

# Jesus Masked: Anti-Jewish Theologies

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How did Jesus' Jewishness get written out of the church's understanding of its Savior by errant theologies through the centuries? One thing is clear: such thinking began early in the church's history soon after the original Jesus movement was totally Jewish.

## Hebraic or Hellenistic?

First, we must set the stage. By the time of Jesus, the Mediterranean world had been Hellenized for over three centuries following Alexander the Great's conquests. The Old Testament had been translated into Greek and the New Testament appeared in Greek. But the worldviews of Hebraic thought patterns and Hellenistic ones had fundamental differences. Simply put, Hebrew thinking is wholistic; Greek thinking is analytical. It was into this Greek thought-world that the Gospels were carried across the Roman Empire of the early church. In a few centuries, the Eastern portion of the Empire was still speaking Greek while the Western parts had moved on to Latin as the vernacular.

In this Hellenized world of the first few centuries of the church, Jewish/Hebraic truths of the Bible were translated into a Greek mindset along with the Greek language. The result was that the default setting for understanding the Gospel became Greek philosophical thought. This "translation failure" has plagued the church since its beginning. Here began the attempts to interpret Christianity to fit into a philosophical system.

I begin here because these underlying worldviews and ways of thinking went on to interpret the Jewish Jesus in philosophical categories rather than the Hebraic understandings implicit in the Old Testament and the world of the Second Temple Period Judaism in which Jesus lived. And while Judaism was accepted as a legitimate religion in the Roman world of Jesus, the movement called Christianity was not, deepening the gap. Added to this, in a short time, the majority of Jesus-followers was Gentile, not Jewish – and biblical concepts began to be cast under the heavy influence of the philosophy *de jour*.

George Koch, Jewish-believer and Anglican pastor, illustrates this understanding of the Bible filtered through Greek philosophy which led to "Concepts Thinking" - abstract, analytical thought patterns in the church.<sup>1</sup> Instead of knowing God, personal and up close as the Hebrew Bible presented Him, the church occupied itself with philosophizing about God and about Scripture. Doctrines, dogmas, and ideas about God predominated in Hellenized Christianity. The Jewish Jesus became the Christ Concept. The Jewish Messiah was masked and disguised in non-Jewish icons crowned with golden halos in domes of basilicas built by Greek geometric, architectural design. Think Joseph in Egyptian garb and language, unrecognizable to his Jewish brothers. Without his Jewishness, Jesus became a mythic, universal, spiritual Jesus in some otherworldly kingdom.

Applied to my topic, anti-Jewish theologies have been ongoing since the second century until the days of the Third Reich and until today. While the philosophical underpinnings of these theologies changed depending on the cultural milieu in which the theologians wrote and taught, the basic errors were similar.

One commonality is that in order to take an anti-Jewish view of Jesus no matter one's philosophical perspective, one is forced to misuse, re-interpretate or edit out large sections of biblical texts. When one questions the inclusion of the Hebrew Scriptures in the canon, one also questions not only the Jewishness of Jesus but Judaism itself. The journey from first century Hebraic Judea and its majority Jewish community of Jesus-believers to a Hellenized Gentile church happened quickly. The journey was marked by Hellenized philosophical thinking.

## The Early Centuries of the Church

The first centuries of the church age were enormously complex, exemplified by the relationship between the church and the synagogue. The question of "where do the Jews fit into God's plan?" especially following the destruction of the temple in AD 70, became a burning issue. Unfortunately, the question was not answered with humility or with an understanding of Romans nine to eleven but with arrogance and even hatred.

Applied to our topic, modern theologies which purport to be "Christian" but remove Jesus from his Jewishness and the Old Testament from the Canon of Scripture aren't. They are rather another religion altogether. Paul wrote to the Galatians, ". . . if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (1:8). Distorting the Jewishness of Jesus invites serious consequences which will be clear as we trace this trajectory through church history.<sup>ii</sup>

Oskar Skarsaune's excellent book *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity*<sup>iii</sup> gives a stimulating perspective on the origins of the early church. His insights into of the world of Jesus's Second Temple period Judaism, the diverse Judaisms of the first century, and the development of the church up to the pre-Constantinian era details how the church morphed from Jewish to Gentile over three centuries. Essays by David Flusser in his book *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*<sup>iv</sup> give insight from an early Jewish perspective of this era.

This paper will attempt to present a survey of the historical line of theologies and philosophies which assumed an understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as Jewish by birth, heritage and culture through to the portrait of the Christ of the Gentile church until finally the claim was made that, in fact, Jesus was an Aryan.

## Beginning with Marcion the Heretic

The early heresies sprang from the teachings of Marcion, though some early Church Fathers pointed to Simon Magus of Acts 8 as the first heretic of the Church age.<sup>v</sup> None of Marcion's writing remain, so his ideas are only known by those who refuted them. The Old and New Testaments were being read in Greek, not Hebrew. The Mediterranean world was thoroughly Hellenized in all cultural aspects – art, education, architecture and philosophy. Gnosticism, which assumed a “secret knowledge” and saw matter as evil, presented questions to early theologians about the Creator of matter, the God of the Jews – and ultimately of the Jewish people themselves.<sup>vi</sup>

## Early Anti-Jewish Interpretations

**Marcion** (b. c. 160) denounced the Hebrew Scripture's God as an evil, war-mongering Demiurge who could not possibly be the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Influenced by the Gnosticism of his day, Marcion taught that those people, the Jews, who worshipped THAT Demiurge had aligned themselves with evil. While Marcion was declared a heretic by the church in 144 and earlier excommunicated by his bishop-father in his native Pontus, the lie was out: the Jews were evil and unrelated to Jesus. The Hebrew Scriptures were to be cast aside. Marcion's heretical ideas found many followers and churches were founded on his “gospel of love over law.”<sup>vii</sup> The word “heretic” entered the church's vocabulary.<sup>viii</sup>

While Marcion's determination to excise the Old Testament from the canon of scripture was based on his erroneous philosophical view of God (or gods, as he had to construct a “good god” to be the father of Jesus), later 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly German, theologians adopted in part Marcion's ideas but from a different philosophical foundation. For example, Adolf von Harnack, a German historian of dogma, wrote a sympathetic modern work titled *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, published originally in 1920.<sup>ix</sup> Harnack traced the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on early Christian writing and called on Christians to question the authenticity of doctrines that arose in the early Christian church. He rejected the historicity of the Gospel of John in favor of the Synoptic Gospels, criticized the Apostles' Creed, and promoted a Social Gospel.

A more current, well-documented and less sympathetic book on Marcion is *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* by Judith M. Lieu.<sup>x</sup>

The heretic Marcion's insistence that the Hebrew Scriptures be taken out of the canon of scripture robbed Jesus of his Jewishness by disconnecting him from his Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Denying the continuity of the Old and New Testaments necessarily and logically negates the validity of Judaism. At its extreme edges, such thinking negated Judaism as the root and foundation of Christianity. Some later theologians posited that the Old Testament “ought to be deposed from canonical rank and placed at the head of the Apocrypha”<sup>xi</sup> (von Harnack) or even “unsuitable for use in the church,” according to Friedrich Delitzsch, the son of the eminent Old Testament scholar, Franz Delitzsch.<sup>xii</sup> Others suggested that Judaism be studied as one would study any other non-Christian religion such as Hinduism.

Marcion's wide influence can be seen in the caliber of those who wrote against him: Dionysius of Corinth; Irenaeus of Lyons; Tertullian of Carthage to name a few. His thesis: the Christian Gospel was wholly a Gospel of Love and Grace with absolute exclusion of Law.<sup>xiii</sup> The influence of his ideas permeated and poisoned ecclesiastical waters and continued to strip Jesus of his Jewishness and rob the Bible of its whole counsel from Genesis to Revelation. Besides expunging the entire Old Testament and accepting only the epistles of Paul (excluding the pastoral epistles) and an edited version of the gospel of Luke, Marcion mutilated the Bible. Marcion's grounds for excluding the other gospels was that the other writers were blinded by the remnants of Jewish influence.<sup>xiv</sup> Marcionite churches continued into the fifth century.<sup>xv</sup>

From this brief outline of Marcion's thinking, it is not hard to see how modern anti-Jewish movements picked up Marcion's theme. At the same time, since none of Marcion's writings are extant. Lieu rightly points out, "The Marcion of Irenaeus and of Tertullian, as of Clement of Alexandria or of Origen, has to be located within the framework of the different overarching theological templates with which each of them works."<sup>xvi</sup> In other words, Marcion's critics may say more about their own ideas than his.

## Justin, the Father of Replacement Theology

**Justin Martyr** (c 100-165) was born to pagan parents in Shechem, today's Nablus. After studying Greek philosophers, he embraced Christianity and taught at Ephesus where he engaged with Trypho the Jew. In his treatise, *The Dialogue with Trypho* (written AD 155-161), he stated that the Gentile believers in Jesus took the place of Israel in God's economy. In *Dialogue* Justin tried to prove the truth of Christianity to a learned Jew, Trypho. His argument posited that a new covenant had superseded the old covenant of God with the Jewish people and that the Gentiles have been chosen to replace Israel as God's chosen people.<sup>xvii</sup> His apologetic relied heavily on the philosophy of Plato. Justin was later denounced to the Roman prefect as subversive and condemned to death by beheading with six Christian companions. Thus, his appellation, "martyr."

In his book *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae Until the Renaissance*, A. Lukyn Williams traces those "certain Churchmen [who endeavored] to win Jews to Christ by their writings, or, at least, to protect Christians against the arguments of their Jewish neighbours."<sup>xviii</sup> Unfortunately, many of the early apologists used language such as, "The Jews oppose all Scripture . . . and slander the Saviour"<sup>xix</sup> ultimately concluding with the charge of deicide, the Jews as "Christ-killers."<sup>xx</sup>

## The Council of Nicaea - AD 325

The neo-Platonic philosophies during the early church were rife and resulted in heterodoxies such as Gnosticism, Arianism, Nestorianism, Docetism, and Manichaeism. To deal with these matters, the yet-to-be-baptized Constantine assembled the first ecumenical Council in Nicaea in Bithynia in AD 325 to bring together the Eastern and Western church factions.

The basic arguments centered around the two natures of Christ: was he fully human and fully divine? How does the church define the “godhead”? Neo-Platonist ideas accepted the premise that matter is evil, and the spirit is good. Questions then arose about what do you do with the Jews with their adherence to regulations regarding the body such as dietary codes and circumcision which involved yucky matter? Or how does the church define a *bodily* resurrection? Or could the Son of God have become *flesh*?

There was a problem: the Council invitees excluded Christian bishops with Jewish backgrounds. While attempting to address the theological issues, the Gentile church leaders at Nicaea also replaced Sabbath worship with Sunday and moved Easter celebration away from Passover dates on the Jewish calendar, thus separating Jewish practice from Gentile Christianity irrevocably.

John Chrysostom (344-407), Augustine (354-430) Jerome (340-420)

Following the Council of Nicaea with its rulings which separated synagogue practices from the now majority Gentile church, church leaders were faced with a dilemma: what do we do with the Jews living in our midst? Even more immediate was the question of what to do with gentile believers who saw legitimacy in participating in biblical “feasts of the LORD” and other Jewish practices? This was the situation with which John Chrysostom dealt. (Living in the still thoroughly Hellenistic culture of Antioch, John encouraged his Christian parents to teach their children the Bible rather than Greek legends. However, Christian parents simply ignored the suggestion and chose the prevailing “well-established, successful, socially approved system of education.”)<sup>xxi</sup>

Robert Wilken’s book *John Chrysostom and the Jews*<sup>xxii</sup> emphasizes the complexity of life in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Mediterranean, specifically Antioch. A contemporary of the emperor Julian the Apostate (331-363) whose nineteen-month reign made a lasting impression, Chrysostom’s world was a mix of Hellenist pagans still steeped in Greek language and culture, Jews, and Christians. Some of the latter were classified as “Judaizing Christians,” “Jewish believers” and even “Arian Christians.” If the Empire had been declared Christian, the culture certainly was not. Wilken asks, what was “the interaction between Christianity and Judaism in the Roman world?”<sup>xxiii</sup>

Wilken attributed three factors to the conflict between Christians and Jews of his day: “divisions within the Christian community, the continuing influence of Hellenism, and the attraction of monasticism.”<sup>xxiv</sup> (The first Jewish settlers of Antioch had come soon after Alexander the Great’s conquest of the area in the early third century BC and so were well established there).

The destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and the cessation of the worship there (as well as the Jewish dispersion which followed the failed Bar Kochba revolt against Rome in

135-7) signaled to many early Church fathers the end of Judaism. Williams wrote, “Christianity would call itself the ‘true Israel’ . . . which had taken the place of the old Israel.”<sup>xxv</sup>

For the fiery preacher and presbyter John, the presenting problem was with those he called “Judaizers” – Gentile Christians and Jewish believers in Jesus who refused to accept the dictums of Nicaea and continued to keep the Jewish calendar often joining the synagogue for observances of Sabbath and other feasts. They celebrated Easter according to the Jewish date for Passover implicit in the gospels themselves.

Beginning in Holy Week 386, John, feeling the competition from the local synagogues for his parishioners, preached eight sermons against the Jews. In them, John, the “Golden-Tongued” orator, condemned the “Judaizers” and the Jews. His accusations included: “Of what to accuse the Jews? ‘Of their cupidity, their deception of the poor, of thieveries, and huckstering? Indeed, a whole day would not suffice to tell all . . . [their] men who are lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits . . . inveterate murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil.” He added that the synagogue was not only “a theater and a house of prostitution, but a cavern of brigands . . . a place of shame and ridicule . . . the domicile of the devil...” Their crime? The assassination of Christ – and for this deicide, John declared, there is “no expiation possible.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

John concluded: “If the Jewish rites are holy and venerable, then our way of life must be false.”<sup>xxvii</sup> His polemics against the Jews exerted enormous influence on Christian attitudes toward Jews for all the ages that followed.

**Augustine** was born a decade after Chrysostom in north Africa. While he saw Judaism as a corruption since Jesus had come, Augustine was more ambivalent about how to view the Jews. He subscribed to the accusation against them as Christ-killers and consequentially destined to be slaves. But Augustine saw them as a “witness-people” by their scriptures. Edward Flannery noted that Augustine believed “Like Cain, they carry a sign but are not to be killed (Gen. 4:15); as in the Scriptures, so in reality the older brother will serve the younger.”<sup>xxviii</sup> The Christian is to love Jews and lead them to Christ. “Let us preach to the Jews, whenever we can, with a spirit of love.”<sup>xxix</sup> Augustine cited Paul’s admonition in Romans 11 and called the church not to boast over the branches that were broken off. Unfortunately, Augustine’s reassertion of Pauline doctrine did not get the same hearing as his theory that of the Jews carrying the sign of Cain.

Author of *Augustine and the Jews*, Paula Fredriksen points to three second century gentile Christian theologians as the culprits: Valentinus, Marcion and Justin who “left behind teachings that contributed to the formation of long-lived, wide-flung, and mutually antagonistic churches.”<sup>xxx</sup>

**Jerome**, best known as the translator of the Bible into Latin from the original languages, worked in Bethlehem. He carried similar attitudes toward the Jews as his contemporaries. While he had personal relations with rabbis and sought Hebrew lessons from them, he called them “serpents, haters of all men and Judases . . . who curse Christians in their synagogues.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

## The Middle Ages – 10<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Thomas Aquinas and the great rabbi Maimonides (Rambam) reached back to the dialectical dialogues of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle to formulate a rational theology amalgamating Greek thought with Christian and Jewish dogma. Thomas's method was called Scholasticism but, in many ways, both the Rambam's and Thomas's thinking was the beginning of what came to be known later as Rationalism: using human reason to formulate matters of faith. I mention these giants of Christian and Jewish theology as the basis of their thinking was that there can be no contradiction between the truths which God has revealed and the findings of the human mind in science and philosophy. Such ideas played into the way 19<sup>th</sup> century theologians saw the Jews under the later philosophical movements which issued from the Enlightenment era.

## The 16<sup>th</sup> Century and Martin Luther

The idea of “a pure Christian Europe” had led to Jews being ghettoized, segregating Jews from “the holy Church.” From the days of Justin Martyr, the church was called “the new Israel” and soon after marked Jews as “Christ-killers.” European Jews were relegated to being wanderers forbidden to own land or to work in certain trades. Two professions were open to them: lending money and selling commodities. In all these ways, Jews were segregated from European society as the new philosophies steamrolled into the minds of the intelligentsia of the continent. So, what happens to Jesus? Could he really belong to this “impure” race of the ghetto? Jesus the Jew was set aside.

In 1517, Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation ruptured the Roman church. From Germany other national churches began, birthing national movements and changing the face of Europe. While hoping that the Jews would come to Christ once they heard his “salvation by faith alone” message, in his later years Luther wrote the most condemning of all words against the Jews in his book *On the Jews and Their Lies*. I recommend Richard Harvey's *Luther and the Jews* to get a full picture of this era. <sup>xxxii</sup>

## Humanism and The Enlightenment

Behind the Enlightenment was the earlier movement during the Renaissance known as humanism and the scientific revolution (think Michaelangelo's David or Leonardo daVinci's airplane design). All were seemingly wonderful notions which formed a cataclysmic break from the old to the new worldviews that followed. Man became the center of all things (not unlike earlier Greek philosophy). So where does this leave the Jewish Jesus?? And what happens to the fixed doctrines of biblical truth? What indeed?

Camus wrote in *The Rebel*: “Revolution originates in the realm of ideas.” The most radical revolution is when man's idea of God is transformed which results in any philosophy becoming possible. “Nothing is true, everything is permitted.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The Age of Enlightenment dominated the thinking of European intellectuals throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The American founding fathers were deeply influenced by this philosophy which included bowing the knee to reason and reliance on scientific data. Principles of this Age of Reason included major themes such as the pursuit of happiness, liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government (opposed to the old monarchical system), and the separation of church and state. Deism, based on Enlightenment ideals, challenged institutionalized religion and the legitimacy of the Bible.)<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## Modern Theologies/Philosophies – 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

It was the 19<sup>th</sup> century mostly German theologians and their ideas about the Bible and the Jews who most influenced the errant ideas which led to the culmination of the near-extirmination of the Jews of Europe. I will end with a focus on three “*Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch*,” the title of a book by Robert P. Ericksen.<sup>xxxv</sup>

These theologians did not appear in a vacuum. They were preceded by German theologians who began “*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*” – the book title by Albert Schweitzer.<sup>xxxvi</sup> These 19<sup>th</sup> century writers were heavily influenced by various philosophies of their day such as rationalism and romanticism. These movements were centered at Tübingen University and its school of theology. Most of these German theologians looked back to the early church age to formulate their theories about the historic Christ. Most proposed “cut and paste” Bibles to fit their notions of who Jesus was and ultimately how they formulated the basis of Christianity itself. Rather than taking the Bible as inerrant and a continuous, inspired narrative from Old to New Testament, these theologians relied on philosophies, nationalist politics, and modern worldviews to trump the plain meaning of the Bible. Each built on the others’ ideas. First, the 19<sup>th</sup> century influencers.

### Georg W. F. Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) saw history as a working out of opposing forces—thesis and antithesis—which interact and form a third force, known as the synthesis. Hegel believed that reason necessarily generates contradictions and that those new premises produced further contradictions. Hegelian dialectic was a game-changer for theologians going forward. The problem was that in the Hegelian continuing cycle of thesis/antithesis, there is no provision to come to a stable synthesis, only more dialectic propositions. Many philosophers and theologians later abandoned Hegelian thought but not before much damage was done.

### Ferdinand Baur

Ferdinand Baur (1792-1860), the German Protestant theologian and founder of the Tübingen School of Theology, was inspired by Hegel’s theory of historical development. Baur applied Hegel’s dialectic to New Testament scripture, interpreting the early church as a struggle



between a Jewish wing (led by Peter) and a Gentile wing (led by Paul) until a synthesis was achieved. In studying the New Testament's pastoral letters, Baur came to view early Christianity as the outcome of a conflict between Jewish Christianity (an amalgam of practices of the two faiths) and Gentile Christianity (which was viewed as free of Jewish influence). Baur held that Jewish Christianity was the thesis; the Gentile version was the antithesis, or reaction; and universal Christianity was the synthesis. This became the key to Baur's understanding of early Christianity.

In 1835 he denied the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, dating them in the 2nd century on the grounds of the historical situation that they presuppose. His monograph on St Paul (1845) went on to deny the authenticity of all the Pauline Epistles except Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans, and assigned Acts to the later 2nd century. In his work on the Gospels (1847) he gave the earliest dating to Matthew, as representing the Judaizing party, and the latest to John, as depicting the final reconciliation. This last Gospel, he argued, reflected the Gnostic and Montanist controversies of the 2nd century and was devoid of historical value. While such views aroused a storm of controversy they nonetheless went forward as a significant influence on those who followed. Baur taught at Tübingen from 1826 until his death in 1860.

### Paul A. Lagarde (nee Wilhelm Bötticher)

Paul Anton de Lagarde (1827-1891) was a German biblical scholar and one of the greatest orientalist of his day. Lagarde was also a Conservative political theorist, a strong supporter of anti-Semitism, a vocal opponent of Christianity, a racial Darwinist and an anti-Slavist. He was among the most influential voices which supported the ideology of fascism. His anti-Semitism laid the foundations for aspects of National Socialist ideology, particularly that of Alfred Rosenberg. He argued that Germany should create a "national" form of Christianity, purged of Semitic elements and insisted that Jews were "pests and parasites" who should be destroyed.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The German edition of Lagarde's book *Deutsche Schriften: Zweiter Band (Germany's Prophet)* is still available at Amazon for \$21.

### Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) (Characterized as "that great, almost overwhelming figure . . . at Göttingen")<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Going on from Baur's thesis, Albrecht Ritschl wrote that "Jesus did not reform or transform Judaism, he condemned it." Jesus' arguments with the scribes and Pharisees, Ritschl claimed, were an attack on Judaism itself. Jesus transcended Judaism by purifying Christianity of its Jewish elements. Ritschl replaced the Jewish Jesus with a Romantic Jesus who had a supernatural ineffable relationship with God cutting out all historical influences. Given the emphasis in modern theology based on deep personal relationships – separated from historical reality – Ritschl disconnected Jesus from his natural community and culture which were Jewish. According to Ritschl, Jesus is historically suspended in space and purified of his Jewishness.

The only problem is that Jesus was born to a Jewish mother in a Jewish home and lived only in the land of Israel in a Jewish culture. One wonders what Bible Ritschl was reading?

I make note here of one of Ritschl's disciples, P. T. Forsyth, who, after returning from Göttingen to a pastoring position in his native England rethought his mentor's theology. "One could, with reasonable accuracy, describe Forsyth's whole theological pilgrimage as an inner critique of Ritschlian theology . . . Forsyth stressed the *kerygmatic* character of Christianity, the miraculous nature of man's reception of God's self-disclosure, and the real possibility of an evangelical metaphysic of the conscience."<sup>xxxix</sup> "Forsyth felt himself at odds with the major theological winds of the day"<sup>xl</sup> by preaching the whole gospel of grace based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. The liberal tide left Forsyth in the shadows, but his twenty-five books and over 260 articles made an impact on the theological world but not until after his death in 1921.

## Adolf von Harnack (1851 -1930)

Harnack was born in Dorpat, Estonia to a family who emigrated from Prussia. His father was an eminent Lutheran theologian.

Adolf von Harnack was the foremost German proponent of a liberal theological program, and one of the most provocative and prolific theologians of his time. His influential studies of early Christianity and Christian dogma called for a historical-critical method to extract the 'timeless kernel' of essential Christianity from the 'husk' of Church history. He distinctively promoted the absolute freedom of inquiry in theological studies.

The use of original sources and textual criticism was clearly reflected in Harnack's university dissertation on Gnosticism. Two elements that would mark Harnack's mature work were present in this work. The first element was the application of historical method in theological study, which prepared him for the reception of F. C. Baur's and Albrecht Ritschl's historical approaches to theology. The second element was Harnack's fascination with Marcion, which he would fully articulate only in 1920 with the work entitled *Marcion, The Gospel of the Alien God*.

Harnack proposed that the majority of Christian dogma in its conception and development was a product of the Hellenistic Greek milieu in which it developed, separating the Church from Jewish influence. Fully affirming the principles of Ritschl's historical criticism, Harnack questioned traditional belief in the authorship of the Gospel of John and Jesus' institution of baptism.

In 1892 Harnack's support for his students' desire to replace the Apostle's Creed in public worship with a shorter confession more in accord with the results of historical critical scholarship initiated rancorous conflict. Harnack took responsibility for the development of freedom of thought to pursue truth without interference from human authorities or organizations, and it was precisely his insistence on the freedom of scholarship that marked him as one of the strongest advocates of liberal theology. Harnack strongly believed that the only way to nurture Christian faith was to remain in the condition of permanent uncertainty.

Though their relationship remained affectionate, Harnack was especially disturbed by his theological encounter with Karl Barth, his former student.<sup>xli</sup> In their correspondence, the younger theologian disparaged Harnack's scientific theology and argued that the main task of theology was the reception and transmission of the Word of the Christ. Although the influence of Harnack's concept of theology declined with the rise of Protestant neo-orthodoxy, his insistence on the historical approach to study of religion is still read today.

Harnack's Christology questioned Jesus' divinity, the meaning of the title "Son of God," and emphasized that the Gospel had to do with the Father, not with the Son.

## Theologians under Hitler

Besides the corrosive theologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one must ask what caused the most prominent German theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to support "Hitler openly, enthusiastically, and with little restraint"?<sup>xlii</sup>

Some of the answers which drove the three theologians I will discuss was

- a reaction to the crisis of modernity, manifested post-World War I in Weimar Germany. The result was destabilization at all levels in the face of the shameful experience of a defeated Germany. These theologians longed for a return to the conservative, monarchical discipline that their society had known under the Kaiser.
- They rejected pluralism and feared democracy which would give power into the hands of those other than the *Volk* -the true Germans.
- Finally, there was the collapse intellectually of Rationalism where all human thought was reduced to science.

Everything was up for grabs in the social upheaval of Germany in the 1920s. Hitler looked like the answer to their anxieties, a kind of re-incarnated Otto Von Bismarck who united the German states in 1871 and served as its first chancellor until 1890. There was a deep longing to return to the good old days. All three of the theologians under Hitler were born in 1888 which meant they lived through the successive political changes which marked Germany during their lifetimes. A true clash of cultures occurred.<sup>xliii</sup>

## Gerhard Kittel (1888-1948)

Gerhard Kittel's father Rudolf was a renowned Old Testament scholar, but many of us know his son best as the editor of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*. An expert on Judaism who studied the New Testament in the light of its Jewish roots, Kittel joined the National Socialist Party in May 1933. As a New Testament professor at Tübingen, he saw that "a genuine Jewish Christian should be accepted as a Christian brother; but that does not make him a German brother."<sup>xliv</sup> With this racial principle in place, Kittel felt no need to defend the Jews against the anti-Jewish laws imposed by the Reich, including opposition to mixed marriages.

Under the Reich, Kittel served as one of fifteen members on the Research Section on the Jewish Question when it opened in 1936 and was a charter member of the National Institute for History of the New Germany. It was these associations that later led to his arrest and imprisonment.

At the end of the Second World War, Kittel was still a professor of New Testament at Tübingen. He was arrested, imprisoned for seventeen months in 1945, denied a pension and died a disappointed man in 1948. This end must have been a surprise for Kittel who had come from a respectable academic middle class family. Until the end, Kittel did not deny his National Socialist beliefs nor confess remorse for his pro-Nazi stands.

### Paul Althaus (1888-1966) “The Almost Middle-of-the-Roader”

Paul Althaus was also a New Testament and Luther scholar and a representative of the German Lutheran tradition. (He served as president of the Luther Society for more than thirty years). Althaus began his academic career at Göttingen but was named Professor of Systematic Theology at Erlangen in 1925 where he remained the rest of his life.

In 1934, when the Confessing Church of Germany published the Barmen Declaration upholding a Christo-centric theology, Althaus signed the *Ansbacher Ratschlag* paper with some of his Erlangen University colleagues disagreeing with the Barmen stand. While finding the *Deutsche Christen* too radical, he nonetheless wrote in October 1933, “Our Protestant churches have greeted the turning point of 1933 as a gift and miracle of God” – referring to the election of the National Socialist party. The basic difference in these opposing theologies was that the Confessing Church (peopled by Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer) declared that God speaks to man only through Jesus as revealed in the Bible<sup>xlv</sup>; the widely accepted national church professed that God speaks to man through nature and history. The 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theologies had come to full bloom.

Feeling the national shame of Germany’s defeat in World War I, Althaus struggled with his commitment to Luther’s separation of church and state doctrine. In 1935, Althaus wrote that “God created and approved the political status quo.”<sup>xlvi</sup> Respecting the natural order, even if imperfect and run by evil men was preferable over instability and change. He believed that what was happening politically in Germany under the Third Reich was “the law of God for modern Germany.” His ideas were grounded in German Romantic Idealism centered around the *Volk* who were “blood related.” In a 1937 lecture, Althaus set out his notion of the *Volk* who shared a common language, history and somewhat mystical view of Luther’s doctrine of Two Kingdoms (*Zweireichlehre*). He thoroughly believed in the *volkisch* movement and supported it in his theology and teaching.

However, after 1937, Althaus’ expression of enthusiasm for the Third Reich seems to have dissipated and in a sermon in 1943 on Romans 13, he stressed “obeying authorities, but only if they honor God’s law.”<sup>xlvii</sup> He confessed after the war that the church should not sidestep its guilt and that it should have protested the Reich’s policies more loudly. Ericksen characterized Althaus this way: “Althaus absolutely refused to be radical.”<sup>xlviii</sup> After a brief time of dismissal from his faculty position at Erlangen, Althaus continued to teach until his death in 1966.

Althaus was a man who tried to take a middle path but realized too late that there can be no compromise in the face of evil. Althaus' susceptibility to Hitler's power centered on antipathy for modernity "which produced in him fear of an unstable, modern, secular world. He erected a theology and a political-intellectual position in opposition to this instability, relying upon *völkisch* ideas as a foundation for both," Ericksen summarized.<sup>xlix</sup>

## Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972) The Nazi Intellectual

Emanuel Hirsch was a contemporary of both Althaus and Kittel and a peer of Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. He was a systematic theologian but tried to distill 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophies into a philosophical-theological foundation for society.

Hirsch was more committed to Hitler and Nazi ideology than Althaus. He was convinced "that Hitler was a heaven-sent Christian leader."<sup>l</sup> Luther, Fichte<sup>li</sup> and Søren Kierkegaard greatly influenced Hirsch's early development, but it was Hitler who won his admiration and loyalty. Hirsch was a prolific writer and thinker and emmeshed himself in the German Church politics backing the National Socialist's candidate, Ludwig Müller, to lead the state church in opposition to those in the Confessing Church. If there was a theologian, philosopher, and historian who gave intellectual justification for the Third Reich, it was Hirsch. At one time he was accused of being Jewish which he vociferously denied. His explanation of his antipathy to Jews was complex including the basic notion that the Jews were a destructive force in Germany and, tied to their emancipation in Europe, unleashed them into the general population and added an ethnic group he found undesirable – and with ties to Bolshevism.<sup>lii</sup>

Hirsch was almost blind from 1931, yet he taught and wrote prolifically and chaired both church history and systematic theology departments at the University of Göttingen from 1921 to 1945. As the war ended, Hirsch was relieved of his position at the University at age 57 on the basis of failing eyesight. His politics attracted attention with legal repercussions in the denazification proceedings, but Hirsch was never brought to legal account for his role in the Third Reich and continued to write until his death in 1972.<sup>liii</sup>

## Ethelbert Stauffer (1902-1979) – a non-Nazi Sympathizer

Ethelbert Stauffer was the son of a Mennonite preacher who joined the Evangelical Church in 1928 and became a professor of New Testament studies at the University of Bonn. He was characterized as a "universalist" believing that all people would be saved.<sup>liv</sup> While not a member of the Nazi party, Stauffer was a leading proponent of the German Church which attempted to align German Protestantism with the Party's antisemitic ideological principles. He argued that it was the duty of the theological faculty to promote a relationship of trust between the church and the state and urged them to strengthen the "political vigor" (*politische Spannkraft*) of the German *Volk*. His 1933 publication was titled: *Our Faith and Our History: Towards a Meeting of the Cross and the Swastika*. Stauffer was never prosecuted for his part for forwarding Nazi ideology.

## Appendix

### Not All Forgot the Jewish Roots of Christianity

Many of our mission agencies were birthed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by biblically committed evangelicals from various strands of Christianity. Thousands of Jewish men and women came to faith in Jesus their Messiah during that time and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bad history should not make for bad theology. To God's glory he raises up the remnant, as we see even in our confused world of today, to love the Jewish people enough to take the Good News of Jesus and his work to them. The late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century English evangelicals like William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon, and Lord Shaftesbury embraced the Jewishness of Jesus. They worked to bring restoration to the Jewish people – both spiritually to their Messiah and physically to their Land. Each of them was part of the founding of CMJ, the Church's Ministry among Jewish People. Our founders believed that Judaism is the root of Christianity and that the unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob stand firm. Men's theologies, philosophies, prejudices and lies cannot change the truth of God's word nor His promises to Israel nor His love for His people. Alleluia!

There is another side of the story from the early church about those theologians who remained true to the biblical promises to Israel, both its spiritual renewal as well as the sure promises of return and possession of the land, told by such writers as Michael J. Vlach.<sup>lv</sup>

In his book, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, John Bright stated: “. . . the church will continue to live from the Old Testament and make use of it constantly . . . since Christianity had its roots in Judaism . . . no movement can be understood unless it is also understood historically, the Old Testament remains essential for the right understanding of the gospel.”<sup>lvi</sup>

Missiologist Andrew F. Walls wrote: “The bewildering paradox at the heart of the Christian confession is not just the obvious one of the divine humanity; it is the twofold affirmation of the utter Jewishness of Jesus and of the boundless universality of the Divine Son.”<sup>lvii</sup> Walls affirmed, “[The Christian] is linked to the people of God in all generations . . . and, most strangely of all, to the whole history of Israel, the curious continuity of the race of the faithful from Abraham. By this means, the history of Israel is part of Church history . . . The adoption into Israel becomes a ‘universalizing factor, bringing Christians of all cultures and ages together through a common inheritance. . . .’”<sup>lviii</sup> Wall noted that to separate the Church from its Jewish roots and Jesus from his Jewish lineage is to leave the church historically suspended in mid-air.

In contrast, it was the failure to recognize the Jewishness of Jesus and the Jewish roots of Christianity that led notable Christian biblical scholars during this same 19<sup>th</sup> century period to deny both the Jewish foundations of Christianity and the Jewishness of Jesus. In essence these proponents of “higher criticism” stripped Jesus of his Jewishness and by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some claimed him to be an Aryan! Just like the biblical Joseph in Pharaoh's court, Jesus has clothed over the centuries in gentile costumes and makeup, rendering him unrecognizable to his own Jewish brothers. From the earliest days of the Church, preachers like Marcion, Justin Martyr,

John Chrysostom and others denigrated the Jewish people, forgetting and forsaking the Jewish Jesus.

Such errant and anti-Semitic theologies and philosophies led directly and ultimately to the atrocities of the Holocaust – as well as the persecutions that Jewish people faced in Europe over the centuries. With the cries of “Never Again” ringing in our ears, the Jewish people now face the new anti-Semitism labeled “anti-Zionism.” This has led today to the BDS movement, numerous United Nations’ resolutions against Israel, and the Human Rights Commission of the UN populated by the most radical abusers of human rights.

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<sup>i</sup> Koch, George B. *What We Believe and Why: Christian faith – from its Jewish roots to its future hope* (Northwood, IL: Byron Arts, 2012), 215.

<sup>ii</sup> A hundred years ago, J. Gresham Machen, founder of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, wrote in the introduction in his book *Christianity & Liberalism*: “. . . it may appear that what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category. It may appear further that the fears of the modern man as to Christianity were entirely ungrounded, and that in abandoning the embattled walls of the city of God he has fled in needless panic into the open plains of a vague natural religion only to fall an easy victim to the enemy who ever lies in ambush there.”

<sup>iii</sup> Skarsaune, Oskar. *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity*. (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>iv</sup> Flusser, David. *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988). See chapter 40 “The Jewish-Christian Schism,” 617-644.

<sup>v</sup> Acts 8: 9-24. Note particularly Peter’s rebuke to Simon vv. 20-23.

<sup>vi</sup> Bright, John. *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Abingdon Press, 1967; reprinting, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1967), 78.

<sup>vii</sup> Born in Pontus in Asia Minor and a wealthy shipowner, Marcion was a son of a Bishop who excommunicated him on the grounds of immorality. Migrated to Rome and expounded his anti-Jewish thesis, gathered a following and was excommunicated in 144.

<sup>viii</sup> Koch, 153-156. The Greek for “heresy” is *hairesis* which can be translated as “an opinion, a choice, a way” (i.e., Acts 24:12-14) but can carry negative meaning (i.e., 2 Peter 2:1) with the addition of an adjective *Apoleia hairesis* translated “destructive heresies.” Koch points out that *hairesis* in the New Testament indicates “to

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break into factions, destroy unity, divide believers” as seen in Galatians 5:19-20. Extrapolated, heresy does not mean “wrong doctrine” but rather ideas which breaks up loving community in the church.

ii Von Harnack, Adolf. *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Pub, 2007; originally published, 1921)

<sup>x</sup> Lieu, Judith M. *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>xi</sup> Bright, 65.

<sup>xii</sup> Bright, 66.

<sup>xiii</sup> Downey, Amy K. *Maimonides’s Yahweh: Rabbinic Judaism’s Attempt to Answer the Incarnational Question* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 23-41.

<sup>xiv</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. F. L. Cross, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 870.

<sup>xv</sup> For example, Tertullian (c AD 200) and other Christian leaders of the day denounced Marcion’s anti-Jewish polemic<sup>xv</sup> while at the same time emphasizing the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. His argument centered on the nature of the Law and its temporary character, that Jeremiah had announced a new Law which called for “circumcision of the heart” rather than bodily circumcision, argued that the Jewish Sabbath was now a spiritual “rest” for the believer and that sacrifices had been replaced by “spiritual” ones to be offered in every place.<sup>xv</sup> Not only is the rhetorical style of the day interesting to the modern reader, but it is clear to see that in the anti-Marcion apologists they often interpreted the scriptures in opposition to Jewish practices.

<sup>xvi</sup> Lieu, Judith M. *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8. Tertullian (c AD 200) and other Christian leaders of the day denounced Marcion’s anti-Jewish polemic<sup>xvi</sup> while at the same time emphasizing the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. His argument centered on the nature of the Law and its temporary character, that Jeremiah had announced a new Law which called for “circumcision of the heart” rather than bodily circumcision, argued that the Jewish Sabbath was now a spiritual “rest” for the believer and that sacrifices had been replaced by “spiritual” ones to be offered in every place.<sup>xvi</sup>

<sup>xvii</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Justin-Martyr> accessed April 28, 2021.

<sup>xviii</sup> Williams, A. Lukyn. *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), Preface.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>xx</sup> Flannery, Edward. *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). Flannery attributes the first separation of Jesus from his Jewishness to Hippolytus and Origen: “that Jews are a people punished for their ‘deicide’ who can never hope to escape their misfortunes, which are willed of God.”

<sup>xxi</sup> Wilken, Robert L. *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 25.

<sup>xxii</sup> Wilken, Robert L. *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press) 1983.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Wilken, xvii. Antioch was at its apex in the days of Chrysostom – the residence of the Roman governor and headquarters of Rome’s chief military officer of the East. After two years of living with Syrian monks, John was ordained deacon in 381 and made patriarch in Constantinople in 398.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Wilken, 29.

<sup>xxv</sup> Wilken, 45.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Flannery, 50-51.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Flannery, 94.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Flannery,

<sup>xxix</sup> Flannery, 53.

<sup>xxx</sup> Fredriksen, Paula. *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 65.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Flannery, 50.



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- <sup>xxxii</sup> Harvey, Richard S. *Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Lies* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> For development of this premise in today's world, read *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* by Carl R. Trueman (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Thomas Paine's book *The Age of Reason* first of three installments appeared in 1794.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Ericksen, Robert P. *Theologians Under Hitler* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press) 1985.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Schweitzer, Albert. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), trans by W. Montgomery.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_de\\_Lagarde](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_de_Lagarde) accessed April 24, 2021.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Rodgers, John H. *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth: The Cross of Christ and the Revelation of God* (London: Independent Press, 1965), 3.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Rodgers, 4.
- <sup>xl</sup> Rodgers, 8.
- <sup>xli</sup> While Barth was a major force in turning the biblical roots of Christianity and the centrality of Jesus and his saving work on the cross, his stand re the Jews was challenged by Jakob Jocz. "Put simply, Barth believed the Jews non-acceptance of salvation through the work of Jesus is *temporary*, and that this Jewish rejection of Jesus' work fits within God's salvific plan for humanity. Barth wrote: "Israel cannot alter the fact that even in this way [rejection of Jesus] it discharges exactly the service for which it is elected." See Theresa Newell's *The Rev. Dr. Jakob Jocz* (Notts, England: Olive Press, 2018), Issue No 36, 12.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Ericksen, Robert P. *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel/Paul Althaus/Emanuel Hirsch*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1.
- <sup>xliii</sup> The German word *Weltanschauungskampf* means the fight or collision of world views.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Ericksen, 33.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Karl Barth stated against the National Church proponents that one cannot equate German history with holy revelation.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Ericksen, 100.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Ericksen, 112.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Ericksen, 83.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Ericksen, 119.
- <sup>l</sup> Ericksen, 146.
- <sup>li</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a philosopher who grounded his entire system on the concept of subjectivity or what he called "pure I." Fichte was a disciple of Kant who became famous for trying to reconcile Critical philosophy with revelation and moral law.
- <sup>lii</sup> Ericksen, 154.
- <sup>liii</sup> Ericksen, Robert P. "Emanuel Hirsch - Intellectual Freedom and the Turn toward Hitler." *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 24, no. 1 (2011): 74-91. Accessed March 1, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43751904>.
- <sup>liv</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethelbert\\_Stauffer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethelbert_Stauffer), accessed May 30, 2021.
- <sup>lv</sup> Bock, Darrell L and Mitch Glaser (*Israel, the Church and the Middle East* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2018), pp 119-134.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Bright, John. *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 77.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Walls, Andrew F. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll New York, Orbis Books, 1996), xvi.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Walls, 9.

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