Luther's Shadow

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Jewish and Protestant Interpretations of the Reformer's Writings on the Jews, 1917–1933[1]

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography on the reception of Martin Luther's writings on Jews and Judaism, his *Judenschriften*, is marked by an ongoing contestation concerning the reformer's religious and political views. Did his reflections on the Jews constitute the core of his theology or were they merely a marginal aspect of his thinking? Was the anti-Jewish obsession that emerged ever more clearly at the later stages of his biography rooted in his theological convictions or was it triggered by contemporary social and political circumstances? The issue of continuity or discontinuity between earlier writings such as *Daß Jesus ein geborener Jude sei* (1523) and the viciously anti-Jewish writings published in 1543, too, remains an open question.

In one well-known view, Luther's initial 'tolerant' attitude underwent a dramatic change in response to crises within the Reformation movement, personal disillusionment in the face of Jewish resistance to his missionary intentions, and the insistence of Jewish scholars on the legitimacy of a distinctively Jewish exegesis that opposed the Christian truth claims. An alternative interpretation, which enjoys wide currency today amongst scholars, assumes a continuity between Luther's underlying theological stance on Jews and Judaism and his understanding of the Christological meaning of the Hebrew Bible and his doctrine of justification.[2]

First and foremost, Luther's *Judenschriften* must be seen in the context of late medieval perceptions of Judaism and the contemporary socio-political practice vis-à-vis the Jewish minority. It is equally critical, however, to consider them against their reception in the following centuries, from the time of Lutheran Orthodoxy via the emergence of Pietism and the Enlightenment up through the nineteenth-century Jewish emancipation and eventually the Weimar Republic and the Nazi period. As the image of "Luther's Shadow" in the title of this essay suggests, Luther's attitude towards Jews and Judaism strongly influenced – and overshadowed – Jewish-Protestant relations, particularly in the German context, and is part of the complex history of modern anti-Semitism. In different historical and cultural contexts this shadow took manifold, partly contradictory forms, reflecting the specific religious and political perspectives from which Luther's writings were viewed. With regard to the impact of these forms on debates concerning the status of Jews and Judaism in German society, it is important to ask whether and how they were discussed among both Protestants and Jews prior to and after the emergence of modern political, cultural, and racial anti- Semitism.[3] This article examines a crucial stage of those debates, mainly the period 1917–1933. Both bracketing years featured highly symbolic Luther celebrations that lend themselves to an analysis of the theological and political readings of the *Judenschriften* among Jewish and Protestant scholars, as well as those that emerged in anti-Semitic circles.

While the topic of Protestant interpretations of Luther's views vis-à-vis anti- Semitic propaganda has received a great deal of scholarly scrutiny, research on corresponding Jewish perspectives is still a desideratum, both with regard to the *Judenschriften* and to Luther's broader thought. It is worth noting that Heinrich Bornkamm (1901–1977), in his seminal study, *Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (1955), includes Catholic sources but does not even hint at the existence of Jewish readings of Luther. The failure to do so may be related to an inclination of Protestant church historians at that time to elide the very notion of active and creative Jewish participation in German intellectual discourse.[4] The 1970s and 80s witnessed a change in the

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perception of Jewish responses to Luther’s writings on the Jews.[5] Nonetheless, a broad approach to Jewish readings of Luther in the modern period is still in its nascence.[6]

The present article aims neither to present a systematic account nor even to summarize the multifaceted Jewish interpretations of Luther’s significance for German intellectual and political culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or to analyse the specifically Jewish character of these readings. Rather, after a brief look at the two dominant trends of that discourse, it will ask to what extent Jewish thinkers took notice of Luther’s *Judenschriften*, which strategies they deployed to counter nationalistic and anti-Semitic narratives, and what distinguished these strategies from contemporary Protestant ones. The sources indicate that the Jewish readings contained two main features: a critique of the disastrous consequences of the anti-Jewish elements in Luther’s theology, and a passionate attempt to oppose the dramatically increasing tendency among German intellectuals since the 1880s to depict Luther as the crown witness for anti-Semitic discrimination by insisting on an idealized counternarrative: that of Luther as a symbolic embodiment of a tradition of tolerance, freedom of conscience, emancipation, and pluralism. In light of the almost complete absence of positive response to this interpretation on the part of Protestant theologians, however, the question of its illusory nature naturally arises.

Between Idealization and Historical Critique: Jewish Readings

Since the early nineteenth century, Jewish readings of Luther have oscillated between two poles: a critique of the reformer as the forefather of political bondage, deference, and spiritual impoverishment, as presented with satirical poignancy by Ludwig Börne (1786–1837) in 1830 in letters from Paris, and an enthusiastic appraisal of Luther as a harbinger of the Enlightenment, as articulated in Heinrich Heine’s (1797–1856) essay *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834). Jewish intellectuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries favored the latter view, which permitted them to advance the idea that the symbolic figure of Protestant culture in Germany had been a pioneer of religious tolerance, including Jewish emancipation.

Of course, such a reading was far from those that showed Luther as the hero of Germanness, an interpretation that dominated German national historiography in the final decades of the nineteenth century. This tendency to portray Luther as the embodiment of the German national character turned out to be inherently exclusive and – explicitly or implicitly – anti-Jewish. Nationalistic interpretations such as those articulated by the historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) in his 1883 essay “Luther und die deutsche Nation”[7] clearly demonstrated that Jewish and non-Jewish readings of Luther were developing in clearly opposite directions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish historians offered a compelling counternarrative, and they did so in two distinct ways. Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), who was in constant critical dialogue with cultural Protestantism,[8] held that the Reformation and Protestant thinking were not merely constitutive components of Europe’s intellectual and political progress but an important link between Jewish tradition and German culture. In a 1917 essay entitled “Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis,” Cohen referred to the reformer as the “most powerful creator of Germanness” and as a symbol of the intellectual overcoming of the Middle Ages. Luther’s translation of the Bible, Cohen argued, had inscribed the Jewish spirit into Western culture, rendering the Hebrew Bible a “tree of life” “for all modern intellectual life, the root from which all the strengths of the newer nations had sprung and have been nourished.”[9]

Cohen was well aware that many aspects of both the historical figure of Luther and the Reformation contradicted his conception. He insisted, however, that it was not each and every utterance of Luther, who was a child of his times, that was decisive, but rather the *idea* of the Reformation, the impetus that idea gave to the development of German thought. With the aid of this conceptual abstraction, Cohen was able to appropriate Luther as part of a Biblical-prophetic

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tradition extending from Plato and Maimonides to Kant and onward, including his own neo-Kantian interpretation of Judaism – the guarantor of Judaism's relevance for the "German spirit." The fulfilment of this interpretation, that is, Luther's significance for a future completion of Jewish emancipation and cultural integration by virtue of a synthesis of "Germanness" and Jewishness, would have required a response from the German Protestant side; in effect, an acknowledgment that Judaism was part of German culture. The absence of such a response was the unstated catalyst for the ensuing debates between German Jewish scholars concerning the historical influence of Luther's writings about the Jews.

A much more critical image of Luther was presented by Leo Baeck (1873– 1956), who had emerged as a prominent voice in the polemical controversies between Jewish scholarship and liberal Protestantism about the "essence" of Judaism and Christianity that had taken place since the turn of the century.[10] In Baeck's essay on"Romantische Religion" (1922), Luther appears as championing an amoral "romantic" religion, one whose emphasis on the Paulinic and Augustinian *sola fide* reduces believers to passivity, fixated on the salvation of their own souls.[11] Judaism, by contrast, is presented as embodying the "classical" religion that views human beings as subjects of their own moral actions, endowing them with responsibility for worldly justice. In his lecture "Heimgegangene des Krieges," which Baeck delivered in 1918 at the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin, he concurred with his Protestant colleague Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) about Luther. According to Troeltsch, Luther, the admirable religious genius, was at the same time a man whose intolerance was rooted in the Middle Ages and whose conservative patriarchal thought had helped to perpetuate both authoritarian rule and political passivity, with disastrous consequences for German political history.[12] Baeck echoed this view, emphasizing that the "Prussian religion," now fortunately rendered obsolete by the revolution of 1918, had been characterized by a "rigid concept of authority and subservience."[13] Baeck's hope was that, with the end of the *Kaiserreich,* Luther's "un-Protestant" attitude,[14] which had moved Lutheranism far from Judaism ("As Jewish as Luther had begun, his subsequent path led him to a point remote from everything Jewish"[15]) might be finally overcome through a fulfilment of the "spirit of Enlightenment" that was so closely related to the "Jewish spirit."[16] Only then would a new culture arise in Germany, a culture more conducive both to the country's Jewish minority and to dialogue between Judaism and Christianity.

Strikingly, the question of Luther's anti-Semitism, which dominated Jewish- Christian debates about the reformer after 1945, was more or less neglected by the majority of aforementioned German-Jewish authors. One reason for this may be that in the Protestant domain, Luther's *Judenschriften* were only rediscovered and discussed in more detail with the late nineteenth-century emergence of both modern political anti-Semitism and a corresponding nationalist approach to the reformer.[17] Additionally, with their focus on integration into German culture, many Jewish intellectuals – at least those following the line from Heinrich Heine to Hermann Cohen – preferred to perceive Luther as a forerunner of Enlightenment and emancipation. Even those, from Ludwig Börne to Leo Baeck, who portrayed him as an embodiment of Protestant servitude to the authoritarian state, refrained from accentuating his attitude towards Jews and Judaism. The early nineteenth-century German-Jewish historians who could not ignore Luther's writing on Judaism and the Jews, because the period of the Reformation played an important role in their representation of Jewish history, tended to sidestep the anti-Jewish dimension of the reformer's theology. In 1828, for example, Isaak Markus Jost's (1793–1860) *Geschichte der Israeliten* mentioned *Daß Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* only, and omitted any reference to the later writings.[18]

The first Jewish historian to deal explicitly with the topic, thus fundamentally changing Jewish perceptions of Martin Luther, was Heinrich Graetz (1817– 1891). In his eleven-volume *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (1853–1876), Graetz tried to explain why Luther, in contrast to the late medieval politics of discrimination and persecution, "so forcefully administered to the Jews' needs in his first flare of reform" and then suddenly repeated "all the

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false tales of poisoned wells, the murder of Christian children and the use of human blood" in his later years.[19] For Graetz, the source of this apparent *volte-face* was Luther's bitterness in view of the failure of the majority of the Jews to embrace the Protestant interpretation of the Christian Gospel, combined with his profound misperception of Judaism's moral character. As a consequence, Graetz argued, the reformer poisoned the Protestant world "with his anti-Semitic testament" for centuries to come.[20]

Later scholarship has nuanced this picture, concentrating more on Luther's theological motives and less on his personal ones. Ludwig Geiger (1848–1919), who had ample familiarity with the relevant Renaissance, humanistic, and Reformation sources, mentioned Luther's disappointment at failed missionary efforts but foregrounded something else: a gradual realization on the reformer's part of a fundamental Jewish-Christian disagreement regarding how to read the Hebrew Bible.[21]

It was in the early twentieth century that the question how to understand the discrepancy between Luther's writings from 1523 and 1543 and its significance for contemporary debates on Jewish integration and anti-Semitism came to the fore. At the end of his *Jewish Encyclopedia* article of 1916 on Martin Luther, historian Gotthard Deutsch (1859–1921) observed that "The wholly different attitudes that Luther showed at different times in relation to Jews made him, during the controversies surrounding anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century, an authority who was cited equally by friends and foes of Jews."[22]

Paying close attention to Jewish voices in that period reveals that, for the most part, the German Jewish authors writing on Luther favoured a "two periods" or "disappointment" theory over one that posited a theological continuity between his earlier and later attitudes.[23] In an influential study published in 1911, the historian Reinhold Lewin (1888–1943) concluded that Luther, in his later years, had indeed left his earlier tolerance behind, marking a clear caesura between a 'pro-Jewish' and an 'anti-Jewish' period in his theological development. Even though Lewin argued that the position of the early Luther ought to be relevant for contemporary Protestantism, he had no doubts regarding the historical impact of his later ideas: "Whoever, for whatever motives, writes against the Jews, believes they have the right to refer triumphantly to Luther."[24]

A decade and a half later, the criticism levelled by Russian-Jewish historian Simon Dubnow (1860–1941) in his *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* is considerably sharper. For Dubnow, Luther's early stance on the Jews, rather than being an expression of true tolerance, reflected a desire "to win them for Christianity of the most recent order." His disillusionment concerning the fulfilment of his naïve missionary hopes then transformed his original goodwill into pathological hatred of Jews and Judaism – a kind of "judeophobia":

> The people of the Bible, from whom Christ and the apostles originated, refuse to join the Lutheran church and thus confirm the divine mission of its founder, so – Luther concluded – they were incorrigible and deserved all the suffering and persecution to which they had been exposed in the Christian countries. This was the logic of the events that caused Luther to swiftly discard the mask of friendliness towards the Jews, and to declare a fight to the death on Judaism.[25]

In light of Dubnow's argument, it is interesting to note that the notion of a rupture in Luther's position appears to have gained acceptance in proportion to the extent to which – starting at the beginning of the twentieth century and then with increased vehemence in the Weimar period – anti-Semitic representatives of German nationalism adopted Luther's anti-Jewish writings. The more anti- Semites declared the latter the crux of his theology and a basis for the political treatment of the Jewish minority in Germany, the more Jewish intellectuals insisted on the primacy of the reformer's 'pro-Jewish' early writings. In his essay "Luther und die Juden," for instance,

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published for the 1917 commemoration of the Reformation, the historian Samuel Krauss (1866–1948), who taught at the *Israelitisch- Theologische Lehranstalt* in Vienna, thus characterized Luther as one of the worst anti-Semites of his age, his "great, unrestrained hate" for the Jews being the result of both theological intolerance and the naïveté with which he anticipated "Judaism merging into Christianity."[26] At the same time, Krauss rendered homage to Luther, depicting him as an advocate of integration and equal rights that had become an inexorable force in modern society:

> The principles that he [Luther] introduced to the whole world at the start of his career, and which were also purer and more just than those put forward in his old age, distorted as they were by hate and bitterness, principles of enlightenment and of the free development of the human intellect, including the demand that the Jews must not be subject to either psychological or physical compulsion, turned out to be powerful factors of the subsequent period, which could not be banished even by Luther's own faults.[27]

Protestant Readings in an Age of Völkisch Anti-Semitism

We find an echo of such idealized Jewish interpretations of Luther's early writings in the rare efforts of Weimar Republic Protestant theologians to oppose the usurpation of Luther's anti-Jewish writings in the context of nationalistic and anti-Semitic positions. One such effort was made by the Stuttgart Lutheran theologian Eduard Lamparter (1860 –1945), in an extraordinary text published in 1928 under the title *Evangelische Kirche und Judentum. Ein Beitrag zum christlichen Verständnis von Judentum und Antisemitismus*. Lamparter, who was a leading figure in the *Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus* and a proponent of liberal democracy, here lamented Luther's betrayal of his own "just and truly Protestant attitude to the Jewish question," a betrayal that had led the Protestant church in a false direction.[28] He praised the young Luther for his high regard for the "Old Testament" and for having objected out of compassion and a sense of justice to the prevailing late medieval policies towards the Jews. In Lamparter's view, it was "one of the most painful things, that this great German, who previously had found such warm words full of sympathy, justice and love for the Jews," then "developed a hatred for them so blind" that he condemned them out of hand.[29] In so doing, Lamparter asserted, Luther had done violence to his own principles of religious freedom and freedom of conscience and had become the "principal witness for modern anti-Semitism." Contemporary Protestant theology, therefore, needed to be won over for the original and true Luther, "who at the pinnacle of his reforming work for the oppressed, despised and ostracised, stood up for them with such warm words and so urgently commended to Christianity brotherly love as the utmost obligation, including in relation to Jews."[30] For Lamparter, this Luther stood aligned with the Lutheran tradition of a 'mission to the Jews' characterized by 'love for Israel' that had been particularly emphasized by Pietism;[31] with the Enlightenment; and with other theologians who had battled against anti-Semitism.

Lamparter's plea for a positive reception of the young Luther's position was coupled with a strong censure of modern anti-Semitism, an attempt to lay the theological foundation for an appreciation of postbiblical Judaism's religious, ethical, and cultural achievements, and a call to overcome traditional stereotypes as well as to discover and accentuate shared values. His reflections on the Reformation, more than a mere rejection of anti-Jewish implications of Luther's theology, went far beyond what those calling for a friendly 'mission to the Jews' considered possible; and it was certainly beyond what the early Luther had in mind. The wealth of religious and ethical affinities between Judaism and Christianity, Lamparter argued, ought to oblige Christians to maintain a relationship of "peace and mutual respect": "the duty to acknowledge Judaism as a divinely ordained path towards the solution of the most crucial questions of life" was, therefore, at least as important as the task "to hype Christianity amongst the Jews." Without explicitly relinquishing the idea of a missionary testimony for Christianity's truth, he acknowledged Judaism's right to be

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seen as a valuable religious and cultural tradition and as a legitimate part of a pluralistic German society and culture:

> Amongst the nations which have a share in modernity's intellectual culture, foreign hands may not interfere with the sanctuary of personal religious conviction and decision. Judaism is an awe-inspiring phenomenon of cultural and religious history.We will make the deepest impression on our Jewish fellow Germans when we do not withhold this admission. The easiest way to win over their hearts is to refute anti-Semitism as an attitude that contradicts the true spirit of Christianity.[32]

Lamparter's thoughts on Luther, published a few years before the Nazis seized power, can be characterized as an attempt to overcome the increasingly dark shadow of Luther's anti-Semitism through an idealizing evocation of an enlightened tradition of love and religious freedom: qualities the liberal theologian saw as rooted in the Reformation. We now know that Luther never came close to a truly positive theological acknowledgment of Judaism but rather, despite the more benevolent tones of the early Reformation period, he held a negative image of Jews and the Jewish religion throughout his life. Thus, Lamparter, like his Jewish colleagues, strongly idealized the reformer's position. Just as anti-Semites used the later Luther to legitimize their hatred, both Jewish and Protestant advocates of German Jewish emancipation were determined to wrest as benign a *Weltanschauung* as possible from the early Luther's ideas.[33]

Jewish and Liberal Protestant observers were, of course, painfully aware that, since the end of the nineteenth century, a completely different – nationalistic and *völkisch* – interpretation of Luther had emerged. Furthermore, they understood that much of contemporary Protestant theology, due to its inherent anti-Jewish inclinations, could hardly counteract that trend.[34] The immediate context of that development was the amalgamation of modern political anti- Semitism with racist and social Darwinist theories, as well as a critique of modernity rooted in cultural pessimism. More than ever before, the Jewish minority was seen as the embodiment of all the phenomena *völkisch* thinking was fighting against: capitalistic mass society, socialism, liberal democracy, individualism, pluralism, and the notion of humanitarian values. Under the influence of racial theories, anti-Semitic thinking amalgamated into the 'Aryan myth,' including its negative countermyth of a Semitic race.[35] The defining characteristics of this ideology were the conviction that the Jews were a biologically inferior and destructive race, and a dualistic worldview, according to which the course of Western history, including the contemporary social, political, and cultural conflicts of modern society, was to be explained by the profound antagonism between the Germanic and the Jewish race. This radical variant of modern anti-Semitism developed into an ideology that tended to turn also against the Christian religion and her Jewish roots or, as in Houston Stewart Chamberlain's (1855–1927) *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899), focused on an "Aryanization" and "dejudaization" of Christianity.[36] Such anti-Semitism drew on an abundance of sources providing political, racial, and religious arguments, including Luther's *Judenschriften*.

A paradigmatic example of this increasingly influential phenomenon is Theodor Fritsch (1852–1933), one of the most important and infamous representatives of radical *völkisch* anti-Semitism during the German *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic.[37] Fritsch sought to systematically undermine the position of the Jews within German society by means of a hateful defamation of their religion, character, and mentality. Already in 1887, Fritsch had published his *Antisemiten-Katechismus*, which was later widely disseminated under the title *Handbuch der Judenfrage*. In this pamphlet, Fritsch compiled copious material depicting the Jewish minority as a dangerous enemy of the German people, and called for a "holy war" against Judaism's "evil spirit" as well as for the preservation of the "highest values of Aryan humanity."[38] The struggle against the Jewish religion played a crucial role in his political agitation. The Jewish emancipation, he claimed, had been granted on the basis of the utterly false assumption "that the Jewish religion had the same moral foundations as the Christian [tradition]."[39] He projected his obsessive anti-

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Semitic fantasies of a "Jewish world domination" onto the allegedly secret contents of rabbinical literature, using the accusation that the Talmud denigrated non-Jews as a class and permitted Jews all manner of criminal acts against them, including economic exploitation and ritual murder. The demonization of Judaism by means of traditional Christian stereotypes served to mobilize and reinforce existing anti-Semitic emotions. Fritsch extended his attacks against the concept of God in the Hebrew Bible, construing an animus between the 'God of Judaism,' a criminal idol, and the 'true God of Christianity.' In his pamphlet, *Der falsche Gott* (1916; first published in 1911 under the title *Beweis-Material gegen Jahwe*), Fritsch referred to Martin Luther,who had "crusaded against the dishonourable strangers with the sharpest weapons," as a model for an appropriate attitude towards the Jews.[40] He quoted extensively fromLuther's polemics, emphasizing particularly his insistence on burning the synagogues and expelling the Jews as a means in the battle against the "poisonous, malicious snakes, assassins, and children of the devil."[41] Fritsch slandered Jewish citizens as heinous enemies of the German people, praising the "German Luther" as a savior who had bound Christianity and Germanness together and exposed the Christian opposition to Judaism, which had been covered up by the "Judaized" Catholic church.[42] While he was not in the slightest degree interested in Luther's actual theological arguments, the anti-Semitic demagogue shamelessly exploited the reformer's writings for his own tirades of hate.

As an early representative of a *völkisch* appropriation of Luther's late *Judenschriften*, Fritsch can be seen as a portent of what was to follow. Another anti-Semitic author, Alfred Falb, who published a pamphlet on *Luther und die Juden* in 1921, was clearly influenced by Fritsch as well as by the infamous book, *Die große Täuschung*, published in the same year by the Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch (1850 –1922). "Luther the liberator," Delitzsch claimed, even though he was not equipped with modern knowledge about Judaism and the nature of the races, had already intuitively – by virtue of the "indignation of his Germanic character" – taken the path towards the insights of anti-Semitism, but unfortunately had stopped halfway through the journey.[43] However, Falb added, it should be appreciated that Luther had at least developed from a "pronounced friend of the Jews to their sharpest adversary."[44] The innocent Luther of 1523 had been too naïve to perceive the intrusion of the "Jewish spirit" into contemporary Christianity and to grasp the racial origins of Jewish usury. He had falsely assumed that it was possible to explain the shameful activities of the Jews as a religious delusion that could be overcome, rather than recognizing "that all our thinking and feeling, doing and acting [emerges from] the deepest foundations of our innate nature, which arises from our blood."[45] The reformer had, therefore, held onto the belief in Jesus' Jewish descent, whereas modern scholarship had now clearly demonstrated his Galilean-Aryan roots.

In the main section of his vitriolic pamphlet that is devoted to the topic, "Luther as an enemy of the Jews," Falb quotes extensively from Luther's anti-Jewish writings and links them to contemporary anti-Semitic propaganda. The reformer's acerbic attacks against the Jews can be explained by his anticipation of the "future Judaization of Christianity"[46] as well as by his perception of the vindictiveness and bloodthirstiness of the Jewish people. He should have recognized that Israel, rather than being God's chosen people, was the people of an evil demon.[47] At least Luther's followers in the present ought to understand that everything they loved in the "Old Testament" was "in reality merely Luther's poetic word and Luther's soul,"[48] whereas it was in actuality nothing but Jewish idolatry. Despite his naïveté, however, Luther had asked himself why it was even possible that such a "Barbarian people" existed on Earth, and his powerful turning against Judaism was thus highly significant for "Aryan humankind": "as an innermost outrage and abrupt rebellion against the Jewish-oriental violation of [human] nature, as a first awakening of the Germanic soul to an Aryan knowledge of God and rebirth."[49] While Luther had expressed this on an emotional level rather than as a clear political insight, he had at least sensed in his Germanic soul that the "God of the Jews" was not the God of Christian love, but an abominable idol. Contemporary – "Judaized" –Protestant theology, however, had distorted the reformer's message rather than reinterpreting it in the light of contemporary knowledge. Hence, they had irresponsibly silenced Luther's true theological legacy – "his fear for the future of the German soul, which, as he

clearly anticipated, was in danger of being suffocated by the claws of the creeping demon of usury."[50]

Numerous examples of this discourse of hate might be listed: the recurring accusation, for instance in the *völkisch* writings of Mathilde Ludendorff (1877– 1966), in Arthur Dinter's (1876–1948) "197 Thesen zur Vollendung der Reformation (1926), and in the abundance of inflammatory anti-Semitic writings which stated that granting Jews equal rights had been a terrible betrayal of Luther. The church, then, had to get back to his late writings, his "unveiling of the secret goals of the Jews," and his "fiery sermons devoted to the defensive battle against Judaism," as Ludendorf phrased it in 1928.[51] Since 1917 at the latest, *völkisch* as well as German-Christian circles had adopted Luther's anti-Jewish polemics as an integral part of their agenda. The voices that made him a forerunner of racial anti-Semitism range from the *Bund für deutsche Kirche*, founded in 1921, to the *Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen* that had emerged in 1932.[52] Their sole objection was that Luther's reformation had not been radical enough, stopping short of eliminating all Jewish traces from Christianity, that is, from abandoning the "Old Testament" and discovering the "Aryan Jesus."[53] During the Nazi period, such attitudes were used to justify anti-Jewish violence; for instance, when the Thuringian bishop Martin Sasse (1890 –1942) portrayed the November pogrom in 1938 as a fulfilment of Luther's political suggestions to the Saxonian authorities:

> On 10 November 1938, on Luther's birthday, the synagogues are burning in Germany. […] In this hour the voice of the man needs to be heard, who, as the prophet of the Germans in the 16th century, once started, due to his ignorance, as a friend of the Jews, and who then, driven by his conscience, his experiences, and reality, became the greatest anti-Semite of his age, the warning voice of his people with regard to the Jews.[54]

In this vein, it might be mentioned that Alfred Rosenberg (1892–1946), whose views strongly influenced those of Hitler,[55] took a completely different direction in his infamous book, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1930). In this work, Rosenberg characterized Luther's enterprise and the Reformation as a step towards the "Judaization" of the German people: by translating the Bible, particularly the "Old Testament," into German and making it a Christian *Volksbuch,* Luther had permeated the German people with the "Jewish spirit." Thus, in one of the most influential articulations of Nazi ideology, Luther was not depicted as an anti-Semite but as a "friend of the Jews." By contrast, the German-Christian and *völkisch* circles in the Protestant church were eager to demonstrate the opposite, appropriating Luther's writings for their own anti-Semitic purposes and interpreting the principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda* as a means to "dejudaize" Christianity.

More interesting in this context than the radical racist discourse that instrumentalized Luther in order to justify anti-Semitic slander, demonization, hatred, and violence are the voices of those more moderate Protestant theologians who attempted to offset or limit the radical *völkisch* distortions of Luther's thinking. Most of them, however, did so without refraining from legitimizing their own anti-Semitic thought patterns in theological terms by referring to the reformer's ideas. While they aimed mainly to defend Christianity against the potential anti- Christian implications of anti-Semitism, in only very rare cases was this effort accompanied by genuine solidarity with Jews and Judaism.

How difficult it was for the majority of the German Protestant theologians to dissociate themselves from *völkisch* perspectives can be appreciated by looking at a series of articles the Rostock Lutheran church historian, Wilhelm Walther (1846–1924), published in 1921 under the title "Luther und die Juden" as a response to the aforementioned pamphlet by Alfred Falb. While rejecting the latter's contempt for the "Old Testament," Walther articulated clearly anti-Semitic views. "The repulsive element of today's anti-Semitism," he argued, was "that, in order to thoroughly denigrate the Jews, it also relentlessly makes the Old Testament contemptible. That way it only

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wreaks havoc, diminishing the victorious power of its legitimate fight."[56] According to the theologian, it was wrong to project Luther's justified accusations against the Talmud and the Jews of his time onto the "Old Testament." Many Christians were distressed by such attacks as it was undeniable that "the national flaws of the Jewish people" were obvious in the biblical stories, and yet Jesus had been loyal to the "Old Testament" in his message as well as in his deeds.[57] If the anti-Semites thought that "the weapon of ridiculing the Old Testament was indispensable for their battle against the threat emerging from Judaism," they should be aware that "the same Luther who so strongly valued the Old Testament, extracting so many blessings from it for our sake, clearly recognized the Jews' flaws and the threat they represented and warned against them in powerful language."[58] For Walther, the reception of Luther's thinking was supposed to teach Christians to respect the "Old Testament," but to despise postbiblical and contemporary Judaism as well as the Jews as a social group. Everything else about anti-Semitic prejudice and politics was perfectly justified:

> As harshly as the anti-Semites contradict Luther [with regard to his appreciation of the Old Testament], as much they have the right to refer to his sayings as far as their battle against the Jewish spirit is concerned. By referring to Luther they can make a strong impression, particularly since the latter, for a long period, took a much friendlier stance regarding the Jews, i.e. it needed many saddening experiences to prompt his harsh judgment about them.[59]

In the following passages of his lectures, Walther defended the anti-Jewish polemics of Luther's later writings while underscoring their contemporary relevance. The reformer, he argued, had no choice but to change course with respect to his position on the Jews: first, the Jews of his time blinded themselves to the truth of the Gospel, and second, his research into rabbinical literature opened his eyes to the rabbis' acid mockery of Christianity in general and Jesus in particular. This enmity towards Christianity,Walther claimed,was also characteristic of contemporary Jewry. The anti-Semites were right in "pointing to the most recent events as a confirmation of Luther's assertions, since Jewish leaders of the Revolution, particularly in Russia […], have unscrupulously shed as much Christian blood as they deemed useful in order to gain and secure their rule."[60] Furthermore, Walther implicitly questioned the entire process of Jewish emancipation in the modern period, again pointing to Luther's negative experiences:

> Were the consequences more favourable than those which Luther needed to deal with after having expressed similar thoughts in his writing in 1523 with its positive attitude towards the Jews? He came to the conclusion that the Jews would become the masters, and the Christians their servants.[61]

Walther thus corroborated anti-Semitic resentments and limited himself to cautioning against an exaggeration of anti-Jewish hatred as well as against the consequences of racist concepts; these would ultimately turn against the "Old Testament," denigrating it as "a purely Jewish book" and as a tradition stemming from "the evil Jewish spirit."[62] In this way, perfidious anti-Semites would themselves do the destructive work of the Jews – a popular argument among Protestant theologians at that time which enabled them to express their affinity to anti- Jewish views without abandoning the "Old Testament."

Walther's strategy of making theological and political concessions to anti- Semitic views while trying to prevent them from damaging Christianity's scriptural foundations was not uncommon among Protestant theologians of his day. In this regard, one popular tactic was to differentiate between the "Old Testament" – understood as the preliminary stage of Christianity – and Judaism, thus asserting a fundamental opposition between the two religions. This move was undergirded by a traditional supersessionist theology, which claimed the "Old Testament" (or rather, its 'valuable'

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parts) for Christianity, and rendered postbiblical Judaism a history of blindness and life under God's curse. Particularly the Luther of the late *Judenschriften* was seen as a guarantor of this anti-Jewish tradition; his early writings were depicted as an irrelevant error made by an inexperienced youth.

1933 and the Failure of a Counternarrative

The effort of Jewish intellectuals to rescue an idealized Luther from anti-Semitic instrumentalization by accentuating the discontinuity between his early and his later writings on the Jews and to create a counternarrative to his appropriation by a nationalistic, anti-Semitic and anti-emancipatory ideology by portraying him as the forerunner and hero of the Enlightenment was doomed to failure. We know this from the reception of Luther's *Judenschriften* at the beginning of the Nazi period. It should be noted that, in the present article, the complex theological context can merely be indicated. Since the late nineteenth century, the "German Luther" had become a figure of German nationalism, and the reformer's later writings on the Jews were drawn on with increased frequency in public discussions of the social position of the Jewish minority in Germany. The 'Luther renaissance,' a programme of renewed historical and theological research on the reformer that had begun shortly before World War I,[63] had elicited a strong response from young Protestant theologians; the response was now intensified, with the numerous academic events on the occasion of Luther's 450th birthday on 10 November 1933 providing the opportunity to promote him as the herald of a new, *völkisch* Germany and the symbol of a revitalized 'Germanness.' Protestant church historians who were close to the renewal of Luther's theology felt compelled to treat the topic "Luther and the Jews" in one way or another and thus contributed to the widespread impact of the theo-political thought patterns of the reformer's anti-Jewish writings. The Jewish lawyer and publicist Ludwig Feuchtwanger (1885–1947) had a good sense of what the celebrations signified:

> This is not an antiquarian curiosity, a peculiar quirk of the dotage of a great man, retold on the occasion of his 450th birthday. The way Martin Luther let loose then against the Jews – that has been heard again and again from the German people for 450 years. In November 1933, we are finding that numerous important representatives of the Protestant church and academia are explicitly adopting this position of Luther, aping him word for word, and insistently citing and recommending his writings on the Jews.[64]

Prominent Protestant theologians such as Heinrich Bornkamm, Hanns Rückert (1901–1974), Erich Seeberg (1888–1945) and others devoted much attention in their speeches to Luther's late writings; and while they tended to reject the *völkisch* usurpation of these texts, they were not immune to anti-Semitic prejudices, including racist ideas. Bornkamm, for instance, delivered a lecture titled *Volk und Rasse bei Martin Luther*, in which he indicated that Luther was also motivated by an "instinctive racial aversion to the Jews." The strong ambivalence of his position becomes apparent when he insists that, ultimately, the reformer's accusations against the Jews did not arise from racial difference, but then all the more emphasizes religious enmity: "They [Luther's accusations] were directed at a nation that incessantly offended God with their faithlessness and blasphemy." While there can be no doubt about the essentially religious character of Luther's enmity towards the Jews, Bornkamm argued, it is also true that the "crime" of "blasphemy against Christ," of defiance against the Holy Scripture, and of the "Jewish deprivation of God's honor" cannot account fully for Luther's rage. Rather, his response must have been intensified by the economic damage inflicted upon society by the Jews and their habit of "sucking out Germany."[65] The way in which Bornkamm outlined Luther's position, letting it go completely unchallenged, was more than likely to reinforce anti-Jewish sentiments amongst his audience. As such, it exemplifies the irresponsibility of Protestant theology at that political moment of German history.

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Bornkamm is but one among many Protestant theologians who, despite dissociating themselves from blatantly racist readings of Luther, did not refrain from celebrating his hatred of the Jews.[66] A telling example in this regard is the Königsberg Luther scholar Erich Vogelsang (1904–1944), who presented his views in 1933 in a book dedicated to the Protestant Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller (1883–1945) under the fitting title *Luther's Kampf gegen die Juden*.[67] While citing an "anti-Semitism that is necessary for the people these days"[68] and declaring his agreement with the Aryan paragraph, Vogelsang's main concern was to reject, by way of Luther, any notion of Christian solidarity with Judaism. Rather than eliding the fundamental antagonism between Judaism and Christianity – a tendency he saw at work in liberal theology from the Enlightenment onwards – what was needed in theological terms, he suggested, was an understanding of the fate of the Jews through the categories of "curse and blinding, wrath and the judgement of God" alone.[69] In this respect, he summarized Luther's position as follows: "That is the mysterious curse that has hung over the Jewish people for hundreds of years […], in truth, a self-inflicted curse. On Christ, the bone of contention, they are dashed to pieces, crushed, dispersed."[70] The Lutheran theologian went as far as alluding to the myth of the "eternal Jew," implying that this curse, from which no political emancipation could redeem the Jews, made them a dangerous, demonic element within German society. In theological terms, he was unable to perceive something different in Judaism than a nation damned by God, and even the tradition rooted in Luther's writings from 1523 and then adopted by the 'mission to the Jews', which at least a critical potential against *völkisch* anti-Semitism, played no role whatsoever in his thinking.

Instead, Vogelsang's interpretation of Luther's "battle against the Jews" had a clear political dimension and featured a full range of stereotypes from the arsenal of anti-Semitism – from polemics against the "Jewish-rabbinical morality" to the interpretation of the notion of Israel's chosenness and the faith in the coming of the Messiah as an expression of "Judaism's enormously tenacious claim to world domination."[71] Vogelsang even attributes *völkisch* categories to Luther by asserting that he had an aversion against "everything foreign to the country," with much of his sentiment against the Jews having a "nationalist tone," being directed against their "un-German slyness and mendacity."[72] Correspondingly, Luther's real strength, Vogelsang suggested, was the "inner agreement and close fit of Germanness and Christianity."[73] He left open – as did many of his Protestant colleagues – the precise nature Luther's "tough mercy" (*scharfe Barmherzigkeit*) was meant to take in the politics of the present, but his emphasis on Luther's idea of a "clean separation between Jews and Christians"[74] demonstrates that what he had in mind was a politics of separation and of a determined revision of the legal emancipation and social integration of German Jewry. It would be difficult not to understand this attitude as a legitimation of the initial Nazi politics against the Jews. In any case, Vogelsang firmly rejected Eduard Lamparter's liberal position: Luther's solution for the "Jewish Question" was definitely not "mutual understanding" or "rapprochement," let alone the amicable acknowledgment "that [quoting Lamparter] the Jewish religion, too, had been granted a divine right to exist *alongside* the Christian [religion], and a special gift and task within humankind's spiritual life (even today)." Rather, the basic contours of the politics of the church ought to be "separation of the spirits and a determined defensive action against the inner subversion by Jewish ways, against all 'Judaization'."[75]

Vogelsang espoused a classic form of Jew-hatred that combined elements of traditional supersessionist anti-Judaism with obvious socio-cultural enmity towards the Jewish minority and openness to racial concepts[76] – a widespread Protestant attitude in 1933 and beyond. Vogelsang might have made the same points without recourse to Luther, who simply served as legitimation for a virulent anti-Semitism obviously in debt to Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909), who had influenced an entire generation of Protestant academic theologians and ministers.[77] The image of the Jews that was disseminated by them was that of an alien and hostile, if not dangerous, race, whose allegedly 'subversive' power imperilled Germany and called for action – a tacit consent to the Nazi's discriminatory measures. The fact that the Lutheran church and Lutheran theologians were also influenced by Luther's "two kingdoms theory," which prompted them to concede the

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right to act in the political realm completely to the State, further contributed to their policy of leaving the fate of the Jews to the Nazi regime. The same holds true for the Confessing Church, which turned out to be equally impotent and passive – first, because many of its members shared the prevailing anti-Semitic sentiments,[78] and second, because it could not rely on a theological tradition that would have enabled it to foil the defamation of Judaism and the persecution of the Jews.

This impression is corroborated by a brief look at yet another Protestant statement from the 1930s regarding Luther and the Jews. In 1936 and 1937, Hans Georg Schroth, a member of the Confessing Church, who was close to Karl Barth's "dialectical theology" and, after 1945, was part of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft "Juden und Christen"* at the German Protestant Church Convention, published two pieces, titled "Luther und die Juden" and "Luthers christlicher Antisemitismus". These publications took a courageous stance insofar as the author defended missionary activities amongst the Jews against the views of racial anti-Semitism, insisted on the right of baptized Jews to become Protestant pastors, vigorously rejected the so-called "Aryan paragraph" and repudiated the radical assumptions of *völkisch* theologies. Luther's "Christian anti-Semitism," Schroth argued, clearly contradicted any form of racial thinking; rather, it was based on hope for the salvation of the Jews and aimed for a theological refutation of Judaism. Even though Judaism, from the reformer's view, was part of the diabolical coalition of the Antichrist as it allegedly slandered Christ, Luther knew that the Church, the "new Israel," was continously threatened by the temptation to deny Christ and thus to become "Judaism" itself. In its essence, Schroth emphasized, Judaism was "anti-Christianity," as was racial anti-Semitism due to its attacks against the Christian tradition: "The Jew is always standing in front of the door, and this would even be the case should there no longer be a racially or politically visible Judaism. And who would deny that today we have to fight such an 'anti-Semitic' battle within the Church?"[7]79 In theory, Schroth even wanted to express a positive thought – namely, that Christians should not abandon the Jews to hatred as they shared with them the solidarity of being sinners before God and because Christians, too, were always tempted to turn against Christ. In addition to this thought, which recalls the attitude of the young Luther, he intended to say that in the present, Luther's "Christian anti-Semitism" could be understood as directed not just against the Jews but also against the *völkisch* movement. Thus, if a nation decides to turn against Christ, it becomes "Jewish," "be it what it may in terms of its race and ethnicity, and even if it is Catholic, Protestant or non-religious. And when a nation, by deciding against Christ, has become a people of Judaism, it will share the fate of racial Judaism: rejection by God."[80] According to Schroth, "the Jew prevails also in anti-Semitism if the latter turns against Christ" – and that is why it is the church's duty to "resist against all forms of anti-Christianity or *völkisch*-national Christianity, as Luther has done with regard to the Jews."[81]

Schroth was apparently unaware of how dangerous and counterproductive Luther's "salvational anti-Semitism" was and that this rather desperate and convoluted argumentation, a belittlement of Luther's anti-Jewish theology, fostered anti-Semitic patterns of thought even if it tried to turn them critically against Nazism. Here, Judaism becomes the symbol of the "anti-Christ" and of the diabolical, which implies that the diabolical in all of its manifestations is related to Judaism. Jews and Judaism thus appear as a countervailing power poised to undermine what is true and ethically good. It is hardly surprising, then, that while Schroth defended Jews who had converted to Christianity, he had no word of solidarity with the other Jews and did not challenge the regime's right to engage in racial politics. His position is revealing as it demonstrates that – even with the best intentions – it was impossible, on the basis of Luther's theology, to effectively counter the anti-Semitic image of the Jews, let alone the denial of Judaism's theological right to exist. On the contrary, anti-Jewish sentiments were reinforced by such interpretations.

In retrospect, the idealization of Luther on the part of Jewish intellectuals and their belief in the liberating effects of the Reformation on German culture emerges as a tragic illusion, the authors blind to the reformer's true views and the absence of contemporary Protestantism's response to

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their dialogical approach.The same might be true for their political faith in the Enlightenment principles they strove to see at work in Luther. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to note the dignity inherent in the endeavour to invoke – via an idealized Luther – a liberal counter-tradition of freedom of thought, tolerance, and human decency that had, tragically, become widely irrelevant in German politics – and in Protestant theology. By showcasing otherwise hidden implications of Luther’s ideas, Jewish scholars protested what they perceived as a catastrophic decline of the liberal tradition that had once guaranteed Jewish emancipation and integration. Ultimately, idealizing Luther in an attempt to offset the inhumane logic of modern anti-Semitism was both a desperate apologetic strategy and an act of intellectual resistance that merits respect.

This seems all the more the case in view of the lack of solidarity on the part of nearly the full gamut of Protestant theologians. Luther’s writings on the Jews not only overshadowed Jewish-Christian relations when theologians tolerated or actively promoted the reformer’s ideas in order to demonize the Jewish minority or justify anti-Semitic politics. More subtly, even Protestant theologians who rejected the harsh views espoused by Luther in 1543 and tried to oppose anti-Semitism by referring to the more sympathetic elements of his statement in 1523 failed to address the fundamental flaws of the reformer’s perception of Judaism and to engage in a radical critique of the inevitable political consequences of his supersessionist theology. Consequently, they did not develop a tradition of respect and dialogue that would have served them in countering the radicalization of anti-Semitic mentalities within the Protestant church and beyond. The handful of hopeful signs for a turn towards an affirmation of Judaism as a valuable religious and cultural force within German society, seen in Eduard Lamparter’s rather unique position, were silenced by an overwhelming merging of different anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic convictions that came to the fore in the crucial years which destroyed Weimar democracy.

The challenge in the Jewish discourse on Luther since the Enlightenment, be it characterized by idealization or theo-political critique, remained unheard by German Protestantism before World War II and the Shoah. It was only gradually – and often reluctantly – that Protestant theologians turned their gaze to the shadow Luther’s anti-Semitism had cast on Protestant-Jewish relations and on Protestantism itself.[82] The historical and theological questions with which they were confronted were nothing less than radical: was there a direct connection between Luther’s writings on the Jews, a specifically German-Protestant variant of anti-Semitism, and the ‘eliminationist’ anti-Semitism (Daniel J. Goldhagen) that led to an unprecedented genocide? Whatever the historical answer to that question, Protestant self-reflection after the crimes of the twentieth century must face the destructive theological and political traditions that belong to the legacy of Luther and the Reformation. The theological questions emerging from the historical analysis were no less challenging: was it possible to forge a new tradition of respectful dialogue with Judaism on the basis of Luther’s theology by reinterpreting his understanding of the Bible and his doctrine of justification, or was it necessary to jettison constitutive elements of his thought?

Albert H. Friedlander (1927–2004), a German-Jewish emigré scholar in London, offered a personal response to such questions in an essay he published in 1987, titled “Martin Luther und wir Juden”. As part of his reflections, he presented a vision of Luther in his *feste Burg* – a solid castle with a treasure chamber full of glimmering gold, but also dark vaults and torture chambers. It is in the latter that the tools for pogroms are to be found – the place where the Jews became the menacing antagonists of his own faith. In an imagined interchange, Friedlander asks Luther to lock the doors of the torture chamber and to walk with him to the treasure chamber – his library, which houses the Bible and where they can engage in a dialogue about their differing understanding of this shared book in an atmosphere of mutual respect.With this vision, Friedlander offered Protestant theology a path towards a critical confrontation with Luther’s legacy. In this vision, the dark chamber of Protestant anti-Semitism would be acknowleged and left behind, and a conversation would begin about what unites as well as what separates Judaism and Christianity.[83]

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[1] This article has been written within the context of the Hessian Ministry for Science and Arts funded LOEWE research hub “Religious Positioning: Modalities and Constellations in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Contexts” at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and the Justus-Liebig- University in Gießen.
[2] For the most recent works, see Thomas Kaufmann, Luthers ‚Judenschriften‘. Ein Beitrag zu ihrer historischen Kontextualisierung (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011); idem, Luther’s Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Andreas Pangritz, Theologie und Antisemitismus. Das Beispiel Martin Luthers (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2017); for influential earlier works, see Heiko A. Oberman, The Roots of Anti-Semitism: In the Age of Renaissance and Reformation (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Peter von der Osten-Sacken, Martin Luther und die Juden – neu untersucht anhand von Anton Margarithas ‚der gantz Jüdisch glaub‘ (1530/ 31) (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002); Dietz Bering, War Luther Antisemit? Das deutsch-jüdische Verhältnis als Tragödie der Nähe (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2014). Overall, it does not seem plausible to interpret Luther’s later writings on the Jews as a lapse from religious tolerance to late medieval hatred. Rather, although the demonization of Judaism and the unpitying recommendation of “sharp mercy” to the authorities in 1543 indeed represented a new element in his thought, the anti-Jewish theological motifs at work here were already present even before 1523. These motifs (among others, the stubbornness of the Jews resulting in God’s wrath and rejection of His chosen people; Judaism’s tenacious hatred of Jesus Christ and Christianity; a false Jewish and blasphemous understanding of the Bible; Jewish existence as an archetype of the self-glorification of sinful man before God) need to be understood as running consistently through Luther’s work, even if they were occasionally tempered by criticism of Christian arrogance and inhumane treatment of Jews. See Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, “Luther und die Juden,” in Die Juden und Martin Luther. Martin Luther und die Juden. Geschichte – Wirkungsgeschichte – Herausforderung, eds. Heinz Kremers et al., 2nd edition (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1987): 72–88. Ehrlich himself diagnoses consistent theological anti-Semitism in Luther; but he also discerns a temporary “new, humane element” (76) of a political nature in Luther’s work, inspired by missionary hopes.
[3] See Christian Wiese, “‘Unheilsspuren’. Zur Rezeption von Martin Luthers ‘Judenschriften’ im Kontext antisemitischen Denkens vor der Schoah,” in Das mißbrauchte Evangelium. Studien zu Theologie und Praxis der Thüringer Deutschen Christen, ed. Peter von der Osten-Sacken (Berlin: Institut für Kirche und Judentum, 2002): 91–135.
[4] Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1955).
[5] See Johannes Brosseder, Luthers Stellung zu den Juden im Spiegel seiner Interpreten. Interpretation und Rezeption von Luthers Schriften und Äußerungen zum Judentum im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert vor allem im deutschsprachigen Raum (Munich: Hueber, 1972); Johannes Wallmann, “The Reception of Luther’s Writings on the Jews from the Reformation to the End of the 19th Century,” Lutheran Quarterly 1 (1987): 72–97. For a most recent analysis from a Jewish thinker, who presents a historical perspective, see Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Luther the Anti-Semite: A Contemporary Jewish Perspective (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2018).
[6] See Christian Wiese, “‘Auch uns sei sein Andenken heilig!’ Symbolisierung, Idealisierung und Kritik in der jüdischen Lutherrezeption des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts,” in Luther zwischen den Kulturen. Zeitgenossenschaft – Weltwirkung, eds. Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004): 214–59; Dorothea Wendebourg, “‘Gesegnet sei das Andenken Luthers!‘ Die Juden und Martin Luther im 19. Jahrhundert,” Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 65 (2013): 235–51; Walter Homolka, “Martin Luther als Symbol geistiger Freiheit? Der Reformator und seine Rezeption im Judentum” in Luther, Rosenzweig und die Schrift. Ein deutsch-jüdischer Dialog, ed. Micha Brumlik (Hamburg: CEP Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2017): 49–60.
[7] Heinrich von Treitschke, “Luther und die deutsche Nation,” Preußische Jahrbücher 52 (1883): 469–86.
[8] For Cohen’s relationship to Protestantism, see Wendell S. Dietrich, Cohen and Troeltsch: Ethical Monotheistic Religion and Theory of Culture (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986); Robert Raphael Geis, “Hermann Cohen und die deutsche Reformation,” in idem, Gottes Minorität. Beiträge zur jüdischen Theologie und zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (Munich: Kösel, 1971): 136–51; William Kluback, “Friendship without Communication: Wilhelm Herrmann and Hermann Cohen,” Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 31 (1986): 317–38; David N. Myers, “Hermann Cohen and the Quest for Protestant Judaism,” Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 46 (2001): 195–214.
[9] Hermann Cohen, “Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis,” Neue jüdische Monatshefte 2 (1917/18): 45–9, here 46.
[10] See Christian Wiese, “Ein unerhörtes Gesprächsangebot. Leo Baeck, die Wissenschaft des Judentums und das Judentumsbild des liberalen Protestantismus,” in Leo Baeck 1873–1956. ‚Mi gesa rabbanim’ – Aus dem Stamme von Rabbinern, eds. Georg Heuberger and Fritz Backhaus (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001): 147–71.
[11] Leo Baeck, “Romantische Religion,” in idem, Aus drei Jahrtausenden – Das Evangelium als Urkunde der jüdischen Glaubensgeschichte, Werke vol. 4 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000): 59–120.
[12] See Ernst Troeltsch, Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1911).
[13] Leo Baeck, “Heimgegangene des Krieges,” in idem, Wege im Judentum. Aufsätze und Reden (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997), 285–96, here 288.
[14] Ibid., 286.
[15] Ibid., 288.
[16] Ibid., 289.
[17] For a discussion of the history of the editions of Luther’s writings on the Jews before the Nazi rise to power, see Volker Leppin, “Luthers ‘Judenschriften’ im Spiegel der Editionen bis 1933,” in Martin Luthers “Judenschriften”. Die Rezeption im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, eds. Harry Oelke, Wolfgang Kraus et. al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016): 19–44.
[18] Isaak Markus Jost, Geschichte der Israeliten seit der Zeit der Maccabäer bis auf unsere Tage, vol. 8 (Berlin: Schlesinger, 1828), 211–2. On Jost, see Ismar Schorsch, “From Wolfenbüttel to Wissenschaft – The Divergent Paths of Isaak Markus Jost and Leopold Zunz,” Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 22 (1977): 109–28.
[19] Heinrich Graetz, Geschichte der Juden. Von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart, vol. 9: Von der Verbannung der Juden aus Spanien und Portugal (1494) bis zur dauernden Ansiedelung der Marranen in Holland, reprint of the 4th edition 1907 (Berlin: Arani, 1998), 300. Graetz described Luther’s early writing as a “word such as the Jews had not heard for a thousand years” (ibid., 189).
[20] Ibid., 301–2.
[21] See Ludwig Geiger, “Zur jüdischen Geschichte. 2. Luther und die Juden,” Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben 5 (1867): 23–9; idem, “Die Juden und die deutsche Literatur,” Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland 2 (1888): 297–374 (on Luther, 326–8); idem, “Renaissance und Reformation,” in Kulturgeschichte in ihrer natürlichen Entwicklung bis zur Gegenwart, ed. Friedrich von Hellwald, 4th edition (Leipzig: Friesenhahn, 1898): 68–217.
[22] Gotthard Deutsch, entry on “Luther, Martin,” in The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 8, 4th edition (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1916), cols. 213–5. Deutsch was Professor of Jewish History at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati; for the most part his article treats the question of Luther’s attitude to Judaism.
[23] Brosseder, Luthers Stellung zu den Juden, 89–96, 112–4, 148–54, and 303, briefly outlines the position of some Jewish researchers in this respect. He emphasizes their tendency to understand Luther’s “late writings” as a break with an earlier, more positive attitude towards the Jews and, once again, as the consequence of disappointed missionary hopes.
[24] Reinhold Lewin, Luthers Stellung zu den Juden. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland während des Reformationszeitalters (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1911), 110. Interestingly, Protestant scholars who shared anti-Semitic sentiments and saw Luther’s anti-Semitism as anchored in his theology, attributed Lewin’s interpretation to his being a Jew; see Erich Vogelsang, Luthers Kampf gegen die Juden (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), 8–9 (“The fact that […] Reinhold Lewin as a rabbi, in spite of an attempt at objectivity and scientific method, was barely able to grasp anything of Luther’s actual concerns, should not surprise us”). On Vogelsang, see below.
[25] Simon Dubnow,Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes. Von seinen Uranfängen bis zur Gegenwart, vol. 6 (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1927), 192–217, here at 200 and 202–3.
[26] Samuel Krauss, “Luther und die Juden,” Der Jude 2 (1917/18): 544–7 (reprinted in Kurt Wilhelm, ed., Wissenschaft des Judentums im deutschen Sprachbereich. Ein Querschnitt, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1967), 309–14, here 310 and 312).
[27] Ibid., 313. Historian Ismar Elbogen (1874–1943), in his Geschichte der Juden seit dem Untergang des jüdischen Staates (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner,

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1919), 69–71, also confirmed the longterm effect of Luther's anti-Semitic invective, but insisted that he remained "the most important milestone on the road to the civil state and to freedom of thought and conscience" (70).
[28] Eduard Lamparter, Evangelische Kirche und Judentum. Ein Beitrag zum christlichen Verständnis von Judentum und Antisemitismus (Stuttgart: Brönner, 1928), 5.
[29] Ibid., 15.
[30] Ibid., 17.
[31] For the intellectual origins, see Christoph Rymatzky, Hallischer Pietismus und Judenmission. Johann Heinrich Callenbergs Institutum Judaicum und dessen Freundeskreis (1727–1736) (Tübingen: Niemeyer-Verlag, 2004); for the Lutheran 'Mission to the Jews,' see, e. g., Christopher M. Clark, The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia, 1728– 1941 (London and Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). An example for the rather ambivalent attitude of the representatives of the 'Mission to the Jews' with regard to Luther's Judenschriften is Ernst Schaeffer, the director of the Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Juden in Berlin, who published a book entitled Luther und die Juden in 1917. In view of the anti-Semitic debates during World War I, he suggested that German society should turn to the young Luther, whose friendly missionary attitude towards the Jews might serve as a model for the present. Even though the reformer's later polemical statements had to be understood historically as a response to Jews' stubbornness, his harsh advice to the authorities needed to be rejected as intolerant. However, Schaeffer seemed strongly irritated by the self-confident insistence of German Jews on Judaism's religious and cultural relevance for modern society and warned against Jewish arrogance as well as the "poisonous" Jewish influence on Christianity. By emphasizing that the main task was to "strengthen Christian self-confidence against the Jews," he made it very clear that a critique of anti-Semitism neither meant acknowledging Judaism as a tradition which deserved an equal status in a pluralistic society, nor excluding religious and political prejudice; Ernst Schaeffer, Luther und die Juden (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1917), 62.
[32] Lamparter, Evangelische Kirche und Judentum, 59–60.
[33] For the early Nazi period, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) should be mentioned in this context. In 1933, he introduced his essay "Die Kirche vor der Judenfrage" with several quotations from Luther's early work; see Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer und die Juden," in Die Juden und Martin Luther, eds. Kremers et al. 211–48.
[34] For other Protestant voices during the Weimar Period, see Gury Schneider-Ludorf, "'Luther und die Juden' in den theologischen Bewegungen der Zwischenkriegszeit," in Martin Luthers "Judenschriften", eds. Oelke, Kraus et al, 145–60.
[35] See Leon Poliakov, The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist & Nationalistic Ideas in Europe (New York: Basic Books, 1974).
[36] See Uriel Tal, Religious and Anti-Religious Roots of Modern Antisemitism (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1971).
[37] See, e. g., Elisabeth Albanis, "Anleitung zum Hass. Theodor Fritschs antisemitisches Geschichtsbild. Vorbilder, Zusammensetzung und Verbeitung," in Antisemitische Geschichtsbilder, eds. Werner Bergmann and Ulrich Sieg (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2009): 167–91.
[38] Theodor Fritsch, Handbuch der Judenfrage. Eine Zusammenstellung des wichtigsten Materials zur Beurteilung des jüdischen Volkes, 26th edition (Hamburg: Hanseatische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1907), 415–6.
[39] Ibid., 12.
[40] Theodor Fritsch, Der falsche Gott. Beweismaterial gegen Jahwe, 10th edition (Leipzig: Hammer- Verlag, 1933), 192.
[41] Ibid., 189.
[42] Ibid., 190–2. For the response of Jewish and Protestant thinkers to Fritsch's demonization of Judaism and the Jewish concept of God, see Christian Wiese, "Jahwe – ein Gott nur für Juden? Der Disput um das Gottesverständnis zwischen Wissenschaft des Judentums und protestantischer alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft im Kaiserreich", in Christlicher Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus. Theologische und kirchliche Programme deutscher Christen, ed. Leonore Siegele- Wenschkewitz (Frankfurt a. M.: Haag und Herchen, 1994): 27–94.
[43] Alfred Falb, Luther und die Juden (Munich: Boepple, 1921), 4 and 8.
[44] Ibid., 11.
[45] Ibid., 24.
[46] Ibid., 30.
[47] Ibid., 47.
[48] Ibid., 53.
[49] Ibid., 59.
[50] Ibid., 53.
[51] Mathilde Ludendorff, Der ungesühnte Frevel an Luther, Lessing. Mozart und Schiller im Dienste des ewigen Baumeisters aller Welten (Munich: Selbstverlag, 1928), 11; for Ludendorff's role in the völkisch movement, see Annika Spilker, Geschlecht, Religion und völkischer Nationalismus. Die Ärztin und Antisemitin Mathilde von Kemnitz-Ludendorff (1877–1966) (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2013).
[52] For the phenomenon of völkisch theology, see Uwe Puschner and Clemens Vollnhals, eds., Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).
[53] See Susannah Heschel, The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[54] Martin Sasse, Martin Luther über die Juden: Weg mit ihnen! (Freiburg: Sturmhut-Verlag, 1938). For the völkisch and National socialist interpretation of Martin Luther, see Brosseder, Luthers Stellung zu den Juden, 156–208; and see Günter B. Ginzel, "Martin Luther: Kronzeuge des Antisemitismus," in Die Juden und Martin Luther, eds. Kremers et al., 189–210.
[55] Alfred Rosenberg, Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit (Munich: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1930); see Ernst Piper, Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe (Munich: Blessing, 2005).
[56] Wilhelm Walther, Luther und die Juden (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1921), 6.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 9.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 35.
[61] Ibid., 37.
[62] Ibid., 39.
[63] See, e. g., Christine Helmer and Bo Christian Holm, eds., Lutherrenaissance Past and Present (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).
[64] Ludwig Feuchtwanger, "Luthers Kampf gegen die Juden," Bayerisch-Israelitische Gemeindezeitung 9 (1933): 371–3, here 371. Feuchtwanger referred to the following sentence from a lecture by the Berlin liberal church historian Hans Lietzmann (1875–1942) on "Luther als deutscher Christ." "It is a terrible judgement that Luther passes here on the Jews, and we can establish that in the assessment of their harmful influence on Germany, he is fully in accord with the popular view of our present day" (quoted ibid., 371).
[65] Heinrich Bornkamm, "Volk und Rasse bei Martin Luther," in Bornkamm, Volk – Staat – Kirche. Ein Lehrgang der Theolog. Fakultät Gießen (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1933), 15–6.
[66] On Nazi-inspired interpretations in the context of German-Christian theologies, see Peter von der Osten-Sacken, "Der nationalsozialistische Lutherforscher Theodor Pauls. Vervollständigung eines fragmentarischen Bildes," Das mißbrauchte Evangelium, ed. idem, 136–66.; Oliver Arnhold, "'Luther und die Juden' bei den Deutschen Christen," in Martin Luthers "Judenschriften", eds. Oelke, Kraus et. al., 191–212.
[67] For a Jewish response, see Ludwig Feuchtwanger's review in Bayerisch-Israelitische Gemeindezeitung 9 (1933): 380–2.
[68] Vogelsang, Luthers Kampf gegen die Juden, 6.
[69] Ibid., 18.
[70] Ibid., 10.
[71] Ibid., 14.
[72] Ibid., 31. Judaism should not, according to Vogelsang, be exposed to racial contempt, but "People and peoples and races are not – as the rationalism of the philosemites opines – all of equal value, equal in terms of nobility, intelligence, approval, strength" (ibid., 12).
[73] Ibid., 32.
[74] Ibid., 23.
[75] Ibid., 25.
[76] My perspective differs here from that of Brosseder, Luthers Stellung zu den Juden, 131–5, who insists that Vogelsang's work is of "high value" despite

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its being temporally affected by the situation of 1933. For Brosseder, Vogelsang attempted a "description of the Jewish question in Luther that does justice to the theology of the reformer" (130). He concedes that Vogelsang both lacks the "academically necessary distance" in relation to Luther's later writing (132) and that he isolates the "Jewish question" in Luther from the overall context of his theology. Given Vogelsang's argument, however, it seems obvious that his goal was, in his capacity as an expert on Luther, to legitimize contemporary anti-Semitism on the basis of the writings of the outstanding theological authority within Protestantism and thus to express agreement with the initial political measures of the Nazi regime. Only within that framework Vogelsang's book understands itself also as a contribution to historical and theological research. This is corroborated by a comparison to another book published in 1932 by Walter Holsten (1908–1982) under the title *Christentum und nichtchristliche Religion nach der Auffassung Luthers*. Much stronger than Vogelsang, Holsten aimed at a scholarly understanding of Luther's writings on the Jews and tried to avoid touching on contemporary politics or alluding to racial categories. However, Holsten, too, presents an anti-Jewish theology according to which Christianity was Israel's "continuation and fulfilment," whereas the "legalistic" religion of postbiblical Judaism was the "authentic scion and descendant of the illegitimate religion of Old Israel" which was, in fact, blind with regard to the truth of the Holy Scripture; see Walter Holsten, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religion nach der Auffassung Luthers (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932), 101. Holsten's systematized summary of Luther's theological verdict on Judaism, presented with an air of agreement (ibid., 99–116), denies Judaism the theological right to exist; and when the author interprets Luther's "sharp mercy" as an expression of "reformatory depth and acerbity," delineating it from a"soft and thus wrong merci" and depicting it as "a loyal imitation of the merci of God," who "performs his merci by way of his alien act, his annihilating wrath," it seems hard not to read this as an at least potential justification of violence against the Jews. The statement following these words, addressing the anti-Semites and emphasizing that he was talking about an essentially "religious issue" and that "the merci meant by Luther was ultimately merci and not hatred" (ibid., 125–6), is strongly limited by what is said before.

[77] See Günter Brakelmann, Martin Greschat and Werner Jochmann, Protestantismus und Politik: Werk und Wirkung Adolf Stoeckers (Hamburg: Christians, 1982).

[78] See Wolfgang Gerlach, And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); for the discussion of Luther's Judenschriften among theologians of the Confessing Church, see Siegfried Hermle, "'Luther und die Juden' in der Bekennenden Kirche," in Martin Luthers "Judenschriften", in eds. Oelke, Kraus et al., 161–90. For receptions within differing groups within the German Protestant church, see Christopher J. Probst, Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).

[79] Hans Georg Schroth, Luthers christlicher Antisemitismus heute (Witten: Westdeutscher Lutherverlag, 1937), 20.

[80] Ibid., 22.

[81] Ibid., 22–3.

[82] For the Protestant discourse after 1945, see Wolfgang Kraus, "'Luther und die Juden' in den kirchenpolitischen Stellungnahmen und Entwicklungen seit 1945," in Martin Luthers "Judenschriften", eds. Oelke, Kraus et al., 289–312.

[83] Albert H. Friedländer, "Martin Luther und wir Juden," in Die Juden und Martin Luther, eds. Kremer et al., 289–300, esp. 297.

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