

Presenter: Anders Gerdmar, Uppsala University

Title: **“The theological legitimation of antisemitism. The case of German Biblical Studies from the dawn of modernity to the Shoah”**

Panel: Bible, Christianity and Anti-Semitism

The peak and most significant outcome of National Socialist Biblical exegesis is probably the National Socialist ‘Bible’ *Die Botschaft Gottes*, published by *Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben* in Eisenach, Germany. This so-called ‘Volkstestament’ was published in 1940 in 100 000 copies. The paper takes its starting point in this product, but aims at describing the road which led up to this extremely antisemitic product, sponsored by a range of German scholars and churchmen.

In the paper I discuss which are the roots of antisemitic theology, trying to describe some tenets which open to antisemitism. The first is what I call the Great Omission, omitting the Hebrew Bible from theological discourse, a tendency that was evident not least in Enlightenment research tradition. The second is replacement theology, arguing that the church has taken over the promises given to Israel, a tradition going back to the earliest Church fathers, where the thought of a discontinuity between Israel and the church replaced the New Testament thought of a continuity. The third is the construction of ‘the Jew’ as a negative entity in the overall symbolic world, Jews representing particularism instead of the cherished universalism, a purported dark backdrop of legalism instead of the freedom of the Christian gospel, and a narrowness connected with the latter and their geographical home in Eretz Israel.

In order to counter tenets that are opening to antisemitism Christian theology must uphold the necessity of the Hebrew Bible as essential to Christian theology, emphasise the continuity instead of the discontinuity between Israel and the church, and counter the view that Judaism represents legalism, whereas Christianity represents its opposites. In concrete terms, to stimulate encounters between Christian theology students and Jewish students in Israel could be an important way to build bridges.