

Deconstructing the Bible: Understanding the Crisis in Biblical Interpretation

Outline Part 3

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I. **Eighteenth-Nineteenth Century Biblical Criticism Continued**

[grounded in My own forthcoming volume, *Theology, Politics, and Exegesis*; and the forthcoming volume I am co-authoring with Scott Hahn]

A. Some further points about Jean Astruc (1684-1766) and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827)

1. Astruc posited several different sources that Moses used in composing Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, but among these sources, only two were major sources for large chunks of material. He called them Source A and Source B. These represented roughly what would later be called the Yahwist (J—since in German J is pronounced like a Y, hence the German Jahweh for Yahweh) and the Elohist (E). Astruc did not label them J or E sources, but he did make his division based on the words used for God—Yahweh or Elohim. Bare in mind that Astruc, Jewish physician to King Louis XV of France, was attempting to defend the traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.
2. Eichhorn is important for a number of reasons, but chief among them is his use of the category of “myth” to describe many of the stories of the Old Testament. By myth he did not mean the sources were fiction, but rather that they were not useful for historical information. Although for much of his career, and in much of his writings, he upheld the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch—following, though, a documentary hypothesis-type-approach to the sources Moses used, he eventually abandoned Mosaic authorship, or at least no longer defended it.
3. The background to the romantic notion of myth, which will become important from Eichhorn forward to the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth (in Germany) is told in George Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*.

II. **The Remains of the 18th Century and the Beginning of the 19th Century in both Old Testament and New Testament Criticism**

[grounded in the forthcoming volume I am co-authoring with Scott Hahn]

A. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), and the Wolfenbüttel Fragments (1774-1778)

1. Reimarus was privately a skeptic, but in his public works he defended traditional Christian claims, and even wrote apologetical works to this effect.
2. Reimarus, however, was a careful reader of Machiavelli—in fact, he wrote his dissertation on Machiavelli.
3. In his private works, which he never published, Reimarus wrote devastating criticisms of the Old and New Testaments, traditional theology, Jesus' resurrection, etc.
4. Lessing published Reimarus' private more skeptical works in fragments from 1774-1778 as the Wolfenbüttel Fragments, but left them anonymous. In some ways this can be seen as the early beginnings to the “quest for the historical Jesus.” These Fragments cast into doubt the miracles of the Old and New Testaments (including Jesus' resurrection), and made the New Testament appear as the biased agendas of the apostles, for political purposes.

B. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849)

1. De Wette was an important figure within the history of Old Testament studies. He was in many ways influenced by Romanticism, and like Eichhorn, he saw most of the Old Testament as “Myth” rather than history.
2. Most importantly, for our discussion, de Wette cleared the way for later versions of the Documentary Hypothesis because he dated Deuteronomy very late. He was able to push much of the Pentateuch after the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.). One of the big historical obstacles to this was that the Samaritans have the Pentateuch too. Even though their version is slightly different than the Pentateuch we use, it is very close. All of those portions identified in the later Documentary Hypothesis as J, E, D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly Source), etc., were/are present in their Pentateuch as well. How can one account for this, especially if portions of the Pentateuch (like P....think Leviticus, Genesis 17, etc.) are to be dated after the exile, after the split between North and South. Why would northern Samaritans steal from southern tribes (Judah, Benjamin, Levi) for their Scriptures after their split? De Wette comes up with a story in an attempt to make this plausible,

about continued favorable interactions between north and south. That clears the way for the late dating of the Pentateuch.

C. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860)

1. Baur was a very important historian at the University of Tübingen, where he trained an entire generation of historians to follow his historical methods.
2. He was perhaps most influential in his historical works on the New Testament.
3. He is the scholar who posited hostile church politics separating Peter and Paul behind the text of the New Testament, such that Peter and his followers were in staunch disagreement with Paul and his followers. This view has shaped New Testament studies to our own day.

III. **The Remainder of the 19th Century: *Kulturkampf*, Anti-Catholicism, and the Triumph of Modern Historical Biblical Criticism**

[grounded in the forthcoming volume I am co-authoring with Scott Hahn; and Michael Gross, *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany*]

A. *Kulturkampf* (1870s)

1. Germany becomes the key center of modern biblical scholarship, based on the preceding trends we covered from the end of the 18th century into the 19th century.
2. There was a revival in German Catholicism in the 1850s, which affected large amounts of the population, including non-Catholics.
3. There were growing concerns about religious orders and monasteries (transnational authorities....they circumvented state-appointed bishops and were representatives of the pope), that revived Reformation and post-Reformation concerns.
 - a. Members of religious orders and monastic communities were seen as subservient (and thus couldn't think for themselves)
 - b. The orders and monasteries tied up a lot of land (hence wealth) that the state wanted.

4. The state pushed back, under Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898). This push back was known as the *Kulturkampf* (culture struggle) and was directed against the Catholic Church.
 - a. Religious orders, like the Jesuits, were kicked out of Germany.
 - b. In many cases, monasteries were turned into state land.
 - c. Various anti-Catholic laws were put into place.
5. This becomes an important context for understanding what happens in biblical criticism at this time period, since such biblical interpretation was happening on universities which were state run, and where professors were civil servants of the state. Hence some, like Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), would be officially involved in a number of political projects—e.g., Harnack drafted the letter of the Kaiser defending Germany's entrance into World War I.
6. It became in professors' interests to espouse the views that supported state concerns.

B. Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918)

1. Wellhausen was the single most important Old Testament scholar in the 19th century (and at the beginning of the 20th century).
 - a. He also worked in New Testament [most of these scholars we have focused on from the 18th through 19th centuries, worked in both Testaments, but I've been focusing on where they were most influential]
 - b. He also worked in Arabic studies and early Islamic history.
2. Wellhausen wrote his *Geschichte Israels (History of Israel)* in 1878. This was an attempt to rewrite Old Testament history. He later revised this volume as *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels (Prolegomena to the History of Israel)* in 1883.
3. Wellhausen is most famous for his classic formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis—that the Pentateuch was originally composed of diverse and separate documents from different authors or communities: J (the Yahwist), E (the Elohist), D (the Deuteronomist), and P (the Priestly Source). He did not invent any of these categories,

but relied on the work of others since Eichhorn (but especially since de Wette).

4. Wellhausen, like many of his contemporaries, had problems with contemporary Judaism and Catholicism—especially with matters pertaining to priesthood, ritual, sacrifice, etc. A Liberal German Protestant of the 19th century, he was a staunch supporter of Bismarck and the *Kulturkampf*.
5. Wellhausen informs readers early on in his *Prolegomena* that he is attempting a history of Israel, standing in a long line of intellectuals who have attempted something similar, which he dates back to the work of Spinoza and La Peyrère (whom he refers to by the Latin Peyrerius). He also informs readers that he had a love of the Old Testament prophets, but after reading the Pentateuch (the Torah), he had trouble reconciling the two pictures (the accounts given in the Pentateuch versus the account of the Prophets). He disliked the Pentateuch greatly.
6. It was on hearing that Karl Heinrich Graf (1815-1869) dated the Pentateuch to after the Prophets that Wellhausen found the answer he was looking for. He writes, “Almost without knowing the reasons, I was ready to accept it as true.”
7. Thus, whenever Wellhausen identified something involving hierarchical priests, ritual, sacrifice, centralized worship, etc., he dated it late, as a late corruption.
8. Unbeknownst to most scholars, it appears that Wellhausen was following the lead of Jacob Grimm—known to us from the Brothers Grimm, of Grimms’ Fairy Tales. Jacob Grimm was a part of the movement (so well described in Williamson’s *Longing for Myth in Germany*) that searched through Germany’s pre-Christian pagan past for attributes that could benefit German culture and the German state of the present. Grimm read a liberal Protestant narrative back into that pagan Germanic past (even though he disliked Christianity)—and saw Catholicism as an oppressor of a more pagan and original natural religion. Wellhausen mirrored this approach when he examined the Old Testament. He viewed the Pentateuchal legislations as a corruption of an earlier more naturalistic religion. The Prophetic critique of ritual (abused) became the highpoint of religion for Wellhausen (and for so many Protestants since Luther).

C. Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1832-1910)

1. Holtzmann is important primarily in New Testament studies for his pivotal role in the history of the Synoptic Problem.
2. The “Synoptic Problem” referred to the fact that Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the Synoptics Gospels) have very similar materials, follow a similar chronology, etc., and share much material (including much from the Gospel of Mark, but Matthew and Luke share material in common that is not found in Mark)—in contrast to the Gospel of John.
3. This had been known since the earliest Christian centuries and was addressed by such early church fathers as Origen and St. Augustine.
4. Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812) came up with a particular solution to the question of Gospel composition. Griesbach held with the Church’s universal tradition (up to that point) which maintained that the Gospel of Matthew was the first written Gospel. He argued that Luke relied upon Matthew, and that Mark relied upon both Matthew and Luke.
5. Holtzmann proposed something novel, which has become the main view in the German and English speaking world of New Testament scholars, namely that Mark was the first Gospel written, and that Matthew and Luke both relied upon Mark.
6. Holtzmann presented his work in 1863, which was refuted by many scholars. It gained popularity in Germany in the 1870s, during the *Kulturkampf*, and triumphed in the 1880s and later when it became viewed as the only tenable hypothesis—at least for those who wished to keep their state-sponsored university positions at the German universities where there was a vested interest in enforcing Markan priority. See the helpful 1995 essay by William Farmer, “State *Interesse* and Markan Primacy: 1870-1914,” in his co-edited volume, *Biblical Studies and the Shifting of Paradigms*.
7. The history makes it clear that the priority of Mark’s Gospel gained popularity until it was the only view acceptable in the German academy because of the success of the *Kulturkampf*, and as a response to the decree on the papacy, *Pastor Aeternus* at the First Vatican Council (1870). The First Vatican Council used the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 16), the Gospel of Luke (Lk 22), and the Gospel of John (Jn 21) in support of its teaching on the papacy. Mark’s Gospel was not used. Mark’s Gospel was interpreted by these German scholars as earlier,

more pure, bereft of these later Catholic corruptions in Matthew, Luke, and John.

D. William Robertson Smith (1846-1894)

1. W.R. Smith was a biblical scholar in his own right, and important early figure in the history of the discipline of anthropology.
2. Smith is important within this history, however, because he brings things back full-circle. We saw how English Deistic biblical criticism (influenced by the German Luther among many other influences) laid the seedbed for German biblical criticism of the 18th and 19th centuries as figures like Semler and Michaelis brought English Deistic biblical criticism (like Toland—which served as a means of bringing Spinoza’s and Simon’s methods into biblical scholarship) into the German speaking world. Now, W.R. Smith would be the major force bringing cutting edge German biblical criticism into the English speaking world.
3. Smith befriended Wellhausen and others on his trip to Germany.
4. Smith became the editor of the famous Ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which included English translations of essays by German biblical scholars including Wellhausen.
5. Smith also helped get Wellhausen’s and others’ works published in English, thus ensuring the popularity of German biblical criticism in the English speaking world.

IV. **Modern Secular Biblical Criticism Enters the Catholic World: Biblical Scholarship and the Modernist Crisis**

[grounded in My forthcoming volume from Catholic University of America Press, tentatively entitled *Alfred Loisy and Modern Biblical Studies*; Ramón García de Haro, *Historia teológica del modernismo*; Marvin O’Connell, *Critics on Trial*; and Fr. Eugene Kevane, *The Lord of History*]

A. Alfred Loisy (1857-1940)

1. Loisy was not the only important figure in the Modernist Crisis, but he was the most important, and he is the one I know best. Loisy was a Catholic priest in France, who studied theology, Scripture, and the ancient Near East (ancient history and ancient languages).

2. Loisy audited biblical studies courses from the famous religious skeptic Ernest Renan (1823-1892). From Renan, among others, Loisy learned the major currents of German biblical criticism.
3. Loisy decided to master Renan's methods. As he describes it later in his (multiple) autobiographical memoirs, Loisy wished to master Renan's methods in order to use them against him in a more faithful way.
4. Loisy studied the languages and histories of the ancient Near East—especially ancient Mesopotamia—from some of the world's leading figures in that field at that time.
5. Loisy taught Bible, Hebrew, etc., at the Institut Catholique in Paris.
6. Loisy was teaching a limited form of biblical inspiration, and he was bringing the major findings of German biblical criticism—like Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis—into the classroom, and was beginning to get in trouble for doing that.

B. The Catholic Church Responds

1. Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903, reigned from 1878-1903) wrote his papal encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893. It was the first ever papal encyclical devoted to the Bible. Loisy was the main (but unnamed) figure behind that encyclical (along with a colleague of his).
2. Leo XIII sets up the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1902 in order to respond to the challenges that were emerging from modern biblical criticism, particularly as being taught and published by Catholic scholars (mainly priests), many of whom would later get in trouble as Modernists.
3. Leo XIII's secretary of state asked Loisy to stop teaching Scripture, which Loisy refused.
4. Loisy was removed from the Institute Catholique the day *Providentissimus Deus* was released.
5. Pope St. Pius X (1835-1914, reigned from 1903-1914)
6. 1906, the Pontifical Biblical Commission promulgates a document defending the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

7. 1907 (May) the Pontifical Biblical Commission promulgates a document defending the historical truth of the Gospel of John.
8. 1907 (July) the Holy Office of the Inquisition promulgates *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* which condemns propositions as Modernist, including a number of points dealing with biblical interpretation. Loisy is one of the main (unnamed figures) here. In fact, recent archival research has demonstrated that some of the propositions condemned in *Lamentabili* come straight from Loisy's published works.
9. 1907 (September) Pope St. Pius X promulgates his papal encyclical on Modernism, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in which he solemnly condemns Modernism as the "synthesis of all heresies." Loisy is another of the main (unnamed) figures in mind here.
10. 1907 (November) St. Pius X issued a motu proprio warning of excommunication for anyone disagreeing with the content of either *Lamentabili* or *Pascendi*.
11. 1908 (March) Loisy was formally and solemnly excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

C. Aftermath

1. Loisy became chair of the History of Religion at the Collège du France.
2. St. Pius X instituted the Oath Against Modernism in 1910.
3. Modernism was forced underground.
4. On the one hand, the complete shutdown of Modernism was seen as necessary because the stakes were so high. It affected everything, including the Sacramental life of the Church. On the other hand, the tools were not in place (or were not used) to help people understand what was happening. Some scholars retained their views intellectually, and taught them privately. Catholic scholars were looked at with suspicion by Protestant scholars who controlled most of the scholarly institutions in Europe and especially in America. Those labelled Modernists like Francis Gigot (former student of Loisy) who taught at seminaries in the U.S., but who apparently did an about face and

supported the official positions of the Catholic Church, did not articulate credible positions.

- a. As an example. Gigot had taught the Documentary Hypothesis, like what Loisy espoused—both following the work of Wellhausen
 - b. When this became a forbidden position, Gigot wrote a work *defending* the traditional view that Moses was responsible for the Pentateuch.
 - c. His book (1915), however, is not credible. It presents an incredibly weak case for Mosaic authorship.
 - d. That there were other more credible works out there at the time, presenting arguments that are still persuasive, makes this even more confusing—unless scholars like Gigot were insincere in what they wrote and were simply trying to play it safe.
 - e. There would soon be a series of books that were quite robust and persuasive arguing for a unitary authorship of the Pentateuch or directly challenging Wellhausen, e.g., Augustin Bea, *De Pentateucho* (1928); Umberto Cassuto, *La questione della Genesi* (1934); P.J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis* (1936); Yehezkel Kaufmann, multi-volume *The Religion of Israel* (1937-1956); Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis* (1941); Cyrus Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (1953); Cyrus Gordon, *The World of the Old Testament* (1958); Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (1964); Kenneth Kitchen, *Pentateuchal Criticism and Interpretation* (1965); Edwin Yamauchi, *Composition and Corroboration in Classical and Biblical Studies* (1966); K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (1977); A.R. Millard and D.J. Wiseman, ed., *Essays on the Patriarchs* (1980); Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (1985); Gary Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (1986); R.N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (1987); and many, many more.
5. More work is to be done, in the spirit of Kevane's *The Lord of History*, fleshing out how the Modernist crisis continued and impacted the fall out after the Second Vatican Council. Suffice it to say, for the moment, it is difficult to understand how the crisis in biblical interpretation that Pope Benedict identified (and which we discussed in the first webinar) was brought into (and has survived in) the Catholic Church, without understanding the history of the Modernist Crisis, and its aftermath.