INTRODUCTION:
ROOTS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTI-SEMITISM

If there exists a cure for Judeophobia, the age-old malady of Christendom, it lies not in the suppression of symptoms but in their exposure to the light.

Frank E. Manuel

As Adolf Hitler strategised his way to power, he knew that his anti-Semitic agenda needed to gain the support of theology and the Church. Hitler himself looked up to the anti-Semitic Hoffprediger Adolf Stoecker, admiring his success in making anti-Semitism a popular movement in the 1880s. Just a few months after the new Reich Chancellor came
to power in January 1933, the respected New Testament professor at Tübingen and international expert on Judaism, Gerhard Kittel, published his book Die Judenfrage. In it, he suggested an apartheid policy against the German Jews, based on his exegesis of the New Testament. Walter Grundmann, too, became a key figure in the Deutsche Christen, using his exegetical skills to construct a dejudaised, Aryan Jesus. Other more moderate exegetes in the 1930s and 40s, such as Adolf Schlatter, Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, each took their stand on Jews, Judaism and anti-Semitism. Their stories are examples of the ways in which Church and theology deal with Jews and Judaism in a racial state.

This book begins two hundred years earlier, however, searching for the roots of theological anti-Semitism, how various positions on Jews and Judaism were theologically justified, and how Jews and Judaism were constructed in the biblical interpretation of German Protestantism, from the dawn of modernity to the years after the Holocaust. This study deals both with the prelude to theological anti-Semitism and with views that opposed anti-Semitism. Although it is true that National Socialism brought attitudes regarding Jews and Judaism to a head, the positions of the exegetes are rooted in their respective theological systems, cultural and political views, and often long research traditions. Protestant New Testament exegesis and the Jews being a large enough project, I leave aside exegesis in Roman-Catholic and Anglo-Saxon environments, although such a study would be of importance.


1 For all scholars mentioned, see their separate chapters below.
2 For Germany under National Socialism as a racial state, see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
3 See below for a definition of theological anti-Semitism.