

Jews Commemorating Luther in the Nineteenth Century

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Moving towards the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, it is instructive to look back at the way in which former centuries have celebrated their Reformation jubilees. While this tradition started in the seventeenth century, the nineteenth century which was in love with historical jubilees in general saw a particular boom of Reformation anniversaries.¹ Looking at them means, of course, looking first of all at the Protestant churches, theologians, rulers, and citizens involved. The present article, however, explores how another group reacted to the commemorations of their Protestant neighbors, namely, the Jews. Its focus is Jewish memory of the central figure of the Reformation, Martin Luther.

You, too, once persecuted Jew,
were helped by Luther's Reformation,
which was for the benefit of all the world,
a blessing for e v e r y religion.²

This little poem was composed in Hebrew by an anonymous Jew from Thuringia in central Germany on the occasion of the Reformation jubilee of 1817 or 1830.³ From the jubilee of 1830, the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the central confession of the Lutheran Church, we have the following vivid description of a festival procession in the Saxon city of Leipzig:

Reverend Superintendent Prof. Dr. G r o ß m a n n had ordered it in such a way that the representatives of the different religious confessions followed each other according to their historical genesis. And thus they wandered in brotherly, spiritual peace: first two r a b b i s of the Israelites with the open thorah, then followed the a r c h i m a n d r i t e of the G r e e k church and the p r i e s t s of the local c a t h o l i c church, afterwards came the ministers of the e v a n g e l i c a l - p r o t e s t a n t [Lutheran] church the first one being the pastor of St. Nicolas church Dr. R ü d e l with the golden chalice placed on a precious cushion of white silk, and then the pastors of the r e f o r m e d church.⁴

These are but two examples of a broader spectrum. As we know from other sources, Jews decorated their houses for the Reformation jubilees as did their Christian fellow-citizens,⁵ they rivalled their neighbours with expensive illuminations,⁶ and partook in the festive collections.⁷ Probably the numbers were not high. But the fact that there was such Jewish participation at all is remarkable.⁸

The Thuringian Jew in his poem quoted above also mentions the motive that led Jews in the first half of the nineteenth century to participate in Reformation jubilees. This motive was their conviction that with Martin Luther and the Reformation the Enlightenment had begun from which Jews expected tolerance, equal rights, and liberation for all religions including their own. A most committed advocate of this view at the time of the jubilee of 1817 was the librarian and publicist Saul Ascher in Berlin (1767-1822), a Jewish adherent of Kantian philosophy and one of the pioneers of Reform Judaism. In 1792 under the title *Leviathan, oder Über Religion in Rücksicht des Judenthums* (Leviathan, or about Religion with regard to Judaism),⁹ Ascher had published an exposition in which he integrated Judaism into a philosophy of religion.¹⁰ The aim of this writing had been nothing less than a "Reformation" of Judaism as Ascher had explicitly formulated.¹¹ Thus by hailing Martin Luther and the Reformation started by him, Ascher at the same time defended his pleading for a renewal of his own religion. The specific reason for Ascher representing Luther as a pioneer of enlightenment at the jubilee of 1817 was the Wartburg festival of students' fraternities in the same year, more specifically the book burning which was staged at the end of this festival in the courtyard of the Wartburg. Among the books which went up in flames there was one of Ascher's own writings, the *Germanomanie*, published in 1815.¹² In the *Germanomanie* he had passionately fought against the ideology of Germanhood (Deutschtum) which men like the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte¹³ had developed during the French occupation of Prussia and the war for liberation against Napoleon and which they had seasoned with heavy anti-Jewish statements.¹⁴ What Ascher derided with particular mockery was the religious disguise in which, as he

said, Protestant “Christianity and Germanhood . . . had melted into one.”¹⁵ Such a “German Christianity,” according to Ascher, was nothing short of Protestantism’s renunciation of its own spirit—a spirit he saw at work in the “beautiful strand” of “Christian religiosity” embodied in the theologians of enlightenment.¹⁶

When he heard that his *Germanomanie* had been burned, Ascher seized the occasion for deepening these thoughts in a new writing entitled *Die Wartburgs-Feier. Mit Rücksicht auf Deutschlands religiöse und politische Stimmung* (The Wartburg-Celebration. With Regard to the Religious and Political Atmosphere in Germany).¹⁷ The gist of this writing was an interpretation of Martin Luther and the Reformation. In fact, *Die Wartburgs-Feier* is wholly aimed at refuting the claim of the students’ festival to be a celebration of the Reformer. “It was not L u t h e r’s . . . spirit that hovered above these admirers of his . . . L u t h e r’s name was only used on the invitation tickets for this festival.”¹⁸ It was equally wrong to claim that the “autodafé”¹⁹ at the end of the students’ festival was a reminiscence of the burning of the papal bull performed by Luther at the city gate of Wittenberg. That deed of Luther’s, “one of the most significant scenes of the life of the great Reformer,” had nothing to do with the doings of the students of 1817. For “what did L u t h e r offer to the stake, and what did they?” The festive community on the Wartburg had thrown the *Germanomanie* into the flames because the author upheld “that Christianity is not a German religion.”²⁰ By doing so the students had made Christianity into an irrational sectarian ideology.²¹ Luther, on the other hand, had done just the opposite: He had burnt a document which served “to make reason and freedom languish under the pressure of the hierarchy,” namely, the papal bull that threatened him with condemnation. Thus he “had made break forth the dawn of a free faith,”²² a dawn which mattered to all humanity. To all humanity and to all religions, as the advocate of a Jewish Reformation was convinced.

To this vision of the Reformation corresponded a well-defined understanding of the faith which was then at stake: It was a faith “in which reason, too, had a word to say” and “Christendom and reason were reconciled.”²³ And it was also a faith which developed further—just as the Jewish enlightenment thinker had demanded

for his own religion.²⁴ For when Luther had advocated such a faith, “willing to sacrifice his own temporal well-being,” he had, according to Ascher, at the same time maintained that “the Christ-religion” could develop and take up a different form compared with the religion claiming to be the one and only agent of salvation upheld before the Reformation.²⁵ Precisely this openness for further development continued to be true for the Protestantism established by Martin Luther, the Jewish publicist claimed. For Luther had “sown” seeds, he had not established a “finished opus.” His deed was of a teleological nature: “He did not create a Lutheranism, he rather confessed a religion which had formed reasonably and freely in himself and would under the protection of reason and freedom maintain its independence.”²⁶ The great danger, according to Ascher, that threatened contemporary Protestantism and that had become manifest in the students’ jubilee celebration of 1817 was the attempt of certain groups to make it into something finished by making it doctrinal and ecclesial²⁷ and—worst of all—by proposing the idea of “German Christianity” or “Christian Germanhood” the other side of which was Anti-Judaism.²⁸ However, this was not at all the program of Luther. Therefore, Ascher concluded emphatically, “L u t h e r w a s a g r e a t m a n .”²⁹

Praise for Luther in the Early Nineteenth Century

Martin Luther as a symbol and starting point of spiritual as well as intellectual freedom and thereby also as a pioneer for the emancipation and renewal of Judaism, the view which placed the Reformer side by side with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn, obviously was the motive for the participation of Jews in the Reformation jubilees of 1817 and 1830. Statements of the same spirit can also be found again and again among Jews of the following generations. To give some examples: Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), co-founder of the “Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden” (Society for the Culture and Study of the Jews, 1819) and editor of the short-lived *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Journal for the Study of Judaism, 1823), wrote that Luther, like Copernicus, was a discoverer and teacher of truths which caused a turn of the

times, although these truths did not immediately take effect on all levels.³⁰ Sigismund Stern (1812–1867), one of the pioneers of Reform Judaism in Berlin and the leading Jewish pedagogue in Berlin and Frankfurt/Main, in his *Geschichte des Judenthums von Mendelssohn bis auf die Gegenwart* (History of Judaism from Mendelssohn until the Present, 1857) characterized the Protestant Reformers as champions of “humaneness and freedom of thought.”³¹ And to add a last name:³² Abraham Geiger, another champion of Reform Judaism (1810–1874), in his famous lectures *Das Judenthum und seine Geschichte von den Anfängen des dreizehnten bis zum Ende des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Judaism and its History from the Beginning of the 13th until the End of the 16th Century, 1871) stated: Luther was “the man who with the hammer of his spirit has destroyed the old form, abolished the intellectual tutelage” and will thus forever “have a place in the hall of fame of the German people and of humanity.”³³ According to Geiger, the Wittenberg Reformer “accomplished two great deeds which opened up and prepared a new time,” namely, liberation of the spirit from priestly, papal power and achievement of equal dignity of every believer on the one hand and, through his translation of the Bible as well as through his writings in the vernacular, the union of religion with the people’s life, on the other hand.³⁴ He prepared free examination of the Bible although he himself, still tied up in dogmatic prejudices, hardly exercised it. In short, “now there was freedom, free space to move around without confinement, fresher air which chased out the mist Thus the great century [the 16th] with its world-shaking events has initiated the rejuvenation of humanity, including the recent development of Judaism.”³⁵ Even if the “liberating work of the Reformation” at first took little effect, “after the course, indeed, of two centuries the liberation becomes manifest” which “arises from that new creation,” that “great event of world history.”³⁶

Two traits of these quotations, which could easily be multiplied, attract special attention. The first trait was common to the Jewish statements on the Reformation and those prevailing among the Christian enlightenment thinkers and liberals of the time. In fact, it was typical for the Reformation jubilees in the first half of the nineteenth century in general.³⁷ What was given prominence and

praise in Luther was his behavior, his “deed” or his “proceeding” which, against enslaving authorities, gave freedom its due place, to quote Saul Ascher.³⁸ None of the Jewish authors who sang Luther’s praises was interested in what the Wittenberg Reformer had said or written theologically. This fact is particularly evident in “the first Jewish theologian in modern times,”³⁹ the physician and philosopher of religion Salomon Ludwig Steinheim (1789-1866), author of *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge* (Revelation according to the Doctrine of the Synagogue, 1835-1863).⁴⁰ In this work Steinheim, among other things, dealt with the theology of Luther. He detected heavy errors therein⁴¹ and concluded that the Reformers unfortunately had been “more impressive characters than thinkers” which is why they had, for example, held fast to the absurd creeds of the ancient church.⁴² But then, in view of Luther’s struggle against the ecclesial authorities, Steinheim rang all the bells in praise of the Wittenberg Reformer: There was nothing any longer standing in the way of a good religious future, since

reason was, by the same hero who insulted it and trampled it into the mud, nonetheless reinstated into its ancient rights and enthroned again on its deserted judge’s seat . . . Honor be to the hero of the sixteenth century, to the great, magnificent German, who out of the dungeon of the inquisition with strong arms liberated the banner of free thought in the highest and purest region of human thinking, thinking about God, and who unfurled it high on the watchtower of the human spirit. Blessed be the memory of *Luther* in spite of all and all where he might have failed in word and deed! Also to us his memory be holy!⁴³

In a similar vein Abraham Geiger⁴⁴ sang the praise of the Reformer’s liberating deeds as quoted above, although in Luther’s theology he found nothing worthwhile. In fact, he claimed that before the Reformation all of Luther’s theological achievements had been already present in Judaism, which could boast of a far superior theology.⁴⁵

The second striking trait of these and similar Jewish judgments on Martin Luther is their complete disinterest in any of his writings. This is, of course, an implication of their disinterest in the Reformer’s

theology in favor of his “actions.” Nevertheless it is striking because after all there were writings among his works which explicitly dealt with the Jews, among them the extremely negative treatises of the year 1543 *On the Jews and their Lies* and *On Schem Hamphoras*.⁴⁶ But neither did the writers cited refer to Luther’s early treatise *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523),⁴⁷ of a completely different tone, in favor of their positive view of Luther the liberator, nor did they feel constrained to qualify their judgments because of his writings of 1543. We have here one more testimony of a fact which has been demonstrated before:⁴⁸ Luther’s late anti-Jewish writings were apparently unknown in the early nineteenth century. This was true for the Christians, and this was obviously also true for the Jews of the time. Those writings were reprinted for the first time after a long period in 1832 as part of the new Erlangen edition of Luther’s works,⁴⁹ but even then few people took notice. Among the Protestant theologians who did, there was overwhelming rejection.⁵⁰ Yet the Jews who read them were in no way prevented by this knowledge from considering the Reformation in general and Luther’s “actions” in particular as an epochal event with altogether positive results. An example is the first Jewish author, as far as I can see, who mentioned Luther’s anti-Jewish writings, Sigismund Stern in his *Geschichte des Judenthums von Mendelssohn bis auf die Gegenwart* (1857), introduced above. Confronting Luther’s late writings with his early treatise, Stern wrote: “When his adherents were still a small band, Luther wrote some beautiful words against the haters of Judaism to which followed, however, equally vehement attacks in his later years.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, on the same page Stern praised Luther for the “tearing-away from the chain of religious coercion” and for his program of “free thought and tolerance.”⁵² Abraham Geiger also mentioned *On the Jews and their Lies* and contrasted this treatise with the one of 1523, but was equally disinterested in dwelling on it.⁵³ His theological criticism of the Wittenberg Reformer as well as his praise for Luther’s liberating “deeds” was completely independent from what he read in that spiteful book.

There was one exception among the German Jews of the nineteenth century where the anti-Jewish writings of the Wittenberg Reformer did play a prominent role, Heinrich Graetz, author of the

epochal *Geschichte der Juden von der Verbannung . . . bis auf die Gegenwart* (History of the Jews from Exile . . . to the Present Time, 1866).⁵⁴ Graetz was not an adherent of Reform Judaism and was opposed to men like Geiger, and thus had no motive to relativize the weight of Luther's anti-Jewish statements in the context of more important actions of enlightenment and liberation. On the other hand he expressed, for the same reason, a religious esteem for Luther which one cannot find in the liberal Jewish authors. Thus Graetz called him "the undisputably most pious and most faithful Christian of his time, also ethically flawless and truly humble"⁵⁵—although monastically narrow-minded⁵⁶ and not particularly intelligent.⁵⁷ Luther's first treatise about the Jews had been a "word as the Jews had not heard it for 1000 years."⁵⁸ Graetz did not mind the mission-oriented passages of this booklet, rather he found them completely understandable on the basis of the "Christ-ideal" of the pious author.⁵⁹ But later, unfortunately, embittered and not up to a theological offensive of the Jews, Luther had written his most hateful anti-Jewish books.⁶⁰ According to Graetz it was a miracle that Judaism had survived, considering these writings and similar ones by contemporaneous Counter-Reformation authors.⁶¹ And he lamented that the followers of Luther had forgotten about his words in favor of the Jews and had remembered only "the spiteful words he had uttered against them in his bitterness."⁶² This was a plain and straightforward critique. But, as I have said before, it was an exception. In the *Geschichte der Reformation* (History of the Reformation) of the Jewish historian Martin Philippson (1846-1916), published around 1910,⁶³ Luther's anti-Jewish writings, which the author must have known, were not even mentioned.

Contrary to the Reformation jubilees of the first half of the nineteenth century, we do not read of any Jewish participation in the grand jubilee of the second half, the fourth centenary of Martin Luther's birth in 1883. There is no evidence that this abstinence was caused by a different attitude towards Luther or the Reformation. It must rather be assumed that the reason lay in the jubilee itself and its changed historical context. Obviously the "Enlightenment Luther" who had dominated the jubilee of 1817 and had also been very prominent in the other jubilees of the first half of the century did not play such a great role in 1883. Instead, other interpretations

of the Reformer became more important. One of them was the “ecclesial” Luther whose significance lay primarily in his achievements for the church. The other was the “German Luther,” understood as guarantor of the unity between the newly-founded German empire and—Protestant—Christianity.⁶⁴ The former interpretation was of no interest for Jews. The latter was dangerous for them. And this was the case all the more since those years saw a wave of growing hostility against Jews and the rise of modern racial anti-Semitism in which a prominent representative of the Protestant church, the Prussian court preacher Adolf Stoecker, had a marked share, yet characteristically, without invoking Luther’s anti-Jewish writings. It is hardly astonishing that in this context Jewish citizens preferred to stay away from the jubilee.

Later, a Mixed Verdict in America and Germany

Whereas we do not hear of any Jewish reaction to the Luther jubilee of 1883 in Germany, things were different on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. In the United States the jubilee became an object of public Jewish debate, and this debate showed that the overwhelmingly positive view of former times was giving way to mixed verdicts. The beginning still reflected the picture of Martin Luther that characterized the Jewish attitude in the first half of the century in Germany, the “Enlightenment Luther.” This picture was painted anew by Emil Gustav Hirsch, Rabbi of the Jewish Reform congregation (Sinai) of Chicago, a few years later professor for Rabbinic Studies at the University of Chicago, and one of the central figures of American liberal Judaism in the late nineteenth century. Hirsch had been invited by the Lutherans of Chicago to deliver the memorial address for the 1883 jubilee in the Central Music Hall of the city, an invitation that was in itself a remarkable sign.⁶⁵ Two days later he took the subject up again in a sermon in his synagogue; the biblical text was Jeremiah 23:29 (“Is not my word like fire and like a hammer that shattereth the rock?”) and the title, “Luther as a Man – His Strength and Weakness.”⁶⁶ Hirsch praised Luther for his achievements, in particular for his translation of the Bible, for having removed “the barriers between ordained priesthood and common laity,” and for

raising esteem for women. This sermon created a scandal. The Jewish press became the battleground for a fierce debate on the Wittenberg Reformer. Hirsch was attacked with particular vigor because he had not given weight to Luther's anti-Jewish writings. In fact, for the Chicago rabbi these treatises were of minor importance compared to the overall significance of the Reformer. Although he regretted that the former "friend of the Jews" had fallen "from the heights of tolerance into the valley of fanaticism," in Hirsch's eyes this attitude was just typical for the time and should not be overrated. One should "pardon this lapse" and rather appreciate "the greatness" and "originality" of the man without whom modernity with its great achievements would not have been possible.⁶⁷

Hirsch's assessment of Luther was most radically rejected by another prominent American Jew, Felix Adler, professor at Columbia University in New York and founder of the "Society for Ethical Culture." According to Adler, the Wittenberg Reformer was far from being a paragon to be followed. "A narrow-minded bigot," caught in the prejudices of his age, defender of a blind faith and a hierarchical social order, he had only condemned the Jews who were continuously being persecuted in any case, and had incited other peoples against them. There was nothing Jews could praise in Luther.⁶⁸

Twenty seven years after this altercation between American Jews, the German Jewish press was the stage for a debate where the different images of Luther met head-on in a similar way. It was occasioned not by a large jubilee like the one of 1883, but by the annual memorial of the Reformation on October 31st, more particularly by the celebrations of this memorial in German schools. The question was whether Jewish pupils should participate in them. In an article of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* from 1910 titled *Schulfeiern* (Celebrations in School) one author enthusiastically argued that they should participate. He claimed it would "raise the hearts" of Jewish boys and girls to experience the "glorification of freedom" which was the content of this memorial of "Luther's bold action."⁶⁹ Once again we see the Enlightenment Luther of 1817. But he could no longer pass uncontested. Another Jewish paper, *Liberales Judentum*, published an *Entgegnung* (Retort): The freedom for which Luther fought had not been a freedom for Jews. After all it was well

known what the Reformer had thought in this respect, at least in his later years⁷⁰—an obvious hint at Luther's anti-Jewish writings.

The last jubilee of the "long nineteenth century" was the fourth centenary of the Reformation which took place in 1917, the decisive year of the First World War. In contrast to the jubilee of 1883, this time there was again a lively Jewish interest in Germany. Not that Jews would have participated once more in processions and other public enterprises. But they were eager for academic debate on the Reformation.⁷¹ And they partook in the activities which characterized the 1917 jubilee much more than public celebrations in any case, namely, in literary occupations with Luther and the Reformation.⁷² In this literary activity, noted Jewish scholars also had their share. Their arguments followed very different lines. Nevertheless, in the end they came, one way or another, to a positive result.

On the one side there was the famous philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) who wrote a jubilee article *Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis* (To the Memory of Martin Luther) in the *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*.⁷³ In this article, the "Enlightenment Luther" joined hands with the "German Luther" in a very special way: He became the—strictly speaking—Jewish Luther. Cohen began by stating that he wanted to speak at this occasion "not as a German" and not as a German philosopher either, but "simply as a German Jew who, as a confessor of Judaism, is conscious of the reverence which connects him, not only regarding his culture, but also regarding his religion, with Germanhood (Deutschtum)." After all, Luther was among the "most powerful creators of Germanhood," who had "steered the providential direction of the German spirit in those channels which later on the classical poets had conducted to the goal of German humanism."⁷⁴ Cohen did not go into historical details in order to specify these claims. He rather concentrated on three topics: Luther's translation of the Bible, his doctrine of justification, and his concept of the state. The scope of his arguments in every case was that Luther, "this German hero of the spirit," was in fact an inheritor of prior Judaism and therefore particularly close to the Jews.

Regarding the first topic, the translation of the Bible: "As religious genius, as German poet, and as literary stylist," Luther according to

Cohen had “grown up to his height alongside our [namely, the Jewish] Bible, alongside the prophets and the psalms.”⁷⁵ Moreover, by giving the Bible “into the hands of the common man” and by thus animating the creative forces in the people, indeed, in all European peoples, Luther made the German Jew’s “own eternal life base, his Bible, into the tree of life for all modern spiritual life, into the root out of which shot up and were nourished all spiritual forces of the peoples of recent history.”⁷⁶ Secondly, regarding the doctrine of justification: Luther’s “basic idea,” his concept of faith, grace, and divine forgiveness, including the ethos of personal responsibility implied therein, was according to Cohen “most intimately connected with the basic idea of the Jewish religion.” In faith in the God of grace, “we feel united with Luther’s faith.”⁷⁷ Finally, regarding the concept of the secular and ethically sovereign state “which has become the true liberator of modern Judaism”—in this respect and particularly in this respect the Jew had “to celebrate Luther and to dedicate to his memory an everlasting affectionate gratitude,” since the Reformer was the “originator” of this modern concept of the state.⁷⁸ The Jewish philosopher even claimed that the impact of the secular principles originated by Luther and put into practice in the modern state was proven by the racist madness which lately rose against the Jews. For it showed that religious arguments against them had played out. “It is noteworthy that the modern hatred of the Jews does not dare any more to appeal to the difference in faith. Rather it has to take refuge to the racist madness which it camouflages with the national masque. Yet the claim that we have an inferior faith, this pretext of anti-Jewish hatred, has nearly vanished.”⁷⁹ However, as much as this whole development was indebted to Luther, according to Cohen here, too, the “original motive” stemmed from Judaism. It was the priesthood of all the faithful proclaimed by Moses which made morality the basis of the state and which Luther later on made fruitful for the development of the modern state.⁸⁰

This article of Hermann Cohen mirrors the self-confidence of Judaism developed during the decades before the war, in particular by the “Wissenschaft vom Judentum.” Here Judaism appeared as the original and superior religion which considered Christianity, understood in the right way, as its offspring and which extended its

hand to it that it might join the older religion in this insight.⁸¹ Elements in the Christian faith which did not quite fit this assessment, like Christology or the “difficulties” of the Lutheran doctrine of justification, were left aside by the Jewish philosopher in favor of the “essential” (Eigentliches). He surrendered them to the “further historical evolution” of Protestant theology.⁸² Out of Cohen’s contribution to the Reformation jubilee speaks the voice of those who had “always been Protestants,”⁸³ moreover, who were the Protestants proper and saw the fellow citizens bearing this name on their way to their older brothers.

There could not have been a stronger contrast to Cohen’s words than the jubilee article written by the Viennese Jew Samuel Krauss (1866-1946) which appeared in the journal *Der Jude* and was titled “*Luther und die Juden*” (Luther and the Jews).⁸⁴ Krauss was an historian, not a philosopher, and thus his article was not interested in Luther’s theology and its “basic ideas” but rather described the history of Luther’s enmity to the Jews. In the introduction he explained why he chose this approach: Luther was “too powerful,” had “set into motion the wheel of history too forcefully” not to have influenced the life of the Jews who “felt the historical changes always at once.” Krauss even claimed that the Jews had played “a principal role” in the new religious formation which came about through the Reformation. Therefore “also in this very moment when all of Germany celebrates the fourth centenary of the appearance of the great Reformer the Jews are memorialized.”⁸⁵ The meaning of this argument is not quite clear, and Krauss did not expand upon the claim that the Jews had played a “principal role” in the Reformation, either.⁸⁶ Rather he concentrated on the role which the Jews had played in Luther’s thought, and this, Krauss states, had from the beginning been negative.⁸⁷ Luther’s hatred of the Jews, however, had had a religious motive, in contrast to the modern anti-Semites, Krauss conceded. Thus the Wittenberg Reformer had also in this respect been “great” compared to those people who, “led by inferior instincts,” interpreted also “their Luther” accordingly.⁸⁸ Krauss found the religious motive of Luther’s anti-Judaism in his alleged disappointment about the lack of willingness of the Jews to convert—a disappointment which had been based on completely illusionary

expectations,⁸⁹ a “deeply religious” but unreasonable conviction “of the power of his Biblical exegesis, of his gospels, and of his sermons.”⁹⁰ There was only “one beautiful trait” in Luther, although a most momentous one. That was his rejection of spiritual and physical force in matters of faith.⁹¹ Yet in the end his hatred of the stubborn Jews had led him to the point of writing his two anti-Jewish tracts of 1543 which contained “the worst that has ever been said or written against the Jews by their enemies.”⁹² Kraus closed his accusations with the reproach that Luther, instead of reading writings by Jews, had taken his information about them primarily from untrustworthy converts.⁹³ And he asked whether the Wittenberg Reformer—who could tell?—in the end perhaps would have rejected even the Old Testament—“his disciples who do and did so after four hundred years were and are not wholly inconsistent.”⁹⁴

One can hardly imagine a contribution to the jubilee which would have been bleaker than the article by Kraus. However, the Viennese historian added a coda which all of a sudden placed everything he had said before within positive brackets: “And yet: The principles which [Luther] at the beginning of his career has introduced in all the world, were to prove themselves as mighty factors for the future which could not even be banished again by Luther’s own faults.” These were the “principles of enlightenment and of free development of the human spirit,”⁹⁵ which included the rejection of the use of force against Jews in matters of faith. In spite of and underneath all else remains the image of Luther the liberator and pioneer of enlightenment, and the determination at no price to be deprived of the possibility of appealing to him. Thus the series of Jewish contributions to the Luther memorial of the long nineteenth century ended with the same keynote with which it had begun.

Postscript

This was four generations ago. Since then a century has passed in which Martin Luther was used, and indeed because of his own statements, to prepare the way to a crime which none of the authors quoted could have imagined. After Auschwitz neither his statements about the Jews nor Jewish statements about him like the ones I have

assembled can be read without this knowledge of what came later. However, to take notice of the view of the Reformer which was prevalent among the elite of modern Judaism in the nineteenth century, one-sided and even naïve as it may have been, reminds us of two things. First, the booklet *On the Jews and their Lies* is not the whole picture. In other words, in our dealing with the Reformation in general and Martin Luther in particular there is a way between blind hero-worship and indiscriminate condemnation. Second, history is not derivable. To understand the past, each event, the agents' deeds, decisions, arguments, and choices have to be viewed and analyzed in themselves. But after all, it is for the sake of such differentiations in view of the past and the present that we study history.

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NOTES

1. For this context, see Dorothea Wendebourg, "Die Reformationsjubiläen des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 108 (2011): 270-335. The nineteenth century is understood here as "the long nineteenth century," namely from the French Revolution until the end of the First World War.

2. Alfred Galley, *Die Jahrhundertfeiern der Augsburgischen Confession von 1630, 1730 und 1830. Gedenkblatt zur Augustana-Feier von 1930* (Leipzig, 1930), 98 [spaced type in the original quotation]. Galley presents the poem in German, the translation possibly his own. The same incident is reported by Georg Arndt, *Das Reformationsjubelfest in vergangenen Jahrhunderten. Gedenkblätter aus der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands* (Berlin, 1917), 29, but he gives only a summary in prose.

3. Arndt attributes the poem to the Reformation jubilee of 1817, Galley to the jubilee of the Augsburg Confession in 1830.

4. Reported by Johann Friedrich Glück, *Beschreibung der Feierlichkeiten, welche am dritten Jubelfeste der Augsburgischen Confession den 25., 26. und 27. Juni 1830 im Königreich Sachsen stattgefunden haben ...* (Leipzig, 1830), 466s. [spaced type in the original quotation]. In the jubilee procession at the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in Brandenburg staged in Berlin in 1839 there was also Jewish participation; Klaus Duntze, "Der Magistrat als protestantische Obrigkeit. Am Beispiel der Säkularfeier 1839 zur Einführung der Reformation in der Mark Brandenburg," *Jahrbuch für Berlin-Brandenburgische Kirchengeschichte* 58 (1991), 170.

5. Galley, *Die Jahrhundertfeiern*, 107.

6. Galley, *Die Jahrhundertfeiern*, 106.

7. Gallely, *Die Jahrhundertfeiern*, 98.

8. Among the innumerable booklets and pamphlets of the jubilee of 1817 in possession of the Staatsbibliothek of Berlin there is the following Hebrew Reformation poem, together with a German translation, by an author whose name is only given as F, printed in Breslau (Silesia):

<p>ליום מועד יובל השלישי תחדש בו רוח נכונה</p>	<p>Dedicated to the Reformation Jubilee. Breslau October 31th 1817.</p>
<p>הן ישמך ולזכרך תאזה נפש בן לוטאר בן יוחנן! גדל יתר מאד יום זה בו גלית לעם תעי דרך את תורת האדם כמגלת ספר במעצות ודעת</p>	<p>Pleasing is, o Luther, son of John, the memory of you and of your name! Great and outstanding is this day. On this day you, thoughtful and discerning, showed to men on a public sheet the superior teaching.</p>
<p>הרעים הזרים כרה דברו טפלו שקר מהבילי העם ההלכים בחשך האמרים במחיר כסף כי ישקלו כפר לנפש לעם כבד עון הזאת משפט הרעים את עדרו הירצה אלהים? ראה חכם יודע ספר איש מהיר במלאכתו כי ברע היא שם על לב נלאה נשא</p>	<p>The insolent sheperds declared defection, made up lies, seduced the innocent people through superstition, promised those burdened by sin forgiveness through money. Is this the sheperds` way with their flocks, could this be pleasing to God? The wise one, the one well versed in Scripture, unique in his enterprise, well understood this evil condition. He took charge of it, could not bear it any longer.</p>
<p>אז לבשה רוח את איש תמים תורת אלהיו בלבו דרך בעקבות משיחו לשובב אליו את עם תעי דרך להבת המדורה חרב הוחדה</p>	<p>This pious man whose whole mind was directed at the divine doctrine followed the footsteps of the Messiah to lead back to him the erring people.</p>

לא כהו רוחו	No stake, no whetted axe could shake his
מערכי לבו ניבו שפתיו	courage.
על נכון היום	
לפני מלכים פחות אבירי הרעים	He stood before kings, princes, and clergy
התיצב בל עצב עמו לחות דעת	without fear to declare his insights. Then,
אשרך ! בצעת מלאכתך ותוכל	on the appointed day, his lips pronounced
ויש שכר לפעולתך.	the fulness if his heart.

(the English translation follows the German version printed side by side with the Hebrew one, both being not always strictly identical)

At first sight this poem seems to belong to the context of Jewish participation in the Reformation jubilees as described above. But closer observation shows that it is most probably the work of a convert. This is indicated by the fourth to last sentence mentioning the messiah. But it is also made probable by the characterization of the Reformation in the first half of the poem. Jews who lauded the Reformation did not refer to such events of church history as is being done here, but rather underlined the importance of the Reformation and particularly of Luther for the freedom of conscience, the birth of enlightenment, and so on, at times also his translation of the Bible.

9. Ascher, *Leviathan* (Berlin, 1792).
10. See Christoph Schulte, *Die jüdische Aufklärung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002), chapter VII.
11. Ascher, *Leviathan* 212f., 219, 228f., 241.
12. Ascher, *Germanomanie. Skizze zu einem Zeitgemälde* (Berlin, 1815).
13. He also included the leaders of the Romantic movement in this criticism.
14. Ascher, *Germanomanie*, 16, 19, 25.
15. Ascher, *Germanomanie*, 13.
16. Ascher, *Germanomanie*, 18. His favorite theologians of this “beautiful strand” were Johann Joachim Spalding and Wilhelm Abraham Teller.
17. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier. Mit Rücksicht auf Deutschlands religiöse und politische Stimmung* (Leipzig, 1818).
18. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 33 (spaced type in the original quotation, as in all Ascher quotations which are to follow).
19. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 31.
20. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 33f.
21. As Ascher made clear in the *Wartburgs-Feier* he rejected the emphasis on a particular people not only in the case of the Germanomaniacs but in other cases as well, including Judaism: The Germanomaniacs have no convincing arguments in favor of the superiority of their people, “just as little as the French when they call themselves the *grande nation* and the Jews when they consider themselves God’s chosen people” (*Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 37f.).
22. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 34.
23. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 4.
24. Ascher, *Leviathan*, 13.
25. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 4.

26. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 6.

27. One of these attempts to make Protestantism ecclesial in Ascher's eyes was the endeavor to unite the different Protestant groups including the unions between Lutheran and Reformed churches concluded in those years in Germany (*Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 7f.). Such undertakings according to the Jewish publicist only served to make Protestantism "popish" (ibid.). For to him the multid denominational structure of Germany, far from being an evil that needed to be overcome, was highly positive: In it lay "the germs of tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and universality of knowledge." Germany was "the womb of humanity" (Schooß der Menschheit), because it was from here that "the ideas of tolerance, internationalism, and intellectual culture" had gone forth, a fact which was due not to a religious unity but rather to the "schism in its faith" (*Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 40f.; similar arguments are found in *Germanomanie*).

28. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 25; see also p. 18.

29. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 4: He often heard people, looking back at the Reformation, "enthusiastically exclaim: Luther was a great man (Luther war ein großer Mann)! Indeed, great he was, I then think. But his true greatness is being misjudged today, I add by myself. Or being misjudged is the true instrument which his greatness could be for the *Menschenbildung* in Protestant Germany. Formerly it was not so." "Luther was a great man! For he, in the age of the hierarchy, sacrificing his own temporal wellbeing, dared sow into the intellects and the hearts of a significant part of humanity the first seed of the rights of reason and of the freedom of faith" (p. 5).

30. "Das sogenannte Mittelalter war vergangen, das wirkliche dauerte fort. Die von Luther und Kopernikus entdeckten und gelehrtten Wahrheiten waren, als ihre Urheber starben, noch zu jung, um sofort den Unterdrückten helfen zu können." Leopold Zunz, *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*, vol. I [first published 1855] Frankfurt/Main, 1920; [reprint Hildesheim, 1967], 334.

31. S. Stern, *Geschichte des Judenthums von Mendelssohn bis auf die Gegenwart, nebst einer einleitenden Übersicht der älteren Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main, 1857), 50.

32. The rare case of an author of a historical work where the Reformation does not appear as decisive in any way is Isaak Markus Jost, *Allgemeine Geschichte des Israelitischen Volkes, sowohl seines zweimaligen Staatslebens als auch der zerstreuten Gemeinden und Secten, bis in die neuester Zeit, in gedrängter Übersicht, zunächst für Staatsmänner, Rechtsgelehrte, Geistliche, und wissenschaftlich gebildete Leser*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1832). According to this work, the positive historical development only began with the enlightenment, namely with Moses Mendelssohn whom, together with some contemporaries, Jost consequently called "Reformer" (478: "true Reformer," see also 481f.). Luther and the Reformation are only mentioned in one sentence in passing (431, see below, n. 48), apart from a later remark where Jost in order to relativize the crucifixion of Jesus by the "Jewish mob" states that the Christians, too, had killed religious figures in their midst, for example, Jan Hus and nearly also Martin Luther (489).

33. A. Geiger, *Das Judenthum und seine Geschichte von den Anfängen des dreizehnten bis zum Ende des sechzehnten Jhs. In zehn Vorlesungen. Nebst einem Anhang: Das Verhalten der Kirche gegen das Judenthum in der neueren Zeit. Ein zweites Wort an den evangelischen Oberkirchenrath* (Breslau, 1871), 140.

34. Geiger, *Das Judenthum und seine Geschichte*, 140.

35. Geiger, *Das Judenthum und seine Geschichte*, 142.

36. Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, 144.
37. See Wendebourg, "Die Reformationsjubiläen des 19. Jahrhunderts" (see n. 1 above), particularly 296-300.
38. Ascher, *Die Wartburgs-Feier*, 6f., 4.
39. This was the characterisation of Steinheim by Schalom Ben-Chorim following Julius Schoeps who had rediscovered Steinheim, in: Julius H. Schoeps (ed.), *Auf der Suche nach einer jüdischen Theologie. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schalom Ben-Chorim und Hans-Joachim Schoeps* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1989), 170.
40. The arguments summarized here are to be found in the third part: S. Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge. Dritter Theil. Die Polemik. Der Kampf der Offenbarung mit dem Heidenthume, ihre Synthese und Analyse* (Leipzig, 1863; reprint Hildesheim, 1986).
41. Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge*, 232-239.
42. Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge*, 243.
43. Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge*, 246.
44. One could also add Sigismund Stern (at n. 31 above), *Die Aufgabe des Judenthums und des Juden in der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1853) (2 edition), 64, according to whom Luther unfortunately had upheld the ancient creeds but through his resistance against the hierarchy and the papacy had brought to bear again "the true spirit of Christianity," the principle which in the end was decisive for Jews and Christians alike: the authority of reason.
45. Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, 140.
46. The former in *Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 57 vols. Eds. J.F.K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883 ff.) 53:417-552 (hereafter cited as WA) and in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, 55 vols. Eds. Pelikan and Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 47:121-306 (hereafter cited as LW); the latter in WA 53:579-648.
47. WA 11:314-336 /LW 45:195-229.
48. Namely, by Johannes Wallmann, "The Reception of Luther's Writings on the Jews from the Reformation to the End of the 19th Century," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 new series (1987), 71-97; regarding the nineteenth century, 86-89 and 95f. As Wallmann shows, there was no continuous history of reception of Luther's anti-Jewish writings from the sixteenth until the twentieth centuries. His result is confirmed by the writings cited in this article from the first half of the nineteenth century, in part even beyond. There is a telling sentence in Jost, *Allgemeine Geschichte*, written in 1832 (see n. 32), 431: "In the territories reforming themselves L u t h e r preached gentle treatment of the Jews regarding their religion, but he desired the change of the usurers into useful craftsmen and peasants, and expresses [sic!] himself in his usual coarseness against them" (spaced type in the original quotation). The remark on the preached "gentle treatment" must refer to Luther's treatise *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew* from 1523, the remark on the liability of usurers to work could refer to Luther's writings against usury – which, however, do not connect this vice specifically with the Jews – or to the late writing *On the Jews and their Lies* which provided such a liability to work for Jews who were now also accused of usury (WA 53:525.31-526.1). It is obvious that Jost fed on longterm indirect information and did not know these treatises themselves, at least not the late one. Had he known it he would hardly have only hinted at the relatively harmless provision of liability to work which, by the way, Jost, himself a strong critic of usury (*Allgemeine Geschichte*, 431), approved of (see the continuation of the

sentence: "most works of the men who carried on the Reformation, where the occasion arises, contain similar thoughts [namely on the liability to work]," whereas the princes mostly suppressed the Jews [431f.].

49. Luther's late anti-Jewish writings are contained in the 32nd volume which was published in 1832.

50. Wallmann, "The Reception," 87-89.

51. Stern, *Geschichte des Judenthums*, 50.

52. Stern, *Geschichte des Judenthums*, 50.

53. Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, 144.

54. H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von der Verbannung der Juden von der ältesten Zeit bis auf die Gegenwart*. Vol. 9: *Geschichte der Juden von der Verbannung der Juden aus Spanien und Portugal [1494] bis zur dauernden Ansiedelung der Marranen in Holland (1618)* (Leipzig, 1866).

55. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 201.

56. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 334.

57. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 333.

58. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 189, see also 300.

59. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 221.

60. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 334-337.

61. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 329; on the side of the Counterreformation, Graetz mentions especially John Eck.

62. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 494.

63. M. Philippon, *Geschichte der Reformation* (Berlin, around 1910).

64. For the jubilee of 1883 in general, see Wendebourg, "Die Reformationsjubiläen des 19. Jahrhunderts," 282, 303-306.

65. For the specific context of Jewish life in Chicago, see Tobias Brinkmann, *Von der Gemeinde zur "Community: Jüdische Einwanderer in Chicago 1840-1900* (Osnabrück: Rasch, 2002); for Hirsch in particular, see 409-422. For the address, see *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 9, 1883.

66. See the report in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1883 and in *Chicago Occident* Nov. 16, 1883. I thank Prof. Dr. Tobias Brinkmann, Penn State University, for useful advice and material on this debate.

67. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1883; *Chicago Occident* Nov. 16, 1883.

68. *Chicago Occident*, Nov. 16, 1883. The editorial staff of the newspaper explicitly voiced agreement with Adler's statement. Brinkmann (*Von der Gemeinde*, p. 417) writes that Hirsch had to take back his sermon. But the newspaper he refers to (*Chicago Occident*, December 14th, 1883) does not support this. The article Brinkmann obviously had in mind, namely, "Was It an Apology?" reports on a haughty justification of Hirsch (who was a highly controversial figure and particularly disliked by the paper) for his sermons and behavior in general. According to the article the rabbi's words, besides not taking anything back, had nothing to do with his address or his sermon on Martin Luther.

69. *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 74 (1910), 1.

70. *Liberales Judentum* 2 (1910), 27.

71. See Christian Wiese, "Jüdische Lutherdeutung von der Aufklärung bis zur Shoah" in H. Medick/P. Schmidt (eds), *Luther zwischen den Kulturen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 215-259, esp. 252.

72. For the jubilee of 1917, see Wendebourg, "Die Reformationsjubiläen des 19. Jahrhunderts," 289f, 306-309.

73. H. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte* 2 (1917/18), 45-49.

74. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 45.

75. Ibid.

76. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 45f. According to Cohen, this was true for Judaism also in the special respect that Moses Mendelssohn with his translation of the Pentateuch and the Psalms "through which he rejuvenated and newly consolidated our modern religious life from Germany for the Jews of all peoples" carried out a "continuation of Luther's work" (46).

77. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 47.

78. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 49.

79. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 48.

80. The same kinship is true for the schools liberated by Luther from the church and entrusted to the government, which became responsible for the education of all children – "as regards compulsory education, too, we [Jews] have always been Protestants." Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 48.

81. See Christian Wiese, "Counterhistory, the 'Religion of the Future' and the Emancipation of Jewish Studies: The Conflict between the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Liberal Protestantism 1900 to 1933," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 7 (2000): 367-398), particularly 377f.; Risto Saarinen, "Wandlungen des Lutherbildes zwischen Liberalismus und Antisemitismus. Zum Verhältnis von Judentum und Luthertum bei Hermann Cohen und Erich Vogelsang," in R. Heinonen, ed. *Religionsunterricht zwischen Judentum und Christentum* (Abo: Akademis Förlag, 1988), 27-43.

82. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 46: "Wir gehen hier nicht auf die Schwierigkeiten ein, mit denen dieser neue theologische Begriff [sc. Luthers Glaubensbegriff] verstrickt sein mußte . . . Wir fragen nun wiederum auch nicht: Wenn Gott allein in seiner Gnade und kraft seiner Gnade den Sünder erlösen kann, welche Bedeutung, welche Befugnis kann dabei Christus noch haben? . . . Diese Frage gehört in das Innere der evangelischen Theologie und in ihre geschichtliche Fortentwicklung."

83. Cohen, "Zu Martin Luthers Gedächtnis," 48. See p. 47: "G r a e t z in the programmatic writing about his work has formulated the noteworthy sentence: Judaism is, from origin, Protestantism" (spaced types in the quotation). Regarding the ideal of Judaism as the true Protestantism, see David N. Myers, "Hermann Cohen and the Quest for Protestant Judaism" in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 46 (2001), 195-214.

84. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden," *Der Jude. Eine Monatsschrift* 1917/18, part 8, 544-547.

85. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden," 544.

86. He only mentions the great expectations raised among Jews by the appearance of Martin Luther (544, 545f.).

87. Thus Krauss does not mention Luther's early treatise *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew* in contrast to his late anti-Jewish writings. This treatise only resonates in his repeated allegations of Luther having strived to convert the Jews and having finally been disappointed in this respect (544-546) – the usual interpretation of the treatise of 1523 – as well as in his hint at Luther's advice not to proclaim Christ's divinity to Jews right away (545).

88. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden," 545.
89. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden," 545.
90. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden" 546. See the characterization of Luther's effort to convert the Jews as rooted in his piety also in Graetz above (p. 256).
91. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden," 545.
92. S. Krauss, "Luther und die Juden," 547.
93. Namely, especially from Paulus of Burgos and Antonius Margarita (*ibid.*).
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*