



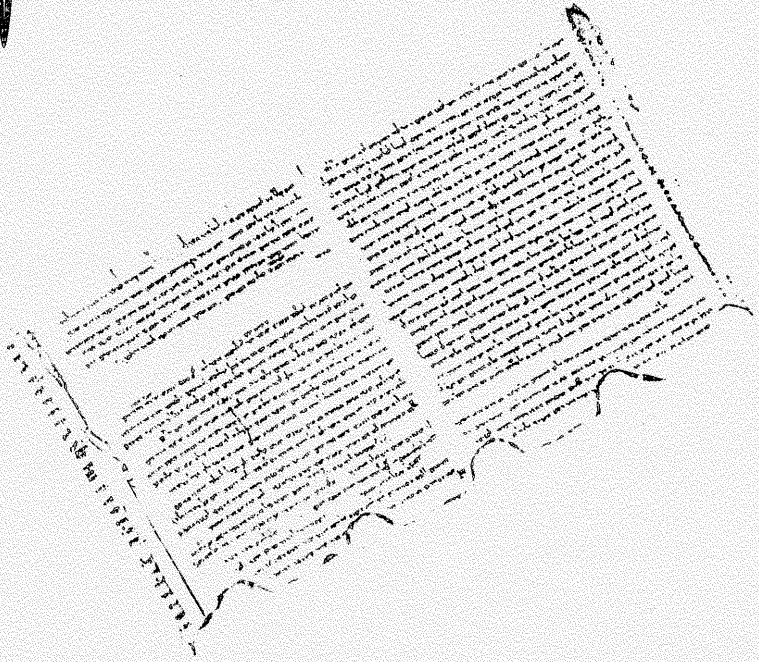
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FOREWORD

This issue of the Quarterly is devoted to an article by Dr. Neelak Tjernagel entitled MARTIN LUTHER AND THE JEWS. We trust that our readers will find it to be interesting and instructive.

Much has been written of late about Luther's attacks on the Jews. In most of these writings Luther is portrayed as being anti-Semitic or senile. Some have even tried to link him with Adolph Hitler. Tjernagel shows that these charges are simply not true. While the author does not condone everything that Luther said, yet he contends that "we do have the obligation to try to understand the historical setting and the common conventions under which he spoke and wrote" and that he does admirably.

Dr. Tjernagel points out that Luther's writings show a keen interest in the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. In his treatise That Christ Was Born a Jew Luther says that "we ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them."

This article also reminds us that Luther lived under a completely different situation than we do. Christianity was the only recognized religion in his day. All other religions were considered to be enemies of the state. By contrast we live under a system that has religious liberty and plurality of religions.

We appreciate being reminded in this article by Dr. Tjernagel that Luther was alone among the Reformers of the 16th century in disavowing any use of force in the proclamation of the gospel and in dealing with dissenters.

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MARTIN LUTHER AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Preface

"One could wish that Luther had died before ever this tract was written."

"I should be glad to believe that More was not the author of this work. That a nature so pure and gentle, so adverse to coarse abuse, and hitherto not unfavorable to the cause of religious reform, should soil itself with vulgar and offensive railery, destitute of all wit and humor, shocks and pains, like the misconduct of a dear friend."

The two quotations above suggest a parallel between two heroic figures of the sixteenth century, Dr. Martin Luther and Sir (or St.) Thomas More. Both paragraphs represent the wishful thinking of admiring biographers, both rueful in contemplation of the occasional coarse and vituperative writing of the subjects of their studies.

The first expression is that of Roland H. Bainton in his deservedly popular book, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther.¹ Bainton is referring to Luther's tirade, On The Jews and Their Lives, published in 1543.²

The second of the quoted paragraphs above is from The Reign of Henry VIII by the distinguished English historian, J. S. Brewer, who deals extensively with the career of Sir Thomas More.³ A verbal battle ensued when Luther published The Babylonian Captivity of the Church⁴ in 1520, and King Henry responded with his defense of the traditional Roman Catholic theology of the seven sacraments.

Two highly respected Englishmen entered the fray in defense of the received theology of the Roman Church. They were the future English martyrs John Fisher and Thomas More. More wrote stridently against the published works of the English Protestants William Tyndale, John Frith, and Robert Barnes, also martyrs-to-be. More's heavy artillery, however, was reserved for his book, Response to Luther, written in Latin under the pseudonym William Ross. More never acknowledged his authorship of the book. It has only recently been identified as More's. Suffice it to say that More's language in this book and other essays against the Lutherans more than equalled the scatological vitriol of the angry essays of Luther's later years.

The offensive language of both Luther and More is remarkable because the natural and instinctive styles of these men was warm and friendly. Martin Luther's proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ was characterized by loving concern and happy confidence. Thomas More, the humanistic intellectual and brilliant writer, was an admired and successful lawyer who enjoyed the company of Erasmus, Henry VIII, Dean Colet, and others who shared mutual interests in the heady atmosphere of Renaissance learning. Both Luther and More were learned men endowed with great personal charm. Each had a fine sense of humor and wrote and spoke with an unflinching wit and eloquence.

Thomas More came into the service of Henry VIII in 1518 and was knighted in 1521. At the fall of Thomas Wolsey in 1529, More was appointed Lord Chancellor of England, a rank second only to that of the king. The rest of his life was to be grim testimony to his unyielding commitment to the Roman Catholic Church. Where Thomas Wolsey had been content to burn heretical books and slap the wrists

of heretics, More undertook to fulfill his obligations as chancellor by initiating the ugly task of burning heretics. Unhappy over the king's marriage to Anne Boleyn, More resigned his chancellorship with his sovereign's consent. Henry's dalliance with Protestantism led him to secure Parliamentary authorization for assuming the headship of the English church. More's martyrdom followed in 1535 when he refused to take the Oath of Supremacy. To have taken this oath would have meant the renunciation of the authority of the Roman pope. This More was not willing to do.

Both More and Luther were to be the victims of their passionate religious convictions. More believed that the rejection of the papacy was tantamount to the destruction of the church and all social order. He preferred martyrdom to a yielding of his convictions.

In a table conversation recorded in 1538, Luther revealed his awareness of More's activity against Protestant heretics. Luther had been asked whether Thomas More might be regarded as a true martyr. He answered, "No!" and said:

He was a very great tyrant against the gospel and shed much blood of the godly confessors of the gospel. He tortured them with strange instruments like a hangman. First he examined the confessors orally under a green tree [in his garden in Chelsea]. Then he stretched them on a rack in dungeons. Finally, when he had attained a place second to the king, he attacked the king himself in opposition to a decree of the whole realm, and for this he paid the penalty [of beheading on a charge of treason, not heresy].⁵

Luther is unfair in these comments. Though he has

the facts straight as to More's activity against Protestant reformers, Luther improperly attributes More's death to a personal attack against the king. More's refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy was a matter of conviction and conscience that was as important to him as Luther's insistence in regarding the merit of Christ the whole and only way to salvation.

Luther outlived More by eleven years. Though Luther had expected, and even desired, martyrdom, he died a natural death. Like More who died for the sake of his passionate loyalty to the Roman Catholic understanding of the doctrine of the church, Luther affirmed his passionate faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ in what, late in his life, often became a shrill and sometimes coarse vehemence that embarrassed a few of his contemporaries and, one may say, almost all of his patrons and fellow Lutherans in the 20th century. It is small enough comfort to know that, unlike Thomas More, Martin Luther's integrity and humanity never permitted him to publish anonymous broadsides or to participate in the torture and execution of heretics.

In our own time the holocaust in Germany and the civil rights movement in America have sensitized us to the injustice and indignity of racism in any form. It is not strange, therefore, that among Luther's writings his diatribes against the Jews should be the occasion for offence in the eyes of the contemporary world. We feel no call, however, either to condemn or condone Luther's outbursts. We do have the obligation to try to understand the historical setting and the common conventions of the time, and the basic motives and conventions under which he spoke and wrote.

A biographical void has marked writing on the

last years of Luther's life. Two recent publications have gone a long way toward helping us to understand the distinctive features of the struggles of Luther's last years.

The writer acknowledges his indebtedness to this study to H. G. Haile, Luther: An Experiment in Biography,⁶ and to Mark U. Edwards, Jr., Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531-1546.⁷

The Jewish People In The Middle Ages

The well-known historian, Will Durant, has summarized the history of the Jewish people from the termination of their history as a nation in A.D. 71 to the establishment of modern Israel in 1948 as

...the story of a people losing its homeland in the seventy-first year of the Christian era, wandering for eighteen centuries over four continents, and suffering repeated crucifixions, before regaining its ancient habitation in the unstable flux of our time.⁸

The first Christians were Jews who accepted Jesus Christ, a Jew of the house of David, as their Messiah. Their leaders were the Jewish Apostles and Evangelists who associated Jesus with the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. They had no thought of founding a new religion. They believed that New Testament Christianity was simply the continuation of the will and purpose of the Creator God as it was made known to man in both Testaments.

In the post-Christian era orthodox Judaism had become a religion imprisoned in its own beliefs.

It was restricted to a single race and anchored in one city, Jerusalem. In the New Testament dispensation Jesus Christ had made Christianity a universal faith, offering the benefits of the redemption to all people in all parts of the world. St. Paul understood this new dimension of the religion of the Old Testament and said: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Rom. 1:16. The Apostle added: "There is no respect of persons with God." Rom. 2:11. In his sermon on Mars Hill, Athens, he said that God "had made of one blood all nations of men." Acts 17:26. He assured His Gentile audience that "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:26-28.

Orthodox Jews rejected the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. They disavowed the messiahship of Jesus and continued to look to the coming of one who would restore the kingdom of Israel. These people held tenaciously to their Old Testament beliefs, ceremonies, and forms of worship. They scorned the Christian Jews for their disavowal of the traditions of the past. They refused to believe that the ancient ceremonies of the Hebrews were merely a shadow of things to come, portents and preparation for the advent of Jesus, the Messiah.

That the orthodoxy of Judaism should have survived for eighteen centuries is a unique and remarkable fact. Christianity prospered and grew on the wave of an expanding western civilization. Unlike almost every other historical religious development, Judaism survived without the bracing support of an

effective nationhood. Christianity, on the other hand, became the basic component in the development of western civilization following the collapse of the ancient Roman Empire. This civilization was to be Christian in its essential character and in the legal system which it adapted from ancient Roman forum. It was to be exclusive in relation to all other religions.

That is to say that all religions outside the Christian faith were not only rejected in a philosophical sense, they were regarded as enemies of the state. Thus Judaism and Mohammedanism and every other religious group was tolerated, at best, but more frequently persecuted and harrassed in a thousand vindictive ways. Our modern conception of freedom of religion in a pluralistic society was an idea that had not been considered, much less put into practice anywhere in Medieval Europe. Thus we may say that western civilization and the Medieval church were both anti-Semitic. The holocaust of our own time is only an extreme example of the litany of horrors that constitutes the history of the Jewish people.

Before the Council of Nicea, A.D.325, the Roman Emperor Constantine had placed the Jewish religion on a level of equality with that of the Christian Church. After the emperor's recognition of Christianity the Jews were oppressed with one restriction after the other. It became a capital offense for a Jew to marry a Christian woman. Jews were taxed at a higher rate than Christians. They were oppressed and persecuted indiscriminately. Once Christians escaped the persecution of pagan rulers they were not slow to apply pagan penalties against Jewish people in their midst. It was an oppression that was to continue to and beyond the era of the 16th century reformation of the Christian church.

The hostility between Christians and Jews derived in large part from the fact that they shared the Old Testament Scriptures. The bitterness was like that which we see between members of the same family. They could not eat together because the Jews retained, and the Christians ignored, the dietary laws of the Old Testament. Each found the worship of the other repulsive because Christians referred to Jesus Christ as the Messiah, their object of worship, while the Jews awaited another fulfillment of God's promise. At first the Jews isolated themselves from Christians in order to preserve their own traditions. Laws against mixed marriages, first imposed by Christians, were even more rigidly maintained by Jews who thus have successfully perpetuated their nationality and their religion. They tended to isolate themselves in their own homogenous enclaves. Later Christians isolated the Jews forcibly by placing them in undesirable ghetto areas. Christianity flourished during the middle ages while the Jews were forced to languish under the sufferance of a preponderant Christian majority.

Like the American Negro slave, the Jews were treated as non-persons. They had no rights, only an inhumane sufferance. Neither could claim the protection of law or any other form of social equity. The Jews could be banished from a local principality, as they often were. They could be compelled to wear an identifying mark or garb, and, under the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, they were obliged to stay off the street and out of sight on Christian holidays.

As non-Christians they could not participate in the feudal religious ceremonies involved in the transfer and holding of land. When, as in rare cases, a Jew did acquire land it was subject to confiscation at the whim of the ruling king or

prince. They could neither be knighted nor granted any of the other feudal privileges that were the life-blood of medieval agriculture and commercial life. They had to make do with any precarious livelihood they could devise, often struggling as itinerant peddlers or in such menial occupations as were despised and spurned by Christians.

The persecution of Jews under the Spanish inquisition had papal approval under an edict of 1478. Thirty thousand Jews and Moslems were destroyed in King Ferdinand's determination to make Spain a nation of one faith and one blood. The Crusaders, embarked on the adventure of restoring Jerusalem and Palestine to Christian rule, paused enroute to the East to kill as many European Jews as appeared in their line of march. The infidel Moslem and the European Jew were in the same circumstance. Neither accepted Christ as the Messiah. Christians who burned their own people as heretics and as tares in the wheat had no tolerance for anyone outside the Christian pale. They were virtually unanimous in their anti-Semitism.

Luther's Initial Attitude Toward the Jews

Luther had barely begun his work as a lecturer at the University of Wittenberg when the gathering storm of conflict between the Christian humanists and the scholastic establishments of the medieval church broke out in full force. John Reuchlin, the epicenter of the storm, was a Christian Jew who had studied Latin and Greek in Paris and Switzerland where he compiled a popular lexicon. Further study in France and Italy led to a degree in law and a humanistic interest in the pursuit of Hebrew studies. His crowning scholarly achievement was a grammar and lexicon of the Hebrew language which was to be the basic tool of Hebrew studies thereafter. It was to

be at Luther's hand constantly as he produced the translation and exposition of the Old Testament. Reuchlin's work was all in the finest tradition of 16th century humanistic studies.

A conflict arose when John Pfefferkorn, also a converted Jew, challenged Reuchlin's writings and called for the destruction of all Hebrew books, including the Talmud, on the grounds that they were at odds with the Christian faith. Voluminous blasts and counterblasts followed. Reuchlin demonstrated that he had in no way opposed Christian doctrine. He said that he considered the wholesale destruction of Jewish literature an affront to scholarship.

The scholastic authorities at Cologne, cast in the role of leadership, and the authorities at Mainz, Louvain, and Erfurt agreed on their condemnation of Reuchlin. The Dominican Inquisitor General at Cologne prepared to take action against the celebrated Hebraist. George Ortwin of Cologne wrote scurrilous pamphlets against Reuchlin while the humanists, almost to a man, rose to his support. Luther read Ortwin's pamphlets and was outraged. He chided Ortwin because he deliberately and heedlessly distorted and twisted the words of Reuchlin. The final outcome of the process against the learned humanist was that Rome dismissed the charges and permitted Reuchlin to continue teaching.

As an expositor of the Old Testament, Luther had ample occasion to talk and write about the Jews. Nothing that he said or wrote about them during the electorate of Frederick the Wise even remotely reflects racial prejudice. Later he hired another Jew, the Spaniard Matthew Adrian, well known as a distinguished Hebraist and scholar, to become a member of the faculty of the University of Wittenberg.

Martin Luther had nothing but scorn for those who blamed the crucifixion of Christ on the Jewish people. In a meditation on the passion of Christ, published in 1519, Luther said:

Some people meditate on Christ's passion by venting their anger on the Jews. This singing and ranting about wretched Judas satisfied them, for they are in the habit of complaining about other people, condemning, and reproaching their adversaries. That might well be a meditation on the wickedness of Judas and the Jews, but not on the sufferings of Christ.⁹

Luther's first reference to the Jewish people occurred in a doctrinal treatise, That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew.¹⁰ He wrote this essay in self-defense. He had falsely been accused of denying that Mary, the mother of God, was a virgin, and also of saying that the Savior's descent from Abraham was through Joseph. In response to these serious accusations, he said:

Since for the sake of others I am compelled to answer these lies, I thought I would also write something in addition, so that I do not merely steal my readers' time with such dirty rotten business. Therefore I will cite from Scripture and reasons that move me to believe that Christ was a Jew born of a virgin, that I might also win some Jews to the Christian faith.¹¹

The essay lived up to this preamble. We need not be detained here by a consideration of Luther's tightly reasoned exposition of the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, the Messiah, which comprised at least nine-tenths of the essay. All the pertinent passages are cited to demonstrate that he had

by no means departed from the received doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. Though Luther is explicit in rejecting false interpretations, whether they were Jewish or papal, the essay is remarkable for the fact that a medieval Christian should have welcomed Jews into the church at all. His words were the gentle commentary of a churchman who wished to teach rather than condemn. Near the end of the essay Luther declares that Jesus, the son of Mary, described in the New Testament, accorded perfectly with the picture of the Messiah drawn by the Old Testament prophets.

Luther's essay, That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew, served its main purpose in that Luther's Catholic opponents did not continue to charge him with false teaching with respect to the virgin birth.

Luther's essay had expressed the hope that some Jews might be persuaded to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He conceded that a conversion of the Jews would be difficult.

If I had been a Jew and 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 monkery. When the Jews then see that Judaism has such strong support in Scripture, and Christianity has become a mere babble without reliance on Scripture, how can they possibly compose themselves and become good Christians.¹²

Saying that baptized Jews had told him that they had heard nothing about Christ from the priests

who baptized them, Luther expressed the hope that:

If one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become pious Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets, and the patriarchs.¹³

Luther warned against the common posture of treating the Jews with arrogance and scorn.

If the Apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among 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.¹⁴

Luther's admonition to Christians continues:

When we are inclined to boast of our position we should remember that we are but Gentiles, while the Jews are of the lineage of Christ. We are aliens and in-laws: they are blood relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord. Therefore if one of us is to boast of flesh and blood, the Jews are actually nearer to Christ than we are, as St. Paul says in Romans 9,5. God has also demonstrated this by his acts, for to no nation among the Gentiles has he granted so high an honor as he has to the Jews. For among the Gentiles there have been raised up no patriarchs, no apostles, no prophets, indeed very few Christians either. And although the gospel has been proclaimed to all the world, yet he committed the Holy Scriptures, that is the law and prophets, to no nation except the Jews,

as St. Paul says in Romans 3, 2 and Psalm 147, 19-20: 'He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation, nor revealed his ordinance to them.'¹⁵

After concluding his discussion of the scriptural references to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Luther returned to a few words of concern for the spiritual welfare of the Jewish people.

I would request and advise that one deal gently with them and instruct them from Scripture, that some of them may come along. 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, 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.¹⁶

The Reformer expressed some surprise that the Jews did not flock to the Christian banner of Jesus Christ who actually was their flesh and blood. It was plain for them to see that Gentiles gladly shed their blood as martyrs to their faith in Jesus. He noted that, though Jews and Gentiles formerly were mortal enemies, the Christian Church had gathered them both into one church and joined them together within the walls of one house of God.

When Luther condemned Judaism it was never on racial grounds. Not once did he make the slightest suggestion that they were in any way inferior to other people. He made, however, many references to heretics, bringing under a single head of condemnation all who rejected the Savior, Jesus Christ. Luther considered the papists the apostates of the New Testament, the Judaizing Jews the apostates of the Old Testament. The Jews had refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the papists had made their own good works, not Jesus Christ, the basis of salvation. Both Judaism and Roman Catholicism, Luther said:

Took over the true name of the true God and worshipped him with ceremonies not commanded by God, but devised by themselves.¹⁷

Judaism and Roman Catholicism alike had failed to pin their hopes on divine words and divine promises and had substituted human works and words according to their own reason, not according to Scripture. Judaism had looked forward to the establishment of a worldly kingdom; Roman Catholics had surrounded the pope with a worldly kingdom. Looking back to the idol worship described in the Old Testament, Luther declared that:

There is more idolatry in Christendom through the mass than ever occurred among the Jews.¹⁸

Later, when the Islamic Turks began to menace eastern Europe, Luther cast them in the same net as all others who make a pretence of coming to God without faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Redeemer. Racial prejudice, the concept of racial inferiority, was not a factor in Luther's preaching and teaching. Any rejection of Christ was a serious matter to Luther, it was blasphemy and brooked no

dainty mincing of words. He sought the salvation of Jew, Turk, and Roman Catholic alike. He condemned their false teachings with equal fervor.

Twenty years after the publication of the treatise, That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew, Luther published a series of three inordinately hostile diatribes against the Jews. These essays have embarrassed twentieth century Lutherans who only recently have come to grips with the shameful offence of racism. As a result some church bodies have seen fit to offer oblique and disingenuous apologies for the essays of the last years of Luther's life. Most of them fail to see the distinction between anti-Semitism and Luther's rejection of the religious beliefs of Judaism. Some writers, friendly to Luther, have sought to disregard or overlook the angry essays of Luther's later years on the absurd grounds that the Reformer had become senile.

An honest approach to Luther's writings must record the difficulties and the stresses of the last years of Luther's activity as a reformer. Such an approach must, above all, take Luther as he was and must recognize the realities of the time in which he lived. We have no call either to exculpate or malign him. The best we can do is to orient ourselves carefully to the concrete events and the living personalities that were factors in the last years of his life. Mark Edwards expresses it well:

To view the Luther entangled within his net of time and circumstance is to transcend the need to accuse or excuse. It is enough to approach a firmer understanding.¹⁹

Nothing we can do or say will, in any case, detract from the immensity and grandeur of Luther's

contribution to the Christian church and the world that encompasses it.

The Maturing Reformation

For the purpose of this study we may place the midpoint of Martin Luther's reforming activity at the moment in the year 1532 when the Saxon Elector John died and his son, John Frederick, succeeded to the electorate.

The Reformation was fully formed in the first period. It gained in depth the dimension in the second. After 1532 Luther's Catechism was in use. The German New Testament was circulating in Germany and the German translation of the Old Testament was nearing completion. The basic elements of Luther's theology were in print. The Augsburg Confession and its accompanying Apology had been raised as the banner of the faith of the princes and people of a large part of Germany. The doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church, unchanged in no significant feature by later developments, had been established.

The first period of the Reformation had placed Luther in one heroic role after the other. He had been seen as the lone monk who dared to challenge the ecclesiastical establishment in the Ninety-five Theses, in the Leipzig debate, and at the Diet of Worms. His sermons had endeared him to the people, and scholars everywhere had seen the dramatic development of the University of Wittenberg under his brilliant intellectual and pastoral tutelage. Luther's home in the Black Cloister had become a model of Christian life honored by his own and succeeding generations.

The years 1517 to 1532 were the glory years of Luther's career and the course of the Reformation.

New pressures and problems were to crowd in on the years 1532 to 1546. In his careful analysis of the last years of Luther's life, Mark Edwards has said:

The time for proselytizing had passed. Now the Reformation needed to be consolidated and defended in the face of threats from Catholics, Turks, Jews and Jewish exegesis, and the 'fanatics.'²⁰

Luther's bitterest opposition was to be reserved for those who had initially supported him and then renounced his religious views and leadership. He reflected his bitter aversion to the people he referred to as "fanatics" in words of comfort to his young friend John Schlaginhaufen when he asked:

Why should you worry about sinning? If you had the sins of Zwingli, Carlstadt, and a Muenzer all rolled into one, faith in Christ would still defeat them all.²¹

A recurring theme in Luther's last years was his disappointment over the failure of his beloved German people to accept the gospel he had brought them at such great cost. The darkness of his own soul had been illuminated by that gospel. His understanding of the grace of God in the justification of sinners had brought joy out of the anxieties of his early *anfechtung*. Was he naive in thinking that his contemporaries would be willing and able to share his experience? In an effort toward understanding we may ask how Jonas Salk might have responded if the medical profession and the American people had ignored the Salk vaccine. In view of the power of Satan in the world, Edwards may be right in saying that Luther's embittering disappointment was predictable:

Given the intractable nature of human beings and the ineluctable conflict of interests in the establishment of anything as great and as encompassing as the Reformation, it could not reasonably have been otherwise. Luther was doomed to disappointment. And so as his hope for the progress of the gospel in the world, however faint, withered in the light of experience, he found solace in his hope for the last day. He had predicted its near advent in the 1528-1529 tracts. The events of the 1530's that disappointed so sorely also stood as further signs of the end time.

The older Luther was largely done with cajoling his sinful Germans. Like the prophets of old he excoriated them for their sins and declared God's judgment on them. Words of prophetic condemnation are harsh; the more so when the prophet fully expects that his words will not be attended to. As Luther exclaimed himself, 'I have done my part as a true prophet and preacher. He who does not wish to listen, may go his way. I am now excused, from this day forward and in eternity.'²²

However much Luther might have been discouraged, and however often he may have expressed similar desires to abandon the struggle, he did not quit. He continued his teaching and administrative roles at the university until the end of his life. He continued, to the end, to turn out a volume of published material that made him "the most prolific author Germany has ever produced."²³ In the six years from 1530-1535 he turned out 156 publications, not counting sermons, letters, and the completed Bible translation of 1534, for an average of 26 each year. In the last ten years of his life his published output averaged 20 publications per year.²⁴

This productivity must be seen against the background of Luther's health. A visitor at Wittenberg in 1535 observed Luther as:

A fellow a bit more than 50 years old, but robust and strong, so that he does not appear to be forty. His features are rather coarse, but he tries to lend them a suffering and tender expression. He has a rather quick articulation, but not too harsh for a German.²⁵

The following year Luther wrote to a friend:

I am compelled to write but little, dear Bucer, for these two weeks I have lain prostrated by unbearably excruciating pains in my left hip.²⁶

On his trip to Smalcald for the meetings in 1537 Luther suffered severely from a kidney stone and he and his friends feared for his life. He blamed his condition on the devil and said: "He takes whatever he can to pester me with. He stoned Stephen with stones; he stones me with the stone."²⁷ Eventually John Frederick saw that it was necessary to send Luther back to Wittenberg. Haile describes what happened: "The obstruction in his bladder or urethra must have been affected by the jolting ride or by the shifting of his body as he was lifted out of the coach. Shortly after midnight he was able to write to Melanchthon:

Praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of all mercy and comfort, who in the second hour of the night, dear Philip, has opened urethra and bladder quite unexpectedly. I got up as you have seen me to do, to make a vain attempt. Scarcely a quarter hour passed, and I urinated eight times, each time

more than a pint, so that I excreted over a gallon in all. Thus does joy make me measure this liquid, so vile to others and so precious to me.²⁸

Mark Edwards' review of Luther's medical history deserves quotation at length.

Throughout his career as a reformer Luther often was not well. He was sick during his appearance before the Diet of Worms in 1521, and he complained of severe constipation during his stay at the Wartburg. In subsequent years he suffered from frequent headaches and dizziness. In 1525 he complained of hemorrhoids, and in 1527 of heart congestion, which, he claimed, nearly killed him. 1527 also saw several fainting spells. In 1529 he labored under spells of dizziness and roaring in the ears. It was also during the second half of the decade that one first hears of an open, flowing ulcer in his leg, which his doctors made strenuous efforts to keep open, believing that this allowed the noxious tumors to drain off.

The years 1531 to 1546 saw more frequent and more serious illnesses. In January 1532 he took to bed with a ringing in his ears followed by 'weakness of his heart.' About this time he suffered the first symptoms of his uric acid stones, which were to cause him agony during much of the rest of his life. In the spring of 1536 he suffered from the 'stone,' and in February and March 1537, while at the meeting of the League of Smalcalden, he experienced the most severe stone attacks of his life, an attack

that included vomiting and diarrhea, the passing of numerous calculi, and eight days of complete inability to urinate. He barely survived. In November 1537 stone attacks recurred, as they did again in summer of 1538, in April 1539, July 1541, August 1543, October 1544, and June 1545.

Also in 1538 he suffered from diarrhea and from pain in his joints, probably arthritis. In early 1540 he complained of excruciating pain in his arm. 1541 was a particularly bad year with a reopening of the ulcer on his leg, an abscess in his throat, an acute middle-ear infection, and a spontaneous perforation in his ear drum. In December 1544 he suffered from severe angina. It was a heart attack in February 1546 that ended his life.²⁹

No wonder that one day, under a high fever, he mused on the question as to whether there could be punishments in the hereafter to exceed the sufferings of this present time.

Sensing something of the excruciating and debilitating anguish of Luther's illnesses and sympathetic with the Reformer's discouragement over the general lassitude of the German people toward the gospel, friendly biographers have surrendered to the ignoble cop-out of referring to the unfortunate senility of Luther's later years. Hostile historians like Will Durant have dismissed a large part of the Reformer's literary legacy as senile fantasy.

Any careful consideration of the work done by Luther from 1532 to 1546 must conclude that he was never senile. He was, as both Haile and Edwards explicitly affirm, in full command of his emotions, his conduct, and his written and oral speech. He

may have suffered cruel pain and grievous disappointment. He was never senile. Some writers have seen an oft-repeated death-wish as an evidence of senility. They fail to appreciate Luther's absolute confidence in the existence of a heaven prepared and waiting for all who die believing in the Savior, Jesus Christ. What could be more natural than for a Christian to desire escape from the toils of the present life? Haile says:

Luther's ready reference to death can shock a modern reader. He found it not at all improper in an exhausting illness to say, 'Ah, how I'd like to die now. I'm so weak and worn down - and this is a moment when my heart is happy and tranquil.'

Haile cautions modern readers to read such expressions "in the spirit of their times, not our own, which, uncomforted by faith, so fears death and longs for youth."³⁰

Nor can one take seriously the view that Luther's frequent references to an early advent of the last day are an evidence of senility. He had seen Satan's endlessly destructive assaults on God's creation. Who can find it an abnormality in the mind of a Christian to look forward to the final and eternal termination of the exercise of Satan's power?

Haile's conclusion as to the soundness of Luther's mind in his last years is amply documented.

Luther can at no time in his life be dismissed as senescent or unaccountable. I have offered my opinion that uremia led to neurological complications after Smalcald, so that many of his utterances reveal an underlying irritability. Yet we have to admit that his periodic

outbursts are not uncharacteristic of him. In general, Luther's mind remained sound. In the years 1538-39 he produced one of his most thoroughly researched scholarly papers, Concerning Councils and the Church, in which he drew on immense historical documentation for the purpose of delimiting the authority of the Church Council and giving a final, scholarly statement of the exclusively spiritual nature of the church.³¹

We will look in vain at Luther's letters, his table talks, his sermons, his commentaries on selected Psalms, his devotional pieces, his liturgical revisions, his hymns and songs, his disputations, and above all, his massive commentary on Genesis written in his last years, for evidences of senility. One may fault the vehemence of some of the diatribes of the last decade of Luther's life, but not on the grounds of the senility of the author.

On the contrary it is a remarkable fact that in his last ten years Luther's writings show, at least in some respects, a new depth and maturity. One of the factors in this progress was Luther's late recognition of the uses of history in theological scholarship. He was led to this new interest by one of the many foreign celebrities who frequented the University of Wittenberg in its halcyon days.

Dr. Robert Barnes, educated at Cambridge and Louvain, was one of the first generation of English Protestant reformers. After flight from the persecutions of Thomas Wolsey and Sr. Thomas More he spent some time as an assistant pastor in Hamburg and then went on to Wittenberg. From this vantage point he wrote a series of doctrinal articles based on the Augsburg Confession. These essays were in the form of an appeal to Henry VIII in behalf of

the reformation of the English church. They were received with some favor by King Henry when political considerations moved him to consider an alliance with the Smalcald League. The one-time fugitive, Barnes, thus became an emissary of the king, enjoying royal favor for a time.

While at Wittenberg Barnes also published a Latin history of the papacy under the title Vitae Romanorum Pontificium. It was a study of the Roman popes from the Apostle Peter to the end of the reign of Alexander III, 1181. Gordon Rupp has called it "one of the earliest excursions of the reformers into church history."³² The book was published at Wittenberg and Basel in 1535, and at Amsterdam in 1615. The book pleased Luther. He wrote the preface to the first edition in which he said:

Though I was not at first historically well informed, I attacked the papacy on the basis of Holy Scripture. Now I rejoice heartily to see that others have attacked it from another source, that is, from history. I feel that I have triumphed in my point of view as I note how clearly history agrees with Scripture. What I have learned and taught from Paul and Daniel, namely that the pope is antichrist, that history itself proclaims, pointing to and indicating the very man himself.³³

Luther's studies up to 1535 had demonstrated that much of Roman Catholic theology was contrary to Scripture. A broad and conscientious reading of history now showed with great clarity that most of the Roman errors had historical motivations far removed from the imperatives of Christian doctrine. The Mass, transubstantiation, the administration of the Sacrament in one kind, the papacy, the

authority of the councils, and many other features of Roman Catholic doctrine were innovations that had neither warrant nor sanction in Holy Scripture. Thus Luther was now enabled to use history and reason to support his exposition of the Bible.

In view of the many demands on his time, the scope of Luther's reading of historical sources is impressive. It enriched his writing and gave new cogency to his appeals to the scriptures. Edwards writes:

Luther had learned to use history and historical documents to reinforce arguments from Scripture and reason. He had gone beyond the younger Luther and acquired an impressively wide ranging knowledge of church history. This knowledge enlarged and enriched both his political arsenal and his theology. The polemics of the older Luther may be occasionally more violent, abusive, and vulgar than those of the younger man. They also can be richer and more sophisticated, for they have gained a historical dimension.³⁴

Luther and The Electorate of John Frederick

John Frederick, the Elector of Saxony from the death of his father, John, in 1532, to the Smalcald war in 1547, was fourteen years old when the Reformation began in 1517. He was 29 when he succeeded to the electorate held successively by Frederick the Wise and his brother, John the Constant. Luther was initially concerned that the youthful elector might be led astray by the courtiers about him. It was a needless concern. John Frederick was to become the stoutest Lutheran of them all. When he was defeated in the Smalcald war of 1547 and was imprisoned and sentenced to

death for conspiracy against the empire, he was offered his freedom in exchange for renouncing the Lutheran faith. His response was unequivocal. No layman ever made a more eloquent confession of faith.

I will rather lose my head and let Wittenberg be battered down than submit to a demand that violates my conscience.... I cannot refrain from informing your majesty [Emperor Charles V] that since the days of my youth I have been instructed and taught by the servants of God's Word, and by diligently searching the prophetic and apostolic scriptures I have also learned to know, and (this I testify in the sight of God) unswervingly to adhere in my conscience to this, that the articles composing the Augsburg Confession, and whatever is connected therewith, are the true, correct, Christian, pure doctrine, confirmed by and founded in the writings of the holy prophets and apostles, and of the teachers who followed in their footsteps, in such a manner that no substantial objection can be raised against it....

Since now in my conscience I am firmly persuaded of this, I owe this gratefulness and obedience to God, who has shown me such unspeakable grace, that, as I desire to obtain eternal salvation and escape eternal damnation, I do not fall away from the truth of the almighty will which his Word has revealed to me, and which I know to be truth. For such is the comforting and also the terrible Word of God: 'Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also

deny before my Father which is in heaven.'³⁵

To understand the role of John Frederick in the Reformation, it is important to realize that the Holy Roman Empire, under the rule of Charles V, was a confederation of about 300 principalities and cities ruled by as many hereditary princelings. Within that empire the Reformation had given a special dignity and importance to the electors of Saxony. When they joined with other princes to form the Smalcald League for the defense of the Lutheran faith in their jurisdictions, the Saxon electors assumed a role of leadership. Apart from the Reformation John Frederick would have been just another princeling among 300 others. Given the presence in Electoral Saxony of Martin Luther and the University of Wittenberg and, beyond that, the political union established by the Smalcald League, the Elector of Saxony became a man to be reckoned with in international politics.

Where Frederick the Wise had taken a neutral position with respect to the Lutheran movement, and where his brother John gave it cautious and tentative support, John Frederick was prepared to go on the offensive and give Luther unqualified support in his teaching and literary undertakings and in his attacks on the enemies of reform wherever they were. The other side of the coin is that John Frederick could use a willing Luther as a weapon in his political conflicts. In this setting, as Edwards observes, a marked change characterized the writing of Luther in his later years.

After 1530 Luther's correspondence and his published polemics reflected a shift in the character of the Reformation itself. A much larger percentage of his total correspondence was directed to secular authorities. A similar

change occurred with his polemics; the previous decade or so included a significant number of treatises that were dedicated to the exposition of the Protestant faith. In contrast, the polemics of these later years were largely works of exhortation, aimed at the converted, as convinced Protestants, and were most often politically inspired and politically significant.³⁶

By the time John Frederick became elector the lines had been clearly drawn between Lutheranism and Catholicism. The differences between the Lutherans and the Sacramentarians, the Anabaptists, and other sects was equally well understood. For political as well as religious reasons the Smalcald League supported Luther and his theology. Luther was no less loyal in supporting the politics of his elector. Thus, as Edwards writes:

For the last fourteen years of his life Luther's polemics were to enjoy John Frederick's unswerving support. For his part John Frederick was to call on Luther repeatedly to issue public statements on issues in dispute between Catholics and Protestants...

In a way markedly different from the preceding decade and a half, Luther was to spend the last years of his life as a counsellor to princes and a publicist in service to a religious movement that had become inextricably entangled in political interests....³⁷

This is not to say that the elector censored Luther's writings, controlled his pen, or compelled the Reformer to write anything that violated his theological principles. John Frederick had too much respect for Martin Luther, his revered religious mentor, for that. Luther was, by twenty

years the elector's senior, and John Frederick had held Luther in an affectionate esteem since his youth. The fact was that the interests of the two men were compatible. Neither needed to place the other under duress. The elector gave Luther many literary commissions. None of them called for a violation of Luther's principles. On the contrary, they gave Luther enhanced opportunities for furthering his religious objectives.

The Smalcald Articles and the Smalcald League illustrate the working relationships of Luther and John Frederick. The latter commissioned the writing of the Smalcald Articles specifying that they were to detail the articles of religion that could by no means be minimized or surrendered by the Lutherans. The elector wished to have this statement at hand for possible presentation to the general council of the church that had been proposed for convocation in Mantua in the year 1537. After considering the matter at length John Frederick concluded that it would be unwise, for both political and religious reasons, for the Smalcald princes and theologians to participate in that council in view of the conditions of its convocation. Luther did not challenge the decision of his elector even though he and the Wittenberg theologians were eager to attend the council, even at the risk of their lives, for the purpose of making a Christian testimony before the world.

In other instances John Frederick would ask for the advice of the theologians, and then either reject or ignore it. Luther claimed no expertise in political matters and yielded graciously to the wishes of his sovereign. It is true that Luther had often pleaded for a general council to resolve the problems of the church. The emperor had postponed disciplinary actions against the Lutherans several times "pending the convocation of a council,"

as at the Diets of Spires in 1526 and 1529, and at the Diet of Nuremberg in 1532. By 1537, however, both sides were beyond yielding on any point of doctrine and John Frederick was wise in refusing participation in the proposed Council at Mantua.

Two of Luther's very important theological works were directly related to the discussions attending the projected Council of Mantua. We have referred to the first. The Smalcald Articles, later incorporated into the Book of Concord. The second was On The Councils And The Church,³⁸ one of the most scholarly of the productions of Luther's later years. The first part of this treatise dealt with Luther's concept of the authority of Scripture, the second was a historical review of the first four ecumenical councils, and the third was a definition of the church. Edwards says of this last section that it:

Could stand on its own as a statement of the Protestant conception of the church and as a reasoned as well as polemical attack on the opposing Roman Catholic conception.

Luther defined 'the holy Christian Church' as 'the holy Christian people.' He explained that an ecclesia was nothing but an assembly of the people. He then listed and discussed how to recognize the 'holy Christian people.'³⁹

The treatise, On The Councils And The Church, was published in 1539. By that time Luther was 54 years old. Age, the effects of his illnesses, and impatience began to show. He had been teaching and preaching for over twenty years and his work had not produced the results he had expected. There were too many people who slighted or ignored the message of the gospel that he had brought to

them. The Jewish people had not listened to his evangelical pleas, and the papacy who hardened in what he considered an erroneous and deceitful theology.

Luther was sure that the end of time was at hand. He believed that the events of his lifetime were referred to in the books of Daniel and Revelations, and that they were signs that the last day was approaching. Edwards says:

Luther identified Daniel's 'kingdom of iron' with the Roman Empire, which, through its transference to the Germans, had survived into Luther's own time and would persist until the last day. The papacy was the anti-christ alluded to in the eleventh chapter of Daniel, and the Turk was the small horn that replaced three horns of the beast in the seventh chapter. The appearance of the papal antichrist and the success of the Turk left no doubt in Luther's mind that the apocalyptic drama was in the final act.

This apocalyptic vision plays a major role in many of the polemics of the older Luther. In subsequent chapters it will be seen how this vision, reinforced by disappointment over the reception of the gospel in Germany and for concern about widespread indifference and even blasphemy, helped shape his polemical writings against Catholics, 'fanatics,' and Jews.⁴⁰

The Turks had menaced Europe during the entire period of the Reformation. Luther steadfastly opposed any effort to mount a Christian Crusade against the Turks for religious reasons. He was just as consistent in opposing any kind of compulsion in the propagation of the gospel. Yet he was

zealous in support of military action to halt Turkish encroachment on Christian lands. He encouraged soldiers who became involved in the wars against the Turks and said that military service was an obligation of citizenship.

It is ironical that the Turkish danger was, indirectly, an aid to the Lutheran reformation movement. Time and again the Emperor Charles was compelled to delay repressive action against the Lutherans because he needed their support in troops and taxes that the Lutheran principalities were able to supply. This was the case, for example, in the Peace of Nuremberg of 1532. "It guaranteed a peaceful status quo of German lands, permitting the mobilization of a large and successful force against the Turk."⁴¹

Luther's hostility to the Turks was motivated not so much by fear of an invasion as it was by his belief that the Turks were a scourge by means of which God intended to punish Europeans for the sin of tolerating the godless monstrosity of the papal antichrist. Much of the impatient anger of Luther's later years shows in "searing indictments of the ingratitude with which the German people had responded to the restored gospel."⁴²

In 1541 Luther responded to a commission of Elector John Frederick to write an essay urging the people to pray for victory against the Turks. These words were the Reformer's introductory statement:

We Germans have heard the Word of God now for many years, by which God, the Father of all mercies, enlightens us and calls from the abominable darkness the idolatry of the papacy into the light of his holy kingdom. But today it is a horrible sight to see how thankless and ungrateful we have been.⁴³

We have referred to the personal compatibility of Martin Luther and John Frederick. This becomes the more understandable when we realize religion was neither alien to nor separate from religion. In those years religion was the principal political issue. In the Lutheran principalities loyalty to the Emperor Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire was not in question. The point of division was loyalty to the pope at Rome. Germany was divided on that issue. England had disavowed papal authority. France and Spain kept the pope at arms length and brooked no interference from him.

Luther and John Frederick recognized the same enemies of the gospel and the same political threats to Lutheranism. It was predictable that they would oppose both in a harmonious unity. Questions may arise as to the degree to which each stimulated the other, but in general we may agree with Edwards who is of the opinion that:

Scholars have placed too much emphasis on Luther himself and have not paid enough attention to changes in the nature of the movement he initiated, and to the secular significance of his actions.⁴⁴

Duke George of Ducal Saxony, a cousin of John Frederick's father, was one of the most persistent thorns in Luther's flesh. George had been educated with service to the church in view and found his knowledge of Latin an advantage in that age of theological debate. He had developed advanced humanistic interests and was among those who sought, with his friend Erasmus, a reform of the church without a change in doctrine. He defended Henry VIII when the King of England attacked Luther's sacramental theology as it was developed in the Babylonian Captivity of the Church.⁴⁵ George was a talented and honest ruler who was respected for his piety and for his traditional attitude toward law and order.

Duke George, as ruler of his half of Saxony, was in control of the University of Leipzig and had a dominant influence over the Dominion order of that city, supporting their well-known activity against heretics. The Duke and Leipzig University sponsored the Leipzig debate of 1519 in the hope that the Lutheran movement would thereby be discredited. George often wrote letters to his cousins in electoral Saxony suggesting stern discipline for the heretical monk of Wittenberg.

George aroused the ire of Luther when he not only prohibited and confiscated copies of Luther's New Testament when they appeared in Ducal Saxony, but added insult to injury when he approved Emser's plagiarized edition of the New Testament. Another issue developed when George threatened banishment to citizens of his lands as a penalty for receiving the Lord's Supper in both kinds. Luther called that tyranny and spoke out in no uncertain terms.

The issue was really Luther's attitude toward what he called the "two kingdoms." He had repeatedly said that citizens owe loyalty and obedience to their rulers in everything pertaining to the secular sphere. Luther taught, however, that no ruler has the right to legislate with respect to the spiritual realm, and he supported the subjects of George when they insisted on the right to receive communion in both kinds. Luther said:

If your prince or temporal lord commands you to hold with the pope, to believe one way or the other, or commands you to put away books, then you must say, 'It is not for Lucifer to sit beside God. Dear prince. I must obey you with body and property, what you command me in accordance with your authority on earth I will follow. But if you tell me what to believe, or what books to put away, I will not obey.'⁴⁶

Luther called George a tyrant and a minion of Satan for attempting to exercise control over the religious life of his people. George considered this incitement to rebellion and complained bitterly to the elector of Saxony while he supported Emser and Cochlaeus in their tirades that more than matched the fulminations of Luther. The debate between the theologians of the two Saxonies went on with increasing bitterness, ending with the death of George in 1539. He was succeeded in the ducal title by his brother Henry who favored the Reformation and introduced it into his lands.

Luther's courage in standing up to George, even with the support of John Frederick, was remarkable. Duke George was a respected ruler in his own right. Moreover, he was outstanding in his support of both the pope and the emperor. Haile compliments Luther on his incredible boldness.

He beards the king of England from afar. Close by all the powerful princes cringe Brandenburg, Brunswick, George of Saxony. We must yet describe the rigorous disciplining of Germany's most powerful sovereign, the cardinal of Mainz. Luther was the first writer able so freely to castigate abuse at its source, and perhaps the last.⁴⁷

Albrecht of Mainz was primate to all Germany, subordinate only to the pope in the ecclesiastical realm. He was also the archchancellor, first among the seven imperial electors. All imperial edicts required his signature. It was Albrecht who precipitated the Reformation by the sale of indulgences condemned by Martin Luther in the 95 Theses. Albrecht was a member of the powerful Hohenzollern family in Brandenburg, a younger

brother of Joachim I, an avowed opponent of the Reformation. Family interest and influence had helped Albrecht get appointment as the Archbishop of Magdeburg while only twenty-three years of age. He was also named archbishop of the ecclesiastical electorate of Mainz. The interests of Joachim were clear, to consolidate two of the electoral offices in the Hohenzollern family.

Appointment to the archbishopric was costly. Dispensations had to be paid to permit Albrecht to hold two very important ecclesiastical preferments, Magdeburg and Mainz, and even more expensive, to get these high offices at the tender age of twenty-three. The bargain was struck after much haggling. An agreement was made to borrow the needed money from the financial house of Fugger and to entrust them with the task of collecting the money due them through the sale of indulgences. The Fuggers received half of all the money collected. The pope and Albrecht split the rest. The Fuggers chose John Tetzl, an experienced collector, for the task of selling the indulgences. Albrecht was named cardinal in 1518 as a reward for standing up to the furore created by the publication of the 95 Theses.

Albrecht kept his distance from Luther, not wishing to get embroiled in the strife following the publication of Luther's theses. When Luther requested that Albrecht terminate the sale of indulgences in Halle the cardinal made a gesture of compliance. He was eager to keep the peace, and when Luther and Katherine von Bora were married he sent the young couple a gift of twenty gulden. Luther refused the gift, but a money-wise Katherine saw to it that the gift was added to her housekeeping funds...This and other gestures made Luther hope that Albrecht of Mainz might become a Lutheran. It was not to be. He became

involved in a conspiracy leading to the assassination of George Winkler, a Lutheran pastor. Recriminations followed, but the scandal blew over with minimal damage to the cardinal.

The Schoenitz affair was more serious, Hans and Anton Schoenitz were wealthy merchants in Halle. Hans had served Albrecht as a privy councillor and had been entrusted with the management of the cardinal's private and public finances. When the people complained of a new tax and asked Albrecht for an audit of expenditures following the last tax assessment the cardinal sought to divert attention from himself. Hans Schoenitz was arrested, tortured into making a false confession of misappropriation of funds, and summarily hanged without trial. No religious issue was involved, but it was, in Luther's opinion, a gross miscarriage of justice, and he wrote a "hard, sharp little book of reproach." In view of Albrecht's high position the book was restrained and publication was delayed until 1539. Luther adamantly held that no one has the right to try his own case. Luther said that a master "is obliged by the eternal wrath and displeasure of God to defend the right of his servant....in which case servant and master are equals: one party against the other. The master can then no longer act as judge over his servant."⁴⁸ Luther had intervened in the case, not from concern about religious principle, but purely out of civic concern for the administration of justice.

Luther outlived both Joachim I and Albrecht of Mainz. Neither had been able to halt the progress of the Reformation, though both had opposed it vigorously. Luther often cited Joachim I as a dreadful example of godless despotism and recalled the loathesome words of the man who had bribed the pope to elevate Albrecht to the electorate of Mainz:

If I could but enjoy the eternal pleasure of being carried from the bed of one whore to another I'd forego heaven.⁴⁹

As in the case of ducal Saxony, Joachim's electorate passed to a brother, Joachim II, who espoused the Reformation and supported it in Brandenburg.

No less evil than the brothers of Brandenburg, Albrecht and Joachim I, was Duke Heinrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbuettel. Luther referred to him in one of his table talks:

They tell of a virgin, Eve of Trott, with whom the Duke of Brunswick begat three children in her maidenhood and five after she died.

Haile explains:

It was true that this Henry of Brunswick had celebrated a bogus funeral for a favorite mistress whom he then secreted away to a pleasure palace, where he kept her for years.⁵⁰

This was only one of many unsavory scandals involving the life of Henry of Brunswick. Political issues created an intense friction between Henry of Brunswick on one side and John Frederick and Philip of Hesse on the other. From 1541 to 1546 the two parties hurled at least a hundred strident pamphlets at each other. At issue between them were the cities of Brunswick and Goslar. Both had become Lutheran early on in the Reformation. When these two cities joined the Smalcald League, Henry, a loyal Catholic out of deference to the emperor, felt threatened. He repented by joining the Catholic League and was made the league's leader for northern Germany. Fuel was added to the fire of Henry's resentment when the Smalcald League

scheduled its 1538 convocation to meet at Brunswick. In his anger he refused to give John Frederick and Philip of Hesse the safe conduct through his territories that the travellers would need for the journey to the city of Brunswick. We need not be detained by the pamphlet war, accompanied by some shooting, that ensued. Suffice it to say that Luther became involved only incidentally. He was enraged by one of the essays of Duke Henry that ridiculed the Elector of Saxony.

Luther answered these jibes by a pamphlet titled Against Hanswurst.⁵¹ It was written in the spirit of the war of epithets raging between Duke Henry and his two opponents. This essay, in H. G. Haile's words, "marked the beginning of a new era in Luther's literary career."⁵²

We shall take note of the character of Luther's later writing in a separate section of this essay. Suffice it here to review briefly the theological content of Against Hanswurst. The main body of the essay is a discussion of the church with a detailed distinction between the true and the false church. Luther shows, under ten headings, that the Lutherans are the true church. A following twelve divisions shows why Luther does not consider the Roman Catholic Church to be the true church. There is a discussion of God's Word and a review of the events of the first years of Luther's experience as a reformer.

The essay closes with a defense of John Frederick and a condemnation of Duke Henry. This was the only one of the hundred or more pamphlets in that war of epithets that had a serious doctrinal content. As in the case of some other essays Luther says that he does not wish to waste the reader's time by a mere rebuttal of criticism and review of the charges of his opponents. He says that he prefers to edify and instruct from Holy

Scripture. In this case Luther gives a substantive and well considered definition of the church based on Scripture itself and adds a review of his perspective of the early years of the Reformation.

We may say that Luther's struggle against the violent opposition and the hostility of Duke George, Cardinal Albrecht, and Duke Henry of Brunswick to the evangelical leadership of John Frederick and other Lutheran princes goes a long way toward explaining a deterioration of Luther's former evangelical patience. In the bitterness and coarseness of the political jungle in which Luther became involved it is evident that he became a partaker in the abusive use of epithets and common coarseness. He was getting older and was suffering severely from disease and frustration. He had profited greatly from the sustaining support of John Frederick, but his involvement in the day to day pressures of the political realities of the time had made for some narrowing and constriction of the evangelical character of the Martin Luther of the 1520's.

Luther's Response To The Theology of Judaism

We shall look carefully at Luther's references to the Jewish people in the last ten years of his life. We believe that they will demonstrate that he did not have a racial bias against the people of Hebraic extraction. He did object to their false teachings and to their slanderous and blasphemous characterizations of Jesus and his mother Mary. When Hitler's Storm Troopers rounded up Jews in the ghettos of Germany no questions were asked about what they believed. They were victimized only because they had Jewish blood in their veins. Luther, on the contrary, had a special regard for people who were Jewish. He said that they were the

true blood brothers of Jesus Christ, while the Gentiles were only in-laws. It pained Luther deeply that he was obliged to condemn the theology espoused by most of the Jews.

Luther's first references to the Jewish people in the last decade of his life occurred in 1538. This publication was an open letter, addressed to a friend, Graf Wolfgang Schlick of Falkenau, who had reported on Sabbatarian tendencies among Christians in Moravia and Bohemia. Luther took it for granted that Jewish proselytization was responsible for the movement. His response to Graf Schlick was a brief handbook that could be used to refute the false teachings of the Jews from texts in the Old Testament.

This book, Against the Sabbatarians,⁵³ had no demeaning references to the Jews. Luther did refer sharply to the rabbis and their stubbornness in retaining their views in spite of Old Testament references that clearly refuted them. He said: "Even when one persuades them out of Scripture, they retreat from the Scripture to their rabbis and declare that they must believe them."⁵⁴

A reference in the Table Talks for 1537 indicates that there had been some discussion of the problem of the Jews in Saxony even before the essay responding to the concerns of Graf Schlick. John Frederick had banned the Jews in his domains in 1536, forbidding them to reside in Saxony or even to travel through it. The reasons for this action are not known. A general hostility to the Jews was common at the time, as it had been through the middle ages. The entry in the Table Talks referred to is as follows:

A letter was delivered to Dr. Martin from a certain Jew who requested and pleaded (as he had often written to the Doctor before) that permission be obtained from the elector

to grant him safe entrance into and passage through the elector's principality. Dr. Martin responded. 'Why should these rascals, who injure people in body and property and who draw many Christians to their superstitions, be given permission? In Moravia they have circumcised many Christians and call them by the new name of Sabbatarians... I'll write this Jew not to return.'⁵⁵

The Jew referred to was Rabbi Josel of Rosheim, an honorable, learned, and influential leader of the Jews. He often represented his people before high political and ecclesiastical authorities. Luther's letter to him was courteous, but negative.

My dear Josel: I would have gladly interceded for you, both orally and in writing, before my gracious lord, just as my writings have served the whole of Jewry. But because your people so shamefully misuse this service of mine and undertake things that we Christians simply shall not bear from you, they themselves have robbed me of all influence I might otherwise have been able to exercise before princes and lords on your behalf.

For my opinion was, and still is, that one should treat the Jews in a kindly manner, that God may perhaps look graciously upon them and bring them to their Messiah -- but not so that through my good will and influence they might be strengthened in their error and become still more bothersome.

I propose to write a pamphlet about this if God gives me space and time, to see if I cannot win some from your venerable patriarchs and prophets and bring them to your promised Messiah....⁵⁶

This letter, quite contrary to Luther's reported table conversation, was courteous and friendly. Refusal to intervene in Josel's behalf before John Frederick corresponds to Luther's attitude toward the papacy. By this time he considered the papacy and Judaism equally incorrigible. He was convinced that both had reached the point of no return so far as appeals from Scripture were concerned. He was no longer willing to plead for the Jews as he had done in 1523 and risk that his good offices might be the occasion for them to take advantage of the elector, John Frederick.

It should not escape our notice that despite his refusal to intervene in Josel's behalf, Luther still had the same attitude toward the Jews that he had expressed in his first major treatise on the Jews in 1523. It was his wish that Christians should treat the Jews in a kindly manner so that God might graciously bring them back to their Messiah. Obviously the Jews desired better treatment than Christian culture had given them in the past. They were not willing to pay the price of the surrender of their traditional faith and religious practice. The twentieth century with its plurality of religions may honor the Jews for their tenacity. But 16th century Christianity acknowledged the right of Christianity, and Christianity alone, to exist in the cultural fabric of western Europe. When we judge Martin Luther it must be in terms of the cultural milieu in which he actually lived, not in terms of our 20th century pluralism which grants to everyone the right to worship on his own terms. The medieval church had preserved its unity in the terrible fires of the inquisition. Religious liberty did not exist.

Luther's next treatise on the Jews was written six years after the discourse against the Sabbatarians. The title was, On The Jews and Their Lies.⁵⁷ We shall first examine its doctrinal

content. The work began with the statement that its purpose was not to convert the Jews but to instruct Christians who were in daily contact with them. He asserted that a conversion of the Jews was impossible and turned at once to a historical fact that, in his view, was primary evidence of the invalidity of Jewish religious claims.

Jerusalem and your sovereignty, together with your temple and priesthood, have been destroyed for over 1,460 years. For this year which we Christians write as the year 1542 since the birth of Christ, is exactly 1,468 years, going on 1500 years, since Vespasian and Titus destroyed Jerusalem and expelled Jews from the city.⁵⁸

Luther added that this passage of time

is proof that the Jews, surely rejected of God, are no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God. This is in accord with Hosea 1, 9: 'Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God.' Yes, unfortunately, this is their lot, truly a terrible one.⁵⁹

Luther added further:

We behold the fulfillment of the words spoken by him [Jesus] in Luke 21, 20, 22ff: 'But when ye see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its destruction has come near.. for these are days of vengeance. For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people.'

At this point Luther proceeds to a discussion of four virtues on which the Jews had prided themselves. The first was their pride of race.

There is one thing about which they boast and pride themselves beyond measure, and that

is their descent from the foremost people on earth, from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and from the twelve patriarchs, and thus from the holy people of Israel. St. Paul himself admits this when he says in Romans 9, 5: Quorum patres, that is, 'To them belong the patriarchs, and of their race is the Christ.' And Christ himself declares in John 4, 22: 'Salvation is from the Jews.' Therefore they boast of being the noblest, yes, the only people on earth. In comparison with them and in their eyes we Gentiles (Goyim) are not human; in fact we hardly deserve to be considered poor worms by them. For we are not of that high and noble blood, lineage, birth, and descent. This is their argument, and indeed I think it is the greatest and strongest reason for their pride and boasting.⁶¹

After giving numerous examples of the vanity of the pride of birth of the Jews, Luther turns to another example of their arrogance and says:

The other boast and nobility over which the Jews gloat and because of which they haughtily and vainly despise all mankind is their circumcision which they received from Abraham... What a stench poor people are in their nostrils because we are not circumcised... In this boast of nobility they glory as much as they do in their physical birth.⁶²

In the first place, Luther continued, circumcision was not unique to the Jews. Many other peoples also followed the practice. Luther then referred at length to an inner circumcision, the spiritual reality of the outward mark. He called attention to prophetic words calling for a circumcision of the heart and spirit and warned those

whose ears were uncircumcised so they could not hear God's Word. In this sense of a spiritual circumcision Luther recalled the warning of Jeremiah, 9, 25, "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised, but yet uncircumcised..."⁶³

These and similar passages prove irrefutably that the Jews' arrogance and boast of circumcision over against the uncircumcised Gentiles are null and void, and, unless accomplished by something else, deserves nothing but God's wrath. God says that they have an uncircumcised heart. But the Jews do not pay attention to such a foreskin of the heart; rather they think that God should behold their proud circumcision of the flesh and hear their arrogant boasts over against all Gentiles, who are unable to boast of such circumcision. These blind miserable people do not see that God condemns their circumcised heart so clearly and explicitly in these verses, and thereby condemns their physical circumcision together with their boasting and their prayer.⁶⁴

The third occasion for the pride of the Jewish people to which Luther calls attention is their boast that God spoke to them, and to them alone, when he gave the law on Mt. Sanai. Luther conceded the truth of that claim from many testimonies in the Old Testament. He countered, however, that all of that is meaningless apart from obedience to the law that was so solemnly given at that place. He added:

This boast makes the Jews seven times more unworthy to be God's people than the Gentiles are. For the external laws were not given to make a nation the people of God, but to adorn and enhance God's people externally. Just as the ten commandments were not given

that any might boast of them. Rather they were given to be observed, and that obedience to God might be shown in them, as Moses and the prophets most earnestly teach.⁶⁵

Finally, and in the fourth place, Luther cited the pride of the Jews, more than ever evident in the 20th century, over the fact that God had given the Jewish people the land of Canaan, Jerusalem, and the temple. To that Luther responded that:

God has often squashed such boasting and arrogance, especially through the kind of Babylon who led them away into captivity and destroyed everything (just as the king of Assyria earlier had led all Israel away and had laid everything low). Finally they were exterminated and devastated by the Romans over fourteen hundred years ago --so that they might well perceive that God did not regard, nor will regard, their country, city, temple, priesthood or principality, and view them on account of these as his own people. Yet their iron neck as Isaiah calls it, is not bent, nor is their brass forehead red with shame. Isaiah, 48, 4. They remain stone blind, obdurate, immovable, ever hoping that God will restore their homeland to them and give everything back to them.⁶⁶

To this Luther added the warning of I Kings, 9, 6f:

If you turn aside from following me... and do not keep my commandments... then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and the house which I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. With an utter disregard for this, they stood, and still stand, firm as a rock or an inert

stone image, insisting that God gave them country, city, temple, and that therefore they had to be God's people or church.⁶⁷

All of this discussion of the four objects of Jewish pride is preliminary to the main issue, the primary heresy of Judaism, its expectation of a messiah to come in the future, and its rejection of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Luther takes up this issue in the second, and main, part of the treatise. This discussion comprises about half of the whole work. It is a careful and comprehensive exegesis of four important proof texts demonstrating that Jesus is, without doubt, the true Messiah. These passages are Genesis 49, II Samuel 23, Haggai 2, and Daniel 9.⁶⁸ While Luther's study of these passages is straightforward and textual, he does insert a few asides that characterized the attitude of Luther's generation toward the Jews. The following examples illustrate the general attitude of medieval people toward the Jewish people.

A person who is unacquainted with the devil might wonder why they are so particularly hostile toward Christians. They have no reason to act this way, since we show them every kindness. They live among us, enjoy our shield and protection, they use our country and our highways, our markets and streets. Meanwhile our rulers and princes sit there and snore with mouths hanging open, and permit the Jews to steal, and rob from their moneybags and treasures whatever they want. That is, they let the Jews, by means of their usury, skin and fleece them and their subjects and make them beggars with their own money. For the Jews, who are exiles, should really have nothing, and whatever they have must surely be our property. They do not work, and they do not

earn anything from us, nor do we give or present it to them, and yet they are in possession of our money and goods and are our masters in our own country and in their exile.⁶⁹

All this is, of course, obvious exaggeration. Luther is using the rhetoric of overstatement, so common in the polemics of that and later times, to make a point. Jewish bankers and merchants did charge usurious rates of interest, but probably no more than their German counterparts.

Luther challenged the literature of the Jews:

Their Talmud and their rabbis record that it is no sin for a Jew to kill a Gentile, but it is only sin for him to kill a brother Israelite. Nor is it a sin for a Jew to break his oath to a Gentile. Likewise they say that it is rendering God a service to steal or rob from the Goy, as they do in fact through their usury. For since they believe they are the noble blood and the circumcised saints and we the accursed Goyim. They cannot treat us too harshly or commit sin against us, for they are the Lords of the world and we are their servants, yes, their cattle.⁷⁰

This, too, is exaggeration. References in the Talmud refer to the killing of Gentiles in time of war.

That Luther's hostility to the Jews was not racially motivated is evident from the high regard he had for a number of Christian Jews. A footnote refers to Paul of Burgos, a converted Spanish Jew, about 1350 to 1435, who rose to the rank of archbishop. Of this man Luther wrote:

In Burgos you will learn what the rabbis really teach, and you will see that I have

written much too mildly against them.

Burgensis [Burgos] who was one of their very learned rabbis, and who, by the grace of God became a Christian - a very rare happening - is much agitated by the fact that they curse us Christians so vilely in their synagogues (as Lyra, a Christian scholar, 1270-1349, also writes), and he deduces from this that they cannot be God's people. To them Jeremiah wrote, 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you in exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.' Jeremiah 20,7.

Ultimately Luther equated the sins of the Jews with those of the adherents of the Roman Catholic faith. He held the Roman papalists in the same contempt as the Judaizing Jews. Neither was better or worse than the other. Both were guilty of demeaning Christ and finding their hope of salvation in meritorious ordinances and works. Luther said:

I stated earlier that they corrupt their circumcision with human ordinances and ruin their heritage with their arrogance. In the same manner they desecrate their sabbath and all their festivals. In brief, all their life and all their deeds, whether they eat, drink, sleep, wake, stand, walk, dress, undress, fast, bathe, pray, or praise are so sullied with rabbinical ordinances and unbelief, that Moses can no longer be recognized among them.

This corresponds to the situation of the papacy in our day, in which Christ and his word can hardly be recognized because of the vermin of human ordinances.⁷¹

Luther's antagonism toward the Jews was clearly not racial. He held German Catholics in the same

contempt as Jewish Judaizers. Both were guilty of demeaning Jesus Christ by their beliefs and their traditional forms of worship. Meritorious good works, not the Redeemer, were at the heart of both religions.

In part three of Against The Jews and Their Lies Luther calls attention to Jewish calumnies against Jesus and the virgin Mary. Obviously both sides could play at the game of maligning the other. The Jews had to be more careful than their Christian counterparts because the Jews were only a fractional part of the population. But there had been no lack of Jewish writers who had said enough to exacerbate the hostility of Christians toward them. Luther opened this portion of his treatise with this general statement.

In conclusion we want to examine their lies against persons, which, after all, do not make the doctrine either worse or better, whether the persons are pious or base. Specifically, we want to look at their lies about the person of our Lord, as well as those about his dear mother and about ourselves and all Christians. These lies are such as the devil resorts to when he can not assail the doctrine. Then he turns against the person -lying, maligning, cursing, and ranting against him. That is what the papist's Beelzebub [John Eck] did to me. When he was unable to refute my gospel, he wrote that I was possessed of the devil, that I was a changeling, that my dear mother was a whore and a bathhouse attendant.⁷²

The Reformer reviewed anti-Christian polemics of the Jews which went back as far as the first and second centuries of the Christian era. Jesus had been called the son of a whore conceived in adultery with a blacksmith. They made this even worse by saying that Mary's adulterous cohabitation took

place during a menstrual period, thus bringing Jesus under a special curse that would make the offspring unbalanced and mentally deficient, a demon's offspring, and a changeling. On such blasphemy Luther invoked the curse of Deuteronomy 28, 18: "The Lord will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind." Luther went on to ask:

What harm has the poor Jesus done to the most holy children of Israel that they can not stop cursing him after his death, with which he paid his debt? Is it perhaps that he aspires to be the Messiah, which they cannot tolerate? Oh no, for he is dead. They themselves crucified him, and a dead person cannot be the Messiah. Perhaps he is an obstacle to their return to their homeland? No, that is not the reason either; for how can a dead man prevent that? What, then, is the reason? I will tell you. As I said before, it is the lightning and thunder of Moses to which I referred before: 'The Lord will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind.' It is the eternal fire of which the prophets speak: 'My wrath will go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it.' Jeremiah 4, 4. John the Baptist proclaimed the same message to them after Herod had removed their scepter, saying, Luke 3, 17, 'His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his granary, but his chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' Indeed, such fire of divine wrath we see descending on the Jews. We see it burning, ablaze and aflame, a fire more horrible than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁷³

Luther then commented on the charge made by the Jews that they were held captive by the Christians.

No one is holding them here now. The country and the roads are open for them to proceed to their land whenever they wish. If they did so, we would be glad to present gifts to them on the occasion; it would be good riddance. For they are a heavy burden, a plague, a pestilence, a sheer misfortune for our country. Proof of this is found in the fact that they have often been expelled from a country, far from being held captive in it.

Luther then asks:

What shall we Christians do with this re-jected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blasphemy. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing, and blasphemy. Thus we cannot extinguish the unquenchable fire of divine wrath, of which the prophets speak, nor can we convert the Jews. With prayer and fear of God we must practice a sharp mercy to see whether we might save at least a few from the glowing flames. We dare not avenge ourselves. Vengeance a thousand times worse than we could wish them already has them by the throat. I shall give you my sincere advice.⁷⁴

That advice, included in part four of the Treatise on the Jews and Their Lies, has scandalized twentieth century Christians. The first part of Luther's advice was addressed to the political authorities, the second to the ecclesiastical leaders. We reproduce it here in summary form.

1. Set fire to their synagogues and schools. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and Christendom, so that God may see that we are Christians and that we do not tolerate such lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his

Son and of his Christians... In Deuteronomy 13, 12ff Moses writes that any city that is given to idolatry shall be totally destroyed by fire, and nothing of it shall be preserved... So also, for Moses' sake, their schools cannot be tolerated. They defame him just as much as they do us. It is not necessary that they have their own free churches for such idolatry.⁷⁵

2. Second, I advise that their homes also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like gypsies.⁷⁶

3. Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blaspheming are taught, to be taken from them.⁷⁷

4. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach on pain of life and limb... They wantonly employ the poor peoples' obedience and blasphemy. In the same way the pope also held us captive with the declaration in Matthew 16, "You are Peter, etc.," inducing us to believe all the lies and deceptions that issued from his devilish mind. We did not teach in accord with the Word of God, and therefore he forfeited the right to teach.⁷⁸

5. Fifth, I advise that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews.⁷⁹

6. Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping... Whenever a Jew is sincerely converted he should be handed one hundred, two hundred, or three

hundred florins as personal circumstances may suggest. With this he could set himself up in some occupation for the support of his poor wife and children and the maintenance of the old and feeble.⁸⁰

7. Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff into the hands of the young, strong Jews and Jewesses and let them earn their bread in the sweat of their brows, as was imposed on the children of Adam.⁸¹

8. But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle... then let us emulate the common sense of other nations such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., compute with them how much their usury has extorted from us, divide this amicably, but then eject them forever from the country.⁸²

Luther's counsel to pastors and the people was more restrained. He advised avoidance of the Jews as far as possible but forbade cursing them or harming their persons, saying that the Jews have harmed themselves more than enough by cursing Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary. Pastors were urged to warn the people of the false teachings of the Jews lest they corrupt the Christian youth.

The Reformer expanded on these thoughts by repeating some of the slanders and legends that had circulated during the Middle Ages and warned that while the Jews were at liberty to believe whatever they wished it was intolerable for them to revile the Son of God publicly. Luther recalled the historical witness to the birth and death of Jesus:

After the crucifixion of the King, God first presented the proper signs that Jesus was the Messiah. Poor, unlearned, unconsecrated

fishermen, who did not even have a mastery of their own language, stepped forth and preached in the tongues of the whole world. All the world, heaven and earth, is still filled with wonder at this. They interpreted the writings of the prophets with power and understanding; in addition they performed such signs and wonders, that their message was accepted throughout the world by Jews and Gentiles. Innumerable people, both young and old, accepted it with such sincerity that they willingly suffered gruesome martyrdom because of it. This message has now endured these fifteen hundred years down to our day, and it will endure to the end of time.⁸³

Luther ended his essay by repeating and elaborating on the counsel that he had previously given with respect to a restraining of the Jews with special emphasis on the responsibilities of the church authorities. A few things were added to his earlier advice. 1. The Bible should be taken from the Jews because they use it to blaspheme the name of the Son of God. 2. The Jews should be prohibited from uttering the name of God in public. 3. The best course of action against the Jews would be to drive them out of the country. Bribes should not be accepted to permit them to remain. 4. They should be forcibly restrained from saying that Christians worship more than one God. After further discussion of the deviation of Judaism from the truth and its invalidity as a religion, Luther recalled the dynamic growth of the Christian church from its beginnings among the Jewish followers of Jesus Christ.

It is a great, extraordinary, and wonderful thing that the Gentiles in all the world accepted, without sword of coercion, with no temporal benefits accruing to them,

gladly and freely, a poor Man of the Jews as the true Messiah, one whom his own people had crucified, condemned, cursed, and persecuted without end.

They did and suffered so much for his sake, and forsook all idolatry, just so that they might live with him eternally. This has been going on now for fifteen hundred years. No worship of a false god ever endured so long, nor did all the world suffer so much because of it or cling so firmly to it. And I suppose one of the strongest proofs is found in the fact that no other god ever withstood such hard opposition as the Messiah, against whom all other gods and peoples have raged and against whom they all acted in concert, no matter how varied they were or how they otherwise disagreed.⁸⁴

A third essay of Luther with reference to the Jewish question was written in 1543. Its title was Treatise On The Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23, 1-7. In his previous essay On The Jews and Their Lies, Luther had commented on the Jewish charge that Christians had three gods. By 1543 he realized that his earlier commentaries on the Psalms had been unduly dependent on rabbinical sources and that some of his earlier interpretations were in need of revision. For that reason he turned now to a new exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ, based on a text in 2 Samuel and corroborated by numerous other references to Scripture.

This essay has very few references to the Jews and includes a minimal polemical content. It is a very good example of Luther's theological expertise, an essay in which Luther makes the Bible its own interpreter. Luther had given vent to his

emotions in his previous essay against the Jews. The Last Words of David represents the quitessential Luther, the man of God instructing his people in the teachings of Holy Scripture.

Martin Luther's Prophetic Office

The degree Biblical Doctor was conferred on Martin Luther on 18 October, 1512. His doctorate included the commission "not to teach false and improper doctrines, and to denounce anyone teaching them." Luther remained faithful to that commission for the rest of his life. He regarded his doctorate as a divine call to teach and preach the Word of God. Later in life he was to express his understanding of the seriousness and the difficulty of discharging his commission. The following words were included in a polemic addressed to Duke George of Albertine Saxony.

...I cannot pray, without thereby having to curse. If I say: 'Holy be thy name,' I must in addition say: 'Cursed, damned, and disgraced must be the papists' name and all who slander by thy name.' If I say: 'Thy kingdom come,' then I have to add: 'Cursed, damned, destroyed must be the papacy with all kingdoms on earth that are opposed to thy kingdom.' If I say: 'Thy will be done,' then I must add: 'Cursed, damned, disgraced, and to nothing must be all thoughts and plots of the papists and all who strive against thy will and advice.' In truth, I pray thusly daily without fail [both] orally and in my heart, and with me [pray in the same manner] all who believe in Christ, and I also feel indeed that it will be heard.... Still I hold a good, friendly, peaceful and Christian heart toward everyone. Even my greatest enemies know that.⁸⁵

Luther's activity as a teacher and preacher had not progressed far before he realized that his doctorate and his role as a reformer had thrust a prophetic office upon him. He understood and imitated the anger of the prophets when he assailed sin and Satan. He once told a papal emissary, Peter Paul Vergerio: "What you hear from my mouth is not my wrath, but the wrath of God."⁸⁶ Edwards says that Luther consciously accepted the polemics of the apostles and prophets as a precedent for his own judgments against evil. "When he rebuked his age for its failures, it was like Jeremiah from whom he borrowed his style, his tone, often the language itself."⁸⁷

Luther can not be dismissed as being merely a bitter and angry man because of his polemical writing and the intensity of his jeremiads. It is true that, as Edwards says, "Every polemic Luther wrote these later years contained sections devoted to clear and persuasive exposition of doctrine and exegesis of Scripture."⁸⁸ Even in such an outspoken polemic as On The Jews and Their Lives a page count shows that the polemical content is less than ten percent and positive biblical exposition over ninety percent.

Nor can Luther be dismissed as a dogmatic theologian who thought he knew it all. Anyone who reads Luther's commentaries extensively will be struck by the frequency of his confrontation with Bible passages in which he is reluctant to make a definite judgment, and says, "I do not know," or defers to others who may have opinions as valid as his own. Haile writes:

Luther, an incisive thinker who liked to reduce issues to clear cut terms, had never been dogmatic. Melanchthon knew him best, and in his fondness for attaching classical Greek sobriquets, called him 'Arcesilas,' the skeptical advocate of suspension or deferral of judgment. Where

logic would eventually lead Calvin to infer predestination, Luther quite flatly refused to probe into imponderables like that. As an Arcesilas he was able to accept what he thought was the clear word of Scripture without following implications into areas where he lacked evidence.⁸⁹

Whatever one may say about Luther's prophetic office and his constant and consistent attendance of Scripture in his teaching and preaching, nothing can quite prepare a 20th century Lutheran for a reading of the "advice" that Luther gave to his political superiors for the suppression of the danger of dissemination of the religious teachings of Judaism. As we have seen before, Luther suggested that the synagogues, schools, and homes of the Jews be destroyed, and that they be lodged "under a roof or in a barn." He advised further that the rabbis be forbidden to teach and that their Talmudic and other literature, even their Bibles, be taken from them. They should be given no safe conducts to travel on the highways, they should be prevented from receiving usurious interest rates, their income and usury should be taken from them and they should be put to work. If these penalties did not bring about their conversion to the Christian faith, they should be ejected from the country. It probably was small comfort to the Jews that Luther counseled German citizens not to take vengeance on the Jews by cursing them or harming them in their persons.

Luther's "advice" for action against the Jews must shock us in the 20th century. We have vivid memories of the Nazi holocaust. We honor Martin Luther King for his effective leadership in the restoration, to some degree at least, of the civil rights of black Americans. We have, by the mercy of God, made a beginning of understanding the inherent equality of men of all races. We have made

some significant progress in eliminating the sin of ethnic racism. We are not yet rid of this cancer, and we shall do well not to stand in righteous indignation over Luther's 16th century attitudes. His writings demonstrate that he was not a racist. He did not despise Italians because the pope was an Italian. No more did he chastize the Jews because they were Jewish. He did condemn Judaism, the religion of the Jews, for the same rejection of Christ that was present in the theology of the Roman Catholic Church in his time.

We do Luther a palpable injustice if we measure him in terms of 20th century ideals and realities. We prize the separation of church and state in America. We honor the principle of religious liberty under which every citizen of the United States of America is protected in his right to worship in accordance with his own personal faith. These principles are bred into us as our inalienable rights. They were unknown and unheard of in Luther's time. Luther had indeed written about the separate and different functions of church and state. He was aware of no practical means for separating the two. Nor had Luther or his generation any conception whatever of a plurality of religious living on equal terms under the protection of a state which formally espoused no particular form of religion.

Any judgment of Luther's harsh advice for the suppression of Judaism must, perforce, keep in mind that Luther, a citizen of Electoral Saxony, was under the authority of Roman law and the Holy Roman Empire. That law recognized only one legal religion, that of Christianity. Luther's advice to the princes of Germany was in accordance with the law of the land and conformed to the political authority under which he lived. We may wish that he had been more farsighted, but wishful thinking does not change the facts of history.

Lutherans, personally loyal to Martin Luther, may take some comfort from the fact that ultimately it was the fundamental principles of the great Reformer, applied by Roger Williams in the context of the political situation in the American colonies, that led to the practice of the separation of church and state and the establishment of religious liberty in America. No social development has had a greater effect than this in eliminating the evils of anti-Semitism and racism.

Luther had spoken of the right of private interpretation of Scripture and had aggressively rejected the tyranny of imposing religion on anyone by force. But an anger fueled by blasphemous references to Jesus and the virgin Mary led Luther into practical inconsistencies in the application of Christian principles. A victim of his own passionate belief in Jesus Christ as the only Savior, he may have compromised the principle of Christian love and evangelical patience in the advice he gave to the German rulers.

We may observe that the practical and immediate effect of the treatise On The Jews and Their Lies was minimal. Melancthon read it with approval and passed it on for Philip of Hesse to read. None of the German rulers adopted it in its entirety. A few increased the severity of their restrictions, others relaxed them and gave refuge to exiled Jews. But nothing that may have been said or written after the publication of the treatise made Luther change his opinion. In a sermon preached at Eisleben shortly before his death the Reformer, referring to Christ, said:

He is my shield as far as heaven and earth extend, my mother hen, under whose wing I escape God's wrath. That is why I can have no fellowship or patience with them [the Jews]. As your compatriot, I wanted to

leave you with this warning at the end, lest you partake of others' sins. For I mean well and loyally by both princes and subjects. If the Jews were to be converted from their blasphemy and other offenses against us, then we will gladly forgive them. If not, then we should neither tolerate nor suffer them here.⁹⁰

The 1983 observance of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth has surpassed all expectations. On-site celebrations were held at Eisenach, Erfurt, and Wittenburg with Communist East Germany's support and participation. Commemorative postage stamps were issued by the United States and many European nations. International conferences were held to review the achievements of Martin Luther. Church bodies gave recognition to his religious and secular heritage. Periodicals with a national circulation as well as local newspapers gave tribute to Luther's role in the progress of civilization. The October 31 issue of Time magazine, in a particularly perceptive article, spoke of Luther under the heading, "Luther: Giant of His Time and Ours," with the comment that "half a millenium after his birth, the first Protestant is still a towering force." Church bodies and local congregations everywhere added to the international chorus of praise for the Augustinian monk who affected the church and the world so profoundly. It is not enough to say that Luther was the most prolific writer in the history of Germany. We must add, with Time magazine, that more has been written about him than about any historical figure except Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Learned conferences of historians and theologians meeting during the anniversary year, 1983, will add to the plenum of Luther literature. New books produced to take advantage of contemporary interest in Luther will add to our knowledge of the reformer and to the living force of his incomparable legacy.

We are bound to recall, however, that a jarring dissonance has marred the chorus of praise in which so many writers and religious organizations have been joined. We refer to the frequent contemporary references to Luther's alleged anti-Semitism. These have ranged from comments on Luther's "vile anti-Semitism" to Time magazine's reference to "Luther's anti-Jewish ranting." In our plea for understanding it is incumbent on us to have a clear understanding between anti-Semitism on one hand and racism on the other.

Anti-Semitism is in the nature of the Jewish historical experience. It dates back to the dispersion of the Jews as a result of their defeat by Roman armies in A.D. 71. Having been dispossessed of their homeland they were obliged to wander from country to country. Sometimes they were a welcome addition to local populations. More often they were seen as intruders, unable and unwilling to adapt themselves to the religious mores of their host countries. Fiercely loyal to their own faith, their dietary restrictions, their worship forms, and their language served to heighten and emphasize their distinctive character. Thus they lived for centuries in Christian Europe at the sufferance of local rulers, bereft of the common rights and privileges of citizenship. Feudal princes could, and often did, exclude them from residence. More often they were restricted to ghettos. Most simply stated, anti-Semitism was an attitude engendered by local governments not willing to give refuge to a people whose distinctive religion and way of life was incompatible with their own Christian culture.

Racism is quite another matter. It looks upon some races in the family of human beings as inherently inferior. They are regarded as sub-species of homo sapiens. Jews and black people have most commonly been placed in these categories. We are indebted to Dr. G. L. Mosse, formerly a specialist

in the history of the Reformation period at the University of Iowa, and now Bascom Professor at the University of Wisconsin and lecturer at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, for his enlightening monograph on the history of racism, Toward The Final Solution,⁹¹ for an understanding of the modern phenomenon of racism. Publications of Dr. Mosse in the last decade have dealt comprehensively with the culture of modern Europe with special emphasis on Nazi Culture.

Dr. Mosse finds the beginnings of modern racism in the eighteenth century in "the new sciences of the Enlightenment and the Pietistic revival of Christianity."⁹² Anthropologists, busy classifying the races, were soon seeing African blacks, living among gorillas and apes, as inferior species closely related to a missing link between man and the sub-species of beasts below the level of humanity. Polygenesis, one of the pseudo sciences of the time, opposed to Christian orthodoxy, 'believed that while the white race was descended from Adam, the black races must have been created by events separate from the biblical story of creation." On the contrary "Darwin believed that there had been one creation in which all existing species were implicit but not yet present, evolving later according to a great original plan."⁹³

Other pseudo-sciences, eugenics, and phrenology, for example, added to the thought that finally culminated in Social Darwinism. Though Darwin himself was not a racist, his concept of the survival of the fittest was to mesh fortuitously with the ideas of the anthropologists and others with an interest in racial classification. These ideas also found fallow ground in the mind of Adolf Hitler. If the survival of the fittest would assure the ascendancy of a German master race then the extermination of the "unfit" followed as a logical consequence. All of this was only theory, but as Dr. Mosse says,

"The holocaust transformed racial theory into practice."⁹⁴ It was an unspeakable culmination, if not the end, of the evil of racism.

We have seen that Luther was not anti-Semitic. We may add that he could not have been infected by the evil of racism, nor could he have had racial motivations in his essays about the Jews. Luther had been dead for over two hundred years before racism reared its ugly head. Why, then, have contemporary writings linked Luther with the racial philosophy and practice of Adolf Hitler? An explanation is at hand.

William L. Shirer was one of the ablest of the American correspondents covering the second World War. His radio dispatches were heard the length and breadth of America. His voice became a familiar and trusted part of the lives of millions of Americans.

When the war ended he undertook the larger task of writing The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.⁹⁵ The book, a large volume, was greeted with popular acclaim and was reprinted in many editions. It was the right book for the right time for readers who were eager to learn more about Hitler, the holocaust, and the Second World War.

Unfortunately William Shirer was a journalist, not a historian. He lacked the broad background of knowledge of German history and the skills of scholarship for the monumental task of writing a book of the magnitude envisioned by the former journalist. So, though the book was a great popular success, sold in larger printings than any book on recent European history, it suffered from devastating critical reviews by knowledgeable historians and scholars.

One of these reviews summarizes the opinions of other scholars competent to evaluate The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.

Shirer's misjudgments on Germany's political history appear relatively insignificant when compared with his systematic prejudice when dealing with Germany's cultural heritage.

It is clear, I trust, from this critical essay that a profound and balanced history of Nazi Germany remains to be written. It must avoid Shirer's rearming of the wartime tale that German history is a one-way road leading from Luther to Hitler.⁹⁶

It is our considered conviction that William L. Shirer's book, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, has imposed a false image of Luther in the minds of contemporary Americans and that his judgment of Luther's motivations in reference to the Jewish people has become the "common knowledge," the "conventional wisdom" about Luther held by most of our contemporaries. We believe that most of the critical references to Luther's direct influence on Adolf Hitler and Nazi culture flow from the same source.

We herewith quote Shirer at length. Let it be noted that he produces no documentation for his wide ranging conclusions. There are no citations from Mein Kampf or from Hitler's lieutenants to verify a link between Luther and the Third Reich. Nor can such links be found in the writings of responsible historians who have written on this subject in the post-war period.

There is not space in this book [The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich] to recount adequately the immense influence of Martin Luther, the Saxon peasant who became an Augustinian monk and launched the German Reformation, had on the Germans and their subsequent history. But, it may be said in passing, that this towering but erratic genius, this savage anti-Semite and hater of Rome, who combined in his tem-

pestuous character so many of the best and worst qualities of the Germans--the coarseness, the boisterousness, the fanaticism, the intolerance, the violence, but also the honesty, the simplicity, the self-scrutiny, the passion for learning and for music and poetry and for righteousness in the eyes of God--left a mark on the life of the Germans, for both good and bad, more indelible, more fateful, than was wrought by any other single individual before or since.

Through his sermons and his magnificent translation of the Bible, Luther created the modern German language, aroused in the people not only a new Protestant vision of Christianity but a fervent German nationalism and taught them, at least in religion, the supremacy of the individual conscience, but tragically for them, Luther's siding with the princes in the peasant risings, which he had largely inspired, and his passion for political autocracy ensured a mindless and provincial political absolution which reduced the vast majority of the German people to poverty, to a horrible torpor and a demeaning subservience. Even worse, perhaps, it helped to perpetuate and indeed to sharpen the hopeless divisions not only between classes but also between the various dynastic and political groupings of the German people. It doomed for centuries the possibility of the unification of Germany.

The Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which followed it, brought the final catastrophe to Germany, a blow so devastating that the country has never fully recovered from it.⁹⁷

Shirer continues later in his book:

It is difficult to understand the behavior of

most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of two things; their history and the influence of Martin Luther. [A footnote at this point declares: "To avoid any misunderstandings, it might be well to point out here that the author is a Protestant."] The great founder of Protestantism was both a passionate anti-Semite and a ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority. He wanted Germany rid of the Jews and when they were sent away he advised that they be deprived of 'all their cash and jewels and silver and gold,' and furthermore, 'that their synagogues or schools be set on fire, that their houses be broken up and destroyed... and they be put under a roof or stable, like the gypsies... in misery and captivity as they incessantly lament and complain to God about us' -- advice that was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goering, and Himmler.

In what was perhaps the only popular revolt in Germany history, the peasant uprising of 1525, Luther advised the princes to adopt the most ruthless measures against the 'mad dogs,' as he called the desperate, down-trodden peasants. Here, as in his utterances about the Jews, Luther employed a coarseness and brutality of language unequalled in German history until the Nazi time. The influence of this towering figure extended down the generations in Germany, especially among the Protestants. Among other results was the ease with which German Protestantism became the instrument of royal and princely absolutism from the sixteenth century until the kings and princes were overthrown in 1918.⁹⁸

It is particularly distressing to us that

the editor of volume 47 of the American Edition of Luther's Works, the volume that includes the treatise, On The Jews and Their Lies, should have erred in parroting Shirer's views with an uncritical acceptance that made no effort to verify the former journalist's off-the-cuff impressions of the line of descent running from Luther to Hitler, even to the point of copying verbatim some of Shirer's language.

The editor of volume 47 begins his introductory remarks by saying that this is the first English translation of the treatise, On The Jews and Their Lies. He says that the essay is presented

for scholarly study of this aspect of Luther's thought, which has played so fateful a role in the development of anti-Semitism in western culture.⁹⁹

At the end of the editorial introduction it is conceded that the immediate effect of Luther's proposals were small. But then the editor goes on to say:

....it remained for a later century to refine and systematize them and apply them on a massive scale.¹⁰⁰

This is sheer nonsense, as we believe this essay has shown. The editor all but suggests that Luther invented anti-Semitism and paved the way for the racism of the Third Reich. As we have seen, anti-Semitism had been a continuous feature of western culture and Christian practice. Hitler's racist ideology was a much later development derived from Social Darwinism and related sources.

In the 1870's the high tide of cultural nationalism had swept over Germany enabling Bismarck to unite the German states into a single powerful organic unity. By 1918 lesser German rulers had led

the Fatherland to catastrophic defeat in the First World War. Adolf Hitler was to become the monstrous instrument of a brief German post-war revival. A recent study, The Modern World From The Twenties To The Eighties, by Paul Johnson¹⁰¹ gives us a picture of Hitler's racial motivations that is in stark contrast to the unfounded assumptions of William Shirer.

In the economic collapse of the post-war period Hitler shrewdly hitched his star to the passionate nationalism of the German people and joined it to the ascendant socialism of the time. He thus created a political party, National Socialism, the Nazi party, to carry out his will for Germany. Paul Johnson writes:

Hitler's strength was that he shared with so many other Germans the devotion to national images new and old: misty forests breeding blond titans; smiling peasant villages under the shadow of ancestral castles; garden cities emerging from ghetto-like slums; riding Valkyries, burning Valhallas, new births and dawns in which shining, millenian structures would rise from the arches of the past and stand for centuries. Hitler had in common with the average German taste precisely those revered images which nearly a century of nationalist propaganda had implanted.¹⁰²

Anti-Semitism found fertile soil for development both in a heightened consciousness of German nationality and in the fortuitous appearance of Social Darwinism that could be used as a "principle of natural selection to evolve 'laws' to explain social phenomena."¹⁰³ Intellectuals in both France and Germany were becoming more and more paranoid about an alleged international Jewish conspiracy. The Versailles Treaty itself gave the controversy new life by driving into Germany a great wave of

frightened Jews from Russia, Poland, and Germany's surrendered territories.¹⁰⁴ Germany's staggering defeat in 1918 created an atmosphere ripe for a quest for scapegoats and treacherous aliens among the German Volk.

Jewish bankers and speculators were blamed for the economic collapse of Germany under the Weimar Republic. Jews were dominant in many fields, especially in publishing, and they were readily seized on as scapegoats responsible for the ills of post-war Germany. The Nazi propaganda referred to Weimar as a Judenrepublik.

Adolf Hitler had developed his socialism and his anti-Semitism in pre-1914 Austria. "It was the 'Pan-Germanist' George von Schoenerer who taught Hitler to place the solution on the 'Jewish problem' in the very center of politics: Schoenerer demanded anti-Jewish laws and his followers wore on their watch chains the insignia of a hanged Jew."¹⁰⁵

Hitler's evil mind conceived the notion that Germany had lost the first world war because it had been poisoned by Jewish blood. A cleansing process involving the extermination of all Jews in Germany became a fixed principle early in Hitler's rise to power. Thus he readily adopted a policy of social engineering designed to rid Germany of Jews, Gypsies, Bolsheviks, and other undesirable racial elements. Paul Johnson calls the Nazi Holocaust the greatest single crime in history and says that "The 'Jewish Problem' was central to his [Hitler's] whole view of history, political philosophy, and programme of action. Next to the provision of space and raw materials for the German Master-race, the destruction of the Jewish 'bacillus' and its home in Bolshvik Russia was the primary purpose of the war."¹⁰⁶

To Hitler, Jewry and Bolshevism were one of and

the same problem. Where Nicolai Lenin believed in a historical determination Hitler believed that a biological determinism was the key to the future welfare of the German Volk. He firmly believed that the cleansing of the poison of Jewish blood in Germany was the first necessary step toward the creation of a new master race and master power.

Paul Johnson's documentation of the Holocaust and Hitler's racial policy is detailed and comprehensive. No mention whatever is made of any role of Martin Luther in the development of Hitler's policy. William Shirer, on the contrary, was content with his own unfounded and undocumented assumption that Martin Luther was at the root of Hitler's racism.

Johnson's appraisal of the sixty years covered in his study takes into account the rise of terrorism and the application of principles of social engineering on a scale beyond comprehension. Hitler's extermination of six million Jews is the worst example because it took place in a Christian nation. Under the international terrorism of the present century millions more were to die under the social engineering of Stalin, Mao-Tse-tung, Paul Pot, and others. Paul Johnson says in summary:

By the 1980's, state action had been responsible for the violent or unnatural death of over 100 million people, more perhaps than it had succeeded in destroying during the whole of human history up to 1900.¹⁰⁷

If we were troubled by the harshness of Luther's advice regarding the Jews, we must remember that we live under a system that has made provision for religious liberty and a plurality of religions. Luther did not.

It is gratifying to know, however, that Luther was alone among the reformers of the sixteenth

century of disavowing any use of force in the proclamation of the gospel or in dealing with religious dissenters. Calvin sent Servetus to stake for denying the Trinity. The Zwinglians drowned Anabaptist heretics. Tudor rulers in an enlightened England sent a thousand dissenters, both Catholic and Protestant, to their death. And all this is to say nothing of the Roman Catholic crusades, the French massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the Spanish Inquisition.

Luther's Last Polemic

Early in his career Martin Luther had hoped that the doctrinal differences growing out of his reforming activity might be resolved by a general council of the church. The Leipzig Debate of 1519, however, had the effect of shaking his confidence in this kind of solution of religious questions. The discussion of the case of John Huss made Luther see that councils could, and indeed had, erred in the past. In spite of that knowledge he continued to hope that a council might give him an opportunity to testify to the truth before such a forum.

By 1536 the kaleidoscope of political relations in Europe had so far adjusted itself as to enable Charles V and the pope to agree on the calling of a council to convene in Mantua in 1537. When that decision was made the Saxon Elector, John Frederick, commissioned Luther to produce an outline of the doctrines on which Lutherans of the Smalcald League could make no concessions to the Catholic party within the empire. The result was the Smalcald Articles of Luther, later incorporated into the Book of Concord. As matters developed, John Frederick refused to participate in the council even though Luther and the Wittenberg theologians were prepared to risk their lives for the sake of the testimony they might make. The council, though

formally convoked, did not convene. Political issues, unrelated to the stance of the Lutherans, forced the cancellation of all plans for the sessions.

Several proposals followed for the convening of another council. Satisfactory conditions prevailed in 1542 and Pope Paul III convoked a council to meet at Trent. The sessions began on 13 December, 1545, and went on through fits and starts until 1563, a period of eighteen years. It was to prove a remarkable success and to provide additional evidence of the enormous impact of Luther's influence on western culture.

The first years of the Council of Trent were a shambles. French and Spanish bishops opposed one another so bitterly that it appeared the council would end in total disarray. The Society of Jesus saved the day for the Roman Catholic Church by rescuing the council from premature dissolution. Two Jesuit theologians, Lainez and Salmeron, superbly competent in their working backstage to assuage the quarrels and harmonize the differences between the conflicting French and Spanish parties the council was eventually brought to a mutually satisfactory conclusion. Lainez and Salmeron further assured that the canons and decrees of the council were validated by a papal decree, Benedictus Deus. The authority of the canons and decrees were thus made to rest on the papal decree, and not on the authority of the council itself.

The long-range outcome of the Council of Trent was such as would have delighted Luther's arch-foe, the Duke of Albertine Saxony. He had sturdily called for a reform of the church without surrender of the fundamental doctrines of Roman Catholicism. Precisely that was the achievement of the Council of Trent. The reform decrees cleansed the Catholic Church to the degree that it became, and has remained, a respected denomination within the family

of Christian churches. The unnumbered thousands who greet and venerate John Paul II in his visitations of his international parish is testimony enough to that.

We have seen that the foundering Council of Trent was literally saved by two of the charter members of the Society of Jesus. Another of them, Francis Xavier, inaugurated the greatest missionary movement since Gregory the Great at the end of the 6th century. Another of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola, the founder and leader of the Society of Jesus, enlarged on the catechetical principles of Martin Luther to establish the greatest international educational system of all time. Not for nothing were the Jesuits known as shock troops of the papacy.

The approach of the Council of Trent had put John Frederick, the leader of the Smalcald League into a panic. Who could have known, at that time, what the religious, political, or even the military outcome of the council might be? The elector's response to the uncertainties confronting him was to turn to his heavy artillery, the pen of Martin Luther. The Reformer was commissioned to write a treatise designed to mitigate, if not to overawe, the forces that seemed to threaten the Reformation and the principles that supported it.

Luther accepted the challenge and wrote a treatise designed to blow the papacy into oblivion. Against The Roman Papacy, An Institution of The Devil was not mere defamation, though there was much defamation in it. Nor was it only an effort to expose the fallacies behind papal claims. Much more than that, it was a serious effort to expound the true essence and nature of the Holy Christian Church against the false assumptions of the Council of Trent.

Luther's arsenal of argument was Scripture and

the history of the church. The treatise, over a hundred pages in the English translation of the American edition, includes more than two hundred citations from the Bible and many references to the documents and history of the ancient and the medieval church. The editor of the treatise in the American edition outlines the essay as follows:

1. Whether it is true that the pope is supreme lord over Christendom, councils, angels, and everything else;
2. Whether it is true that no one can depose him;
3. Whether it is true that he brought the reign of the Roman Empire from the Greeks to the Germans, that is, whether German emperors could receive the title "Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation" only from the pope--a fiction fostered by the popes since the coronation of Charles the Great by Leo III in 800.¹⁰⁸

Luther spent very little time on the last two parts. He may have run out of steam. His strength was reserved for the first part. He knew he had only a brief tenure on life. Though he had attacked the pope through more than twenty years of ceaseless writing, preaching, and teaching he felt that it was now necessary to give his very best and most vigorous effort to this last attempt to destroy the anti-Christ. The false claims of the papacy, he thought, were well summarized in the formal statement of Pope Nicholas III, 1058-1061:

The Roman church has founded and instituted all churches, be they patriarchates, archbishoprics, primates, or of whatever dignitaries or orders they are. But it, the Roman see, was instituted and set on the rock of newborn faith solely by him who gave Peter, the keybearer of eternal life the power and

authority over both earthly and heavenly kingdoms. Thus the Roman church was not instituted by any earthly verdict, but by the word, through which heaven and earth and all the elements were created. It has its privilege from him who established it. Hence there is no doubt that whoever takes away a right from other churches does wrong, but whoever takes away the privileges of the Roman church, which the supreme head of all churches has given it, falls into heresy; and just as the former should be rebuked as a wrongdoer, so the latter should be rebuked as a heretic.¹⁰⁹

Against this Luther marshalled all his knowledge of Scripture, his comprehensive reading of the history of the church, and his unique gifts of rhetoric and scholarship. Contrary to the claim of the divine origin of the papacy, Luther said there was a time when there was none and evil men concocted the fallacy of papal authority:

For they did not begin this loathesome papacy in ignorance or weakness; they knew quite well that their predecessors --St. Gregory, Pelagius, Cornelius, Fabian and many other holy bishops of the church-- never practiced such a horror, as declared above. They knew well that St. Cyprian, Augustine, Hilary, Martin, Ambrose, Dionysius, and many other holy bishops in all the world had known nothing of the papacy, had not been subject to the Roman church. They knew well that the four great councils-- Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon-- and many other councils had never acknowledged such a papal horror.

Oh, what more shall I say? They knew well-- and still know well-- that the whole of Christendom in the world has no sovereigns, except

solely our Savior Jesus Christ. The Son of God, whom St. Paul calls the head of his body, which is all Christendom.¹¹⁰

We have a vivid example of Luther's angriest polemical style in the following characterization of the pope.

He is the head of the accursed church of all the worst scoundrels on earth, a vicar of the devil, an enemy of God, an adversary of Christ, a destroyer of Christ's churches; a teacher of lies, blasphemies, and idolatries; an arch church thief and church robber of the keys and all the goods of both the church and the temporal lords; a brothel keeper over all brothel keepers and all vermin, even that which cannot be named; an antichrist, a man of sin and a child of perdition [2 Thess. 2,3], a true werewolf. Whoever does not want to believe this may keep on riding with his god, the pope; I, a qualified teacher and preacher in the church of Christ responsible for telling the truth, have herewith done my share.¹¹¹

Luther's argument in this portion of the essay is presented in the longest single section of the treatise, about sixty percent of the whole. His reasoning, given the assumption that God's Word is truth, is unassailable. Nevertheless we must grant that his presentation is marred by outbursts which seem coarsely vulgar. A review of his development as a controversialist may help us understand his polemical style.

As is well known, Luther was brought up in the home of rough-hewn peasants. His later residence in a monastic cell gave him none of the refinements of court life or the polish of association with intellectuals. He said of himself:

I was born to go to war and give battle to sects and devils. That is why my books are stormy and warlike. I have to root out the stumps and clumps, break away the thorns and brambles. I am the great feller of forests who must clear the land and level it. But Master Philip [Melanchthon] comes softly and neatly, tills the plants, sows and waters with pleasure, as God has abundantly given him the talents.¹¹²

Commenting on Psalm 119, 53, "Horror hath taken upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law," Melanchthon said to Luther, "You have that same kind of wrath within you. It is a heroic virtue."¹¹³

Luther often admitted his short temper and his wrathful nature, but was quite ready to use it to serve his purposes. Anger cleared his head, he said, and put an edge on his writing. Edwards says:

The harshness of Luther's later polemics was not a new element in his work and thought. His polemics were angry and abusive from the beginning. By his own admission he was an angry man. Anger was his special sin. But anger could also be necessary and proper. It helped him, he said, to write well, to pray and preach. 'Anger refreshes all my blood, sharpens my mind, and drives away temptation.'¹¹⁴

Anger was really in the nature of his work as a biblical scholar. He knew Jesus' angry denunciation of the Pharisees (Matthew 23), John the Baptist's scathing denunciation of sin (Matthew 2), and the prophetic execrations of Hosea 1-3, and Ezekial 23, which Luther rather uncharacteristically said was written "almost too coarsely."¹¹⁵

In 1983, the year of the observance of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, many critical

references were made to the vulgarity and coarseness of the expressions of the Reformer's last years. A number of well-meaning apologies have been made in his behalf. Judgments have been based, regrettably, on the social conventions of our own time with a thoughtless disregard for the conventions of the age in which Luther did his work.

As we have observed, Luther's final polemic against the papacy was based on substantive argument from Scripture and church history. In order to make his presentation effective Luther deliberately engaged in railery designed to ridicule the pope and make an absurdity of his office. The pope is referred to as the most hellish father, the damned Antichrist, a desperate scoundrel, an ass-pope and, in view of the moral horrors of the city of Rome, as a brothel keeper and the pope of Sodomites.

Even more shocking to the sensibilities of twentieth century Christians is Luther's frequent references to the excretory function in his effort to demean the pope. These references shock us. They did not shock Luther's generation. The matter of local linguistic conventions is illustrated in the author's own personal experience. His forbears, sturdy Norwegian peasants in America used their mother-tongue for three generations. They felt quite comfortable in their use of the Norwegian equivalent of the English colloquialism for excrement. They never used the same word when they spoke English.

We dare not forget or ignore Luther's passionate concern for the truth of the gospel and his angry abhorrence of anything that militated against it. He considered it appropriate to use the filthiest examples and illustrations to convey his rage against the teaching of opponents who distorted and

opposed the gospel. His contemporaries accepted his scatological references for what they were, a deliberate rhetorical tactic employed to convince people of the validity of his theological opposition to those whom he called "enemies" of the gospel. His contemporaries took no offence. Edwards sees Luther's rhetoric in these terms:

While there was still need for education in the tenets of the Protestant faith, stress was now placed on the deepening of beliefs already held. It was time to rally the troops, to whip up passions for the battles ahead. This stage in the movement's history was well served by Luther's apocalyptic vision of the climactic struggle between the true and the false church, between the followers of Christ and the minions of Satan. His highly charged rhetoric and liberal abuse of opponents proved useful to the movement's leaders and reassuring to its followers. Such were the treatises circumstances called for. Such were the treatises that Luther delivered.¹¹⁶

John Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, who had commissioned Luther's last polemic, Against The Roman Papacy, An Institution of The Devil, supported the Reformer's treatise against all critics. He said that Luther:

...has a special spirit that does not allow him to be moderate in this matter or otherwise [and] that without doubt [he] would not have used these bad words without special reasons. For this reason, too, he was specially awakened against the papacy to cast it to the ground. It is also not his intention to convert the papacy, which is also not possible; therefore for him good words are not necessary. It is his fixed intention

to so display the papacy that everyone becomes aware of the abomination of the papacy and knows how to defend himself against it.¹¹⁷

It is easy to demonstrate that Luther's contemporaries, Eck, Emser, Murner, Cochlaeus, and others employed vulgarism no less than Luther. These were lesser men whose scholarly competence was inferior to that of the Reformer. It is surprising that Martin Luther should have been outdone in this regard by the honored intellectual, and canonized saint, Sir Thomas More of England. His career was briefly reviewed in our preface. Two new publications, a biography of More¹¹⁸ and a compendium of More's works¹¹⁹ give us fresh insights into More's career as a controversialist and provide, for the first time, an English translation of the anonymous attack on Martin Luther.

Luther's doctrinal essay, The Babylonian Captivity, had prompted a response from Henry VIII. When Luther answered the king, the English mounted a three-level response to the Reformer's attack on the sacramental system of the Roman Catholic church. It was agreed that the king would keep his silence after writing a letter of protest to the Saxon electors. Second, Bishop John Fisher was to write a learned treatise against Luther. This Fisher did in a sermon preached on 12 May, 1521. While paying tribute to Luther's learning and the apparent purity of his life, Fisher denounced him for his pride, the sin of Lucifer, which vitiated all his virtues and had led him to set up his personal opinion against the weight of the authority of the pope, the church, and all learned authorities.¹²⁰ In future publications Fisher denounced heretics with dignity and restraint without sacrificing his intellectual integrity.

The third level of response to Luther agreed on in England was to be a book by Thomas More which

would ridicule Luther and make him the laughing stock of Christian England. More carried out his mission by publishing a book in which he "attacked the Lutherans hysterically and meanly in a way which degraded him [More] both intellectually and morally.¹²¹ The book was written in Latin. More must have had some reservations about the book because he concealed his part in its writing by hiding behind a pseudonym, William Ross. It conformed with the principles of the English ecclesiastical authorities that stipulated that the reformers: "Must be fought and defeated by every available means, and that all means would be justified by the end for which he would employ them."¹²² Accordingly, More was prepared to lie unscrupulously in the interests of the Catholic Church. Ridley observes that "More's Answer to Luther is more obscene than anything Luther ever wrote, but no other sixteenth century polemicist, either on the Catholic or Protestant side, sank to the depths which More reached in this work... More's Answer to Luther reads like the scribblings of a dirty-minded schoolboy on a lavatory wall."¹²³

We have seen how harshly Luther handled the pope. Thomas More could be even more scurrilous in flaying Luther. A few citations from The Response To Luther give us a vivid picture of the nature of 16th century polemical writing.

O Satan, Satan, how much more honestly even you treat the Scripture than your disciple Luther! ... Exult, Satan, you have the kind of disciple who makes even the words of Christ doubtful.¹²⁴

Luther. The very person in whose pen there is nothing but calumnies, lies, and deception; in whose spirit there is nothing but venom, bombast and ill will; who conceives nothing in his mind but folly, madness and

vanity; who has nothing in his mind but fairies, filth, and dung, with which he plays the buffoon more fully and impurely than any buffoon... He has devoted himself totally to hell, and has persisted in schism...¹²⁵

Luther 'surpassed magpies in chatter, pimps in wickedness, prostitutes in obscenity, and all buffoons in buffoonery... The most absurd dregs of impiety, of crimes, of filth, should be called Lutherans.'¹²⁶

More suggested the following epitaph for Luther:

Him who once stood against heaven, who hurled curses even at the holy fathers, who scorned the laws of men and all laws and wished to live by no counsel, but thought himself free to do as much as he pleased, and held nothing sacred, nothing pious, him this small urn conceals, turned to ashes. Luther. He dwells in Tartarean shade for his sins.¹²⁷

Conclusion

Martin Luther died early on the morning of 18 February, 1546, undiminished by Thomas More and all other detractors. Given the conventions of the 20th century and a sensitivity towards the sin of racism we may have some regrets about Luther's counsel against the Jews and his earthy vigor of expression. Whatever failings he had, and he freely admitted that they were many, he kept his integrity to the end. His use of hyperbole was frequent and his exaggerations often outrageous, but he never knowingly lied about his opponents or hid behind fictitious names. His lifetime commitment was to God's Word, to learn to know it, and to teach it

effectively. His hundred volumes of published works are his epitaph.

We now know, as he did not, that the Jewish people would not be persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah. We know that the Council of Trent reformed and sustained the Roman papacy. We also know that Luther's principle of the right of private interpretation of Scripture, and its corollary, the separation of church and state, has become an enduring outcome of the Reformation. It is a considerable legacy. To the Lutherans, the Reformer's principal legatees, Luther left his Bible translation, the Catechisms, and the incomparable quality of his instruction in God's Word.

--- N. S. Tjernagel

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