

Irony of Ironies

Jewish Students Flock to a Lutheran College

William S. Abruzzi

(March 2014)

Muhlenberg College has recently become a popular destination for Jewish students. According to [Hillel International](#), at 35% Muhlenberg ranks 5th in the nation in terms of the percentage of its student body that is Jewish, above such notable institutions as Barnard College (#6), Sara Lawrence College (#7), Columbia University (#13), Oberlin College (#14) and New York University (#17). Only the Jewish Theological Seminary, Yeshiva University, American Jewish University and Brandeis University rank higher. Jewish students reportedly comprised 40% of the incoming 2013 freshman class at Muhlenberg. If the current increase in Jewish enrollment continues, it is not inconceivable that Jewish students could comprise a majority of the Muhlenberg student body in the not too distant future. As a measure of the growing Jewish presence on campus, the Muhlenberg Campus Hillel Building was recently upgraded and expanded at a cost of some \$3.5 million dollars.

The attraction of Jewish students to Muhlenberg has provided a clear financial benefit to the college. Private colleges, such as Muhlenberg, are constantly concerned with student enrollments. This is especially true for those colleges, like Muhlenberg, where operating expenses are heavily dependent on student tuition. From the perspective of college administrators, Jewish students present a highly advantageous demographic profile. Some 90% of Jewish high school graduates attend college, compared to only 66% for the nation as a whole. Furthermore, since Jewish family income exceeds the national norm, Jewish students are less likely to require financial aid. They, therefore, pose less of a drain on the college's budget. In turn, for Jewish students Muhlenberg provides an especially welcoming environment. Diversity is strongly promoted and defended at Muhlenberg, which established its *Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding* in 1989. The College's Hillel Center is also a prominent and highly active organization on campus.

What is ironic in all this, however, is that Muhlenberg is a Lutheran college, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Martin Luther was a notorious anti-Semite who became the spiritual leader of the Nazis. As Raul Hilberg states in his book, *The Destruction of European Jews*,

"The picture of the Jew we encounter in Nazi propaganda and Nazi correspondence had been drawn several hundred years before. Martin Luther had already sketched the main outlines of that portrait, and the Nazis, in their time, had little to add to it." (Hilberg 1985:15)

Luther Preached against the Jews and wrote several strongly anti-Jewish essays, the most famous of which was, ***On the Jews and Their Lies***. This essay, some 70 pages in length, is a vituperative attack on Jewish theology, morality, attitudes and behavior. According to David Singer,

“They . . . [the Jews] . . . were, he wrote, stubborn and fanatical; they perverted the meaning of Scriptures and slandered Christianity. No invective against the Jews was spared in Luther’s diatribe against them. They were, among other things, drunkards, adulterers, usurers, thieves, and disgusting vermin. These abusive terms did not exhaust the list of insults that Luther flung at the Jews. He compared them to pigs, asses, and animal excrement, and he likened them to the devil — a particularly injurious comparison, because the devil symbolized all evil in Luther’s theology.” (Singer 2009:403)

Indeed, in ***On the Jews and Their Lies*** Luther refers to the Jews as [among other things] *“prophet-murderers”, “vulgar people”, “bloodhounds”, “liars”, “a brood of serpents”, “children of the devil”, “a base, vexatious, blasphemous people”, “seducers of the people”, “usurers”, “stranglers”, “indolent bellies”, “circumcised saints”, “circumcised ravens”, “this stinking scum”, “impious scoundrels” and “moldy leaven”. He also claimed that Jews were “blinded”, “cursed”, “evil”, “vindictive”, “greedy”, “blasphemous”, “jealous”, “conceited”, “possessed”, “stubborn” and “incorrigible.”*

One need only read a few excerpts from Luther’s essay to understand the depth of his anti-Semitism.

Martin Luther, ***On Jews and Their Lies***

The full text of ***On Jews and Their Lies*** is available on line:

<http://www.awitness.org/books/luther/index.html>

CHAPTER 3:

“ . . . they are the ones who constantly have pursued godless ways, idolatry, false doctrine, and who have had uncircumcised hearts, as Moses himself and all the prophets cry out and lament. But in all this they always claimed to be pleasing to God and they slew all the prophets on this account. They are the malicious, stiff-necked people that would not be converted from evil to good works by the preaching, reproof, and teaching of the prophets. The Scriptures bear witness to this everywhere. And still they claim to be God’s servants and to stand before him. They are the boastful, arrogant rascals who to the present day can do no more than boast of their race and lineage, praise only themselves, and disdain and curse all the world in their synagogues, prayers, and doctrines. Despite this, they imagine that in God’s eyes they rank as his dearest children.”

“The sun has never shone on a more bloodthirsty and vengeful people than they are who imagine that they are God's people who have been commissioned and commanded to murder and to slay the Gentiles. In fact, the most important thing that they expect of their Messiah is that he will murder and kill the entire world with their sword.”

CHAPTER 4:

“. . . this subject is beyond the ken of the blind and hardened Jews. Speaking to them about it is much the same as preaching the gospel to a sow.”

“Learn from this dear Christian, what you are doing if you permit the blind Jews to mislead you. Then the saying will truly apply, ‘When a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into the pit’ [cf. Luke 6:39]. You cannot learn anything from them except how to misunderstand the divine commandments, and, despite this, boast haughtily over against the Gentiles — who really are much better before God than they, since they do not have such pride of holiness and yet keep far more of the law than these arrogant saints and damned blasphemers and liars.”

“Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in-which sheer self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehmning his eyes on them. . . . And where you see or hear a Jew teaching, remember that you are hearing nothing but a venomous basilisk who poisons and kills people merrily by fasten- And with all this, they claim to be doing right. Be on your guard against them!”

CHAPTER 9:

“I say, before they would have us Gentiles whom they incessantly mock, curse, damn, defame, and revile share the Messiah with them, and be called their co-heirs and brethren, they would crucify ten more Messiahs and kill God himself if this were possible, together with all angels and all creatures, even at the risk of incurring thereby the penalty of a thousand hells instead of one. Such an incomprehensibly stubborn pride dwells in the noble blood of the fathers and circumcised saints. They alone want to have the Messiah and be masters of the world. The accursed Goyim must be servants, give their desire (that is, their gold and silver) to the Jews, and let themselves be slaughtered like wretched cattle. They would rather remain lost consciously and eternally than give up this view.”

CHAPTER 10:

“From their youth they have imbibed such venomous hatred against the Goyim from their parents and their rabbis, and they still continuously drink it. As Psalm 109:18 declares, it has penetrated flesh and blood, marrow and bone, and has become part and parcel of their nature and their life. And as little as they can change flesh and blood, marrow and bone, so little can they change such pride and envy.”

“If they do perform some good deed, you may rest assured that they are not prompted by love, nor is it done with your benefit in mind. Since they are compelled to live among us, they do this for reasons of expediency; but their heart remains and is as I have described it.”

“A person who is unacquainted with the devil might wonder why they are so particularly hostile toward Christians. They have no reason to act this way, since we show them every kindness. They live among us, enjoy our shield and protection, they use our country and our highways, our markets and streets. Meanwhile our princes and rulers sit there and snore with mouths hanging open and permit the Jews to take, steal, and rob from their open money bags and treasures whatever they want. That is, they let the Jews, by means of their usury, skin and fleece them and their subjects and make them beggars with their own money. For the Jews, who are exiles, should really have nothing, and whatever they have must surely be our property. They do not work, and they do not earn anything from us, nor do we give or present it to them, and yet they are in possession of our money and goods and are our masters in our own country and in their exile. A thief is condemned to hang for the theft of ten florins, and if he robs anyone on the highway, he forfeits his head. But when a Jew steals and robs ten tons of gold through his usury, he is more highly esteemed than God himself.”

CHAPTER 11:

Why, their Talmud and their rabbis record that it is no sin for a Jew to kill a Gentile, but it is only a sin for him to kill a brother Israelite. Nor is it a sin for a Jew to break his oath to a Gentile. Likewise, they say that it is rendering God a service to steal or rob from a Goy, as they in fact do through their usury. For since they believe that they are the noble blood and the circumcised saints and we the accursed Goyim, they cannot treat us too harshly or commit sin against us, for they are the lords of the world and we are their servants, yes, their cattle. (Chapter 11)

“Christ says in Matthew 5 about how they preached and interpreted the Ten Commandments so deviously, how they installed money-changers, traders, and all sorts of usurers in the temple, prompting our Lord to say that they had made the house of God into a den of robbers [Matt. 21:13; Luke 19:46]. Now figure out for yourself what a great honor that is and how the temple is filled with such glory that God must call his own house a den of robbers because so many souls had been murdered through their greedy, false doctrine, that is, through double idolatry. The Jews still persist in such doctrine to the present day. They imitate their fathers and pervert God's word. They are steeped in greed, in usury, they steal and murder where they can and ever teach their children to do likewise.”

Chapter 12:

“They curse us Goyim. In their synagogues and in their prayers they wish us every misfortune. They rob us of our money and goods through their usury, and they play on us every wicked trick they can. And the worst of it is that they still claim to have done right and well, that is, to have done God a service. And they teach the doing of such things. No pagan ever acted thus; in fact, no one acts thus except the devil himself, or whomever he possesses, as he has possessed the Jews.”

“If they weren't so stone-blind, their own vile external life would indeed convince them of the true nature of their penitence. For it abounds with witchcraft, conjuring signs, figures, and the tetragrammaton of the name, that is, with idolatry, envy, and conceit. Moreover, they are nothing but thieves and robbers who daily eat no morsel and wear no thread of clothing which they have not stolen and pilfered from us by means of their accursed usury. Thus they live from day to

day, together with wife and child, by theft and robbery, as arch-thieves and robbers, in the most impenitent security. For a usurer is an arch-thief and a robber who should rightly be hanged on the gallows seven times higher than other thieves. Indeed, God should prophesy about such beautiful penitence and merit from heaven through his holy angel and become a flagrant, blasphemous liar for the sake of the noble blood and circumcised saints who boast of being hallowed by God's commandments, although they trample all of them under foot and do not keep one of them."

"what a base, vexatious, blasphemous people."

"the Jews tear apart the text wherever they can, solely for the purpose of spoiling the words of Scripture for us Christians, although it serves no purpose for them either. For it teaches them nothing, it does not comfort them, it gives them nothing; it results in nothing but meaningless words."

CHAPTER 14:

*". . . no one is holding them here now. The country and the roads are open for them to proceed to their land whenever they wish. If they did so, we would be glad to present gifts to them on the occasion; it would be good riddance. For they are a heavy burden, a plague, a pestilence, a sheer misfortune for our country. Proof for this is found in the fact that they have often been expelled forcibly from a country, far from being held captive in it. Thus they were banished from France (which they call *Tsorfath,* from Obadiah 20), which was an especially fine nest. Very recently they were banished by our dear Emperor Charles from Spain, the very best nest of all (which they called *Sefarad,* also on the basis of Obadiah). This year they were expelled from the entire Bohemian crownland, where they had one of the best nests, in Prague. Likewise, during my lifetime they have been driven from Regensburg, Magdeburg, and other places."*

". . . they hold us Christians captive in our own country. They let us work in the sweat of our brow to earn money and property while they sit behind the stove, idle away the time, fart, and roast pears. They stuff themselves, guzzle, and live in luxury and ease from our hard-earned goods. With their accursed usury they hold us and our property captive. Moreover, they mock and deride us because we work and let them play the role of lazy squires at our expense and in our land. Thus they are our masters and we are their servants, with our property, our sweat, and our labor."

"There is no other explanation for this than the one cited earlier from Moses, namely, that God has struck them with "madness and blindness and confusion of mind." So we are even at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and of the Christians which they shed for three hundred years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the blood of the children they have shed since then (which still shines forth from their eyes and their skin). We are at fault in not slaying them. Rather we allow them to live freely in our midst despite an their murdering, cursing, blaspheming, lying, and defaming; we protect and shield their synagogues, houses, life, and property In this way we make them lazy and secure and encourage them to fleece us boldly of our money and goods, as well as to mock and deride us, with a view to finally overcoming us, killing us all for such a great sin, and robbing us of all our property (as they daily pray and hope). Now tell me whether they do not have every reason to be the enemies of us accursed Goyim, to curse us and to strive for our final, complete, and eternal ruin!"

In Chapter 15 (and again in Chapter 17) Luther lays out what he believes should be done to the Jews.

Chapter 15:

“What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews?

***First**, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians. . . .*

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

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

***Fourth**, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. . . .*

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

***Sixth**, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. The reason for such a measure is that, as said above, they have no other means of earning a livelihood than usury, and by it they have stolen and robbed from us*

***Seventh**, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, as was imposed on the children of Adam (Gen. 3 [:19]). For it is not fitting that they should let us accursed Goyim toil in the sweat of our faces while they, the holy people, idle away their time behind the stove, feasting and farting., and on top of all, boasting blasphemously of their lordship over the Christians by means of our sweat. No, one should toss out these lazy rogues by the seat of their pants.”*

“In brief, dear princes and lords, those of you who have Jews under your rule: if my counsel does not please you, find better advice, so that you and we all can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews. Lest we become guilty sharers before God in the lies, the blasphemy, the defamation, and the curses which the mad Jews indulge in so freely and wantonly against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dear mother, all Christians, all authority, and ourselves. Do not grant them protection, safe-conduct, or communion with us. Do not aid and abet them in acquiring your money or your subjects' money and property by means of usury. We have enough sin of our own without this.”

“And you, my dear gentlemen and friends who are pastors and preachers, . . . When you lay eyes on or think of a Jew you must say to your self: Alas, that mouth which I there behold has cursed and execrated and maligned every Saturday my dear Lord Jesus Christ, who has redeemed me with his precious blood; in addition, it prayed and pleaded before God that I, my wife and children, and all Christians might be stabbed to death and perish miserably.”

“Especially you pastors who have Jews living in your midst, persist in reminding your lords and rulers to be mindful of their office and of their obligation before God to force the Jews to work, to forbid usury, and to check their blasphemy and cursing.”

“But if the authorities are reluctant to use force and restrain the Jews' devilish wantonness, the latter should, as we said, be expelled from the country and be told to return to their land and their possessions in Jerusalem, where they may lie, curse, blaspheme, defame, murder, steal, rob, practice usury, mock, and indulge in all those infamous abominations which they practice among us, and leave us our government, our country, our life, and our property, much more leave our Lord the Messiah, our faith, and our church undefiled and uncontaminated with their devilish tyranny and malice.”

“I have read and heard many stories about the Jews which agree with this judgment of Christ, namely, how they have poisoned wells, made assassinations, kidnapped children, as related before. I have heard that one Jew sent another Jew, and this by means of a Christian, a pot of blood, together with a barrel of wine, in which when drunk empty, a dead Jew was found. There are many other similar stories. For their kidnapping of children they have often been burned at the stake or banished (as we already heard). I am well aware that they deny all of this. However, it all coincides with the judgment of Christ which declares that they are venomous, bitter, vindictive, tricky serpents, assassins, and children of the devil who sting and work harm stealthily wherever they cannot do it openly.”

CHAPTER 17:

“If I had power over the Jews, as our princes and cities have, I would deal severely with their lying mouth.”

* * * * *

Luther's Influence on the Nazis:

Martin Luther was a hero and an inspiration to the Nazis. One of the first acts the Nazis performed after coming to power in 1933 was to organize **German Luther Day** to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth. During this celebration and throughout their rule, Nazi leaders praised Luther and drew comparisons between his teachings and those of the Third Reich.

“If we wish to find a scapegoat on whose shoulders we may lay the miseries which Germany has brought upon the world- I am more and more convinced that the worst evil genius of that country is not Hitler or Bismarck or Frederick the Great, but Martin Luther.”

-Reverend William Ralph Inge, 1944.
(quoted in Paras 2008:1)

[The following descriptions of praises of Martin Luther, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Steigmann-Gall (2003), **The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945.**]

Konstantin von Neurath

Foreign Minister of Germany (1932–1938):

“The German Volk celebrates the 450th anniversary of Luther’s birth at a time when a mighty political event is welding together a great inner unity. . . . The mighty development of the spiritual life of the German Volk, even outside the sphere of the religious, is unthinkable without Luther.” (p. 135)



Hans Schemm

Head of the National Socialist Teachers' Federation

Schemm was an ardent admirer of Luther and was known throughout the Reich for his slogan “Our religion is Christ, our politics Fatherland.” He frequently ended his speeches with the Lutheran Hymn “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” (p. 24-25)

“What went for Luther goes for us as well; only through the mirror of our blood and our race are we able to see God as he must be seen.” (p. 55).

“The older and experienced he [Luther] became, the less he could understand one particular type of person: this was the Jew. His engagement against the decomposing Jewish spirit is clearly evident not only from his writings against the Jews; his life was too idealistically, philosophically anti-Semitic. Now, we Germans of today have the duty to recognize and acknowledge this.” (p. 136)



Dr. Bernhard Rust

Reich Minister of Science, Education and National Culture:

“Since Martin Luther closed his eyes, no such son of our people has appeared again. It has been decided that we shall be the first to witness his reappearance. . . . I think the time is past when one may not say the names of Hitler and Luther in the same breath. They belong together; they are the same old stamp [Schrot und Korn].” (pp. 136-137)



Karl Koch

President of the East Prussia Protestant Church and later first Comandant of the Nazi concentration camps at Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Majdanek.

Koch compared Hitler to Luther and claimed that the Nazis fought with Luther's spirit. By the end of the war, Koch had gained tremendous notoriety as the Reich Commissioner for Ukraine, where he played a leading role in the murder of thousands of Jews and partisans, their deportation to camps, the destruction of their villages, and the virtual enslavement of the remaining Slavic population.

Koch maintained,

“Externally, much has changed. But in our church the Word of Christ according to the doctrine of Luther remains. . . . Righteousness, truth and love should guide us, not only at the level of charity but also in the joyful and active struggles for our Protestant confession of faith.” (p. 2)



During his postwar testimony, taken by a public prosecutor in Bielefeld in 1949, Koch insisted,

“I held the view that the Nazi idea had to develop from a basic Prussian-Protestant attitude [Grundhaltung] and from Luther's unfinished Reformation.” (p.2)

Artur Dinter

Nazi Party leader in Thuringia

Dinter was a fervent admirer of Luther and saw the Nazi Party as completing the Reformation begun by Luther. In 1926 he published “197 Theses for Completion of the Reformation” and in 1927 he founded the Christian-Spiritual Religious Association.



Hans Hinkel

Reich Leader of the Militant League for German Culture, and Manager of Herman Goebbels's Reich Culture Chamber and Propaganda Ministry.

"Through his acts and his spiritual attitude he began the fight which we still wage today; with Luther the revolution of German blood and feeling against alien elements of the Volk was begun." [p. 137]



Heinrich Himmler

Reichsführer SS, head of the Gestapo, and Waffen-SS. Himmler was also Nazi Minister of the Interior in charge of the mass murder of Jews by the Third Reich.

Himmler had a high regard for Luther. In March 1940, shortly before the beginning of the "Final Solution," Himmler held a conversation on the "Jewish problem" with Felix Kersten, during which he proclaimed that Judaism had infected Catholicism and that in Luther's day the Vatican had been run by "Jew Popes." Whereas the Catholic Church, according to Himmler was blind, Luther saw and understood the Jewish peril:

"You should read, moreover, what Luther said and wrote about the Jews. No judgment could be sharper." (Kersten, 1957:35)



Himmler held Luther in such esteem that in January 1941 his personal secretary wrote,

"The Reichsführer-SS wishes to be remembered at the Luther Archive in Wittenberg after the war." (p. 235)

Martin Sasse

Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thuringia

Sasse was an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazis and of the **Godesberg Declaration** (see p.15 below). He published a pamphlet in response to *Kristallnacht* titled, "Martin Luther uber die Juden: Weg mit Ihnen" ("Martin Luther on the Jews: Get Rid of Them"), in which he argued that the pogrom was fully in accord with Luther's own intentions. Luther, Sasse noted, had also called for synagogues and Jewish books to be burned, and the eradication of Judaism was, he argued, one of Luther's own goals for the Protestant Reformation (Heschel 1999: 71). He also applauded the burning of the synagogues and commented on the coincidence that

"On 10 November 1938, on Luther's birthday, the synagogues are burning in Germany." (Goldhagen, 1997: 265)

The German people, he urged, ought to heed these words *"of the greatest anti-Semite of his time, the warner of his people against the Jews." (ibid.)*



Phillip Bouhler

Head of the Nazi euthanasia program

Bouhler was in charge of the T-4 Action, the euthanasia campaign that served as a precursor to the "Final Solution." He was also appointed the *Delegate for Culture* to the Fuhrer's Deputy where he ruled on whether or not specific books should be allowed to be published.

Bouhler approved *The Goal of Religious Education in the National Socialist School*, written in 1936 stating that Nazi education should

"start with the personality of Jesus and should regard Martin Luther not simply as the reformer of the Church, but as the reformer of the religious education of the Volk." (p.237)



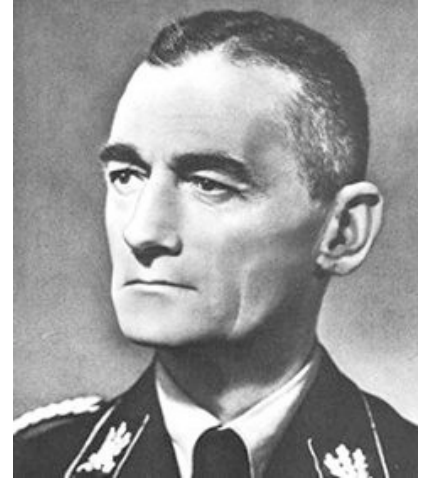
Walter Buch

Head of the Nazi Party Court and Martin Bormann's father-in-law.

Buch related Nazism as a movement to Christ's own "struggle." To this end, he was able to appropriate the legacy of Martin Luther,

"When Luther turned his attention to the Jews, after he completed his translation of the Bible, he left behind 'On the Jews and their Lies' for posterity." (p. 13)

"Many people confess their amazement that Hitler preaches ideas which they have always held. . . . From the Middle Ages we can look to the same example in Martin Luther. What stirred in the soul and spirit of the German people at that time, finally found expression in his person, in his words and deeds." (p. 55)



F.K. Otto Dibelius

General Superintendent of the Kurmark

At a 1933 service for the new Reichstag, Dibelius announced,

"We have learned from Martin Luther that the Church cannot get in the way of state power when it does what it is called to do. Not even when [the state] becomes hard and ruthless. . . . When the state carries out its office against those who destroy honor with vituperative and cruel words that scorn faith and vilify death for the Fatherland, then [the state] is ruling in God's name." (p. 69)



Alfred Rosenberg

Hitler aid, Reich Minister and leading theorist of Nazism's paganist faction

For Rosenberg, Luther's great deed had been the destruction of the priesthood and the Germanification of Christianity. "Rosenberg regarded Luther as nothing less than the greatest forerunner of German nationalism, racial purity, and spiritual independence." (p. 97)



Julius Streicher

Editor of *Der Sturmer* the virulently anti-Semitic Nazi weekly newspaper.

During the Nuremberg trials following the war, Streicher defended himself by saying that even a "genius" like Luther hated the Jews.

"Dr. Martin Luther would very probably sit in my place in the defendant's dock today, if this book [On the Jews and Their Lies] had been taken into consideration by the prosecution."
(Paras 2008:8).

Streicher also published an anti-Semitic Children's book, *The Poisonous Mushroom*, with such chapter titles as "How to Identify a Jew", "How Jewish Traders Cheat". "How the Jew Treats His Domestic Help", and "Money is the God of Jews."



"When you see a cross, then think of the horrible murder by the Jews on Golgotha..." *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*)

Last, but certainly not least, as early as 1923 **Adolf Hitler** himself praised Luther, calling him the greatest German genius that "saw the Jew as we today are starting to see him." In July 1941, Hitler hailed Luther and his translation of the Bible as revolutionary.

"Luther had the merit of rising against the Pope and the organization of the Church. It was the first of the great revolutions. And thanks to his translation of the Bible, Luther replaced our dialects by the great German language!" (p.256)



In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler discussed the “great warriors” of this world, who:

“ . . . though not understood by the present, are nevertheless prepared to carry the fight for their ideas and ideals to their end...to them belong, not only the truly great statesmen, but all other great reformers as well. Beside Frederick the Great stands Martin Luther.” (p. 213; quoted in Paras 2008:7).

Hitler also quoted Luther during one of his earlier speeches:

“I do insist on the certainty that sooner or later-once we hold power . . . the German church established . . . without a Pope and without the Bible, and Luther, if he could be with us, would give us his blessing. (Wiener 1999: ix-x; quoted in Paras 2008:7)

Finally, influenced by Luther’s theology, Hitler stated:

“My Lord and Savior . . . recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them.” (Heer, 1967: 284-286)

* * * * *

During the early 1930s, the *Deutsche Christen* (**German Christian**) **Movement** arose within the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It represented a self-conscious attempt to fuse Christianity and National Socialism (Bergen 1999). Comprising some 600,000 German Lutherans, its members promoted a "racially pure" church, and many of its adherents rose to prominence within the Third Reich. Even before Hitler became chancellor, the self-styled "Storm Troopers of Christ" began to attack Jewish influences in Christianity. Organizers sponsored huge rallies with tens of thousands of the faithful. The movement generated newspapers, scholarly monographs and controlled several university theology departments. Its members also played a dominant role in the unification of Germany's twenty-eight regional Protestant churches into the German Protestant Church.



Deutsche Christen
Flag



Deutsche Christen
Badge

Adherents of the movement frequently cited Luther as a precursor of their attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. They reprinted his essay "Against the Jews and Their Lies" and presented him as a champion of anti-Semitism. In 1940, they published a religious instruction book that quoted Luther's instructions to "set their synagogues and schools on fire, and whatever will not burn, heap dirt upon and cover so that no human ever again will see a stone or a cinder of it." A German Christian publication in 1943 urged its readers to be hard like Luther in their attitudes toward Jews". (Bergen 1999:47)



**Presidium of the *Deutsche Christen* Lutherans
Berlin, November 13, 1933**

In April 1939, leading Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church signed the **Godesberg Declaration**.

*"In the realm of faith there exists the sharp opposition between the message of Jesus Christ and his apostles and the **Jewish religion** of legalism and political messianic hope, which is already emphatically fought against in the Old Testament.*

In the realm of the völkisch life an earnest and responsible racial politics is required for the preservation of the purity of our people."

The declaration was printed in the official *Gesetzblatt* of the German Protestant Church, along with an addendum stating the church's intention to establish an ***Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on the Church Life of the German Volk.***" (Heschel 1999: 70-71) That Institute was formally opened on May 6, 1939. Over fifty

professors of theology at universities throughout the Reich joined the Institute, as did dozens of instructors and graduate students. The Institute also listed some one hundred pastors and bishops as members (Heschel 1999:71). It soon produced a deJudaized version of the Bible, which changed or removed offensive passages from the New Testament and completely eliminated the Old Testament from its canon. The Institute also published a hymnal free of Judaic references, and a catechism that presented Jesus as the savior of Aryans.

Two years later, in December 1941, seven Evangelical Lutheran state churches, recalling Luther's command that Jews should be banished from German lands, issued a statement claiming,

"From Christ's crucifixion to the present day, the Jews have fought against Christianity, or have misused or falsified it for their selfish aims. Christian baptism does not alter the racial character of the Jew, his affiliation with his people, or his biological essence."
[Stegmann-Gaul, 2003, p. 186]



**Friedrich Coch
Lutheran Bishop of Saxony
giving a Nazi greeting**

In 1935, just two years after they came to power, the Nazis built an imposing church in Mariendorf (south Berlin) dedicated to Martin Luther.

The Martin Luther Memorial Church



The spiritual connection between Martin Luther and The Third Reich was expressed throughout the church.



The baptismal font contains a carving of Adolf Hitler holding a stormtrooper hat



An Iron Cross Chandelier (formerly containing a swastika) was placed inside the entrance of the church



The stone carving on the arch surrounding the chancel of the church (where the alter is located) contains a helmeted Nazi soldier



The soldier is located just below Jesus' crown of thorns



The Pulpit contains a depiction of Jesus with a Nazi soldier



William Shirer (1960:236), in his best-selling *magnum opus* on Nazi Germany expressed the profound influence he believed Martin Luther had on the Rise of the Third Reich.

“. . . it is difficult to understand the behavior of most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of . . . the influence of Martin Luther. The great founder . . . was both a passionate anti-Semite and a ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority.”

Given the theology of Martin Luther and the history of the Lutheran Church, it is indeed an irony for so many Jewish students to be attending a Lutheran college. Luther must be rolling over in his grave!

* * * * *

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg

To complete the irony, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the patriarch of the early Lutheran Church in America, and for whom Muhlenberg College is named, was also an ardent anti-Semite. He lobbied strongly to have restriction placed on Jews (and other “infidels”) written into the Pennsylvania Constitution. According to William Pencak (2010:250),



“Pennsylvania Jews unanimously supported the American Revolution, having previously shared a double victimization with the Philadelphia lower classes and people of the western counties in that they could not participate meaningfully in provincial as well as imperial politics. Yet when the ‘radicals’ overthrew the conservative proprietary government that refused to endorse independence, they wrote into section ten of the constitution an oath of allegiance that disenfranchised not only Jews, but also Quakers and all those who in conscience would not swear that both the Old and New Testaments were divinely inspired.

The politician who suggested the Christian oath and built on popular anti-Semitism to ingratiate himself with the revolutionary authorities was Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the leading Lutheran clergyman in America who was suspected (correctly, it later turned out) of loyalist sympathies. . . . Muhlenberg tried . . . [unsuccessfully] . . . to persuade the other Philadelphia ministers to support him.”

Frederick Cople Jaher (1994:106) corroborates Pencak's portrait of Muhlenberg.

"During the Revolution, as in other crises, expressions of anti-Semitism multiplied . . . The Pennsylvania Evening Post, during the state constitutional debate of 1776, printed several letters advocating that Deists, Jews, Turks, Catholics, and other "enemies of Christ" be ineligible for public office, lest Pennsylvania become a bridgehead "for Antichrist" and "unsafe for Christians." Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the foremost German Lutheran pastor of the colonial period, also feared that if the state constitution did not ordain Christianity as the civic religion "a Christian people" might be degraded under "rule by Jews" or some other depraved group. The drafters of the documents heeded these imprecations by including a test oath disqualifying infidels from holding office."

Muhlenberg's anti-Semitism is even featured on **ExplorePAhistory.com's** web page describing the **Kahal Kadosh Mikveh Israel Historical Marker**.

"Pennsylvania's Constitution of 1776 barred Jews from the political process. The test oath of the 1776 state constitution was inserted at the request of the Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, a leading German Lutheran minister, whose anti-Semitism set a pattern for that of others who scapegoated the state's handful of Jews as a way of diverting attention from their own patriotic shortcomings."

<http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-276>

1776 PA Constitution, Section 10:

"And each member, before he takes his seat, shall make and subscribe the following declaration, viz: I do believe in one God, the creator and governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked. And I do acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine inspiration."

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pa08.asp - 1

* * * * *

"Irony of ironies, all is irony."

(sayeth the anthropologist)

REFERENCES CITED

- Bergen, D. 1999. Storm Troopers of Christ: The German Christian Movement and the Ecclesiastical Final Solution. In ***Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust***. R. Ericksen and S. Heschel. Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 40-67.
- Goldhagen, Daniel. 1997. ***Hitler's Willing Executioners***. New York: Vintage.
- Heer, F. 1967. ***God's First Love: Christians and Jews over Two Thousand Years***. London, Weidenfield and Nicholson.
- Heschel, S. 1999. When Jesus Was an Aryan: The Protestant Church and Antisemitic Propaganda. In ***Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust***. R. Ericksen and S. Heschel. Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 68-89.
- Hilberg, R. 1985. ***The Destruction of the European Jews***. New York, Holmes & Meier.
- Jaher, Frederick Cople. 1994. ***A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America***. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Kersten, Felix. 1957. ***The Kersten Memoirs, 1940-1945***. New York, Macmillan.
- Luther, Martin. 1543. ***On Jews and Their Lies***.
<http://www.awitness.org/books/luther/index.html>
- Pencak, William. 2011. "Anti-Semitism, Toleration, and Appreciation: The Changing Relations of Jews and Gentiles in Early America". In Chris Beneke & Christopher S. Grenda (eds.) ***The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America***, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press: 242-262.
- Paras, Emily. 2008. "The Darker Side of Martin Luther," ***Constructing the Past*** 9 (1): [Article 4](#).
- Shirer, William L. 1960. ***The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich***. New York, Simon and Schuster.
- Singer, David C. 2009. "Baptism or Expulsion: Martin Luther and the Jews of Germany." ***Journal of Ecumenical Studies*** 44 (3): 401-408.
- Steigmann-Gall, R. 2003. ***The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945***. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Weiner, Peter F. 1999. ***Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor***. Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press.