



Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany

By Christopher J. Probst

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The acquiescence of the German Protestant churches in Nazi oppression and murder of Jews is well documented. In this book, Christopher J. Probst demonstrates that a significant number of German theologians and clergy made use of the 16th-century writings by Martin Luther on Jews and Judaism to reinforce the racial antisemitism and religious anti-Judaism already present among Protestants. Focusing on key figures, Probst's study makes clear that a significant number of pastors, bishops, and theologians of varying theological and political persuasions employed Luther's texts with considerable effectiveness in campaigning for the creation of a "de-Judaized" form of Christianity. Probst shows that even the church most critical of Luther's anti-Jewish writings reaffirmed the antisemitic stereotyping that helped justify early Nazi measures against the Jews.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A close look at specific ways in which Protestant theologians and pastors used and reacted to Luther in their teaching and preaching under Nazism.... In his treatment of the supposed disconnect between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, Probst shows how German Protestants during this period [following Luther] combined theological opposition to Jews with irrational, anti-Semitic stereotypes.... An important and useful book."
?Robert P. Ericksen, Kurt Mayer Professor of Holocaust Studies, Pacific Lutheran University

"Probst is to be lauded for presenting an insightful account of the convoluted echoes and reverberations of this deeply problematic aspect of Luther's legacy within German Protestantism over the *longue durée*."
?German Studies Review

"[Probst]... challenges the dichotomy between theological anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism, since he sees a great deal of overlap both in the sixteenth as well as the twentieth century. Anti-Judaism and antisemitism existed side-by-side in both Luther's writings and in those of many German Protestants in the Nazi era."
?Journal of Ecclesiastical History

"This book is clearly a worthwhile read for a Jewish audience unaware of the basis of Protestant anti-Semitism as a component of the overall phenomenon." ?AJL Reviews

"This is a useful, clearly written, conscientious supplement...." ?German History

"Christopher J. Probst has written a helpful book on an important topic." ?HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE STUDIES

"Christopher Probst has written an insightful analysis of the ways in which Protestant reformer Martin Luther's anti-Jewish writings were used by German Protestants during the Third Reich." ?Contemporary Church History Quarterly

"[R]epresents a valuable addition...." ?H-Soz-U-Kult

"Probst provides us with a detailed exegesis of each of his sources, which taken together thoughtfully challenge the supposed discontinuity between premodern anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism." ?H-Judaic

"Probst illuminates the grim reality of Germany from 1933 to 1939, an era in which the Nazis disavowed Enlightenment humanitarianism and internationalism in its various forms and turned the secular state against the most prominent beneficiaries of the Enlightenment, assimilated German Jews." ?American Historical Review

"[B]y introducing us to new figures and showing us how three different church groups in Germany responded to 'The Jewish Question,' this book makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the churches under Nazism." ?Lutheran Quarterly

About the Author

Christopher J. Probst is a visiting assistant professor of modern European history at Saint Louis University. He was a Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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