

Vom Schem Hamphoras

Martin Luther

Previously unpublished in English, and Other Milestones in Church Doctrine
Concerning Judaism by Gerhard Falk

Dedicated to my beloved wife Ursula and to the memory of my friends, Janet and Selig Adler, Zellman Notarius and Milton Plesur, and to "The Righteous Gentiles" who gave their lives during the Nazi tyranny so that their Jewish brethren could live.

"To save a single life is to save the world." - Talmud; Mishnah Sanhedrin 4

"No greater love has any man than that he gives his life for another." -The New Testament

Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi

(of the Unknowable Name and the Generations of Christ)

Introduction to the English Translation

Written in 1543, this book, now published in English for the first time, must seem difficult if not impossible to understand. Not only is the English usage confusing and ungrammatical, but the thoughts and views of the author, Martin Luther, seem so foreign to our thinking. The original German is of course even more difficult. The reasons for this are not hard to find. In the first place it must be remembered that prior to Luther, literate Germans (indeed all literate Europeans) used Latin to write almost anything, especially something as serious as theology. Luther's failure to be grammatical and use a consistent style is explained by the fact that there was no German grammar in 1543, any more than there was an English grammar. Thus, anything went. Luther mixed tenses in the same sentence, jumped from one thought to another in the same paragraph, rushed from the singular to the plural and back, had no consistent punctuation and spelled any way at all. In addition, the expressions and idioms used by Luther are antiquated. This is best understood by considering that Luther was a contemporary of William Dunbar in English literature and wrote earlier than Spenser and before Shakespeare was born. With these problems in mind, I first translated this long essay into modern German and then into English, although I have kept the English translation as Luther wrote German. I left all of the errors where they were. This gives the non-German reader at least some notion of Luther's style. Luther alludes to many Hebrew and Latin words, uses Latin and Hebrew phrases without translating them into German and quotes biblical sources inaccurately.

Luther's Hebrew was weak, as he himself readily acknowledged. As a result, there are numerous mistranslations in the text. I have left these as they were written. In short, I made no effort to correct Luther's mistakes. I did make many judgments concerning the English vocabulary best suited to reflect Luther's meaning. All translators must do that. I have no doubt that another translator may have chosen different interpretations in some instances. It is nevertheless my contention that I have faithfully reflected the book Vom Schem Hamphoras by this English rendition and have given the reader an opportunity to look at an aspect of Luther's work and thinking which needs to be understood in order to comprehend the spirit of his age and the consequent fate of the European Jews. In making this translation I followed these principles. First, I tried to reflect the manner in which Luther wrote. Second, within these limits I tried to make the English version reasonably understandable to its reader. Third, I tried to remain flexible enough, using certain American idioms where necessary, to give the translation the meaning it deserves. This means that I did not translate verbatim if such translation would have led to a total distortion of the author's intent. This translation is based on the German St. Louis edition published by the Concordia Press in 1890. I used this edition because the editor, Johann Georg Walch, succeeded in updating many of the antiquated phrases and words used by Luther. This made this edition much more understandable to me. I also referred to another German edition begun at Weimar in 1883. This edition was published by the Herman Bohlaus Publishing Co., which issued over 60 volumes through 1983. None was published during World War II. The 53rd volume of this edition contains the Vom Schem Hamphoras and was published in 1920. However, the language is that of 1543. Consequently, it is accurate to say that the St. Louis edition is now the most modern in the German language. Nevertheless, I referred extensively to the footnotes in the Bohlaus Edition. The Collected Works of Martin Luther also exist in English and were published by Concordia Press in 1971. However, Vom Schem Hamphoras was not translated and was therefore omitted from that English edition. Therefore, the present translation is the only English version of that book yet published. The notes attached here are my own. They serve to explain some of the obscure references made by Luther to various authors whose names and works are seldom known today or to whom Luther refers so casually that they cannot be easily identified. This lack of precision is also true of Luther's references to historical names and places. I have tried therefore to explain these as well in the footnotes, particularly since Luther did not always know the dates of various events in the history of Israel or Christianity. The Bohlaus Edition of Vom Schem Hamphoras published in 1920 contains several introductory remarks. The following is a translation of these remarks, which may be found on pages 573 and 574 of that edition. These remarks are not signed. No name is associated with them. However, the editors of Volume 53, in which this essay appears, are F. Cohrs and O. Brenner. Printed in Gothic German, they are German spelling of the Hebrew word for "name." The usual English spelling is "shem."

Vom Schem Hamphoras (English translation) slightly longer than this translation.

I have rendered into English only that part which makes the Luther text more understandable than it would otherwise be. The remainder of the introductory remarks in the Bohlaus edition concerns the fare of the original Weimar edition of this book and has nothing to do with the content. In his publication Concerning the Jews and Their Lies, Luther already announced another publication concerning the Jews: in special notes he sought to exhibit what Porchetus had written about the power of the Shem Hamphoras. Directly after finishing that publication Luther fulfilled that promise.

Our publication was already finished on the 7th of March 1543, so that the preparation must have succeeded directly the publication "Of the Jews etc." Luther announced the conclusion of "On the Jews etc." to Justus Jonas who promptly translated it into Latin and who was therefore particularly interested in the development of the new work. [That is, Vom Schem Hamphoras.] He wrote this about it: "non is facile transferes in Latinum." (1) Jonas did not risk the translation of this publication.

In "Of the Jews," Luther already used the work of *Salvagus Porchetus de Salvaticis*, a 14th century Carthusian monk, *Victoria adversus impios Hebraeos*.(2)

Porchetus (d.c. 1315) Victoria adversus impios Hebraeos, in qua tum ex sacris litteris tum ex dictis Talmud ac cabbilistarum et aliorum omnium auctorum quos hebraei recipiunt monstratur veritas catholicae fidei. Victory against the impious Hebrews, in which the truth of the Catholic faith is shown both from the sacred writings and from the sayings of the Talmud and the kabbalists and all other authors whom the Hebrews accept. Porchetus wrote this essay about 1303 but it was not published until 1520.

This time he exhibits in German translation the part from the 11th chapter of Part 1 which deals with the sacred incantation of the Schem Hamphoras and the legends concerning its origins. He (Luther) censures the superstition which is evidenced by the veneration of that incantation and ridicules the Jews who believe these silly tales. But, as its entire heading indicates, the announced comments have yet a second part: "Of the Lineage of Christ." Luther says himself what motivated him to present this part. The publication which had been the inducement for Luther's work "Of the Jews" also claimed that it could not be proved that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah because the apostle Matthew directs the tribe of Juda toward Joseph and not toward Mary; that therefore he could not have been the Messiah because of the tribe of Juda and the House of David. Since Luther had not yet discussed this issue in "Of the Jews" he made up for it now and provides harmony between the divergent lines of descent in Matthew 1, 1-16 and Luke 3, 23-37. Thus, he lets Jesus descend from David in one instance through his stepfather Joseph and in the other through his mother Mary. This second

part is attached to the first without any other connection. They hang together only because they constitute a supplement to *Of the Jews and Their Lies*.

The Lineage of Christ (Matth.1)

March 1543

Doctor Martin Luther

1. In the last pamphlet [*Of the Jews and Their Lies*] I have announced that I will henceforth ignore what the ferocious, miserable Jews lie about their Shem Hamphoras (3) as described by Porchetus in his book called *Victoria*. (4) This I have done herewith, in honour of our belief, and in opposition to the devilish lies of the Jews so that those who want to become Jews will see what kind of "fine" dogmas they must believe and keep among the damned Jews. For as I plainly stipulated in that pamphlet, it is not my opinion that I can write against the Jews in the hope of converting them. That is why I did not call that pamphlet *Against the Jews*, but *Of the Jews and Their Lies*, so that we Germans may know from historical evidence what a Jew is so that we can warn our Christians against them as we warn against the Devil himself in order to strengthen and honour our belief; not to convert the Jews which is about as possible as converting the Devil. (5)

2. For just as we must teach and write concerning the Devil, Hell, Death and Sin; what they are and what they can be, so I also write about the Jews so that we can guard against all of these. Not that we can make an angel out of the Devil or a heaven out of Hell or Life from Death or Holiness from Sin. All that is impossible. A Jew or a Jewish heart is as hard as stone and iron and cannot be moved by any means. Even if Moses and all the Prophets came and did all their wondrous works in front of their eyes as did Christ (6) and his apostles, so that they would quit their unreason, it would still be useless. Even if they were punished in the most gruesome manner that the streets ran with blood, that their dead would be counted, not in the hundred thousands, but in the millions, as happened under Vespasian in Jerusalem and for evil under Hadrian,(7) still they must insist on being right even if after these 1,500 years they were in misery another 1,500 years. Still God must be a liar and they must be correct. In sum, they are the devil's children damned to hell; if however, something human still remains in them, for him this essay may be of use and come to some good. Some, so inclined, may still hope for that whole gang as they wish. I have no hope there anymore and know of no writings concerning such hope. We cannot even convert the majority of Christians and have to be satisfied with a small number; it is therefore even less possible to convert these children of the devil! Although there are many who derive the crazy notion from the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans that all Jews must be converted, this is not so. St. Paul meant something quite different.

Notes

1. *"It is not easy to translate into Latin. "*

2. *Victory over the impious Jews.*

3. *As discussed in Chapter 3, this Hebrew phrase means "Hidden name" and reportedly refers to the true name of God.*

4. *Luther here refers to the Genoese monk Porchetus Salvaticus and his book, *Victoria adversus impios Hebraeos* or *Victory over the impious Jews*, published in 1315. A pamphlet of 94 pages, this tract by Porchetus was reprinted several times. A Parisian edition of 1520 came into Luther's possession. The book is now stored in the municipal library at Karlsruhe. In 1938 the Karlsruhe librarian Gerhard Katterman discovered seven German and Latin "notes in the margins of that book written by Luther. See D. Martin *Luthers Werke*, Weimar, Herman Bohlaus, Nachfolger, 1980.*

5. *Diabolos comes from the Greek verb diablein meaning "to calumniate or throw across." This is a close translation of the Hebrew word *Shaton* or *Satan*. The ancient Iranian word *daeva* or *evil spirit* is involved here and has a Sanskrit cognate *deva* meaning a benevolent deity of India. The reason for this apparent divergence in meaning between the two cultures is that the Hindu Indians and the Parsis of Iran fought many a battle over religion until the benevolent god of the Hindus became the malicious spirit of their enemies, the Parsis. The name *Beelzebub* is also used to signify the devil. This name is derived from the Hebrew *Baal Zebub* meaning *Lord of the Flies*, an expression found in *Kings II 1:2* and referring to the god of the Ekronites, hence a Phoenician deity. As the god of strangers, he became the devil of the Israelites. There are of course innumerable other names for the devil in other cultures. All however indicate that men everywhere and at all times recognized that evil and natural calamities such as disease and death are inevitable. Consequently, a large literature concerning the devil exists not only among religious writers but also in folklore, mythology and in art. Consider the role of the devil, called *Mephistopheles*, (From the Latin *mefitis*, stench) in the story of *Faust*. See George V. Tomashevich, "Unbelief in the Concept of the Devil," in the *Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, Buffalo, N. Y., Prometheus Press, 1985, pp. 141-150.*

6. *Christ is derived from the Greek word *chriein* meaning "to anoint. " This in turn is a direct translation of the Hebrew word *mo'shiach* which also means "to anoint." The kings of ancient Israel were anointed with oil. The word *anoint* is derived from the Latin *unguere*, "to smear." · 7. *The emperor Vespasian had the full name of *Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus*. It was he who commanded the Roman armies which put down the revolt of the Jews in Galilee, i.e., northern Israel. As a consequence of that victory he was elected emperor of Rome and left his son, *Titus*, in charge of the army. *Titus***

destroyed Jerusalem in 70 and later became co-emperor with his father, assuming sole power on Vespasian's death in 79. Publius_Aelius Hadrianus was born in 76 C.E., became emperor of Rome in 117 and died in 138. Buried at Castel Sant Angelo in Rome, he was known in his lifetime as a great builder of public works and a man of many talents, interests and considerable education. He declared his intention to rebuild the Jewish temple and the city of Jerusalem which had lain in ruins since 70 when the first Judean revolt was put down with great ferocity. Hadrian, who visited Judea in 130, declared that the intended temple was to be dedicated to the Roman god Jupiter and that the city was to be called Aelia Capitolina. This announcement led to the second Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba in the year 132, a revolt fuelled by the additional rumour that Hadrian intended to prohibit circumcision. Despite some initial successes, the Jewish armies were defeated again by the Romans and their allies. This second defeat led to the final exile of most Jews from their homeland and their dispersion throughout the Middle East and Europe. It was this dispersion and the failure of the Jews to have their temple rebuilt which Christians for many centuries viewed as divine punishment for the rejection of Jesus by the Jews.