

11-25-2020

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Recommended Citation

Telushkin, Joseph (2020) "Martin Luther and the Jews: Passion over Ethics," *Consensus*: Vol. 41: Iss. 2, Article 3.

DOI: 10.51644/WJUP3261

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol41/iss2/3>

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Martin Luther and the Jews: Passion over Ethics

Joseph Telushkin¹

I am profoundly honoured and feel a profound sense of responsibility. This is a very unique sort of conference. Forgive me, if at certain points in my speech I am not as fluent as I normally am. I will be checking my notes more. I have worked out the speech very, very carefully and, I hope, wisely. I hope I do not make too many mistakes. I am assuming since I am not a Lutheran scholar, and I am surrounded by Lutheran scholars, that I will be happy if people disagree, maybe, with my interpretations. I do not want to say something incorrect factually though. Even that, probably, you have disagreements.

When Israel was created in 1948, air travel was not nearly as good as it is now. The trek by plane from Israel to the United States, for example, was very protracted. People were not coming over quite as often. In 1949 a major figure in the Israeli government came to the United States. It was not that common to travel so a big group greeted him at what was then called Idlewild, present day JFK Airport. As he came out of the plane, one of the members of the group said to him, “So, tell us what the situation is like in Israel in one word.” He said, “Good.” Then somebody said, “Okay, in two words.” He says, “Not good.” In a sense, any time we are going to speak about what is going on in the world or even in the talk today, as was made so clear by the Bishop in her opening comments.

Growing up as I did in a Jewish context, my impressions of Martin Luther are not as positive because you are familiar with another part. But, actually, a title came into my head. I come up with a lot more titles than books. People say, ‘You have written a lot of books.’ You have no idea how many more titles I have. I thought of a title for a biography from a Lutheran perspective about Luther, called *Flawed Diamond*. It just struck me as that –because in a sense that is what we are speaking about.

What I want to do before I get into the story of Luther and the Jews is I want to make a number of sort of overriding comments about antisemitism and its history in general. The word antisemitism, of course, was a euphemism created by a man named Wilhelm Marr, who really disliked Jews. It was intended to replace the word *Judenhaus* (Jew hate / Jew hater)² because he wanted to make it sound like it was something more scientific; which has often led people in the Arab world to claim, “How could we be antisemites?” And many of them are not. But many of them – certainly those who would like to see Israel destroyed – are. And they said, “How could we be antisemites? We are Semites.” But it never had anything to do with the designation “Semite”. That is why in all of my books about it I have adopted a different spelling for the word. I just write “antisemitism” or “antisemite” as one word, not “anti- (dash) capital “S” [i.e. “anti-Semitism,” “anti-Semite” (ed.)] – as if there was something distinctive, as if there was a distinctive entity of Semites that it was being directed against.

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² Literally, the term refers to tenement housing where Nazis housed Jews during World War II. Figuratively, however, the term acts as a transferred epithet for hatred of Jews, based on ill-treatment assumed by the word. (ed.)

What has been striking historically about antisemitism has been how widespread it is. Very few non-Jews and, for that matter, not that many Jews are aware of just how small a people the Jews are. The Jews today constitute about one-fifth of one percent of the world's population. A friend of mine was once on a plane and he was speaking to a woman next to him who seemed quite knowledgeable about Jewish matters. She was not Jewish but she knew quite a bit and at a certain point he asked her, "How many Jews do you think there are in the United States?" This was quite a number of years ago when the population in the U.S., which is today well over 300 million, was only about 200 million. She said, "Well, you know, they always say America is Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. I know the Jews are the smallest group. I would estimate that there must be 30 million Jews in the United States." He told her there were fewer than six million. She responded, "Well, then, they all live in my city." Because Jews have tended to have a disproportionate impact and make oversized contributions – and those who do not like Jews would say oversized negative contributions – but disproportionate to their numbers. So, I want to first speak about the universality of antisemitism, the depth of antisemitism, and its permanence.

When I say universality, Jews at one point or another have been expelled from many of the societies in which they lived in. The most famous expulsion, of course, was the expulsion from Spain, which five years later, was followed by the expulsion from Portugal. Fewer people today are aware that the Jews were expelled from England, an expulsion that lasted for 400 years. Jews were expelled in 1290 from England. What makes that so interesting is that means that when Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*, there were no Jews living in England, and, no Jews had lived in England at that point for over 300 years. It shows how negative stereotypes can persist for such a long period, even when the Jews are not around. Jews were then restricted in Russia to what was called the Pale of Settlement.

The depth of antisemitism is suggested by the fact that words entered the English language which are widely known among non-Jews and Jews that are used by any group to describe terrible campaigns against them. For example, Jews were confined to certain areas of cities, which were known as ghettos. Now we see the term commonly used to apply to other groups as well. Attacks were often made on Jewish neighborhoods in the town. These attacks would sometimes lead to murder, rape, robbery and those attacks were known as *pogroms*.

Obviously, the attempt by the Nazis to wipe out all the Jews has two words for it: the term, "genocide," which is an attempt to wipe out a group, and the term, "Holocaust." More recently, a term that people fear greatly is the term "suicide bombers." People might forget but this term started with attacks against Jews. These 'homicide bombers' were willing to die, as a by-product of their killing. That is how important it was to them. That is how the term came in, and then the permanence of antisemitism was that Jews, though they were a minority group, often became an obsession to the people who disliked them.

At one point, to the Roman Empire and then, of course, for much of the history of the Jewish-Christian encounter, Jews were often perceived as very great enemies. I want to emphasize something: relations today are better than they ever have been, which is not to say there has been a total elimination of antisemitism in Christianity. But there has been such a dramatic change, and a lot of Jews – particularly, European Jews recall the past history of Christian antisemitism that a lot of Jews have difficulty dealing with. I said to them, "You know, you have to recognize (that) in different ages different things happen." There is a real reaching out.

I would say that one of the things that epitomizes this is the very fact that I have been called here to speak at an event like this. Martin Luther probably would not have invited me to present my views about Judaism, certainly not in the way that I am planning to present them.

So obviously, the Jews became the obsession of the Nazis, and, simultaneously, it became the obsession also of the communist world. Stalin, fortuitously for the Jewish community and, I would say, probably fortuitously for many of the people in Russia died less than a week before he was planning to put a group of Jewish doctors on trial. The doctors were being charged with trying to poison the Soviet leadership. From the documents that were subsequently uncovered, they were obviously going to be found guilty, and then Stalin was going to exile all of Russia's Jews to Siberia because he wanted "to protect them" from the murderous rage that would then happen with the Soviet people. Clearly today, to much of the Muslim world, Jews are seen as a particularly vicious enemy even though we (again, I emphasize) are a very, very small people. The Jewish population today in relation to the Muslim world is about one percent, not more (it is about one percent of the size of the Muslim world) and, obviously, Jews tend to do least well in extremist ideologies.

By and large, most Jews that you meet today are not religiously observant, but they always still identify as Jews because in Judaism peoplehood is also a part of the religion. The first convert, whose process of conversion was described at length in the Bible, is a woman named Ruth. This in itself is interesting because in the Bible, much more often than not, males play major roles. But you have the five books of the Torah and the Scrolls.³ So, two of the Scrolls have no plot lines (the Song of Songs... no, actually, the Song of Songs does have somewhat of a plot line), the Lamentations, which is Jeremiah's lament over the destruction of the Temple, and Ecclesiastes, which is in some ways the most pessimistic book in the Bible ("all is vanity").

In the three that do have somewhat story lines, the central characters are women – and they are very atypical women. Esther, a Jewish girl who wins a beauty contest, marries a non-Jewish king and ends up saving the whole Jewish people. Any year, whenever I speak about the story of Esther to a Jewish audience, I say, "Number 1: she is the central character. You know, her cousin Mordecai plays a very great role, but as the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to note, "the book is called Esther; it is not called Esther and Mordechai." She is the sort of Jew that Jews would often write off. She wins a beauty contest - not the most common aspiration of the Jewish community, or at least not one that is verbally expressed, maybe secretly it is. She then goes and marries a non-Jewish king, but she ends up saving the Jewish people, which means that we should not write anybody off. Then, in the Song of Songs, the unnamed Shepherdess who is so loyal in her love to the Shepherd to whom she is not at that point married. Then, of course, there is Ruth, who is a Moabite woman. Ruth embraces and also marries a Jewish man, and then, subsequent to her husband's death, becomes a Jew. She does so with a four-word declaration in Hebrews. (And, by the way, some of you were looking at me; I just want to make it clear, I am going to soon get to the topic of Martin Luther, okay – and I want to dwell on happier things for a moment than the aspects of Luther.) She says, "Your people shall be my people; your G-d shall be my G-d." That really has been in some ways the paradox within Jewish life – that peoplehood and religion are so intertwined.

³In Hebrew, the collection of five writings, is called the Megillot, literally translated as Scrolls. (ed.)

So many Jews, who today consider themselves Jewish, are not at all religious, and, as a result, a lot of the theories about antisemitism started being questioned. “Is it really based on a reaction to Judaism?” I believe that it is. I believe that until about 1800 the world that the Jews inhabited was overwhelmingly a religious world. Most Jews were in Muslim or Christian societies and antisemitism was focused on the religion of the Jews. By and large, a Jew who was willing to give up his or her religion could be accepted. I mean, just to give you a dramatic example, Isaac D’Israeli converted his son Benjamin in the nineteenth century in England to Christianity to evade some of the consequences of antisemitism. His son, Benjamin D’Israeli becomes Prime Minister of England, which is quite remarkable because he basically kept the name, Benjamin the Jew. A lot of Jews in the United States – I assume probably it happened in Canada – changed their names to make them sound like less Jewish names. Clearly, the antisemitism was directed against the religion of the Jews.

As nationalism started to become more significant, antisemitism increasingly became directed towards the peoplehood of the Jews, which is why the contemporary expression often of it is anti-Zionism. So, people came up with other reasons like: how many of you have ever heard it said, “Jews were hated in the medieval world because they were money-lenders?” So, the first question is, ‘Is that true?’ and, yes, a disproportionate percentage of moneylenders were Jews. Did people have reason to hate moneylenders? Nobody here will be shocked to learn that, yes, they do.

I once saw a thirteenth century document in France that showed that interest rates had reached 43 percent per annum. How would you like holding a mortgage at 43%? But, in order to assume that that is the reason that Jews were hated, you would have to make the following assumption. Jews were regular members of European societies; then they got together at some annual retreat of Jewish leaders and said, “The real money to be made is in money-lending;” whereupon antisemitism erupted. Obviously, what I just said is ridiculous. What happened is that Jews were hated. Because they were hated, they were forbidden to practice other professions. They were forced into moneylending. Once they became moneylenders, it exacerbated but did not cause antisemitism.

There is another problem with the economic theory of antisemitism. Jews have tended to encounter the least antisemitism in capitalist societies where they have been most affluent. When I speak to American Jewish audiences. I ask them, “How many of you know yourselves to be more affluent than your great grandparents?” And every hand goes up. Then I ask, “Did your great-grandparents encounter less or more antisemitism than you encounter?” Now again, we are very nervous right now in the Jewish community about sudden rising tides of antisemitism, but obviously it has been far less. Jews are often used as scapegoats. People blame Jews in order to gain power. Many years ago, Lucy Davidowicz wrote a history of the Holocaust called *The War against the Jews*, and she made the point that Hitler did not gain power by blaming the Jews. He gained power in order to murder the Jews. Have a look at the last statement Hitler made before he committed suicide. He wanted to keep up the campaign against the Jews. But the scapegoat theory has another fallacy to it. It still does not explain why the Jews can unite the far right and the far left? Groups that hate each other and can find almost nothing they agree on? You can suddenly, strangely enough, unite them when it comes to hatred of the Jews. Maurice Samuel, a Jewish scholar who wrote about antisemitism years ago, once said, “To say that a man has hallucinations when he is hungry makes sense. To say that a man has hallucinations when he is hungry only about the Jews does not make sense.” This still doesn’t account for why the Jews are targeted. After

World War II, they came out with a whole series of studies called *The Authoritarian Personality*. That was the lead volume, and they were trying to psychologically explain antisemitism, which, not surprisingly, came up with the thesis that antisemites basically were people with fascistic personalities, were rigid, and all sorts of other things. This was done to try and assure Jews that anybody who disliked them was probably psychologically sick which, obviously, we would like to believe. But, do I know for a fact that of the thousands of people who saved Jews during the war, all of them were necessarily models of mental health? We all would like to believe that people who do not like us have something psychologically wrong with them, but can the tens of millions of Europeans, the millions of people who voted Hitler into office, can we comfortably say that they were all mentally ill? So, the thesis years ago (that) my friend Dennis Prager and I offered is that antisemitism ultimately is a reaction against Judaism's values that challenge the world.

The three pillars of Judaism are G-d, Torah, and peoplehood. Martin Luther was not one of those who was aroused to anger at the Jews because of their notions of peoplehood. For Luther, it was the Jewish concept of G-d which excluded the possibility of Jesus being a God and, interestingly enough, and this is less focused on - the Jewish concept of law. Luther, as I understand it (I am going to keep saying as I understand it; you can point out to me if I am wrong), very much stood in the Pauline tradition in which the law was thought of as a curse. The law in Judaism is not thought of as a curse but, in Luther's view, it really was because people would inevitably break the law, and that would cause them to be a bit damned, which is, of course, Paul's position. Certainly, it comes across if you read Saint Paul. I most strikingly remember the quotes from Galatians where, basically, it amounts to the fact that if you break the law you will be damned.

Now, how does Judaism deal with that issue? It deals with it in a very different sort of way. It acknowledges, already in the Bible, that there is no person so righteous who will never sin. So, then you have to deal with it in one of two ways. Will that sin damn you in G-d's eyes and damn you permanently? Or is there some mode of rectification for the sin? You find very pronounced in Judaism the development of the notion of *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is the term for repentance in Hebrew and it was very much believed. You see sinners in the Bible, people who have done wrong things. You are pointing out in your conference that Martin Luther was a great man, but he had done some great wrongs. He is certainly not the only one who has done it, you know. Look at King David in the Bible. There are problematic issues even with other Biblical characters, and the notion that repentance can change G-d's attitude is very pronounced whether it is in the case of David or for that matter. The longest religious service in Judaism is the Yom Kippur service, the Day of Atonement service. You are pretty much in the synagogue for the whole day, and they have readings from the Torah. But those of you who might be familiar with the Jewish liturgy know that in addition to the readings from the Torah, there are also readings from the Prophets. The central reading from the Prophets on the Day of Atonement is from the book of Jonah. Jonah tells the story of a Jewish prophet that G-d tells to go preach to the people of Nineveh, which was a negative city from the Jewish experience, and tell them (that) in 40 days Nineveh is going to be destroyed. Jonah goes there even though he does not want to do it. He does not want to preach to them. He does not want those people to repent. He does not want G-d to forgive those people. Jonah tries to run away and G-d ends up putting him on a boat. Then a whole series of escapades happen, and Jonah gets swallowed by some sort of gargantuan fish and he gets spit out. He goes to Nineveh and, tells the people of Nineveh to repent. They are then forgiven. So, there

is a notion that you have to repent. Now the trick is in learning to be a good person. I once read a comment by an American humorist writer, not a Jew, Edgar Watson Howe. He said it is harder to repent of sins before we commit them than after. That is really the idea. How do you get people to anticipate in advance? It is something I am working on, I am writing on now, what I call moral imagination – you know, to imagine the enormity of something before you do it – and therefore come away and not do it.

In the case of Luther, one of his distinctive features is, Luther actually starts out as a philosemite, not a commonly used term. One of the books I want to write is a book on philosemitism, which Jews underrate – the number of non-Jews who have been very supportive of Jews in the Jewish community and for whom one has boundless admiration. I will just give you one brief example. Teddy Roosevelt was the President of the United States in the early 1900s. In 1895, he was the Police Commissioner of New York City, which already had a substantial Jewish population. An antisemitic preacher named Hermann Ahlwardt visited New York City. There was a big German community there that was often somewhat hostile to the Jews. You probably had comparable things here in Canada. Roosevelt wrote in his autobiography that the Jewish community was very unhappy about this and they came to him as Police Commissioner, and they said, “First of all, do not give him a permit to speak,” and, secondly, “even if he does speak, do not give him any police protection.” Roosevelt replied, “First of all I do not know if that would be legal, and, secondly, even if legal I think it would be unwise. You will just turn him into a martyr. Our goal should be to make him ridiculous.” Roosevelt wrote that he assigned 20 policemen to guard this preacher; 20 policemen to be at every one of his speeches; and all 20 of the policemen were Jews. Ahlwardt was giving his antisemitic tirade surrounded by Jewish cops. This is an example, I would say, of philosemitic behavior.

So, Luther starts out as a philosemite. Here is Luther writing in 1523 in his essay, “That Jesus Christ was born a Jew.” This is quite a remarkable statement to be coming from a Catholic Priest as he was then. Luther writes, “If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads governing and teaching the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings. They have done little else than deride them and seize their property.” He went on to say how he really would have preferred anything rather than to become a Christian. This was a philosemitic statement, but it had a price tag attached to it, which was not obvious to people at first. Luther really did seem friendly to the Jews, but part of his friendship was rooted in the idea implicit in what he said, that if the leaders of the Catholic Church had treated the Jews differently, they would have converted. And so, Luther really did advocate a much more tolerant policy towards the Jews as he spent the next years. It was not a major effort of Luther's, but it was a significant attempt to convert Jews. But Jews did not convert and that is what turned Luther with great anger against the Jews. That is when he came out in 1543 with his essay “On the Jews and Their Lies,” which had catastrophic results. He wanted eight measures to be taken against the Jews. 1) burn all synagogues; 2) destroy Jewish homes; 3) confiscate the Jews' holy books, including the Bibles; 4) forbid Rabbis to teach; 5) forbid Jews to travel; 6) forbid Jews to charge interest on loans to non-Jews; and confiscate Jewish property; 7) force Jews to do physical labor; and 8) expel the Jews from provinces where Christians live. I think we see that, with the exception of murdering all the Jews, where Luther was heading.

I remember I once read something by the historian, Roland Bainton, in his biography of Luther, *Here I Stand*. He says that maybe it would have been better if (because this was written quite near the end of Luther's life. Luther died in 1546 and he wrote this in 1543) Luther had died before he had written that. Then trying to find some good in it, he says, 'but in a way he was sort of anticipating Zionism, you know, getting Jews back into doing physical labor.' Jews often were not allowed to own land. Land was taken from them but I think that is somewhat naïve. I do not think that there was some hidden hope for any redemption there. Now, again, what caused this great animosity? It really was a disagreement over faith. The Jewish denial of Jesus as being the Messiah, as being a divine being, and the Jewish insistence on the supremacy of deeds. Remember, Luther (it depends on the way you could read it – I was discussing this with someone last night – but how you read what Luther said. My impression from my readings of Luther, and again here I am speaking in the face of an audience that is read Luther much more carefully than me) is that Luther had very much a tendency towards Paul.

Within the writings of the New Testament, the figure it seems to me who had tendencies more in the opposite direction of Paul was Jesus' brother James. The Epistle of James is a small epistle. Nevertheless, James insists on the significance of deeds. How does he put it? Faith without works is dead. So, he said the proof is, I will give you an example drawn from a totally different world. The word "love" as divorced from deeds I find to be a meaningless term, and I will tell you why I say that. Do you know that a large percentage of parents who have abused their children actually claim that they love their children? I have heard people defend that, "Well they do." I said, but if there is no difference in the behavior between parents that say they love their children and mistreat them and parents who love their children and treat them well, then you have taken away any meaning from the word "love" because if a person who acts abominably to somebody can still be considered to have loved that person, so then what does love mean? Love becomes some amorphous emotion. So, in a sense, that is what the Jewish issue was. If you have faith, that has to manifest itself in deeds – which is why there has always been the Jewish problematic.

I am curious because, here is where I am attentive to what I say and cautious in what I say because I have heard people quote things from Jewish sources that do not sound so nice at all, but I happen to know that within the Jewish tradition the way those sources are interpreted do not yield the worst possible explanation. I am assuming there are different ways that Christians understand it. But here is a letter that Luther wrote to his close associate, Philip Melanchthon. In his letter to Melanchthon he writes, "If you are a preacher of grace, do not preach a fictitious grace but a true grace. G-d does not work salvation for fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin vigorously. But, even more vigorously believe, and delight in Christ who is victor over sin, death, and the world. It is sufficient that we recognize through the wealth of G-d's glory, the Lamb who bears the sins of the world. From this, sin does not sever us even if thousands and thousands of times in one day we should fornicate or murder.

I must admit, I have never understood that thousands of times in one day we should fornicate – this was even before Hugh Hefner [founder of *Playboy Magazine* (ed.)] – or murder. The point of the matter is, if you really do have faith in who Jesus was you would not do that. Again, I am giving it from a Jewish perspective; so, understand that it is not for me to tell you how you should believe. If Luther had said everybody is going to sin but he then

restricted his explanations of sins or his examples of sins to somewhat more minor types of sins, of course we would say it is all true.

There are problems with the Sermon on the Mount. For example, “He who looks upon a woman lustfully is as if he had slept with her or committed adultery.” That is more understandable, because that is a very, very common human tendency. But, murder? That someone could find a way to be forgiven? I do not know. Maybe, if people knew in advance that if you committed murder you could never be forgiven – maybe that would make them less likely to commit murder. Why should we worry that much about afterwards? And then, if their victims had the wrong faith? However, according to Luther you could end up with the weird situation that a murderer who then gets the right faith will be saved but the person whom he murdered who did not have the right faith will not be. So that became one of the problematic teachings that separated Luther very, very much from the Jews.

So, what was the Jewish attitude? The Jewish attitude will come probably as a little shocking because while faith in G-d is very important, the keeping of the law is in some ways even more important. There is a radical statement in the Talmud attributed to G-d. But even though it is attributed to G-d, it is not said anywhere in the Bible. G-d is imagined to be saying, “Better if the Jewish people abandoned me and kept my commandments, for the keeping of those commandments will ultimately bring them back to me. It is like the old joke: a Lutheran minister was friends with a rabbi, and when they parted from each other, the minister said to the rabbi, “Keep the faith, rabbi” and the rabbi answered, “Keep the commandments.” In a sense, that is really what the idea was in the commandments. In Christianity, this idea was very influential and particularly in Paul's understanding of it. Jesus' sacrificial death was necessary to atone. The rabbis confronted the same problem when the temple was destroyed. And the teaching in the Talmud is, now that we no longer have the Temple G-d will have to accept acts of *Gemach*, acts of loving kindness, as purposes of atonement. Now I told that joke, “Keep the commandments or keep the faith” - if the conflict could only remain that lighthearted. But for Luther the conversion of the Jews was very important, as it was for many early Christians, and it was not unrelated to the fact that the Jews were the people who actually knew Jesus and rejected the claims being made for him.

The joke I tell in the United States – I do not think it will have as much resonance here because he is not as significant a figure, but – imagine in the United States if everybody believed that Jimmy Carter, the former president, was the Messiah. It is a bit far-fetched what I am saying. Imagine everybody in the United States believed Jimmy Carter was the Messiah except for the citizens of a small city in Georgia called Plains where Carter comes from. How would the rest of the citizenry react to the people of Plains, Georgia? Either people would say, “Listen, if we who know him only a little think he is the Messiah, but they who know him well say he is not, maybe he really is not.” Or, alternatively, “If we who know him only a little can recognize that he is the Messiah, they who know him well must assuredly know that he is the Messiah. If they deny it, it must be because they are allies of Satan.” Unfortunately, for the Jews, the second interpretation became more common, and this explains an unusual feature of medieval antisemitism.

Normally, when people hate a group, they make things up. Even if they are making up stuff, they are normal sorts of claims such as, they will cheat you in business, they will kill you or all sorts of things. But the claims that were made against the Jews were so out of sync with any reality, but they were, indeed, claims that you would only make against people who you assumed to be allies of Satan. I will take the most famous one, the blood libel, that Jews

kill non-Jews and drink their blood. It is interesting because this was very widely believed. Tens of thousands of Jews were murdered in Europe on the basis of this accusation, and it was totally false. It was not based on any truth.

An early cultural Zionist thinker, made an interesting comment. He said, “There is only one good thing you can say about the blood libel. Normally, when a lot of people say something about you, you start to question yourself. Can I alone be right and the whole world wrong?” And he said, “The blood libel will prove that possible. Yes, the whole world could believe that, or very large segments of the world, but anyone who was Jewish knew that Jews never would kill somebody in a ritual and drink their blood. In fact, interestingly there is an irony. The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, was – as far as I know – the first book in any society that forbade the consumption of any blood, including animal blood. Anybody who is familiar with the laws of *Kashrut* (knows) you have to drain the blood. The blood is the life. Interestingly, and maybe not surprisingly, there was a country where consumption of blood was not at all uncommon, which was Germany. They had these blood burgers – not burgers – blood sausage, which I found really was blood. That was forbidden (for Jews to eat), and yet many people could (not?) believe it.

That is the reason I am so resentful of the attempts now to resurrect a similar sort of accusation against Israel of genocide. I am a big proponent of a two-state solution. I want there to be a separation of Jews and Arabs where they do not want to live together. I think that would be immensely helpful. But, to accuse Israel of genocide? We know what genocide means. We know that by the end of World War II, two-thirds of the Jews who lived in Europe were dead. The increase in population of Palestinians living under Jewish rule since 1948 has been seven-fold. So, it is very, very dangerous when such things are said; and, the other medieval accusations that Jews poisoned non-Jews.

In 1610, the medical faculty at the University of Vienna certified as its official opinion that Jewish law required Jewish doctors to kill one out of ten of their Christian patients. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be in a Jewish doctor's office with nine people in front of you? Unfortunately, one of the people who propagated that belief was, indeed, Martin Luther, who said Jewish doctors are so proficient they can kill somebody with a poison in an hour, in a few hours, or even in 10 or 20 years.

By the way, in this statement of Luther's we find another distinctive theme of antisemitism, which is that usually when people dislike a group, they often claim that the group they dislike are their mental inferiors. You speak to a white racist and you know the sort of garbage you are going to start hearing coming out of their mouths. It has been done with groups throughout history, and I believe there has been a lot of disrespect in the United States. Non-Jews have rarely accused Jews of being stupid. They tend to see Jews as smart, but using their intelligence in a malevolent manner. So, normally, what would be regarded as a virtue gets converted in the minds of the non-Jews into a bad thing, which probably was somewhat true of Luther's beliefs. Why would Luther have minded if the Jews did not convert? One, because they were of the people of Jesus; and, two, because he thought they were smart and they might therefore use their intellect to turn other people away from Christianity. I have a thesis that there are two sorts of people who think Jews are smarter than everybody else: antisemites and Jews.

Jews tend not to be the most modest group in the world. As I said, one out of every 500 people in the world is Jewish. Statistically, one Jew should win one Nobel Prize every 30 years. In any given year, however, if a Jew does not win a Nobel Prize, the Jewish community

immediately assumes it is antisemitism. They tell a joke that a Jew is traveling alone on the trans-Siberian railroad in Russia in the early twentieth century. Suddenly, the train pulls to a stop. An officer in the Czar's army gets on the train. The train starts to move. He grabs the Jew by the lapels and says, "Tell me, why are you Jews brighter than everybody else?" The Jewish guy does not know what to answer. He is nervous. "This guy is, like, holding on to me." He says, "I think it is because of the herring we eat." The train resumes moving. The Jew takes out some herring and starts eating it. The officer asks, "How much do you want for that herring?" The Jew says, "20 Rubles." The officer gives him 20 Rubles. Normally, it is an enormous amount of money. He takes one bite of the herring and then he says to the Jew, "This is ridiculous. In Moscow I could have bought all that herring for a few Kopeks." The Jew says, "You see, it is working already." But you had the poison. I am dealing with these situations in a calm atmosphere where we are all joking around. The accusation of Jews as poisoners again led to tremendous amounts of deaths of Jews. Jews were blamed for the Black Plague in Europe. Whole Jewish communities were killed. You found, in Switzerland, any Jewish child over the age of seven was considered to be knowledgeable and complicit in the plot of spreading the blood poisoning and killed. Any Jewish child under the age of seven was allowed to live and was converted to Christianity.

I want to speak now for a few minutes about an issue related to that which enables me to see Luther, I would say, in kindly or in somewhat more kindly terms and then, also, to offer a suggestion. There is something else I keep mentioning, other projects I am working on. I have a theory that when people make ethics secondary, even if the primary value that they are propagating is a good one, it ends up having catastrophic results. I want to set Luther in a balance of five different people over whom I want to offer this thesis. Obviously, the problem I am presenting, again from my Jewish perspective, is that Luther made faith central, and not the ethical. That is how he came up with if you have the right faith, you will be saved, even if thousands of times in one day you murdered. Faith is an extraordinarily important value but if it is the most important value and it overrides the ethical, then bad things will be advocated in its name. There was a reason why - and Luther is not responsible for the Nazis - but there was a reason why Hitler liked to publicly align himself with Luther and why Nazis reprinted his works. However, not all Germans were taken in. One of them I want to speak about is one of my heroes, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But I will give you four other examples.

Emmanuel Kant was considered the supreme ethicist philosopher of Germany. Kant had his area where he thought one value was supreme above all others - truth. Kant actually offers the following example: "If somebody runs by you and (he actually says this), and then another person runs by clearly intending to murder that person - he has a dagger drawn or whatever - and asks you where the first person ran, you are forbidden to lie. He writes about this in an essay called, "On a supposed right to lie from beneficent motives." He forbids it. Interestingly, Kant was trying to establish an ethic that did not depend on G-d. Kant personally believed in G-d, but he felt that it could not just be a commanded ethic so he came up with a series of what he called categorical imperatives. Sissela Bok, a philosopher who wrote a book called *Lying*, analyzed Kant's statement. She said there is no question that according to Kant, a German ship captain who, during World War II, would be hiding Jews on his ship - if the ship was stopped by the Nazis and they demanded to know if he was carrying any Jews - there is no question that Kant would have said that he is forbidden to lie. I do not know if Kant had any really close personal relationships, but I have wondered about that because the fact that he could so easily dispense - look there are people, not everybody for

example has children. Kant, as far as I know, was not in any romantic attachments, and did not have children. I think that anybody who has children would think, anyone who would say, "I would rather not lie and let my child be killed," we would think of as a somewhat irresponsible parent. But what further convinced me that Kant has been vastly overrated is another example, and this is far less known of Kant. It is only because I was so curious about how morality acted out in his personal life (that I discovered this fact about Kant.). Kant was a believer in capital punishment. I am very limited, but in certain circumstances, I also think that that can be just. I know the prevailing view is that it is never right. But I do think that in certain situations I can imagine it. Kant had certain exceptions. Two notable exceptions, one of which I can go along with. He did not think that someone who killed somebody in a duel should be executed. I would say if the other party really had agreed to the duel, okay. I think there is a case to be made for that. But the second, and this is not widely known: a mother who kills her child, if the child was born out of wedlock. Kant believed that a child who was born out of wedlock had no right to exist. He believed – to use his language – the child had stolen into the country like contraband goods, and, therefore, there was to be certainly no capital punishment. I do not know if he thought there should be any punishment at all. So, I thought, look what Kant established in the minds of people: two very terrible teachings, very useful to totalitarian countries. The first is you cannot lie to authorities. The exaggerated respect for authorities, you cannot lie to them. Certainly, that would make the Nazis happy. The second one was he declared a class of people who had no right to live. Think about that - a child born out of wedlock who had done nothing wrong had no right to live. That also established the basis of it.

A second example – so it does not look like I am only looking to go after Christians – I will give you one of the Jewish teachings, which I was hurt by. It is maybe not as extreme as the last example I gave, and I could be accused of being unfair. I come from a background that was largely Hasidic. How many of you are familiar with the term Hasidic Jews? Okay. I certainly expected some people to raise their hand. The other side were the misnagdim, and the misnagdim were accused of being cold rationalists. The leading figure among the misnagdim was Rabbi Elijah of Vilna who was known as the Vilna Gaon. He felt that the highest value in Jewish life was Torah study. Many of you might be familiar that there are Jews who assert that that is the highest value and will spend many hours a day. But, as is the problem with most people when they have a favorite value, he took it to an extreme. What did he do in his extreme? In his commentary on the Book of Proverbs, he comments on a verse that refers to people of stout heart and he said, "Who is a man of stout heart? A man who believes that Torah study is the highest value there is and spends his whole life studying Torah. When his children come and say to him, "Abba, father, we have no food; father, we have no clothes; he does not listen to them, and he continues studying Torah." Again, on behalf of a good value, suddenly he is acting not as a very good parent. That is what happens when we make another value supreme. I will give two more examples, and then I want to say something about Bonhoeffer.

Another example is a man who is widely esteemed as one of the greatest or perhaps the greatest saint of the twentieth century, which was Gandhi. Gandhi was probably the second most famous person in the British Empire, in the British world. The most famous during World War II, I would say, was probably Churchill. Gandhi and Churchill did not have a particularly high view of each other. I will tell you one of the reasons why. Gandhi saw non-violence as always being the right. Now I want to be fair to him. He saw non-violent

resistance as always being the highest moral goal and the highest moral behavior. And indeed, he did practice non-violent resistance against the British and was willing to suffer. The British did some terrible things in India. On one famous occasion, they killed over 1,500 people. But Gandhi still advocated nonviolent resistance. Eventually, he also knew against whom he was advocating it. Eventually, it wore the British down and they really did get out of India. Gandhi, similarly advocated nonviolent resistance to the Jews of Germany, and in the light of Kristallnacht, he said if 5,000 German Jews were willing to die that it would melt Hitler's heart.

Years ago, I wrote a book, *A Code of Jewish Ethics*. One chapter in the book is on common sense. I remember my wife argued with me. She said it is not fair to call common sense an ethical value because if people do not have common sense it is not their fault. In order to be unethical you have to know what you are doing. I am saying not being smart enough to know the difference between good and bad – unless you actually are so functionally lacking (for example, having an IQ of 40) - becomes a moral offense at a certain point. I will tell you why I say that about Gandhi. It is not just because of what he advised the Jews, it is because in May of 1940 when France was about to fall, Canada had entered the war, but the U.S still had not entered the war and England was going to be left alone to fight against the Nazis. Gandhi, at that time, wrote a public letter to the soldiers of England to lay down your arms and let Hitler and Mussolini occupy your country – but do not surrender your souls. We know what would have happened. The Nazis would have occupied the country and people would not surrender. They would have been wiped out. So, again, he saw the value of non-violent resistance as eclipsing all other values.

My final example is a person who is probably not as well known here in Canada as he is in the United States. But he is a significant figure, a man named Robert E. Lee. Robert E. Lee was the general of the southern armies during the Civil War. Lincoln had actually offered Lee to be the overall commander of the American army but Lee said, "I can not take up arms against my people," and Lee, because of a sense of what he called honor and loyalty to the state of Virginia, became the General of the Confederate army. He was a very good General. He was very smart. Things that actually are normally a good thing can become a terrible thing. It is much worse to encounter a bad person who is smart because the person is going to use intelligence for malevolent purposes. In his personal dealings with people, you could say Lee was an honorable person. I do not know if black people thought he was such an honorable person. He was ultimately fighting a war on behalf of slavery and, because of his mastery of being a soldier, tens and tens of thousands of more soldiers died than would have died otherwise because of a notion. Lee himself questioned whether slavery was a good thing. But his sense of loyalty – he could have set out the war if he did not want to fight against his own people. But he took up arms on their behalf. When people make a value other than ethics their central value, no matter how good the other value is, it will end up getting perverted to bad means. Where do we go from here if we acknowledge that Luther was a mixed bag?

I did not even get into the other subject. I assume there are people here who are far more knowledgeable than me - but Luther's advocacy of extreme violence against the peasants. From what I understand, and here I might be being unfair to Luther, but from my reading of it, it seemed to me that when Luther advocated basically destroying the peasants in their peasant rebellion in the most violent way, when he ended up to use as I once saw quoted somewhere, when he preached pacifism to the peasants but not to the lords, he

betrayed a certain moral thing. As I have understood it, he did so in part because he was dependent on those German princes to support him. Luther was not the first person in history who ever thought the Papacy was doing terrible things. But the others generally got wiped out. Luther had allies, and maybe he felt he could not alienate those allies. Whatever it was, where do we go from here? Yet, for many people who are followers of Luther, he is a flawed diamond. You can only focus on the flaws and, in that case, where do you go? This is your Church. Or you can only focus on the diamonds, and in that case, where do you go? You ignore and have no motive to improve. But then, you had people who did want to improve.

One of the people whose lives, from the time I have learned about it - was it Eric Metaxas who came out with a biography of Bonhoeffer - I have been profoundly moved. So, we have models of other people that we can also follow. We can be followers of Luther, but not necessarily in every way. You are blessed in a sense with the fact that Luther is regarded as a very holy figure, but he's not regarded as a figure whose every word is divine. Jews would have more problems with biblical teachings because the words of the Torah are regarded as divine. Muslims believe that the words that came out from Muhammad were divine. First of all, Luther had a lot more words. Are not the collected works of Luther about 100 volumes? In that regard, I do envy him. I cannot come out with that. Maybe the world should envy him. I cannot come out with that many books.

Bonhoeffer was, obviously, a German who had grown up his whole life in Germany and already had come out quite anti-Nazi. His life was in danger, and everybody was relieved when he accepted a position at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Then, after he accepted that position, he went back to Germany in 1939. He went back during the most dangerous times and was willing to accept martyrdom. The Nazis did not kill him immediately. They arrested him. Then they kept him alive for a while. He said, "Only those who cry out for the Jews may sing Gregorian chants." He was really challenging because the Lutheran Church in Germany was not willing to stand up to Hitler. One of Luther's less edifying teachings, in my mind, was that he did grant such powers to princes, to worldly rulers.

I remember - and this is not a Lutheran I am speaking about here - years ago, Billy Graham the famous American evangelist went to Russia. The Russian evangelicals were moved. It was exciting that Russians had let him in. He spoke in church and he said to the people who were looking for hope and encouragement, "You have to listen to your masters. You have to do your work." He took a position not that dissimilar from Luther's, even when Germans who had been captured and were being held as slaves by Turks wanted guidance from him. He said, "You are slaves, and you owe it to your masters. When do you, when can you rebel? And against what can you rebel? The one leniency he allowed was that if the prince was a Catholic, you had to follow him. If he was a Lutheran, you had to follow him. If you disagreed, you were allowed to leave.

I think what we need to build on is exactly on people like Bonhoeffer. Regarding Luther's antisemitism, so in 1940 Bonhoeffer wrote a draft for a Church confession of guilt, which was never made.

The church was silent when she should have cried out. The Church confesses that she has witnessed the lawless application of brutal force and the spiritual and physical suffering of countless innocent people. The Church has witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder, but she has not raised her voice on behalf of the victim. She has not found

a way to hasten to their aid. She is guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenseless brothers of Jesus Christ.

So we have models on which we can build, and I think the outreach has started when you read the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada's statement from 1995. This is hardly the only Lutheran church in the world that has come out with such statements and with this acknowledgement – in a way they had almost had to, also, because most Protestant denominations are not named after a person. Since this person was so identified with it. But that is the way.

In Jewish teachings, Maimonides writes, "What is the first step in repentance?" It is exactly what you said, recognition of the wrong one has done. Maimonides writes that you have to say it aloud, which you have done, because otherwise we can rationalize in our minds we do not want any other people to know. But if we acknowledge it aloud, that becomes the first step. You have taken that first step. I am sure you have taken more steps. And I am very proud, and I hope I have represented myself fairly, and your positions fairly, to have been invited as you get ready to take more steps. I really am honored to be here.

Thank you very much.