

Higher Criticism

p. 18-19 The study of the manuscripts and of their readings is known technically as "lower criticism." "Higher criticism" is the study of the meaning, significance, origin, and purpose of the writings. Higher Criticism needs to use Lower Criticism. Anyone who asks about the origin or meaning of a biblical book or passages has trespassed into Higher Criticism. Some representatives of conservative denominations, aghast at the iconoclasm of some Higher Critics, try to limit the term to a contemptuous epithet for a type of scholarship they cannot accept. One Jewish scholar (whose field was not the Bible) said that "the Higher Criticism is higher anti-Semitism." Similarly, "fundamentalist" Christians have regarded Higher Criticism as anti-Christian.

p. 19 This book is unabashedly a book of Higher Criticism. The Jewish scholar whom I have quoted was right to a limited extent - certain German Higher Critics were psychotic Jew-haters, but they were few. Higher Criticism is a process, not a conclusion. The discipline itself stands or falls on its rightness or wrongness, not on the personal foibles of its practitioners. Each generation of scholars is obligated by the requirements of scholarship to scrutinize and assess the work of earlier generations. Some of the heritage is found to be sound and acceptable, some unsound and in need of rejection. To label the Higher Critics anti-Semites is silly. Indeed, a more devastating judgment can be passed on the nineteenth-century Higher Critics by demonstrating that their scholarship, however laborious and vaunted, was often shabby, and that they were seldom able to rise above their own pre-suppositions and intellectual biases. Modern biblical scholarship, however, inevitably uses nineteenth-century scholarship as a point of departure. To ignore it is as grievous an error in judgment as never to depart from it.

Graf-Wellhausen theory

p.332 Various expositions were made of the significance of Graf's view, for in some way the alleged three ages, primitive, poetic-prophetic, and priestly, were connected with it. In 1878 appeared a work of major importance by Julius Wellhausen. The work was called Prolegomena to the History of the Religion of Israel, and in it Wellhausen drew together the implications for the religion of Israel of Graf's view. Since that time it has been customary to allude to the analysis of the documents in the Pentateuch (Graf's contribution) and the synthesizing account of the history of Israel's religion (Wellhausen's contribution) as the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis. This hypothesis is still the point of departure for the scientific study of the Pentateuch and is therefore the initial milestone in a student's approach to scientific biblical criticism. Yet a point of departure scarcely deserves its name unless it is departed from. For a student in the 1960's to remain glued to the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis is evidence of nearsightedness.

That which is notable and still broadly adhered to in the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis is the amazing correspondence between the sequence of the documents (with D associated with Josiah, and P with the postexilic period) and the contents of the prophetic literature. Moreover, as we shall see, this correspondence extends to the reflections of pre-exilic religion preserved in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

333 If the Graf-Wellhausen view is correct, then the view expressed in the Pentateuch cannot be taken literally. The Pentateuch, in its present form, supposes that in the Wilderness Moses prescribed a priestly system and a Sacred Calendar, and enjoined a single central sanctuary. If this were the case, then the pre-exilic period of Israel's religion represents a tremendous deviation from Moses' prescription. The Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis denies, however, that what truly