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Once more: Martin Luther and the Jews – Martin Luther's Antisemitism

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Introduction

Martin Luther's attitude towards the Jews has often been examined as an example of the role of theology in the history of antisemitism in general and in the preparation of the Holocaust in particular.¹ Rightly the authors of the article on Luther in the 'Encyclopaedia Judaica' state: 'Inconsistency and violence characterized Luther's utterances in all fields, but perhaps in none with more disastrous consequences than in his statements on the Jews... Throughout the subsequent centuries Luther's ferocious castigation of the Jews provided fuel for anti-Semites and the vicious force of that legacy was still evident in Nazi propaganda.'²

Lutheran theologians on the other hand are still inclined to qualify or even to excuse Luther's attitude towards the Jews, employing a whole set of apologetic strategies. One version of these strategies has consisted in stressing the obvious inconsistencies in Luther's theological development, particularly the obvious contrast between the early reformer and the later embittered political advisor. This explanation however results in an attempt at playing down the disaster and at excusing Luther's

¹ Cf. Reinhold Lewin, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland während des Reformationszeitalters*. Neue Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche, ed. N. Bonwetsch and R. Seeberg (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1911). – Cf. also: Heiko A. Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus. Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1981). – Cf. also: H. A. Oberman, 'Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes toward Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus, and Luther', in: Oberman, *The Impact of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), p.81-121. – Cf. also: Walther Bienert, *Martin Luther und die Juden. Ein Quellenbuch mit zeitgenössischen Illustrationen, mit Einführungen und Erläuterungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1982).

² Article 'Luther, Martin', in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1982), vol. 11, col.586.

unpleasant aberrations psychologically. Another version is the historical comparison of Luther's position with the ,normal' antisemitism of the time. Was not Luther simply a child of his time, sharing in the literary ,brutalism' (*Grobianismus*) of the time?

Others point to the fact that the polemic between Jews and Christians was mutual, passing in silence over the fact of an extremely unequal balance of power within the social reality of the time.³ Another version of playing down the problem is the reference to the economic context of Luther's attitude, as far as his polemics against usury is concerned. Here the question should be permitted, ,why the Fuggers were cursed, whereas the Jews were expelled'.⁴

The most disturbing problem, however, is posed by another strategy, that is the complete separation of Luther's decisive theological discovery – ,justification by faith alone' (*solus Christus, sola gratia, sola fide*) – from his statements on the Jews, which are played down as tied to the time. Obviously the purpose of this strategy is to maintain the praise of Luther, the Reformer, without any reservations, because the theological essence of the Reformation movement allegedly has nothing to do with its antisemitic form. We can hear, for instance, that ,It is not the Reformer Luther, but the church politician Luther, who in an historically given situation proved to be anti-Jewish. The Reformer and the gospel proclaimed by him are pro-Jewish.' Moreover: ,The Reformer Luther is another person than the church politician Luther. It is scientifically untenable to construct a harmony between the Reformer Luther and the enemy of the Jews in relation to church policy.'⁵ Well, if this is scientific, I prefer to risk scientific untenability, simply presupposing that Luther and Luther are the same person. The question must be permitted, whether there is an inner connection between Luther's theological approach and his antisemitism. Oberman, for instance,

³ Walther Bienert, *Martin Luther und die Juden*, p.192.

⁴ Heiko A. Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus*, p.16.

⁵ W. Bienert, p.181 and p.190.

points out that the theme ‚Jews‘ is ‚not a dark special page‘ in Luther’s work, but a ‚central theme of his theology‘.⁶

The purpose of the paper is a critical assessment of these apologetic strategies, based on a *relecture* of Luther’s 1523 treatise in comparison with his later, explicitly antisemitic writings. A close reading of Luther’s statements will prove that already in 1523 he was interested in the Jews simply as objects of conversion. It may turn out that there is much more continuity than apologists of the Reformer would admit between Luther’s allegedly pro-Jewish attitude in 1523 and the explicitly antisemitic writings of his later years.

A clarification with respect to terminology seems to be necessary in advance: It is unusual – at least among Protestant theologians – to speak of Luther’s ‚antisemitism‘. Certainly, the use of this term in the context of the 16th century means an anachronism, as the term has its historical roots in the 19th century racism. Therefore it has become popular among Christian theologians and sometimes is regarded as the only ‚scientific‘ attitude, to speak of ‚anti-Judaism‘ instead of ‚antisemitism‘, as far as theological motives are concerned. Obviously qualifications in the use of the term ‚antisemitism‘ are necessary and useful. On the other hand it seems to be not unlikely to suspect that sometimes the neat and tidy distinction between racist antisemitism and theological anti-Judaism shall serve as a tranquilizer in order to play down the role of theology in the history of antisemitism. The difference may be important with respect to the psyche of the perpetrators, for the victims on the other hand the question of motives does not make much difference. And, returning to Luther: At least in his later years he would not hesitate to find theological reasons in order to proclaim eliminationist actions against the Jews. And these were not shallow words, but propaganda with immediate political effects. Therefore – in spite of necessary

⁶ Oberman, *Wurzeln...*, p.125.

differentiations – it seems to be appropriate to speak of ‚antisemitism‘ with respect to Luther’s position as well.⁷

In what follows I will first give an account of how Luther’s attitude towards the Jews developed biographically. In a second section I will inquire into the strongest aspect of Luther’s theological view of the Jews as it is expressed in his early treatise ‚That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew‘ (1523). In a third section I will compare Luther’s early essay with his later, explicitly antisemitic writings, particularly with the treatise ‚On the Jews and Their Lies‘ (1543). In our century particularly Luther’s later writings against the Jews would provide fuel for Nazi propaganda: They were used by the German Christians, the Nazi party within the Protestant church, as ammunition for the persecution of the Jews.⁸ And even among more conservative Lutherans the Reformer’s antisemitic attitude was applauded.⁹ No wonder then that Julius Streicher, the editor of the ‚Völkischer Beobachter‘, would be in state to quote from Luther’s writings in support of his own attitude during the trial against the major war criminals at the International Military Court in Nuremberg in 1946: ‚Dr. Martin Luther would certainly be at my place in the dock today...‘¹⁰

⁷ It has long become usual to speak of ‚antisemitism‘ with respect to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, in spite of the obvious anachronism. There is no reason why such anachronism should not be permitted with respect to Luther as well. However, speaking of Luther’s ‚antisemitism‘ we should stay aware of the fact that historically (and in Luther’s biography as well) we can distinguish different forms and motives of antisemitism.

⁸ Cf. the statement of the Protestant churches of Saxony, Hesse-Nassau, Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Anhalt, Thüringen and Lübeck, 17 December 1941, on occasion of the ‚Reichspolizeiverordnung‘ on marking the Jews with the yellow star: ‚... as already Dr. Martin Luther after bitter experiences raised the demand to take harsh measures against the Jews and to expel them from German countries‘ (German text cited in: Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, ‚Luther und die Juden‘, in: Heinz Kremers [ed.], *Die Juden und Martin Luther – Martin Luther und die Juden* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985], p.86).

⁹ Cf. the statement of the church leaders of Hannover, Braunschweig and Kurhessen, 23 June 1939: ‚In the realm of faith there is no harsher opposition than the conflict between the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Jewish religion of legalism and political messianic expectations‘ (German text cited in: Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, ‚Luther und die Juden‘, op.cit., p.87).

¹⁰ Julius Streicher, 29 April 1946: ‚Antisemitische Presseerzeugnisse gab es in Deutschland durch Jahrhunderte. So wurde bei mir zum Beispiel ein Buch beschlagnahmt von Dr. Martin Luther. Dr. Martin

1. *The development of Luther's attitude towards the Jews*

Many attempts have been made to defend Luther against the reproach of dealing with the Jews in an antisemitic way. Most popular among these strategies – as already mentioned before – is the reference to Luther's allegedly pro-Jewish early treatise *'That Jesus was Born a Jew'* (1523), whereas the later violent attacks are played down as regrettable aberrations of an embittered old man.

So let us first have a look on the way how Luther's attitude towards the Jews developed throughout his lifetime. It is true: *'During the first period of his activity' as a university teacher in Wittenberg, Luther often condemned the persecution of the Jews and recommended a more tolerant policy toward them...'*¹¹ In the 1513 controversy between the humanist Johannes Reuchlin and the converted Jew Pfefferkorn, for instance, Luther takes side with Reuchlin against the Dominican monks of Cologne and strongly disapproves of the confiscation of the Talmud and rabbinic literature. The reason, however, is at least ambiguous: Luther does not see any chance to *'improve'*, that is: convert the Jews; God alone is in state to bring about the inner conversion of the Jews and to end their blasphemies. For the time being the Jewish blasphemies and their invectives against Christ must be regarded as fulfilment of the predictions of the prophets against this people. Human beings should not anticipate the actions of God. Obviously, Luther's early practical tolerance with respect to Jewish writings already includes an anti-Jewish theological position, or, more precisely: it is exactly his anti-Jewish theology which paradoxically enables him to take side in favor of the Jews.

Luther säße heute sicher an meiner Stelle auf der Anklagebank, wenn dieses Buch von der Anklagevertretung in Betracht gezogen würde' (*Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg*, Nürnberg 1947, vol 12: 346, cited in: Martin Stöhr, *'Martin Luther und die Juden'*, in: H. Kremers [ed.], *Die Juden und Martin Luther – Martin Luther und die Juden* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag], 1985, p.89).

¹¹ Art. *'Luther, Martin'*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, col.584.

Around 1520 Luther's attitude towards the Jews seems to have changed. His reflection on the Jews in the context of the comment on the Magnificat, written in 1521 during his stay at the Wartburg, for instance sounds rather friendly. On occasion of the final words of Mary in Luke 1,55 – ‚As he has spoken to our fathers, Abraham and his seed, in eternity’ – Luther remarks: ‚That is why we should not be so unfriendly to the Jews, because among them there are still future Christians and day by day becoming more of them. In addition it is they alone and not us Gentiles, who have such promise that there should be Christians in Abraham's seed for ever... Who would become a Christian, observing Christians treating people in such an un-Christian way? Not this way, beloved Christians! Tell them the truth gently, and if they do not want to listen, let them go their way!’¹²

Luther's most tolerant remark on Jewish-Christian relations I know can be found in his treatise ‚On Married Life’. Here he even accepts intermarriages between Jews and Christians, as between Christians and Pagans, Turks and Heretics. He hopes, however, that a Christian wife by her good Christian behaviour would convert her Jewish husband to Christianity.¹³

It is in the early twenties of the 16th century that Luther also wrote his treatise ‚That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew’. Luther's relatively gentle behaviour in that period even caused some positive expectations among the Jews with respect to the Reformation movement. ‚Luthers's disruptive impact in Roman Catholicism ... was welcomed by Jews as a break in the monolithic power of the Church. Others hoped that the turmoil arising in the Christian world through the spread of Lutheranism would lead to

¹² M. Luther, ‚Das Magnificat, verdeutschet und ausgelegt’ (1520 and 1521), in: *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clemen, vol. 2 (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber's Verlag), 1920, p.184.

¹³ M. Luther, ‚Welche Personen verboten sind zu ehelichen. Vom ehelichen Leben’ (1522), in: *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. O. Clemen, vol. 2, p.342: ‚As I may eat, drink, sleep, go, ride, buy and deal with a pagan, Jew, Turk, Heretic, so I may become married with him as well...’.

toleration of all forms of worship. There were even some ..., who regarded Luther as a Crypto-Jew...'.¹⁴ This was certainly a misunderstanding.

As the time went by Luther's attitude towards the Jews changed again. It seems that especially after the troubles of the peasants revolt of 1525 his position harshened more and more. One example: In 1537, after the electoral prince of Saxony, Frederic the Magnanimous, had issued a ruthless edict of expulsion against the Jews, Joseph (Josel) b. Gershom of Rosheim in Alsace, the speaker of German Jewry at that time, dared to ask Luther for a letter of recommendation to the prince, in order to receive permission to pass through Saxony. Luther, gentle in style, but uncompromising in content rejected Josel's suggestion: In his heart he was still convinced that the Jews should be treated gently, but only in order to convert them to their Messiah, not in order to confirm them in their error. Should his 'good friend' Josel find other persons to help him.¹⁵

This rejection marks the begin of Luther's explicitly antisemitic propaganda in his writings against the Jews of the late 30ies and the 40ies of the 16th century. Some more examples from Luther's table talks of the time: In one talk he expressed his conviction that Jews could not really be converted. He does not believe in the possibility of their inner conversion, whereas external conversion alone will lead into simulation.¹⁶ This argument derived from the suspicions of the Spanish Inquisition over against the Marranos clearly represents a prelude to modern racist antisemitism. In another table talk Luther even expresses his desire to kill a 'blasphemious Jew'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Art. 'Luther, Martin', in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, col.584f.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Luther, 'An den Juden Josel' (Wittenberg, 11 June 1537), in: *Weimar edition. Correspondence*, vol. 8 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1938), p.89-91.

¹⁶ M. Luther, 'De Iudaeo baptisando et altero, qui fuit impostor' (summer 1540), in: *Weimar edition, Table Talks*, vol 5 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1919), p.83. – Cf. also: Bienert, p.126f.

¹⁷ M. Luther, 'De Iudaeis' (spring 1543), op.cit., p.257. – Cf. also: W. Bienert, p.172.

On 14 February 1546, on occasion of a visit in Eisleben, Luther publicly read his ‚Admonition Against the Jews‘, an appendix to his last sermon on Matth 11,25-30. It seems that a sudden feeling of weakness forced him to break off the sermon. Yet Luther found enough strength to read the ‚Admonition‘, which in view of his death three days later may be regarded as his theological testament. It ends with the words: ‚As soon as the Jews will convert themselves to us and end their blasphemies and their other deeds, we will forgive them. Otherwise we will not bear nor tolerate them any longer.‘¹⁸

2. ‚That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew‘ (1523)

As already mentioned before, Luther’s treatise ‚That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew‘ (1523)¹⁹ is often referred to as a document of his friendly attitude towards the Jews in his younger years. The problem with this characterization of the treatise is that it has only poor evidence in the text. More precisely: Readers of the treatise, who restrict themselves to take the phrases of the introduction and of the conclusion, where Luther speaks up for a humane treatment of the Jews, out of their context, tend to misjudge his attitude to the extent that they praise the alleged tolerance of the Reformer. They ignore the danger of reversal already imminent in 1523: If the mild treatment does not work, then it will not be worthwhile to employ it any longer. In addition, it seems that these interpreters have hardly any knowledge of the treatise as a whole, the corpus of which consists of an extended anti-Jewish theological polemic in the tradition of the ancient and medieval ‚*adversus Iudaeos*‘ literature.²⁰ It contains

¹⁸ M. Luther, ‚Ermahung wider die Juden‘ (1546), in: *Weimar edition*, vol. 51 (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt [reprint], 1967), 195f.

¹⁹ M. Luther, ‚Daß Jesus Christus ein geborner Jude sei‘ (1523), in: *Weimar edition*, vol. 10/2, p.314-346). – English translation: ‚That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew‘, in: *Luther’s Works [American edition]*, Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1955 and later, vol. 45, ed. Harold J. Grimm, Theodore Bachmann, et alii, p.199-229.

²⁰ Luther’s patterns were drawn among others from Nikolas de Lyre’s treatise ‚*Contra perfidiam Iudaeorum*‘ (printed in Nuremberg 1497) and Paulus de Burgos’ ‚*Dialogus qui vocatur Scrutinium*

two main parts, one concerned with the evidence of the Christian doctrine that ,Christ was a Jew, born of a virgin', the other concerned with the rejection of the messianic expectations of the Jews.

In his introduction Luther indicates as the reason that prompted him to write the treatise ,a new lie ... being circulated' about him: ,I am supposed to have preached and written that Mary, the mother of God, was not a virgin either before of after the birth of Christ, but that she conceived Christ through Joseph, and had more children after that.'²¹ The purpose of the treatise therefore is apologetic. The primary addressees are not the Jews but the Christians who might be confused by the rumours spread by theologians of the Roman Church on Luther's allegedly heretic teachings. But Luther adds a side effect which might follow from his arguing, namely, ,that I might perhaps also win some Jews to the Christian faith'.²²

At this point Luther admits that ,our fools, the popes, bishops, sophist, and monks – the crude asses' heads – have hitherto so treated the Jews that anyone who wished to be a good Christian would almost have had to become a Jew'. He even adds that ,if I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian'.²³ Again, it is clear that the primary direction of this polemic is against the Roman church.

Interesting is the theological connection between the two main parts of the treatise. Both parts are like the two sides of a coin, one working as the theological evidence of the other: If Jesus really was born a Jew, more precisely: born by a Jewish virgin, he obviously was the true Messiah and the messianic expectations of the Jews are

scrutinarum libris duobus contra perfidiam Iudaeorum' (printed in Manuta 1475). Both book are quoted extensively in Luther's later treatise ,On the Jews and Their Lies'.

²¹ M. Luther, ,That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew', in: *Luther's Works [American edition]*, vol. 45, p.199.

²² M. Luther, op.cit., p. 200.

²³ Ibid.

erroneous and politically dangerous. And conversely: As the messianic expectations of the Jews have turned out wrong and disproved by history, there is no reason for the Jews left why they should not accept Jesus as their true Messiah.

In the first main part Luther provides his reasons from Scripture for the doctrine that Jesus was born by a virgin. It is important to note that the series of arguments is already resembling the series employed in his later overtly antisemitic writings. These are Luther's four points for the virginity of Mary:

1. ‚Christ is promised for the first time soon after Adam's fall, when God said to the serpent, „I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel“ [Gen 3,15].‘²⁴

According to Luther this promise refers to Christ. He is the seed of Eve, who will crush the head of the serpent: ‚This seed of the woman ..., because he is to crush the devil's power, that is, sin and death, must not be an ordinary man, since all men have been brought under the devil through sin and death. So he must certainly be without sin... How, then, can this be? ... The solution must ultimately be that this seed is a true natural son of the woman; derived from the woman, however, not in the normal way but through a special act of God... This is thus the first passage in which the mother of this child is described as a virgin.‘ Christ in fact could not be ‚a distinctive man, without sin..., had he been begotten like other men because the flesh is consumed and corrupted by evil lust, so that the natural act of procreation cannot occur without sin.‘²⁵

2. Luther's second argument is God's promise to Abraham, Gen 22,18, saying: ‚In your seed shall all the Gentiles be blessed.‘ – Here again, according to Luther, the mother of Christ ‚is proven to be a pure virgin.‘ For ‚human nature‘ as such ‚has nothing but

²⁴ M. Luther, op.cit., p.201.

²⁵ M. Luther, op.cit., p.202.

cursed seed and bears nothing but unblessed fruit... Therefore, apart from Christ, all who are born of man must be under the devil, cursed in sin and death'. Christ was to be ,the blessed seed which should bless all others'; therefore ,he could not be begotten by man, since such children ... cannot be conceived without sin...'.²⁶

The word ,by which God promises his blessing upon all Gentiles' requires that ,this blessed fruit' – the seed of Abraham – ,had to be the fruit of a woman's body only, not of a man, even though that very woman's body came from man, indeed, even from Abraham and Adam... Now this passage [Gen 22,18] was the gospel from the time of Abraham down to the time of David, even to the time of Christ' (204). And Luther remarks that ,Scripture does not quibble or speak about the virginity of Mary after the birth of Christ... Scripture stops with this, that she was a virgin before and at the birth of Christ; for up to this point God had need of her virginity in order to give us the promised blessed seed without sin'.²⁷

The Christian doctrine of the ,original sin' in the sense of biologically hereditary corruption is thus decisive in Luther's understanding of God's blessings onto Abraham. As we will see later, this Christian doctrine of sin forms at the same time the other side of the teaching on righteousness by God's grace alone, as revealed in Christ.

3. Accordingly, the passage addressed to David, II Samuel 7, 12-14, promising that God would establish the kingdom of David's seed for ever, that God would be ,his father' and that he could be the ,son' of God, ,must' in Luther's view ,refer to Christ'. Moreover, it would be possible to show that David's seed ,had to be the son of a woman only in order to be called here God's child'.²⁸ In other words: The teaching on

²⁶ M. Luther, op.cit., p.203f.

²⁷ M. Luther, op.cit., p.205f.

²⁸ M. Luther, op.cit., p.206.

the ‚virginity of Mary‘ seems to be only the other side of the doctrine that Christ is God’s son. But Luther is hear very brief and does not wish to into details yet.

4. The fourth and most important passage is Isaiah 7,14: ‚God will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin [*jungfrau*] is with child, and shall bear a son.‘ – The pregnancy of a young maiden, promised here, refers to the virgin Mary. Here Luther explicitly attacks the Jews, who ‚contend that the Hebrew text does not read, „A virgin is with child,“ but, „Behold, an *almah* is with child.“ *Almah*, they say, does not denote a virgin; the word for virgin is *bethulah*, while *almah* is the term for yougn damsel [*dyrne*]. Presumably, a young damsel might very well have had intercourse and be the mother of a child.’²⁹ In contrast to this linguistic argument, Luther insists that both Matthew and Luke in their gospels ‚apply the passage from Isaiah to Mary, and translate the word *almah* as „virgin“. They are more to be believed than the whole world, let alone the Jews. Even though an angel from heaven were to say that *almah* does not mean virgin, we should not believe it. For God the Holy Spirit speaks through St. Matthew and St. Luke; we can be sure that He understands Hebrew speech and expressions perfectly well’.³⁰

Luther concedes that the Jews would not be convinced by this evidence, as they ‚do not accept the evangelists‘. Therefore Luther insists that also the term *almah* ‚means a young woman who has never had intercourse; call her by whatever term you please, in her person she is still a virgin‘. Luther concedes that the translation, ‚Behold, a maiden [*Magd*] is with child‘ would certainly be most accurate, but again he insists that even in this case ‚Isaiah means a damsel who is nubile but still wears her crown... Hence the mother of God is properly called the pure maiden, that is, the pure *almah*.‘³¹

²⁹ M. Luther, op.cit., p.207f.

³⁰ M. Luther, op.cit., p.208.

³¹ M. Luther, op.cit., p.209f.

So far, this seems to Luther ,enough for the present to have sufficiently proved that Mary was a pure maiden, and that Christ was a genuine Jew of Abraham's seed'. We can realize here that the headline of the treatise – ,That Jesus Christ was born a Jew' – is only the other side of Luther's main purpose: the evidence of the doctrine of Christ being born of a virgin. Luther concludes this part of his treatise summarizing: ,So certainly no one can doubt that it is possible for God to cause a maiden to be with child apart from a man, since he has also created all things from nothing. Therefore, the Jews have no ground for denying this, for they acknowledge God's omnipotence...'.³²

We can ask: Why should the Jews be interested in Luther's representation of the Christian doctrine on the miraculous birth of Christ so far? Once more Luther's primary concern is not to convince the Jews but ,to answer the futile liars who publicly malign me in these matters'. But at this point of his argument Luther goes on adding that ,we would also like to do a service to the Jews on the chance that we might bring some of them back to their own faith, the one which their fathers held'.³³

This is the begin of a second main part, where Luther disputes messianic expectations of the Jews:

1. Luther's first argument refers to Gen 49,10ff, ,where the holy patriarch Jacob says: „The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a teacher from those at his feet, until the Shiloh comes; and to him shall be the gathering of the nations“'.³⁴ – Here Luther argues from historical evidence: ,The Jews cannot deny that for nearly fifteen hundred years now, since the fall of Jerusalem, they have had no scepter, that is, neither

³² M. Luther, op.cit., p.213.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

kingdom nor king. Therefore, the *Shiloh*, or Messiah, must have come before this fifteen hundred year period, and before the destruction of Jerusalem.³⁵

Luther ascertains: ,This prophecy can therefore be understood to refer to none other than Jesus Christ our Lord, who is of the tribe of Judah and of the royal lineage of David... He has been king these fifteen hundred years, and will remain king on into eternity.'³⁶ ,It is the kingdom of Christ which is here described in masterly fashion.'³⁷ But Luther even concludes from this passage a prediction of death and resurrection of the Messiah: ,For since he is to come from the tribe of Judah [Gen 49,10], he must be a true, natural man, mortal like all the children of Judah. On the other hand, because he is to be a special king, distinguished above all who have held the scepter of Judah before him, and he alone is to reign forever, he cannot be a mortal man, but must be an immortal man.' The only solution of these two contradicting statements is that ,he must through death put off this mortal life, and by his resurrection take on immortal life, in order that he may fulfil this prophecy and become a *shiloh* to whom all the world shall be gathered'.³⁸

The kingdom has been taken from the Jews and transferred to Jesus in all eternity. ,Because *shiloh* was to come when Judah's scepter was ended, and since that time no other has fulfilled these prophecies, this Jesus must certainly be the real *shiloh* whom Jacob intended.'³⁹

At this point we meet the crucial argument. Luther asks the Jews: ,When was there ever such a man of Jewish ancestry to whom so many nations were subject as this Jesus Christ?' And Luther gives the answer himself: ,The Jews will have to admit ... that

³⁵ M. Luther, op.cit., p.214.

³⁶ M. Luther, op.cit., p.215.

³⁷ M. Luther, op.cit., p.217.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ M. Luther, op.cit., p.220.

the Gentiles have never once yielded themselves so willingly to a Jew for their lord and king, as to this Jesus.⁴⁰ Why is this important? The fact that Jesus was born a Jew is important not so much with respect to the Gentiles but with respect to the Jews. It forms a strong argument in the attempt to convert the Jews. I quote the crucial passage: ,It is amazing that the Jews are not moved to believe in this Jesus, their own flesh and blood, with whom the prophecies of Scripture actually square so powerfully and exactly, when they see that we Gentiles cling to him so hard and fast and in such numbers that many thousands have shed their blood for this sake.⁴¹ In other words: When great numbers of Gentiles were ready to become followers of a Jew, there is no excuse left for Jews to reject this Jew.

Luther makes the anti-Jewish background of his argument very clear, when he continues: ,They [the Jews] know perfectly well that the Gentiles have always shown greater hostility toward the Jews than toward any other nation, and have been unwilling to tolerate their dominion, laws, or government. How is it then that the Gentiles should now so reverse themselves as to willingly and steadfastly surrender themselves to this Jew, and with heart and soul confess him king of kings and lord of lords, unless it be that here is the true Messiah, to whom God by great miracle has made the Gentiles friendly and submissive in accordance with this and numerous other prophecies?⁴² It is clear that in Luther's view the Gentiles would refuse to follow any other Jew except Jesus. So Jesus was born a Jew, but he was an exception of the Jews.

2. Luther has yet another argument, taken from Daniel 9,24-27, a vision on the future of Jerusalem and the Messiah, which contains the theory on the seven weeks of history, which – in the sense of year-weeks – always have provoked theological

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ M. Luther, op.cit., p.220f.

⁴² M. Luther, op.cit., p.221.

speculations on a messianic timetable. – For Luther it is clear from this passage ,that the true Messiah must have come over one thousand and five hundred years ago, just as we hold that our Jesus Christ did’. In addition it seems clear to him that Gabriel in this passage ,can surely be referring only to that destruction of Jerusalem which subsequently took place under the Roman emperor Titus’ about forty years after the ascension of Christ.⁴³

Luther constructs from Daniel’s vision a clearly anti-Jewish theology of history. His conclusion ,that the true Messiah came after the rebuilding of Jerusalem [by Nehemiah] and prior to its destruction [by Titus]’ is not simply a matter of historical calculations but at the same time a crucial theological statement in order to ,thus mightily overcome the error of the Jews’.⁴⁴ Luther interprets Gabriel’s announcements: ,They [who cut him off] shall not be his – that is, those who crucify him and drive him from this world will no more belong to him and be his people, but he will take unto himself another people... All of this happened just that way. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed with frightful severity, and to this time have never come into the hands of the Jews or been restored to the former position of power despite the earnest efforts made in that direction. The city today is still the ruin it was before, so that no one can deny that this prophecy and the actual situation before our eyes coincide perfectly.’⁴⁵

Clearly Luther here repeats the anti-Jewish theological tradition on the Jews as the people who crucified Christ. In any case the destruction of Jerusalem is interpreted as punishment of the Jews by God himself. And it is clear on the other hand that – on the level of such theological speculations on history – we would have to admit that Luther’s perspective has been refuted at least in part by the foundation of the state of

⁴³ M. Luther, op.cit., p.222.

⁴⁴ M. Luther, op.cit., p.223.

⁴⁵ M. Luther, op.cit., p.227f.

Israel in our century. The question however is, if such theological speculations on history are legitimate at all.

What makes this argument so cogent in Luther's view is the fact that this traditional Christian theology of history easily fits with the central theological discovery of the Reformation: righteousness by grace alone without works of the law. When Gabriel announces that ,seventy weeks are determined concerning your people and your holy city, that transgression may be finished, forgiveness sealed, iniquity atoned for, and everlasting righteousness brought in...', then Luther interprets: ,This is as if he were to say: Your nation of the Jews and the holy city of Jerusalem have yet four hundred and ninety years to go; then they will both come to an end.' And it is clear that Luther understands ,everlasting righteousness' in the sense that ,the righteousness of faith' is ,preached, that righteousness which is eternally valid before God', whereas ,before it there has been nothing but sin and work-righteousness, which is temporal and invalid in the sight of God'.⁴⁶ Therefore, when Gabriel announces that ,in the middle of the week the sacrifice and offering shall cease', it is clear in Luther's view that the meaning is that ,the law of Moses will no longer prevail, because Christ, after preaching for three and one-half years, will fulfill all things through his suffering, and thereafter provide for the preaching of a new sacrifice, etc.'.⁴⁷ Clearly we can observe at this point how Luther's teaching on righteousness by grace alone works as the other side of his teaching against human work-righteousness as the central symbol of sin.

Luther is so convinced by his own anti-Jewish theology that he concludes: ,Scripture and history agree so perfectly with one another that the Jews have nothing they can say to the contrary. They certainly are painfully conscious of their destruction, which

⁴⁶ M. Luther, op.cit., p.226.

⁴⁷ M. Luther, op.cit., p.228.

is immeasurably greater than any they have ever endured... It would be unthinkable that God would leave them so long without prophets unless they were finished and all Scripture fulfilled.'⁴⁸

After this nearly completed destruction of the Jews by Scripture and by history in the two main parts of the treatise Luther suddenly turns to a conciliatory conclusion: In a pedagogical tone he admits that the Jews might feel offended ,because we confess our Jesus to be a man, and yet true God'. It goes without saying that Luther is ready to ,deal forcefully with that from Scripture', but – as he allows – ,in due time'. It would be ,too harsh for the beginning. Let them first be suckled with milk, and begin by recognizing this man Jesus as the true Messiah; after that they may drink wine, and learn also that he is true God.'⁴⁹ And it is in this context of a soft version of Christian mission to the Jews that Luther finds some friendly formulations which have always been quoted as testimony of Luther's allegedly pro-Jewish attitude: ,I would request and advise that one deal gently with them and instruct them from Scripture; then some of them may come along... So long as we thus treat them like dogs, how can we expect to work any good among them? ... If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love.' In the context of the treatise as a whole and in knowledge of Luther's further theological development, however, the concluding phrases sound like a threat: ,Here I will let the matter rest for the present, until I see what I have accomplished.'⁵⁰ It would last less than 15 years that Luther drew the consequences from his lack of success. Then he would no longer spare the Jews the Christian doctrine on Jesus as God's son.

Provisional stock-taking. ,For Luther conversion is the main subject, along with which the method disappears as irrelevant or at least trivial. We firmly draw the attention to

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ M. Luther, op.cit., p.229.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

this fact, because here ... a point is reached, where the danger of a reversal comes into threatening closeness. Does the new means not work, fails the leniency as well as the harshness and cruelty of the former times, then it will not be worthwhile to employ it any longer....⁵¹ – ,The conversion of the Jews ... forms the keystone of the marvellous building that he has erected. Papacy has failed to accomplish the task, not only because it employed the wrong methods but rather because its foundation is based on fake and heresies. Luther, having discovered true Christianity again', would regard ,the final victory of the church against the synagogue' as ,the most splendid confirmation' of the truth of the Reformation.⁵²

I fully agree with this interpretation by Reinhold Lewin. Luther's antisemitism gains its explosive force from its connection with the anti-Roman catholic polemics, which was indispensable in the context of the approach of the Reformation movement. The desperately expected conversion of the Jews seemed necessary to Luther as documentary evidence of the theological truth and right of the Reformation over against Rome. The other side of the coin, however, which I would add to Lewin's perspective, is the following: The fact that the Jews remained obstinate even after the Reformation must have lead Luther into a state of severe uncertainty about the truth of the Reformation itself. That is the reason, why his attitude towards the Jews became more and more urgent and violent.

3. ,On the Jews and Their Lies' (1543)

In 1538 Luther published his first explicitly antisemitic treatise, the letter ,Against the Sabbatarians to a good friend'. Since 1532 Count Schlick zu Falkenau had warned Luther of a group of Moravian ,Jews', called Sabbatarians, who allegedly persuaded Christians in Moravia to observe the Sabbath and to be circumcised. It is likely that

⁵¹ Reinhold Lewin, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden*, p.30f.

⁵² R. Lewin, p.36.

these Moravian ‚Sabbatarians‘ were not Jews at all, but radical Reformers, that is: anti-trinitarian Christians, who according to Luther’s source even believed that the Messiah had not yet appeared and the Mosaic law would prevail for ever and should be adopted by the Gentiles as well. Interestingly, in his conviction that the dispersal of the Jews is the consequence of God’s definitive judgment, Luther swears that, ‚as soon as the Jews return to Jerusalem to re-establish the temple, priesthood, and statehood, the Christians will follow them‘ and become Jews themselves.⁵³

This letter ‚Against the Sabbatarians‘ turned out to be only a forerunner of a whole series of unscrupulous antisemitic pamphlets published in 1543. Most infamous is the first: ‚On the Jews and Their Lies‘ (*Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*), followed by ‚On the Shem Ha-Mephoras‘ (The Ineffable Name; *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*) and ‚On David’s Last Words‘ (*Von den letzten Worten Davids*) – a treatise on Christ being God.

The immediate cause for this series of pamphlets was the message received by Luther that a rabbi had written a polemic response to his Letter ‚Against the Sabbatarians‘. Now Luther pleads for a ‚sharp mercifulness‘ and repeats all the accusations and invectives of medieval antisemitic polemics: they are in his eyes well-poisoners, kidnappers etc. In addition he makes ‚practical suggestions‘, as for instance forced labor, confiscation of Jewish books, burning of synagogues and outright banishment. And these suggestions were successful: ‚As many of the Protestant rulers of the times relied on Luther’s political advice, his attitude resulted in the expulsion of the Jews

⁵³ M. Luther, ‚Wider die Sabbathar. An einen guten Freund‘, *Weimar edition*, vol. 50, p.323. – Cf. H. A. Oberman, *Wurzeln...*, p.62 and p.82 (note 137); cf. also Oberman, ‚Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes toward Judaism...‘, in: Oberman, *The Impact of the Reformation*, p.116. – In his protest against these radical Reformers Luther did not hesitate to use sexual allusions: He would never be so stupid to accept circumcision; rather he would have his Käthe and every woman cut off their left breast.

from Saxony in 1543 and the hostile *Judenordnung* of Landgrave Philip of Hesse in the same year.⁵⁴

It would be disgusting to deal extensively with Luther's boring explanations, full of repetitions, in the treatise 'On the Jews and Their Lies'. The editors of the *Weimar edition* of the pamphlet were well aware of the continuity between Luther's later explicitly antisemitic writings with his earlier more friendly attitude towards the Jews and of the convergence of his antisemitism with his theological approach. They write in their introduction: 'This treatise ... ends with a serious warning against the Jews. But before that Luther creates a basis for his advices in an attempt to prove that the prophecies of which the Jews still await the fulfilment, already have found their fulfilment in Christ and in his kingdom. He repeats a lot of what we already know from his treatise „Against the Sabbatarians“ or even from his first treatise on the Jews, „That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew“.'⁵⁵

In fact, it is only in the introduction of 'On the Jews and their Lies' that Luther addresses the Jews directly: 'Do you hear, Jew, do you know that Jerusalem and your kingdom together with the temple and the priests has been destroyed about 1460 years ago now?' This 'cruel wrath of God' should show them 'clearly enough that they are certainly mistaken and on the wrong way'.⁵⁶ Luther refers in this context to Hosea 1,9: 'Lo ami. You are not my people, and I am not your God.' But then he makes clear: 'It is not our intention to talk to the Jews now, but about the Jews and about their doing that our Germans also should know.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Art. 'Luther, Martin' in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol 11., col.585.

⁵⁵ F. Cohrs and O. Brenner, in: M. Luther, *Weimar edition*, vol. 53 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1920), p.413.

⁵⁶ M. Luther, 'Von den Juden und ihren Lügen', *Weimar edition*, vol. 53, p.418.

⁵⁷ M. Luther, op.cit., p.419.

With respect to the content of Luther's treatise we ask again: Is there an inner connection between Luther's theology and his antisemitism? The answer seems to be unavoidable that there is such a connection. We can see this connection already in the composition of the treatise 'On the Jews and Their Lies', which in some respects is resembling the composition of the early treatise 'That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew': again we have two main parts, where the second demasks the false messianic expectations of the Jews and particularly their political components. And again the first part forms the other side of the coin, but this time the topic is not Christology – 'Jesus Christ was a Jew, born of a virgin' – like in 1523, this time the topic is the doctrine of 'justification by grace alone' and therefore the attack against the so-called 'self-righteousness' of the Jews, who believe that 'good works' may help.

Again Luther employs biblical references in support of his argumentation. In the second main part some of these references are the same as in the earlier treatise. Most important in our context is the exposition on Daniel 9,24-27, which had played a decisive role already in his earlier treatise. Here the connection between theology and antisemitism becomes particularly evident. Now Luther confronts explicitly Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, who according to him had been crucified by the Jews,⁵⁸ with the wrong, political messianism of the Jews, and particularly with Bar Kochba, the revolutionary Messiah, who allegedly – like Thomas Müntzer in Luther's days – had 'slaughtered very many Christians, who were not willing to deny Jesus Christ', until he and his prophet Rabbi Akiba were killed by the Romans.⁵⁹ This disaster should have humiliated the Jews, were they not blind in their self-righteousness. They should have recognised that their worldly messianism was erroneous and that Jesus was the right, spiritual Messiah.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ M. Luther, op.cit., p.494.

⁵⁹ M. Luther, op.cit., p.496.

⁶⁰ M. Luther, op.cit., p.498.

In addition we can observe a connection between Luther's Christology and antisemitism. This becomes clear particularly in his profession of Jesus as God's son, which constitutes a new feature in his polemics compared with the earlier treatise. Luther's threat at the end of the treatise 'That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew' now becomes reality: Now the fact that the Jews cannot accept Jesus as the only begotten Son of God is condemned as blasphemous. 'Luther's antisemitic utterings, as they can be found particularly in his treatise „On the Jews and Their Lies“ are not the regrettable aberrations of a disappointed man who has become old, rather they are the almost compulsive consequences from his central theological discoveries. According to Luther the Jews, as long as they continue to be Jews, are necessarily unbelievers.'⁶¹ – 'Luther identifies God himself and Christ directly'⁶², and at the same time he almost identifies the Christians who are professing Christ with Christ himself. Therefore he states: 'He, who blasphemously denies and curses us at this point, denies and curses Christ, that is: God himself as an idol.'⁶³ Or, at another place: 'Cursing God's Son, that is the same as cursing God himself, the father, the Creator of heaven and earth.' And: 'Everything happening in honour or dishonour to the Son, certainly happens to God the father himself.' Finally: 'We Christians know that they [the Jews] publicly curse and swear God, when they curse and swear this Jesus.'⁶⁴

Rightly Wengst comments such phrases: 'It is to be noted that according to this logic the blasphemy of the Jews simply consists in not accepting Jesus, that is in their very existence *as Jews*.' And that is the reason, why Christians are not permitted any longer to be tolerant with respect to the Jews, because otherwise they would 'be

⁶¹ Klaus Wengst, 'Perspektiven für eine nicht-antijüdische Christologie. Beobachtungen und Überlegungen zu neutestamentlichen Texten', in: *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 59 (1999), p.240.

⁶² Wengst, p.241.

⁶³ M. Luther, 'Von den Juden und ihren Lügen', *Weimar edition*, vol. 53, p.540: 'Wer uns in diesem Artikel abgöttisch beleuget und lestert, der beleuget und lestert Christum, das ist: Gott selbs, als einen Abgott.'

⁶⁴ M. Luther, *op.cit.*, p.531.

cursed with someone else's sin' (*fremder Sünde teilhaftig*). Wengst continues: 'It is exactly from this definition of God exclusively in the perspective of Jesus Christ or rather from this identification of Jesus Christ as God that Luther's wicked advices against the Jews follow.'⁶⁵ Wengst refers in this context to the connection drawn by Luther between Christology and the practical advices: tolerance with regard to the Jews would imply dishonouring God's son, whereas honouring the Son means persecution of his enemies, the Jews.⁶⁶ In other words, Wengst concludes: 'It has to be noted with absolute clarity that the harshness of [Luther's] advices follows from the theological basis, from the „*Solus Christus*“ which is emphasized particularly over against the Jews... These consequences result necessarily, when God is defined exclusively from the perspective of Jesus Christ...'⁶⁷

The treatise ends with Luther's infamous practical advices on how the Jews should be persecuted. However, explicitly antisemitic are not just these final passages, but also many of Luther's phrasings in the preceding theological parts of the treatise. As an example of the antisemitic style of the treatise I will quote only one paragraph from the second main part: 'Shame on you here, shame on you there and wherever you are, you damned Jews, for you have ventured to interpret this solemn, magnificent, consoling word of God so shamefully to satisfy your mortal, maggotty, greedy belly, and for that you are not ashamed of displaying your greed so vulgarly. You are unworthy to look at the outside of the Bible, let alone read inside it. You should read only that Bible which is under a sow's tail, and the letters that fall from there you should gobble up and gulp down...'⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Wengst, op.cit., p.241.

⁶⁶ M. Luther, 'Von den Juden und ihren Lügen', *Weimar edition*, vol. 53, p.536.

⁶⁷ Wengst, op. cit., p.241f.

⁶⁸ M. Luther, 'On the Jews and Their Lies', quoted in: Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau. A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (Warburg Institute Surveys, ed. E. H. Gombrich and J. B. Trapp; Worcester and London: The Trinity Press) 1974, p.86, note 232; cf. 'Von den Juden und ihren Lügen', *Weimar edition*, vol. 53, p.478.

The passage is interesting particularly with respect to the association between Jews and pigs, constructed by Luther. In fact the City Church of Wittenberg was decorated by a so called *Judensau*, an antisemitic symbol spread in medieval Germany. Luther refers to this symbol again in his pamphlet *On the Shem Ha-Mephoras*. Here he asks regarding the mystic tradition on the ineffable name of God: *Where have the Jews got this high wisdom, that they so divide the words of Moses, the holy blameless letters, into three verses and make out of it arithmetical signs or numbers, and also name seventy-two angels and, in short, reconstruct the whole Shem hameforash?* At first he refuses to give an answer: *Let me in peace with it, ask the Rabbis about it, they will certainly tell you.* Then, however, he announces his own explanation: *There is here in Wittenberg, on our parish church, a sow carved in stone, young piglets and Jews lie under it and suck teats. Behind the sow stands a Rabbi who lifts the sow's right leg up, and with his left hand pulls the tail over himself, bows and stares with great attentiveness under the tail of the sow into the Talmud, as if he wanted to read and understand something intricate and extraordinary. From this, certainly, they got their *Shem hameforash*. For in the past there have been many Jews in these lands... and some learned and esteemed man, who was an enemy of the dirty lies of the Jews, had such a sculpture made...'*⁶⁹

In his study on *The Judensau* Isaiah Shachar points out that Luther's explanation of the *Judensau*, although it would become very influential, *does not shed light on the original meaning of the relief. The inscription *Rabini Schem HaMphoras* (The Rabbi's expounded name of God), at least two hundred years later than the relief, is clearly inspired by Luther's passage.* As for the original meaning of the relief, Shachar points out that *this Judensau is placed outside the church but is not part of an allegorical cycle of vices. The emphasis on the activity round the animal's tail and hind-quarters*

⁶⁹ M. Luther, *On the Shem Ha-Mephoras*, quoted in: I. Shachar, *op.cit.*, p.86, note 236; cf. *Vom Schem Hamphorasch*, *Weimar edition*, vol. 53, p.600.

... leaves little doubt about a derisive intention... It was in Wittenberg for the first time ... that the motif was publicly exhibited not as a symbol of a particular vice but as a defamatory representation of the Jews. Here the isolation of the motif from a wider moralizing context and the elaboration of the obscene theme make the Jews sole target... The Jews were expelled from Wittenberg in 1304, but were allowed to re-settle there a short time after; evidence exists of a community in 1339... A link between the expulsion and the sculpture should not be totally discounted. The special location of the sculpture and its lack of a symbolic context suggest such a link.⁷⁰

Luther adds to this interpretation the suggestion that the Wittenberg sow was meant to stand for the Talmud or Jewish teaching in general, especially with respect to mystical speculations on the name of God. But the ‚culminating point‘, according to Shachar, in Luther’s explanation is the following: ‚In this way one may also easily relate, and turn round, the word *Shemhamphoras* namely „Peres schama“ or, as they do, master it boldly and make it into „Schamha Peres“; so that it sound very similar... This is how the Devil makes fun of the Jews his prisoners; he lets them say *Shem hamforash*, believe in it and hope for great things. But *he* means „Sham haperesh“, meaning [in Hebrew]: „here is dirt“; not the kind that lies in the streets, but that which comes out of the belly...‘⁷¹

It must be said in this context that other reformers of the time got sick of Luther’s antisemitic pamphlets. Heinrich Bullinger for instance, Zwingli’s successor in Zurich, wrote in 1545: ‚There is Luther’s swinish, filthy Schemhamphorasch, which, had it been written by a herdsman of swines, not of souls, would have only a weak excuse.‘ Martin Butzer in Straßburg and Andreas Osiander in Nuremberg likewise detested

⁷⁰ I. Shachar, op.cit. p.31.

⁷¹ M. Luther, ‚On the Shem Ha-Mephoras‘, quoted in: I. Shachar, op.cit., p.86f., note 237; cf. ‚Vom Schem Hamphorasch‘, *Weimar edition*, vol. 53, p.601.

Luther's pamphlets.⁷² Josel von Rosheim, after reading Luther's antisemitic pamphlets ,expressed undisguised hostility to the Reformation, calling Luther „the unclean“ (*Lo-Thahor*, a word play on his name)'.⁷³ He successfully intervened with the magistrate of Strassburg in order to forbid Luther's pamphlets there.

Conclusion: ,The conversion of the Jews', in which Luther had placed his hope in 1523, would have been ,the most splendid confirmation' of the truth of the Reformation, in Luther's eyes. This ,final victory of the church against the synagogue' (R. Lewin) had not taken place, Luther had to abandon his hope. After the Reformation movement had failed with respect to the Jews, aggressive antisemitism in honour of Jesus Christ, which already had lurked in Luther's earlier more tolerant attitude, became – according to his opinion – the only way out in order to save the Christians.

⁷² Cf. H. A. Oberman, ,Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes toward Judaism...', in: *The Impact of the Reformation*, p.114: ,We have good reason to assume that Melanchthon was as embarrassed as some of the leading city reformers by the ferocious anti-Judaism of the later Luther.'

⁷³ Art. ,Luther, Martin', in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, col.585. – Cf. R. Lewin, p.90f.