

The Consistency of Gerhard Kittel's "Christian" Antisemitism in His "Die Judenfrage" and "Meine Verteidigung"

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Abstract : Faced with arrest, imprisonment and the denazification process in 1945, Tübingen University's Professor of Theology, Gerhard Kittel, refused to abandon the "Christian" antisemitism which he had first expounded in his *Die Judenfrage* [The Jewish Question] (1933 and 1934). At the heart of this paper is a critical engagement with *Die Judenfrage*, the first in English. Putting *Die Judenfrage* into dialogue with Kittel's 1946, *Meine Verteidigung* [My Defence] (1945-6) exposes the remarkable consistency of Kittel's idiosyncratic but closely argued Christian theology of antisemitism. Girdling his career as a foremost theologian, antisemite and enthusiastic supporter of Hitler and the NSDAP, the consistency between *Die Judenfrage* and *Meine Verteidigung* attests Kittel's consistent and authentic, intellectual position. In both texts, he claims to be advancing Christian, as opposed to "vulgar" or racial, antisemitism. Yet, in the thirteen years which divide them, Kittel had mediated contact with Nazi illuminati Rudolph Hess, Alfred Rosenberg, Winnifred Wagner, Josef Goebbels and Baldur von Schirach, through his publications in various antisemitic journals. The paper argues: *Die Judenfrage*, as both a text and as a theme, is axiomatic to Kittel's defence statement; and that *Die Judenfrage* constitutes the template of Kittel's arcane, personal "Christian" antisemitism of which *Meine Verteidigung* is a faithful impression. Both are constructed on the same theologically chimeric and abstruse hypotheses regarding Volk, Spätjudentum [late Judaism] and Heilgeschichte [salvation history]. Problematising these and other definitional vagaries that make up Kittel's "Christian" antisemitism highlight the remarkable theoretical consistency between *Die Judenfrage* and *Meine Verteidigung*. It is concluded that a deadly synergy of Nazi racial antisemitism and the New Testament antisemitism shaped Kittel's judgement to the degree that, despite the slipstream of concentration camp footage which was shaking the foundations of post-war German academia, *Meine Verteidigung* is a simple restatement of the antisemitism conveyed in *Die Judenfrage*.

Keywords : Gerhard Kittel, Third Reich theology, the Jewish Question, Nazi antisemitism

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