsh comments toward the Jews had upon Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, will be discussed in this paper. To the average reader, Martin Luther seems to be much more tolerant of (and even friendly toward) the Jews in his earlier years. However, toward the end of his life, Luther suggested the raiding of Jewish homes, the destruction of their synagogues, the confiscation of their religious writings, and the revocation of their right to practice usury. When interpreting Luther’s comments toward the Jews, it is imperative to understand and consider the social context of the 16th Century, a time when anti-Semitism was rampant amongst several European countries. Likewise, it is of utmost importance for one to realize that such comments were derived from a religious conviction, not a racial one; Luther’s anger resulted from the Jews’ constant rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, their self-righteousness, and his (Luther’s) belief that they posed a threat to Christendom. However, some historians will claim that Luther’s frustration fueled the Jewish persecution under the Nazi regime. This study will examine Martin Luther’s attitude toward the Jews by chronologically tracing his remarks toward them. Also, the anti-Semitic social context in which Luther was raised and lived will be given attention. Hitler’s admiration and quotation of Luther in support of his anti-Semitic ideology will also be examined in an attempt to understand whether or not Luther’s statements influenced Hitler’s persecution of the Jews. Through the study of the social context of the 16th Century, Martin Luther’s remarks on the Jewish people, and whether or not such comments resulted in the formation of Adolf Hitler’s

hatred of the Jews, historians can more accurately deduce that Luther's statements stemmed, not from a racially driven animosity, but from a religious anger, resulting from the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah.