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## Miscellanea

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## Miscellanea

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### Luther's Attitude Toward the Jews

By RALPH MOELLERING

[On account of the recent misrepresentations of Luther's position concerning the Jews a longer and thorough study of this subject will be welcomed. The paper here submitted consists chiefly in Mr. Moellering's Master's dissertation, written for the history department of Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.—A.]

Almost 1,900 years have elapsed since the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews. Empires and kingdoms have risen and crumbled. History has recorded far-reaching changes in the development of new ideas, laws, and institutions. Old races have died out, and new nationalities have been formed. But the perennial Jewish problem is still vexing the world. The vicious circle of suspicions, accusations, and apologies continues unabated.

What is the root of the conflict? Is it aversion to an undesirable race? Is it contempt for the religion of Judaism? Is it prejudice growing out of a failure to understand and appreciate a different culture? Is it economic rivalry? In seeking to answer these questions, protagonists as well as opponents of the Jews have often invoked the authority of Martin Luther. Prior to 1921 no fewer than two dozen writings had appeared in Germany with varying interpretations of his position.

After World War I there was a circle of anti-Semites in Germany which referred to Luther in an attempt to discredit the entire Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> To gain popular support for Jewish persecution, the Nazis did not hesitate to make use of Luther.<sup>2</sup> The publications of the German Library of Information in the United States before our entrance into the late war echoed the same propaganda. An English translation of Luther's writing *The Jews and their Lies* was publicized and circulated in the spring of 1948.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time severe denunciations of Luther by critics seldom fail to include his pronouncements on the Jew. McGovern holds that there was an historical affinity between Luther's Reformation and the rise of Hitlerism.<sup>4</sup> Abram Lipsky comments: "Luther's unbridled tongue tossed off phrases that still are a god-send to anti-Semitic ranters, and so long as the Prophet's words are cherished, so long, no doubt, will the stream of invective and abuse

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<sup>1</sup> Led by Dr. Alfred Falb. See his *Luther und die Juden*, Deutscher Volksverlag, Muenchen, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Fritsch quotes some of the most inflammatory statements in his *Handbuch der Judenfrage*, p. 122 ff.

<sup>3</sup> By J. E. Perkins, P. O. Box 4163, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

<sup>4</sup> *From Luther to Hitler*, Houghton Mifflin, 1941.



flow from this hallowed spring."<sup>5</sup> Wiener is of the opinion that Luther's vehemence against the Jews surpassed that of Julius Streicher and "der Stuermer." He dismisses the solemn prayers in behalf of the Jews as the height of hypocrisy. Luther is depicted as the precursor of modern anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup> Catholic assaults on the Reformation have been quick to lay bare the same "blight" in Luther's career.<sup>7</sup>

It is undeniably true that Luther can be quoted as writing:

The Jews are veritable liars and vampires. . . . A more blood-thirsty and vindictive race has never seen the light of day.<sup>8</sup> . . . This race has been possessed by Lucifer and all his angels. . . . Cursed be the vile race of Jews and cursed be their iniquity. . . . It is our own fault that we have not annihilated them. . . .<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand the same Luther may be quoted by an advocate of modern tolerance as writing:

I would advise and beg everybody to deal kindly with the Jews and to instruct them in the Scripture; in such a case we could expect them to come over to us. If, however, we use brute force and slander them, saying that they need the blood of Christians to get rid of their stench, and other nonsense of that kind, and treat them like dogs, what good can we expect of them? . . . If we wish to make them better, we must deal with them not according to the law of the pope, but according to the law of Christian charity. We must receive them kindly and allow them to compete with us in earning a livelihood, so that they may have an opportunity to witness Christian life and doctrine; and if some remain obstinate, what of it? Not everyone of us is a good Christian.<sup>10</sup>

Both citations, isolated from their context and deprived of their intended meaning, misrepresent Luther's position. It will be one of the main purposes of this study to examine the astonishingly sharp contrast between these passages.

The investigator will raise questions like these: Was there a change in Luther's attitude, or was he guilty of forthright contradictions? If there was a change, how is it to be explained? What factors contributed? Was it racial antipathy? Were there economic causes? What theological tensions played a part? Was his outlook prejudiced by medieval concepts? What personal contacts with Jews influenced Luther? What were his sources of information? Were they adequate? Did Luther have a sufficient knowledge of Hebrew to judge fairly? What relations did he have with con-

<sup>5</sup> In *Martin Luther, Germany's Angry Man*, p. 274, Frederick A. Stokes, New York, 1933.

<sup>6</sup> *Martin Luther, Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor, Win the Peace Pamphlet—No. 3*, Hutchinson and Co., London, N. Dak.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Brophy in "Luther, Hitler, and Chaos," reprinted from *Hibernia* (March, 1946), in *The Catholic Mind* (July, 1946).

<sup>8</sup> Translated by M. Sasse, *Martin Luther and the Jews*, from W. A., LIII, 443.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 477—478, 522.

<sup>10</sup> Translation in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, W. A., XI, 336.



verted Jews? And, most important, did the change involve a reversal of Luther's original attitude, or was there an underlying consistency? These are some of the issues which this treatise will seek to answer or at least to clarify.

## I

**The Medieval Conception of the Jew**

To evaluate Luther's attitude toward the Jews properly, it is essential to examine the nature of the Christian conception of the Jew which developed during the Middle Ages and still predominated in the sixteenth century. Luther's theology, his whole mental outlook, was grounded in the past. He inherited the entire legacy of Christian thought handed down from his predecessors.

The problem of analyzing the medieval conception of the Jews is unavoidably complex. A variety of factors combined to embitter Christian-Jewish relations. Not least among them was the anti-Jewish tradition derived from the Christian Scriptures.

The Old Testament portrays the Jews as the recipients of God's revelation. Monotheism, the prohibition of idolatry, and a high code of ethics distinguished them from heathen tribes. They enjoyed the favor of their God, Jehovah, to a special degree, but they despised God's mercy. They had responded to His goodness with rebellion and ingratitude. The messages of inspired prophets were ignored. Although they were the privileged bearers of the Messianic promise, the New Testament records how they rejected Christ when He actually came. The Jews failed to appreciate their unique opportunities. Not only did they pervert the intended meaning of the Law and Prophets with their foolish traditions, but they committed the worst crime of the ages — they crucified the Son of God!<sup>11</sup> With the words "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25) they invoked a curse which was fulfilled when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The *Diaspora* and all the ensuing misfortunes experienced by the Jews may be traced to their rejection of Christ.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation was adopted by most medieval churchmen and was decisive in determining the place assigned the Jews in Christian theology.

Of course, Christians could not deny the Jewish background of their religion. They had to reckon with the inescapable fact that the noble patriarchs, the venerable Prophets, the New Testament Apostles, and even Jesus, were Jews. Nevertheless, the

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Luther on the Jews' crucifixion of Christ, W.A., I, 624; Hol. Ed., III, 104.

<sup>12</sup> In 1524 Luther warned the councilmen of German cities that "God's Word and grace is a passing rainstorm, which does not return where it has once been. It came to the Jews, but it passed over; now they have nothing." (Hol. Ed., IV, 108). — In 1525 Luther criticized the princes for their pride and cautioned: "Do not jest with God, dear lords. The Jews, too, said, 'We have no king' (John 19:15), and it became so serious that they had to be without a king forever." (Hol. Ed., IV, 222). (Cf. W.A., XVIII, 291 ff.)



Jewish race as a whole seemed to be reprobate. The woes which Jesus pronounced upon His contemporaries were assigned collectively to medieval Jewry. The literature of Europe was filled with allusions of hatred toward the Jew.<sup>13</sup>

A difficulty arose when the Christian thinker endeavored to explain the unyielding perversity of the Jews. Since the Jews were the custodians of Messianic prophecy, there could be no plea of ignorance. They *knew* the truth. They had been eyewitnesses of Christ's life and miracles, but because of their ingrained wickedness they stubbornly refused to accept what was apparent to all others.

Only one explanation satisfactorily explained this paradox. The Jews no longer possessed a will of their own. They were in league with the devil, and consequently normal human actions could not be expected of them.

Various legends established a causal relationship between these two evil forces. Chrysostom maintained that the synagogues of the Jews are the homes of idolatry and evil. A sixteenth century series of prints entitled *Juden Badstub* showed the devil assisting the Jews in their bathhouses. A seventeenth century print, *Der Juden Synagog*, depicted the devil as a participant in Jewish rituals. A cartoon portrayed a sow as the mother feeding her Jewish offspring, with the devil standing by to supervise the operation.<sup>14</sup> When a Jew seeks to wash himself clean of sin in a river, the devil is downstream gathering up his sins and preparing a hotter bath for him in hell. Jewish prayers, it was believed, called for the downfall of Christians. Few doubted that the Jewish ceremonial required the use of Christian blood during the Passover service, on the day of the Purim festival, at circumcisions, and at weddings.<sup>15</sup>

A quotation from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* illustrates the connection that was drawn between the devil and the Jew: "Let me say 'Amen' betimes lest the devil cross my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew."<sup>16</sup> Luther wrote in a similar vein: "Where you see a genuine Jew, you may with a good con-

<sup>13</sup> The Frenchman Pierre de Froissard wrote in 1497: "The hatred of the Jews has spread so widely in Germany that the most unexcitable men are stirred into a rage if the conversation begins to treat of the Jews and their money-grabbing. It would not surprise me if suddenly and simultaneously in all areas a bloody persecution of the Jews would break out, as they have already been driven out of many cities by force." Quoted by Geiger, *Die Juden und die deutsche Literatur*, p. 309.

<sup>14</sup> In *Vom Schem Hamphoras* Luther tells of how the Jews failed to recognize the fulfillment of the Law in Christ; and when describing the blundering of their rabbis, he speaks of "Saeujuden in ihrer Saeuschule." Cf. S. L. A., XX: 2073, 111; E. A., 32, 322; cf. W. A., LIII.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 15-30.

<sup>16</sup> Act III, i, 22; cf. II, ii, 27: "Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnate!"



science make the sign of the cross and say with certainty: 'There goes a genuine devil.'"<sup>17</sup> In another paragraph he assures his readers that, next to the devil, they have no worse enemy than the Jews.<sup>18</sup> Again, he points to the Jews as a warning illustration of how easily people can be deluded by the devil.<sup>19</sup> Their very thoughts and words stem from the devil. When Jews are permitted to exploit their Gentile neighbors, the devil must laugh and dance with glee knowing that he has discovered such a paradise among Christians. Associating with the Jew is like keeping company with the devil.<sup>20</sup>

Numerous superstitions prevalent during the Middle Ages centered around the Jew. One of the most popular legends associated the Jew with the Antichrist. The deduction was made that if Jesus was really the Messiah, the only person for whom the Jews could be waiting must be the antithesis — his worst antagonist, the Antichrist. The general outline of the theory propounded by some leading scholastics<sup>21</sup> included the belief that Antichrist would be born of the tribe of Dan, would be circumcised in Jerusalem, and would easily persuade the Jews that he is their long-awaited Messiah. He would rebuild the Temple, establish his throne there, and proclaim himself god. For a brief while he would exercise tremendous power, but then God would send Enoch and Elijah to stir up opposition against him, until at last Christ would dispatch the archangel Michael to destroy him on the Mount of Olives. Popular views differed mostly in the details which were added. The parentage on both sides of the Antichrist would be Jewish, as well as his chief supporters. The later French and German Antichrist plays displayed the Jews as the leading figures in the drama. These plays were so effective sometimes that they aroused the base passions of the mob. The Frankfort city council, for instance, found it necessary, in 1469, to set up special regulations for the protection of the Jewish quarter during the time when such a play was being presented.

At the time of the Mongol invasions the Jews of Germany were accused of being traitors who aided the invading hordes. Reports about the Wandering Jew reached Europe about the same time. It was later said that he undertook a personal tour of the continent in the sixteenth century, stopping at the most important cities.

The consciences of Christians, as a whole, remained unperturbed, because the average Christian could contend that Christian

<sup>17</sup> *Von den Juden und ihren Luegen*, S. L. A., XX:1937, 171; E. A., 32, 178.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. S. L. A., XX:1940, 177; E. A., 32, 182.

<sup>19</sup> S. L. A., XX:1975, 264; E. A., 32, 219.

<sup>20</sup> S. L. A., XX:1982, 280; 1988, 293; 1996, 316; E. A., 32:255 ff.

<sup>21</sup> E. g., Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus.



treatment of the Jews was mild compared to what they would suffer if the world were in Jewish hands.<sup>22</sup>

It was also believed that the Jew possessed physical characteristics which distinguished him from other people and identified him with the devil. The figure of the horned Jew was not uncommon. At times the Jews were obliged to appear in public with the horn somewhere on their garb. Other characteristic features of the devil were attached to the Jewish physiognomy. The devil's tail was often worn. In prints and folk tales the *Ziegenbart* was used. The devil was supposed to have created the goat which appeared in picture and story as the riding animal of witches and sorcerers. There was a notion that the Jew emitted a foul odor as a punishment for his crime against Jesus—the *foetor iudaicus*. Stench and unbelief in combination were Jewish attributes. Men and women were said to suffer from all sorts of strange maladies. In 1575 Johann Fischart's illustrated *Wunderzeitung* announced the birth of two little pigs to a Jewish woman. The only way they succeeded in covering up their deformities was by the use of magic or Christian blood.<sup>23</sup>

Luther wrote in *Vom Schem Hamphoras*: "A Jew is as full of idolatry and sorcery as nine cows have hair on their backs. . . ."<sup>24</sup> The Jewish addiction to magic was traced back as far as Moses and Joseph. Solomon was regarded as the first real expert. The Council of Narbonne (589) already had prohibited Jews from harboring or consulting sorcerers.<sup>25</sup> The revival of classical learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was accompanied by a renewed interest in magic. The Hebrew language was considered as an especially effective medium. The popularity of Hebrew among sorcerers tended to stamp the masters of that tongue as adepts. In *Das Buch Belial* (Augsburg, 1473) the demon is pictured presenting his credentials to Solomon, who came to be regarded as the original source of occult science.

Reputedly a disputation was once held before Emperor Constantine between Pope Sylvester I and a group of Jews. The contest ended with a direct trial of power between the Pope and the Jewish champion, Zambri, the magician. Zambri attempted to kill a fierce bull simply by whispering into his ear the holy and omnipotent name of Jehovah. The Pope accepted the challenge; and when Zambri succeeded in putting the bull to death, Sylvester promptly restored it to life with the name of Jesus, thus proving

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 32—42.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42—52.

<sup>24</sup> W. A., LIII, 602.

<sup>25</sup> It is not the intent, nor does it fall within the scope of this treatise, to determine to what extent the charges leveled against the Jews had a basis in fact. There would be little or no available evidence. It is sufficient for our purposes to merely describe what the Christian beliefs concerning the Jew were in the age of Luther and suggest how they may have influenced his attitude.



the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The incident became a popular subject for medieval chronicles and miracle plays.

Zedekiah, the Jewish physician of Emperor Charles the Bald, toward the end of the ninth century, was another such renowned figure in medieval folklore. The abbot of Tritenheim reported in 1378 that "he threw a man into the air, tore him there into pieces, piled his organs in a heap, and then joined them together again." In 1553 a committee of experts appointed in Venice to examine the Talmud supported the decision to ban its use by Jews, "since primarily the majority of their Talmudists are sorcerers, heretics, and vicious persons." It was whispered about that "Jews possessed the evil eye." Fortunetelling was another forte of the Jews. Legends pertaining to buried treasures intimated that the devil and the Jews knew where they were hidden. Jewish synagogues were suspected as likely repositories. From Spain we learn that the Jews were credited with the power to bring rain in time of drought. Luther was warned by his friends against a Jewish physician who could render himself invisible at will.<sup>26</sup>

There are many references to Jewish astrologers. Alchemy was regarded as a special Jewish art. About the middle of the sixteenth century three Jewish alchemists were reported to have appeared in Germany. Luther warned the Elector, Joachim II of Brandenburg, not to place too much trust in the Jews at his court lest they prove better experts in alchemy than in the conduct of his affairs.<sup>27</sup> The Jews had a reputation for knowing how to utilize the magical virtue of precious stones. There are a number of allusions to the Jewish proclivity for dispensing amulets. When Pope Pius V expelled them from the Papal States in 1569, he complained:

The worst of it is that they seduce a great many imprudent and weak persons with their satanic illusions, their fortunetelling and witcheries, and make them believe that the future can be foretold, that stolen goods and hidden treasures can be recovered, and much else can be revealed.<sup>28</sup>

The cabalistic studies of Pico della Mirandola and John Reuchlin helped to popularize Jewish magic in Christian circles. A converted Jew was executed in Halle (c. 1514) after confessing that he had stolen an "imprisoned devil" from a priest in Franconia, with whom he performed some magic before he finally sold him for five gulden. One reason which Duke Christopher of Wuerttemberg gave for his assault against the Jews in 1551 was that they were "overt sorcerers." It was reported that Charles V's naval excursion against Algiers in 1542 was frustrated by a Jewish magician who caused a terrific storm to arise. The forced "confession" of Lippold, the Jewish financier of Elector Joachim II of

<sup>26</sup> Lewin, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden*, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 58—76.



Brandenburg (1571), told of a variety of crimes which he had committed:

He had conjured the devil, who put in an appearance once as a black dog and again in human shape, had entered into a pact with him, and had made him offerings . . . he had set the devil against several people, causing them ill luck, injury, and death; he had induced sexual incompatibility between a married couple, had aroused illicit passion in an unmarried couple, had manufactured a magic key that opened all locks and even defeated bolts and bars . . . with the aid of magic he poisoned his patron.<sup>29</sup>

Crimes of arson were pinned on the Jews. The *mezuzah* was looked at with suspicion. Jews were sometimes stoned as sorcerers.

In condemning Jewish magic Luther related the anecdote of a Jew who proffered an amulet to Count Albrecht of Saxony to make him immune to all weapons of attack. Albrecht surprised the donor by putting it around his neck and testing its efficacy by thrusting him through with his sword.<sup>30</sup>

The reputed magical skill of the Jews reached its zenith in the field of medicine. The tradition of Jewish medical proficiency was deeply rooted. The *Sachsenspiegel*, one of the great German codes, granted the Jews the privileges of the king's peace on the ground that "it was Josephus who gained this peace for them from King Vespasian when he cured his son Titus of the gout." This legend recurs in a number of German lawbooks to explain the favor and protection extended to the Jews by the German rulers. Assuming that they were successors of the Roman emperors, they felt bound by these obligations.

Undoubtedly there was some basis for the belief that Jewish physicians were capable — "their wide knowledge of languages, the availability of Arabic-Greek medical texts in Hebrew translation, their propensity for travel and study abroad . . ."<sup>31</sup>

Calumnious tales were circulated about Jewish physicians, spurred on by mixed motives of piety and superstition, or perhaps economic competition. John Eck, the eminent theologian, wrote: "When they come together at their festivals, each boasts of the number of Christians he has killed with his medicine; and the one who has killed the most is honored."<sup>32</sup> In his *Table Talk* Luther spoke of evil-minded Jewish physicians who took advantage of their unsuspecting Christian patients and secretly killed some.<sup>33</sup> On another occasion he wrote:

If they could kill us all, they would gladly do so, yes, and often do it, especially those who profess to be physicians. They know all that is known about medicine in Germany; they can give poison to

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79—86.

<sup>30</sup> S. L. A., XXII:1588, 35; E. A., 32, 375.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 88—92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> S. L. A., XXII:1582, 20.



a man of which he will die in an hour or in ten or twenty years; they thoroughly understand this art.<sup>34</sup>

Poisoning became a familiar charge against Jewish physicians. In Bohemia, in 1161, 66 Jews were burned as accomplices in an alleged plot of Jewish physicians to poison the people. Johann Pfefferkorn testified that when he was still a Jew, posing as a doctor, he had attempted to poison Archbishop Albrecht of Magdeburg and Elector Joachim of Brandenburg. Although he failed in this venture, he still claims to have succeeded in killing thirteen Christians by administering poison. In 1610 the medical faculty of Vienna "confirmed" the accusation that Jewish physicians were bound by their laws to kill every tenth Christian patient by means of drugs.

The charge of well poisoning took on serious proportions in the fourteenth century. In France there was said to be a plot in which the lepers, Saracens of Spain, and the Jews were collaborating. It was suggested that the cause of the Black Death might well be traced to Jewish well poisoning.<sup>35</sup>

A sixteenth century chronicler records that in 1337 the Jews had planned to poison the entire Christian population of Germany, but their plan miscarried. In 1348 the Jews of a Provençal town were burned on the basis of a rumor of well poisoning. The Jews were reported to have "compounded a poison out of Christians' hearts, spiders, frogs, lizards, human flesh, and sacred hosts and to have distributed the resultant powder to be deposited in wells and streams which supplied Christians with water." This tale spread in variant forms into Germany. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Jews at Halle and elsewhere suffered or were expelled after similar accusations were made. The charges were repeated in Germany as late as 1541 and 1543.<sup>36</sup> Luther heard them and was inclined to give them credence.<sup>37</sup>

For pious Christians an even more damning charge was host and image desecration. According to the usual story, a Jew bribed a Christian to secure a wafer of the host; then the Jew mutilated the host by stamping upon it, piercing it with a knife or nails, cutting, burning, or grinding it. Blood flowed from the wafer, some miraculous event occurred, and the Jew was apprehended and punished. Oftentimes not only the suspect was seized, but the crime was fastened on entire groups.

The first accusation of host desecration occurred in 1243, at Belitz, near Berlin. All the Jews of the city were burned on the spot later called the *Judenberg*. The last serious case took place in Berlin in 1510. A thief had stolen some sacred emblems from

<sup>34</sup> In a sermon delivered shortly before his death, S. L. A., XII:1265, 4; W. A., LI, 195, *Tischreden*, IV, 338; cf. Lewin, *op. cit.*, p. 39 f.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Geiger, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 97—108.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Von den Juden und ihren Luegen*, S. L. A., XX:1940, 177; E. A., 32, 181.



a church and confessed having sold the holy wafer to Jews in the Brandenburg district. Twenty-six Jews were burned, while two who submitted to Baptism were only beheaded.<sup>38</sup>

The primary purpose in stealing the host, as Christians saw it, was to re-enact the crucifixion, to torture Christ anew. A secondary motive was to discredit the doctrine of transubstantiation. The stolen host acquired unique importance in the practice of magic. The wafer became a favorite ingredient in medicinal potions. The blood that was believed to spurt from the mutilated wafer was supposed to be of special utility for the Jews. They needed it to counteract the *foetor iudaicus* and to cure the secret ailments from which they were believed to suffer. Their young ladies, it was rumored, used this blood as a superior form of rouge to redden pallid cheeks.<sup>39</sup>

John Eck repeated a number of legends about Jewish misuse of holy images, with the miraculous flow of blood, in his *Ains Judenbuechlin* (1541). Sometime in the first quarter of the sixteenth century Pamphilus Geugenbach compiled the material for his *Meistergesang* called *Fuenf Juden*. A Jew with four companions entered a church and mocked a picture of the Virgin. A smith and his brother dropped in by surprise just as the Jew had pierced the picture with a spear. Drops of blood flowed over the face. The smith wanted to kill the transgressor at once with an ax, but his brother restrained him. The Jew disappeared, but later was captured and stretched out on the rack. . . . He protested his innocence and offered to prove it in fighting a duel with the smith. The challenge was accepted, and the Jew was defeated. His final fate was to be hanged from the city gate between two dogs.<sup>40</sup>

An even more vicious evidence of Jewish misanthropy was found in alleged ritual murders.<sup>41</sup> The Passover service, according to popular versions, required the use of Christian blood. More than 150 charges of ritual murder have been listed.<sup>42</sup> A Christian writer, Democritus, maintained that every seven years the Jews had captured a stranger, brought him to the Temple at Jerusalem, and sacrificed him, cutting his flesh into pieces. A number of impecunious Christian parents offered their children, at a price, to be killed by Jews.<sup>43</sup> The prioress' tale by Chaucer relates the

<sup>38</sup> Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Vol. IV, p. 440.

<sup>39</sup> Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 111—117.

<sup>40</sup> Geiger, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

<sup>41</sup> Accusations of ritual murder have been explained as (1) attempts on the part of the clergy to punish the enemies of their faith; and (2) attempts on the part of real thieves and murderers to find scapegoats for their crimes.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.

<sup>43</sup> There seem to have been at least several authentic cases of the theft of children in France by Jewish slave traders for sale to the Moors of Spain. The guilt of individual Jews was ascribed to all. Cf. the testimony of Agobard in Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 128.



pathetic story of a Christian child who was waylaid by Jews on the way home from school while singing "O Alma Redemptoris Mater," killed, and cast into a pit.<sup>44</sup>

The earliest explanations connected these atrocities with the Easter season. It was said that Jews crucified Christian children during Passion week in order to re-enact the crucifixion of Jesus and to mock and insult the Christian faith. A Jew by the name of Copin was forced to confess that a boy had been crucified "*in iniuriam et contumeliam Iesu.*" Sometime in the fourteenth century the opinion arose that Jews used Christian blood in baking their Passover unleavened bread or mixed it with their Passover wine. In 1462 a boy was allegedly murdered near Innsbruck and his blood carefully collected in vessels.<sup>45</sup>

One of the most pervasive beliefs of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages was in the value of human blood for medical and magical purposes. Witches considered it indispensable for their acts of sorcery. A Jewish doctor was reported to have given this counsel to Richard the Lionhearted: "Know that you will recover your health completely if you can make up your mind to bathe in the blood of a newborn child. . . . The child's heart must be added, which Your Majesty must eat and consume quite warm and raw just as it has been taken from the body." A woodcut in a work published in Paris in 1575 depicts a Jew "producing the devil from a vessel of blood obtained from a crucified child's body." It was thought that ever since the Jews had called out to Pilate: "His blood be upon us and on our children" they had been afflicted with hemorrhages for which the only cure was Christian blood. John Eck attempted to explain why the blood of children was used: "They desire innocent Christian blood, not that of an old Christian whose innocence, acquired through baptism, has been forfeited by his subsequent sin." The city of Tyrnau produced a set of confessions in 1494 with these explanations for the need of blood:

Firstly, they were convinced by the judgment of their ancestors that the blood of a Christian was a good remedy for the alleviation of the wound of circumcision. Secondly, they were of the opinion that this blood, put into food, is very efficacious for the awakening of mutual love. Thirdly, they had discovered, as men and women among them suffered equally from menstruation, that the blood of a Christian is a specific medicine for it, when drunk. Fourthly, they had an ancient but secret ordinance by which they are under obligation to shed Christian blood in honor of God in daily sacrifices in some spot or other. . . .

Confession was extracted in Baden in 1476 to prove that Jews use Christian blood to alleviate the wounds of circumcision. Another suggested reason for using Christian blood was to play safe in case the Christian religion is true.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *The Poetical Works of Chaucer*, New York, 1900, Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., pp. 548—551.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 130—138.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140—153.



At times Luther appears to be dubious about the reliability of all these tales. Then again, in an outburst of emotion, he appears to accord them full credence. The Jews, he writes, are "thirsty bloodhounds and murderers" who stand accused by past history of poisoning water and wells and of stealing children to use Christian blood. Their protestations of innocence prove nothing because they are such notorious liars.<sup>47</sup>

Luther lived at a time when witch hunts were being conducted all over Europe. It has been estimated that "between the years 1450 and 1550 perhaps a hundred thousand witches were put to death, mostly by burning, in Germany alone."<sup>48</sup> A sixteenth-century mystery play, *La Vie de Saint Martin*, offers an account of a band of Jews celebrating their Sabbath disguised as bears and wolves, just as witches were believed to do. At the Black Mass of the witches' Sabbath there was said to be enacted a blasphemous burlesque of the Mass, during which the host was desecrated. Many of the crimes were perpetrated of which the Jews were accused, such as the stealing of wafers and the kidnaping of children.<sup>49</sup>

There was an apparent paradox in the policy of Christians toward the Jews. They were to be condemned with all severity and yet tolerated. The rule was "respect their humanity, but not their unbelief." It was considered no more than just that they forfeit most legal rights in recognition of their crime against Christ. Although they "resembled" Christians in human form, they were rigidly separated by their failure to conform to the Christian faith. Judaism was branded as a contemptible, decadent religion. The Moslems were regarded as infidels altogether outside the pale of Christian society. The Jews, too, were outcasts, but could not be dismissed as ordinary infidels. Despite better knowledge they willfully resisted Christian convictions.

Reuchlin objected to the fact that the distinction between heretic and infidel was not preserved in the case of the Jew. He argued that since they stood outside the Church, the ideas of heresy and unbelief should not apply to them.<sup>50</sup> Occasionally Popes and ecclesiastical councils sought to protect the Jews. The official policy of the secular authorities was "nonviolent toleration." Frequently they found that the Jews were convenient sources of funds.<sup>51</sup>

The period from the sixth to the eleventh centuries was comparatively favorable for the Jews, with only a sporadic dissemination of anti-Jewish propaganda. The first massacres of Jews were

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Von den Juden und ihren Luegen*, S. L. A., XX:1986, 290; 1999, 322; *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, 2066, 95.

<sup>48</sup> Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, III, 549.

<sup>49</sup> The suspicions about the celebration of a Black Mass have continued down to the present time. Cf. *Newsweek*, 1-19-48.

<sup>50</sup> Graetz, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-168.



directly inspired by clerical preaching. Priests sometimes led the bands which seized and executed Jewish "criminals."

A decisive turning point in medieval Christian-Jewish relations came with the first crusade. The passion generated against "infidels" found an outlet on the "home front" wherever non-Christians chanced to be. Widespread massacres of Jews throughout Western Europe were the result.

After the crusades the Church became more than ever a unified agency—a totalitarian power which refused to tolerate dissenting doctrines. Heresy had to be stamped out by force if necessary. The strong arm of the State could be employed for this purpose because heretics were criminals who disturbed the public peace. Besides, the secular ruler derived his authority from the Church and was duty bound to root out whatever endangered the purity of faith. Offense to the Divine Majesty was a far greater crime than offense to a king or emperor. During and after the twelfth century the death penalty was adopted for heresy. The Church was exculpated from the odium of shedding blood by "releasing" the heretic to the State for the execution of the sentence.

Jews were sometimes regarded as the instigators of heresy. Opponents of the heretics called them "Judaizers." The Nestorians were frequently termed "Jews." The Iconoclastic Revolt was directly traced to the baneful influence of Jews. Luther mentions the Jews and Arians together as subverters of the deity of Christ.<sup>52</sup> The Jews were suspected of contributing generally to the rise of schismatic sects. The adherents of these sects were stigmatized at times as "half Jews." It was thought that Michael Servetus, burned by Calvin at Geneva, may have been instructed by Marranos in Spain.<sup>53</sup> (The Marranos were baptized Jews and Moors who were suspected of secretly adhering to their ancestral religion.)

When the Inquisition against heresy was first established, the Church felt obliged to delimit the area of its operation in keeping with the technical distinction between infidels and heretics. The Spanish Inquisition was limited to the Jewish Pseudo-Christians. Many Jews feigned conversion for business reasons or other practical considerations. When the hypocrisy was discovered and they openly reverted to their former faith, Christians were disgusted and incensed. The large numbers of Marranos tended to add to Christian distrust of the Jewish character.

In 1232 the writings of Moses Maimonides were banned in the city of Montpellier. The Dominicans were invited to proceed against Jewish heretics in the same fashion as they would against Christian nonconformists. The following year the papal legate commanded the first public burning of Hebrew books. This event established the precedent. The Inquisition assumed the right

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<sup>52</sup> S. L. A., XXII:1587, 30.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Graetz, *op. cit.*, p. 541.



thereafter to confiscate and burn Jewish writings as it deemed requisite. Talmuds were burned at Rome and Paris as the source books of Jewish iniquity. In 1248 the Jews were forbidden to own copies.

The Jew became the pronounced enemy of the people. The Jew badge was introduced to warn Christians against these adversaries who desired nothing more than the collapse of Christendom. When Bernard of Clairvaux preached in the second crusade, he ejaculated: "While we pray for the Jews, they persecute and curse us." John Eck averred: "Could they but drown all Christians in one spoon, they would eagerly do it."<sup>54</sup>

The loyalty of Jewish citizens was questioned from an early date. If the people of the Middle Ages had been endowed with a twentieth century vocabulary, they would have called them "Quislings" and "fifth-columnists." There is a tradition that when the Catholic Frankish ruler Clovis laid siege to the Arian Visigothic city of Arles in 508, the Jews of the city conspired to betray it to the invader. Barcelona was allegedly handed over by them to the Moors in 852. When the Mongols and the Tartars under Genghis Khan reached the borders of Germany, it was said that they were secretly aided by German Jews. The Jews and the Turks were regarded as natural allies, conniving together to plot the downfall of their common enemy—Christianity. When the Turks moved north against the Empire in the sixteenth century, it was asserted that the Jews were in league with them. The expulsions from Bohemia (1541) and from parts of Austria (1544—1602) were based in part on this alleged treachery. The Jewish quarter in Crete was ransacked in 1538 on the suspicion that Turkish spies were being harbored there. Jacob Ayer's *Comodie von Nikolaus* includes among its *dramatis personae* the figure of the Jew Moses, whose role it is to reveal the secrets of the Christians to the Turkish sultan. Luther makes reference to a Jewish-Turkish conspiracy and discusses the affinity between their religions, particularly their insistence upon the unity of God and denial of the Trinity.<sup>55</sup>

The over-all effect of the medieval concept of the Jew was to relegate him to the position of an outcast. With a few notable exceptions, he was altogether outside the confines of "respectable" society. Intermarriage with Christians was excluded with the threat of excommunication and death.

Economic activities were restricted, but credit was essential to the expanding economy of Europe that followed the first crusade. Large-scale Jewish trade with the Orient was cut off. It became the uneasy lot of many Jews to take up moneylending. Rulers sometimes fostered it in order to be able to exact a steady flow of tribute. It was a vicious circle when economic conditions served to make the Jew a usurer, and usury exposed him to the cupidity

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 171—182.

<sup>55</sup> S. L. A., XXII:1583, 22; 1591, 38; cf. Lewin, *op. cit.*, pp. 74—75.



of feudal overlords and made him an object of embittered hatred. The Church condemned usury as a sin for Christians and yet negotiated with Jewish firms. At best the usurer was a necessary evil, tolerated but despised. In the twelfth century the words *Jew* and *usurer* became almost synonymous. "The Jew-heresy-usury equation became a medieval cliché." In the passion plays, Judas, the tool of the devil, often had the typical role of usurer, usually associated in the medieval mind with the Jew. The title page of a sixteenth-century diatribe against Jewish usury and wealth depicts three devil Jews with horns, tails, claws, and Jew badge.<sup>56</sup>

"Jew" is used by Luther as a byword for economic evils. Gluttony, luxury, and rent charges he mentions as "the three Jews . . . who suck the whole world dry."<sup>57</sup> Christians are warned against usury, Luther says, while Jews are encouraged to take it. Their rabbis, whom they follow blindly, "teach that usury is a right that God has given them through Moses."<sup>58</sup> They are strengthened in their avarice by the belief that when their Messiah comes, he will take all the world's gold and silver and divide it among them.<sup>59</sup>

In the mind of the Christian the Jew was the personification of everything despicable. Somehow the Jew and the devil worked together to produce every economic, political, and spiritual evil that was known. During the life span of Luther these concepts were still predominant. In fact, they have not been completely eradicated today.<sup>60</sup>

In the next installment the early attitude of Luther toward the Jews will be sketched.

## A Decree from Caesar Augustus

### Light from the Papyri on the Census of Luke 2:1-7

By ERIC C. MALTE

For many years American and English scholars, following the line put out by Baur and the Tuebingen school of Bible critics, accused Luke of being guilty of many historical inaccuracies and errors in his Gospel and Acts. By these critics Luke was regarded as wholly untrustworthy. "It is not possible to bring Luke's account into accordance with the facts of history," they stated.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 188—194.

<sup>57</sup> In *Treatise on Good Works*, Hol. Ed., I, pp. 266—267. Cf. *Sermon on Usury*, W. A., VI, 51—60.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. E. A., 32, 134. The Lateran Council of 1215 decisively forbids the charging of interest by Christians. Up to about 1400 members of royal families are found as debtors of Jews for money loans.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. S. L. A., XX:1934—1935, 166—168; 1940—1941, 179—180; 1965, 235: "Denn ein Wucherer ist ein Erzdieb und Landraeber, der billig am Galgen siebenmal hoerher denn andere Diebe haengen sollte."

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Livingstone, *Facts About Fictions Concerning the Jew*, p. 16, Anti-Defamation League, Pamphlet 370, Chicago.



"Luke was unconsciously influenced to a considerable extent by religious bias, preconceived opinion, and therefore not sufficiently critical and cautious in the materials he employed," it was said. In his effort to set the events of the Savior's life and the activities of the Apostles in relation with the tides and forces of imperial world history, Luke, these critics maintained, showed himself to be at best only a third- or second-rate historian. No reputable and trustworthy historian would be guilty of such concoctions of errors and fabrications as these critics supposedly discovered in Luke's Gospel and Acts.

Especially was Luke 2:1-7 with its account of the imperial world-wide census at the time of the birth of Christ cited as a passage containing more historical blunders and errors than any similar passage in any historian. Typical of these critics is the statement by F. Sieffert in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*<sup>1</sup>: "Disregarding later untrustworthy accounts, there are no literary or epigraphic traces of an imperial census in the time of Augustus, and such an event could not have occurred without leaving some traces." In *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Alexander Bruce, in his notes on the second chapter of Luke's Gospel, states the case thus:<sup>2</sup> "The passage has given rise to a host of questions which have been discussed, with bewildering conflict of opinion, in an extensive critical and apologetic literature. The difficulty is not so much as to the meaning of the evangelist's words, but rather as to their truth."

The fashionable fad with this school of Biblical critics was to decry Luke as wholly untrustworthy in his account of the world-wide census with respect to these four points, viz., that Augustus never issued any decree ordering a census; that there never was under the Roman emperors any regular and periodic system of census as Luke implies; that where any casual census was held, the presence of the wife was not required, but only of the husband; and that his presence was never required at his original home.

But today it is no longer popular to decry Luke as untrustworthy, for as A. T. Robertson puts it:<sup>3</sup> "The spade has done well by Luke, for inscriptions and papyri have brought remarkable confirmation for scores of points where Luke once stood all alone and was discounted because he stood alone." Few archaeological discoveries in recent years have helped to give us a clearer understanding of the events recorded in Luke 2 than the countless papyrus fragments and documents which have been recovered from the sands of Egypt.

<sup>1</sup> Sieffert, F. *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. II, p. 495.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, Alexander. *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. I, p. 472. George H. Doran Company, New York.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. III. The Acts of the Apostles, p. xii. Harper and Brothers.



In the following an attempt will be made to present a brief examination of a few of the many census papyrus documents and to evaluate their meaning for a clear understanding of the census decree of Caesar Augustus as mentioned by Luke.

After the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra in 30 B. C. the land of Egypt fell into the hands of Octavian, afterwards known as Augustus, and became a Roman province, or rather, an imperial province of the emperor, who was regarded by the Egyptians as the successor of the Pharaohs and Ptolemies. The Roman senate possessed no authority in Egypt, even of a nominal kind; senators were jealously barred from entering the country without express permission of the emperor.

Under the Roman emperors the chief economic aim with regard to Egypt was to exact from it the greatest possible revenue. Wilcken<sup>4</sup> devotes thirty-three pages to a description of the various kinds of taxes exacted from the people of Egypt during the Roman period. And Schubart states:<sup>5</sup> "In der Besteuerung folgte Augustus dem Vorgange der Ptolemaeer, steigerte aber die Anforderungen noch und fuehrte sie strenger durch." In our day when it is estimated that twenty-five cents out of every dollar go for direct and indirect taxes, some comfort may be gained from recalling that in the days of the Roman emperors almost everyone and everything was taxed heavily. There were poll taxes, taxes on beer, taxes on pigs, baths, olive oil, weaving, wheat, land and houses — to mention a few of the many which occur in the papyri.

Of the direct money taxes the poll tax was of outstanding importance. Our information on this subject belongs chiefly to the Roman period, though the tax existed already in some form under the Ptolemies and also under the Byzantine emperors, while after the Arab conquest of Egypt it was exacted from non-Moslems only. In Roman times it was levied on all males of the subject population between the ages of 14 and 60. In Egypt Greeks of a certain status were not liable to it, and exemption or partial exemption was also granted to a few privileged classes. Quite naturally, the amount of poll tax varied considerably in different districts and provinces and at different times.

To determine who was liable for this poll tax, Augustus, it now appears, introduced a new system of registration of individuals. Henceforward an exact census of the inhabitants of each house was taken every fourteen years and in preparation for this all absentees were commanded to return to their own homes in order to be registered in person. These census registrations are now referred to as *κατ' οἰκίαν ἀπογραφαί*.

In the opening verses of his second chapter in his Gospel

<sup>4</sup> Wilcken, Ulrich. *Grundzuege und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, Erster Band: Historischer Teil. Erste Haelfte: Grundzuege, pp. 185—218. Teubner, Leipzig-Berlin, 1912.

<sup>5</sup> Schubart, Wilhelm. *Einfuehrung in die Papyruskunde*, p. 266. Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, Berlin, 1918.



Luke tells us: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary." (Revised Standard Version.)

An example of the declarations handed in on these occasions we find in Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 255<sup>6</sup> of the year 48 A. D. We may assume that the registration of Joseph at Bethlehem was similar in many details.

"To Dorion strategus and . . . royal scribe and Didymus and . . . topogrammateis and komogrammateis from Thermoutharion the daughter of Thoonis with her guardian Apollonius, the son of Sotades. There are living in the house which belongs to me in the South Lane. . . . Thermoutharion, a freedwoman of the above-mentioned Sotades, about 65 years of age, of medium height, dark-complexioned, long-visaged, a scar on the right knee. Total—three persons. I, the above-mentioned Thermoutharion, along with my guardian, the said Apollonius, swear by Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Emperor that assuredly the preceding document makes a correct and true return of those living with me, and that there is no one else living with me, neither a stranger, nor an Alexandrian citizen, nor a freedman, nor a Roman citizen, nor an Egyptian, in addition to the aforesaid. If I am swearing truly, may it be well with me, but if falsely, the reverse. In the ninth year of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Emperor. Phaophi . . ." (The document is slightly defective, without impairment, however, of its chief contents.)

A few particulars regarding this and similar census returns may be mentioned.

It has been generally established that these enrollments followed a cycle of fourteen years. Schubart<sup>7</sup> says: "Da die Kopfsteuer vom vollendeten 14. Lebensjahr an zu zahlen war, verlangte man jetzt alle 14 Jahre die *κατ' ολίαν ἀπογραφὰν* ueber den Personenstand, mit der besonderen Absicht, die Bevoelkerung nach ihrem Heimatssitze festzustellen." As yet no documents have been unearthed for any period earlier than A. D. 19—20, but from that date to the middle of the third century A. D. the recurrence of the census at intervals of fourteen years is attested by numerous examples. Thus far census records in papyri have been found for the years 19—20, 47—48, 61—62, 75—76, 89—90, 103—104, 117—118, 131—132, 145—146, 159—160, 173—174, 187—188, 201—202, 215—216, 229—230, 243—244, and 257—258.

If we start with the census record of 19—20 A. D., the earliest census document as yet discovered, and trace back the fourteen-year cycle one step, we reach the census of 5—6 A. D., to which, it is generally agreed now, Luke makes reference in Acts 5:37.

<sup>6</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. II, p. 215 ff. Oxford, 1899.

<sup>7</sup> Schubart, Wilhelm, *op. cit.*, p. 266.



This was the second of the fourteen-year census registrations inaugurated by Augustus. If we trace back one step farther, we reach 10—9 B. C., the census generally accepted as the one to which Luke refers in the opening verses of the second chapter of his Gospel. In their critical notes on Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 254 the British papyrologists Grenfell and Hunt discuss the origin of the fourteen-year cycle of the census returns and reach this conclusion: <sup>8</sup> "There is good ground for believing that censuses were held for 10—9 B. C. and 5—6 A. D. in the 21st and 35th years of Augustus. . . . The conclusion to which the data from both sides converge is that the fourteen-year census cycle was instituted by Augustus."

Allowing for a delay of a year or two in getting such a major imperial project under way, Professor Ramsay has established the date of Christ's birth as falling somewhere between 8—6 B. C. <sup>9</sup> Evidence from other sources seems to substantiate the correctness of Ramsay's contention. It has long been known, for instance, that the abbot Dionysius Exiguus, who invented the "B. C." and "A. D." system, was mistaken in his calculations by a few years.

In the main, these imperial *κατ' οικίαν ἀπογραφαί* follow the same pattern. They begin with a statement as to the house, or part of a house, which belongs to the one registering; then the number and ages of the inhabitants are specified, whether members of his own family or slaves or tenants, both males and females. Then distinctive physical marks of the declarant are listed. And finally the date of the registration and the signature of the one being enrolled are added.

Thus these census returns were evidences with regard to a man's age, address, household property, slaves; but their chief purpose undoubtedly was to be the basis of a list of inhabitants liable to or exempt from the poll tax. On this point Wilcken <sup>10</sup> says: "Dass diese *κατ' οικίαν ἀπογραφαί* vor allem den Zwecken der Steuerveranlagung dienen, geht schon aus dem 14jaehrigen Zyklus hervor, denn mit Ruecksicht auf den Beginn der Kopfsteuerpflichtigkeit mit dem 14. Lebensjahre ist dieser Zyklus gewaehlt worden. Zweck dieses Zensus war, die gesamte Bevoelkerung Aegyptens, und zwar einen jeden nach seiner Heimat (*ἰδία*) festzustellen."

Much light is shed on the requirement that each person return to his ancestral home by the Edict of Vibius Maximus, praefect of Egypt, in 104 A. D. <sup>11</sup>

"Proclamation of Gaius Vibius Maximus, praefect of Egypt. The house-to-house census having started, it is essential that all

<sup>8</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. II, p. 209.

<sup>9</sup> Ramsay, W. M., *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?* Hodder and Stoughton, Limited. London.

<sup>10</sup> Wilcken, Ulrich, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>11</sup> *British Museum Papyri*, Kenyon and Bell. III, p. 124 ff.



persons who for any reason whatsoever are absent from their homes be summoned to return to their own hearths in order that they may perform the customary business of registration and apply themselves to the cultivation which concerns them. Knowing, however, that some of the people from the country are needed by our city, I desire all those who have a satisfactory reason for remaining here to register themselves before . . . Festus, praefectus alae, whom I have appointed for this purpose, from whom those who have shown their presence to be necessary shall receive signed permits in accordance with this edict up to the 30th of the present month Epeiph. . . ."

This document presents an interesting analogy to Luke's statement that each person was required to return to his native village or city. It would be helpful if someday a papyrus document were discovered explaining the reason for this somewhat unusual requirement. At present we can only conjecture. If a person could register at some city in which he did not live, he might easily evade the taxation. The existence of a floating population and of many travelers away from their original home would make the census difficult. Was this requirement included in the census edict for the purpose of keeping the subject peoples close to the soil and the cultivation of the land, a factor which meant much for the maintenance of the Roman Empire? Was it due to the fact that the Roman census system was largely an adaptation of earlier Ptolemaic custom in Egypt? Probably the return to the native home was a device older than Augustus. Whatever the reason may have been, we can rest assured that Roman emperors cared little for any inconvenience or hardship this requirement might cause many people.

In conclusion, we thus see that Luke is entirely correct when he states that he traced the course of all things accurately from the beginning before he even began to write. As in countless other instances, so also in the record of the world-wide census, Luke has been shown to be a trustworthy historian. The entire question of an imperial world-wide census at the time of the birth of Christ has passed out of the sphere of speculation into the realm of definite historical truth. The truth of God's inspired Word is thus again vindicated, and the spade of the archaeologist goes on digging from year to year, confirming one by one, even to the minutest detail, the historical accuracy of those men who spake as the Holy Ghost moved them.

