

Annual International Conference of the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem  
**500 Years of Reformation. Jews and Protestants – Judaism and Protestantism**  
February 12-14, 2017  
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2017 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Among the thousands of events commemorating is this conference, organized by the Leo Baeck Institute in Jerusalem, together with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Goethe University in Frankfurt, the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Hebrew University, the Institute for the History of the German Jews in Hamburg, the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, Tel Aviv University and the Minerva Institute for German History, Tel Aviv University. 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's publication of Martin Luther's 95 theses. Topics ranged from the impact of the Reformation on 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish in the Empire through the impact of the Reformation on Jewish reform movements in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to conversion and conversional activities among Jews by Lutheran churches, to the developments in Lutheran German theology during the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 purified 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 both a sworn and dangerous enemy, not to least because of the attraction of "purified" Christianity and of assimilation into *Deutschtum*, and 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 of how 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 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 Jews authors were quoted by Lutheran theologians.

The final paper of the panel was given by CLEMENS SCHMIDT (Leipzig), who added a Huguenot and New England Puritan perspectives on Jewish history. Huguenots and Puritans, like Jews, viewed exile 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. Some are , such as 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 real of Wissenschaft during the 19<sup>th</sup>

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 PROF. SUSANNAH HESCHEL (Hanover). Heschel managed to capture all 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. On the contrary, often 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. Given the obsessive discussion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century German literature of Jewish men as emasculated, Jesus, too, could be a source of intersex, like all Jewish males. Jews and Judaism therefore play a major role in the Protestant imagination. One can argue, Heschel claims, that much of 19<sup>th</sup> 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 morning session of the second day of the conference 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 a purification of Christianity and its return to its Jewish roots,

while others were more apprehensive and 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. One of her important contributions was her ability to demonstrate how much Jews knew about the Reformation as it was unfolding.

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 a religion of social justice, 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. Since others converted to Judaism in the seventeenth century and were not punished, 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 toleration 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 (Wroclaw), 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 into Eastern Europe. The three panelists looked at interactions between Jews and Protestants in Polish and Czech towns over time. ANAT VATURI (Haifa) began the panel in early modern Cracow, dissecting the everyday interactions of Jews and Protestants, two religious minorities in a Catholic town. YVONNE KLEINMANN (Halle) delved into 18th century Rzeszow and the relations among Jews, Catholics and Protestants there, while 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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, and how this was almost unavoidable, considering his position as cantor in the Lutheran church in the 17th century.

The rest of the final day of the conference was devoted to the tumultuous and tragic developments in Protestant-Jewish relations in Germany over the last 200 years.

The seventh panel, "Hebraism and the Science of Judaism" focused on German research into Judaism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. OFRI ILANY (Tel Aviv) looked at how early 19<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> century, but following the Napoleonic Wars, became increasingly popular. The promoters of this figure intended to develop a new Christian nationalist theology.. 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. These Protestant scholars related to the Karaites, who rejected Talmudic Judaism and based their teaching on the Old Testament alone, and whom they saw as being proto-Protestants. Finally, WALTER HOMOLKA (Potsdam) addressed the similarities between Jewish and Protestant German research into the "real" Jesus. In both religions, he proposed, the Historical Jesus was a figure that could be appropriated for different causes. While Jewish scholars saw this research as a way of gaining acceptance in the Christian German society, Protestant scholars (except for Julius

Wellhausen) struggled to balance the recognition of Jesus' Jewishness with the need to maintain Christian exclusivity that denied 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 ephemeral 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. They slowly developed an anti-anti-Semitic attitude, which did not prevent them from adhering to supersessionist and conversional attitudes toward Jews. In the lively discussion following the panel participants rejected David Goldhagen's simplistic view of the direct line leading from Luther to Hitler. Still there were enough anti-Semitic elements in traditional Protestantism, to supply Nazis with a religious legitimacy.

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 between 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. Tillich strove after the Second World War to develop a Protestant theology that was attached to neither place nor time. Prophetic Judaism alone, he even argued, can save the church from pagan attachment to the soil. He addressed the notion of guilt not as an individual responsibility but as a permanent new foundation of the church. 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. She offered a detailed chronology of the activities and pronouncements of the Lutheran Commission on Church and Judaism over the 40 years which led to the Declaration of Dribergen (1990). IRENE AUE-BEN-DAVID (Jerusalem) analyzed in her paper the motives of historian Selma Stern for her biography *Josel von Rosheim* – her first German publication after the Shoa (1959) and her migration to the United States. Based on this Aue-Ben-David examined the encounter of Luther and von Rosheim in the book as well as the reactions of the West-German public to the book. Finally, JOHANNES BECKE (Heidelberg) and JENNY HESTERMANN (Frankfurt) presented a joint paper on contemporary attitudes of Lutherans toward Judaism and the reconfigurations of theology in the shadow of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Focusing on *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste*, they 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, then, 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. The interconnected between Lutheran Pietism and German Jews were addressed; 500 years of conversional politics and their (mostly) failures and (a few) successes; the crucial role of Protestant scholarly enterprise, from 16<sup>th</sup> century Hebraism to early twentieth century debate about Jewish prophetic universalism, and, of course, the tragic beginning and ends of the German-Jewish religious dialogue on German soil. Luther, like most Christians and all Christian theologians, was committed to a supersessionist theology. Prior to his disappointment with the Jewish refusal to accept his purified Christian message, however, Luther was happy to remind his listeners and readers of the Jewish origins of their belief system and of Jesus' own Judaism. Just as his writings were used by anti-Semites to promote the physical annihilation of the Jews, it is possible to use Luther's writings on the Jews to develop a theology of understanding and mutual interest. Obviously, this theology, as recent developments in German Lutheran theology make clear, can only be shaped by the horrors of the last century. But the long history of Protestant engagements with Judaism also enable alternative interpretations and a better future.

#### Conference Overview:

Sunday, 12 February 2017

Opening Remarks and Greetings

**Shmuel Feiner** (Jerusalem), **Moshe Sluhovsky** (Jerusalem), **Christian Wiese** (Frankfurt),  
**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** (Hanover)

*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** (Vienna)

*“[...] 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 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Rzeszów*

**Johannes Gleixner** (Munich)

*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)

*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)