

THE HISTORICAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: A SURVEY OF ORIGINS

By VICTOR PAUL FURNISH, B.D., M.A., Ph.D.

PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT, PERKINS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY,
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY, DALLAS, TEXAS

INTRODUCTION

IT is a commonplace to refer to mid-nineteenth century German Protestantism as the particular setting wherein historical-critical methods began to be applied to the New Testament materials with profound, and for many Christians, disturbing results. The names of such important (and controversial) scholars as F. Chr. Baur (1792-1860) and David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74) come immediately and appropriately to mind. Less attention has been given, however, to the various persons and movements which prepared the way for and made specific contributions to the rise of New Testament criticism.¹ But a study of the progenitors of such figures as Baur and Strauss and of some of the developments in the study of history and historical documents to which they were heir, not only helps to put their own work into historical and theological perspective, but also to clarify some of the essential components of the historical-critical method itself. This is the objective of the survey and analysis presented here.²

¹ For example, Peter C. Hodgson's assessment of the work of Baur (*The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* [New York: Harper & Row, 1966]) falls notably short at this point. See the review of Hodgson's book by Klaus Penzel, *Journal of Religion*, xlviii (July 1968), 310-23, esp. 320.

² This study originated as a paper presented on 16 September 1971, to the Seminar on the Development of Catholic Christianity. I am grateful to the members of the Seminar both for the invitation to undertake the study in the first place and for their discussion of it—which has contributed substantially to the present revision. Even in this revised form the scope of the study is due largely to the terms of the original assignment, viz. to trace the antecedents of nineteenth-century, historical-critical study of the New Testament. In particular, only the barest account has been taken here of developments in the study of the Old Testament (which usually preceded those involving the New), and of the philosophical and theological contributions to historical criticism by such important figures as Kant, Lessing and Schleiermacher. To have done so

The earliest of Baur's publications on the New Testament appeared in 1831, and it is clear that by this date one must reckon with the use of a self-consciously "historical-critical method". It will make some sense, therefore, to establish 1830 as the *terminus ad quem* of our study, recognizing that there would be a certain arbitrariness involved with any *terminus* selected. An added advantage of this particular one, however, is that it allows us to take into account two full decades of German scholarship following the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810. The founding of this University, as James Westfall Thompson points out, began "the great renaissance of German scholarship" following Napoleon's defeat of King Friedrich-Wilhelm III at Jena in 1806, and the subsequent closing of the important University of Halle.¹ The theologians appointed to the new Berlin faculty were DeWette, Schleiermacher, Neander and Marheinecke, and among the historians was B. G. Niebuhr.²

The *terminus a quo* of this study must, in the nature of the case, be left much more flexible. One could argue, for instance, that such a survey must take into account the whole history of the interpretation of the New Testament within the Church. But that would take us at least back to the second century, and would require a thorough redefinition of the task at hand. Or again, it might be suggested that the proper *terminus a quo* is the Protestant Reformation when "historical criticism became a Protestant weapon and documents were made missiles in the hands of the Magdeburg Centuriators".³ But the Reformers did not apply this same historical criticism to *scriptural* documents in any rigorous fashion; and, as Kendrick Grobel has observed, it was "precisely the pre-eminence of scripture ('scripture only!') [which] inhibited Protestant theologians from candid would have detracted from the more limited purpose of examining the way historical study developed in the work of persons specifically concerned with the exegesis and interpretation of the New Testament.

¹ *A History of Historical Writing, II: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1942), pp. 149-52.

² *Ibid.* p. 152, although Thompson omits the name of Neander (see *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3. Aufl., i. 1058). On DeWette see below, p. 359 f., and on Niebuhr, p. 361.

³ Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing*, ii. 3.

scrutiny of their highest authority, whereas the Roman scholar, with tradition as highest authority, could be relatively free toward scripture".¹ In fact, it is not the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, but much more the Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century, which may be reckoned as the inaugural moment in the development of historical criticism. This first becomes clear, however, in the seventeenth century application of scientific methods to the study of historical data.² And that is where our survey must commence.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century marks the beginning of modern science with its concern for "the generalisation of perceptual experience by means of adequate concepts...".³ By the early seventeenth century it was becoming increasingly clear that direct observation of data must precede generalizations about natural phenomena, and that the inductive method is the only proper basis for properly scientific investigation. Thus, Galileo's observations in January of 1610 that Jupiter was the centre of its own small planetary system provided data which proved the falsity of the Ptolemaic view that the sun never lies between the earth and Venus, and the correctness of the Copernican and Keplerian theories. "Here at last then was evidence appealing directly to the senses and not being based merely on geometrical elegance and simplicity that the earth together with other planets revolves round the sun..."⁴

It was probably inevitable that concern for an inductive method in formulating general concepts would eventually arise also in connection with historical observations and generalizations. Thus, R. G. Collingwood speaks of "a new school of historical

¹ "Biblical Criticism", *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, A-D (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 411.

² In this connection see the important monograph by Klaus Scholder, *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik im 17. Jahrhundert*, "Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus", 10, xxxiii (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966), esp. pp. 7-10 and chapters 3-4.

³ W. P. D. Wightman, *The Growth of Scientific Ideas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 58 f.

thought ” in the latter half of the seventeenth century which he describes as “ Cartesian historiography ”. Basic to this new historiography was its refusal to accept merely written testimony unless that had itself been subjected “ to a process of criticism based on at least three rules of method : (1) Descartes’s own implicit rule, that no authority must induce us to believe what we know cannot have happened ; (2) the rule that different authorities must be confronted with each other and harmonized ; (3) the rule that written authorities must be checked by the use of non-literary evidence ”.¹

The new critical spirit in historiography to which Collingwood refers is apparent already in the work of the Dutch Jesuit, Herbert Rosweyde (1569-1629) who projected a study of the *Lives of the Saints* which would rescue the biographical facts from the pious legends with which they had been long embellished.² The project was actually carried out under the initial direction of the Belgian Jesuit, John Bollandus (1596-1665), his associates G. Henschen (1600-81) and D. Papebroche (1628-1714) and their followers—collectively known as the “ Bollandist Fathers ”. In France, about the same time, the Benedictine Congrégation de St. Maur began to devote itself to the collection and editing of historical documents, giving scrupulous attention to such matters as palaeography and chronology. Most prominent of these scholars was Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) of the community of St. Germain des Prés who published, between 1688 and 1701, nine volumes covering the period from St. Benedict (*ca.* 480-547) to the end of the eleventh century. Thompson remarks on the “ distinctive intellectual honesty and scrupulous fidelity ” which these Jesuit and Benedictine scholars “ combined with an independent spirit of historical criticism and an unsurpassed technical method ”.³

It is not too surprising, however, that the church’s own theologians and scholars were not among the first to apply the new inductive and critical methodologies to Scripture itself. It

¹ *The Idea of History* (New York : Oxford University Press, “ Galaxy Book ”, 1956 ; first published 1946), p. 62.

² See Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing*, ii. 8 ff.

³ *Ibid.* 11.

is one thing to separate fact from fancy in non-canonical sources, but quite another to subject the church's canon to critical inquiry. Just as twentieth-century nuclear physicists were among the first to raise questions about the moral consequences of their discoveries, so in the seventeenth century men like Kepler and Galileo were among the first to have to face the consequences of their work for the authority of the Bible. Kepler (1571-1630), for instance, sought to accommodate the new world-view to the Bible by emphasizing the *theological* intention of the biblical texts. Genesis and the Psalter, for instance, are not interested in astronomy or physics, but in the history of creation theologically understood, namely, in the meaning of man's life before God and in the world.¹ This profoundly correct insight about the nature of the biblical sources was coupled, however, in the work of Kepler and many subsequent thinkers, with the assignment of science and theology to totally separate spheres, the natural and the supernatural, the secular and the religious. Thereby a genuinely historical-critical approach to Scripture itself was fatally compromised.

Kepler's contemporary and correspondent, Galileo (1564-1642), was, of course, personally and seriously involved with the theological implications of his scientific views. Scholder reckons Galileo's open letter addressed to Christine von Lothringen in the year 1615 "one of the most noteworthy documents for the history of biblical criticism".² In this letter Galileo subscribes to the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy, but only so long as it is understood that the truth of the Bible is not identical with its words. The Old Testament anthropomorphisms show, for instance, that the words of the text need interpretation. Therefore, he concluded, since both Scripture and Nature are manifestations of God's Word, and since the laws of Nature are observable and regular, whereas the meaning of Scripture is always open to question, the Bible's answers to questions of natural science are no longer binding.³ On the contrary, the results of scientific study become the key which unlocks the meaning of Scripture. For Galileo, the authority of Scripture

¹ See Scholder, *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik*, p. 70.

² *Ibid.* p. 72.

³ *Ibid.* p. 73.

is therefore bound up with its pedagogical function; only through the revelation of the Holy Spirit can mankind be persuaded of the truth about the world.¹ Galileo himself recognized what was decisive here, namely, that experience, not the church's tradition, is the real criterion of truth. Experience deals with what is demonstrable, tradition—of which the Bible is a part—has to do only with uncertain opinions.²

In Holland, meanwhile, the jurist and statesman, Grotius (1583-1645) was developing another approach to biblical interpretation. Grotius believed that the Bible contained "the pure, classical form of Christianity" which had been lost in the course of the centuries.³ The humanism and classical training of Grotius (he had studied under the great philologist J. Scaliger)⁴ is evident here, for he was convinced "that in the earliest church biblical Christianity had been most purely grasped and understood", not yet overlaid with dogma.⁵ Therefore, in spite of his defence of the Remonstrants, Grotius sympathized with the Roman Catholic view of the importance of tradition as providing, along with Scripture, the norm of Christian teaching.

Already in his book, *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (1627),⁶ Grotius had compared the New Testament writings (the authorship of which he did not question, since it was attested by the church fathers, 141 f.) with other ancient works, e.g. of Plato, Xenophon, Polybius. Just as there are often disagreements among the various writers of antiquity, and even contradictions within the writings of one and the same writer, so we may expect these in the New Testament, too (157 f.). Many of the minor contradictions can be reconciled; and if there are some that cannot be, this does not compel us to regard the whole as worthless, for then there would be no trustworthy historical book anywhere, not even the books of, e.g. Livy and

¹ Ibid. p. 74.

² Ibid. p. 75.

³ Joachim Schlüter, *Die Theologie des Hugo Grotius* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1919), p. 25 f.

⁴ W. G. Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament, Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1958), p. 29.

⁵ Schlüter, *Die Theologie*, p. 32.

⁶ Trans. into English by John Clarke (London: James & John Knapton, 1739).

Plutarch, whose authority in the main is accepted in spite of discrepancies within them. It is "much more reasonable", then, to retain confidence in Scripture in spite of its contradictions, because those writers "have always a very great Regard to Piety and Truth" (159). At the end of his life (1641 ff.) Grotius was publishing a series of annotations on the Bible in which he included many parallels from other ancient sources. This was in keeping with his belief that the Bible is not "a system of teaching and of regulations", but the writings of men who "have written as occasion required and in accord with what the time involved . . .".¹

While Grotius defended the sincerity and piety of the biblical writers, he rejected both verbal and direct inspiration,² and began to view the canon itself in a historical way. Thus, he says, the canonicity of Luke-Acts is due solely to the fact that the earliest church judged these books to have been "purely and dependably written" and to "deal with matters which are of the greatest meaning for Salvation".³ Grotius himself acknowledged that some writings were more firmly canonical than others, that in some instances (e.g. Paul on the eschaton) biblical writers were simply wrong, and that there were lower and higher degrees of revelation provided the various authors.⁴ But most important of all was Grotius' constant effort to free exegesis from all dogmatic presuppositions and to apply the methods of philological criticism in such a way as to recover the original meaning of the biblical texts.

Perhaps, however, as Ernst Cassirer has claimed, "the first attempt at a philosophical justification and foundation of Biblical criticism" was made by the Dutch-Jewish philosopher, Spinoza (1632-77).⁵ His philosophical monism led him to apply the rules and methods developed for the study of natural phenomena to the study of the scriptural texts, a step which can be seen very clearly in his, *A Treatise Partly Theological and Partly Political*

¹ Cited by Schlüter, *Die Theologie*, p. 26.

² Ibid.

³ Cited by Schlüter, *ibid.* p. 27 f.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 28-30.

⁵ *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, tr. F. C. A. Koelln and J. P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 184. See also Scholder's discussion of Spinoza, *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik*, pp. 165-9.

published in 1670.¹ Here, in a move similar to but even bolder than Galileo's, Spinoza identifies the "Universal Laws of Nature" with the divine ordinances themselves (129), and maintains that anything in the Bible which cannot be reconciled with the Laws of Nature must be rejected as "inserted by Sacrilegious Men; for whatever is against Nature, is against Reason, and whatever is against Reason, ought to be rejected as absurd (145)".

Specifically, "the method of interpreting Scripture, doth not differ from the method of interpreting Nature", for also in the former a "true History" must be composed "that thence, as from sure Principles, we may by rational consequences collect the meaning" of the biblical writers (157 f.). Doctrine, then, is not to be imposed upon Scripture, but derived from it (160), and this requires a knowledge of Hebrew (important for New Testament as well as Old Testament interpretation), freedom from prejudiced views of the meaning of Scripture, and concern for "the Lives, Manners and Studies of the Authors of every Book; who the Person was, upon what occasion he wrote, in what time, to whom; and in what Language", as well as for the book's subsequent reception and canonization within the church (160-5). Spinoza's overall rule was that Scripture alone must interpret Scripture, and unlike Grotius he regarded tradition as always suspect (171-3).

Spinoza was less rigorous in applying his rules to the New Testament than to the Old, but even respecting New Testament writers he could say, "If we carefully read over the Epistles, we shall find that the Apostles did agree concerning Religion it self, but differ'd about its Foundations" (271). Thus, he distinguished between the "few and plain Doctrines" of Christ (272) and those "temporary" doctrines formulated by the Apostles for missionary purposes (273; cf. 164 f.).

But Spinoza, like others before him (for example, Kepler and Galileo), was concerned to work out some kind of accommodation between the biblical revelation and the observable

¹ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 184 ff. Subsequent references to Spinoza's *Treatise* are from the English translation of the Latin original, published in London in 1689.

phenomena of nature. Consequently, he refused to identify Scripture with "God's Word" as such, arguing that both the Bible and Reason show that the true Word of God ("true Religion") is to be found imprinted in men's hearts. Therefore, no amount of biblical criticism can impugn God's Word (274). Like Galileo he accorded to Scripture a pragmatic, specifically pedagogical, value. Reason alone, he suggested, is insufficient to lead "most" (ordinary) people to salvation; to this end, therefore the testimony of Scripture can have good effect (318-30).

The French Oratorian, Richard Simon (1638-1712) is, like Grotius and Spinoza, sometimes mentioned as the founder of biblical criticism. The liberalism of his *Critical History of the Old Testament* (1678) resulted in his expulsion from the Congregation of the Oratory shortly thereafter. Subsequently his *Critical History of the Text of the New Testament* was published in two parts in English.¹ Simon was well acquainted with the work of both Grotius and Spinoza, and often refers to them. He is critical of their view of the inspiration of Scripture (see esp. ii. 60 ff., 80 ff.), and for his own part staunchly maintains that the writers were inspired. However, Simon was not willing to defend verbal inspiration, and insisted that the writers' "Reason and Memory" were not suspended and that "they continued to be Men still . . ." (ii. 61).

Throughout, Simon emphasizes the dual importance of Scripture and Tradition; the former "is not altogether sufficient of it self; it is necessary to know, besides this, what are the Apostolical Traditions; and we cannot learn them but from the Apostolical Churches, who have preserved the true Sense of Scriptures" (i. 31; cf. 136). It is precisely this linking of Scripture and Tradition so closely together which allows Simon to begin to interpret the New Testament writings as documents of history, and not merely as doctrinal statements. Thus, he regards the Gospels as "only Collections of the Preachings of the Apostles", made "without having too scrupulous a regard" for factual (e.g. chronological) details (i. 86) and composed in response to the specific needs of particular congregations (i. 103). Simon is quite aware of textual problems such as the apparent

¹ London: R. Taylor, 1689.

lateness of John vii. 53-viii. 11 (i. 119-25), and deals at some length also with the problem of John xxi (ii. 84-94)—which he concludes, in spite of certain stylistic irregularities, is like the rest of the Gospel from St. John.

By the end of the seventeenth century historical-critical methods were also beginning to be applied to the New Testament in England. Lightfoot (1602-75), the Cambridge Hebraist, in his lectures and publications emphasized the Jewish background of the New Testament authors and thereby contributed significantly to the philological study of their writings.¹ Perhaps even more important, however, was the work of Richard Bentley (1662-1742), a man of many parts—classicist, royal librarian, and finally (from 1717) Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. His most famous and important work was the *Dissertation Upon the Epistles of Phalaris* (1699), in which he was able to prove that the letters ascribed to this sixth-century B.C. Sicilian were actually composed in the second century B.C. Bentley's real achievement here was methodological, for his study proceeded upon the basis of evidence internal to the documents themselves.² Later in his career, Bentley turned his attention to the textual criticism of the New Testament, but he himself seems not to have applied the historical-critical method to the canon in any thoroughgoing way. Thus, in a sermon at the Cambridge Commencement a few years after he took Anglican orders,³ he agreed with the Deists that "right Reason" is "the native lamp of the soul, placed and kindled there by our Creator" (6), but dissented from them about the exercise of reason and its bounds. There are, he insisted, abstruse mysteries of Christian faith which lie beyond the reach of reason. Nevertheless, they are to be believed, "because they are plainly taught in the word of God, who can neither err nor deceive" (11). As for Spinoza so for Bentley, Reason and Scripture stand together, each with its

¹ See, e.g. Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament*, p. 36 f.

² See Samuel Terrien, "History of the Interpretation of the Bible. III. Modern Period", in *The Interpreter's Bible*, i (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 130.

³ *Of Revelation and the Messiah. A Sermon Preached at the Publick Commencement at Cambridge, 5 July 1696* (London: Printed by J. H. for Henry Mortlock, 1696).

proper role. The “divinity of [Christ’s] doctrine” is guaranteed by the fact “that the finger of God upon the tables of our hearts, and the pens of the inspired Writers in the volume of the Gospel have prescribed us one and the same lesson” (33 f.).

The work of Locke (1632-1704), too, is often mentioned in connection with the development of biblical criticism; often mentioned, but rarely given enough attention. Of particular interest are Locke’s paraphrases of Pauline letters, originally written only for his own use, but subsequently published.¹ (How much these may owe to similar projects previously undertaken in Holland by Grotius has not, so far as I know, ever been investigated.) In a lengthy prefatory essay Locke refers to Scripture as an “infallible Rule” (x) “dictated” by the Spirit of God (xii). But his main point is that an understanding of Paul’s thought requires attention to the apostle’s own intentions relative to the particular congregations he addressed. Locke’s plea, in effect, is for setting the Pauline letters in their proper historical context. He is particularly opposed to the usual practice of commentators which, he believes, is to “bring the sacred Scripture to their Opinions, to bend it to them, to make it as they can a Cover and Guard of them” (x). Locke proposes a different approach. Instead of the kind of “commentary” produced in his day, he offers a “paraphrase”. In form, his work consists of the English text of each letter printed in small type at the left side of the page; a paraphrase in larger type, parallel to the text but covering the remaining two-thirds of the page; and notes, printed in small type across the bottom of the page. These notes refer to related passages elsewhere in Paul and the New Testament generally, offer comment on the meanings of Greek words and phrases, clarify the syntax, and provide historical and literary background information. A “Synopsis” of the contents of each letter is provided at the outset, in which some information about the historical circumstances and occasion of the letter (e.g. its date and place of composition) is also given. This description of Locke’s work is offered in order to show that it is far more than a “paraphrase”. In fact, we have here, and

¹ *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, Romans, I, II Corinthians, Ephesians* (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1705-7).

in similar annotated texts from Hugo Grotius in Holland, the direct ancestors of the modern critical commentary. Indeed, Locke's paraphrases served as the model for numerous other writers, both in England and—even more importantly—in Germany.¹

Locke's method, as he discusses it in the prefatory essay, may be summarized as follows. (1) Each letter must be taken as a whole to discern its "main Subject and Tendency" (xiv); (2) the apostle's argument is to be presumed coherent and reasonable; (3) by "stubborn Attention, and more than common Application", one must attempt to gain from the letters themselves the facts about the historical circumstances surrounding them (xvii); (4) *meanings* not just single *words* should be the object of study, for Paul sometimes uses different words to express the same idea (xx f.); (5) and, at all times, one must avoid reading his own views into the text (xxiii).²

Before moving on from this survey of seventeenth-century developments, notice also needs to be taken of English Deism which was at its peak as the century closed. The Deists' protests, in the name of reason and "natural religion", against the established Church, its institutions and dogmas, were of course at the same time attacks upon the orthodox use of Scripture as the divinely inspired authority for traditional theological beliefs and doctrines.³ It is not really possible, however, to ascribe to the Deists themselves any special concern for the development of rules or methods for the interpretation of Scripture. In this regard the major Deist thinkers were largely dependent upon the work of other seventeenth-century critics, the results of whose

¹ See p. 352 f.

² A contemporary of Locke's was the French rationalist, Pierre Bayle (1647-1707), whose contribution to historical science is particularly emphasized by Cassirer. Bayle and Locke had much in common. Thus, Bayle like his English contemporary, urged "that history is to be touched only with unsoiled hands, that the presentation of historical phenomena must not be hindered by any prejudice or distorted by any religious or political bias" (Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 208).

³ See especially, for a discussion of the Bible and the English Deists, Edward Carpenter's essay, "The Bible in the Eighteenth Century", pp. 89-124 in *The Church's Use of the Bible, Past and Present*, ed. D. E. Nineham (London: S.P.C.K., 1963).

work they transformed into lethal weapons to use in their battles against orthodoxy.¹ Deism, then, served as a catalytic agent insofar as it used the methods and results of still rather cautious biblical critics to pose in radical new ways the question of the authority of the Bible. Just at this point, however, it must be noted that Deism's long-term contribution to the development of historical-critical study of the Bible was destined to be made not in England, but in Germany, where Deism (largely through the translated works of Lord Shaftesbury [1671-1713]), was one of the vital elements in the ferment of the *Aufklärung*. But to speak of the German *Aufklärung* is already to cross over the threshold into the eighteenth century.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The eighteenth century, the "Age of Enlightenment", has been described as the dawn of reason and of the humanistic "endeavour . . . to secularize every department of human life and thought".² But so far as traditional religious institutions and dogmas were concerned, the Enlightenment posed a serious threat. Religion in the traditional sense was regarded as sheer, irrational error. Thus, as Collingwood has pointed out, Enlightenment historians who regarded one phase of history (the religious) as totally irrational were in fact abandoning a genuinely *historical* outlook. So Collingwood can say, with some justification, that eighteenth-century historiography, "in its main motive . . . was polemical and anti-historical".³

There were, however, two countervailing forces at work. On the one hand, in keeping with the broadened vistas encouraged by natural science ever since Kepler and Galileo, there was a surge of interest in organizing and interpreting in a comprehensible way the phenomena of civilization;⁴ that is, in

¹ For this reason it is not quite fair to say that Deism represents the problem of the historical-critical method in the seventeenth century, viz. that it was "critical but not historical" (M. E. Andrew, "The Historical-Critical Method in the Seventeenth Century and in the Twentieth", *Colloquium*, iv (1971), 98).

² Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 76.

³ *Ibid.* p. 77.

⁴ See G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., rev. edn. 1952), p. 5. Chap. I of Gooch's book ("From the Renaissance to the French Revolution") affords a useful survey of the development of historiography in the period under consideration.

ordering the events of societies in such a way as to make clear their historical significance.¹ And on the other hand, particularly in Germany, there was an ever-increasing zeal for the discovery and interpretation of the *data* of history, its texts and its artifacts—as often as not out of concern for enhancing and supporting given political commitments and goals. Biblical study profited both directly and indirectly from these two powerful movements and from the lifting of the standards of critical research which they each involved. In particular, one can note over the course of the century the emergence of a concern for the biblical books as separate writings belonging to diverse times and places and occasioned by varying circumstances. Such interests are already apparent in the work of men like Grotius, Simon and Locke; but now they are raised to a new level of importance, enhanced by the availability of new evidence from all fields of historical inquiry and pursued with a new critical acumen.

In the year 1700 there were by actual count only three journals devoted to historical studies being published in Germany. But by 1790 there were 137.² The Göttingen historian, J. Ch. Gatterer, reported in 1772 that almost twenty per cent of the 5,000 German publications between 1769-71 were on historical subjects.³ Gatterer further observed that the legal and constitutional disputes among the several sections of the politically turbulent German empire had prompted “the critical and documentary study of the nation’s history . . .”.⁴ The University

¹ In what follows I regret having to forego a discussion of the work of Giambattista Vico (1668-1774) who, in his *New Science* (1744), shows such a keen sense of the importance of historical evidence, of historical reconstruction, and of the nexus of cause and effect in the movement of world history. But his work seems to have had no particular influence on biblical scholarship, and I am therefore omitting any discussion of it. See, however, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. from the third edn. of 1744 by T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1948), and the discussion in Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 63 ff.

² R. Wittram, cited by Herbert Butterfield, *Man On His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1955), p. 37.

³ *Ibid.* Butterfield notes that, at the same time, only about one-ninth of the publications in England were devoted to historical topics.

⁴ *Ibid.*

of Göttingen, founded by the Elector of Hanover (George II of England) in 1737, soon became a centre of the German "historical school". Its scholars enjoyed special opportunities for travel and publication, and many of them became especially conversant with English and Dutch scholarship.¹ By 1785 one of the university's historians, A. L. von Schlözer, could write that Göttingen, "in contrast to the speculative tendency of other German universities", was "the seat of historical thinking".²

The first Rector of the University of Göttingen was J. L. von Mosheim (1694-1755), himself a church historian. Gibbon's description of Mosheim was apt: "Less profound than Petavius, less independent than LeClerc, less ingenious than Beausobre, the historian Mosheim is full, rational, correct, and moderate".³ His massive three-volume study of church history first appeared in 1737-41, with later editions in 1752 and 1755.⁴ In his concern to "trace events to their *causes*" and to discuss "not only *what* happened, but likewise *how* and *why*",⁵ Mosheim is representative of those eighteenth-century historians who look for lines of development in the course of history.⁶ Mosheim also warns about the danger of foisting one's own prejudices upon the sources, or holding them in such reverence that they are allowed "to lead us blindfold".⁷ It must be observed, however, that for all his importance as a pioneer in the writing of a "full, rational, correct, and moderate" church history, it apparently did not occur to Mosheim to apply his methods to the New Testament sources. His discussion of first-century Christianity employs the New Testament materials quite uncritically. He presumes them to yield straightforward factual evidence for both the internal and external history of the apostolic church.⁸

¹ Ibid. pp. 39 f.

² Cited by Butterfield, *ibid.* p. 41, n. 4.

³ Quoted by Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing*, ii. 121.

⁴ The last edition was translated into English by James Murdock as *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern* (1832). References here are to the edition published by H. L. Hastings at Boston in 1892.

⁵ Ibid. i, p. xxvii.

⁶ Cf. Butterfield, *Man On His Past*, p. 34. Von Schlözer, for instance, described world history as "philosophy, perpetually connecting results with their causes" (quoted *ibid.* p. 49).

⁷ *Institutes*, i, xxviii.

⁸ See *ibid.* i. 23-96.

The Göttingen historian, von Schlözer, testified that biblical textual studies were among the important precedents for his own attempt to produce critical texts from the history of Germany.¹ The beginnings of New Testament textual criticism are clearly visible already in the seventeenth century (e.g. Simon), but it is in the eighteenth century that such study comes into its own. Especially noteworthy was the work of J. J. Wettstein (1693-1754) of Basle.² Even as a student, Wettstein was interested in New Testament manuscripts, and began a diligent search of European libraries for them. When he was only twenty-one, for instance, he began a literary tour which was to take him to France, where he visited the great paleographer Bernard de Montfaucon at the Benedictine Abbey of St. Germain des Prés, and England, where he inaugurated a friendship with Richard Bentley. In 1746 Wettstein again visited England, renewing old acquaintances and making new ones, as well as examining more manuscripts.

Wettstein's own two-volume edition of the Greek Testament was published in 1751-2 and is a landmark in the effort to establish the best possible New Testament text. The apparatus with Wettstein's text was in two parts. The first discussed variant readings and made judgements about which were to be preferred. The second (which has not yet been superseded) brought together a wealth of citations from classical and Jewish literature which Wettstein regarded as providing significant parallels to New Testament passages. Thus, along with his contributions to the advancement of textual studies, Wettstein (in the train of John Lightfoot and Hugo Grotius) provides further evidence in support of the contention that, to be properly interpreted, the New Testament must be viewed as a document of its own time and place.

Closely associated with the developing science of textual criticism was the concern for a strictly philological (sometimes called "grammatical-historical") exegesis. As contrasted with exegesis controlled by the interpreter's own theological interests and commitments, "philological exegesis" sought to adhere

¹ Butterfield, *Man On His Past*, pp. 57 f.

² See Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament*, pp. 52 f., and C. L. Hulbert-Powell, *John James Wettstein* (London: S.P.C.K., 1938).

solely to the words of the text itself. It presupposed that any given text could have only one correct interpretation—the one which conformed to the author's original intention. Indeed, John Locke's concerns and methods for interpreting Paul's letters, as expressed in the essay prefaced to his *Paraphrase*, are quite in accord with those of philological study. It was left for scholars in Germany, however, eager and able students of the Oriental languages and caught up in the excitement of historical discovery, to define such concerns with precision and to refine the methods for serving them.

The work of J. Fr. W. Jerusalem (1709-89) is a good example. He had begun the study of Hebrew and other ancient Semitic languages at the age of twelve.¹ Travels in England in 1738-40 acquainted him with the work of Locke and, influenced by Locke's paraphrases of the Pauline letters, he decided to produce his own. He was firmly convinced that New Testament ideas must be expounded solely in relation to their historical and logical context and without a concern to support the dogmatic tradition.² He was also interested in applying such a method to the study of the history of doctrine, and (according to Aner) became the first German Protestant to make such a proposal (in a letter to Gottsched, 1747).³

Jerusalem's contemporary, J. D. Michaelis (1717-91) was, however, a more important figure in the development of biblical criticism as such. Son of an Orientalist, Michaelis himself later became Professor of Philosophy (1746) and of Oriental Languages (1750) in Göttingen. His published works include monographs on Oriental languages, archaeology, and the Old Testament (particularly important was his six-volume study of the Mosaic law), as well as on the New Testament. Like Jerusalem he had visited in England (1741-2), and in 1762 he took the first of his many trips to the Middle East.⁴ Again like Jerusalem, Michaelis had been attracted by the many New Testament paraphrases being produced in England (modelled after Locke's) and, in 1746 and 1747 published German translations of the paraphrases

¹ Karl Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964 [reprint of 1929 edition]), p. 210.

² *Ibid.* pp. 205 f.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 224 f.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 211 and n. 1.

of George Benson and James Pierce respectively. Subsequently, other Germans produced translations of paraphrases by Philip Doddridge (1750; by F. E. Rambach), John Taylor (1759), James McKnight (1772) and Arthur A. Sykes (1779, by J. S. Semler). Michaelis published his own paraphrases of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and the Pastorals in 1750, and of Hebrews in 1762.¹

More important, however, was Michaelis's work on the text and versions of the New Testament, work which he specifically regarded as an updating and broadening of that begun by Richard Simon.² Michaelis was one of the biblical text critics his Göttingen colleague, von Schlözer, had in mind as he pursued his own work in German national history,³ and Aner has suggested that it was Michaelis more than any other who made textual criticism acceptable in Germany.⁴ Michaelis's introductory lectures on the New Testament, first published in 1750, were, over the years, expanded and revised. By the fourth edition (1788) they had grown to four substantial volumes.⁵ Volume I deals principally with the authenticity and inspiration of the New Testament. Here he accepts the traditional views of authorship of all the New Testament books on the grounds that "they have been received as such without contradiction from the earliest ages . . ." (24). While he claims that the real issue for faith is the "genuineness" of the New Testament, not its "inspiration" (72), he defends also the latter as necessary "to promote [the] beneficial effects" of Christianity (74). Significantly, though, explicitly in response to the *Fragments* (later discovered to be from Reimarus) recently published by Lessing, Michaelis in effect rejects the view that the *whole* New Testament is inspired. The anonymous author of the *Fragments* had based his case against the resurrection of Jesus largely on the grounds of contradictory evidence within the Gospel narratives.

¹ Ibid. p. 208.

² *Introductory Lectures to the Sacred Books of the New Testament* [trans. from the German edn. of 1750] (London: Wm. Dawson, 1780).

³ Butterfield, *Man On His Past*, pp. 57 f.

⁴ *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, p. 217.

⁵ Subsequently translated into English by Herbert Marsh as *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1823).

But if one is able to admit that Mark and Luke were not infallible, then such arguments are “deprived of their force” (96). Hence, Michaelis believes that the abandonment of the idea that these two evangelists were inspired will “essentially serve the cause of our religion, and disarm our adversaries at once . . .” (97).

Volume II is devoted entirely to a discussion of the ancient versions and manuscripts of the New Testament, to its quotation by the Church Fathers, textual emendations of the Greek text, editions of the Greek text, and its punctuation and divisions. Volume III discusses the Gospels and Acts. The treatment of Luke-Acts is perhaps most noteworthy. While Luke (who, it is claimed, knew neither Matthew nor Mark, 247) was “a very credible historian” (230), he was at the same time “a mere human historian” (231), and—because he was not divinely inspired—he made “some few mistakes” (230 f.). Michaelis contends that the author’s chief objectives in writing Acts were to relate the manner of the delivery of the spiritual gifts at Pentecost, and to support the validity of the Gentile mission (330 f.). This second point, at least, begins to suggest a *theological* motive animating Luke, but Michaelis does not develop the matter in this way. Instead, he goes on to emphasize Luke’s faithful preservation, in Acts, of “the manner of speaking which was peculiar to each of his orators” (332 f.), and that Acts provides the reference points by which Paul’s letters may be properly dated (338).

Volume IV deals with Paul’s letters (including a seven-page sketch “of St. Paul’s character and mode of life”) and the rest of the New Testament. In this concluding volume as throughout, one is reminded of Gibbon’s description of Mosheim’s work: “full, rational, correct, and moderate”. This is also a passing good description of Michaelis’s New Testament criticism. Thus, he argues that there is only an apparent contradiction between James ii. 14 ff. and Paul’s view of the sufficiency of faith apart from works and is convinced that James, had he been familiar with Romans, would surely have phrased his own points differently (306). And Paul himself is certainly not to be charged with enthusiasm or fanaticism. In his ethical teaching,

for example, "we meet with nothing, but what is rational, and consistent with philosophical ethics" (182).

If Michaelis was the greatest eighteenth-century practitioner of philological exegesis, then J. A. Ernesti (1707-81) was its most important theoretician. His *Elementary Principles of Interpretation* was first published in Latin in 1761, went through several editions, and was eventually translated into English—first in England, and then also in the United States by Moses Stuart.¹ Ernesti provides a succinct statement of the philological method: "The art of interpretation, is the art of teaching what is the meaning of another's language; or that skill, which enables us to attach to another's language the same meaning that the author himself attached to it" (14). He insists that Scripture was "written by men divinely inspired" and is therefore free of contradictions (31), and that if one allows himself to be led "by the *words* of the Holy Spirit only" he will arrive at a true understanding "respecting *things*" (28). It is apparently in regard to this concern for the *words* of the text, that Ernesti can say that "the Scriptures are to be investigated by the same rules as other books" (27). It is significant, however, that Ernesti at the same time urges attention to the whole *context* of a passage (for it, too, has been established by the Holy Spirit, 31 f.) and that he warns against "rash *etymological* exegesis". The lesson biblical scholarship was being retaught as recently as 1961² is present already in Ernesti: "Etymology often belongs rather to the history of language, than to the illustration of its present meaning; and rarely does it exhibit anything more than a specious illustration" (62).

The contributions of the philological method to the advancement of biblical criticism were profound. Its exponents, however, were still tied, by and large, to a view of the Bible's inspiration which inhibited a fully *historical* understanding of its authors and their ideas. Thus, Aner properly remarks that Michaelis "was and remained an exegete and still knew nothing

¹ From the Latin edition of 1809 (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1842).

² Notably, in James Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961).

of the history of doctrine, of the genesis and development of the church's teaching viewed overall. This was his limitation".¹ While Jerusalem had proposed such a history of doctrine and had helped to "bring the Scripture down from the pedestal" on which orthodoxy had placed it,² even "the most orthodox Lutheran . . . could have been able to take no offense at [his] sermons".³ The same would most certainly have been true also of Ernesti.⁴ As significant, then, as the "grammatical-historical" method was in the development of modern New Testament criticism, it hardly wrought as fundamental a shift in biblical studies as did the work of J. S. Semler (1725-91), the Halle theologian generally regarded as being the most important precursor of the new German critical theology known as "Neology".⁵ With respect to the New Testament in particular, Semler more than any of his contemporaries opened the way for a genuinely historical view of the canon.

In his landmark, *Dissertation on the Free Investigation of the Canon* (I-IV, 1771-5),⁶ Semler insists on making a clear distinction between God's Word and the words of Scripture (74). Others, of course, had already made this or similar distinctions, most notably Grotius and Spinoza and even earlier, in a preliminary way, Galileo. But now Semler makes this distinction with special clarity and begins to see in a more systematic way its consequences for biblical study. If the words do not collectively constitute the Word, then one is freed not only to

¹ *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, p. 233.

² *Ibid.* p. 206.

³ *Ibid.* p. 221.

⁴ Albert Schweitzer aptly characterizes Ernesti: "He did not realise that the undogmatic, philological method of exegesis must necessarily lead to a method in which philology is the handmaid of historical criticism" (*Paul and His Interpreters, A Critical History*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1912), p. 4. Note also Schweitzer's remarks about Michaelis (*ibid.* p. 7).

⁵ See, e.g. Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, p. 98—where the names of Mosheim, Ernesti and Michaelis are also mentioned. Also, G. Hornig, *Die Anfänge der historisch-kritischen Theologie. Johann Salomo Semlers Schrifterständnis und seine Stellung zu Luther*, "Forschungen zur systematische Theologie und Religions-philosophie", 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961).

⁶ References to and quotations from Semler which follow are derived from excerpts provided by Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament*, and page numbers refer to Kümmel.

reject portions of the text poorly attested in the manuscripts (e.g. John vii. 53-viii. 11), but also to make judgements about the varying theological and historical value of the several New Testament writers (74 f.). One can still be a good Christian, he believes, even if he does not ascribe the same divine origin to all the biblical books and even if he does not hold them all in the same esteem (77). Semler therefore is much more open to the possibility of theological diversity within the earliest church than most of his contemporaries. Long before F. Chr. Baur he suggested the importance of distinguishing between Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity, thus between the followers of Peter and those of Paul (80).

Semler's approach to the canon was more revolutionary than it must have seemed to his contemporaries, for Semler's rhetoric was usually temperate and his judgements were usually measured. The only thing temperate or measured about H. S. Reimarus's handling of the New Testament, however, was his decision that his real views should remain secret until after his death. From 1728 Reimarus (1694-1768) was Professor of Oriental Studies in Hamburg, and quietly under the influence of English Deism as mediated principally through the thought of the German rationalist, Christian Wolff.¹ Only after Reimarus's death was his rationalist attack on Christianity finally published (1774-8, by G. E. Lessing), and the author's true identity remained unknown for a number of years.

Like other rationalist opponents of Christianity, Reimarus spends a good deal of time pointing out the contradictions within the Gospels, especially in the respective Easter narratives (153-200). The real significance of Reimarus, however, was correctly summarized by D. F. Strauss. When Reimarus observed how each of the New Testament books "was intended originally for a restricted circle and only slowly became known to larger groups, how they owed their acceptance to very accidental factors, and that only much later a general agreement was reached about the canon of the New Testament, he opened

¹ On Reimarus see now, *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. C. H. Talbert, trans. R. S. Fraser, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970). Page references that follow are to this translation.

a wide prospect for a free historical criticism of the documents of the New Testament".¹ Among the points Reimarus himself argues are the following. (1) Jesus' own teaching had in no way departed from the beliefs and laws of Judaism (72 ff.). (2) The apostles—especially Paul—converted Jesus' teaching into a new religion (e.g. 71). (3) Jesus and John the Baptist followed the Hebraic mode of speaking of prophetic visions and dreams as if they were actual events (93 ff.). (4) The evangelists' accounts of Jesus' life and ministry have been formulated with reference to their own faith in him; thus the Gospels are primarily sources for the theology of the evangelists. Only "by accident and because of human carelessness" do they contain "some remnants" of Jesus' own views (130).

It is of course quite arbitrary for Reimarus to state that "the apostles and all the disciples were induced by ambitious motives, by hopes of future wealth and power, lands and worldly goods, to follow Jesus as their Messiah and king" (241 f.). And he can also be faulted for his narrowly rationalistic criterion of truth: "The unerring signs of truth and falsehood are clear, distinct consistency and contradiction" (234). But in a provocative and often penetrating way, he raised questions, problems and possibilities for New Testament research which henceforth could not be ignored.²

III. 1800-30

As the nineteenth century opened F. Chr. Baur was not yet eight years old, the son of a village pastor in Württemberg, and D. F. Strauss had not even been born. Yet there were those who were aware that the new critical spirit already for some time evident in the study of the Bible and of Christian origins could mean an important new era in Christian theology. While some naturally dreaded this, others welcomed it. Among the latter was the German theologian, J. Philipp Gabler (1753-1826) who took up the scientific question of what eighteenth-century

¹ "Hermann Samuel Reimarus and His Apology", *ibid.* p. 57, trans. from the second German edn. of 1877.

² Note, for instance, Grobel's comment that Reimarus "uncovered all the central problems of the life of Jesus" ("Biblical Criticism", p. 411).

developments portended for the nineteenth century in the way of historical-critical New Testament study. He was cautiously hopeful: "Es dämmert jetzt nur in unserer Seele, aber Licht haben wir noch nicht"—"It is now just dawning in our soul, though we do not yet have the light".¹ Gabler himself was influenced not only by the rationalist spirit but also by the studies in primitive mythology of the classical philologist, C. G. Heyne, and by the ideas of the dramatist, G. E. Lessing. His own most important contribution to the development of historical-critical biblical study occurs in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Theology in Altdorf (delivered two years after his appointment in 1785 and published in 1788).² There he points out the "historical character" of biblical theology and insists that the simple equation of "biblical" with "dogmatic" theology has to be abandoned.³

In 1805 Gabler moved to Jena and became, along with J. J. Griesbach who was already there and H. E. G. Paulus who had recently left there, one of the influential teachers of W. M. L. DeWette (1780-1849). In his own life and work DeWette represents the heritage of the critical, rational spirit of the eighteenth century as it was being increasingly appropriated by special historical and hermeneutical interests which were to play such an important role in nineteenth-century Germany. Even before he began his theological studies at Jena in 1799 DeWette had studied with J. G. Herder, whose ideas about the nature of Hebrew poetry were certainly congenial to the historical-critical interests of the Jena theologians. Moreover, his later appointment to the faculty of theology at the newly established university

¹ "Wann ist eine vollendete Einleitung in das Neue Testament zu erwarten?" in *Kleinere Theologische Schriften*, ed. Th. A. and J. G. Gabler (Ulm: Im Verlage der Stettinischen Buchhandlung, 1831), i. 316. Gabler's sons who collected these essays did not indicate the original dates of their publication. This one, however, must have appeared prior to 1804, because Gabler is looking forward to his teacher, J. G. Eichhorn's, New Testament introduction, and the first volume of that actually appeared in 1804. The deliberate way in which Gabler refers to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (p. 316) suggests that he was writing at about the turn of the century.

² See the excerpt in Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament*, pp. 115-18.

³ On this point see G. Ebeling's excellent article, "The Meaning of 'Biblical Theology'", *Journal of Theological Studies*, vi (1955), 210-25.

in Berlin brought him into direct contact with such important scholars as Schleiermacher and B. G. Niebuhr. It is probably not coincidental that, during his Berlin tenure (1810-19), the first editions of some of DeWette's most important historical-critical studies were published.¹ His appointment to Berlin was perhaps, in its way, as important for his own historical work as the new university there was important for the flowering of historical-critical and philosophical studies in the whole of nineteenth-century Germany.

Before DeWette had even begun his theological studies, however, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1826) had left Jena to assume a Professorship in Philosophy at Göttingen (1788) where he remained until his death. Previously, Eichhorn had been one of Gabler's teachers in Jena, and when Gabler himself considers the prospects for progress in New Testament study in the nineteenth century, he identifies Eichhorn's introduction to the Old Testament as the model to be followed.² An examination of Eichhorn's work, I believe, confirms the essential correctness of Gabler's judgement. Here we may see already the major elements of the historical-critical method being conscientiously applied to Scripture, not in any erratically partisan way or for any polemical purposes, but with scholarly care and seriousness.

Eichhorn himself had studied in Göttingen (1770-3) and by his own account was particularly influenced by three professors: Michaelis, the classicist Heyne, and the historian von Schlözer.³ Even before his call to a Göttingen Professorship Eichhorn had

¹ E.g. his introductions to the history of Christian dogma (1813, 1816), to Hebrew-Jewish archaeology (1814), and to the OT and apocryphal books (1817).

² *Kleinere Theologische Schriften*, i. 316.

³ Eichhorn's indebtedness to these three teachers especially, is emphasized by Eberhard Sehmsdorf, *Die Prophetenauslegung bei J. G. Eichhorn* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 117-31, 187-97. Sehmsdorf, whose monograph became available to me only after my own judgements had been formed, shows that Eichhorn's contributions to the development of the historical-critical method of biblical study have been significantly underestimated. Although Sehmsdorf's study focuses on just one aspect of Eichhorn's biblical research, he helpfully sets this in the context of the scholar's whole life's work (see esp. pp. 165-74). On Eichhorn's use of the concept of myth, see Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der Modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1952), pp. 11-90 (where Heyne and Gabler are also discussed).

published a three-volume introduction to the Old Testament (1780-3 ; expanded to five volumes in the 1820-4 edition). But most of his publishing was done while in Göttingen as one of the leaders of the new school of German historiography which centred there. Butterfield's comment about Göttingen in this period could in fact be applied to Eichhorn in particular : " The ideas that belonged to the Age of Reason had a powerful effect ; but they were sifted, and brought into conformity with the demands of scholarship, so that there is antagonism as well as acceptance.¹ Just as the monumental *History of Rome* (1826, 1828) of the statesman-historian, B. G. Niebuhr (1776-1831), represents the synthesis of a new methodology for the study of classical antiquity,² so Eichhorn's five-volume New Testament introduction (1804-27) demonstrates the possibilities for a systematically historical-critical study of the life, literature and faith of the earliest church.³

The plan and procedure Eichhorn follows in his introduction to the New Testament are themselves significant. In the first three volumes he examines the historical and literary features of the various writings. The first volume considers the Synoptic Gospels, but not the Fourth Gospel (contrast Michaelis's *Introduction*). The Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Letters, as well as Acts, are reserved for Vol. ii. In the third volume Eichhorn turns to Paul's letters, Hebrews (which he regards as non-Pauline), and the Catholic Epistles. Not until the fourth volume does he deal with questions of biblical authority and inspiration, and then it is done under the heading of " the importance " of the New Testament collection, canon, and authenticity. In this volume, too, he begins his discussion of

¹ *Man On His Past*, p. 60.

² Note Collingwood's remark about Niebuhr and his indebtedness to Herder (and behind him, to Vico), *The Idea of History*, p. 130. I wish it were possible here to discuss Niebuhr's work, at least the preface to his *History* in which he reflects on his own methodology and on the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars. The German edn. of 1828 was translated into English by J. C. Hare and Connop Thirlwall (London : Taylor and Walton, 1847). See especially vol. i, pp. v-ix.

³ *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 5 Bde. (Leipzig : In der Weidmannischen Buchhandlung, 1804-27). I have used the second edition of vol. i, published in 1820.

New Testament versions, and that is concluded in Vol. v. Also in the final volume he discusses the patristic use of the New Testament, New Testament manuscripts, and editions of the Greek text.

Much more than in Michaelis's *Introduction* one finds in Eichhorn's a consistent and serious engagement with the work of other scholars. There are, for instance, many references to the work of Griesbach, Semler, Michaelis, Wettstein, Paulus, and also some to Herder, Lessing, and—among earlier scholars—Grotius and Simon. It is also clear that Eichhorn stayed fully abreast of English writers, e.g. Evanson, John Lightfoot, Paley, Herbert Marsh, Joseph Priestley. (Locke, however, is not mentioned.) Moreover, one cannot help noticing the very complete Indexes (of authors, passages and topics) which cover the first three volumes (iii. 657-844; a shorter index is offered for the last two volumes: v. 325-78). This utilitarian feature was rather distinctive for its time, and is a further measure of the thoroughness with which Eichhorn pursued his work.

Some of Eichhorn's conclusions were also distinctive, even daring. His grappling with the relationships among the Synoptic Gospels, for instance, led him to conclude that, where they agree, an Aramaic *Urevangelium* stands as their common source (i. 161-75). He surmised that it had contained the essentials about Jesus' life, though not in perfect chronological order (i. 176-81), and that it had undergone editing by various hands (i. 184 ff.). While Eichhorn did not dispute the common, apostolic authorship of the Johannine literature (including the Apocalypse; ii. 99-512), he did deny the authenticity of 2 Peter (iii. 630 ff.). Moreover, he concluded that none of the Pastoral Epistles could be ascribed to Paul.¹ Eichhorn's discussion of the Pastorals provides an exemplary instance of his use of a historical-critical method (iii. 315-410). Two principal objections to the acceptance of these letters as Pauline are set forth.

On the one hand there is the problem of their language and

¹ By the time Eichhorn's discussion of the Pastorals was published, Schleiermacher's questioning of the authenticity of 1 Timothy had already appeared in print. But Eichhorn claimed that he had been presenting his independent opinion in lectures already before that.

style. He is not only bothered by the various terms employed to combat the errant teaching (foreign to other Pauline letters), but also by apparently un-Pauline ways of expressing Pauline ideas. He observes, for instance, that Paul speaks of love as the *plērōma* of the law (Romans xiii. 8-10) but in 1 Timothy i. 5 it is described as "the aim of our charge". A literary man might be expected to vary his language and style, Eichhorn admits, but Paul was a missionary preacher, not a polished writer. Thus, in his years of preaching, he must have developed certain set ways of expressing himself, and these are in fact reflected in most of the extant letters (325 f.). Eichhorn perceptively observes that, while the apostle's references to common matters would not necessarily be articulated in standard ways, his discussion of "technical" and "spiritual" things usually would have been—and here precisely is where the language and style of the Pastoral Epistles presents a problem. It is hard to believe that Paul, the "erster Wortführer" of Christianity, would so significantly change the style of his preaching (326).

On the other hand, Eichhorn finds a historical difficulty with Pauline authorship of these letters; namely, within the framework of the apostle's life as otherwise reconstructed, there is simply no period or year wherein the Pastorals could have been written (327 ff.). Eichhorn examines each case in detail and concludes (380) that this objection can be answered only by resorting to numerous, tenuous historical conjectures. On the hypothesis that the Pastorals are pseudonymous, however, quite believable occasions and purposes can be defined for each. Titus is regarded as the earliest, written after the apostle's death by one of his students in order to convey Paul's oral teachings about the organization of local congregations. Since there was to that time no precedent for such an administrative manual, the material was formed into the usual type of Pauline letter (385-92). One or two decades later the same person wrote 1 Timothy, prompted by new problems within the churches, or perhaps by new information about them (393-405). Finally, 2 Timothy is written by the same student to replace an original Pauline letter to Timothy in which the apostle summoned his helper to Rome. Eichhorn believes such a letter must have existed, because on

the one hand Timothy is mentioned as being with Paul in Rome in Philippians i. 1 and Colossians i. 1, but on the other hand he was not one of Paul's companions on the journey to Rome (Acts xxvii. 2). Perhaps the author of 2 Timothy had actual knowledge of the contents of that lost letter, or perhaps he simply guessed at what it had contained. In either case, 2 Timothy was written to replace it (406-10).

Quite apart from the specific merits of Eichhorn's observations and conclusions, it is notable that, by proceeding as he has with the problem of the Pastorals, he has shown how both philological and historical considerations may and must be brought to bear on the interpretation of the New Testament. Moreover, he is quite willing to acknowledge that such a methodology can only proceed if one is willing to grant that the New Testament writers "sought for their writings no different rules of criticism than those applied to other human literature" (iv. 9). Basic to this judgement is Eichhorn's distinction between Jesus' own teaching (which he does not doubt was divinely given and authenticated) and the oral preaching of the apostles commissioned by Jesus. There is, further, he insists, an important distinction to be made between the oral preaching of the apostles and its written formulation in the New Testament (iv. 1-8). "The teaching of Jesus contained in the writings of the apostles has had great effect in the world, not the New Testament presentation itself. The former came from God, the latter came from men" (iv. 8).

Neither Baur nor Strauss, nor even DeWette before them, had studied with Eichhorn; but these and other important nineteenth-century scholars were heir to the integration of philological, critical, historical and exegetical interests which his work so impressively achieved. Eichhorn's scholarly career bridged the two centuries and occupied those very decades (1775-1826) which might be described as the "adolescent years" of New Testament criticism. Finally, with Eichhorn, we can see a significant degree of self-consciousness about the necessity and scope of a historical-critical method in New Testament research. It is also important that most of Eichhorn's career was spent in Göttingen, the acknowledged centre of historical-critical study

in Germany. There he was surrounded by historians at work in many different fields, for example, the history and literature of classical antiquity, of the Near East and of modern Europe. Eichhorn's study of the history and literature of Israel and the earliest Church was not done in isolation from, but precisely and necessarily in concert with the historical-critical investigation of these other literatures and times. Significantly, Eichhorn himself published many lengthy studies on a dazzling array of topics, including the history of literature in general, the history and culture of modern Europe, and the history of the French Revolution—at the same time that he was writing and constantly revising his introductions to the history and literature of the Old and New Testaments.¹ Not some special doctrine of biblical inspiration and canonical authority, not the history of dogma, not the theological needs of the church of his own day, but a historical-critical concern for the interpretation of civilization as a whole formed the context of Eichhorn's work and influenced the methodology he employed.² Basic to his approach was the conviction that “the writings of the New Testament want to be read and examined humanly [*menschlich*]”, and that one can, therefore, “without fear of giving offense . . . research the manner of their origin, investigate the components of their subject-matter, and inquire after the sources out of which their influential content has flowed”. Here was the charter for the task, as Eichhorn saw it. And in his next sentence he provides its motto as well: “Je kritisch-genauer, je richterlich-strenger, desto besser”—“The more critically exact and the more circumspectly rigorous, the better”.³

¹ Note, e.g. his *Geschichte der französischen Revolution*, 2 vols., 1797; *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur des neueren Europa: Litterär-geschichte* (pt. 1, 1799; pt. 2, 1814); *Weltgeschichte* (5 vols. 1801-14); *Geschichte der drei letzten Jahrhunderte*, 6 pts. 1803-4.

² Sehmsdorf has also emphasized Eichhorn's concern for “universal history” and has noted the importance of this as the context of Eichhorn's biblical criticism (*Die Prophetenauslegung bei J. G. Eichhorn*, esp. pp. 82-104, 165-74).

³ *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, v. 9. It is interesting to note that several young scholars from the United States were among Eichhorn's students in Göttingen. One of these was George Bancroft (1800-91), who earned a Ph.D. in history from Göttingen in 1820, and later became one of the most distinguished American historians. But Bancroft found the Göttingen theologians too radical.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

It is neither possible nor profitable to try to identify a single individual as the founder of modern biblical criticism or the instigator of a historical-critical approach to the New Testament in particular. This survey of developments in the wake of the Copernican revolution has shown that many different persons,

In a letter written from there to President Kirkland of Harvard in 1819 he said: "They neither begin with God nor go on with him, and there is a great deal more religion in a few lines of Xenophon, than in a whole course of Eichhorn" (cited by Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* [Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969], p. 43). And further, "The bible is treated with very little respect, and the narratives are laughed at as an old wife's tale, fit to be believed in the nursery" (*ibid.*).

But Bancroft's remarks only caricature the work of Eichhorn and his colleagues, and reveal his own unwillingness to apply historical-critical methodologies to Scripture. A more perceptive American student of Eichhorn's was Edward Everett (1794-1865), appointed in 1815 as Professor of Greek at Harvard, a chair which at that time included responsibility for lecturing on the New Testament. For the first several years of his appointment, however, Everett was given leave to study in Europe, and after two years in Göttingen completed studies for his doctorate in 1817—the first American to earn a German Ph.D. The full story of Everett's work in Göttingen, and especially of the influence of German biblical studies upon him, has yet to be told. Everett's biographer, Paul Revere Frothingham (*Edward Everett: Orator and Statesman* [Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925]), is chiefly interested in his later career as a statesman and diplomat and devotes less than three full pages to the Göttingen years (pp. 38-41). But it is clear that Everett was sympathetic to the Göttingen theologians, and in London, on his way back to the States, had at least one opportunity to defend them (see his diary entry [?] for 14 May 1818, cited by Frothingham, *ibid.* pp. 50 f.). Upon assuming his Professorship at Harvard in 1819 Everett devoted himself exclusively to classical Greek literature, perhaps at least partly, as Brown suggests, because the theological climate in New England, even within Everett's own Unitarian circles, was too conservative to tolerate a historical-critical approach to the Bible (*The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*, pp. 39 ff.). In a few years Everett had left the academy entirely, and he devoted the rest of his life to statecraft, for which he is now best remembered. One can only speculate as to the course of biblical criticism in the United States had Everett not abandoned theology. As it was, American biblical scholarship proceeded in virtually complete isolation from the historical-critical work of continental scholars until almost the end of the nineteenth century (see, e.g. Brown, *ibid.* pp. 180-2). [The 1964 Doctoral dissertation of Cynthia S. Brown, "Discovery of the German University: Four Students at Göttingen, 1815-22" has so far not been available to me].

movements, events and ideas, representative of many different times, places and theological traditions, contributed to the rise of historical criticism as it is found guiding the New Testament research of Baur, Strauss and others in the middle of the nineteenth century. It can be useful in conclusion, however, to identify and summarize those factors which have emerged as the most crucial in the history of the development of New Testament historical criticism. In so doing we shall have at least begun to sort out some of the most essential features of the method itself.

First, it is clear that the new Copernican world-view raised profoundly serious problems for those who regarded the Bible as the divine revelation of all truth. Kepler and Galileo were aware of the difficulties, indeed constantly kept aware of them by their opponents within the Church. They themselves sought to reach some kind of accommodation between the data derived from their observations of natural phenomena and the teachings of Scripture. The issue which had emerged for them was nothing less than the question of the authority of the Bible and the nature of its claims to truth. Or, put in a way more in accord with the original terms of the discussion, the issue was what kind of data the Bible provides and how the biblical teachings are to be related to data gained by direct observation. No longer was it enough for the teachers and defenders of Christianity simply to *cite* biblical texts and canonical traditions. Now they were forced to *interpret* them, to explain their meaning in relation to what was known by experience.

In Rationalism and Deism the problem of the conflict between natural and biblical data was broadened and deepened into the problem of the relation between Reason and Revelation. It was in this form that the problem exercised Spinoza particularly, and his insistence that Reason is the one valid means of interpreting *both* nature and Scripture led to important consequences for exegesis: the lives, times, manners, language and purposes of the biblical writers are to be taken into account, and the meaning of the texts is to be sought in the texts alone, not in the traditions external to them. Here it is apparent that *methods* employed by the observers of nature, as well as the *results* of their observations, have begun to work an influence

upon biblical criticism. The results of their observations had forced the issue of biblical truth ; now some of their methods come to be adopted as the way to uncover that truth. This is a step of the highest significance. Now the Bible itself is on the way to being viewed as a datum of world history, as first of all an object, not to be believed, but to be observed, investigated and rationally understood.

As soon as this step is taken, however cautiously, the door is opened to a wide range of areas for study. Thus, one finds Simon initiating research into the versions of the New Testament, and others—notably Wettstein—engaged with the problems of the Greek text behind the versions. It was clear that apart from a reliable text there could be no reliable data, and that apart from reliable data there could be no reasonable conclusions. Significant also was the relatively early recognition that biblical research must take into account the individuality of the biblical writers and the particularity of the circumstances under which they wrote. This was specifically articulated by Spinoza and it had already been specifically practiced by Grotius. In England John Lightfoot showed that the writers' individuality was partly due to their religious backgrounds, and in Germany the work of Herder and Lessing demonstrated that the ancient, Oriental background of the Bible required an understanding of particular modes of thought and expression (Hebrew poetry, ancient myth, etc.). Bentley and Locke were among those who first drew attention to the importance of evidence internal to the texts themselves, and how this could be used to shed light upon the authors and their intentions. The philological approach of critics like Jerusalem, Michaelis and Ernesti was also animated largely by the conviction that a systematic and rational analysis of the texts, quite apart from dogmatic prejudices, could make their true and original meaning clear. In the work of Eichhorn more than in that of any other New Testament scholar before Baur and Strauss, one may find this whole broad range of historical-critical concerns alive and active in shaping the scholar's total approach to his task.¹

¹By way of contrast, for example, Ernesti's hermeneutical rules dealt exclusively with the *documentary* contexts of the words to be interpreted and

It was inevitable that investigation of the individuality of the biblical writers and of the particularity of what they had written should raise in a new and urgent form the issue of biblical authority and the question of biblical inspiration especially. What is the relationship between the words of particular writers and the Word of God, between the particularities of their distinctive times and places and the eternality of divine Truth? Even Grotius had declined to speak any longer of the "inspired" words of Scripture, although he confidently accepted the church's attestation of apostolic authorship for the New Testament books. Instead, he spoke only of the authors' "piety" and "sincerity". Also in Spinoza, even in Simon, and then with special force in Semler, a distinction is drawn between the words of the text and God's own Word of Truth. This was a decisive distinction for those who made it, for thereby interpreters were freeing themselves for a full and uninhibited historical-critical examination of the text. Now this kind of study could be pursued without necessarily transgressing God's own Word.

Another decisive development in the rise of historical-critical New Testament study was the acceptance of a historical view of the canon itself. This began to emerge already with Grotius when, for instance, he pointed out that Luke and Acts were in the canon only because the earliest *church* had found them significant enough to *include* there. Perhaps also in Simon's consistent juxtaposition of Scripture and Tradition the way was further opened for an eventual recognition that one must speak of the *formation* of the New Testament canon, and this precisely in the setting of the church's ongoing concern for its doctrine, community life and mission. With Semler, of course, the matter found substantial and influential exposition. An important result of his work was to demonstrate that New Testament study must be attentive not only to the historical

largely ignored the *historical*, situational context of them. The matter was on the way to being corrected, however, in the work of one of Ernesti's students, K. A. G. Keil (1754-1818), who stressed the inter-relationship of "grammatical" and "historical" inquiries (*Lehrbuch der Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments nach Grundsätzen der grammatisch-historischen Interpretation* [Leipzig: Fr. Chr. W. Vogel, 1810], esp. pp. 8 ff.).

and literary individuality of the writers, but also to their—and thereby to the earliest church's—theological diversity. The name of Reimarus, too, must be mentioned in this regard; but he was so encumbered with his particular rationalist presuppositions and theological prejudices that his own fully historical view of the canon did not yield many convincing results. The contrary is the case with Eichhorn, however, who in his *Einleitung*, influenced by Semler's views, manifested a consistent awareness of the various historical and theological factors which played a role in the formation of the New Testament.

Here in broad outline are the most crucial factors in the development of historical-critical New Testament study. At the same time we are put into touch with some of the most basic components of the method itself as this continues to be employed in New Testament research. Any assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the method¹ must take these essential features of it under consideration: (1) a concern to understand the relation between biblical teachings and the data derived from experience; (2) an assumption that also the Bible is a proper object for rational investigation; (3) a conviction that this investigation must proceed with attention to the individuality of the writers; (4) a commitment to the distinction between the words of the New Testament writers and the Word of God; and (5) an acceptance of a thoroughgoing historical view of the canon itself.

¹ Such an assessment of course lies beyond the scope of the present study and would have to be concerned with a much broader range of philosophical and theological problems than has been dealt with here. See, e.g. Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism", pp. 17-61 in *Word and Faith*, vol. i, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1963).