Anti-Semitism as a ‘scientific’ world view.

Theodor Fritsch and his Catechism

The article sets out to analyse the phenomenon of German anti-Semitism within the process by which its leading adherents endowed it with the semblances of science. Alongside Wilhelm Marr, coiner of the term ‘anti-Semitism’ and “patriarch” of the position it describes, one of the champions of that ‘modern anti-Semitism’ was a student of his, Theodor Fritsch, to whom the paper is devoted. Fritsch’s *idée fixe* was to present the traditional anti-Semitism of the confessional, in other words, anti-Judaism, as well as the then fledgling racial anti-Semitism, with a ‘scientific’ world view (*wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung*). This guise of unquestionable knowledge, empirically verified, was intended to place an ideological weapon in the hands both of the disciples of the ‘old school’ of anti-Semitism and of the new votaries who were drawn to the ‘movement’ (*Bewegung*). In the eyes of the latter, the central conception of the ‘instinctive’, ‘pre-scientific’, which is to say, religious, anti-Semitism was offensive, if not to say discrediting *per se*. Fritsch’s *opus magnum* was his *Anti-Semitic Catechism*, the systematics and substance of which are the subject of penetrating analysis in the article, as are his ideological path and the reception of his works in Hitler’s Third Reich.