

### 500 Years of Reformation. Jews and Protestants – Judaism and Protestantism

**Veranstalter:** Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem; Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Goethe University Frankfurt am Main; Evangelical Church in Germany; Center for the Study of Christianity, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg; Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, Tel Aviv University; Minerva Institute for German History, Tel Aviv University  
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**Bericht von:** Lior Hadar / Moshe Sluhovsky, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Among the thousands of events commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, 42 scholars from Europe, Israel, the United States, and Canada met in Jerusalem to discuss all that relates to Jewish-Protestant relations since the 1517 publication of Martin Luther's 95 theses. Topics ranged from the impact of the Reformation on 16th century Jews in the Empire through the impact of the Reformation on Jewish reform movements in Germany in the 19th century, to conversion and conversional activities among Jews by Lutheran churches, to the developments in Lutheran German theology during the 19th century. As only to be expected from a conference on Protestants and Jews, Protestantism and Judaism, an entire day was devoted to the process that started in the 19th century with the adoption by many Lutheran theologians of German nationalism, continued with Lutheran theology and theologians during the Holocaust, and terminated (for the time being) with the reconfiguration of Lutheran theology toward Judaism since the 1980s. The presence of Martin Hauger of the Evangelical Church in Germany at the conference and his opening remarks were indicative of the transformation that reshaped Lutheran theology in the last 35 years.

Traditional Lutheran theology concerning Jews and Judaism, as numerous speakers pointed out, was shaped by Pauline theology of supersession and Luther's own trajectory from hoping to bring about mass conversion of the Jews now that he allegedly puri-

fied Christianity of the pagan elements that had been inserted into it and corrupted it, to his nasty and even exterminatory theology of his later years. For Jews, as well, Luther and Lutheranism were sworn and dangerous enemies, not to least because of the attraction of „purified“ Christianity and of assimilation into *Deutschtum*. But the Lutheranism was also a model for imitation. It is not easy to entangle the conflicting (mis)understandings, interpretations, and emotions that have characterized the contacts between the two religions for the last 500 years. But this, exactly, was what the conference tried to do.

The first panel of the conference „Mutual Readings“ addressed the ways Jewish and Protestant communities perceived each other. DEAN PHILLIPP BELL (Chicago) started the conference by asking how the Reformation affected the Jewish communities of the Holy Roman Empire. While not denying Luther's antisemitism and its impact on German Lutheran theology, Bell warned against a teleological history that ignores Lutheran-Jewish moments of interaction and collaboration. He recalled the role of Jews in the development of Lutheran Hebraism, the growing interest of theologians in Hebrew texts and traditions, and the Jewish support of the idea of a godly community. He also looked at some parallel developments among Lutheran and Jewish communities, among them the emphasis on education, communal reorganization, and the slow process of a creation of a canon.

ALEXANDRA ZIRKLE (Chicago) focused on Jewish and Protestant German biblical scholars of the 19th century, especially how Jewish scholars fit into the wider academic community at the time. More than 50 Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament were composed during the 19th century, and, unlike a traditional view of the transformations of German Jews in the period, exegetical writings were not replaced by historicism. Some offered counter-narratives to Christian religious narratives; others participated in a dialogical exchange with Protestant scholars, in which both Jewish and Lutheran scholars took each other very seriously. Some Jews published in Lutheran academic theological journals, and Jewish authors were quoted by Lutheran theologians.

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The final paper of the panel was given by CLEMENS SCHMIDT (Leipzig), who added a Huguenot and New England Puritan perspective on Jewish history. Huguenots and Puritans viewed exile like Jews: as a major component of their existence. Jewish exile, though, was viewed by Huguenot and Puritan theologians as an historical proof of the vindication of Christianity. Using this proof, conversion missionary zeal was viewed as an act of Christian charity toward the Jews. But they also preached and promoted a humane treatment of Jews, which will lead Jews to conversion.

Some major conclusions were drawn from this panel, conclusions that were to shape the following 2 days. Among them are the crucial role Judaism played in the development of Lutheran theology, the importance of Jewish history as a theological truth (open to conflicting interpretations, of course), and the rejection of teleological reading of German theology („from Luther to Hitler“). Others are as important: the shared realm of Wissenschaft during the 19th century, the tension between theological hostility and peaceful daily co-existence, and, above all, that it is important to remember that the success of Lutheranism was accidental and not pre-ordained. As such, Lutheranism, German Judaism, and the relations between them were always conjunctural.

The keynote lecture of the conference was given by the leading American Jewish historian and public intellectual SUSANNAH HESCHEL (Hannover). Heschel managed to capture all the main themes of the conference, discussing the tensions and problems of a Jewish-Protestant dialogue while combining theological, feminist, historical and political dimensions. According to Heschel, Judaism always played a larger part in Protestant theology than vice versa. In aspiring to recover their pre-Catholic origins, Protestants entered the world of Jews, since Jesus was Jewish and the history of Jesus' body was a Jewish history. But this was not necessarily a cause of pride. It led to shame and to attempts by some Lutheran theologians to further purify Lutheran theology and make it immaterial, solely a matter of faith. Jews and Judaism therefore play a major role in the Protestant imagination. Heschel claimed that

much of 19th century Lutheran theology is an on-going effort to exorcize the Jew from Christianity. The *Volk*, and, in some parts of Liberation Theology, Universalism, have come to substitute for the Jewish Jesus.

The next session dealt with Jewish Perspectives on the Reformation. MARKETA KABURKOVA (Olomouc) explored Jewish views of Luther and of the Reformation as it unfolded. Kaburkova showed that the Jewish reaction was split, some seeing the Reformation as purification of Christianity and its return to its Jewish roots, while others thought that Lutheranism was a punishment of Catholicism for the mistreatment of Jews during the expulsion from Spain. All believed that the reformers did not understand Scripture.

GEORGE Y. KOHLER (Ramat Gan) focused in his paper on the first Jewish reform rabbis during the 19th century. Viewing Luther as a rejection of Paul, they saw the Reformation as a missed opportunity to return Christians into the Jewish fold. Like Protestantism, many reform rabbis wished to abolish rituals and ceremonies. But going farther than Luther, Reform Jewish rabbis also changed dogma and precepts, transforming traditional Judaism into an ethical movement. YANIV FELLER (Berlin) explained how Rabbi Leo Baeck believed Luther was not the „first“ reformer of the church, but that the origins of the Reformation lie in the writings of Marcion, the second century heretic, who formed a Christian canon separating the religion from Judaism entirely.

The third panel, „Missionary Activity“, dealt with different aspects of conversion in Europe. ALEXANDER VAN DER HAVEN (Beer Sheva) looked at the single persecution of Jews in the Dutch Republic, who happened to be Protestants who had converted to Judaism. Van de Haven offered a close reading of the specific historical and inter-Calvinist dynamics that led to the execution. He was followed by DORON AVRAHAM (Ramat Gan) and YAAKOV ARIEL (Chapel Hill). Both discussed Protestant missionaries, especially Pietists and Evangelists. Avraham focused on the tolerant approach of the Pietists towards the Jews, as they believed Jesus' Jewish roots were enough reason for tol-

eration of the Jews. Ariel showed how the Pietists approached conversion of Jews, by teaching their missionaries Yiddish and ensuring their extensive knowledge of Judaism, so as to relate to the Jewish communities and through friendly contact convert them to Protestantism. The final paper of the panel was given by AGNIESZKA JAGODZINSKA (Wrocław), who focused on the particular missions of the London Society in Poland, and their attempts to convert the Jews into Protestantism, as they competed with their Catholic counterparts.

The fourth panel, „Conversion and Anti-Conversion“, looked at conversion at two different eras. AHUVA LIBERLES (Jerusalem) focused on late-medieval conversions and how the converts were rejected by their communities, while ASTRID SCHWEIGHOFER (Vienna) discussed conversion in Fin de Siècle Vienna, and the circumstances that brought Jews at that time to convert to Protestantism.

Panel number five took the conference to Eastern Europe. The three panelists looked at interactions between Jews, Protestants and Catholics in early modern Cracow (ANAT VATURI, Haifa) and in 18th century Rzeszów (YVONNE KLEINMANN, Halle). JOHANNES GLEIXNER (Munich) focused on the position of Jews and Protestants in relation to the political changes in the Habsburg Empire in the late 19th-early 20th centuries.

The sixth panel of the conference opened with lectures by TUVIA SINGER (Jerusalem), SARIT COFMAN SIMHON (Tel Aviv), and LARS FISCHER (London), who discussed „Jewish-Protestant Relations and Influences in Music, Theatre, and Literature“. Singer discussed changing configurations of the Wondering Jews in Catholic, Protestant, and scientific discourses in 19th century Germany. Examining how Lessing and Wolfsohn represented interfaith marriages in their plays, Cofman Simhon pointed out that Lessing did not allow for interfaith marriage in his plays, but his sophisticated attempt to deal with the issue allowed for later playwrights to weave into their plays marriages between people of different faiths. Lars Fischer discussed the anti-Semitic nature of Bach's cantatas in the context of his position as a cantor in the Lutheran church in the 17th century.

The panel, „Hebraism and the Science of Judaism“ focused on German research into Judaism during the 19th century. OFRI ILANY (Tel Aviv) looked at how early 19th century German nationalists transposed themselves into the narrative of the Hebrews in the Old Testament, proclaiming that they, rather than the Jews, were the Chosen People. The National God (*Nationalgott*) was invented already in the 18th century, but following the Napoleonic Wars, became increasingly popular. GOLDA AKHIEZER (Ariel) spoke about how Protestants researched not only Halachic Judaism but also different Jewish sects, assuming that this type of wider-scale Hebraism would help purifying the Christian faith of Catholic corruptions. Finally, WALTER HOMOLKA (Potsdam) addressed the similarities between Jewish and Protestant German research into the „real“ Jesus. While Jewish scholars saw this research as a way of gaining acceptance in the Christian German society, many Protestant scholars struggled to balance the recognition of Jesus' Jewishness with the need to maintain Christian exclusivity that maintained the universality of God.

The papers given at the eighth panel, „In the Shadow of Racism and Fascism“ examined the ways in which Luther's writings and the ideas of the Reformation were fit into the rhetoric of National Socialism. DIRK SCHUSTER (Potsdam) looked at how religion played a crucial role in determining racial purity in Nazi Germany and how being Protestant was promoted as a key part of being Aryan. HANSJORG BUSS (Göttingen) looked at how Luther's ideas on Protestant and Christian superiority and the anti-Semitic writings of his later life were used in churches in Nazi Germany. Examining a wider variety of Lutheran publications and journals, KYLE JANTZEN (Calgary), argued that prior to the Second World War American Lutherans perpetuated anti-Semitic propaganda. But once the war started, they identified Nazism as an enemy of religion. Still, this did not prevent them from adhering to supersessionist and conversional attitudes toward Jews.

A panel on „Jewish-Protestant Relations after the Holocaust“ closed the conference and focused on the rebuilding of these relations and the need for a reopening of dialogue be-

tween the two communities. CHRISTIAN WIESE (Frankfurt) discussed Paul Tillich's writings in which the theologian had analyzed the anti-Semitic problem of Protestantism and laid the foundation for a more inclusive Protestant theology that reconnects to its Jewish elements. URSULA RUDNICK (Hannover) focused on the process undertaken by the Lutheran church in condemning the anti-Semitic writings of Martin Luther, while at the same time renewing theological discussions between Jews and Lutherans after the Shoah. IRENE AUE-BEN-DAVID (Jerusalem) analyzed in her paper the history and reception of Selma Stern's biography of Josel von Rosheim (1959). Finally, JOHANNES BECKE (Heidelberg) and JENNY HESTERMANN (Frankfurt) gave a paper on Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste and presented both theological and sociological evidence to shifting notions of guilt, responsibility and atonement among different generations of German Lutheran youth.

The three days in Jerusalem focused neither only on the recent past nor on Luther's own anti-Semitism. Instead, it offered a complex picture of ever shifting connections, tensions, and reconfigurations. Unlike many discussions of Protestant-Jewish relations, much attention was paid to the period in-between: between Luther and Hitler.

### **Conference Overview:**

#### *Opening Remarks and Greetings*

Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem) / Moshe Sluhovsky (Jerusalem) / Christian Wiese (Frankfurt am Main) / Martin Hauger (Hannover)

#### *Mutual Readings*

Dean Philipp Bell (Chicago): The Impact of the Reformation on Early Modern German Jewry: Politics, Community, and Religion  
 Alexandra Zirkle (Chicago): Beyond Counter-Narrative: Jewish-Protestant Dialogue Revisited  
 Clemens Schmidt (Leipzig): History as Affirmation and Mission. Three Protestant Readings of the Jewish Diasporic Experience, 1706–1819

#### *Keynote Lecture*

Susannah Heschel (Hannover): Is God a Virgin? Theological Benefits and Problems in the Protestant-Jewish Relationship

#### *Jewish Perspectives on the Reformation*

Marketa Kaburkova (Olomouc): Echoes of Christian Reformation Movements in Early Modern Jewish Writings

George Y. Kohler (Ramat Gan): A Return to Judaism? – Luther's Reformation of Christianity in the Eyes of the First Reform Rabbis  
 Yaniv Feller (Berlin): The First Reformer of the Church? Leo Baeck on the Marcionite Origins of Protestantism

#### *Missionary Activity*

Alexander van der Haven (Beer Sheva): Predestination and toleration: The sole persecution of Jews in the Dutch Republic in the context of Calvinist debates about free will

Doron Avraham (Ramat Gan): German Pietism and the Jews: Between Luther's Reformation and the Enlightenment

Yaakov Ariel (Chapel Hill): New Modes of Protestant Interactions with the Jews: The Rise of Pietist and Evangelical Missions

Agnieszka Jagodzinska (Wrocław): Converted to Modernity? The Impact of the Missions of the London Society on Polish Jews

#### *Conversion and Anti-Conversion*

Ahuva Liberles (Jerusalem): 'Like a Journey to a Distant Land' – Considering Conversion in Late Medieval Germany

Astrid Schweighofer (Wien): „[...] that I have quite a protestant point of view“ (Lise Meitner) – Conversions from Judaism to Protestantism in Fin de Siècle Vienna on the Example of Egon Friedell and Lise Meitner and their Engagement with Liberal Protestant Theology

#### *Eastern Europe*

Anat Vaturi (Haifa): Beyond Theology? Everyday Encounters between Jews and Protestants in Early Modern Cracow

Yvonne Kleinmann (Halle): A Microhistory of Conversion: Interactions between Catholics, Jews and Protestants in 18th-Century Rzeszów

Johannes Gleixner (München): Standard bearers of Hussitism or agents of Germanization?

Czech Jews and Protestants competing and cooperating for the religion of the future 1899-1918

*Jewish-Protestant Relations and Influences in Music, Theatre and Literature*

Tuvia Singer (Jerusalem): The Wandering Jew as a Cosmological Figure in Protestant, Catholic and non-Confessional Use

Sarit Cofman Simhon (Tel-Aviv): Lessing and Wolfsohn: Representing Interfaith Marriage in German Theatre during the Enlightenment

Lars Fischer (London): Bach and the Jews

*Hebraism and the Science of Judaism*

Ofri Ilany (Tel Aviv): 'Der Gott Jakobs ist unser Schutz!': German Nationalism and the Old Testament God

Golda Akhiezer (Ariel): Protestant Hebraism, the Study of Jewish Sects and Wissenschaft des Judentums

Walter Homolka (Potsdam): Jewish and Protestant Jesus Research – Striving for Origins and Authenticity

*In the Shadow of Racism and Fascism*

Dirk Schuster (Potsdam): Protestantism and Racial Boundaries. Jews, »Aryans« and Divine Salvation at the German Christian Church Movement

Hansjorg Buss (Göttingen): The Reception and Instrumentalization of Martin Luther's „Judenschriften“ in the „Third Reich“

Kyle Jantzen (Calgary): Nazi Racism, American Antisemitism, and Christian Duty: U.S. Protestant Responses to the Jewish Refugee Crisis of 1938

*Jewish-Protestant Relations after the Holocaust*

Christian Wiese (Frankfurt am Main): Traces of the Encounter with Martin Buber in Paul Tillich's Writings on Judaism and the „Jewish Question“ after World War II

Ursula Rudnick (Hannover): The Long way of the European Lutheran Churches toward a Condemnation of Luther's Antisemitism and a Re-definition of Lutheran-Jewish-Relations

Irene Aue-Ben-David (Jerusalem): Josel von Rosheim meets Martin Luther in 1950. On the Reception of Selma Stern's Josel of Rosheim in Germany

Johannes Becke (Heidelberg) / Jenny Hestermann (Frankfurt): German Guilt and Hebrew Redemption: Aktion Sühnezeichen and the Legacy of Protestant Philo-Zionism (Dartmouth College)

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