LIBERTY BAPTIST SEMINARY

CHURCH HISTORY

A Thesis

Submitted to
the Department of Church History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

with a major in Church History

By

JAY FLETCHER

Lynchburg, Virginia
May, 1984
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM TO A.D. 1000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. THE LATE MIDDLE AGES</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. FROM HUMANISM TO REFORMATION</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. MARTIN LUTHER: EVANGELIST TO THE JEWS</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. LUTHER'S NEW APPROACH</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. WHY LUTHER CHANGED</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. THE OTHER REFORMERS AND THE JEWS</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY                                                              98
INTRODUCTION

What then shall we Christians do with this damned, rejected race of Jews? Since they live among us and we know about their lying and blasphemy and cursing, we cannot tolerate them if we do not wish to share in their lies, curses, and blasphemy. In this way we cannot quench the inextinguishable fire of divine rage, nor convert the Jews. We must prayerfully and reverently practice a merciful severity, so that you and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden - the Jews.¹ - Martin Luther, 1543.

Martin Luther's remarks as noted above were directed to the princes and nobles of Germany. Four hundred years later a German prince named Adolf Hitler wrote, "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."² It is a sad fact that the Nazi propaganda experts found much in Luther's writings to weave the net of hatred that so readily engulfed the German people.

History links Hitler to Luther. But is this the true legacy of Luther's attitude toward the Jews? This question prompted this writer to ponder if the saving grace of Jesus Christ was able to permeate sixteenth century man's monstrous hatred for the Jewish people. What then was the attitude of Luther and his fellow first generation reformers toward the Jewish people living in their time? Why did they have this attitude? And did this


attitude affect the reformers' evangelistic outreach to the Jews?

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the attitude of the reformers toward the Jews did not affect the desire of the reformers to evangelize them. Most certainly, if this disposition was negative, on even a subconscious level, it would adversely affect a successful evangelistic endeavor. This, of course, was the case, since every man's thinking is molded by his culture, and the culture of Medieval Europe secreted antisemitism.

It is important to examine the topic because all men are subject to the venom of prejudice. Hence, every Christian should evaluate his attitude toward ethnic groups, especially in the light of an attempt to evangelize them. We can glean much from a study on the Reformers, emulating their virtues and avoiding their errors.

When examining the writing of the Reformers as they discussed the Jewish problem, it becomes evident that they expressed ambivalent feelings. On the one hand they demonstrate a heartfelt desire to see the Jews come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and on the other hand we find them slinging malicious denunciations and calling for barbaric, vindictive assaults on both life and property. It thus becomes the task of this writer to explain this paradox, for the explanation will determine if the Reformers truly wished to evangelize the Jew or if they were only giving lip service to Paul's proclamation:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes; for the Jew first, and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).³

³All scriptural quotations will be taken from the New King James Version.
It is necessary, therefore, to examine in some detail the progression of a religion that began with an almost exclusively Jewish adherence, and evolved to a state of universal repulsion for the non-converted Jew. The concept of Jews being contemptible did not raise its ugly head overnight. It took centuries to gradually produce a culture saturated with such a vigorous antagonism toward Jews.

After the culture of the Reformers is fully examined in its relationship to Judaism and Jewish people in particular, the Reformers' attitudes and actions will be examined individually. Their desire or lack of true desire to evangelize the Jews will thus be judged.

It is the intention of this thesis to establish that these early Reformers, although so influenced by their culture as to be basically antisemitic, were sympathetic to the need to evangelize the Jewish people. Hence, the sanctifying power of the blood of Christ can and did break down the sin of prejudice and hatred.
CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM TO A.D. 1000

The antisemitism of the pagan world, whether expressed in outbreaks of violence or rioting or in ideological diatribes and libels, did not hold such fateful consequences for Jews as that which later crystallized within Christianity.4

As Christianity expanded into pagan Europe, the seeds of antisemitism began to germinate. By the year 1000, the weed had choked reason and logic, and the stage was set for the crusades and their ensuing parade of terror and death. This chapter is an attempt to trace this cancerous growth from its roots in misinterpreting Scripture to the dawn of the crusades.

Christianity, properly understood, does not negate Israel. His people have not been forsaken or cast away by God. It is God's purpose that all of Israel will be saved (Matt. 5:17, Rom. 11:1,26). The synagogue, however, resented these claims and Judaism's replacement was greatly accentuated. This weakening of relations was greatly accelerated by the interpretation of both Christians and Jews of passages in the New Testament as antisemitic in their intention. The most quoted verse is, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44). It is easy to see how this verse was misinterpreted.

The Jews' resentment mounted as the first century progressed. This is well documented in the book of Acts. It is

---

unanimously reported that Barnabas died at the hands of the Jews of Cyprus in A.D. 60. This type of persecution was strong, but sporadic. "The Jewish initiative did not enter into the category of general persecution." It must be noted that many Jewish voices protested these acts of violence and during early Roman persecutions of Christians, Jews are reported to have given Christians asylum in their synagogues. "There are cases confirmed by archeology, where Christian martyrs were buried in Jewish cemeteries." The Great War (A.D. 66-70) and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem proved to be a turning point for Judaeo-Christian relations. As the war began, Christians left Jerusalem for Pella, there to remain for the duration of the war. To the Jews, this act of disloyalty left no doubt in their minds that this new movement had disassociated itself from not only the practice of the law, but also from Jewish nationalism. But the Christians saw the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy in the destruction of the Temple. This only served to confirm their belief that the scepter had passed from Israel to the church. This new awareness on both sides served to increase tensions. 

The definitive separation for the Jew came in A.D. 80 when the Sanhedrin decided to send a series of letters to the

7 Flannery, op. cit., p. 28.
8 Ibid.,
Diaspora that in effect constituted a formal and final excommunication of Christians from the synagogue. 9

Even after their excommunication from the synagogue, many Hebrew Christians still hoped that the Jews would come to the Savior. "It was not until A.D. 130, when a majority of Jews, including the influential Rabbi Akiba, hailed Bar Kovba as the Messiah that hopes were finally dashed." 10 The Jews had revolted, feeling secure that their Messiah would break the chains of Rome. "The revolt was quenched, but only after the Romans had wreaked fearful vengeance upon the Palestinian Jews. A poll tax was levied and circumcision and observance of the Sabbath forbidden." 11

Christians saw this decline of Judaism as a sure sign for the validity of their faith. Jews were only bitter. The Christian attitude was stiffening. The refusal of Jews to enter the church "was regarded more and more as blindness and malice." 12

As Jewish bitterness in many cases turned to hatred, sporadic violence ensued. "It is reported that "in A.D. 155 at Smyrna when St. Polycarp was condemned to be burned, Jews gathered faggots for the pyre as was usual with them." 13 Justin wrote speaking of Jews: "You hate us and when you have the power

---

10 Ibid.
11 Daniel Fuchs, How to Reach the Jew for Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943), p. 72.
12 Flannery, op. cit., p. 30.
13 Ibid., p. 33.
you kill us." Tertullian wrote: "Jews are the seed plot of all calumines against us." Origen later wrote: "Jews rage against Christians with an insatiable fury." Rabbinical animosity towards the church was also increasing as this rapidly growing church coupled with the sharp demise of Judaism, both nationally and religiously, threatened Judaism's very existence.

It is understandable that the Jews feared and even hated Christians. But why would a rising star, such as Christianity, fear and later hate a fallen discredited band of exiles? The church from its inception was plagued with those who would attempt to draw the church back into Judaism. They used their persuasive powers armed with the Old Testament laws to turn Christians from trusting in the grace of God to trusting in the law. The book of Galatians was written especially to counteract this error. Paul wrote: "I do not set aside the Grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:21). Ignatius, writing to the saints at Philadelphia, later warns them against those who Judaize. He likened them to those who are "like tombstones and graves inscribed merely with the names of men."  

From this Judaizing influence in the church, Paul's worst fears ("I am afraid for you, lest I have labored in vain," Gal. 4:11) were realized in some quarters. The following heresies, 

---

15 Flannery, op. cit., p. 32.
16 Parkes, op. cit., p. 124.
17 Cited by Flannery, p. 31.
robbing thousands from the faith, found their roots in the practice of Judaizing: Ebionitism, Gnosticism, Nazarenism, Elkasites, Symmachians and Cerenthians.  

It was during these early years of the church that the teaching of contempt originated. There are three main themes in the teaching.

1. The dispersion of the Jews as a providential punishment for the crucifixion.

2. At the time of Jesus the religion of Israel was mere legalism without a soul.

3. The crime of deicide.  

Time and time again, the church fathers alluded to these themes. Throughout the centuries their tales were told and retold. To make matters worse, preachers, when expounding the word of God, were quick to point out the descriptions (God's own descriptions of the Jew) that were most unflattering. The Christians claimed the heroes and virtuous characters of the Old Testament as their very own. These Christian Moseses and Abrahams received praise and honor. The promises of blessings and rewards were claimed by the Christians. On the other hand, the villains and idolators were always the Jews. The Jews were recipients of threats and denunciations. 

It is only natural that the fear of Judaizing and the proselytism of Judaism, coupled with preachers of contempt ("Trib-

---

18 Flannery, op. cit., p. 42.


ulations were justly imposed upon you Jews for you have murdered the just one" - Justin Martyr) led not only to ecclesiastical decisions, but civil laws to regulate Christian-Jewish relationships.

Even the earliest of church councils reflects the fear.

Many councils - diocesan, provincial, national, and ecumenical - have dealt with matters that concerned the Jews. The very first ecumenical council, that of Nicaea (325), called primarily for the purpose of defining the nature of Jesus, also had before it the problem of transferring the day of rest from the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday, a problem not solved for a long time after. Even before Nicaea, a council in Elvira (Spain c. 305) had tried to keep Jews and Christians apart by ordering the latter not to share a meal with Jews, not to marry Jews, not to use Jews to bless their fields, and not to observe the Jewish Sabbath. These objective remained constant for centuries.

After A.D. 321, the emperors began to translate the concepts and claims of the theologians and preachers into practice. The ancient privileges granted Jews under Roman law were gradually withdrawn. Under the laws of Constantius August 13, 339, we find that intermarriage between a Jew and a Christian was prohibited. This offense was punishable by death of the husband if he was the Jewish party. Jews were also prohibited from owning a Christian slave.

The last half of the fourth century marked a sharp turn toward intolerance and virulent attacks that shaped the face of


22Encyclopedia Judaica, S.V. "Church Councils" by Soloman Goldfield.

Christianity with the scar of antisemitism.

Gregory of Nyssa describes the Jews as:

Slayers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, enemies of God, haters of God, adversaries of grace, enemies of their fathers' faith, advocates of the devil, brood of vipers, slanderers, scoffers, men of darkened minds, leaven of the Pharisees, congregation of demons, sinners, wicked men, stoners and haters of goodness.24

Jerome reflects his attitude toward the Jews in the following series of remarks: "Serpents, haters of all men; their image is Judas, and their psalms and prayers are the braying of donkeys; he states that they curse Christians in their synagogues.25

As bad as this seems, it is dwarfed by John Chrysostom, who in his zeal to end the flow of Jewish theological influence upon the church of Antioch, sets a new low for a Christian preacher's effort to abase and slander a people. The following is a sampling of what Chrysostom accused the Jew of: "Their rapine, their cupidity, their deception of the poor, being lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits; having the manners of a pig and the lusty goat, getting drunk to kill and maim one another, murdering their offspring and immolating them to the devil."26 He describes the synagogue as "a house of prostitution, the domicile of the devil, an assembly of criminals and a den of thieves."27 He went on to say, "God hates the Jews and

24 Cited by Flannery, p. 47.
25 Ibid.
26 Cited by Flannery, p. 48.
27 Ibid.
always hated the Jews - It is the duty of Christians to hate the Jews. He who can never love Christ enough will never have done fighting against those Jews who hate Him. 28

Ambrose of Milan, when accused in 388 of burning the Synagogue of Milan, denied the responsibility for the arson and wrote:

Though it is true that he has not burnt down the Synagogue of Milan, it is only laziness on his part, and the fact that God has already destroyed it Himself. But it would be a glorious act to do so that there might be no place where Christ is denied. 29

Hence, the Fathers have passed the name-calling stage and are now condoning acts of violent crime against the Jew. It is interesting that five years later, Theodosius issued an order to the Count of the East to punish any Christian who attacked and destroyed synagogues. 30 This may indicate that in some cases, the civil authorities proved more tolerant of the Jews than the fathers.

Augustine, who does not appear to have had any personal contact with the Jew, offers his theological insights that set the standard for theologians and their attitudes toward the Jews for over one thousand years. "In his 'Sermon Against the Jews,' he asserts that even though they deserve the most severe punishment for having put Jesus to death, they have been kept alive by Divine Providence to serve, together with their scriptures as

28 Ibid., pp. 48-49.
30 Marcus, op. cit., p. 107.
witnesses to the truth of Christianity."  

The final accounting of antisemitism through the fourth century was a reaction to a sometimes violent and assertive Judaism. The stubborn refusal to join the ranks of Christ stood forth as a scandal to the Christian faithful and a source of worry for the Bishops, who were alarmed by the Judaizing existing within their churches. Antisemitism was thus not rooted in the scriptures, or in orthodox Christian doctrine, but rather in pastoral zeal that snowballed beyond Christian limitations, resorting to all human means to find an answer to the Jewish problem.

For the next six hundred years, the progress of antisemitism seems to have abated. On the popular and often the ecclesiastical and political level, the Jew fared well. In this era there was no popular or economic antisemitism. The Jews for the most part had adopted a separation stance as far as religion was concerned and were no-longer viewed as being a violent and assertive people.

However, there are some major issues that must be addressed in this transitional time. Ecclesiastical and civil laws were still being passed to protect the population from the feared Jewish influence on the church.

In 589, at the Council of Toledo III, it was decreed that children of mixed marriages had to be Christians, that Jews could not be appointed to positions of authority, i.e. hold pub-

---

lic office, and were not permitted to circumcise their slaves. 32

Gregory I went a step further in the continuing endeavor to eliminate the possibility of Christians being influenced by Jews. "He made it illegal for Christians to consult Jewish doctors; the clergy was forbidden to employ Jewish clerks; secular rulers were warned against seeking the advice of Jews or employing them in positions in which they would hold power over Christians." 33

Moderate and fair-minded, Gregory did all in his power to avoid any greater tensions in the relations between Christians and Jews because he was much concerned with the latter's conversion. He, however, insisted that no pressure must be employed to persuade Jews to convert. This, of course, implies that forced baptisms were unorthodox. He wrote to Bishop Paschalis of Naples: "If we wish to win new converts for Christianity, we must proceed with kindness and must not use harshness; for otherwise vexation will repel even those whose souls might by reason have approached close to Christianity." 34

Consequently, he was an opponent of all fanaticism. "He vigorously opposed physical persecution of the Jews, strongly reprimanded all arbitrary acts, and upheld the autonomy of the Jewish community government." 35

32 Solomon Goldfield, "Church Councils."
34 Ibid., p. 124.
In a circular letter, he instructed the Church:

Just as it is not befitting to permit the Jews in their communities to go beyond the boundaries of what is permissible by law, so also the rights they already hold should not be diminished. We forbid burdening and oppressing the Jews, contrary to the existing ordinances, and permit them to live under the same conditions as Romans and to hold their property without restrictions, except that they must not own Christian slaves.36

Gregory commanded great respect and immense authority. Hence, he wielded a decisive influence on the official Catholic policy toward the Jews for the rest of the Middle Ages. The problem was, as the years passed, papal policy was often heeded more in principle than actual practice.

Justinian I, emperor of the Roman Empire, helped to shape the destiny of Judaism in this era. He formulated legislation, termed the Justinian Code, that seriously affected the situation of the Jews and inspired future antisemitic legislation.

There were over fifty... statutes of the Theodosian Code which dealt with Judaism. Justinian retained less than half, eliminating many of those protecting Jewish rights, notably, the statute conceding Judaism's legal existence. The slavery laws were tightened; a Jew absolutely could not own a Christian slave; Jewish property rights were narrowed; Jews were barred from public functions, excepting the decurionate, and also from the practice of law; they were also prevented from testifying against a Christian.37

This legislation paved the way for future encroachments on Jewish rights. Four years after the code was chronicled, such an abuse occurred in Borion in North Africa. Judaism was

36 Ibid.
37 Flannery, op. cit., p. 66.
outlawed, synagogues were closed, and Jews were forced into being baptized.  

This action set an ominous precedent and the Jew, under this code, was without legal recourse against it. In 694, at the Council of Toledo XVII, all those practicing Judaism were to be reduced to slavery, their children were taken from them and raised Christians. These kinds of abuses were, however, uncommon for most of Europe due to the fact that the Jews were an indispensable factor in the economy.

The stage was now set for the crusades. Antisemitism was imbedded into the heart of both the church and the state. With few rights, the Jews were left to be at the mercy of popular opinion and economic opportunists.

38 Ibid., p. 67.
39 Ibid.
40 Goldfield, "Church Councils."
THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

To find a year more fateful in the history of Judaism than 1096 would necessitate going back a thousand years to the fall of Jerusalem or forward to the genocide of Hitler. Though often surpassed by other years in the volume of atrocities, 1096 marks the beginning of a harassment of the Jews, that in duration and intensity, was unique in Jewish history. It was the year of the First Crusade. 41

The call to crusade, which resulted in the first of four expeditions to recover Jerusalem for Christianity, was made by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095. "Its chief popular advocate was Peter the Hermit." 42 Whole nations were seized by the call to revenge Christ's desecrated sepulcher and other holy places. Thousands left their homes to join the war against the unbelievers. 43

These crusaders were constantly endued by preachers, including Peter the Hermit, with an enthusiasm for liberating Jerusalem "and especially the landmarks of the crucifixion. A concentration upon the sufferings of Christ, and therefore upon Jews as his original tormentors aroused an antagonism toward the Jews which rivaled, if not surpassed, any enmity toward the Moslems, who were the immediate targets of the crusader." 44

41 Flannery, op. cit., p. 90.


43 Keller, op. cit., p. 201.

With the long latent hatred for Jews for killing Christ now rekindled in the passions of the common people, it was not surprising that the violent reaction took place. As these mobs of undisciplined zealots marched through cities with Jewish populations, they said to one another as recorded by a Jewish chronicle of the times:

Now we are setting forth to take our revenge upon the Ishmaelites, but even here we come upon the Jews whose forefathers crucified our Saviour. Let us first of all take revenge upon them. Let the name of Israel be annihilated if they refuse to be like us and acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.45

Guibert of Nogent reported the crusaders as saying: "We desire to combat the enemies of God in the East; but we have under our eyes the Jews, a race more inimical to God than all the others. We are doing this whole thing backwards."46 So they set out to revenge Christ, and from May to July of 1096 twelve thousand Jews were killed in the Rhine Provinces.47

Many Jews, in order to save their lives, accepted Christian baptism. When the Emperor, Henry IV, heard the reports of murder and forced baptisms, he was filled with anger and "abhorrence for what had happened." He "ordained that all Jews baptized by coercion should be permitted to return to Judaism with impunity."48 He also began an investigation to find and punish the murderers.

46 Flannery, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
48 Ibid.
Upon hearing of the act of Jews once baptized returning to Judaism, Pope Clement III, being indignant, wrote the Bishop of Banberg: "We have heard that the baptized Jews have been permitted to apostatize from the Church. This is something outrageous and sinful, and we require you and all our brothers to ascertain that the sacrament of the church is not desecrated." To his credit, Henry IV refused to forego his stand.

The Crusades lasted almost two hundred years, during which time untold multitudes of European Jews were massacred. Only a few popes raised any objections. St. Bernard bluntly summarized the facts when he wrote that "the Crusades were first and last a papal enterprise."50

Bernard, however, did see the sin of the church. He wrote concerning the Monk, Rudolph's preaching:

It is noble of you to wish to go forth against the Ishmaelites, still, whoever touches a Jew so as to lay hands on his life, does something as sinful as if he laid hands on Jesus himself. My disciple, Rudolph, who has spoken against them to exterminate them, has preached only unrighteousness, for, concerning them it stands written in the Book of Psalms: Do not kill them; let my people not be forgotten.51

The great French scholastic, Peter Abelard, served as a voice crying in this wilderness. Writing in 1135, he depicts the conditions the Jew was forced to live under after the church sanctioned by silence his slaughter.

49 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
No nation has ever undergone such sufferings for God. Scattered among all the nations, having neither king nor secular prince, the Jews are oppressed with heavy taxes as if they must buy their lives anew every day. To mistreat Jews is regarded as work pleasing to God. For Christians can only explain such imprisonment as the Jews suffer as the result of God's hatred of them. The lives of the Jews are in the hands of their fiercest foes. Even in sleep they are not spared terrifying dreams. Except for heaven, they have no safe refuge. When they wish to travel to the nearest town, they must pay large sums of money to buy the protection of Christian princes who, in truth, desire their death in order to seize their inheritance. The Jews are not permitted to own fields and vineyards because there is no one to guarantee their possession. Thus the only livelihood that remains to them is usury, and this, in turn, excites the hatred of the Christians. 

The tone for the rest of the Middle Ages had been set. The crime of deicide was the war cry. "For the first time a wide rift had opened between Jewry and Christendom in the West." The protections rendered by ecclesiastical and lay authorities could not muzzle or hinder hatred unleashed.

"The Crusades were followed by the darkest periods of the Middle Ages for the Jews - three centuries in which the centers of Jewry throughout Western Europe were destroyed." 

Commenting on Deuteronomy 32:21, a verse in which Moses foretells the future punishment of the Jews at the hands of 'a no people', a Jewish writer of the late thirteenth century explained: 'He means at the hands of the Franciscans and Dominicans; for they are everywhere oppressing Israel, and they are called a no people' because they are more wretched than all mankind.

---

52 Keller, op. cit., p. 209.
53 Ibid., p. 206.
From early in the thirteenth century to the end of the Middle Ages and even beyond, "Dominican and Franciscan friars directed and oversaw virtually all anti-Jewish activities of the Christian clergy in the West." When Pope Innocent III started the inquisition by waging a crusade within Europe itself against the Albigensians, the friars were his agents of death. While zealously performing the task of persecuting the so-called heretics, Jewish communities were also brought under fire.

In order to persecute Jews on the grounds that they, like the Albigensians, were heretics, they chose to ignore the canons protecting the Jews.

The friars encroached upon the practice of Jewish life, forcibly entering synagogues and subjecting Jews to offensive harangues, participation in debates whose outcome had been predetermined, and incited the violence of the mob. The intent of the friars was obvious: to eliminate the Jewish presence in Christendom - both by inducing the Jews to convert and by destroying all remnants of Judaism even after no Jews remained.

Innocent III now found himself in a theological dilemma. Augustine's teachings had provided the foundation for Christian-Judaism relations. It was taught that God had ordained the survival of the Jews, who were witnesses to what evil can do to a nation and by doing so help verify the truth of Christianity. Augustine also taught that one day the Jews will be converted. Gregory taught that winning the Jew to Christianity should be done by employing kindness. Innocent must either rewrite papal policy and theological dogma or call back his monks which may

56 Ibid.
58 Ibid., p. 97.
prove difficult. He chose the former option.

Innocent decided to ignore Gregory's practices (because of its lack of success) and to amend Augustine's theology. He agreed to assure the Jews their rights but with a noteworthy limitation: "We wish, however, to place under the protection of this decree only those who have not presumed to plot against the Christian faith."\(^{58}\)

With this new policy in hand, the Inquisitors did not hesitate to attack the Jew under whatever pretext they could find. "In view of the friar's estimation of rabbinic Judaism, such a stipulation might have excluded a large portion, if not all, of European Jewry."\(^{59}\) Even Thomas Aquinas supported this policy which he expressed thus:

Among unbelievers there are some who have never received the faith, such as heathens and Jews. These are by no means to be compelled, for belief is voluntary. Nevertheless the faithful, if they are able, should compel them not to hinder the faith whether by their blasphemies or evil persuasions or even open persecutions. It is for this reason that Christ's faithful often wage war on infidels, not indeed for the purpose of forcing them to believe, because even were they to conquer them and take them captive, they should still leave them free to believe or not, but for the purpose of stopping them from obstructing the faith of Christ.\(^{60}\)

With this type of support, it is little wonder that the concept of future papal protection for the Jews would be at a loss for practical effectiveness. The powers of Rome have retrograded from simply ignoring Jewish massacres in the first Crusade

---

\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 243.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., pp. 47-48.
to sending out ambassadors to work their wretched deeds in the names of the church and the honor of the Lord. But unlike the friars, who would eliminate Judaism from Europe, Rome's policy "was to make the Jew regret his persistence in his religion, until he abandoned it or else to punish him for his obstinacy in clinging to it."61

The Crusades and Inquisition accompanied by the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council degraded the Jews to the lowest class in society. This council of A.D. 1215 prepared the way for the economic ruin of European Jewish communities. It forbade Jews to practice occupations in which Christians were employed. Trades they had followed for centuries were now closed to them. They lost all positions of authority. The only trades now available to them were peddling, pawnbroking and money lending at interest. Usury was forbidden for Christians for theological reasons.

Thus the beginning of a social and political decline for the Jew of Western and Central Europe that would directly result in the expulsions of the next three centuries had commenced. From the thirteenth century onward, anti-Jewish violence increased throughout Europe. During this period, Jews were portrayed as active agents and close allies with Satan. Trachtenberg writes describing the mind set:

Master, companion, or servant, what matter? The incontestable fact was that the interest of devil and Jew were one, that both made common cause and this not as a result of Jewish refusal to acknowledge the

61 Keller, _op. cit._, p. 211.
truth, the Christian truth, but because the nature and character of the two are alike.\textsuperscript{62}

The vast mass of Europe's inhabitants were steeped in ignorance and superstition "breathing an atmosphere polluted by dark spirits and demons, constantly oppressed by a sense of its inadequacy and defenselessness against the forces of evil."\textsuperscript{63} Black magic, witches, demons and sorcerers were readily accepted as forces of Satan. By the fifteenth century mass mania had broken out. "These representatives of the devil" were hunted and slaughtered with a fanatical ferocity. In such an atmosphere, the reputed allegiance of the Jew to Satan could not but have borne its full sinister implication.\textsuperscript{64}

The Jews, only naturally, as agents of Satan were charged with any number of forms of hostility toward Christianity, and individual Christians. One of these bizarre charges was the ritual murder accusation. It was believed that Christian blood was required at the passover service. An official murder of a Christian, preferably a child, was the means of securing the blood. Blood and organs not used in rituals were said to be employed by Jewish sorcerers.

One of the most pervasive beliefs of the ancient world, and of the Middle Ages perhaps even more, was in the unexcelled value for medicinal and magical purposes of the elements of the human body. Medieval magic is full of recipes for putting to occult use human fat, human blood, entrails, hands, and fingers.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 60.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 140.
With the doctrine of transubstantiation clearly and definitively stated at the Fourth Lateran Council came the charge against the Jews of desecration of the Host. What could be more natural than suspecting that enemies of Christ would profane the wafer of the Eucharist. Christ killers were now mutilating his body.

In 1222, a former Christian was burned at Oxford because he was charged with bestiality: he had embraced Judaism in order to marry a Jew. Some time later in Paris, Jean Alard kept a Jewish woman in his house and had several children by her. He was convicted of sodomy and burned. The "coition with a Jewess is precisely the same as if a man should copulate with a dog," was the decision of the court.

The demeaning process was reflected in the arts. For example, Jews were depicted as sucking the teats of a sow. Shakespeare, in the lines of The Merchant of Venice, proclaimed: "Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnal."

The scope of this paper allows for only a brief and scant view of the charges brought against the Jews in the Middle Ages. But even these provide a glimpse of a vast and fanatical hatred altogether subjective and irrational. The most telling as far as direct consequences, however, was the accusation that all of medieval Europe believed - "The Jew was the devil's creature! Not a human being, but a demonic, a diabolic beast fighting the

---

Ibid., p. 187.

Cohen, op. cit., p. 244.

Ibid., p. 18.
forces of truth and salvation with Satan's weapons." 69

The mythical Jew, supplanted the real Jew in the medieval mind, until that real Jew to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. The only Jew whom the medieval Christian recognized was a figment of the imagination. 70

Permanent expulsion of European Jews began in 1290 and continued through the time of Reformation. English royalty had taxed the Jew until they were impoverished and then expelled them from the kingdom. This became the rule across Europe. When the Jews were out of money, they served no future use and were expelled.

In France, Jews were victims of the Albigensian Crusade. In Spain, they were expelled for seducing new Christians. Even in Italy, the Franciscan order was successful in expelling Jews from some Northern cities. 71 German Jews were expelled from numerous cities following the mass murders initiated by the accusation that poisoning of the wells by Jews resulted in the Black Death of 1347-1350. By the time of Luther’s Reformation, most of Western Europe contained no Jews at all.

Since Germans almost always thought of themselves either in a tribal sense or as citizens of the Holy Roman Empire, national self-consciousness never developed among them as among the French or English until the time of the Reformation. The concept

69 Ibid., p. 18.
70 Ibid., p. 216.
of an all-embracing national law was weak. Consequently, cities and provinces took it upon themselves to expel their Jewries. "Cologne saw the last of the Jews in 1426, Augsburg in 1439, Erfurt in 1448, Nuremberg and Ulm in 1499. Regensburg held out till 1519, Rothenburg till 1520 and Wurzburg till 1565. In Germany, when the Jewish community was expelled from one town, they generally found refuge in a neighboring town. However, Emperor Maximilian I, who ruled during Luther's early years, hunted down and tortured the Jewish fugitives. Nevertheless, by the time of the reformation, many Jews resided in Germany.

In approximately four hundred years, the state of the Jews in Western Europe had deteriorated to the place where they were considered animals and even devils, unfit to reside in Christendom. Thus was the social and religious mood as the Reformation curtain arises.

74 See Lowenthal for specific examples, p. 136.
FROM HUMANISM TO REFORMATION

At the advent of the sixteenth century, few Jewish communities remained in the Holy Roman Empire. They had been expelled altogether from England, France, Spain, and Portugal. In Germany, there were less than a few hundred Jews. The largest community was Frankfort, which had only about 78 Jews. Most of these communities numbered fewer than 20 people. Even these communities had to continue to hope that their existence would be tolerated.

The spread of humanism sparked a ray of hope in the hearts of the German Jew, both at home and for those in exile. The focus of all intellectual endeavors was shifting from the clergy to the layman. The church was no longer the exclusive force behind social and cultural progress. The spirit of the age was individualism. This age "reflected a far higher appreciation of the individual scholar or businessman who was acting no longer primarily as a member of his church, monastic order, merchant or artisan guild, but rather as a creative person in his own right." Individualism found its intellectual expression in Humanism and later in the Reformation.


Consequently, Jews were beginning to once again be judged more on their individual merits rather than collectively. Participation of Jews in the intellectual life of the Christian world was slowly becoming a reality.\textsuperscript{78}

This interaction between Christian and Jewish scholars was greatly facilitated by the deepening interest of humanistic scholars for Hebraic studies. This appreciation of the Hebrew language was a part of the revival of the study of the classics. In order to fully appreciate the delicacies of the arts, a mastery of their grammar, vocabulary and syntax was mandatory. In general though, the Hebraists among the Humanists prior to the Reformation were a small minority. Their knowledge of the Hebrew was basically superficial. However, most of the Humanists "at least appreciated the language and its literary treasures in principle."\textsuperscript{79} Hence, Jewish Hebrew scholars were in demand at every Humanistic university in Germany. Jews began to return from exile to be teachers in their hometowns.\textsuperscript{80} The study of the Jewish religion for a few fleeting years became fashionable, as Baron expounds:

Jewish scholars were in demand not only as teachers and lecturers but also as purveyors of Hebrew manuscripts and books. The awakened interest in antiquities led many princes, nobles, and wealthy merchants to become collectors of ancient writings, these patrons sometimes commissioning copyists to prepare transcripts.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 159.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 162.
\textsuperscript{80} See Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews, Vol. 4., pp. 471-472, for details.
\textsuperscript{81} Baron, op. cit., p. 168.
Such personal contacts did not necessarily mean that the Christian would recognize the Jewish faith as having worth. It is true that many outstanding Humanists were critical of the church and applied textual criticism to the traditional Catholic sources including the Latin Vulgate. But as a rule they were true to their faith "and they used their newly acquired knowledge of Hebrew and classical antiquity to buttress their own religious convictions."\textsuperscript{82}

This is not to say that in Germany all was well between the Christian and the Jew. In many minds, an aura of suspicion surrounded the very idea of studying Hebrew. Baron relates examples of the mindset of many Realism theologians of the era.

A popular adage stated that a good grammarian was a bad theologian. Professor Fran Joel not only denounced the humanist Leonhard Thurneissen to the elector of Brandenburg as being in league with the Devil, but claimed that those who study that language [Hebrew] became Jews.\textsuperscript{83}

One of the major concerns of the Christian Church from New Testament times was once again becoming a serious challenge. The charges of Judaizing once again rang their alarm. Somehow the Jews were going to attempt to pull Christianity back to homebase - Judaism. In reality this was the hope of the Jews and the very real fear of many churchmen.

In the first major religious upheaval in the European continent prior to the Reformation, the possibility of this hope and fear becoming reality was preoccupying the hearts of the

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 172.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 164.
faithful.

The Hussites deeply impressed Jewish observers by the intense cleavage between the heretics and the leadership, traditions and ritual of the church. Jews considered the anti-hierarchical, anti-monastic and inconclastic tendencies characterizing the Hussite movement, as a whole or in part, to be a change in the right direction. In their eager minds such trends wove themselves into an image of Hus and his followers as men who had chosen a road that led to the goal of Jewish monotheism. The subsequent failure of the reformers to join the Jewish faith was ascribed to the absence of a worthy leader after the burning of Hus.84

Two Jewish converts to Christianity were in the vanguard in the fight against Judaizing - Johann Pfefferkorn and Viktor vonCarben. In the wake of the "Jewish disillusionment over the pseudomessiah Asher Lammelein, 85 a few Jewish intellectuals threw up their hands in despair and joined the dominate faith."86 One of these was Carben who, together with Pfefferkorn, initiated a controversy that was to last over ten years.

They started their anti-Jewish campaign by engaging in a disputation with Rhenish Rabbis that became a soap box for violently anti-Jewish diatribes, resulting in the expulsion of Jews from all of the Lower Rhine district.87

Pfefferkorn began a series of literary attacks on Judaism. He felt his actions were necessary because Hebrew literature in some quarters was beginning to demonstrate a Judaizing influence

85 See Chapter 7 for discussion of the eschatological climate of the day demonstrated in both faiths.
86 Baron, p. 185.
87 Ibid.
on Christian thinking. The principal aim in his pamphlets was to persuade the Christian world that all Jewish writings were written in a tone bitterly hostile toward Christianity. He demanded that these writings, including the Talmud, should be destroyed because of their blasphemies.

With the support of the Cologne Dominicans, especially their leader, Inquisitor Jacob Hoogstraaten (who it seems was aiming "at securing for the Dominicans of Germany the same power which they held in Spain owing to the Inquisition"), he submitted a plan of making a search for Hebrew books prejudicial to Christianity directly to Emperor Maximilian I. The Emperor lost little time authorizing Pfefferkorn to seize Hebrew books for inspection.

At this point, the greatest Christian Hebraist of the period, Johannes Reuchlin, was unwittingly drawn into the controversy. "The emperor's final mandate ordered that Pfefferkorn's accusation be submitted to judgment by the theological faculties of Cologne, Mayence, Erfurt, and Heidelberg, and by three individuals: Hoogstraaten, Carben and Reuchlin." Reuchlin had a greater familiarity with Jewish letters than any Christian scholar of the early fifteenth century Germany. His Hebrew grammar was considered the standard text for all aspiring Hebrew students. Reuchlin also enjoyed high prestige in

90 Baron, op. cit., p. 187.
humanist circles.

An eminent jurist, he also occupied an important position in the bureaucracy of the Holy Roman Empire, serving for many years as an advisor and diplomatic envoy of the Duke of Wurttemberg and later as member of the Supreme Court of the Swabian Confederation. Quite early, he was also raised by the emperor to the ranks of the nonhereditary nobility and distinguished by the title of Count Palatine. 91

It seems quite obvious that his opinion in such a court of inquiry would hold considerable weight.

Before being appointed counsel by the emperor, Reuchlin knew very little about the Talmud. On the whole, unlike the Kabbalah, it was only of secondary interest to humanists. He did, however, believe that it needed to be tolerated even if it was a basically anti-Christian document. He held that view as long as Jews were allowed to live and practice their religion in Germany. 92

This should not be misconstrued to mean that Reuchlin was a friend of the Jews. He regretted their expulsion from Spain and their persecutions in Germany for the simple reason that "such intolerance might lead to the withering away of the Hebrew language and of the study of the Old Testament." 93

While the emperor's counsel concerning Pfefferkorn's accusation and ambitions was deliberating the issues, the Dominicans were busy directing an intense anti-Jewish propaganda campaign. The printing press spilled out rivers of pamphlets in-

91 Ibid., p. 183.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., p. 49.
tended to raise popular feeling against Jews to a fever pitch. The situation degenerated to the point where in Berlin, thirty Jews were martyred. 94

The time was set for a heroic act. Reuchlin drew up his report: Whether it was a godly, laudable and advantageous to Christianity to burn the Jewish writing, especially the Talmud. This report was the only opinion against forcible suppression among the counsel. Salo Baron summarizes the force of the other recommendations.

Heidelberg gave a rather evasive answer; it suggested that scholars from all over Germany be con­voked to a conference to pass judgment on the talmud. Erfurt, too, was noncommittal. The two other theo­logical faculties, however, together with Hoogstraaten and Carben, sided with Pfefferkorn. The Cologne fac­ulty recommended that all Hebrew writings, with the exception of the Bible, be subjected to careful scru­tiny. Objectionable passages should then be submitted to representative Jews, who would have to decide whether to repudiate or to defend them. The rejected books should be banned, while with respect to the other books, "the ruler would judge whether they [the Jewish defenders] are deficient in morals, or whether they invent and practice heresies against their own law." Going out of its way, the Cologne faculty also suggested that Jewish usury be restricted, and that Jews be made to engage in manual labor, wear badges, and be forced to listen to Christian sermons. The Mayence faculty went even further. It impugned the authenticity of the biblical books, since "it is to be feared that even their [the Jews] original texts are corrupt and depraved in certain passages, partic­ularly those which offer testimony for our Christian faith." The Mayence theologians recommended that all original Hebrew Bibles be carefully examined by the local bishops and, if found deficient, be dealt with according to the Church's provisions relating to her­etical writings. Such review of all Jewish books were to be repeated every ten years. 95

---

94 Danby, op. cit., p. 49.
95 Baron, op. cit., p. 187.
Reuchlin begins this thesis by pointing out that Jewish commentaries on the Bible frequently proved to be of great value to Christian exegetes. He claimed that the Talmud was being condemned by those who do not understand it. He did agree that books containing specific attacks on Christianity were to be confiscated. However, he added that he knew of only two such books: Lipmann's polemical work *Toldoth Jeshu* and *The Geneology of Jesus*. On the other hand, going beyond the literary feud, he began a crusade to defend the rights of the Jews. He declared that the Jews "are fellow citizens of the same Roman Empire and live on the basis of the same law of citizenship and internal peace." He also asserted: "In matters relating to their faith the Jews are subject to their own judgment and to no other judge: No Christian is entitled to make any decision about it...for they are not members of the Christian church, and hence their faith is of no concern to us." 

The controversy lasted for years. Reuchlin, after many emotionally charged and costly battles, finally was exonerated of all accusation. He had saved the Jews and their books. Reuchlin was greatly aided by most of the German humanists, especially by Von Hutton and Erasmus.

The Jews now observed that the intellectual winds were beginning to smile on them. Who would have thought in 1500 that

---

96 Ibid., p. 188.
98 Cited by Salo Baron, p. 188.
German men of greatness and power would recognize and defend their civil and religious rights?

The Roman church exonerated Reuchlin in 1522, five years after the beginning of the Reformation. The question that comes to mind is what ties are there between the humanist-Jewish relation and Luther? One will need to first examine Luther in light of his own humanism. The most satisfactory approach, it would seem, would be to trace Luther's humanistic development through his educational process.

Luther's first exposure to the humanistic emphasis occurred during the time in his childhood when he lived and studied with the Brethren of Common Life. It was here that young Luther started the germination process of the concept that each individual needed a direct relationship to God. The Brethren "stressed the inwardness of religious experience and minimized the external forms of religion and any emphasis on theological subtleties."99

Luther later matriculated at the University of Erfurt, a center of German Humanism. It was here also that he became aware of the Hussites' anti-clerical propaganda.100 Later, Luther studied theology at an Augustinian monastery. It would hardly go without significance that at both institutions, he must have been, due to the philosophical inclinations of their faculties,

thoroughly grounded in Nominalism. 101

It is not surprising that Luther, arising from a humanistic and nominalistic background, would not only reject scholastic theology, but would place emphasis on the authority of the Scriptures and the fathers, especially Augustine. 102 Gerrish correctly classifies Luther as a Biblical Humanist and provides the following clarification:

The name "Humanist" by itself is, of course, a singularly ambiguous one, and there were many varieties of Humanists in the age of the Renaissance. What bound them together was a characteristic Heimweh, a homesickness for the distant past. For the Biblical Humanists this homesickness was directed towards a primitive Christianity, recoverable only through the instrumentality of a new mastery of the Biblical languages. Without any doubt we may, broadly speaking, link Luther's name with this group. 103

This "Heimweh" held the Humanists together through the Pfefferkorn crisis and even through the early stages of the Reformation. It was only when it became apparent that reform was not forthcoming and an independent church was arising that the Heimweh group began to experience severance.

Erasmus, in fact, in the very early pre-Worms years, defended Luther, writing publicly in defense of his reforms. But a few years later, he wrote that he was "orthodox in the


fundamentals of the Christian faith." Erasmus did acknowledge his responsibility for what Luther hatched. He answered, "Yes, but the egg I laid was a hen whereas Luther has hatched a gamecock."  

Reuchlin, as well, never gave up his allegiance to their traditional creed. In 1521, "he publicly expressed his disagreement with Luther's work, and in his will, he disowned his grand-nephew, Philip Melanchton, Germany's outstanding exponent of a fusion of Humanism and Lutheranism."  

Nevertheless, in Luther's pre-Reformation Humanist days, he was in league with the German Humanists' battle on behalf of the Jews, and against the corruption of the church. It can be thus surmised that the Jewish issue helped ignite the fires of the Reformation. "A conflict over a Jewish question created the milieu in which Luther's movement emerged and developed."  

In Luther's early writings, he handles the Jewish question in a cold theological manner. But as the years of controversy wear on, Luther's medieval heart began to warm to the more humanist idea of being kind and just to the sons of Moses. 

106 Baron, op. cit., p. 206.  
107 Danby, op. cit., p. 51.  
The preoccupation of the Lutheran Reformation with the Jewish question was a direct continuation of the Humanist-Dominican struggle. George Spalatin, court chaplain to Frederick the Wise, made inquiries concerning Luther's opinion on the controversy. Luther replied in February, 1514, with a brief letter. The tone of the letter portrayed the heart of an unregenerated medieval man who saw the Jews as a rejected people, guilty of the murder of Christ. The Jews in Luther's opinion were, because of the wrath of God, "abandoned to the power of their corrupt mind, so that they would remain unregenerated." He also emphasized that "the prophets had foretold that the Jews were to be blasphemers of God and of Christ, the King, and their scorners."\textsuperscript{109} It is apparent that in the early years of the controversy, he questioned the value of giving aid and comfort to the Jews. Luther, however, did not participate for many years in the controversies which were going on, either pro or con.\textsuperscript{110}

However, Luther's attitude gradually changes, and in 1523 Luther was crowned the leading champion and friend, among Christians, of the Jewish people. In the next few pages, excerpts of various publications by Luther will be presented to chronicle his progression from indifference to concern.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] Holmio, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 65.
\item[110] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
In Luther's commentary on Romans, Chapter 11 (written in the summer of 1516), he begins to see for the first time that contemporary Jews had worth in God's eyes.

I say then, have they [Jews] stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Luther comments:

Thus God willed that the fall of the Jews should be of benefit to them, while at the same time He caused it to benefit the Gentiles, so that He might provoke the Jews when they would see that they themselves had fallen, and that they had been deprived of the grace by which the Gentiles were now adorned.  

Commenting on the "first fruit" mentioned in verse 16, he writes:

If the apostles are holy people who have been taken from the Jews as the first fruits and as the most precious part, as it were, then the whole nation, since they are of the same stock and nature, must not be despised because of their unbelief.

Thus, Luther, who most probably had come to a personal saving relationship with Christ the previous year after lecturing on Romans 1:17, begins to shed his medieval cataracts. To say that Jews should "not be despised because of their unbelief" is the first step toward a genuine effort to convert them to the true Christianity that he, himself, had only recently discovered. Now with a new prospectus on life, Luther begins to throw his support behind Reuchlin and the Jews as well. Commenting on the "goodness" of God noted in verse 22, Luther penned:


112 Ibid., p. 427.
In opposition to this, many people are proud with marvelous stupidity when they call the Jews dogs, evildoers, or whatever they like, while they too, and equally, do not realize who or what they are in the sight of God. Boldly they heap blasphemous insults upon them, when they ought to have compassion on them and fear the same punishments for themselves. Moreover, as if certain concerning themselves and the others, they rashly pronounce themselves blessed and the other cursed. Such today are the theologians of Cologne, who are so stupid in their zeal, that in their articles, or rather their inarticulate and inept writings, they say that the Jews are accursed. Why? Because they have forgotten what it says in the following Chapter: "Bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14), and in another place: "When reviled, we bless; when slandered, we try to conciliate" (I Cor. 4:12-13). They wish to convert the Jews by force and curses, but God will resist them.\textsuperscript{113}

During Luther's early battles with Rome, he must have realized that "the Papacy's position in Germany had been undermined through the humanists'" attacks, in part generated by the Reuchlin-Pfefferkorn controversy over the Talmud, and Rome's Dominican supporters.\textsuperscript{114} For example, in his Lectures on Hebrews of 1517, he exclaims:

They (the priests) do so with the greatest violence, namely, because they are enraged and hasten with panting piety to burn a few Jews who pierce the host of the sacrament with small lances or cut them with small knives. But they do not slay the hosts; they slay the matter itself, and not with small lances, but with cannon, and all the commotion and violence of their weapons.\textsuperscript{115}

One year later, commenting on Psalm 22, he fulminated against those priests who:

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., pp. 428-429.  
\textsuperscript{114}Baron, op. cit., p. 217.  
With great haughtiness gossip that the Jews are serfs of the Christians and in the emperor's bondage. Please tell me then who would adopt our religion, even if he be a most humble and patient person, when he sees how cruelly, hatefully, and in a cattle-like rather than Christian-like, fashion they are treated by us? Most Passion preachers during the Easter Week do nothing else but enormously exaggerate the Jews' misdeeds against Christ and thus embitter the hearts of the faithful against them. 116

In 1521, Luther wrote a commentary on the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), which he entitled "The Magnificent." With its completion, he aligned himself with Humanists in their insistence that Jews should be treated in a Christian manner. He concludes his work with the following plea:

We ought, therefore, not to treat the Jews in so unkind a spirit, for there are future Christians among them, and they are turning everyday. Moreover, they alone, and not we Gentiles, have this promise, that these shall always be Christians among Abraham's seed who acknowledge the blessed Seed, who knows how or when? As for our cause, it rests upon pure grace, without a promise of God. If we lived Christian lives, and led them with kindness to Christ, there would be a proper response. Who would desire to become a Christian when he sees Christians dealing with men in so unchristian a spirit? Not so my dear Christians. Tell them the truth in all kindness; if they will not receive it, let them go. How many Christians are there who despise Christ, do not hear His word, and are worse than Jews or heathen? Yet we leave them in peace and even fall down at their feet and well nigh adore them as gods. 117

In 1522, Luther wrote an article, "Estate of Marriage," in which he started to attack the social structure steeped in anti-Judaism. He instructs:

116 Cited by Baron, p. 217.

Know, therefore, that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride with, buy from, speak to, and deal with a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic, so I may also marry and continue in wedlock with him. Pay no attention to the precepts of those fools who forbid it. You will find plenty of Christians—and indeed the greater part of them—who are worse in their secret unbelief than any Jew, heathen, Turk, or heretic. A heathen is just as much a man or woman—God's good creation—as St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Lucy, not to speak of a slack and suprious Christian.\textsuperscript{118}

At the Diet of Nurnberg (1522), the question of what to do about Luther proved to be one of the major issues discussed. Although he was under the ban of both Church and empire, he lived and wrote freely in Wittenberg. Luther was charged by the Diet of teaching that "Jesus was conceived of the seed of Joseph and that Mary was not a virgin, but had many sons after Christ."\textsuperscript{119}

Since this was a serious charge, Luther soon made an effort to clear his name by writing the treatise: "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew." The work was first published in 1523, a year after Reuchlin's death.

"That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew" went beyond a simple refutation of the charges; to explain scripturally that Christ was born of a virgin. By doing so, Luther hoped to win some Jews to Christ. It had been Reuchlin's conviction that by appointing two professors of Hebrew to each German University that Jews could be won over to Christianity through the path of conviction and Bible studies. This idea had not "passed on as an inheri-


tance from Humanism to the Reformation." 120

The treatise immediately gained great popularity and a particularly wide circulation, going through nine printings in six months. This indicates that there was a great interest in the Jewish problem. 121 One can only ponder how this extremely pro-Jewish work affected the attitudes of the other reformers.

After Luther dedicated his work to the hope of many Jewish converts, he fulminated against the Roman Church.

Our fools, the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks - the crude asses' heads - have hitherto so treated the Jews that anyone who wished to be a good Christian would almost have had to become a Jew. If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them, they show them nothing of Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and mockery. When the Jews then see that Judaism has such strong support in Scripture, and that Christianity has become a mere babble without reliance on Scripture, how can they possibly compose themselves and become right good Christians? I have myself heard from pious baptized Jews that if they had not in our day heard the gospel, they would have remained Jews under the cloak of Christianity for the rest of their days. For they acknowledge that they have never yet heard anything about Christ from those who baptized and taught them. I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs. They will only be frightened further away from it if their Judaism is so utterly rejected that nothing is allowed to remain, and they are treated only with arrogance and scorn. If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with Jews, there would never have been a Christian among

---

120 Holmio, op. cit., p. 91.
121 Ibid., p. 67.
the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Luther's Works}, Vol. 45, pp. 200-201.}

In the first half of his treatise, Luther goes to great length to present Scriptural proof for the virgin birth of Christ and that Jesus was indeed a Jew. After thus silencing his lying accusers, Luther wrote what Justus Jonas praised as the "best missionary tract ever written."\footnote{Baron, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 219.}

This tract is indeed a masterpiece and should be read by those wishing to win Jews to Christ. His tract is laced with love and understanding and is grounded on the Old Testament. He introduces this section thusly:

We would also like to do a service to the Jews on the chance that we might bring some of them back to their own true faith, the one which their fathers held. To this end, we will deal with them further, and suggest for the benefit of those who want to work with them a method and some passages from scripture which they should employ in dealing with them.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Luther's Works}, Vol. 45, p. 213.}

His scripturally based argument was designed to prove that Jesus was the Jews' awaited Messiah. His first argument is based on Genesis 49:10:

\begin{quote}
The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.
\end{quote}

His point was that nearly fifteen hundred years since the fall of Jerusalem, there had been no scepter, that is, neither a King nor a Kingdom. "Therefore, the Shiloh, or Messiah must have
come before this fifteen hundred year period, and before the de-
struction of Jerusalem." 125

The second passage employed by Luther is Daniel 9:24-26:

Seventy weeks are determined for your people and
for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make
an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to
bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision
and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know there­
fore, and understand, that from the going forth of the
command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the
Prince, these shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
the street shall be built again and the wall, even in
troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah
shall be cut off but not for Himself; and the people of
the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and
sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and
till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Luther, by means of an exhaustive exegetical and histori­
cal study, displays this interpretation of this passage. He
proves that Daniel is predicting the time of Messiah to be at
the same time that Jesus lived and after being cut off, that is
crucified, the city of Jerusalem and the temple would be de­
stroyed. If Luther's interpretation could not be refuted, then
Jesus must be the Messiah.

After presenting his arguments for his interpretation of
these two passages, he began to explore possible objections that
thoughtful Jews might consider. He then proceeds to gently,
wisely and Biblically answer each objection, and Luther does this
in the spirit of a teacher of a Jewish evangelism class. The
text is punctuated with phrases like: "If they try to say" 126 or
if the "Jews should take offense." 127

125 Ibid., p. 214.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., p. 229.
Luther concludes his appeal and means to evangelize the Jews with the following inspiring summary:

Therefore, I would request and advise that one deal gently with them and instruct them from Scripture; then some of them may come along. Instead of this we are trying only to drive them by force, slandering them, accusing them of having Christian blood if they don't stink, and I know not what other foolishness. So long as we thus treat them like dogs, how can we expect to work any good among them? Again, when we forbid them to labor and do business and have any human fellowship with us, thereby forcing them into usury, how is that supposed to do them any good?

If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law, but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either. Here I will let the matter rest for the present, until I see what I have accomplished. God grant us all His mercy.  

Luther's spirit of goodwill toward the Jewish people for the next few years is demonstrated by the following note:

That is what Jeremiah did when the Jews were driven out and captured and slain. He comforted himself and said, "It is of the Lord's grace and goodness that we are not entirely destroyed." We Germans are much worse than the Jews, and yet we have not been driven out and slain, as they were; but we want to murmur and become impatient and justify ourselves. --An open letter on the Harsh book of 1525.  

Also commenting on Isaiah 54:21:

My spirit who is upon, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants, says

128 Ibid.
the Lord, from this time and forevermore.

Further, Luther wrote:

This is the nature of the covenant, that "the Spirit and My Word" will endure forever. Thus Paul and the prophet agree this is Paul's argument: the Gentiles must not despise the Jews, because God can reinstate them, since the Spirit of the Lord and the Word of the Lord will remain in the world, and by them God can reclaim some. As long as the Word remains, God can only save people through this means. Who knows the potential of that nation? There might be more and better Christians in their midst than in ours. For though not all Jews will be converted, some persons will be. - 1527

Elsewhere, Luther speaks of the Jews as the instruments of God's revelation to man:

The Jews are of the best blood on earth; through them alone the Holy Spirit wished to give all the books of Holy Scripture to the world. They are the children, and we are the guests and strangers. Indeed, like the Cannanitish woman, we would be satisfied to be the dogs that eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table. 131

It can truly be said that "at no time in recent history had any significant spokesman written so kindly about Jews. At no time in recent history had Jews needed kind words more than after 1492."132 The critical question that must be examined next is: What was the response to these friendly words by the Jews of Germany?

It must first be stated what the Jews thought of Christianity in general. The extreme view was that Christianity was


131 As cited by Danby, p. 53.

132 Friedman, op. cit. p. 32.
no different than any other pagan religion mentioned in the Bible. Jesus proclaiming himself to be God, in their eyes, was no different than a pharaoh or Roman Emperor doing so. The idols of the Canaanites only differed in form from the images prayed to in the Roman church. To any reasonable Jew, the proponents of this view claimed, Christianity was clearly a violation of God's teachings. The more moderate or tolerant view gave the church credit for believing the Old Testament, teaching the ten commandments and at least advocating a system of morality.

When the reformers began to express their views concerning the Catholic church's adoration of the Virgin of Saints and of relics, Jews were congratulatory. However, the Jewish masses conceived the Reformation as only a struggle within the ranks of Christians, until Luther's "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew."

The Jews began to grasp the revolutionary significance of the Reuchlin-Pfefferkorn controversy and the rise of Luther. Their initial reaction was one of astonishment at the incredible transformation of attitudes. Could it be that the arch enemy of Judaism, the Christian Church, was beginning to crumble? Was religious toleration to be hoped for? Ben-Sasson provides the following insight:

From the Jewish point of view, the break-up of Catholic uniformity was a significant phenomenon in itself. But most of all, R. Joseph is fascinated by the prospect of religious toleration, which he believes to be burgeoning out of the formula that each man should worship his God according to his wish without fear.

133 Ibid., p. 25.

134 Ben-Sasson, op. cit., p. 47.
It is of little wonder that the Jews circulated Luther's tracts. "The masons of Antwerp are said to have sent them during the early days of the Reformation to Spain, their homeland, and even as far away as Palestine."\textsuperscript{135}

Many Jews felt that since the humanists and reformers were promoting not only the study of Hebrew and Jewish religious writings, but actually advocating the rights of Jews to live in peace, that they were about to embrace Judaism. This would certainly "give rise to universal salvation, in accordance with Jewish aspirations. The very same manifestations that had infused Jewish hearts with sympathy for the Hussites were likewise in evidence here."\textsuperscript{136} The teachings of the Maimonides were well established and gave evidence to fire this belief. They "taught the historic mission of Christianity and of Mohammedism was to serve the pagans as a stepping stone to Judaism."\textsuperscript{137}

As mentioned earlier, the Rabbis had developed a strong messianic mentality in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in order to help satisfy the needs of a people who had been expelled from their European homes. Now with the fall of Rome at hand, so was the Jews' approaching redemption and deliverance by the Messiah. Halevi, the foremost rabbi concerning messianic thought, was concerned that Luther did not understand that his reformation was leading to Judaism. He hoped that he and those in his camp would see where they were religiously headed,

\textsuperscript{135} Holmio, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{136} Ben-Sasson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{137} Holmio, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 147.
for "God's right hand is outstretched to accept them before the advent of the Messiah, for afterwards they are no longer acceptable."  

Joseph d'Arles, a French Kabbalist, contended "that the Reformation was to inaugurate the realization of the Jewish Messianic expectations." Due to the strength of his argument, three German Jews received an audience of Luther and proposed that he lead the way and accept Judaism.  

When it became clear that Luther was not going to accept the role of Elijah, the Jews began a continual resistance to Luther's evangelistic overtures, although they appreciated his concern and friendly words. The major cleavage point between the two camps was hermeneutical in nature. Luther saw Christ and the church in every chapter of the Old Testament, to the almost exclusion of the historic factors of interpretation.  

He presents the following rule for translating the Bible. 

The second rule is that if the meaning is ambiguous, I ask those who have a better knowledge of the language than I have whether the Hebrew words can bear this or that sense which seems to me to be especially fitting. And that is most fitting which is closest to the argument of the book. The Jews go astray so often in the Scriptures because they do not know the [true] contents of the books. But if one knows the contents, that sense ought to be chosen which is nearest to them.  

Salo Baron provides the following summary of the Jewish

---

138 Cited by Friedman, p. 33.
139 Raisin, op. cit., p. 658.
141 Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed. Theodore Tappert Vol. 54: Table Talk (Philadelphia: Fortress Pres, 1967,
They certainly could subscribe to such theological assertions as that "God's word cannot come forth without God's people, while God's people cannot exist without God's word," and yet consider the identification of Christendom with "God's people" a betrayal of the Old Testament idea of the "chosen people" established by the patriarchal and Sinaitic covenant between Israel and the Lord. They also appreciated less and less Luther's admittedly theological, rather than literal, interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, and they remained skeptical about his high-sounding claim, "I have received my doctrine from heaven by the grace of God."142

Luther's personal contact with Jews was very limited, for they had been expelled from Wittenberg almost a century before. There were a few converts, however, teaching Hebrew at the University. Luther was in conflict over theological matters with two of these: Matthew Adrian and Johann Boeschenstein. Both were labeled pseudo-Christian by Melanchthon and were forced to resign their posts. More to his liking was the convert, Berhard, to whom Luther sent a copy of his work "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," and a letter in order to strengthen him in his faith.143 The following is an excerpt of that letter that gives indication of Luther's optimism concerning the success of his Jewish mission effort.

I think the cause of the ill-repute is not so much the Jewish obstinacy and wickedness, as rather the absurd and asinine ignorance of the wicked and shameless life of the popes, priests, monks, and scholars, who neither through their teaching nor through Christian behavior have communicated to the Jews even a spark of light and warmth.144

142 Baron, op. cit., p. 219.
143 Newman, op. cit., p. 627.
144 Cited by Baron, p. 219.
Even earlier during his attendance at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he was visited by two Jews, one of whom was converted after hearing Luther's explanation of Isaiah 7:14 and its relationship to Jesus. 145

It can be said that Luther believed and sincerely hoped that if the Jews were approached with the true Christian doctrine in a spirit of kindness and consideration, that they might come to a personal knowledge of Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Luther was most probably also encouraged by conviction that Jesus would come again in 1558 when the whole world, including the Jews, would accept Him as their King. 146

Luther's campaign to win the Jew proved to be inadequate. The Jewish people could not distinguish between "the disfigured Christ of the medieval church, whose brutal intolerance had done so much to alienate them," 147 from the risen loving Lord of the Reformation. He "apparently staked his hopes too much upon the efficacy of Christian charities and Christian graces, emerging greatly disappointed." 148

145 Baron, op. cit., p. 218.
146 Raisin, op. cit., p. 656.
LUTHER'S NEW APPROACH

Luther has relatively little to say about the Jews in the late 1520's and early 1530's. However, during this time Luther had entertained several Jewish scholars who took issue with him over his interpretation of various messianic passages of the Old Testament. These interchanges served only to frustrate Luther and his evangelistic zeal.

This is not to say that he was entirely unsuccessful in his efforts. In his "Table Talk," he related an incident that must have given him encouragement.

In 1537, when I was in Frankfurt, a great rabbi said to me: My father has read very much, and waited for the coming of the Messiah, but at last he fainted, and out of hope said: As our Messiah has not come in fifteen hundred years, most certainly Christ Jesus must be he.149

At one time, three Jewish visitors engaged in a long and tiring debate with Luther, which ended, like almost all the rest, without the Jews yielding ground. Luther was even more distraught when it turned out that, before their departure they accepted from him a letter of introduction to the neighboring customs officials which normally would have freed them from payment of tolls, yet, because the reformer had inserted into his letter a reference to Jesus Christ, they informed him that their conscience would not allow them to use it. Luther was later told that, while on the road, they had destroyed the letter.150

149 Holmio, op. cit., p. 91.
150 Baron, op. cit., p. 225.
He later found out, to his amazement, that they had spoken contemptuously of Christ to Aurogallus, to whom they had shown the letter, calling him "the crucified bandit." 151

By 1535, Luther had begun "not only to insist on the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, but specifically to insist that the Old Testament testified to the trinity and to the incarnation." 152 He continued this line of argument in his 1538 "Three Symbols" and in his "Schmalkaldic Articles." In these works designed to continue his debate with rabbinic exegesis, his anger began to show through. His tone was shrill, and abusive remarks about the Jews were more pervasive. 153

Luther's patience was beginning to wear thin. In 1532, when a Jew, who had been won and baptized by Luther, relapsed to his old faith, Luther entered into his "Journal": "Were he again to baptize a Jew, he would take him to the Elbe, hang a stone around his neck, and drop him into the river, saying 'I baptize you in the name of Abraham':" 154

Dr. Luther's frustration and resentment, by 1536, was manifested by a change in attitude concerning social and political policy. In a Table Talk, he repeated the rumor that in Prague, Jews were not allowed to keep company with Christians, "and that a Jew could be beaten with impunity." 155 In the same

151 MacKinnon, _op. cit._, p. 196.
153 Ibid.
154 Cited by Baron, p. 225.
155 Baron, _op. cit._, p. 225.
year Elector Johann Friedrich issued a mandate to expell Jews from Saxony. Jews were even forbidden to travel through the electoral lands. Luther did nothing to intervene in behalf of these Jews.

In the summer of 1537, he received a letter from Josel of Rosheim, "Imperial representative of Germany Jewry to the Court of Charles V," requesting that he be given permission to safely enter Electoral Saxony. Luther, who had known and entertained Josel for years and had even referred to him as a good friend, refused the request of intercession. To his table companions, he explained his reasoning:

Why should these rascals, who injure people in goods and body and who estrange many Christians with their superstitions, be given permission? For in Moravia they have circumcised many Christians and called them by the new name of Sabbatarians. So it goes in those regions where Protestant preachers are expelled, I'll write this Jew not to return.

In his letter to Josel, Luther spelled out his position toward the Jews. He maintained that just as "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew" was of great service to all Jewish people, he would have gladly interceded on behalf of Josel. He claimed that he failed to help because "the Jews so shamefully misused such service as his and undertook things which were intolerable to Christians." Luther also through their actions had limited his potential positive influence for the sake of the Jews with the princes and lords. Luther believed that continued favor on his part concerning the Jews would only serve, at that time, as a

---

156 Friedman, op. cit., p. 35.
means for which "they should become worse and strengthened in their error."\textsuperscript{158}

In his heart, Luther still felt that the Jews should be treated with kindness and friendliness in order to win some for Christ. He had not "abandoned his hope for Jewish converts, although he expected their numbers to be small."\textsuperscript{159} For in this letter, he announced "that if God granted him the opportunity, he intended to write a booklet to see if he could not win a few from Josel's paternal tribe of holy patriarchs and prophets and bring them to their promised Messiah."\textsuperscript{160}

Scholars differ as to whether the open letter "Against the Sabbatarians" is or is not the pamphlet promised by Luther to Josel. Sherman writes:

Arguing for it is the fact that this treaty does deal with the general subject of the Jews and that its composition followed Luther's letter to Josel by only a few months. Arguing against it is the fact that the theistise does not seem to be directed at the apologetic and missionary purposes indicated by Luther in the letter. Rather, he expresses great pessimism concerning the prospects of converting the Jews. In this writing, he explains chiefly to strengthen Christians to resist the Jews and to refute their arguments. There is no other writing by Luther, however, which more closely corresponds to the intention expressed in his letter to Josel.\textsuperscript{161}

From 1523 to 1538, it became gradually clearer to Luther that his dream of wholesale conversion of the Jews was only a

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., p. 125.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
dream. To his horror, far from accepting Christianity, the Jews of Moravia were actually making proselytes to their own faith from among the Christian population, convincing some "that they should be circumcized, that the Messiah had not yet come, that the Jewish law was eternally valid and that it should be observed by Gentiles."162 They had also come to observe Saturday instead of Sunday as the Sabbath; thus the name Sabbatarians. Luther, having been accused throughout the years by the Roman Catholics of being a Judaizer, began to see that his tolerant attitude was backfiring. He began to feel pressure. He had to produce a strong statement against Judaism, or else he would face the charge of abetting Judaizing. Luther thus began to change his strategy as to how to solve the Jewish problem. Therefore, Luther began to take a firmer grip on the Jews.

In this work, "Against Sabbatarians," Luther explained how the proselyting arguments of the Jews should be refuted with scripture. He also demonstrated his frustration over not finding success in converting the Jew. He wrote, "In the first place, the Jewish people have become very stubborn because of their rabbis. As a result, they are difficult to win over."163

Although this treatise is not intended primarily as a Christian apologetic or evangelistic tract, it still produced some arguments for the cause. To prove the merits of Biblical Christianity, sixteenth century Judaism must be discredited. Note the following example:

163 Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 47, p. 65.
Since it is clear and obvious that the Jews are unable to name a sin because of which God should delay so long with his promise and thus be a liar in this matter, and that even if they could mention one or more, God's Word still stamps them as liars, since he assuages them that he will never fail because of their sins in his promise to send the Messiah and to preserve the throne of David forever - it follows incontestably that one of the following two things must be true: either the Messiah must have come fifteen hundred years ago, or God must have lied (may God forgive me for speaking so irreverently) and has not kept his promise.\footnote{Ibid., p. 78.}

In all of his arguments, Luther was uncompromising in his insistence that the Jews were in error. However, the tone of his language was still "temperate and restrained." The hope was to provide sufficient material for those who needed to defend themselves against the Sabbatarians.

At about the same time, the Jewish question began to be increasingly prominent in Luther's Table Talk, providing insight into Luther's changing attitude toward the Jews. For example:

There are sorcerers among the Jews who delight in tormenting Christians, for they hold us as dogs. Duke Albert of Saxony well punished one of these wretches. A Jew offered to sell him a talisman, covered with strange characters, which he said effectually protected the wearer against any sword or dagger thrust. The Duke replied: 'I will essay thy charm upon thyself, Jew,' and putting the talisman round the fellow's neck, he drew his sword and passed it through his body. 'Thou feelest, Jew!' said he, 'how 'twould have been with me, had I purchased thy talisman?'\footnote{Edwards, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 127.}

A rich Jew, on his death bed, ordered that his remains should be conveyed to Ratisbon. His friends, knowing that even the corpse of a Jew could not travel

\footnote{Martin Luther, \textit{The Table Talk of Martin Luther}, Tran. by William Hazlitt (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1952), p. 430.}
without paying a heavy toll, devised the expedience of packing the carcass in a barrel of wine, which they then forwarded in the ordinary way. The wagoners, not knowing what lay within, tapped the barrel, and swilled away right joyously, till they found out they had been drinking jew's pickle. How it fared with them you may imagine.

Thus, it can be observed that Luther's talks were beginning to reflect his building resentment, even in the telling of these good-natured tales.

Sometimes, a more bitter spirit was evident in his talks:

On April 12, 1539, he [Martin Luther] was reading in a Hebrew book in which the prayers and holy days of the Jews, as these are now observed, were described. He wondered at the extraordinary presumption of the Jews. No knowledge of the Scriptures appeared there, but only boasting in special laws that are of mutual benefit. 'They understand nothing about grace and justification by faith [he said], but they wish to be holy by nature and by blood, as the heathen try to be by the will of the flesh.'

Holmio summarizes still two other occasions:

The subject came up once of how the Jews mocked Christianity and a table companion asked if it were possible to give a 'colaphum' or cuff to a mocking Jew with whom one happened to be alone. Luther said he was prepared to 'slap him across the mouth in his anger and even to run him through with his sword if he could.' Once someone remarked that the nobility and the wealthy favored Jewish physicians because they were more skillful than the German ones. Luther burst out with, 'The devil can bring great things about!' 169

In 1541, Luther wrote:

If a Jew, not converted at heart, were to ask baptism at my hands, I would take him on to the bridge, tie a stone round his neck, and hurl him into the river; for these wretches are wont to make a jest of

---

168 Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 54, p. 348.
Luther's tone was beginning to echo the voices of the wicked generation in which he lived. Luther was a product of a religiously violent world. After two decades of kindness and tolerance that only resulted in failure, Luther might have been searching for a new approach. Luther had not given up hope for the Jews' salvation, nor had he reversed his position on the value of the Jewish people, as the following two excerpts bear witness:

A certain Jew who heard the singing of Christ is risen, said, Within a year one gets tired of every song and doesn't sing it any longer. Only this song must be sung year after year and remains unforgettable - Spring 1542.171

Afterward he read in the Psalter and spoke with admiration of David's genius: 'Dear God, what people those were! This David was a husband, king, warlord, almost crushed by political affairs and submerged in public business and yet he wrote such a book! In like fashion, the New Testament was written by real Jews, for the apostles were Jews. Thus God indicates that we should honor the Word of God in the synagogue. We Gentile Christians have no book that has such authority in the church - except Augustine, who is the only doctor in the church of the Gentiles who stands out above others. Accordingly we Gentiles are in no way equal to the Jews. Paul therefore makes an excellent distinction between Sarai and Hagar and their two sons. Hagar was a woman, too, but far from the equal of Sarai. It was therefore terrible temerity on the part of the pope to dare, as a man without Scripture, to oppose the Holy Scriptures - March 1539.172

The fact that Luther in his later years wrote treatises that speak harshly of the Jews is rather well known. The year 1543 marks the year of the marked change in Luther's attitude.

170 Luther, The Table Talk of Martin Luther, p. 203.
171 Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 54, p. 420.
172 Ibid., p. 340.
This was the year that Luther published three treatises against the Jews and Jewish exegesis: "On the Jews and Their Lies," "On the Ineffable Name and on Christ's Lineage," and "On the Last Words of David." "These three treatises are best understood as three parts in one major statement." 173

In May of 1542, Luther received a letter from Count Schlick of Moravia, in which it is recorded that a Jew attacked the Lord Christ, the Virgin Mother and the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. The harshness of this Jew's abuse lit a fire under Luther's frustration that exploded into an unrestrained fury of previously suppressed emotions.

Luther made note of his outrage and his intention to refute the Jewish treatise in table conversation of the fall of 1542:

I intend to write against the Jews once again because I hear that some of our lords are befriending them. I'll advise them to chase all the Jews out of their land. What reason do they have to slander and insult the dear Virgin Mary as they do? They call her a stinkpot, a hog, a monstrosity. If I were a lord, I'd take them by the throat or they'd have to show cause [why I shouldn't]. They're wretched people. I know of no stronger argument against them than to ask them why they've been in exile so long. The Jews put their own flesh and blood to shame when they defame Christ. They bear a grudge against us who believe in him who was born from their blood. 174

In Luther's introduction to "On Jews and Their Lies," Luther writes what amounts to a surrender. After twenty years of trying to convert the Jews, the frustration has overtaken him. He wrote, "It is not my purpose to quarrel with the Jews, nor to

173 Edwards, op. cit., p. 128.
174 Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 54, p. 426.
learn from them how they interpret or understand Scripture; I know all of that very well already. Much less do I propose to convert the Jews, for that is impossible."\textsuperscript{175}

After briefly rehearsing the arguments of past works, he took up several claims and boasts allegedly made by the Jews. The lengthiest part of the treatise was no less than an expanded exegesis of the Old Testament Messianic passages addressed in his 1523 work, "Jesus was Born a Jew." The difference, other than expanded treatment and more texts in the newer work, was in the purpose of the contrasting essays. The early work was clearly intended to be an evangelistic tool. In "On the Jews and Their Lies," the intent was to refute Jewish exegesis.

In the next section, Luther addresses the Jewish slander of Jesus and Mary. He wrote, "They defame our Lord Jesus Christ calling him a sorcerer and tool of the devil."\textsuperscript{176} They called Mary "a whore, who conceived him (Jesus) in adultery with a blacksmith."\textsuperscript{177} They also claimed that Mary conceived while menstruating, the results of which were "imperfect and infirm fruit, that is, insane children, mental deficients, demon's offspring, changelings and the like people who have unbalanced minds all their lives."\textsuperscript{178} Therefore, the Christian Messiah must be of this stock.

Luther later returns to the medieval mentality by repeat-

\textsuperscript{175}Luther, \textit{Luther's Works}, Vol. 47, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{176}Ibid., p. 256.
\textsuperscript{177}Ibid., p. 257.
\textsuperscript{178}Ibid., p. 260.
ing the following unproven charges:

They have been bloodthirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom for more than fourteen hundred years in their intention and would undoubtedly prefer to be such with their deeds. Thus they have been accused of poisoning water and wells, of kidnap­ping children, or piercing them through with an awl, or hacking them to pieces, and in that way secretly cooling their wrath with the blood of Christians, for all of which they have often been condemned to death by fire.179

Luther described the Jews as "a heavy burden, a plague, a pestilence, a sheer misfortune for our country."180 He claimed that "they stuff themselves, guzzle, and live in luxury and ease from our hard-earned goods."181

Luther then swung immediately into a series of harsh recom­mendations to secular authorities. There is some debate as to whether Luther was serious about the actual implementation of these recommendations. The governors simply ignored them. Luther first suggested that fire be set "to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them."182 Second, he advised "that their houses also be razed and destroyed."183 Third, he advised "that all prayer books and Talmudic writing in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be

179 Ibid., p. 264.
180 Ibid., p. 265.
181 Ibid., p. 266.
182 Ibid., p. 268.
183 Ibid., p. 269.
taken from them."  

Fourth, he advised "that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb." Fifth, he advised "that safe conduct on highways be abolished completely for Jews." Sixth, he advised "that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them." Seventh, he recommended "putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses, and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow."  

Luther summarized his purpose for these recommendations to the princes and lords:

If my counsel does not please you, find better advice, so that you and we can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews, lest we become guilty sharers before God in the lies, the blasphemy, the defamation, and the curses which the mad Jews indulge in so freely and wantonly against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dear mother, all Christians, all authority and ourselves.  

Luther went so far as to stoop to identifying the Sixteenth Century Jew with the Jews that Jesus referred to as a brood of vipers and children of the devil (Matt. 12:34 and John 8:44). He wrote concerning Jesus:

He knows that these Jews are a brood of vipers and children of the devil, that is, people who will
accord us the same benefits as does their father, the devil - and by now we Christians should have learned from scripture as well as experience just how much he wishes us well.190

The greater part of the book, notwithstanding its harshness, was a positive Old Testament exegetical study, which clarified his view of the Messiah question and other matters of importance to the Jew. The general theme of these sections was to point to Jesus as the Messiah.191 In fact, Luther's closing sentence reads: "May Christ, our dear Lord, convert them mercifully and preserve us steadfastly and immovably in the knowledge of him, which is eternal life. Amen."192

Scarcely had "On the Jews and Their Lies" reached the book sellers when Luther was already preparing the second book of the trilogy entitled "On the Ineffable Name and on Christ's Lineage." The theme and purpose of this work is identical to the first book. Its contents basically revolved around ridiculing the teachings of Judaism and the Jews themselves in, even for Luther, the most vulgar language.

Luther, it would appear, had given up all hope for a mass Jewish turning to Christ. He wrote:

A few of their number might yet be saved, but the great majority of the Jews were so stubborn that to convert them would be like converting the devil into an angel, hell into heaven, death into life, and sin into holiness.193

190 Ibid., p. 277.
191 Holmio, p. 103.
192 Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 47, p. 306.
193 Cited by Edwards, p. 132.
Still in the same year, there appeared the last volume of the trilogy, "On the Last Words of David," which was basically an exegetical study of II Samuel 23:1-7. Luther focussed upon the doctrine of the trinity and the divinity of Christ and for the most part, it was not a polemic work. Luther, in this work however, still had harsh words, howbeit less severe than former ones. Concerning the fate of the Jews, Luther commenting on verse seven wrote:

Thus the hardened Jews are such evil, prickly thistles...Neither God's benefactions nor His miracles could convert them and cannot convert them now. 194

This cold, if not bitter, attitude of the aged Luther unfortunately continued to the end. In January, 1546, writing to his wife of the illness he contracted, explained:

Dear Kathi, I became extremely weak when I was close to Eisleben, but it was my own fault. However, hadst thou been there, thou wouldst have said that either the Jews or their God were at the bottom of it. For we had to pass through a village close to Eisleben where many Jews lived, and perhaps they blew upon me, for there is no doubt—that at the village a strong wind blew in at the back of the carriage, penetrating through my doctor's hat, threatening to turn my brain into ice. 195

Luther turns from this apparent good natured kidding to the reality of his demise. "When the principal matters are arranged, I must endeavor to banish the Jews. Count Albrecht does not like them, and has tried to expose them, but as yet no one has meddled with them. If God will, I shall help Count Albrecht,

---


195 Holmion, op. cit., p. 106.
and speak about them from this pulpit." 196

Seven days later, he writes again to his wife:

Count Albrecht, who owns all the area around Eisleben, has declared that the Jews who are caught on his property are outlaws. But as yet no one wants to do them any harm. The Countess of Mansfeld, the widow of Solms, is considered to be the protector of the Jews. I do not know whether this is true. Today I made my opinion known in a sufficiently blunt way if anyone wishes to pay attention to it. 197

Luther's last sermon, being preached just three days before he died, was entitled "A Warning Against the Jews." It contained "a fervent exhortation to the Jews to turn to the Messiah and let themselves be baptized." 198 Later in the sermon, he becomes threatening: "You are still harboring in your midst the Jews who are causing great harm - if the Jews refuse to be converted, we must neither tolerate nor suffer them in our midst." 199

The effect of these treatises was immediate in the Strasbourg area. The pastor of Hochfelden preached of the need to kill Jews. Consequently, when Josel requested that these treatises not be published in Strassburg, the town council agreed. 200

In 1544, Charles V, sensing the growing friction between the Protestant and the Jews, 201 issued a new statement to safe-

196 Ibid.


198 Holmio, op. cit., p. 106.


200 Friedman, op. cit., p. 36.

201 For details of the numerous official action initiated following the publication of Luther's treatises, see Holmio, p. 120.
guard the then current rights and provide new privileges for the Jewish people. Friedman provides the following summary of what was in effect a new set of Jewish laws that were the most liberal ever for German Jews to that time.

Jews were granted full freedom of trade; Jewish bankers were permitted to charge higher interest rates than those permitted Christian bankers. The closing of synagogues was forbidden as was any interference with Jewish ritual and religious practice. It was forbidden to spread false rumors regarding ritual murders or alleged Jewish desecration of the host and well poisoning. The expulsion of Jews from any state was forbidden except with the personal approval of Charles himself.\textsuperscript{202}

Luther's anti-Jewish writings aroused great hostility toward Luther among the Jews. They did not hesitate to launch a counterattack with almost equal vigor. The foremost rabbis of Germany, among them Josel of Rosheim "wrote several pamphlets of rebuttal."\textsuperscript{203}

The flowing hopes of both Luther and the Jews of 1523 had now faded into a revived medieval enmity by 1543.

\textsuperscript{202} Friedman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{203} Newman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 628.
WHY LUTHER CHANGED

One of the questions that has puzzled Luther scholars over the years is, why did Luther in the space of twenty years go from the kind, tolerant friend of the Jew to the one man they feared and despised the most? This chapter is intended to present the various factors that collectively contributed to Luther's change of approach concerning the Jewish problem.

In searching for reasons for this change, the question arises as to whether he had personal motives. There was a rumor circulating that the Jews intended to poison him. "In 1525, he had been informed by letter that a certain physician, a Polish Jew, had been paid 2,000 gurden to poison him. The physician was imprisoned."204

The last years of Luther's life were spent in recurring poor health. His work became more and more of a burden on his enfeebled body. His nervous system became less resilient and he suffered from "overstrain," frequently complaining of being "washed out." MacKinnon observed that "opposition frays his temper all too easily, and his increasing tendency to irascibility upsets his judgment of men."205 Noted for his ill temper all his life, it is not surprising that during times of sickness, he demonstrated his frustrations and wrath on paper.

204 Holmio, op. cit., p. 108.
On his own confession, he wrote sometimes out of the emotion of the present controversy that on second thought, he would have rather not seen in print. The older Luther became, the harder his disposition, which "steadily gained the mastery over his gentle religion and humility." Luther had again become a medieval man.

However, it should be noted that the vulgarity and violence, and even charges of the Jews being in league with the devil, are unique to these later treatises. If anything, his 1541 "Against Hanswurt" and his 1545 "Against the Papacy at Rome, Founded by the Devil," make his 1543 Jewish works appear mild in comparison. Luther called the pope "Roman Duke, Antichrist, Servant of Error, Apostle of Satan, Man of Sin, and Son of Depravity." Luther's polemics in his old age against Turks and the other Protestants were only slightly more restrained. With all of his opponents, "he occasionally passed on libelous tales and gave credence to improbable charges."

Even as early as 1524, Luther employed such violent tones against still another potential detriment.

Luther called upon the peasants to remember the injunction of the Gospel that servants should obey their masters. When they refused to listen, he declared that rulers have unlimited authority over their

---

206 Ibid., p. 201.
207 Graetz, op. cit., p. 548.
208 Edwards, op. cit., p. 140.
209 Baron, op. cit., p. 227.
210 Edwards, op. cit., p. 141.
subjects and "may force them and drive them as we force and drive pigs and wild beasts." "Treat them like mad dogs," stab, strangle, and slay as best you can the thievish murderous hords of peasants. Whoever dies fighting for authority is a martyr before God.\(^{211}\)

Hence, Luther treated the Jews, in his writing style no differently than he treated his other opponents.

As previously noted, Luther had slackened in his practice of the Christian virtues of humble-mindedness, love, patience, forbearance, and temperance. With this fall from grace completed, the age-long inbred and almost instinctive Jewish hatred broke loose. Luther took on the values and mores of the medieval world around him.

Once again, a medieval in attitude, it is not surprising to find Luther ensnared in the undercurrent of the superstition of the middle ages, "in which the Jew figured as the embodiment of all that was uncanny or subversive of established order."\(^{212}\) Sorcery and magic, poisoning of wells, kidnapping of children for the sake of torture and murder are found in Luther's 1543 treatises.

Luther never was able to completely divorce himself intellectually from the mythological lore of his peasant upbringing. Luther, as a boy, was completely absorbed with the mythology that surrounded him. This can easily be seen in his sermons and his "Table Talk." It is evident that he had a "persistent belief in the creations of the lower mythology of the German peasant. Upon this he built in later years a complex structure of superstitions

\(^{211}\)Raisin, op. cit., p. 653.

\(^{212}\)Sherman, op. cit., p. 131.
derived from scholarly sources."²¹³ In fact, at the age of forty-three, he admitted that he believed that demons in female form were to be found in a pond in Wittenburg.²¹⁴

The political climate in Germany gave rise to the increased anti-Jewish feelings of Luther. German nationalism was steadily growing as Luther's struggles with the Papacy propelled him to the position of "spokesman of national independence from the Church."²¹⁵ Nationalism and Lutheranism were united forces for a common cause - Germany. The Jews played no part in either movement.

Germany at that time was not a wealthy land. Industry and commerce, compared to Southern Europe, was only in developmental stages. The Reformation was in part responsible for the initiation of economic growth by severing many of the previously endless streams of money flowing to Rome.²¹⁶

Nevertheless, many German principalities were experiencing financial difficulties. Because the Jews were the money-lenders and were exploiting the Christians and weakening the economy, Luther launched his attack. He condemned the Jews because he believed that they were charging exorbitant interest rates that brought ruin to many debtors. "Luther denounced such capitalistic exploitation and called on the state to regulate

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.
²¹⁵ Baron, op. cit., p. 220
²¹⁶ Holmio, op. cit., p. 113.
interest rates for the common welfare."^{217}

Luther's growing hostility to the Jews was reinforced by the Jews' loyalty to the emperor. "It so happened that, among the major impediments to the progress of the Lutheran Reformation was the almost unanimous backing of the Catholic Imperial Regime by big German banks."^{218} The combined forces of these banks and the Jewish money-lender had worked to the disadvantage of the German masses.

Another national cause which contributed to cooled attitude of the Lutheran Reformation and the Jews was their assumed cordial relationship to Christianity's chief earthly foe, the Turks.^{219} Since there was considerable dread among the German people of a Turkish invasion, it is easy to understand the suspicion and hatred for Jews that had been generated by the growing spirit of nationalism.

Luther may also have been influenced by contemporary religious leaders' opinions of the Jewish problem. The Strassburg Reformer, Martin Bucer's, publication "On the Jews" of 1539, advised harsh treatment for the unconverted Jew. Two years later, Luther's arch antagonist, John Eck, published a similar treatise entitled "Refutation of a Jew Book," noting in his views the "cunning, false, perjured, thievish, vindictive, and traitorous

^{218}Baron, op. cit., p. 222.
^{219}Holmio, op. cit., p. 118.
Doctor Eck also recommended "new and more stringent anti-Jewish laws. Heinrich Graetz, noting the striking similarity between Eck's treatise and Luther's "On the Jews and Their Lies," writes "These two passionate opponents were of one heart and soul in their hatred of Jews."221

The Jews and Jewish exegesis, unlike "external" threats like the Turks, were considered by Luther to be "internal" threats to the Reformation.222 One of the greatest threats was the challenge posed by the Rabbis' interpretation of the Old Testament. Luther, who had a profound respect for the Old Testament, saw the battle lines of interpretation forming. Luther believed in a Christological interpretation to most of the Old Testament. The Jewish exegetes, of course, challenged him. Most damaging to Luther's attitude toward the Jews was that "Protestant theologians were adopting the exegetical opinions of the Jewish exegetes."223 Consequently, Luther, even though he had consulted Jewish exegetes and had employed their interpretations in his earlier works, turned sharply on his Hebrew contemporaries. Luther's fear was so intense that at Wittenberg during his declining years, Christian - Hebraica was devoid of any Jewish contact.224

220 Sherman, op. cit., p. 129.
221 Graetz, op. cit., p. 546.
222 Edwards, op. cit., p. 141.
223 Ibid., p. 142.
Since the Protestants appealed to the authority of the Scripture, including the Hebrew Bible, over the traditions of the Church, it was not surprising to find sects arising that began to follow Old Testament precepts literally. Those groups reared on ceremonialism in the Roman Church found Jewish ritualism as a Biblical alternative.

Luther felt the responsibility for the growth and spread of these Judaizing secretaries. When the Sabbatarian movement became known in Germany, Luther's Reformation was blamed.

To make matters worse, there were rumors spreading rapidly throughout the land that many Christians had undergone full conversion to Judaism, and were being aided by the Jews to emigrate to the hated land of Turkey. Baron cites the following report of the Polish chronicler, Marcin Bielski, about the events of 1539, "though quite inaccurate, reflect his contemporaries' wide-spread gullibility." 225

When they saw that people began talking and fighting about their Christian faith as if they were doubting it, the Jews of that period seduced not a few Christians among us to the Jewish religion, and circumcised them. In order to prevent their relapse, they sent them to Hungary and subsequently to Turkey. When King Sigismund ordered the governor and captain of Cracow to institute an investigation among the Jews, the latter sent an agent to the Turkish sultan and asked his intercession with the king, that the road to Turkey might remain open. The sultan replied that there was no need for such action, for, if they waited for a while, he himself would come there and expel the Christians, safeguard peace for the Jews, and open for them a free road everywhere. 226

Luther echoed similar sentiments: "For the Jews would

225 Baron, op. cit., p. 223.

226 Cited by Baron, p. 223.
like to entice us Christians to their faith and do this whenever they can." 227

All of these Judaizing problems were a nightmare come true for Luther. From the very beginning of the Reformation, he had recoiled with horror when learning of accusations of him being a Judaizer. From even the earliest years, Roman propagandists were asserting every effort to discredit Luther's reforms as being Judaizing in nature. By the late 1530's, his earlier pro-Jewish statements had only served as fuel for the propaganda machine. Protestantism was easily identified with Judaism.

Friedman concluded:

Protestant interest in Hebrew, Reformed covenantism, sporadic outbreaks of anti-trinitarianism and Sabbatarianism all made it possible for Eck and other Catholic propagandists to label the new religion as just one step away from the rabbis to account for its strange heretical views. 228

Charles V's advisors were under "the opinion that the Jews were responsible for the Reformation because the Jews had taught their faith to the Lutherans." 229

With Luther's fear now fully realized, he protected not only his personal interests, but that of the Reformation by turning in anger against the Judaizers and against the Jews as well.

Edwards writes that Luther's attacks on the Jews cannot be understood properly apart from its "apocalyptic context." As noted earlier, Luther believed he was living in the wake of the Lord's return and the ensuing "Last Judgment." With establish-

227 Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 47:149.
228 Friedman, The Reformation in Alien Eyes, p. 33.
229 Ibid., p. 35.
ment of the Reformation came the "exposure of the papal anti-
christ. Within the church, the devil had unleashed his last most
violent attack on the true church. The devil's servants in this
final assault were the papists, the fanatics, the Turks and the
Jews."\textsuperscript{230} It was therefore Luther's duty to protect the true
church from her enemies as she awaited the second advent.

However, Luther may have begun to feel that it would be
best to return to the traditional Catholic method of relating to
the Jewish problem since his methods were failing, but most
likely his attitude changed because of the continual practice of
some Jews of blaspheming Jesus and Mary, and the refusal of the
Jews to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Luther experienced other radical shifts from his early
reformation policy and convictions. He went from a position of
supporting the separation of church and state to the establishing
of a church state, and the right of every believer to privately
interpret the scriptures to a position where only his interpreta-
tion was correct.\textsuperscript{231} It was not unusual, therefore, for Luther to
radically shift gears if he deemed the change necessary. He was
forced to establish a state religion in order to secure political
and military protection. So many fanatics and sects had reinter-
preted the scriptures that he felt it imperative to insist on one
interpretation for the sake of the Reformation. Likewise, Juda-
izing, Jewish proselyting of Christians, and Jewish blasphemies

\textsuperscript{230}Edwards, op. cit., p. 142.

\textsuperscript{231}C. Daniel Kim, Lecture Notes for the Course "Great
and obstinacy convinced Luther that he must change his tactics concerning the Jews if the Reformation was to survive.
THE OTHER REFORMERS AND THE JEWS

Just as Luther was not the only reformer, he was not the only reformer to have an opinion on the Jewish problem. It is true that Luther played the central role in the story of the relationship between the Jews and the early Reformation, but other men played significant parts as well. The purpose of this chapter is to present a survey of the other reformers' attitudes toward the Jews, with a special emphasis placed on their desire or lack of desire to convert them to Christ.

It has been the author's experience that little research in English has been done on this subject, and due to the author's deficiency in German and French, this chapter will be somewhat limited. This topic, it would seem, would be a worthy and rewarding subject for some church history scholar to pursue for an English publication.

The first, and probably the most, important reformer in regard to the Jewish question to be examined is Martin Bucer of Strassbourg. Bucer, because of his lower middle-class background, like Luther, was plagued with his culturally bred anti-Jewish feelings. He, again like Luther, is noted as having seemingly ambiguous views displayed in his publications concerning the Jews.

Like Luther, Bucer was a supporter of Reuchlin, but there is no indication in his letters that he had any interest in protecting Jews or their books. His support more probably was
for the noble Reuchlin as an individual and for the new school of humanistic learning and reform.232

In Bucer's "Dialogues" of 1535, he wrote in a tolerant tone concerning the Jews. He insisted that "Jews do serve God to some extent in accordance with the divine law and therefore ought to be given preferential treatment." Bucer, however, saw the need for Jews to be converted to Christianity. If they failed to make the conversion, he would classify them as "despisers of God's grace" who must "be reminded of the divine anger."233 Unfortunately, he believed the magistrate was to function as the instrument of God's wrath against the Jews.234

He also made a strong point to insist that the Christian authorities be sure that the Jews "hear the holy gospel of Christ which is to be preached to all creatures" and if they "despise it and remain in their unbelief," the Christian authorities are "to help them so that they may sustain themselves through their own work without disadvantage to other people, and they [the Christian authorities] are not to prevent them from doing useful work as now commonly happens to Jews who are permitted to destroy completely the poor people with their usury."235

Bucer did demand that the Jews refrain from "blasphemy or any derogation of Christian life and teaching" and that "they


233 Cited by Kleiner, p. 194.

234 Ibid.

235 Ibid., p. 195.
do not permit any public idolatry or false worship."\textsuperscript{236}

Bucer's Romans Commentary of 1536 can be labeled missionary oriented insofar as it relates to the Jews. He writes:

Since God, who is himself righteousness, demonstrates such long-suffering towards them \textsuperscript{237}, we ought not to think about destroying them, for we have no such command from God. The Jews are to be loved by us even now and looked after with all zeal; certainly not that we would cherish them against Christ, but that we might entice them to Christ.\textsuperscript{237}

The ambivalence of Bucer's position is no better demonstrated in the commentary on Romans, for in it he wrote that the Jews "are to be hated and loved by us at the same time, to be held as enemies and friends, to be fought against and cherished."\textsuperscript{238} Kleiner cites the following passage as a possible reason for Bucer's ambivalent position: "The former on account of their present unbelief and for the sake of the saints from the Gentiles...The latter on account of election...and for the sake of the holy forefathers."\textsuperscript{239}

In the Council of Hesse of December, 1538, Bucer introduced a document which has been termed "Cassel Opinion." The drawing up of this work was prompted by a petition from the Jews asking for new commercial rights. The Jews' timing could not have been worse, for it was then that the heat of fierce propaganda was being applied by the Roman Catholics upon the Reformers due to the Judaizing problem in Moravia. The proposal made by

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., p. 196.  
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., pp. 199-200.  
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., p. 200.  
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
the Jews was a compromise arrangement for their toleration. It consisted of a series of seven articles.

1. That they be permitted to buy and sell in cities where there were no guilds, since there they could not injure the guilds.

2. That they be obliged to carry on all their business honestly, without contriving any dishonest business or finance, and that they be punished in case they did.

3. That no Jew should engage in money lending for gain or usury, but they might lend small amounts to any person. But in such a case, it must be done under civil supervision and a just interest should be given.

4. That the Jews should have special supervisors for themselves to point out those deserving punishment and to see that they were punished by the Jews themselves in their own way.

5. That each Jew should pay the landgrave a tax for protection, either the traditional amount, or whatever the prince should tax him.

6. That they should go to "preaching".

7. That they should not argue about their religious beliefs.  

With the help of several Hessian preachers, Bucer composed his substitute plan for tolerating the Jews. He laid down five fundamental principles on which he based his decisions concerning this matter. The first principle was that there is only one religion that is true and it should be upheld above everything else. Second was that the Jews had an "evil record" of conduct. Third, the Jews were condemned by God to severe punishment if they proved unfaithful. Fourth, "all forms of economic rivalry with the Jews must be avoided." Fifth, the "problem must be treated as an existing condition, not as a theory."  

241 Ibid., pp. 130-131.
The Cassel Advice allowed the Jews to live among the Christians and at the same time enabled the governmental authorities to uphold their duty to the one, true religion. The preacher suggested the following recommendations.

1. Jew should take an oath to do no harm to Christ or the church.
2. Forsake the teachings of the Talmud.
3. Stop arguing with Christians over religion.
4. Attend preaching services provided for them.
5. Jews were to be excluded or at least regulated in their money-lending businesses.
6. In order that Jews may earn a living they should be permitted "to engage in any work which was subordinating, wearisome and ungainful."
7. A "reasonable tribute" was required of Jews according to their ability to pay.\textsuperscript{242}

To this severe opinion, Landgrave Philip replied in a letter advocating a far more tolerant view. After seeing both his "Cassel Opinion" and Philip's letter published together in a pamphlet, Bucer felt another answer was in order. In May of 1539, he published "Von den Juden."\textsuperscript{243} Eells provides a summary of contents of this work.

As for the Jews, they were closer to the papists than to the Protestants, Bucer said. They were no longer God's chosen people, because they had become enemies of Christ and of the children of God. True, Jesus was a Jew, but his connection with the Jewish race was purely physical. The bond between Christians was not physical but spiritual, and by this spiritual bond Christ was united with

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., pp. 131-133.

Christians, not with Jews. Christ died for Christians, while the Jews robbed them. So exorbitant was the amount of usury that they took from Christians, Bucer claimed, that the Jews themselves would consider it a sin to take as much from other Jews. At the same time it was true that the patriarchs and fathers of the Christian church were Jews, and for their sake Christians should help the Jews in so far as it was possible to do so without harming others. 244

It is evident that the fifteen years that Bucer spent in the Dominican Order 245 had a profound effect on him and his attitude toward the Jews. Nevertheless, Bucer's protestant evangelical spirit shined beams through the medieval fog. In Bucer's "Von den Juden" he claimed that God had ordained that unbelievers should serve believers. Even though this service was a punishment, it might produce good results. It may help Christians to shun the errors of Judaism and "it might even lead some of the Jews to see that they were wrong and so result in their conversion." 246

Wolfgang Capito had extensive contacts with Judaism, being a competent Hebraist. He also had limited contacts with contemporary Jews, including Josel of Rosheim. Josel and Capito had great respect for each other in spite of the fact that Capito was Bucer's "closest associate" in Strassbourg. 247 Selma Stern, Josel's biographer, claims that they were bound together "by

---

245 Holmio, op. cit., p. 80.
247 Baron, op. cit., p. 240.
ties of warm friendship." Josel, in his memoirs, indeed speaks warmly of Capito: "A mild, warm personality tending toward melancholy. In his undogmatic way, the most broadminded of all German reformers, the protector of the persecuted and the oppressed." 249

It was Capito who wrote to Martin Luther on behalf of Josel when Jews were forbidden to travel through Saxony. In this letter, Kleiner relates how that Capito felt that Jews should not be treated as enemies, but be "treated well by Christians so that the Christian faith will make a favorable impression on them." 250

It is interesting to note that even though Capito demonstrated no strong missionary thrust in his writing, he did preach on saving faith in services attended by Josel. Each time Capito began discussing faith, Josel would walk out. 251

Casper Hedio, a Strassbourg contemporary of Capito and Bucer, in his "On the Jewish War," indicated that Christians should treat the Jews with love and compassion because they are not a uniquely lost race. 252 He, however, never even hints in his recorded works of a desire to see the Jews converted. 253


249 Ibid., p. 155.
250 Kleiner, op. cit., p. 68.
251 Baron, op. cit., p. 240.
252 Kleiner, op. cit., p. 132.
253 Ibid., p. 137.
Paul Fagius was also one of the reformers at Strassbourg. He was, like Capito, a scholar who was concerned with Judaism and Hebraic studies. The following quotation from "Precationes," one of his finest publications, provides insight concerning his attitude toward the Jews.

Finally, so that you may see here the deplorable blindness of the Jewish people who always seek carnal rather than spiritual things from God, who feed the stomach rather than the soul. And how till now they tenaciously and lamentably look for another liberator than Christ, our true Messiah, dreaming I know not what carnal dreams of his future kingdom. 254

Citing the same pamphlet, Fagius' hope for the Jews is expressed:

If perhaps the Lord would grant his grace, so that in this way [his work] the blind eyes of some, if not all, of the Jews might be opened and, acknowledging their errors, they might be converted to Christ, our one and true salvation. 255

Fagius, however in his work "Liber fidei," was careful to note that Christians needed to defend their faith against the attacks of hostile Jews. 256 In the forward, he wrote:

You certainly know, 0 best man, what a hostile race of men [is] the Jewish people to our Christian religion, and how it is scarcely able to tolerate books of this kind which are published to refute their errors and to show the glory of Christ our only Saviour, and how often they revile with great indignities and intolerable outcries the truth itself. With such this book particularly deals, by revealing the deplorable blindness of the Jews and by protecting and confirming with valid arguments from the sacred scriptures, the truth and sincerity of our faith... 257

254 Ibid., p. 163.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid., p. 165.
257 Ibid., p. 166.
Fagius then proceeds to call Jews "a rebellious, stubborn, unbelieving people, as scripture truly says, a stiffnecked people among who Satan greatly rages." 258

It is important to note, however, that Fagius does not want to hold contemporary Jews responsible for either their attitude toward Christians or for their wicked life style. He blamed the Jewish leaders in New Testament times who "blinded the eyes of the common people with their strange interpretations and thus blocked the hearts of the fickle multitude so that they believed their words were true and right." 259 Hence, he viewed the Jews as basically misinformed rather than deliberately pursuing after evil. He, therefore, recommended that the Jews "are to be exhorted with good and kind words, so that by this reasoning they might be led back gradually onto the right road of faith." 269

Sebastian Munster was the most eminent Protestant Hebraist of the sixteenth century. Munster believed that it was important for the purpose of evangelism that the Bible be given to the people in their own language. With this principle in mind, he produced Hebrew versions of Matthew and Hebrews, so as to make them available to Jewish readers.

At the beginning of his Hebrew translation of Matthew is found a 33-page treatise that clarifies that the whole book is specifically intended as a mission work toward the Jews. He first presented a broad affirmation of the Christian faith, but

258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., p. 172.
260 Ibid.
with a special emphasis placed on the doctrine of the trinity. He then gives a presentation of the Jewish faith and a refutation of the more common errors of the Jews concerning the Messiah. The treatise is brought to a close with the following statement:

"This is our true and rightful faith, by which alone we are saved, and he who does not believe it will surely eternally perish, nor will the shedding of the blood of Christ nor his atonement benefit him before the Lord."  

Munster also published two missionary tracts, "The Christian and the Jewish Messiah" and "The Dialogue of a Christian with a Jew." Both of these works were written throughout in a "comparatively friendly and sympathetic spirit. Munster does not want to smite the Jews but his purpose is to help them find the truth." The dialogue was employed for years in the work of Jewish evangelism.

Concerning the other German reformers, the record is at best spotty. Very little was written concerning the Jews. The following lines will present this writer's findings.

Ludwig Haetzer, another Christian Hebraist, wrote various tracts for a more Christian treatment of the Jews, with the motto, "O God, set free the prisoners." He also wrote a pamphlet on the conversion of the Jews in collaboration with Hans Denck.

Johann Agricola was called to Berlin in 1540 to act as

---

261 Holmio, op. cit., p. 137.


court chaplain to Joachim II. Joachim had initiated a liberal economic policy concerning the Jews. Agricola set himself wholeheartedly, in spite of fierce persecution, to uphold Joachim's policies and to protect the Jews.\textsuperscript{264}

Andreas Osiander, of Nuremberg, boldly refuted in 1541 the accusations that Jews were involved in the blood libel of ritual murders, advancing twenty arguments for the falsehood.\textsuperscript{265} He was also highly critical of Luther's "Shem Hamphoras" in his letter to Elijah Levita.\textsuperscript{266}

Philip Malanchthon, Luther's dear friend and closest associate, was known to have been unhappy with the severity of tone in Luther's "On the Jews and Their Lies." Also in 1539 at Frankfurt, he presented a convincing argument that proved the innocence of thirty-eight Jews who had been executed in Berlin on the charge of desecration of the host.\textsuperscript{267}

Without ever actually writing any anti-Jewish essays, Melanchthon did echo Luther's harangues of 1543. He was delighted, for instance, with Luther's pamphlet, "The Last Words of David," which he praised as enjoyable reading. On the other hand, he forwarded Luther's "On the Jews and Their Lies" to Philip of Hesse with but a noncommittal comment that it contained "many a

\textsuperscript{264} See Holmio, pp. 83-84 for the details of the persecution.

\textsuperscript{265} Valentin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{266} Baron, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 232.

\textsuperscript{267} Sherman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 264.
useful lesson."\textsuperscript{268}

Ulrich Von Hutten, before joining Luther, wrote a strongly anti-Jewish poem, in which he repeated the desecration of the host accusation. He never did revise his view during the last few years of his life, even though Luther was beginning to write favorably concerning the Jews.

Of the Anabaptist reformers, this writer was able to locate relevant information concerning attitudes toward the Jews on Hans Denck, Balthasar Hubmaier and Pilgram Marpeck.

Hans Denck of Nuremberg, besides co-writing with Haetzer a missionary tract to the Jews, translated the Prophets with the expert aid of Jewish Rabbis and even acknowledged this aid in the publication.\textsuperscript{270} In his 1527 essay, "Concerning Genuine Love," he alludes to the idea of evangelizing Jews.

\begin{displayquote}
It is not necessary to teach heathen the customs or the old dispensation if one preaches to them a gospel of love...It is not necessary either to hold these up to the Jews, if one intends to preach love to them.\textsuperscript{271}
\end{displayquote}

Pilgram Marpeck also made a reference to his desire to see Jews come to Christ.

\begin{displayquote}
They [the Jews] completely overlooked the time, for they saw and desired in Christ only the
\end{displayquote}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{268}Baron, \emph{op. cit.}, p. 231.
\bibitem{269}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 230.
\bibitem{270}Werner O. Packull, \emph{Mysticism and Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531} (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), p. 45.
\end{thebibliography}
scandalous and not the true, and thus they must perish, even to this day may God grant them the recognition of this error. 272

Before Hubmaier became a true believer, he took an active role; in fact, he became the leader in the expelling of the Jews from Regensburgh in 1519. However, even after his salvation, "he expressed no regret for his course, but rather gives it tacit approval, though by no means tells the whole story of his misdeeds." 273

In 1526, he makes this allusion to the matter:

While still a preacher in Ratisbon, I saw the great oppression suffered by the population from excessive Jewish usuries. I saw that ecclesiastical and secular judges issued judgments in this matter. I therefore urged the people from the pulpit not to tolerate that state of affairs any longer. But no one paid any attention, and everything remained unchanged until the King [Emperor Maximilian I] died. 274

Later in life, Hubmaier did write a statement that may indicate a change of heart. He wrote, "Friendship which might be extended to Jews and heathens could never be extended to a banned person." 275

Since the Jews had been expelled from most of the Swiss cities during the fifteenth century, "none of the Swiss reformers had occasion to concern himself deeply with contemporary Jewish


274 Cited by Baron, p. 243.

In this section Oecolampadius, Bullinger, Zwingli, and Calvin will be discussed.

Johannes Oecolampadius of Basel wrote nothing concerning the Jews of significance, but he was successful in converting a Jew to Christ in 1531. Oecolampadius celebrated the Jew's baptism in such an elaborate manner that a contemporary writer wrote a detailed account of the event.\textsuperscript{277}

Zwingli spent much time refuting charges of Judaizing due to his reliance on the Rabbis in his Hebrew studies and his belief that the Jews were still God's chosen people and that they and the Church were under one covenant.\textsuperscript{278} However, he wrote very little of practical significance concerning his attitude toward the Jews.

Henry Bullinger of Zurich, in correspondence with Martin Bucer, remarked that Luther's "views of 1543 reminded him of the Inquisitors."\textsuperscript{279} He also wrote of Luther's "lewd and houndish eloquence" and of this "scurrility which is appropriate for no one and still less for an old theologian."\textsuperscript{280}

Bullinger, using an old argument, makes an appeal to the Jews to accept the Savior:

\begin{quote}
What have they \textsuperscript{[the Jews]} wherewith to cloak their stubborn incredulity? They have now by the space
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{276}Baron, op. cit., p. 239.  \\
\textsuperscript{277}Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{278}Newman, op. cit., p. 494.  \\
\textsuperscript{279}Sherman, op. cit., p. 123.  \\
\textsuperscript{280}Baron, op. cit., p. 228.
\end{flushright}
of more than a thousand and five hundred years been without their country; I mean, the land of promise that flowed with milk and honey; they have wanted their prophets, and lacked their solemn service and ceremonial rites. For where is their Temple? Therefore let the unhappy Jews (unless perhaps they had rather to be entangled in greater errors, to be vexed daily with endless calamities, and so at last perish eternally) turn unto Christ by faith. 281

John Calvin, the great French reformer of Geneva, had few contacts with contemporary Jews and did not concern himself with the Jewish problem. Long before Calvin's arrival in Geneva, professing Jews had been forced to depart. When, in 1547, a few Jews came to Geneva on their way to Venice, the city council "probably with Calvin's approval" decided that "according to existing regulations, such transients were not to be allowed to stay in the city for any length of time." 282

Calvin, however, when residing in Strasbourg from 1539 to 1541, must have come upon meaningful contacts with living Jews, probably including Josel of Rosheim. Calvin wrote one tract entitled, "Ad Quaestiones et Obiecta Judaei Cuiusdam Responsio," in which he expressed his anti-Judaism polemic in a debate format. The Jewish debater is believed to be Josel. 283

Calvin's covenant theology, which hindered him in understanding Israel's place in prophecy, produced a cold indifference to the plight of the contemporary Jews, both socially and politically. This attitude is reflected in his treatment of Romans

281 Ibid., p. 238.
282 Ibid., p. 280.
283 See Baron's Article, "John Calvin," The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 5:68 for the details of the debate.
11:25, "and so all Israel will be saved:"

Many understand this of the Jewish people, as if Paul were saying that religion was to be restored to them again as before. But I extend the word Israel to include all the people of God, in this sense, when the Gentiles have come in, the Jews will at the same time return from their defection to the obedience of faith. The salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be drawn from both, will thus be completed, and yet in such a way that the Jews, as the first born in the family of God, may obtain the first place. 284

Like Luther, Calvin saw the Old Testament as a clear testimony of Jesus Christ and often attacked the Jews for their persistant adherence to their traditional interpretations. But unlike Luther, he expresses little concern for them. He wrote:

I do not labor here in order to convince the Jews, whose stubbornness is indomitable to the last ditch. I merely wish to show how unjustly they have disturbed Christian minds because of their different readings of this passage. 285

It is also of import to note that in the first edition of his Institutes, he objected to use of force in converting a Jew to Christianity. However, this passage was omitted in later editions. At any rate, there is no record in Calvin's works of any anti-Jewish statements. Nor is there any evidence that he objected to Jewish communities rising in number and affluence in reformed cities to the East. 286


286 Ibid., p. 291.
CONCLUSION

From the birth of the Christian Church to the renewal of the Reformation, tension has existed between the Jew and the Christian. In the first century, the Jews engaged in a strong, but sporadic, persecution of the Church. By the second century, the signs of growing bitterness on both sides became increasingly evident.

Christians viewed the decline of Judaism as a sign of God's verification of their faith. The refusal of the Jews to see Jesus as their promised Messiah was considered increasingly as Jewish blindness and malice.

The Christian doctrine that claims that the Church is the fulfillment of Israel and the ceremonial law was of no value after Christ's work sparked great Jewish animosity toward the Church. On the other hand; one of the greatest fears of the Christians, from Paul to Luther, was the fear that the Church's doctrines would be contaminated by those who would take the Church back under the Jewish Law.

As centuries passed, the Church became the dominant religion of the Empire. Bitterness toward the Jewish people, who "dared" to reject Christ, mushroomed to the extent that by the fourth century, the greatest of the church fathers were participating in seemingly hateful discourses against the Jews and Judaizing influences within the churches. Laws, both ecclesiastical and civil, were passed to protect the Christian from the Jew
and his feared influence.

It was becoming increasingly clear to the theologians of the Church that the Jews, because of the rejection and their murdering Christ, were under the curse of God. By the time of the crusades, these "wicked Christ killers" became the targets of the Inquisitors' bloody swords. The common people, stupefied in ignorance and superstition, considered the Jews subhuman representatives of the devil, and practitioners of all kinds of evil and atrocious deeds. The Jews, by the fifteenth century, were deemed a race unsuitable for habitation in Christendom. By the time of the Reformation, the Jews had either been executed in or expelled from all but a few cities in Western Europe.

Humanism and nominalistic scholasticism were the philosophical foundations for the Reformation, and also for Luther's as well as other reformers' tolerant views concerning the Jews. Each of the reformers were to some extent influenced by the cultural antisemitism of the Holy Roman Empire as well. This is well illustrated in Luther's life. He was a man of peasant nurturing, which only served to cloud an already culturally darkened perspective of his Jewish neighbors with the shadows of fearful superstition and folklore. At the same time, he embraced the humanistic spirit of individualism.

These were the early days of individualism. Jews, in the minds of these modern men, were to be judged as individuals rather than as a people. Christian and Jewish interaction and dialogue had been rekindled. It was not surprising that Luther believed that the whole of Jewry might be won to Christ one by
one. The reformers were not just religious men who broke with tradition as they ran with the winds of philosophical revolution. They were men regenerated, men in whom the miracle of Christ's redeeming blood was evident. One would expect that the love of Christ should be manifested by concern for the fate of the unregenerated, which included many Jews. This proved to be the case, as noted in Chapter 8. The reformers, for the most part, joined Luther in his interest in Jewish evangelism, and with the exception of Bucer, they were not advocates of Jewish persecution.

The German reformers, in particular, were by and large sympathetic to the spiritual state of the Jews. Bucer, Fagius and Munster wrote strong evangelical statements; Capito, Medio and Haetzer were evangelistically minded; Agricola, Osiander and Melanchthon were at least defenders of the Jews.

Of the Anabaptist reformers, Hans Denck was the most evangelically minded and Hubmaier was, in his later life, friendly toward the Jews.

The Swiss reformers were almost silent concerning the Jewish problem. However, it is also true that they had little negative impact.

In general, the reformers, other than Luther and Bucer, were too preoccupied with maintaining a Protestant stronghold and fortifying their doctrinal positions on the theological and political battlefields of the Reformation to give time to writing on the Jewish problem.

Sadly, Luther launched a campaign to evangelize the Jews that served only to support the expectation of the Jewish people,
that their Messiah and promised kingdom was at hand. The Reformation was viewed as the long-awaited demise of Christianity. They believed that Luther most assuredly would pull his followers back into Judaism. As the years passed, both Luther and the rabbis grew frustrated as their dreams faded into reality. Consequently, Luther, as well as Bucer, advocated a negative Jewish stance in a public fashion. But even those writings are laced with the concern that the Jews hear and respond affirmatively to the gospel message. Luther's polemics indeed were sparked for the most part by the frustrating experience of observing years of kindly, patient overtures concerning the grace of God, even at the risk of being labeled a Judaizer and thus jeopardizing the Reformation, being ignored or seen as an opportunity to blaspheme the Christian faith.

Although embittered by the price the Jews' resistance cost his work, Luther remained unto the end a man with a burden for the souls of the individual Jews. However, the tide of toleration with the hope of mass conversion proved to be misunderstood, and as is often the case with revolutionary or radical concepts, it was met with failure. Consequently, a return to the medieval approach of securing converts appeared to be the more expedient course of action for both Luther and Bucer.

The reformers, overcoming to a great extent the prejudice of their day, saw the Jews, not as devils nor as murderers of Jesus, but as men and women in need of their Savior.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Thompson, Bard. "Bucer Study Since 1918." Church History. 25 (1956).

