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Pious and Critical Scholarly Paradigms of the Pentateuch

— during the 19th & early 20th centuries

by Spencer Morgan

Abstract

This paper examines the antithesis between Christian scholarship and modern higher criticism of the Pentateuch during the 19th and early 20th centuries. During the 19th century, the popularization and eventual hegemony of the Documentary Hypothesis revolutionized the field of Biblical studies. Modern critical scholars claimed that Moses did not write the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) during the 15th century BC, but rather it was the product of a later redaction of at least four separate documents: J, E, P, and D. Writing hundreds of years apart and long after Moses, their authors reflect not the ancient covenantal religion of Moses, but rather various periods in the evolution of Israel's religion. The implications of the Documentary Hypothesis bring into question the historicity and theological validity of not only the Pentateuch, but also the Christian New Testament which presupposes it. The goal of this research is to identify the foundational presuppositions, conclusions, and contextual consciousness that both the modern critics and the Reformed body of Christian scholars opposing them brought to their scholarship. These Reformed Christian scholars recognized the antithetical nature of and cultural power bolstering the modern critics' paradigm and thus challenged its conclusions at its foundational roots.

Introduction

The Apostle Simon Peter wrote that God's people should always be πρὸς ἀπολογίαν¹ for the hope that is within them. Such was the calling of Chris-

1 ΠΕΤΡΟΥ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ ΠΡΩΤΗ 3:15 (NTG). (Pros apologian) – Literally: “with (a/an) defense/answer.”

tian scholars laboring in the modern era to defend the Pentateuch against the increasingly prominent and dominant naturalistic and skeptical views of the world around them. This paper seeks to provide an historical understanding of the relationship between conservative Reformed² scholars with liberal and skeptical scholars from the beginning of the 19th century until the climactic restructuring of Princeton Theological Seminary and subsequent opening of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. It is my goal to present these scholars in their respective contexts, noting especially their interpretations of the history and state of Old Testament higher criticism – particularly the modern critical paradigm³ and the conservatives opposing it.

The conception and emphasis of *worldview* and *paradigm* are not novel observations and concerns of recent times or secular philosophy, least of all in the study of the Bible, for in fact they are biblically-attested factors of the utmost relevance on one's thought and actions. Ezekiel says that the Lord scoffs at those with idols in their hearts seeking to consult Him.⁴ Paul proclaims that God has “made foolish the wisdom of the world” and rhe-

2 The phrase “conservative Reformed” shall be used in this paper to refer specifically to Christian authors whom hold to orthodox Reformed (colloquially Calvinist, often ecclesiastically Presbyterian) doctrines of faith, deriving their theology from *sola scriptura*, which they hold to be sufficient *for* and inerrant *in* historical and theological revelation. Where the word conservative is used it is to be assumed that the additional designation “fundamentalist” has been omitted for the sake of brevity and implies the inclusion of those scholars who could fall under the categorical definition of *fundamentalism*, unless otherwise qualified.

3 A paradigm, described and applied to scientific research by Thomas S. Kuhn, is the dominant and definitive model by which legitimate research in a particular field of study is carried out. The work within a paradigm largely focuses on an “attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies ... Nor do scientists normally aim to invent new theories, and they are often intolerant of those invented by others. Instead, normal-scientific research is directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies.” Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11, 24.

4 Ezekiel 14:3 (ESV).

torically asks “where is the debater of this age?”⁵ Likewise, Proverbs opens by declaring that all knowledge begins with a fear of the Lord and that those whose knowledge does not do so are fools who will eat the fruit of their way.⁶ In the final analysis, there is an antithesis between a believing worldview and non-believing worldviews. This information being pertinent to a Christian historical perspective, special consideration of the relationship between such worldviews themselves, as well as their scholarly applications, methodology, and conclusions is necessary. There is precedent in historiographical use and application to this scholarly period of *paradigm* by evangelical scholars Köstenberger and Kruger, who in applying it to the radical New Testament historical perspective introduced by Walter Bauer in the early 20th century, described paradigms as being “a controlling framework for how we view the world” that (even outside of particular argumentation) exerts strong general influence over scholars sharing common predispositions.⁷

There stands a vital contrast between the Reformed worldview with the opposing ethos of theological liberals and the skepticism and naturalism of modern critical scholars (those whom Robert Dick Wilson termed “radicals”).⁸ The work of these latter two groups stands in final analytical contrast to that of the conservative scholars responding to them, who recognized and named the common presuppositions these groups utilized in constructing their histories of Israel and its religion. Thus, they attacked the assumptions and consistency of modern scholarship, while promoting the explanatory power and Christian necessity of their own. Writing in an era marked by the development of a hegemonic liberal ethos and naturalistic paradigm of historical skepticism towards the Pentateuch and

5 1 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)

6 Proverbs 1:7, 22, 31 (ESV).

7 Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination with Diversity has Reshaped our Understanding of Early Christianity*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 18.

8 Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, Revised Edition ed. Edward J. Young (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, (1926) 1959), 11.

history of ancient Israel in academia, Reformed scholars of the 19th and early 20th century consciously recognized these cultural and institutional developments and challenged them in their defense of the historicity of the Pentateuch.

The Reformed Ethos

The worldview and epistemology of the Reformed tradition is vital in beginning to understand their conservative scholarship during this period. Concerning this approach, Reformed Princeton and Westminster philosopher Cornelius Van Til wrote:

It is impossible and useless to seek to defend Christianity as an historical religion by a discussion of facts only ... It is apparent from this that if we would really defend Christianity as a historical religion, we must at the same time defend the theism upon which Christianity is based, and this involves us in philosophical discussion. But [this] does not mean that we begin without Scripture. We do not first defend theism philosophically by an appeal to reason and experience in order, after that, to turn to Scripture ... We get our theism as well as our Christianity from the Bible.⁹

Van Til rejected the possibility of having true knowledge of Christianity or *anything* independent of or morally neutral in respect to the triune God revealed in Scripture. That is, if we live in God's world, then the Bible is necessarily the foundational and ultimate authority to which a Christian must appeal. Therefore, the Bible's validity is presupposed and must be defended. Van Til maintained that his views and methodology are those of "generic or historic Calvinism" and that it all "rests on Calvin and upon the classical Reformed theologians."¹⁰ His Princeton and Westminster colleague Robert

9 Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th Edition, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, (1955) 2008), 28-29.

10 *Ibid.*, 23.

Dick Wilson likewise argued that Christians should not ignore the testimony of the Scripture in which they believe and should assume the same inspiration for the Pentateuch as they do for the words of the prophets, and that its historicity should be assumed ‘innocent until proven guilty’ by the critics.¹¹ Edward J. Young additionally notes that Wilson thought little of historical objections based solely upon the presuppositional denial of the possibility of miracles or prophecy.¹² Reformed Princeton scholar William Henry Green also recognized the fundamental importance of the inspired authority of Scripture – which in this era was the focal point of criticism – in determining Biblical doctrines and scholarly worldviews.¹³ Green’s contemporary Melancthon W. Jacobus aligned with the Van Tilian view that knowledge and theories are true only so far as they correspond to Biblical truth.¹⁴ This being the case, and taking seriously his relationship and interactions with other Reformed academics in his era,¹⁵ Van Til’s beliefs here should serve as adequate grounding for the general worldview, instincts, and presuppositions of the Reformed scholars. They did not conduct their study of the Pentateuch from a presumption of neutrality or independent empirical study, but necessarily in relation to their faith in God’s revelation in Scripture for the affirmation of the Christian Church and edification of their brethren therein.

11 Wilson, *Scientific Investigation*, 27, 40-41.

12 Edward J. Young, introduction to *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* by Robert Dick Wilson, (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, (1926) 1959), 20.

13 William Henry Green, *Moses and the Prophets*, (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883), 9.

14 Melancthon W. Jacobus, *Notes, Critical and Explanatory, on the Book of Genesis*, (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1867), v.

15 Van Til is significant as one of the early leaders and the definitive apologetics methodologist of Westminster Theological Seminary, founded directly in response to the institutional liberalization of Princeton Theological Seminary by its estranged conservative professors in 1929. Among Westminster’s other early members are its founder J. Gresham Machen, as well as Old Testament scholars O.T. Allis and Robert Dick Wilson.

***Liberalism, the Spirit of the Age, and Wellhausen's JEPD
Documentary Hypothesis***

A key theological movement within Christian academia and laity – both affecting and affected by the skeptical criticism during this period – is that which is broadly termed as (theological) *liberalism*. Historian Carl R. Trueman defines it in his introductory essay to Reformed scholar J. Gresham Machen's 1923 book *Christianity and Liberalism*:

The many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism – that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God in connection with the origin of Christianity Admitting that scientific objections may arise against the particularities of the Christian religion ... the liberal theologian seeks to rescue certain of the general principles of religion ... and these general principles he regards as constituting “the essence of Christianity.”¹⁶

In contrast to Reformed thought, liberalism does not hold the inner testimony of the Bible as to the truth, date, and authorship of its own content as being the ultimate authority. On the contrary, while some liberals such as John William Colenso¹⁷ maintained the necessity of God in the attainment of knowledge, independent critical analysis nonetheless yield truth that may *supersede* and *revise* the testimony Scripture. On this note, W. Robertson Smith asserted the modern liberal school did not necessarily deny

16 Carl R. Trueman, introduction to *Christianity and Liberalism*, by J. Gresham Machen, New Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 2, 5.

17 As is affirmed in the revisionist work of Bishop Colenso John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, Second Edition. (London: Longman, Green Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1862), 8.

supernatural stories and revelation.¹⁸ He clarified that external history cannot add to the “true religion,” but nonetheless there is a benefit to having a wider historical foundation.¹⁹ Total rejection of the supernatural and use of historical-critical methodology indeed appeared on the liberal spectrum,²⁰ which historian Alec Ryrie identifies as an apprehensive response and concession to skeptical and pagan critics.²¹

Liberalism was not merely a modified and reactionary perspective growing in the Christian Church, but additionally was the institutional ethos of 19th century Christian academia. Princeton’s B. B. Warfield argued that America derived its education from Germany (whose rationalism superimposed upon its Lutheran foundation) and its culture from England (“stained ... with an Anglican colouring”), both of which were antithetical and stifling to Calvinism.²² Thus, neither Calvinism nor general Protestant fundamentalism were the foundational principles of the 19th century American university, but rather, as George M. Marsden points out, liberal nonsectarian Protestantism was the dominant force setting educational standards. Moving outside of the theological boundaries of previous centuries of Western academia and into naturalistic science, liberalism’s goal was to promote an academic tradition of freedom and inclusiveness (opposed to Catholic authoritarianism) – so profound was this, that academia declared the use

18 Reformed conservative scholar James Orr notes here the inconsistency of Smith and other liberals whose system has no internal foundation to account for revelation, who thus are forced to borrow it from the high view of conservatives. James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 20.

19 W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel and their Place in History*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1882), 10.

20 Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 28.

21 Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: The Faith that Made the Modern World*, (New York: Viking, 2017), 240.

22 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “Present Day Attitude to Calvinism,” in *Calvin Memorial Addresses: Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*, (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1909), 223.

of Scripture as evidence to be *unscientific*.²³ This, combined with the lack of development of Christian schools of thought outside of theology itself, led to the abandonment of a common theistic point of reference and the marginalization of traditional Christian perspectives.²⁴

Not a word could be said about the dialectic state of scholarship during the 19th and early 20th centuries without an understanding of the paradigm of modern criticism, from which came the greatest critical challenge to belief in the historical reliability and authenticity of the Old Testament. Traditionally, Judeo-Christian beliefs and Scripture had affirmed Moses as the author of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – collectively called the Torah or Pentateuch.²⁵ However, new academic attitudes, both liberal and radical, placed substantial criticism onto this belief. Green and Wilson argued this skeptical spirit of the modern criticism was born out of England's deistical movement which, as Green argued (and Scotland's James Orr explicitly affirmed²⁶), profoundly impacted continental thought, particularly German critical speculation and anti-supernatural prejudice, and thus modern criticism.²⁷ Warfield claimed the entire age was *hostile* to supernaturalism and from this foundation came New Protestantism and naturalistic philosophy.²⁸ Jacobus added that the zeal of modern critics came from their natural aversion to and "deep seated alienation" from God.²⁹

23 Jacobus, Notes, Book of Genesis, iv.

24 George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14-16.

25 Julius Wellhausen, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 8th ed., vol. xviii. "Pentateuch and Joshua." (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885), 505.

26 Orr, *Problem*, 17.

27 Green, *Moses and the Prophet*, 12-13. See also Orr, *Problem*, 58.

28 He defines this "New Protestantism" (which is liberalism) as "religious indifferentism." Warfield, "Present Day," 234-235.

29 Jacobus, *Book of Genesis*, viii.

Out of these instincts at the beginning of the 19th century came the work of German scholar Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette. De Wette profoundly influenced the field by re-dating Deuteronomy to the time of King Josiah, arguing that the Mosaic laws were a later creation unknown until long after Moses, and declaring that the books of the Pentateuch had no historical authority outside of the periods of their fraudulent composition.³⁰ Writing retrospectively, German scholar Julius Wellhausen noted that in the decades that followed, “all who were open to critical ideas at all stood under his influence ... and started from the ground that he had conquered.”³¹ Wellhausen further describes De Wette being tempered by other scholars such as Heinrich Ewald, who in the 1830s mediated with a positive critical approach which, with an essential concern for Biblical Hebrew history as the foundation for the historical development of the “only eternally true religion,”³² conceded certain parts of the Pentateuch while defending Mosaic authorship and the historicity of other parts.

Meanwhile, literary criticism became effectively utilized in the developing paradigm, allowing for more precise distinguishing of the sources of the Pentateuch.³³ By the latter half of the 19th century, De Wette’s students Leopold George, Wilhelm Vatke, and Eduard Reuss had developed and popularized the belief that the Pentateuch was the product of four independently written documents (J, E, P, and D) from different periods in the first millennium BC.³⁴ This so-called Documentary Hypothesis would define the scholarly career of Wellhausen, a student of Ewald, who was first attracted to the radical criticism of De Wette’s school by way of Karl Hein-

30 Wellhausen, “Pentateuch,” 505.

31 Ibid., 505-506.

32 Heinrich Ewald, *The History of Israel*, Second Edition, vol. 1. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869), 58.

33 Wellhausen, “Pentateuch,” 506.

34 John Bright, “Modern Study of the Old Testament Literature,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. G. Ernest Wright. (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961) 15.

rich Graf, a student of Reuss. Graf's hypothesis that the Law was written after the Prophets so captivated Wellhausen that he candidly wrote "almost without knowing his reasons for the Hypothesis, I was prepared to accept it."³⁵

As a giant in the field and having been commissioned by W. Robertson Smith (England's preeminent Old Testament scholar at the time and an editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*),³⁶ Wellhausen's account of the field's development reflects modern criticism's understanding of itself, notable for both the scholars whom it regards as historically significant and those scholars it does not (such as the Reformed scholars of the time). Smith likewise contrasted the entirety of the modern school with those holding "the common faith of the Churches."³⁷ Reformed Lutheran scholar E.W. Hengstenberg, referring to the skeptical and naturalistic presuppositions of De Wette and his peers in 1847, all but names as a paradigm the radical state of modern criticism. These scholars, now consciously recognizing their power in embodying the "spirit of the age," had thus moved to openly ignore and hold in contempt "the powerless opposition" who, in affirming the historicity of the supernatural content of Scripture, had failed to keep pace with their certain intellectual progression.³⁸

In his seminal work *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, Wellhausen himself refined and formulated the version of the Documentary Hypothesis which became the formal paradigm for the historical-critical study of the Penta-

35 Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*. (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 3-4.

36 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2nd ed., "Julius Wellhausen." (The Gale Group, 2010). <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/julius-wellhausen> (accessed February 11, 2018).

37 Smith, *The Prophets*, 10.

38 E.W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, vol. 1. (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1847), 32, 35.

teuch and ancient Israel.³⁹ He argued that within the Pentateuch were four independent documents, each reflecting the historical context of their time:

- **J**, or the Jehovist Document. Written in the 9th century BC, it comprises much of the Genesis and Exodus narrative. It laws endorse a multiplicity of worship sites, reflecting Israel's first historical period.⁴⁰ It is marked by its use of the Hebrew word יהוה (Jehovah) to refer to God.
- **E**, or the Elohist Document. Written during the first historical period, its content is distinguished from J by its use of the Hebrew word מֵיְהוָה (Elohim) to refer to God.
- **P**, or the Priestly Code. Written as late as the 5th century BC, possibly by Ezra, it is concerned with laws and rituals. Its content reflects the third and final historical period.⁴¹
- **D**, or the "Deuteronomist" Document. Written in 621 BC, it reflects the second historical period of "struggle and transition" during King Josiah's reform condemning multiple worship sites, centralizing all worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴²

These documents were all eventually compiled and edited together into the Pentateuch by a redactor – possibly Ezra – after the Babylonian Exile, no earlier than the end of the 5th century BC, about 1000 years after Moses was supposed to have lived.⁴³ Central to the Wellhausenian take on the Documentary Hypothesis was the evolution of Israel's religion over time. Read-

39 David J. A. Clines, "Pentateuch," in *The Oxford Companion to The Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 580.

40 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 33.

41 *Ibid.*, 35.

42 *Ibid.*, 27, 33.

43 Clines, "Pentateuch.", 580.

ing between the lines of the Old Testament, Wellhausen rejected the unity of the Pentateuch and the history of Israel described in Kings, claiming that each of the JEPD documents reflect the legal context of three periods in Israel's religious history. Following De Wette, he claimed that the view of the Temple or any other place being the single legitimate sanctuary of worship was unknown to 'JE' or Israel in the first historical period, even in the time of Solomon. The antithesis to JE's law, a single place of worship, appears in the second historical period, marked by Deuteronomy and King Josiah's 7th century struggle against JE's pluralistic worship tradition.⁴⁴ 2 Kings 22 recounts the discovery of a Book of the Law which inspires Josiah's reform movement. Wellhausen argued that this very Book of the Law was in fact Deuteronomy.⁴⁵ Finally, Wellhausen believed the Priestly Code "stands outside of and above the struggle, – the end has been reached and made a secure possession."⁴⁶ Thus, P reflects the third period where the principles of Deuteronomy are normative. The Pentateuch is the final redaction of these source documents, P weaving the legal principles established by D into the JE narrative, thus conforming Israel's past to the dominant ideals of P in the present.⁴⁷ Israel's history, preserved within the hidden documents of the Pentateuch, is that of thesis (JE), antithesis (D), and synthesis (P). It seems Hegel, not Moses, captured the imagination of modern Old Testament scholars.

Writing in 1904, liberal Anglican Bishop Herbert Edward Ryle said of the Documentary Hypothesis: "But on the main point agreement has been reached. The battle of controversy is no longer being fought over the question, whether the separate existence of these documents can be identified, but over a different question, which relates to the priority in date of the

44 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 17-27.

45 *Ibid.*, 33.

46 *Ibid.*, 35.

47 *Ibid.*, 38.

composition of these documents.”⁴⁸ At the turn of the century, the Wellhausen Documentary Hypothesis was academically and ecclesiastically established as *the* paradigm of modern criticism. Normative research within it progressed the field.

Backlash against Liberal Aspersions

A full appreciation of conservative and liberal scholarship is incomplete without bringing into focus the man serving as the central focus of many of the former group’s writings: Anglican Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso. Stemming from his personal difficulty with and practical rejection of Biblical inerrancy, a striking contrast appears between Colenso’s approach to Old Testament scholarship and that of the conservatives in his taking for granted supposed contradictions in the Pentateuch. Asserting he had grounded his study within the Pentateuch itself, Colenso made internal literary critiques and inferences about the true author and their intent in writing particular problematic passages.⁴⁹ Explicitly rejecting the conservatives’ belief that the Pentateuch was intended to be an historical record, Colenso differs consciously from Ewald in dismissing the basic historicity of the Exodus story – denying what Ewald believed was the essential necessity for Israel’s national history.⁵⁰ Ultimately, he radically concluded that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch and while its books contain certain revelations about the characteristics of God and doctrine, the stories largely cannot be considered historical.⁵¹ Alec Ryrie notes that “professional biblical scholars found Colenso’s bluntness simple-minded, but his claims were easy to understand and hard to rebut.” As such, there developed ecclesiastical fear that the attacks by the “apostate Bishop”⁵² would demote the Bible

48 Herbert Edward Ryle, *On Holy Scripture and Criticism*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1904), 88.

49 Colenso, *Pentateuch*, 37.

50 *Ibid.*, 70.

51 *Ibid.*, 13-15.

52 Jacobus, *Book of Genesis*, iv.

to the status of ordinary books.⁵³ This fear was not without warrant and by 1923, J. Gresham Machen wrote that this exact development had taken root in the rapidly burgeoning liberal Church.⁵⁴

In one notable response to Colenso, Princeton's William Henry Green methodologically grounded his study of the Pentateuch within the content of Scripture itself and from here he made several observations that allowed him to internally contextualize and satisfy the "absolute self-contradictions" that the practical Colenso notes.⁵⁵ In one representative example of their differences, Colenso claimed Genesis errs in stating Jacob's party came into Egypt with 70 members, since Hezron and Hamul could not have been born at this time; any arguments counting them before birth could also apply *ad infinitum* to all descendants.⁵⁶ Green responded by pointing to the logic of Genesis 46:12 and Genesis 46:27. They imply and give precedent, Green argued, that the text counts Hezron and Hamul symbolically and that the author was concerned here with the "substantial truth" rather than "punctilious precision."⁵⁷ This demonstrates the differences between (and consequences of) Colenso's rational, "practical" reading of the text and Green's reading that prioritizes the internal logic of Scripture and coinciding facts therein to sufficiently make sense of it.⁵⁸ Green observed Colenso reading *eisegetically*⁵⁹ towards his theory of contradiction, his perception of the incompatibility of the text being due to inappropriately literal readings and counter-contextual Hebrew translations.⁶⁰

53 Ryrie, *Protestants*, 249.

54 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, New Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, (1923) 2009), 65.

55 Colenso, *Pentateuch*, 10.

56 *Ibid.*, 19, 22.

57 William Henry Green, *The Pentateuch Vindicated from the Aspersions of Bishop Colenso*. (New York: John Wiley, 1863), 33-34.

58 Colenso, *Pentateuch*, xviii.

59 That is, projecting his own views into the text.

60 Green, *Pentateuch Vindicated*, 74-79.

Conservative Response to Modern Criticism

Writing at the end of the era in focus, Princeton and Westminster scholar Robert Dick Wilson explicitly outlined the approach he and his ideological peers utilized in their polemics: that of illustrating the presuppositions and insufficiency therein of the modern scholarship paradigm, while in turn promoting his biblically-affirming model of interpretation. Contrary to the modern paradigm's assumptions and subsequent conclusions of contradictions and minimal historicism, Wilson argued that established facts like the uniquely accurate documentation in the Bible of the ancient nations and names, order, and spelling of the names of kings provides an "indestructible basis" by which one can comfortably and legitimately assume the historical reliability of the Old Testament.⁶¹ Additionally, whereas W. Robertson Smith maintained a traditionally viable and historically attestable development over time of the Law from its principle Mosaic foundations⁶² and the De Wette scholars denied Mosaic roots entirely, Wilson emphasized the established outside historical precedent and intertextual Scriptural attestation of a Mosaic composition of such law.⁶³

There is a conscious recognition of the paradigm of modern scholarship in Wilson's work. He compares the methods of conservative and radical scholars respectively to that of English Common Law and the Inquisitorial approach – innocent until proven guilty versus guilty until proven innocent.⁶⁴ Later Westminster scholar Edward J. Young identifies Wilson's primary contention being that the radicals utilized unscholarly methodologies.⁶⁵ As with other Reformed scholars, such as Jacobus,⁶⁶ Wilson emphasized that the methodology of the radicals began with the presumption that

61 Wilson, *Higher Criticism*, 14, 21.

62 W. Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 310.

63 Wilson, *Scientific Investigation*, 39-44.

64 *Ibid.*, 23-24.

65 Young, introduction to *Scientific Investigation* by Wilson, 20.

66 Jacobus, *Book of Genesis*, viii.

the Pentateuch's supposed source documents are forgeries and not inspired by God.⁶⁷ He argued that the conclusions of these critics⁶⁸ are entirely subjected to the set of commitments and presuppositions compelled by their theories. He charged that "they cut up the books and doctor the documents and change the text and wrest the meaning, to suit the perverted view of their fancy."⁶⁹ Writing nearly 80 years prior, Hengstenberg likewise blasted the radical critics of the Pentateuch for being philosophically superficial and argued that the conclusions of their study were inevitable as a "slave of inclination and prejudice."⁷⁰ Responding to Wellhausen, W. L. Baxter mocked the "scientific" criticism of the German scholar, noting Wellhausen's inconsistency in dismissing the content of Kings when it contradicts his theory, while at the same time affirming Kings whenever it agrees with his reconstruction of Israel's history; Baxter noted this contradiction when Wellhausen takes for granted 2 Kings' description of Josiah's reforms and their effect, but dismisses its portrayal of Solomon's reform as "unhistorical."⁷¹

In line with Baxter's observations and with what Thomas Kuhn describes as normal research within a paradigm,⁷² Wilson noted that the radical scholars ignore or throw out any textual evidence that does not align with their theory.⁷³ Additionally, under the authority of "scientific criticism," they echoed from one national field to another their uncritical *prima facie* assertions (made first by German scholars) about the impossibility of Biblical stories.⁷⁴

67 Young, 34.

68 He specifically names and criticizes the selectivity, ignorance, and "subjective views" of scholars like Heinrich Ewald, George Buchanan Gray, and Samuel Rolles Driver. *Ibid.*, 51, 57.

69 *Ibid.*, 61.

70 Hengstenberg, *Dissertations*, 168.

71 W. L. Baxter, *Sanctuary and Sacrifice*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1895), 7-11.

72 Kuhn, *Structure*, 24.

73 Wilson, *Scientific Investigation*, 39, 83.

74 *Ibid.*, 23-26.

Wilson's recognition of the power of the radical critics eclipses Hengstenberg's earlier observations – the German idea that the “will to power” is power had ruined scholarship by *willing* false power to know the Old Testament text, which in turn replaced the true power scholars once possessed.⁷⁵

Green, Wilson's elder at Princeton, writing against Colenso and the radical theories of forgery and redaction, argued that certain details in the Pentateuch reflect expected authentic developments and records, but are peculiar to those of a deliberate, ideological forger. Green noted the originality and lack of later continuity in the families of Jacob's house,⁷⁶ which begs the question why a forger would create them in the first place. Likewise, a major line of Wilson's argumentation follows in the mold of Green's from half a century earlier: namely, the inclusion (or lack thereof) in the Pentateuch of details that do not fit the fraudulent and reforming purposes proposed by Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis. There is deafening silence on the house of David, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple, while there is inexplicable emphasis on the Tabernacle and legal vocabulary long obsolete by the 5th century. If the composition of the Pentateuch was a pious fraud meant to legitimize the religious reforms of Josiah in Judah and those of the priests after the Babylonian exile, then why does its historical, legal, and prophetic content not comport with this very purpose?⁷⁷ Though much by way of theory was developing, the same conservative questions and tensions remained posed to the dominant theories of the modern school.

End of the Era

At the close of the era in focus, the modern critical school had largely prevailed in academia, though not without personal grief. Julius Wellhausen in the process lost his faith as a Lutheran and expressed regret over the effect his teaching had on his theological students, ultimately deciding to

75 Wilson, *Higher Criticism*, 46.

76 Green, *Pentateuch Vindicated*, 38.

77 Wilson, *Higher Criticism*, 39-41.

resign his professorship at Greifswald in 1882; John William Colenso and W. Robertson Smith also suffered, each undergoing a high-profile heresy trial in Britain.⁷⁸ The effect on Reformed scholarship and Church in general was even more drastic. Reflecting in 1959, Edward J. Young writes that, with the influx of modernists and doctrinal indifferentists, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America had increasingly liberalized by the 1920s – with this evolving identity came strife within the Church over doctrine as well as the ethos of Princeton Theological Seminary, a long-established Presbyterian institution.⁷⁹ With the liberal restructuring of both, Princeton’s conservative vanguard of J. Gresham Machen, Robert Dick Wilson, Cornelius Van Til, and others left to found Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929 and later the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.⁸⁰ No longer was the modern consensus confined to the classrooms of liberal universities. Now the very culture whose spirit had encouraged the cultivation of the modern academic paradigm found itself marching in tune to the drumbeat of the academy’s progress.

78 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, “Julius Wellhausen.”

79 Young, introduction to *Scientific Investigation* by Wilson, 19.

80 *Ibid.*, 19-20. See also Trueman, introduction to *Christianity and Liberalism*, by Machen, xv.

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