

LUTHER'S WORKS

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The Christian in Society

IV

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fall victim to such wrath, and even worse! Rather, as we said also earlier, let us honor his divine word and not neglect the time of grace, as Muhammad and the pope have already neglected it, becoming not much better than the Jews.

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing, and blasphemy. Thus we cannot extinguish the unquenchable fire of divine wrath, of which the prophets speak, nor can we convert the Jews. With prayer and the fear of God we must practice a sharp mercy to see whether we might save at least a few from the glowing flames. We dare not avenge ourselves. Vengeance a thousand times worse than we could wish them already has them by the throat. I shall give you my sincere advice:¹⁷³

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, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians. For whatever we tolerated in the past unknowingly—and I myself was unaware of it—will be pardoned by God. But if we, now that we are informed, were to protect and shield such a house for the Jews, existing right before our very nose, in which they lie about, blaspheme, curse, vilify, and defame Christ and us (as was heard

¹⁷³ Most of Luther's proposals are paralleled in the other anti-Jewish literature of the period, but the specific formulation which follows may be attributed to him. Fortunately, as has been noted above (p. 135), most of the authorities proved unwilling to carry out his recommendations, whether out of horror at their inhumanity or out of self-interest (since Jews played an important role in the economy).

It is impossible to publish Luther's treatise today, however, without noting how similar to his proposals were the actions of the National Socialist regime in Germany in the 1930's and 1940's. On the night of November 9-10, 1938, the so-called *Kristallnacht*, for example, 119 synagogues in all parts of Germany, together with many Jewish homes and shops, were burned to the ground (cf. William H. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960], pp. 430 ff.). In subsequently undertaking the physical annihilation of the Jews, however, the Nazis surpassed even Luther's severity.

above), it would be the same as if we were doing all this and even worse ourselves, as we very well know.

In Deuteronomy 13 [:12 ff.] Moses writes that any city that is given to idolatry shall be totally destroyed by fire, and nothing of it shall be preserved. If he were alive today, he would be the first to set fire to the synagogues and houses of the Jews. For in Deuteronomy 4 [:2] and 12 [:32] he commanded very explicitly that nothing is to be added to or subtracted from his law. And Samuel says in I Samuel 15 [:23] that disobedience to God is idolatry. Now the Jews' doctrine at present is nothing but the additions of the rabbis and the idolatry of disobedience, so that Moses has become entirely unknown among them (as we said before), just as the Bible became unknown under the papacy in our day. So also, for Moses' sake, their schools cannot be tolerated; they defame him just as much as they do us. It is not necessary that they have their own free churches for such idolatry.

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. This will bring home to them the fact that they are not masters in our country, as they boast, but that they are living in exile and in captivity, as they incessantly wail and lament about us before God.

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. For they have justly forfeited the right to such an office by holding the poor Jews captive with the saying of Moses (Deuteronomy 17 [:10 ff.]) in which he commands them to obey their teachers on penalty of death, although Moses clearly adds: "what they teach you in accord with the law of the Lord." Those villains ignore that. They wantonly employ the poor people's obedience contrary to the law of the Lord and infuse them with this poison, cursing, and blasphemy. In the same way the pope also held us captive with the declaration in Matthew 16 [:18], "You are Peter," etc., inducing us to believe all the lies and

deceptions that issued from his devilish mind. He did not teach in accord with the word of God, and therefore he forfeited the right to teach.

Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home. I have heard it said that a rich Jew is now traveling across the country with twelve horses—his ambition is to become a *Kokhba*—devouring princes, lords, lands, and people with his usury, so that the great lords view it with jealous eyes. If you great lords and princes will not forbid such usurers the highway legally, some day a troop may gather against them,¹⁷⁴ having learned from this booklet the true nature of the Jews and how one should deal with them and not protect their activities. For you, too, must not and cannot protect them unless you wish to become participants in all their abominations in the sight of God. Consider carefully what good could come from this, and prevent it.

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 all they possess. Such money should now be used in no other way than the following: Whenever a Jew is sincerely converted, he should be handed one hundred, two hundred, or three hundred florins, as personal circumstances may suggest. With this he could set himself up in some occupation for the support of his poor wife and children, and the maintenance of the old or feeble. For such evil gains are cursed if they are not put to use with God's blessing in a good and worthy cause.

But when they boast that Moses allowed or commanded them to exact usury from strangers, citing Deuteronomy 23 [:20]—apart

¹⁷⁴ Apparently Luther anticipates that the political authorities will find his proposals too severe. He envisions and perhaps even sanctions action against the Jews by a *Reuteret*, probably meaning a band of robber barons. Prof. Jacob R. Marcus, in citing this passage, identifies Luther's "rich Jew" with "the wealthy Michael," court-Jew of Joachim II of Brandenburg. Cf. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Sinai Press, 1938), p. 168.

from this they cannot adduce as much as a letter in their support—we must tell them that there are two classes of Jews or Israelites. The first comprises those whom Moses, in compliance with God's command, led from Egypt into the land of Canaan. To them he issued his law, which they were to keep in that country and not beyond it, and then only until the advent of the Messiah. The other Jews are those of the emperor and not of Moses. These date back to the time of Pilate, the procurator of the land of Judah. For when the latter asked them before the judgment seat, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" they all said, "Crucify him, crucify him!" He said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" They shouted in reply, "We have no king but Caesar!" [Matt. 27:22; John 19:15]. God had not commanded of them such submission to the emperor;¹⁷⁵ they gave it voluntarily.

But when the emperor demanded the obedience due him, they resisted and rebelled against him. Now they no longer wanted to be his subjects. Then he came and visited his subjects, gathered them in Jerusalem, and then scattered them throughout his entire empire, so that they were forced to obey him. From these the present remnant of Jews descended, of whom Moses knows nothing, nor they of him; for they do not deserve a single passage or verse of Moses. If they wish to apply Moses' law again, they must first return to the land of Canaan, become Moses' Jews, and keep his laws. There they may practice usury as much as strangers will endure from them. But since they are dwelling in and disobeying Moses in foreign countries under the emperor, they are bound to keep the emperor's laws and refrain from the practice of usury until they become obedient to Moses. For Moses' law has never passed a single step beyond the land of Canaan or beyond the people of Israel. Moses was not sent to the Egyptians, the Babylonians, or any other nation with his law, but only to the people whom he led from Egypt into the land of Canaan, as he himself testifies frequently in Deuteronomy. They were expected to keep his commandments in the land which they would conquer beyond the Jordan.

¹⁷⁵ The same German word (*Kaiser*) underlies the English words "Caesar" and "emperor" in this passage.

Moreover, since priesthood, worship, government—with which the greater part, indeed, almost all, of those laws of Moses deal—have been at an end for over fourteen hundred years already, it is certain that Moses' law also came to an end and lost its authority. Therefore the imperial laws must be applied to these imperial Jews. Their wish to be Mosaic Jews must not be indulged. In fact, no Jew has been that for over fourteen hundred years.

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.

But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc., if they had to serve and work for us—for it is reasonable to assume that such noble lords of the world and venomous, bitter worms are not accustomed to working and would be very reluctant to humble themselves so deeply before the accursed Goyim—then let us emulate the common sense of other nations such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., compute with them how much their usury has extorted from us, divide this amicably,¹⁷⁶ but then eject them forever from the country.¹⁷⁷ For, as we have heard, God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!

I hear it said that the Jews donate large sums of money and thus prove beneficial to governments. Yes, but where does this money come from? Not from their own possessions but from that of the lords and subjects whom they plunder and rob by means of usury. Thus the lords are taking from their subjects what they receive from the Jews, i.e., the subjects are obliged to pay addi-

¹⁷⁶ I.e., confiscate a portion of the Jews' wealth before expelling them.

¹⁷⁷ Expulsion of the Jews had already occurred in England, France, Spain, and some German principalities. Luther urges those other rulers who may be susceptible to his influence to follow suit.