

Higher Bible Criticism = Higher Antisemitism? A Historical and Contemporary Examination

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at the PLUS University in Salzburg
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For bibliographical references of the quoted passage and works, and the original German versions of the translated quotation, I refer to the attached handout.

In this paper, I am diving into a complex and often contentious topic: the relationship between higher criticism of the Bible and antisemitism, particularly as articulated by Jewish scholars in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

Solomon Schechter's speech

In a pivotal speech at the 1903 convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, at the so-called Judean Banquet, Solomon Schechter articulated his belief that higher bible criticism was not merely a scholarly endeavor but a tool that could fuel antisemitism.

Solomon Schechter's speech was related to the installation of Kaufmann Kohler as the president of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, the school that trains reform rabbis. Kohler's installation represented a significant moment for Reform Judaism, as he was a prominent scholar who engaged with higher bible criticism and was seen as a bridge between traditional Jewish thought and contemporary scholarship. Schechter, on the other hand, was a Conservative/Masorti Jew, and the president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the school that trains conservative rabbis. Reform and Conservative Judaism are distinct forms of non-orthodox Judaism, but this does not explain their differences of opinion completely.

Schechter viewed the critical writing by contemporary Bible scholars, who were mostly German and Protestant, as inherently biased, often rooted in supersessionist ideas—that is, the belief that Christianity replaced Judaism. This bias, he argued, could perpetuate negative stereotypes about Jews and their scriptures, and support antisemitism, if not already antisemitic itself.

Some quotes from the famous speech by Schechter, which was later published in his *Seminary Addresses*, will make his standpoint clear. The provocative title of the speech already tells it all: Higher Criticism-Higher Antisemitism.

I remember when I used to come home from the *Cheder*, bleeding and crying from the wounds inflicted upon me by the Christian boys, my father used to say, my child, we are in Galut (exile), and we must submit to God's will. [...] Thus the pain was only physical, but my real suffering began later in life, when I emigrated from Roumania to so-called civilized countries and found there what I might call the Higher anti-

Semitism, which burns the soul, though it leaves the body unharmed. The genesis of Higher anti-Semitism is partly, though not entirely—for a man like Kuenen belongs to an entirely different category—contemporaneous with the genesis of the so-called Higher Criticism of the Bible. Wellhausen's Prolegomena are *teeming with asperçus* full of venom against Judaism, and you cannot wonder that he was rewarded by one of the highest orders which the Prussian Government had to bestow. (36)

The Bible is our sole *raison d'être*, and it is just this which the Higher anti-Semitism is seeking to destroy, denying all our claims for the past, and leaving us no hope for the future." (37)

“professional and imperial anti-Semitism” (38)

In the following I will try to explain why Schechter and others had such problems with Higher Criticism, and what exactly the problem was, because the problem is not an essential aspect of the critical exegetical method. It was, rather, a problem of the mixture of exegesis and Christian theology, especially in that time and place, the German academies before and around 1900.

What is Higher Criticism?

For those among us who are not biblical scholars, I should expand a bit more about what exactly Higher Criticism of the Bible is.

Higher Criticism is a method for the study of the Hebrew Bible or the Christian Old Testament, *and* for the New Testament, but in this talk we are mostly concerned with the Hebrew Bible.

Higher criticism refers to the scholarly study of biblical texts that seeks to analyze their origins, authorship, historical context, and development over time. The idea is that the way the Bible emerged and was put together is studied in a historical, scientific, way. Yet because it is the *Bible*, scholars, most of whom were and are people of faith, had certain presuppositions that influenced their historical perspective.

There are various forms of higher criticism, but in its heyday, it meant mostly Source Criticism, based on the so-called Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch, first developed by Karl Heinrich Graf as early as 1865. This is the view that the Five Books of Moses, also known as Pentateuch or Torah emerged gradually, as a compilation of various sources.

Typically these were four sources: The Jahwist, the Elohist (so called because of the two different names for God they would employ, the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and the name “Elohim” on the other), the Deuteronomist, and the Priestly source, indicated as J, E, D and P. These sources were said to have originated in different time periods, some pre-exilic (i.e., before the Babylonian captivity, in the 6th century BCE), some during this exile, and some after the Babylonian exile. In the latter period the four documents or sources were put together into what we now know as the Pentateuch.

The method is called “higher *criticism*,” as it goes beyond traditional religious views of the Bible. Indeed, the idea that the Torah originated from various sources over a long period of time does not coincide with the traditional belief that it originated in one piece as the word of

God, given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, which is not only the traditional Jewish view, but, with some modifications, also the traditional Christian view.

The emergence of Higher Criticism in the 19th century is closely tied to the Protestant Reformation. Protestantism championed the principle of *sola scriptura*, the belief that scripture alone is the authority for faith and practice. This emphasis led to a heightened interest in understanding the Bible's text and context. The academic environment in which Higher Criticism developed was predominantly shaped by Enlightenment thought. This period encouraged critical thinking, scientific inquiry, and a questioning of traditional authorities. Protestant scholars, particularly in Germany, were at the forefront of this intellectual movement. They also thought that to explore the historical and literary backgrounds of biblical writings would help them to better understand their faith. Incidentally, not all Protestants were in favor of source criticism: more “orthodox” Protestants were often against it, because it challenged the divine authorship of the Bible.

Also Catholic scholars were cautious regarding critical biblical interpretation. For a long time, the Catholic Church viewed higher criticism with skepticism, fearing it could undermine established doctrine. This has changed in later years, especially after 1943 with the encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu*, after which also Catholic faculties of Theology welcomed critical biblical scholarship, and quickly gained their place in it, as exemplified by the department of biblical studies at the faculty of theology which hosts me this year.

Wellhausen's Priestly Source and the Decline of Israelite Religion

For various reasons, *Jewish* scholars in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were wary of the burgeoning Higher Criticism. Orthodox Jews were against it, because it questioned the unity of the Bible and its capacity as Word of God. But also many Reform and Conservative Jews had problems with it, for various reasons. For one, some found that only cutting the text apart was not the right way to deal with the source of their living faith. Secondly, they recognized that the critical methods employed by some Protestant scholars could serve antisemitic agendas, as we have seen in Schechter's fierce remarks in his speech Higher Criticism-Higher Antisemitism.

To understand Schechter's and other progressive Jewish scholars' concerns, we must consider the work of Julius Wellhausen, the name most prominently connected to Higher Criticism. He was not the only one, but Wellhausen was the red flag on the bull, so to say, to which many Jewish, and later also non-Jewish, scholars, reacted. This was not only because of his source-critical method of biblical exegesis, but even more because of the biblical theology which was mixed into his so-called “History of Israel,” He published this in his most famous work “Prolegomena zur geschichte Israels”, translated as “Prolegomena to the History of Israel.” This was, as we will see, far from objective history, but history mixed with Christian supersessionism, a Hegelian view of history, and romantic ideas about “natural” people, their soil, and their celebrations, which were popular in that time and place.

Wellhausen argued that the four sources mentioned above: J, E, D and P not only reflected different stages of the Pentateuch as a literary document, but also of ancient Israelite religion. In Wellhausen's framework, the J and E sources were tied to an early, dynamic, and “authentic” form of Israelite faith, which was natural, spontaneous and centered around the prophets. The original core of the prophetic books of the Bible, which are not part of the

Pentateuch, were also said to have originated in that same old period. Hence the famous expression *Lex post prophetas* – which was, incidentally, not used by Wellhausen himself, but by later scholars to refer to his ideas. In contrast, the Priestly source, which Wellhausen dated to the period after the Babylonian exile, represented a later, more institutionalized, and rigid form of religion, dominated by priests and rituals. The P source, was said, for example, to be responsible for the biblical books of Leviticus/Vayikra, but the Priestly voice was also thought to be reflected in, for example, the book of Chronicles.

According to Wellhausen, the shift from prophetic religion to priestly religion signaled a decline in the spiritual vitality of Israelite religion. To be fair, Wellhausen saw this as a necessary effect of the exile and the return afterwards: being removed from their original “heimat”, the Israelites could not but preserve their faith and rituals in a written down and somewhat “fossilized” form. To refer to the differences between the early prophetic and the later priestly religion, Wellhausen used the language of nature: of the fresh green trees, now only dried up wood remains.

[a] We may compare the cultus in the olden time to *the green tree which grows up out of the soil* as it will and can; later it becomes the *regularly shaped timber, even more artificially shaped with square and compass*. [...] it is not from the atmosphere of the old Kingdom, but from that of the church of the second temple, that the Priestly Code draws his breath.

Wellhausen’s use of the language of death when he speaks about post-exilic Judaism is noteworthy.

The same happens in a relevant quote about the Chronicles, which he treats as a typical by-product of the Priestly source. Wellhausen calls Chronicles a “midrash” on Kings. In someone else’s mouth (like mine), this might be a neutral or even positive remark, but not so in Wellhausen’s. Interestingly, the word “midrash” does occur twice in Chronicles. This was for Wellhausen an opportunity not to be missed to state his opinion about midrash, which is of course mostly known as a post-biblical, rabbinic genre. Note again the language of, green and dry, life and dead.

[b] of course the commentators assert that the word *midrash* which occurs in the Bible only in these two passages (2 Chron 24:27; 13:22), there means something quite different from what it means everywhere else; but the natural sense suits admirably well and in Chronicles we find ourselves fully in the period of the scribes. *Midrash is the consequence of the conservation of all the relics of antiquity*, a holy peculiar artificial *reawakening of dry bones*, especially by literary means, as shown by the preference for lists of names and numbers. *Like ivy it overspreads the dead trunk with extraneous life*, blending old and new in a strange combination. It is a high estimate of tradition that leads to its being thus modernized; but in the process it is twisted and perverted and set off with foreign accretions in the most arbitrary way.

A last quote will suffice to convince you that this language of life and death was a trend, not a coincidence. Now he speaks explicitly about Judaism and uses the contrast between living and still water.

[c] when it is considered that the canon is what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel, it is recognized at the same time that what distinguishes Judaism from ancient

Israel is the written Torah. *The water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni (“offspring”) stored up in cisterns.*

Thus, Wellhausen smartly used his commentary on Chronicles and the Priestly source to make derogatory remarks about Judaism, also in its later forms. He would speak about the “Judaization” of the Israelite religion in the Priestly source of the Bible.

[d] The alternations and additions of Chronicles are all traceable to the same fountainhead—the Judaizing of the past, in which otherwise the people of that day would have been unable to recognize their ideal.

The term “Judaizing” is usually not used for the Hebrew Bible; it is rather found in early Christian sources, as an accusation at the address of fellow Christians who were still too much engaged in Jewish practices.

Indeed, Wellhausen drew a direct line from the Priestly source of the Hebrew Bible to the Pharisees of Jesus’ time over the rabbinic sages who created the Talmud and Midrash, to orthodox Judaism in his own time. In this view, Judaism became a religion of external practices rather than inner ethical and spiritual vitality. Christianity, to the contrary, was conceived as the real heir of natural, vital, prophetic Israel, the “new” or “true” Israel in fact.

Spätjudentum

This view of the Bible was not a new invention of Wellhausen. The whole organization of the Christian canon of the Old Testament, with the prophetic books at the end, is symptomatic of this view. When joined together with the New Testament in the Christian Bible, the prophetic books lead directly to the birth of Christ, which is seen as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies. All this was traditional Christian biblical theology. Wellhausen, however, now put a scientific base under it, with his history of Israel based on the four-source theory, which gave it an objective aura.

Wellhausen and like-minded scholars called Judaism after the exile, and especially after the emergency of Christianity “Spätjudentum” (Late Judaism). This term has persisted in Christian theology and Biblical Studies until the second half of the 20th century. Presently, ironically, this period is indicated as Early Judaism (Frühjudentum), which is more accurate because Judaism in the form that we know it, in fact only started, not ended, in the same period that Christianity emerged.

One more quote from Wellhausen's work exemplify his view of Judaism as a decline, and of Christianity as the real heir of the old, pre-exilic, Israel.

Referencing Paul, whom he calls, admiringly, “the great pathologist of Judaism” he writes:

[e] the great pathologist of Judaism is quite right: in the Mosaic theocracy the cultus became a **pedagogic instrument of discipline**. It is estranged from the heart; its revival was due to old custom, it would never have **blossomed again** of itself. It no longer has its root in child-like impulse, it is like a **dead work**, in spite of all the importance attached to it, nay, just because of the anxious consciousness with which it was gone about.”

Wellhausen here refers to Galatian 3:24, where the Law (*nomos*) is called the *paidagogos* who watched the Israelites until Christ came, but in his quote, he swapped the Law for the priestly cult, which in his view was related to the Law, and maybe even worse than the Law.

Was Wellhausen really an antisemite?

At this point we need to take a break. Was Wellhausen really an antisemite? Rudolf Smend, in a 1982 article “Wellhausen und das Judentum,” takes it up for his Göttingen predecessor and tries to convince his readers that Wellhausen is incorrectly treated as an antisemite. He states, correctly, that everybody always uses the same quotes from the Prolegomena to claim that he was. And indeed, I also used some of these same quotes.

In defense of Wellhausen, Smend adduces some lesser-known writings, such as personal letters and statements, some of which, however, make it only worse, in my view. Some of the critics of Wellhausen, like Blenkinsopp, a catholic scholar who is indebted to Wellhausen’s insights on priests and prophets, but very critical of Wellhausen anti-Jewish bias, state that Wellhausen contributed to the antisemitism that would lead up to the Holocaust. Jon Levenson, a prominent Jewish scholar, quotes Blenkinsopp approvingly on this. But maybe it is unfair to single Wellhausen out like this. Wellhausen was an independent spirit, and not a member of the anti-Semitic liga or any racist antisemitic group. Even Blenkinsopp refers to the fact that Wellhausen’s view of Judaism was more the rule than the exception in the German academy throughout the 19th century, and that, moreover, Wellhausen was equally critical of the Church as an institution. Other contemporary, and later, theologians and exegetes, but also earlier and more influential figures like Martin Luther, said much worse things about the Jews. We cannot blame Wellhausen for being a child of his time, which was many decades before the rise of Nazism. Yet he was famous because his views of the bible were revolutionary and for some quite shocking as they were, also without the anti-Jewish innuendo’s. This is why his ideas are seen as landmarks in biblical studies until the present day, and his anti-Jewish remarks should not be overlooked.

In his defense, Smend reminisces that Wellhausen pleaded successfully for a chair in Jewish Studies at the university of Frankfurt. Smend also states that Wellhausen admitted that he was not interested in post-biblical Jewish literature and that he didn’t know much of it. Not everybody can be an expert in everything, and even today Jewish Studies and Biblical Studies are often still separate worlds.

What is more, and this also needs to be mentioned, many reform Jews such as Leo Baeck, Hermann Cohen and others spoke highly of Wellhausen’s research into biblical history. This brings us to our next point. The liberal Jewish scholars who admired Wellhausen, mostly did this because they were aware that they were falling behind. A telling witness to this is found in a review of one of Wellhausen’s books, by Abraham Geiger, who is considered the founder of Reform Judaism.

At the end of his review, in his own *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* in 1872, Geiger calls on young Jewish scholars to engage in Biblical studies, so as to make it an interconfessional endeavor, and so that the Christians will also start reading the Jews, and not only the other way around.

I would strongly urge younger researchers to regard the scholarly treatment of the Hebrew Bible as an interconfessional field, so that Christian scholars, just as Jewish

scholars have long made it their duty, will finally approach Jewish learning with the same scientific respect appropriate for scholarly men.

Historical Context: Jewish Emancipation and Wissenschaft des Judentums

To fully appreciate these dynamics, we must explore the historical backdrop somewhat further and also look at the developments within Judaism and Jewish Studies. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Germany not only saw the emergence of critical treatment of the Bible by Protestant theologians. Concurrently, in the wake of Jewish emancipation, Jewish academic scholarship also emerged, in the movement known as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* emerged as a scholarly movement aimed at studying Judaism using the methods of modern historical and philological research. This *Wissenschaft* was conducted, among other places, in the Jewish Seminaries in Berlin and Breslau, which were later identified with the two currents of non-Orthodox Judaism, Reform in Berlin, and Conservative Judaism in Breslau. Jewish reform and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were therefore closely connected.

The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had both an internal and an external agenda: For Jews, the goal was to preserve and strengthen Jewish identity by demonstrating that Judaism had a rich intellectual history that could stand up to modern academic scrutiny. This helped to instill pride in Jewish heritage and offered a way for Jews to engage with modern ideas without abandoning their religious roots. It was also a way to counter the idea that, in order to count in society, one should be, or become, a Protestant Christian, a choice that was made by many prominent Jews in that generation.

Externally, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was aimed at proving to the broader non-Jewish world that Judaism was an ancient tradition worthy of respect. In an era of rising antisemitism, many Jews felt the need to demonstrate that their religion and culture were not relics of the past, but living traditions that could engage with modernity just as Christianity had. By applying the same historical-critical methods for Jewish sources that were used in Christian biblical scholarship, Jewish scholars sought to gain respect and legitimacy within European intellectual circles.

Jewish Scholarly Responses to Higher Criticism

Solomon Schechter and other progressive Jewish scholars were not only outraged at the antisemitic tendencies in protestant Bible Criticism, they were also critical at the address of their fellow Jewish scholars, and accused them that they were complicit in letting their Bible “steal” from them by the Christians. We already saw that in Geiger’s review of Wellhausen’s book. Indeed, leading figures of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, like Leopold Zunz, had focused more on other areas of Jewish literature, such as midrash and rabbinic texts, than on the Hebrew Bible.

Why was this so? Leopold Zunz's focus on rabbinic literature was closely related to his efforts to modernize Jewish liturgy. Even though Zunz himself was not formally a leader of the Reform movement, his scholarship significantly influenced the intellectual foundations of Reform Judaism. Zunz saw *midrash* as a historical predecessor to modern Jewish sermons. In his groundbreaking work *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* (1832), Zunz had argued that *midrashic* literature had served as the foundation for Jewish

preaching throughout history. He saw a direct line from the early rabbinic tradition of sermonizing and expounding upon scripture to the modern practice of delivering sermons in synagogue services. He especially wanted to demonstrate, by means of these ancient sermons, that Jewish liturgy had evolved over time and was thus not immutable. This focus on post-biblical Jewish literature had, however, the unintended consequence of shifting attention away from the Tanakh as the central text of Jewish identity and scholarship.

In the speech that I already quoted from, Solomon Schechter eloquently and pathetically formulated it as follows:

The Bible is our patent of nobility granted to us by the Almighty God, and if we disown the Bible, leaving it to the tender mercies of a Wellhausen, Stade and Duhm, and other beautiful souls working away at diminishing the “nimbus of the Chosen People” the world will disown us. [...] We have to create a really living, great literature, and do the same for the subjects of theology and the Bible that Europe has done for the Jewish history and philology. (Schechter, Higher Criticism, 38)

With the latter, he referred to the accomplishments of Zunz and others in the burgeoning *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

Benno Jacob's response to higher criticism and his alternative

Benno Jacob was one of the only Jewish scholars of his time whose main field was Biblical exegesis. That is why he is worth our attention. He wrote his most famous works, his commentaries on Genesis and Exodus, relatively late in his career, when he was retired as a rabbi and living in London. Benno Jacob was trained at the university and at the Jewish seminary in Breslau. Already as a student he openly reacted against the growing antisemitism in the academia. He founded a Jewish student fencing club in which he challenged non-Jewish students to compete with them. He spared also no effort to openly challenge antisemites. A famous incident regards an anti-Semitic leader with specific opinions about the Talmud whom Jacob confronted with an actual Talmud, of which he of course could not read a word.

Important for us is that Jacob, like Schechter and Geiger, realized that Jewish scholarship had not paid enough attention to the Bible. But more than the others, he spared no effort, as a rabbi and as a teacher, to make Jews “return” to the Bible. He also stressed the importance of Bible study in the education of Jewish children. This is clear from a passionate lecture which he held when he was rabbi in Göttingen, which, as you may know, was the center of critical *Bibelwissenschaft* at that moment.

The lecture was published as a series of contributions in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* in the year 1898. The title of the lecture was “Unsere Bibel in Wissenschaft und Unterricht.”

Here are a few relevant quotes, in my own English translation; you can find longer quotes in German and English on the handout.

“Our Bible is no longer our Bible.”

“But Judaism without the Bible is doomed to death “

In his own scholarship, Jacob rejected the conclusions of higher criticism, particularly the documentary hypothesis. He did not only object to it because of its inherent antisemitism. He

also objected to the fact that higher criticism often limited itself to the historical and literary dissection of the text, and left it at that. Jacob, rather, sought to interpret the Bible in a way that upheld its spiritual and ethical integrity within the Jewish tradition. Jacob already stated this in his early work, from 1898.

“For us the Bible is the book of life and therefore we need our own our Jewish Study of the Bible by which it can open for us new sources for life”

“We have to understand the Bible, not judge it. [...] so that we can correct ourselves according to it, and not correct it according to us.”

Many years later, Benno Jacob applied these ideas by offering constructive interpretations in his famous commentary on Genesis, *Das erste Buch der Tora*, written in 1933; and his later commentaries on Exodus and Leviticus. The original German edition of the Genesis Commentary is provided with a Foreword that is not reprinted in the English translation. In this foreword, and laced in the commentary, he often lashes out at source criticism.

On the handout (number 5) you find relevant citations from the original German foreword and my English translations. I only single out one that makes the intention of the commentaries clear.

[c] This commentary aims to be, and is intended to be, a Jewish one. This means: written by a son of the people for whom the Torah was written, it does not allow its understanding to be obstructed from the outset by the presupposition and unspoken assumption that the ‘Old’ Testament is merely a preparation for a ‘New’ one, and only finds its fulfillment and true meaning in the latter.” (p. 10)

It would lead us too far to look into concrete examples of Jacob’s own exegesis, in his commentaries to the various books of the Torah. Suffice it to say that he offers an original and creative combination of modern critical insights and traditional Jewish sources. He was in no way a fundamentalist Jewish scholar, he also refers, e.g., frequently to texts from the New Testament. Yet he knew the value of classical midrash and medieval Jewish commentaries and used these, critically, in his own commentaries.

Many of Jacob’s objections against Biblical Criticism are now mostly obsolete. Fortunately, most Biblical Criticism is no longer supersessionist, and few scholars still engage in pure source-criticism like in the 19th century. Historical critical exegesis has long surpassed the stage of dividing the text in pieces and is now mostly combined with other, literary, methods to understand the full scope of the text, not just its growth and history. We should read Jacob’s remarks, however, as a document of his time. He, like Schechter and others, saw the warning signs of what antisemitism could lead to, only a few years later. In hindsight we can see how this antisemitism had long before infiltrated the study of Biblical Literature, and worse, how the apparently scientific study of the Bible was used as a platform to spread antisemitic ideas. Benno Jacob’s student fencing club, his talks and newspaper articles, and his biblical commentaries were in his time of no avail to turn the high tide of the antisemitic wave. Yet many years later, Jacob’s commentaries have been rediscovered and they are appreciated among many contemporary scholars for their fresh, independent, insights, their deep knowledge of Jewish sources, and their keen eye for the composition of the text. Moreover, his discerning eye for the dangers that can lurk behind so-called objective science, Christian theology, and their combination should serve as a perpetual warning flag.

Contemporary Jewish Bible Scholarship, Jewish Biblical Theology and Jewish-Christian dialogue

Fast forward to today, and the landscape of Jewish biblical scholarship has evolved significantly. Many contemporary Jewish scholars, like Marc Zvi Brettler and Marvin Sweeney, do not shy away from biblical criticism; instead, they incorporate it into their theological frameworks. Moreover Marc Brettler is a pioneer of joint Jewish-Christian exegesis and Jewish exegesis of the New Testament, as attested in his co-editing, with Amy-Jill Levine, the Jewish Annotated New Testament, which they personally presented to the pope.

It was long held as a given that Jews do not “do” biblical theology. A famous name in this respect is Jon Levenson. Yet, recently, more and more works of specifically Jewish biblical theology are seeing the light. Jewish Biblical theology is very much in dialogue with biblical interpretation, including specific Jewish ways of reading the Bible such as midrash. An eminent example is Michael Fishbane who speaks about “Jewish hermeneutic theology.” Benno Jacob and his contemporaries can be considered the predecessors of this new articulation of Jewish Biblical Theology.

In closing, also Christian theologians can learn from the Jewish approach to biblical criticism, which seeks to engage critically with texts while maintaining a commitment to faith and tradition. This approach can enrich both Jewish and Christian theological landscapes. There are many contemporary examples of Christian exegetes engaging with Jewish traditional ways of reading the Bible; and Jewish scholars dealing with the New Testament and Christian literature, such as the Jewish Annotated New Testament. Christian theologians are more and more aware of the fallacies of supersessionism, which is always lurking at the door in Christian theology, sometimes hidden as philosemitism. With Rosemary Radford Ruether I am convinced that Christian faith and theology can overcome the need of fratricide.

A more relaxed look at one’s own faith, from both the Jewish and the Christian sides, which is an advantage of today’s greater relativism and maybe even secularization, allows for seeing the value in other traditions, and using these to enrich one’s own tradition.

Handout

Marko Feingold Lecture by prof. dr. Lieve Teugels
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Higher Bible Criticism = Higher Antisemitism? A Historical and Contemporary Examination

1. Quotes from Solomon Schechter, “Higher Criticism-Higher Antisemitism,” in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing, 1915), 35–39.

- a. I remember when I used to come home from the *Cheder*, bleeding and crying from the wounds inflicted upon me by the Christian boys, my father used to say, my child, we are in Galut (exile), and we must submit to God's will. [...] Thus the pain was only physical, but my real suffering began later in life, when I emigrated from Roumania to so-called civilized countries and found there what I might call the Higher anti-Semitism, which burns the soul, though it leaves the body unhurt. The genesis of Higher anti-Semitism is partly, though not entirely—for a man like Kuenen belongs to an entirely different category—contemporaneous with the genesis of the so-called Higher Criticism of the Bible. Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* are *teeming with aperçus* full of venom against Judaism, and you cannot wonder that he was rewarded by one of the highest orders which the Prussian Government had to bestow. (36)
- b. The Bible is our sole *raison d'être*, and it is just this which the Higher anti-Semitism is seeking to destroy, denying all our claims for the past, and leaving us no hope for the future. (37)
- c. “professional and imperial anti-Semitism” (38)
- d. The Bible is our patent of nobility granted to us by the Almighty God, and if we disown the Bible, leaving it to the tender mercies of a Wellhausen, Stade and Duhm, and other beautiful souls working away at diminishing the “nimbus of the Chosen People” the world will disown us. [...] We have to create a really living, great literature, and do the same for the subjects of theology and the Bible that Europe has done for the Jewish history and philology. (38)

2. Quotes from Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*

Cf. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels: Mit einem Stellenregister*, 6th ed. (De Gruyter, 1927). = DE

Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel. With a Reprint of the Article Israel from the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1983). = EN

- a. In der alten Zeit ist der Kultus dem grünen Baume zu vergleichen, der aus dem Boden wächst, wie er will und kann. Hinterher ist er zurecht gehauenes Holz, das mit Zirkel und Winkelmaß immer günstlicher ausgestaltet wird. Er sichtlich hängt mit dem qualitativen Gegensatz, der soeben entwickelt worden, der formalen von Brauch und Gesetz, von dem

wir zu Anfang ausgegangen sind, enger Zusammen.[...] Es ist nicht die Luft des Alten Reichs, sondern der Gemeinde des Zweiten Tempels, in der der Priesterkodex atmet. (DE, 79)

We may compare the cultus in the olden time to *the green tree which grows up out of the soil* as it will and can; later it becomes the *regularly shaped timber, even more artificially shaped with square and compass*. Obviously there is a close connection between the qualitative antithesis we have just been expanding and the formal one of law and custom from which we set out [...] it is not from the atmosphere of the old Kingdom, but from that of the church of the second temple, that the Priestly Code draws his breath. (EN, 81)

- b. Nun versteht es sich schwer von selbst, dass die Ausleger behaupten, das Wort Midrasch, das nur an diesen beiden Stellen in die Bibel hineinragt, heiÙe hier etwas ganz anderes als was es sonst immer heiÙt --aber die wirkliche Bedeutung paÙt ausgezeichnet und wir stehn mit der Chronik mitten im Zeitalter der Schriftgelehrten inne (1. Chron 2,55). Der Midrash ist die Folge der Heilighaltung der Reliquien der Vergangenheit, eine ganz eigene Wiedererweckung der toten Gebeine, auf k¼nstlichem und zun¼chst auf schriftlichem Wege, wie die Vorliebe f¼r Listen von Namen und Zahlen zeigt. Wie Efeu umgr¼nt derselbe den abgestorbenen Stamm mit fremdartigem Leben, Altes und Neues in sonderbarer Vereinigung mischend. Es ist Hochsch¼tzung der ¼berlieferung, welche sich in ihrer Modernisierung ¼uÙert, aber dabei wird sie auf das Willk¼rlichste umgedeutet, verrenkt und mit fremdartigen Zutaten versetzt. (DE, 223)

Of course, the commentators assert that the word midrash which occurs in the Bible only in these two passages (2 Chron 24:27; 13:22), there means something quite different from what it means everywhere else; but the natural sense suits admirably well and in Chronicles we find ourselves fully in the period of the scribes. Midrash is the consequence of the conservation of all the relics of antiquity, a holy peculiar artificial reawakening of dry bones, especially by literary means, as shown by the preference for lists of names and numbers. Like ivy it overspreads the dead trunk with extraneous life, blending old and new in a strange combination. It is a high estimate of tradition that leads to its being thus modernized; but in the process it is twisted and perverted and set off with foreign accretions in the most arbitrary way (EN, 227)

- c. Erkennt man an, dass der Kanon das Judentum vom alten Israel unterscheidet, so erkennt man auch an, dass die schriftliche Thora das Judentum vom alten Israel unterscheidet. Das Wasser, das in der Vergangenheit gequollen war, faÙten die Epigonen in Cisternen. (DE, 409)

When it is considered that the canon is what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel, it is recognized at the same time that what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel is the written Torah. The water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni ("offspring") stored up in cisterns. (EN, 410)

- d. Die ¼nderungen und Supplemente der Chronik flieÙen schieÙlich alle aus demselben Brunnen. Es ist die Judaisierung der Vergangenheit, in welcher sonst die Epigonen ihr Ideal nicht wiedererkennen konnten.

The alternations and additions of Chronicles are all traceable to the same fountainhead—the Judaizing of the past, in which otherwise the people of that day would have been unable to recognize their ideal.

- e. Der große Patholog des Judentums hat ganz recht: in der mosaïschen Theokratie ist der Kultus zu einem pädagogischen Zuchtmittel geworden. Dem Herzen ist er entfremdet; wäre er nicht alte Sitte gewesen, so würde er aus sich selber nie mehr emporgeblüht sein. Er wurzelt nicht mehr in dem naiven Sinn. Er ist ein totes Werk, trotz aller Wirklichkeit, ja gerade wegen der Peinlichkeit und Gewissenhaftigkeit, womit er genommen wurde. (DE, 423)

The great pathologist of Judaism is quite right: in the Mosaic theocracy the cultus became a pedagogic instrument of discipline. It is estranged from the heart; its revival was due to old custom, it would never have blossomed again of itself. It no longer has its root in child-like impulse, it is like a dead work, in spite of all the importance attached to it, nay, just because of the anxious consciousness with which it was gone about. (EN, 425)

- f. From: Julius Wellhausen, "Israel. Reprinted from the Encyclopedia Britannica," in his *Prolegomena* (EN), 427-548.

Jesus casts ridicule on the works of the law, the washing of hands and vessels, the tithing of mint and cummin, the abstinence even from doing good on the Shabbat. Against untruthful self-sanctification He sets up another principle of morality, that of the service of one's neighbour. ... Thus religion ceases to be an art which the Rabbis and Pharisees understand better than the unlearned people which know nothing of the law. The arrogance of the school fares ill at the hands of Jesus; [...] He is most distinctly opposed to Judaism and his view of the Kingdom of heaven. ("Israel", in *Prolegomena* (EN), 510)

3. **Quote from Abraham Geiger, "review of: Der Text der Bücher Samuelis untesucht von Lic. Julius Wellhausen. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1871," in *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* 10, (1872), 84-103, 103.**

Die jüngeren Forscher möchte ich aber dringend ermahnen, die wissenschaftliche Behandlung der hebräischen Bibel als ein interconfessionelles Gebiet zu betrachten, so dass endlich die christlichen Gelehrten ebenso unbefangen von dem jüdischen Lernen, sie mit derselben, wissenschaftlichen Männern geziemenden Achtung behandeln, wie es die jüdischen Gelehrten schon längst zu thun als Pflicht sich auferlegen.

I would strongly urge younger researchers to regard the scholarly treatment of the Hebrew Bible as an interconfessional field, so that Christian scholars, just as Jewish scholars have long made it their duty, will finally approach Jewish learning with the same scientific respect appropriate for scholarly men. [Translation, LT]

4. **Quotes from Benno Jacob, "Unsere Bibel in Wissenschaft und Unterricht", in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 62 (1898), nr 43, 511-513, nr 44, 525-526, nr 45, 534-536. [English translation, LT]**

- a. Die Bibel ist fast verschwunden aus der jüdischen Wissenschaft, aus dem jüdischen Hause und hat nicht überall die gebührende Stellung im jüdischen Unterricht. Das schlechthin Einzige, was Israel an unvergänglichen, weltbeglückenden Gütern hervorgebracht hat, die Grundlage seines Glaubens, die Quelle seines dreitausendjährigen Geisteslebens, sein höchstes Gut, sein teuerstes Heiligtum ist ihm entrissen. Unsere Bibel ist nicht mehr unsere Bibel.

The Bible has almost disappeared from Jewish scholarship, from the Jewish home, and has not received the proper place in Jewish education everywhere. The one and only thing that Israel has produced in terms of imperishable, world-blessing treasures—the foundation of its faith, the source of its three-thousand-year spiritual life, its greatest good, its most precious sanctuary—has been taken away from it. Our Bible is no longer our Bible.

- b. Das Judentum aber ohne Bibel ist dem Toten verfallen.

But Judaism without the Bible is doomed to death.

- c. Kein falscher Respekt vor berühmten Namen, noch Furcht vor der augenblicklichen Herrschaft der Tagesweisheit, darf uns hindern, es in aller Bestimmtheit auszusprechen: dass die heutige Methode dieser Wissenschaft auf einer unzureichenden Grundlage beruht, dass sie in den schwersten Irrthümern und Vorurtheilen befangen und ein Tummelplatz der größten Willkür ist. Die Bibel leidet unter ihr noch schwerer als unter der christlich-dogmatischen Auffassung, und für das Judentum wäre ihre bedingungslose Anerkennung der reine Selbstmord.

No false respect for famous names, nor fear of the current dominance of contemporary wisdom, should prevent us from stating with complete certainty: that today's method in this field of scholarship is based on an insufficient foundation, that it is trapped in the gravest errors and prejudices, and has become a playground for the greatest arbitrariness. The Bible suffers under it even more than under the Christian-dogmatic view, and for Judaism, its unconditional acceptance would be pure suicide.

- d. Uns aber ist die Bibel ein Buch des Lebens, unseres Leben, und darum brauchen wir eine eigene, eine *jüdische Wissenschaft von der Bibel*, damit sie uns neue Quellen des Lebens eröffne.

For us the Bible is the book of life and therefore we need our own our Jewish Study of the Bible by which it can open for us new sources for life

- e. Wir wollen die Bibel verstehen, nicht richten. [...] damit wir dann uns nach ihr, nicht sie nach uns, korrigieren.

We have to understand the Bible, not judge it. [...] so that we can correct ourselves according to it, and not correct it according to us.”

5. **Quotes from Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934); Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus* (Calwer Verl, 1997). ([English translations, LT])**

- a. Jedoch ein weit schwereres Hemmnis für das wahre Verständnis im Ganzen wie im Einzelnen sind gewisse, mit dem Anschein strenger Wissenschaftlichkeit und uninteressierter Objektivität auftretende, moderne gelehrte Dogmen und Hypothesen. (9)

However, a much more serious obstacle to true understanding, both in the whole and in the details, are certain modern scholarly dogmas and hypotheses, which appear under the guise of strict scientific rigor and disinterested objectivity.”

- b. Als das größte Hindernis eines richtigen Verständnisses ist die sogenannte Quellenscheidung im Pentateuch zu betrachten. Indem sie einen sinnvollen Organismus, bei dem alle Teile sich aufeinander beziehen, voreilig zerstückelt, wird sie gänzlich unfähig,, die Zusammenhänge zu begreifen und die eigenartige Kompositionsweise des Buches zu erfassen.

The so-called source division in the Pentateuch must be regarded as the greatest obstacle to a proper understanding. By hastily fragmenting a coherent organism, in which all parts are interconnected, it becomes completely incapable of grasping the relationships and understanding the distinctive composition of the book.

- c. Dieser Kommentar will und soll ein Jüdischer sein, das soll heißen: von einem Sohne des Volkes verfasst, für das die Thora geschrieben ist, lässt er sich nicht von vornherein das Verständnis durch die Zielsetzung und stillschweigende Voraussetzung verbauen, dass das "alte" Testament nur Vorbereitung auf ein "neues" sei und erst in diesem seine Vollendung und seinen wahren Sinn finde. (10)

This commentary aims to be, and is intended to be, a Jewish one. This means: written by a son of the people for whom the Torah was written, it does not allow its understanding to be obstructed from the outset by the presupposition and unspoken assumption that the ‘Old’ Testament is merely a preparation for a ‘New’ one, and only finds its fulfillment and true meaning in the latter.

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