

Modern Church History (Part 7: Foes of the Faith¹)

I. Introduction: “During the nineteenth century several influential movements appeared that threatened the faith that the church has endeavored to maintain throughout the ages. Biblical criticism grew out of the individualistic and humanistic climate that was produced by the Renaissance. This development was reinforced both by the rationalism², and individualism³ of the eighteenth century and by the historical outlook of the Romantic Movement⁴ and German idealistic philosophy.⁵ The preoccupation with material goods, engendered and promoted by the higher standard of living made possible by the industrial revolution, also helped to turn the minds of all classes of people from the absolute authority of the Bible as a standard for faith and life. The biological dogma of evolution, when applied to the Bible by analogy, made Christianity nothing more than the product of a system of religious evolution. The denial of the authority of the Bible was a logical outcome of this point of view.”

II. Criticism.

A. Background.

1. “People have usually followed one of three approaches to the Bible. Pietists have approached it from an experiential viewpoint in which the application of truth to daily life is the criterion. Others have approached it as a source book of doctrine. Still others have adopted a historical approach, which results in the conception of the Bible as an ethical guidebook only. This latter approach became the fashion in the nineteenth century because of the influence of German idealistic philosophy. When the historicocritical approach was combined with the application of the theory of evolution to religious phenomena, the background for a system of biblical criticism was completed.”
2. “Discussion between one who accepts the critical approach to the Bible and one who is a believer in the inspiration and the integrity of the Bible is difficult

¹ This material was taken from Earl E. Cairnes, *Christianity through the Centuries*, pp. 409-416.

² “In epistemology and in its broadest sense, rationalism is ‘any view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification’ (Lacey 286). In more technical terms it is a method or a theory ‘in which the criterion of truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive’ (Bourke 263)” (Wikipedia).

³ “Individualism is a political and social philosophy that emphasizes individual liberty, belief in the primary importance of the individual and in the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence. It embraces opposition to authority and to all manner of controls over the individual, especially when exercised by the state or society. It is thus directly opposed to collectivism” (Wikipedia).

⁴ “The exultation of feeling above intellect, or of hope above knowledge” (Durant).

⁵ “The philosophical meaning of idealism is that the properties we discover in objects depend on the way that those objects appear to us as perceiving subjects, and not something they possess ‘in themselves’, apart from our experience of them” (Wikipedia).

because each has a different set of basic ideas. The radical critic of the Bible assumes that the Bible is merely a work to be judged by the canons of literary criticism just as any other literary work would be; that there is an evolution of religion; and that natural explanations of biblical phenomena should replace supernatural explanations. Such individuals look on the Bible as a book written by human authors. They ignore the function of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the writers of Scripture.”

B. The Philosophic and Theological Background of Biblical Criticism.

1. Immanuel Kant.

- a. “The idealistic philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), when combined with the views of Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Ritschl created a philosophic background favorable to a critical approach to the Bible. Kant accepted Locke's emphasis on sensation and Descartes's stress on reason as the keys to knowledge concerning the phenomena of nature; but he argued in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that man cannot know God or the soul, both of which he classed as data of the world of ‘noumena’ by the senses or reason. His pietistic background led him to the assertion that the sense of moral obligation or conscience in man, which he called the ‘categorical imperative’ should be the starting point for religion. Because man has a moral sense, Kant argued in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1781), there is a God who has provided that sense. The postulates of the soul and immortal life become essential, if those who obey the dictates of conscience are to be rewarded, because often the good receive no temporal reward in this life.”
- b. “Because Kant denied that man can know the world of noumena, there is no place in his system for a historical and objective revelation of God in the Bible.



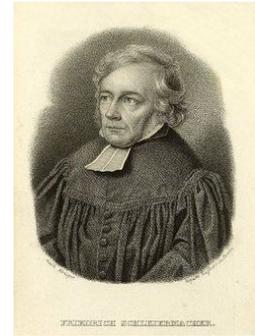
To him it is only a man-made book of history, to be subjected to historical criticism just as any other book. There is no place for Christ, the God-man, in Kant's system. Man with his free will and his immanent sense of what is right becomes the creator of a religion in which he develops the morality inherent in himself. There is a logical line of continuity between Kantian idealism and modern liberalism with its insistence on the ‘spark of the divine’ within each of us, which liberals insist we need only to cultivate to achieve good moral conduct and eventual immortality. In this fashion

Kant helped to provide a philosophical framework for both biblical criticism and modern liberal theology.”

2. **Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher.** “Unlike Kant, who found the starting point for religion in man's moral nature, Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) made feelings or the emotions the element out of which religious experience develops. Schleiermacher was trained in Moravian schools and owed the subjective nature of his philosophy to them and to Romanticism. In his book *The Christian Faith* (ca. 1821) religion is presented, not as a set of beliefs and obligations based on the

authority of the church, but as the result of man's feelings of absolute dependence in a majestic universe in which he is but a small entity.

Christianity best brings man into harmony with God as man passively realizes his dependence on God. Religion thus becomes a mere subjective apprehension of Christ, who serves as the Mediator to reconcile man to the Absolute who is immanent in the universe. Thus man is freed from dependence on a historical revelation of the will of God and needs only to cultivate the feeling of dependence on God in Christ to enjoy a satisfactory religious experience. Because of his view that the essence of religion is subjectivity,



Schleiermacher is often referred to as the 'Father of Modern Theology.'"

3. **George W. F. Hegel** (1770-1831) also had a marked influence on both theology and the critical approach to the Bible. God was the Absolute who was seeking to manifest Himself in history by a logical process of reconciliation of contradictions, which Hegel called thesis and antithesis. The synthesis or reconciliation created a new pair of contradictions that were again merged in a new reconciliation or synthesis. Hegel thus held to philosophical evolution as the way in which the Absolute was manifested. His dialectic or logic was taken over by Marx, and his emphasis on the state as a manifestation of the Absolute was borrowed by Hitler and



Mussolini in order to glorify both the state and the dictator who headed it."

4. **Albrecht Ritschl** (1822-89) was influenced by Schleiermacher's acceptance of religious feeling as the foundation for religion, but he insisted that religion was the social consciousness of dependence. The historical Christ of the Gospels brought the practical revelation of sin and salvation to the individual in the kingdom by faith. The Bible is simply the record of community consciousness, and it should therefore be subjected to historical investigation in the same manner as any other book. Thus Ritschl, as well as the other philosophers, made religion subjective and opened the way for extreme critical study of the Bible. He also promoted the social approach of love to religious problems."



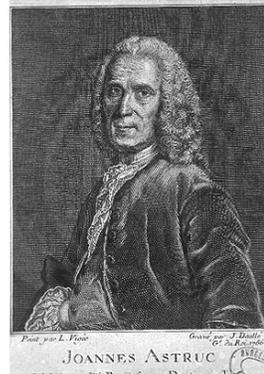
C. Biblical Criticism.

1. "Rationalism of the Enlightenment⁶ and idealistic philosophy of the Romantic era were thus the parents of a criticism that tries to destroy the supernatural nature of the Bible as a revelation and that makes the Bible the record of the subjective evolution of religion in human consciousness. Opposition to such destructive criticism should not lead the reverent student of the Bible to reject all biblical criticism. Higher, or historical and literary, criticism, or as it is also sometimes known,

⁶ "Enlightenment, Age of Reason: a movement in Europe from about 1650 until 1800 that advocated the use of reason and individualism instead of tradition and established doctrine" (WordNet).

introduction, which has come to be associated with the above destructive views, is simply the careful study of the historical background of each book of the Bible; and lower, or textual, criticism is the study of the text of the Bible in an attempt to ascertain whether the text that we have is the one that came from the hands of the writers. Lower criticism has resulted in the granting to the text of the Bible a high degree of accuracy so that we can be sure that we have the writings of the original authors of the Bible. Thus no doctrine or ethical teaching of Scripture can be called into question by the most radical critic. It has been radical higher criticism, rather than lower criticism, that has destroyed the faith of many persons in the divine revelation in the Bible.”

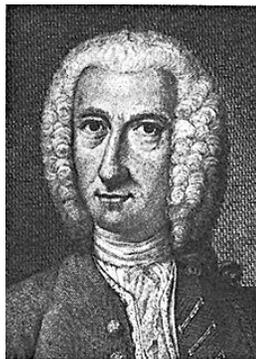
2. “The popularization of higher criticism has been associated with an eighteenth-century French doctor by the name of **Jean Astruc** (1684-1766), who in 1753 divided the Book of Genesis into two parts. He assumed the use of two documents as sources because he found the name *Elohim* (God) used in some places and *Jehovah* (Lord) in others. **Johann G. Eichhorn** (1752-1827), who laid down the dictum that the Bible was to be read as a human book and tested by human means, gave such studies the name of higher criticism. Eichhorn noticed other literary characteristics, besides the use of the names for



God, that led him to believe that not only Genesis but also the entire Hexateuch (Genesis to Joshua) was made up of composite documents. Hupfeld in 1853 was the first to claim that the Pentateuch was the work of at least two different authors rather than a narrative composed from many sources by Moses. Graf and Wellhausen developed a well-elaborated theory, known as the Graf-Wellhausen theory, that has been adopted by the higher critics. According to this theory, the sections in which the name Jehovah is used constitute the earliest document; another part by another author is known as E; still another in Deuteronomy as D; and P. In this fashion the unity of the Pentateuch and its Mosaic authorship are denied.”



3. “Later critics divided Isaiah into at least two parts and advanced the date of Daniel to the Maccabean period so that it became history rather than prophecy and history. The development of doctrine in the Bible was explained along evolutionary lines. Critics emphasized the development of the idea of God from the primitive storm god of Mount Sinai to the ethical monotheistic God of the prophets. The work of biblical archaeologists has forced many critics to abandon their former radical positions and has tended to confirm conservative views of the Bible.”

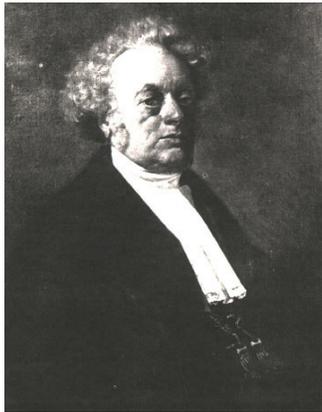


4. “The beginning of higher criticism of the New Testament is usually associated with the name of **Hermann S. Reimarus**

(1694-1778), who taught Oriental languages at Hamburg. In his *Fragments* (1778) he denied the possibility of biblical miracles and advanced the idea that the writers of the New Testament with their stories of miracles were pious frauds. **Gotthold Lessing** (1729-81), who published Reimarus's *Fragments*, argued that the Scriptures served man as a guide during the primitive phase of his religious development but that reason and duty were sufficient guides in the more advanced state of religion.”



5. “**Ferdinand C. Baur** (1792-1860) argued in 1831 that in the early church there had



been a Judaism that emphasized the law and the Messiah. This earlier approach can be observed in the writings of Peter. Paul developed an antithesis in such books as Romans and Galatians, in which the emphasis was on grace rather than on law. The Old Catholic church of the second century represented a synthesis of Petrine and Pauline views. This synthesis is revealed in such books as the Gospel of Luke and the Pastoral Epistles. Baur then proceeded to date the books of the New Testament in this framework as either early or late according to the manner in which they reflected Petrine, Pauline, or Johannine tendencies. Thus historical data

gave way to subjective philosophical presupposition in ascertaining the chronology of the books of the New Testament.”

6. “In the twentieth century New Testament criticism has successively focused on three different but interdependent approaches to the Gospels. Source criticism was concerned with the order of writing of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew) Mark) and Luke) and the extent to which one was dependent on another or on even earlier sources. In the 1920s and 1930s form criticism arose to investigate evidences in the Gospels for the forms in which the gospel was orally passed on in the earliest years before written Gospels. This approach claimed that the Gospels contain truth about Christ that can be found only after one peels off the layers of tradition and form in which the truth is hidden. Most recently redaction criticism has taken center stage. It proposes to analyze the manner and significance of the subtle changes the Gospel writers allegedly introduced into their accounts of Christ's life and work.”
7. “Some theologians, who adopt critical views of the New Testament, consider that the essence of the gospel is in the ethical teachings of Jesus and that Paul changed the simple ethical religion of Jesus into a redemptive religion. Destructive higher criticism has led many to deny the inspiration of the Bible as a revelation from God through men inspired by the Holy Spirit and to minimize or to deny the deity of Christ and His saving work on the cross of Calvary.



The Life of Jesus (1835-36) by **David F. Strauss** (1808-74) combined all these views. Strauss denied both the miracles and the integrity of the New Testament as well as the deity of Christ, whom he saw as a man who thought He was the Messiah.”

8. “Germany, once the home of the Reformation, became the land in which criticism developed. The history of Hitler's Germany well illustrates the lengths to which men will go when they deny God’s revelation in the Bible and when they replace revelation with reason and science as the authority for thought and action.”

III. Materialism. “Another movement or viewpoint that threatened the faith during the nineteenth century, and that still threatens it today, was materialism. More subtle perhaps than higher criticism, materialism may be defined as the practice in modern

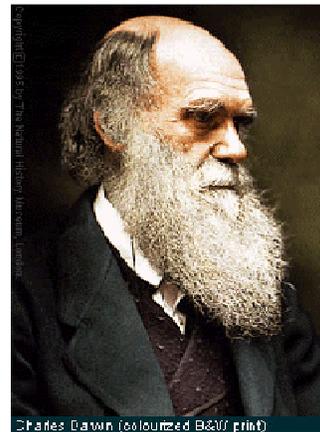


society of emphasizing the material values of a high standard of living. To the extent that man's attention is concentrated on this life, he will neglect the spiritual values of eternal life. The abundance of goods, which has made a high living standard possible, is an outcome of the industrial revolution that occurred first in England between 1760 and 1830. Machine power was substituted for hand power so that great amounts of goods could be produced cheaply. Nowhere has this emphasis on a high material standard of living been as great as in America.

Both **Walter Rauschenbusch**, the founder of the social gospel in America, and Karl Marx emphasized in their systems what they thought was the primary importance of material goods in life. Those who lay such stress on the distribution of material goods forget that ‘man does not live by bread alone.’”

IV. Creationism Vs Evolution.

- A. “If philosophical, literary, and historical criticism of the Bible destroyed faith in it as a revelation from God, and if the materialism induced by the industrial revolution created indifference to a future life, the views of **Charles R. Darwin** (1809-82) and his successors created the idea that there was no such thing as sin or that sin was merely the remnant of animal instinct in man. Evolution as a philosophical doctrine goes back to the time of Aristotle, but Darwin was the first to put it on what seemed to be a scientific basis.”



- B. “Darwin spent some time in studying medicine and theology before he developed his inclinations to become a naturalist. A voyage around the world on the *Beagle* between 1831 and 1836 convinced him that differences between living animals and fossils on the mainlands and those on the islands that he visited could be accounted for only by biological evolution. He published his book *Origin of the Species* in 1859 after finding that Alfred Wallace had independently arrived at similar conclusions. In his book Darwin argued that

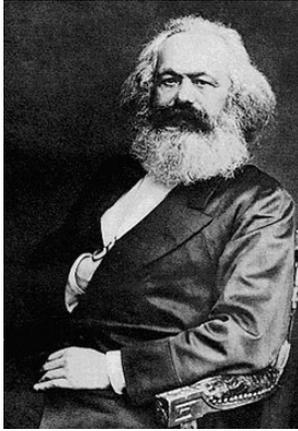
the struggle for existence kept the population of the various species constant in spite of the fact that reproduction is geometric and that many more are produced than are essential for the survival of the species. In this struggle some individuals develop characteristics favorable to survival through a process of adjustment or adaptation to environment. These characteristics are passed on by sexual selection in which the favored males and females mate. Thus only the fittest survive. He thought that such a similarity as that of the body structure of man and animals substantiated his theory, but he forgot that this and other similarities might be evidence of design on the part of the Creator who gave His creatures similar body structures because of the similarity of their environment. Darwin applied his theory to man in *The Descent of Man* (1871) and argued that man was linked with animal life by common ancestral types.”

- C. “Darwin's idea of continuity between man and animal has been summarized as ‘descent with change,’ or continuity. This view is opposed to the biblical concept of special creation by God, or discontinuity, with fixity in the groups thus created. In emphasizing similarities between man and animals, Darwin ignored the uniqueness of man's larger brain, his power of speech, his memory, his conscience, his concepts of God, and the soul. He admitted that the last three items were problems for his theory. No missing link that would conclusively identify man with animals has been discovered; in fact, crossbreeding between many groups is impossible. The use of the Hebrew word *Bara* for the act of creation is used only of the heavens and the earth, mammals and man (Gen. 1:1, 21, 27). God is said to have made each of the different groups reproduce ‘after his kind.’”
- D. “Although the theory of evolution denied the direct creation of man by God, the greatest damage came from the application of the theory to the development of religion. God and the Bible were looked upon as the evolutionary products of man's religious consciousness, and the books of the Bible were dated accordingly. The biblical eschatology, in which perfection would come into this world only by the direct intervention of God through the return of Christ, was replaced by the evolutionary view of a world that was being increasingly improved by human effort. Because man was not guilty through original sin, there was not need of Christ as Savior. Tennyson gave poetic expression to evolution in his autobiographical poem, *In Memoriam* (1850).”
- E. “Evolution was also used to justify the idea of race superiority because that idea seemed to fit in with Darwin's concept of the survival of the fittest. It has also been used to justify having no absolute foundation or norm for ethics. Good conduct is merely those actions deemed suitable by each generation for the proper conduct of society. The doctrine of evolution has also been used to glorify war as the survival of the fittest. All these conclusions have been reached by the application of a biological theory to other fields through an unwarranted use of the argument from analogy.”

V. Communism.

- A. “The church has also faced the enmity of socialism in the twentieth century. This movement had its roots in the materialistic philosophy of **Karl Marx** (1818-83). From Adam Smith Marx borrowed his idea that only labor creates value; from

Hegel his method; and from the utopian socialists, his utopian goal. He and Friedrich Engels developed the major outlines of his view in the pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Marx had been attracted to the philosophy of Hegel, but he substituted materialism for Hegel's Absolute Being. Reality, he maintained, was only matter in motion. On this foundation he built the idea that all the religious, social, and political institutions of society are determined by the way people make a living. Class struggle takes place because the capitalist takes the surplus value or profits. Marx argued that the profits belong to labor because, he believed, it is only labor that can create value. Marx charted the progress of this struggle by the application of Hegel's logic. Capitalism generated its antithesis, the proletariat [the working class], which would destroy it and set up a



classless society after a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat or workers. Lenin provided a set of aggressive tactics by which this system could be worked out. He emphasized the idea that a devoted, disciplined, small party of Communists could infiltrate democratic organizations, such as labor unions and government, and use a time of crisis or war to seize power. Stalin successfully combined this program and technique in the Russian state.”

- B. “Marx and his followers believe that ‘man shall live by bread alone.’ They ignore human sin, which will always upset their ideal order unless they resort to brutal regimentation – which Communists have done everywhere. They also oversimplify human problems. There is no place for God, the Bible, or absolute standards in their system. They insist that ‘religion is the opiate of the people.’ While the emphasis on the importance of the economic factor has been an aid to the historian, recent history reveals the fundamental hostility of Marxism to all forms of religion. While the continuance of the Christian religion and the church is not dependent on any particular political or economic system, it must be recognized that socialism as practiced by the Communists finds it difficult to come to terms with the church.”

VI. Conclusion. “Criticism of the Bible, Darwin's theory of evolution, and other social and intellectual forces created religious liberalism in the late nineteenth century. Liberal theologians have applied evolution to religion as a key that might explain its development. They have insisted on the continuity of man’s religious experience to such an extent that the Christian religion has become the mere product of a religious evolution rather than a revelation from God through the Bible and Christ. Christian experience has been emphasized much more than theology. Conservative Christianity has fought and the movement associated with the name of Karl Barth has opposed various forms of liberalism and socialism.”