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Rationalism and Biblical Interpretation: H.E.G. Paulus, K.G. Bretschneider, and W.M.L. de Wette

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1. Introduction

This chapter examines standards of argumentation for interpretation of the Bible between the 1815 Congress of Vienna and the Revolutions of 1830. In doing so, it contends that so-called rationalist interpreters constructed a specific kind of courtroom for demonstration: one which, firstly, permitted certain types of evidence (ancient sources, earliest versions, original languages, human reason) while barring others (church authority, hermeneutical tradition, personal experience); which, secondly, demanded specific modes of explanation (grammatical, historical, natural) yet prohibited alternatives (dogmatic, supernatural, even philosophical at times); and which, thirdly, admitted a few confessional adherents (state-church Protestants) but excluded many (Catholics, Jews, free-church Protestants). By so delimiting sets of data, regulating techniques of exposition, and circumscribing types of interlocutors, such scholars – it claims further – portrayed a particular modality of reading as universal, cast their interpretative approach as neutral arbitration, and elevated their own training and expertise into prerequisites for establishing and evaluating objective knowledge. In effect, if not intention, these critics set new rules for the game of explicating the Bible, which brought themselves advantage and authority. Moreover, their endeavor to configure

[*] Given the volume's intended readership, English secondary sources have been prioritized. When not indicated otherwise, all translations are mine; the italics, original. To avoid a heap of given names, past authors have only initials. I gratefully acknowledge funding by the Flemish Research Council (FWO).

one mode of exegesis as general and impartial – able to yield knowledge absolute and true – entailed appeal and necessity, insofar as this was an age of vehement politics both between and among spiritual and temporal powers (themselves divided between supernaturalism and rationalism), with high personal and professional stakes for those who would, at least in public, cause a stone to fall from the scriptural foundation of church and state. Their works thus prove dense with meaning: not in the sense of disclosing deep truths about the divine but rather charged with direct functions, filled with strategies of exposition, laden with interpersonal relationships, and freighted with material and symbolic connections to the world that encompassed more immediate questions of exegesis.

The examination bases this argument on written work by three iconic figures: H.E.G. Paulus (1761–1851), K.G. Bretschneider (1776–1848), and W.M.L. de Wette (1780–1849). Their claims to fame were rooted in their claims about the Bible. All three, in providing a 'rationalist' interpretation, made claims that upset established positions concerning biblical authority. While Paulus proposed a swoon or 'apparent death' hypothesis, wherein Jesus did not die but only fainted on the cross, Bretschneider raised doubts about the authorship of John, and de Wette judged Deuteronomy not the law of Moses but a later compilation written in his name. Their fame also came from claims advanced against them. Whereas Protestant consistories attempted to remove Paulus from his professorship in Jena for threatening the Christian faith, a powerful Saxon minister prevented the appointment of Bretschneider to high church office in Dresden, denouncing him a 'John slanderer' (*Johannisschander*), and Prussian authorities deposed de Wette from his position in Berlin not only on grounds of association with a political assassin, Karl Sand, but also on account of theological statements unsettling to well-placed conservative officials. However, this chapter pushes such familiar stories to the background and foregrounds not these scholars' statements on the biblical past or the modern present in which their statements were made but the 'scientific' world they ultimately fashioned. This inquiry avoids trailing well-worn paths of exploration, whether placing interpretations by such exegetes against the longer history of theological doctrine, finding connections between these hermeneutics and wider philosophical ruminations, or rendering their textual conclusions into a narrative of accumulated correct understanding. Instead, it sets out to analyze practice in lieu of results: less what these scholars said than what they did – and did not do – as they read the Bible. Rather than deliver any judgment on which principles or procedures might still prove proper or productive, this historical investigation seeks only to consider their not inevitable predominance.

As for sources, the analysis centers on educational books by these three Protestant professors, all prolific. Unlike specialist articles or dedicated monographs, such compositions – primers, handbooks, manuals – sought a place not up in the dizzying heights of *érudits* but upon the desks of down-to-earth teachers, preachers, and students, as they tried to understand and explain what the Bible said and what the Bible meant: whether they be two or one and the same thing. Paulus produced the multivolume *Exegetical Handbook to the First Three Gospels* (1831–33); Bretschneider printed a *Textbook of the Religion and the History of the Christian Church* (1824); de Wette had a penchant for the genre, with his *Textbook of Christian Dogmatics in Its Historical Development* (1813, 1816), *Textbook of Hebrew-Jewish Archaeology, with an Outline of Hebrew-Jewish History* (1814), and *Textbook of the Historical-Critical Introduction to the Bible, Old and New Testament* (1817, 1826). Written in German, they combined and condensed, distilled and disseminated, much from their authors' fuller disquisitions, though with more cautious statements and less polemical tones than treatises aimed at an audience of experts. More fundamentally, these pedagogical works served not only to propagate specific conclusions but also to moderate particular methods of explication, define which sort of readers merited engagement, and transmit certain assumptions about what kind of knowledge was worth knowing. Furthermore, they trace the trajectory of liberal theology. By portraying their endeavors as neutral and irenic, these interpreters carved a discursive space (and thus a material one) between the powers of church and state. They themselves were far from apolitical – often engaged if not embroiled – nor were their writings without direct political implications, not least in anti-Catholic or anti-Jewish statements. Yet though ostensibly open, the courtroom of demonstration they constructed barred others at the door: the allegedly partisan, unscientific, and irrational. The cases of Paulus, Bretschneider, and de Wette thus look not only back to the Enlightenment, with its vision of progress and an enlightened republic, but also forward to the claims of impartial science, the protestantization of the secular domain, and challenges to liberal Christianity as well as Judaism in Imperial Germany.

2. Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus

Though long largely overlooked, H.E.G. Paulus (1761–1851) lived a life that well indexed his times.[1] Most accounts juxtapose mystical father and rationalist son, the deacon dad in Leonberg becoming central to the boy after the mother's early death. Paulus proceeded through the classical institutions of Württemberg theology: the schools of Blaubeuren and Bebenhausen followed by the Tübinger *Stift*, where he trained in theology, philosophy, and 'oriental' studies (*Orientalistik*). After a church internship and work as private tutor, he received a grant to travel across the Germanies, Netherlands, France, and England, which brought him further language training and into contact with chief figures in the European Enlightenment. In 1789, Paulus succeeded J.G. Eichhorn as chair of oriental languages at the University of Jena. Four years later, he became professor of dogmatics and exegesis in the faculty of theology, which enrolled more than half the total students. In 1803, he joined the exodus from Jena and went to Würzburg: partly pushed by the Atheism Controversy, which led to the removal of J.G. Fichte from the Jena faculty, partly pulled by the reform agenda of the recently reconstituted university. As professor of theology, Paulus was meant to advance the enlightened, modernizing agenda of the Bavarian government, lecturing amidst a mostly Catholic populace and to Catholic seminarians, at least until forbidden. When Würzburg returned to Hapsburg control, the state reassigned its Lutheran theologian to non-university duties, so his work shifted to school and district responsibilities on Protestant matters in Bamberg, Nurnberg, and Ansbach. In 1811, he moved to Heidelberg for a double professorship, replacing (his former student) de Wette in theology and P.K. Marheinecke in philosophy, who had both gone to the newly founded university in Berlin. Through it all, Paulus was prolific. He wrote an Arabic grammar, published Saadia's Arabic translation of Isaiah, produced a glossary to the Psalms, printed travel reports from the East, collected writings of J.D. Michaelis, edited works by Spinoza, and penned much on the New

[1] For (non-auto)biography, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, "Frühliberaler Rationalismus: Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, 1761–1851," in *Profile des neuzeitlichen Protestantismus*, vol. 1, *Aufklärung, Idealismus, Vormärz*, ed. idem (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1990), 128–55; Christoph Burchard, "H.E.G. Paulus in Heidelberg, 1811–1851," in *Semper Apertus. Sechshundert Jahre Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 1386–1986*, ed. Wilhelm Doerr, 6 vols. (Berlin: Springer, 1985), 2:222–97; Wagenmann, "Paulus," listing many other sources; Daniel Schenkel, "Paulus, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob," in *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 1st ed., vol. 11, *Palästina bis Polemik* (Gotha: Besser, 1859), 252–62; Karl Alexander Freiherrn von Reichlin-Meldegg, *Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus und seine Zeit, nach dessen literarischem Nachlasse, bisher ungedrucktem Breifwechsel und mündlichem Mittheilungen dargestellt*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Verlags-Magazin, 1853); Heinrich Döring, "Dr. Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus," in *Neuer Nekrolog der Deutschen*, vol. 29, *1851* (Weimar: Voigt, 1853), 614–27.

Testament.[2] His pamphlets and polemics outnumbered his academic work: between 1816 and 1846, 'hardly a year passed in which Paulus would not appear with some kind of writing or brochure on the book market or on the battlefield'.[3] At 80, this pugnacious Protestant relaunched his journal *Sophronizon*. Even in his final dying days, he summoned the strength to dictate a statement on local Jesuit missionaries in Heidelberg.

Paulus was also a fighter. His fight was rationalism. A statement often ascribed, though unsourced, asserted, 'What is not understandable for mathematical reasons is also not religiously or ethically (*sittlich*) true', and more than one biographer has elaborated how he believed in rationalism and lived what he believed.[4] The most obvious example arose concerning miracles. A sceptic with what Albert Schweitzer called 'an unconquerable distrust of anything that went outside the boundaries of logical thought', Paulus found himself the subject of consistorial petition after transfer to the Jena theology faculty, which demanded that the Saxon government remove him for promoting a Kantian philosophy liable to lead to pantheism and atheism and to introduce a religion of reason – part of a larger attempt to limit publication freedoms on matters of religion.[5] J.G. Herder, in the upper consistory at Weimar, supported Paulus, and the temporal authorities dismissed the case. Yet his most noted conflict involved a lifelong feud with philosopher F.W. Schelling. Not only did they share the same birthplace, same universities of Jena and Würzburg, and same building in those cities, but the plot was thicker still, with Paulus' daughter Sophie briefly, and unhappily, betrothed to A.W. Schlegel, whose ex-wife Caroline (daughter of Michaelis) had divorced him to marry Schelling – an affair with even more complexities.[6] In fact, Schelling's father had replaced Paulus's when the latter was dismissed for alleged mysticism and accusations of unbelief among the aristocracy and government: an irony given Paulus' excoriation of Schelling for antirationalist views. Others were caught in the crossfire. Though friends with G.W.F. Hegel,

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[2] For bibliography, see, chronological but not comprehensive, Reichlin-Meldegg, *Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus und seine Zeit*, 2:465–70; more thoroughly, Döring, "Dr. Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus," 622–27; on Judaism and the New Testament, Burchard, "H.E.G. Paulus in Heidelberg 1811–1851," 268–77.

[3] Wagenmann, "Paulus," 291.

[4] Daniel Schenkel, "Paulus," 253.

[5] Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, 48; Graf, "Frühliberaler Rationalismus," 132.

[6] See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 111–12, 222–23. More than one author blamed their wives: cf. Wagenmann, "Paulus," 289; Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, vol. 6.1, *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling* (Heidelberg: Bassermann, 1872), 138. Paulus' wife/cousin was a writer in her own right – one even Goethe appreciated.

Paulus opposed his appointment when in Würzburg, preferring J.F. Fries as a Kantian counterbalance to Schelling, who was backing Hegel, foe of Fries. (Paulus later helped bring Hegel to Heidelberg, in 1816.) Peak acrimony hit in 1841–42, when Schelling, then Hegel's successor in Berlin, delivered a lecture series entitled 'Philosophy of Revelation', which Paulus, aged 83, pirated by publishing an unauthorized transcript alongside a hefty critique of a foreword, more than 60 pages. Schelling filed suit, leading Prussian authorities to confiscate the work, but a court ruled Paulus' favour, which drove Schelling to resign.

In 1830, Paulus began to publish his *Exegetical Handbook to the First Three Gospels*, which ran about 2,500 pages across three volumes, published in five parts over three years.[7] Yet the portions most important here were front-loaded, none especially structured: a protracted foreword and prolonged introduction in part one of volume one and a peculiar 'self-review' at the beginning of part two. The foreword described Paulus' career, approach to scholarship, ambitions with the undertaking, and its relation to earlier work. The introduction discussed critical issues in the texts and explained the handbook's organization, which arranged the contents of the Gospels chronologically, not canonically. The self-review restated the aims, approach, and audience, including its usefulness for exegetes of all persuasions. With this work, Paulus set three goals: to process anew the information and proof necessary for specialists in the language and material, based on his *Philological-Critical and Historical Commentary on the New Testament* (1800–04); to authenticate the explanation of events and teachings as appropriate to the times in view of the tradition and historical circumstance, as in his *The Life of Jesus as Basis of A Pure History of Early Christianity* (1828); and to guide those interested in studying these 'historical sources' step-by-step with evidence and facilitate a gathering of resources (FW xl-xli). Ultimately, he sought to establish the history and teachings of early Christianity as credible and normative (FW xxi; SR vi). The problem was twofold, however: misapprehension among the ancients, who occupied a different conceptual world, and misinterpretation among later theologians, who retrojected their own ideas and whose doctrinal tenacity skewed interpretation. But through an integrated analysis – connecting the many parts to a single historical whole – he hoped to assemble 'a harmonious scientific account of at least the teachings of duty and of faith of Christianity, which passes from the

[7] Paulus, *Exegetisches Handbuch über die drei ersten Evangelien*, 3 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1830–33). The second, 'cheaper edition' (1842) included a new preface addressed to the publisher. Here, FW with Roman numerals refers to the foreword; I with silcrows, the introduction; SR with Roman numerals, the self-review.

revealed to reason' (FW xli). To move forward theologically, one needed to go backward historically.

Paulus was mad about his method.[8] The first line of his *Exegetical Handbook* declared it an 'urgent need of the day' 'to renew the *notiologico-philological method*' for explication of the New Testament. Though crediting his forebears by name, he judged their work too fragmented, leaving his generation painfully aware of the need for holistic understanding. Now, Paulus argued for a factual core to biblical writings and for their historical contingency, claiming, for instance, Jesus' ideas were not 'cloaked' but conditioned by time and place (FW xxvi). In doing so, he argued against mythological interpretations. The first thesis in his introduction read, 'our gospels contain convictions conceivable and factual for Orientals, not embellishments mythically poeticized' (I §1). Rather, affirming 'the education of humanity', which conceived of incremental divine revelation shaped by a progressive human world, he considered the biblical text a record of plausibility structures now distant: in temporal, geographical, cultural, and linguistic difference. A chief exegetical task, then, was 'to extract from what was believed, as transmitted, that which – as internal or external fact and experience – had given reason to belief in invisible influences' (I §14). The exegete must mine what had happened from what was thought, extricating the event from interpretation of that event, or historical fact from authorial judgment (I §§9). Scholars needed to pass through language to access an author's thoughts, in all their individuality. To do so, Paulus proposed a twofold reading strategy: philology and, with his propensity for neologism, 'notiology.' While philology remained at the general level of grammatical, textual, and historical analysis, notiology targeted ideas ('notions') in the context of specifically Christian history, determining the 'new social language' of Christianity. Together, they would foster a '*panharmonial* explication' (FW xxxii, cf. xx). Paulus identified his method with a '*Christian rationalism* that unites what took place with what is conceivable now' (SR iii, FW xlii). On the one hand, he advocated for the use of all mental faculties, rather than privilege feeling, imagination, or dialectics (FW vii). On the other, he resisted rigid dogmatic systems, which had skewed interpretation, and overly speculative philosophy, whose excesses and contradictions had lost it credibility with the public (FW xxiv, xxx, xxxiv). For Paulus, the interpretative venture had

[8] For his exegesis specifically, see esp. ibid; Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 4, 204–10; Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, with a preface by F.C. Burkitt (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1910), 48–57. This volume is based on the original 1906 edition. The much expanded and retitled second edition of 1913 was only translated into English, by John Bowden, in 2000.

to start with a methodical recovery of the early Christian past and teaching of Jesus himself – and only afterward proceed to philosophical reflection (FW xix): 'Purely historical knowing cannot but *begin from the philological*' (FW xii).

The professor believed purified material would refine results. Not only did Paulus boast of his teaching, which he prepared by noting only 'the data to be considered', instead of writing detailed manuscripts to lecture (in the etymological sense), and thus allowed him to return to the material 'unbiased' and modify his interpretation. But he also cast the handbook as a collection of evidence for his audience to reach their own conclusions – although he avoided a proliferation of scholia and superfluous reproduction of citations, which required of his readers both time and libraries, and elaborated his own judgments (FW xix; xli). On one level, the exegete approved of internal evidence, in two senses. Interpretation hinged, first, on the biblical text. Individual words proved paramount. Yet words were embedded in context, enveloped in authorial idiosyncrasy, and encased in diverse sources, whose origins relied on earlier traditions, oral and written, and whose fate depended on a chain of transmission, marked by conservation and corruption. Linguistic competence could thus establish the meaning of words as well as the genuine text – 'originality' being the chief aim of criticism, which also involved conjecture (FW xix, xiv-v). Within the biblical writings, Paulus prioritized sources immediate and unmediated, assuming contemporaneous and direct meant more reliable – be it oral or written testimony – and preferred eyewitnesses, believing later reports with more information did not outweigh earlier ones (cf. I §§ 16, 20, 32, 88b). It pivoted, second, on authors' inner thoughts. Moving from the philological to the notiological in pursuit of 'a thorough elucidation of the religious meaning of every single passage' (SR vii), he targeted the concepts encoded in words. As Paulus affirmed the difference between ideas then and now – i.e., the different signifieds behind a signifier – the mind of a biblical writer (no longer that of God) became crucial to determine terminology, which then made predictable his invocation of Plato's *Cratylus* for this '*psychological philologizing*' (FW xxx). On another level, he validated some external evidence. Paulus permitted data from Demosthenes of classical Athens for Luke's standing as a witness to events (I §41), from the Quran for practices of writing and collecting records among 'primitives' (I §83), and from 'oriental ways of speaking and thinking' for understandings of causation (I p. 62). While noting the importance of 'theological antiquity' and 'all of antiquity in and outside the Christian world' for religious understanding in general, for biblical interpretation in particular he followed a largely unarticulated logic of linguistic and cultural (perhaps even ethnic) affinity, with variation in temporal elapse (FW xii-iii).

However, exclusion matched inclusion in importance. No tradition of belief – 'be it three hundred or three thousand years old' – should preclude the use of any scientific method, he argued, especially for matters of religion, which needed to be updated according to God's continued education of humanity (FW xlii). The modern Protestant could hardly believe claims by ancient Pharisees to 'an uninterrupted succession of their secret regulations' (I §47). Little better fared the fathers of the church. True, Paulus followed the church father Irenaeus on the history of Jesus' death, especially his age (I §71), and the later father of church history Eusebius on oral transmission of stories about Jesus (I End, p. 57f.). But he hit hard inconsistencies and hit home inaccuracies of 'church tradition,' like Matthew writing his gospel in a language other than Greek (I §56) or Luke and Lucius of Cyrene being one and the same person (§16). Commenting on their tendency to elevate suppositions and conflations to the level of history and experience, he stated, 'here, as so often, little can be built on the alleged traditions of the church fathers…' (I §16). His primary source was biblical texts. As evidence, the Bible was primary.

Although Paulus demarcated biblical interpretation as a field free and open for cultivation, he delimited the furrows to be ploughed and tools to be wielded. He also defined those most able. Not only did he celebrate Jena circa 1800, where governmental spirit and university ethos promoted 'a thoroughly active freedom of investigation into all scientific matters', but he even hailed his own work as scholarly, autonomous, unprejudiced, and non-partisan (FW v, SR v). For this reason, 'experts of all parties', supernaturalists included, could profit from his 'philologico-critical and archaeological data and resources for textual explication in its entirety', while the interested of any sex or class would benefit (SR vii; FW xxxix, xl). However, he considered Catholics dubious cultivators of hermeneutics. He referred to one opponent as a 'cryptojesuit'; to 'pseudo-Protestant, in fact Catholic, mysticism'; to scholastics as 'slaves to church tradition'; and to 'false reasoning (patristic and scholastic pseudo-Rationalism)' that had imported preconceived opinions into the biblical text (FW xxxii, xxxvi, v; SR iv). So too errors of the 'medieval church' continued at first into an unpracticed Protestant exegesis (FW xvii). Much to the chagrin of 'the hierarchy that wavers to and fro in the patristic tradition', Jesus, Paul, and Peter himself rejected 'everything priestly as Jewish' – a conclusion reached through the duty of diligent investigation, assigned and exemplified by the Reformation (FW xl). Paulus tarnished analytical alternatives with such associations, diagnosing a scholastic 'sickness' of addiction to systems in philosophy and palaeology and regretting 'renewed scholastic sophistries over orthodoxy' (FW v, xxxiii). This explicit distrust of Catholics corresponded to an implicit disregard of Jews, who featured not

at all in his foreword, introduction, and self-review. He engaged little with contemporaneous Jews, availing himself of their work on only few occasions, such as J. Löwe on chronology (published in Paulus's own *Neues Theologisches Journal*) and the convert A.R.G.C. Matthäi on festivals. Consequently, although Germans of both confessions were seeking to reconcile Christ and reason, it was the Protestants, hands down, who had a leg up on reality (SR iii). Paulus hailed the 'Protestant freedom of instruction' and the promise of 'conscientiously free, Protestant investigation, bound with philologico-historical and philosophical expertise' (FW xxxii, v). On the one hand, such textual analysis, unbound from the tenets of orthodox belief, would offer greater insight into the past amidst 'the alarming strife between the undeniably far more developed, reasonable research into truth of our own age and the patristic, often pagan superstitious theology of tradition' (SR iv). On the other, this modality of reading would grant access to universal truths, insofar as 'the Bible is far more harmonious with Reason according to an impartial, knowledgeable exegesis than with the mysterious part of dogmatics' (SR vii). If Paulus elevated (one form of) Protestant interpretation as neutral scientific inquiry, he claimed precedence in the spirit of Luther, who had united 'faith in the Bible with the full, persuasive use of Reason' (FW xliv). A message to his co-confessionalists: breaking from Paulus in explication meant reading the Bible against science, against reason, and therefore against Luther.

3. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider

A man of letters and of God, K.G. Bretschneider represented the entanglement of altar and academy at the nexus of exegesis.[9] He also showed a delicate balance: between reason and revelation, revolution and restoration, theology and philosophy. Born and bred a Saxon, Bretschneider breathed his first in Gersdorf, the year 1776, his last in Gotha, 1848. Although his parents passed when he was 13, the call of blood set and kept him on the path to

[9] For (non-auto)biography, see Manfred Baumotte, "Liberaler Spätrationalismus: Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, 1776–1848," in *Profile des neuzeitlichen Protestantismus*, vol. 1: *Aufklärung, Idealismus, Vormärz*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Gütersloh, Mohn, 1990), 202–32; Karl Rudolf Hagenbach, "Bretschneider (Karl Gottlieb)," in *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 1st ed., vol. 2, *Bekehrung bis Columbien* (Stuttgart: Besser, 1854), 370–73; and Christian Neudecker, "Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider," *Allgemeine Kirchen-Zeitung* 38 (1848): 305–12; 39 (1848): 313–25, abridged in *Neuer Nekrolog der Deutschen* for 1848 and based on the material posthumously edited into *Aus meinem Leben*.

theological training: the wish of pastor father, tradition of mother's brothers, and expectations of other relatives. After gymnasium in Chemnitz and, from 1794, university in Leipzig, he served as private tutor to the baronial family von Kotzau, only to return, with his pupils, for further study. Moving down the path, he completed his degree and habilitation in Wittenberg, in 1804, where he then lectured. Two years later, Bretschneider sought transfer to church work in Dresden, concerned the city and university of Wittenberg would fall amidst war. The following year, he married Charlotte *née* Hauschild (whose younger sister he wed upon the elder's death) and moved to Schneeberg. Under patronage, he moved quickly through church offices and stayed the clerical course, declining calls to university chairs in Königsberg and Berlin. His superior salary made them easy to decline. A Doctor of Theology came from Wittenberg in 1812 (the last conferred by the university). Feeling blocked by the minister in Saxony, he moved to Gotha, in 1816, which brought less responsibility, more money, better climate, and higher conversation. As detailed in the hagiographical yet helpful account by his confrère C.G. Neudecker, Bretschneider ascended the upper echelons of church and state. He also took part in the expanding associational life: from the *Collegium philobiblicum* and a private society for Latin disputation in Leipzig to the Masonic Lodge of *Ernst zum Compaß* in Gotha and Mother Lodge in Berlin.

Bretschneider published on a range of topics, seemingly broad in our time yet less so for his.[10] The fundamental included a lexicon for the Septuagint and Apocrypha, edition of Ben Sira, and dictionary of the New Testament (all in Latin). The monumental consisted of the *Corpus Reformatorum*, which he founded and whose portions on Melanchthon he furnished himself.[11] The controversial comprised an inquiry into authorship in the gospel and epistles of John (whose criticism forced him to qualify his arguments), aphorisms on the union of Protestant churches (which drew Schleiermacher into debate on election), and a public dispute, reciprocally translated, with discourses by English divine H.J. Rose on 'the state of the Protestant religion in Germany' (which generated an 'apologia' by Bretschneider and 'historical inquiry' by Oxford don E.B. Pusey).[12] The interventional encompassed polemics,

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[10] For bibliography, see Bretschneider, *Aus meinem Leben*, 196–208 (partial yet thematic); Baumotte, "Liberaler Spätrationalismus, 225–27; Neudecker, "Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider," 319–21.

[11] See Zachary Purvis, "The *Corpus Reformatorum* and Other Major Editing Projects," ch. 33 in this volume.

[12] See James Moffatt, "Ninety Years After: A Survey of Bretschneider's 'Probabilia' in the Light of Subsequent Johannine Criticism," *American Journal of Theology* 17, no. 3 (1913): 368–76; cf. also Lutz Danneberg, "Probabilitas hermeneutica. Zu einem Aspekt der Interpretations-Methodologie in der ersten Hälfte des 18.

pamphlets, and plenty of periodical literature (much brought into Dutch): from articles in *Allgemeine Kirchen-Zeitung* – the flagship journal of early liberal Protestantism he eventually helmed and which the conservative *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung* set sail against – to the dialogue *Heinrich and Antonio*, a book written in response to Jesuit missions of the 1820s, republished five times in his lifetime, rendered in French, Dutch, and twice in English, reimagined with a continuation by a secular priest in Vienna, and adapted to the American context as *To Rome and Back Again*. Yet apart from his New Testament lexicon, at least its third edition, the work he cherished most was his two-tome *Handbook of Dogmatics of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church; Or, Attempt at an Evaluating Account of Those Principles Which This Church Has Pronounced On the Christian Doctrine in Its Symbolic Writings*, which underwent four editions in his lifetime (1814/18–1838).

In 1824, the guru of Gotha published his *Textbook of the Religion and the History of the Christian Church: For the Higher Gymnasium Grades and for the Educated Classes Generally*, with a second edition three years, and English translation three decades, later.[13] In view of eight years' teaching and an era plagued by everything from pantheism and proselytism to atheism and philistinism, he thought it essential to give an account of religion in general and Christianity in particular, such that 'religiosity would be firmly rooted in the heart (*Gemüthern*) and kept safe from philosophical and theological fen fires, esteem for biblical Christianity and the Evangelical Church would be awakened, and deviation to irreligion and indifference as to superstition and mysticism would be cut off' (§1). He divided his textbook in six parts: introductory remarks to philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, divine revelation ('the education of the human race to freedom through God'), revealed theology, the Christian church and its institutions as instruments of revelation, and history of the Christian church – with those on divine revelation and revealed theology centered on the Bible. Bretschneider offered other divisions: theology and religion (§11), philosophical and positive theology, i.e. by

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Jahrhunderts," *Aufklärung* 8, no. 2, Issue: 'Hermeneutik der Aufklärung' (1994): 27–48, at 35; Iain G. Nicol and Allen G. Jorgenson, "*On the Doctrine of Election*: An Introduction," in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Doctrine of Election: With Special Reference to the* Aphorisms *of Dr. Bretschneider*, trans. Nicol and Jorgenson, foreword by Terrence N. Tice (Louisville: WJK, 2012), 1–20; Albrecht Geck, "The Concept of History in E.B. Pusey's First Enquiry into German Theology and Its German Background," *Journal of Theological Studies* 38, no. 2 (1987): 387–408; cf. also translator's preface in Lichtenberger, *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, ix n. 1.

[13] Bretschneider, *Lehrbuch der Religion und der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche, für die obern Klassen der Gymnasien und für die gebildeten Stände überhaupt* (Gotha: Perthes, 1824), translated from the second edition by N.N. as *A Manual of Religion and of the History of the Christian Church: For the Use of Upper Classes in Public Schools in Germany and for All Educated Men in General* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857). Citation here refers to the first German edition.

reason and by history (§12), and manifestation and inspiration of the divine (§170/4). Notwithstanding the opinion of K.R. Hagenbach, whose entry in the *Subject Encyclopedia for Protestant Theology and Church* doubted whether the author had been called to dogmatics, the volume encompassed theology philosophical, historical, biblical, doctrinal, and practical. It averred *that* God had engendered human rationality (and morality) though conceded the *how* remained unknown, argued philosophical must precede positive theology, and asserted revelation could not diverge from reason (§§13, 175, 229, 172). As Otto Pfleiderer later described the position, 'the relation of natural to positive religion resembles that of the universal moral consciousness to the definite morals and laws of individual nations, or that of the common constitution of men as men to the specific unfolding of it in history'.[14] Bretschneider hence affirmed a gradual development of the rational, under God's guidance, and its historical contingency: in transfer of reason from the 'cultured' to the 'savage' and in devolution of certain nations (§§168, 177). Meanwhile, he contended the contents of scripture offered 'the surest evidence that the Holy Writ contains the history of divine revelation and is the codex of the same' (§178). Rehearsing the biblical narrative and surveying the canon book-by-book, the *Textbook* integrated exegesis into a holistic theological endeavor.

With this book for the educated and educating, the critic-cleric promoted a particular mode of reading.[15] First, exegesis should uphold contingency in the shaping of the Bible, in form and content alike. Not only did Bretschneider believe explication should consider how ideas had developed over time, reflected by the diversity in the texts themselves, but he even held revelation could not have come any earlier, since the right conditions first needed to emerge in the world (§§237, 180, 240–41, 243). (Likewise, he emphasized the spread of Christianity presupposed invention of the compass, gunpower, and printing press and the development of naval navigation and universal trade, §242.) Just as some beliefs of Jesus and certain stories about him were rooted in Jewish thought, Zoroastrian ideas, and ancient

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[14] Otto Pfleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant, and its Progress in Great Britain since 1825*, trans. J. Frederick Smith (London: Sonnenschein, 1890), 91.

[15] For his exegesis specifically, see Lee C. Barrett, "Bretschneider: The Tangled Legacy of Rational Supernaturalism," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, vol. 2, *Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart (Kirekegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Sources 6; Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 39–52; Jörg Lauster, *Prinzip und Methode. Die Transformation des protestantischen Schriftprinzips durch die historiche Kritik von Schleiermacher bis zur Gegenwart* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 46; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 40–44; Joachim Wach, *Das Verstehen. Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2, *Die theologische Hermeneutik von Schleiermacher bis Hofmann* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1929), 113–20.

thought more broadly (§§254, 267, 268, 265), so too the gospel of John received dubious additions (§211). Second, interpretation could not accept as argument occurrences beyond the natural world but could agree on faith to a higher causality beyond the physical world (§§113–14). While reports of miracles and prognostications supplied no primary evidence, none less than Luther valued them little as demonstration of divine words and deeds (§176). Lightning, not the Lord, likely showed to Paul *en route* to Damascus (§212). Third, the Bible carried implications for modern economics, politics, and ethics. For Bretschneider, scripture cohered with all forms of governance, supported capital, protected private property, and guided behavior: be it to proscribe idleness, loitering, mixing social classes, and 'monastic asceticism' or to prescribe unemotional expression, polite conduct, grammatical speech, and proper dress (§§240, 275, 292, 278, 294, 281, 283, 299, 282). Ultimately, he advocated for two perspectives on scripture: one historical, as a collection of documents from Jewish and Christian religion; another theological, as a collection of documents written by men but inspired by God, containing the history and teaching of divine revelation (§179). With this method, he could theorize older sources – oral and written – incorporated into biblical writings (§§182, 210) yet assemble a composite of divine qualities from across the Old Testament and narrate a progressive knowledge of God (§235). As he moved into the history of Christianity, Bretschneider associated his mode of reading with German Lutheranism since the 18th century, which – through philosophy, historical criticism, and rationalism – expanded knowledge, extended tolerance, but preserved morality. Most of all, this Lutheran theologian saw a conceptual shift: 'theology, formerly ecclesiastical (symbolic) became biblical, and it was acknowledged that there was a difference between church doctrine and evangelical doctrine and that the New Testament is the true source of Christian religious doctrines' (§416). Looking for common Protestant ground, he claimed neither 'critical rationalism' nor 'mystical rationalism' (or 'pantheistic idealism') disturbed the practical or moral dimensions of the Christian faith (§417).

The Saxon scholar wrote a textbook volume for assessing evidence. As he synopsized each book of the Bible, Bretschneider described scripture as self-interpreting and self-confirming. He amassed nearly three dozen citations to explain the term 'son of God' and contended the biblical witness showed Jesus to be genuine (§§247, 246). Yet the theologian did not always take the Word of God at its word, prioritizing the 'original' instead, be it language, source, and manuscript. Linguistic data undermined Solomonic authorship of Song of Songs (§201), while stylistic comparison undercut Petrine authorship of 2 Peter (§223), and transmission evidence gainsaid the end of Mark and Johannine comma as original (§§209,

251b). Likewise, the early, consistent, and 'honorable' qualities of the Synoptics outweighed contradictions, evincing their reliability (§§207, 248). Alongside such internal evidence, the *Textbook* admitted some external proof. If desert climate and despotic governance explained the fate of religions like Islam (§§242, 236), the record of 'profane history' gave lie to Esther as a historical record (§189). He cited the Latin *Satires* of Juvenal for context on the Jews of Rome (§217, cf. 213), Josephus for Jewish communities (§265), the rabbis and talmudists for codification of the Old Testament by Ezra (§181), the languages of Arabic, German, and Sanskrit for the fate of Hebrew among Jews (§181), and ideas in Egypt, Greece, and India for concepts of the soul (§265). According to J. Wach, by so interpreting other 'revealed' writings – *viz*. the Quran and Zend – Bretschneider made one of the first attempts in the history of hermeneutics to argue from the history of religion, which marked a proto-historicism.[16] Nonetheless, tradition, for this interpreter, proved particularly patchy: the church fathers could supply information otherwise absent, as on the deaths of John and Paul (§§211, 213), yet oral teachings must always concede to scripture where the two conflicted (§325). Although an unbroken chain was more reliable, the Catholic church had 'no historical datum' to support papal authority post-Peter, which written biblical texts explicitly countered and the ancient church never recognized (§322). Subsequent history furnished testimony, too, though less for interpreting scripture than establishing its truth. The divine origin of Christian revelation became clear, he avowed, through its effects on the mind and heart and its inner nature, including the diminishment of misanthropy, slavery, and tyranny and the enlargement of female education, cosmopolitanism, and science – but excluding hierarchy, inquisitions, and religious wars, which came from human passions and characterized the Catholic church (§244).

Bretschneider also delineated faithful interlocutors. If in principle he seemed to promote an irenic approach to Christian confession, in practice he propagated sentiment against Catholics and free-church Protestants (§§318–20). In his judgment, not only did Jesuits, concerned with power and serving the Pope, persecute Protestants, start wars, launch rebellions, overthrow kings, create a secret realm in Paraguay, conduct secrete commerce in the West Indies, and lead immoral lives, but they also instrumentalised science and religion without any interest in truth and dared not publish a thought without authorization (§§418–21). Yet he supported equal opportunity when discrediting opponents, including non-establishment Protestants. While offering a roll call of groups and beliefs across the globe,

[16] Wach, *Das Verstehen*, 117–18.

including missions and colonies, he referred to Anabaptists as 'rapturists' (*Schwärmer*), deceived by dreams and misled by false revelations, and the 'rapturism' of Quakers (§§424, 430) – in contrast with Jesus, who had nothing in common with such 'ravings' (§246). He rejected those who read the Bible against the laws of reason and experience and dismissed those who derived knowledge from imagination and feeling (§§4, 128, 174). Having claimed one should associate with those comparable in age, rank, wealth, and education, the pedagogue commended education in philology, theology, and law for those of a specific background and recommended the Bible to all, while maintaining the laity should concentrate on passages easy to understand (§§266, 279, 328). He even enumerated the qualities necessary for young men devoted to study: industry in all branches of knowledge, zeal for moral education, desire for aesthetic enhancement, chastity, thrift, moderation, respect, and obedience (§301). Bretschneider thus turned exegesis into a matter of class, to say nothing of gender.

4. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette

The meteoric rise of W.M.L. de Wette set him up for an astronomical fall.[17] Born a pastor's son in Ulla, anno 1780, he attended gymnasium in Weimar, drawing inspiration from the General Superintendent Herder, and, in 1798, worked as private tutor to the son of a French *émigré*, which took him to Geneva. The next spring, he enrolled at Jena, coming under the influence of J.J. Griesbach and (less enthusiastically) Paulus in theology and Schelling in philosophy. In early 1805, he received a Doctor of Philosophy, lectured as private docent, and wed his first wife, Eberhardine Boye, who soon died in childbirth. Two years later, he moved to the reorganized Heidelberg as associate professor, as the once united Catholic–Lutheran–Reformed faculty of theology divided, with promotion to full professor after

[17] For (non-auto)biography, see Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John W. Rogerson, *W.M.L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 126; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), inventorying important earlier sources; Ernst Staehelin, *Dewettiana. Forschungen und Texte zu Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wettes Leben und Werk* (Studien zur Geschichte der Wissenschaften in Basel 2; Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1956); idem, "Kleine Dewettiana," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1957): 33–41; Karl Rudolf Hagenbach, "De Wette, Wilhelm Martin Leberecht," in *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 1st ed., vol. 18, *Wessenberg bis Zwingli* (Gotha: Besser, 1864), 61–74.

another biennium. There, de Wette espoused his second wife, Henriette Beck, *née* Frisch, and espoused the ideas of Fries, notably his concept of 'presentiment' (*Ahnung*). With colleagues like F. Creuzer and C. Daub, he also mingled with Heidelberg Romantics. In 1810, de Wette left for the newly founded University of Berlin, likely targeted by Schleiermacher to break the deadlock between rationalists and supernaturalists and to bind faith and science together. As one colleague wrote, 'he sought the true, vibrant middle or, much more, the deep ground of unity and life in theology'.[18] De Wette developed an ambivalent relationship with Schleiermacher, collected an honorary Doctor of Theology from Breslau, opposed the appointment of Hegel and Schelling in philosophy (supporting Fries instead), and headed the Berlin faculty's resistance to reconstitution of Wittenberg as a pietistic seminary. In 1819, the professor was discharged over the Sand Affair. However, as John Rogerson has shown, 'When de Wette's dismissal came, it was on political grounds, but was already a marked man, and the dismissal was not unrelated to the view that he was a dangerous theologian.'[19] Although de Wette withdrew to Weimar, he could not escape Berlin, which foiled his attempt at a pastoral position in Braunschweig, thwarted his travel in other German states, and – once he regained a chair in a by then backwater Basel, in 1822 – forbade Prussian citizens from studying there and even forced the city to investigate his step-son for political intrigue. (Rather than go to Weimar, his wife and children returned to Heidelberg, where she later died.) In Basel, he married his third wife, Sophie von May, *née* Streckeisen, gave lectures famously open to all classes and genders, participated in associational life, backed a new German Reformed seminary in America, championed Greek independence, and took in a young Hellene himself.[20] Moreover, the theologian served five times as university rector and underwent ordination in the Reformed church, declining a professorship in Jena and pastorship in Hamburg. But he faced troubles in Basel, too, not only drawing continuous confessional fire from left and right but also drawn into *the* Troubles of the 1830s, which set

[18] Friedrich Lücke, *D. W.M.L. de Wette. Zur freundschaftlichen Erinnerung* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1850), 18.

[19] Rogerson, *W.M.L. de Wette*, 149; see George S. Williamson, "What Killed August von Kotzebue? The Temptations of Virtue and the Political Theology of German Nationalism, 1789–1819," *Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 4 (2000): 890–943.

[20] On his reception in North America, see Siegfried B. Puknat, "De Wette in New England," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 102, no. 4 (1958): 376–95.

Basel City against Basel State.[21] Growing conservative theologically, if not politically, with age, he died in 1849, unable to finish his sermon series on the Christian faith.

Whether replacing others or displaced himself, de Wette produced a large body of literature. As one clear profile summarizes, he fought for 'an aesthetic rationalism that distanced itself from enlightened moralism and orthodox dogmatism equally yet defended the achievements of the Enlightenment'.[22] His work centered on philosophy of religion, biblical exegesis, and Christian ethics, appearing in many volumes and editions, but also included reflections on contemporary politics, homilies, and thoughts on church art and architecture, not to mention novels and a play.[23] He published Luther's letters in five volumes, edited W.H. Gesenius's Hebrew reader, and worked on a German translation of the Bible. De Wette also offered editorial assistance to *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* in Jena, helped launch *Theologische Zeitschrift* in Berlin, and co-founded *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift* in Basel. The professor published many textbooks as well: on Christian dogma (biblical and church doctrine), Hebrew-Jewish antiquity, Old and New Testaments, and Christian ethics. Much went into English; some, into Dutch; a little, into French.

In 1817, de Wette first published his *Textbook of the Historical-Critical Introduction to the Canonical and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* – with volume two, on the New Testament, coming a decade later.[24] While the book went through six editions in his lifetime and another two after, the English translation underwent four. According to a handwritten note cited by his colleague Hagenbach, de Wette deemed it the most sterling of his critical works. Supplying a counterpoint to Paulus's handbook on the New Testament and Bretschneider's textbook on dogmatics, this primer by de Wette offers insight into analysis of the Old Testament and the mostly forgotten branch of *Einleitungswissenschaft*, or science of

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[21] Zachary Purvis, "Religion, Revolution, and the Dangers of Demagogues: The Basel 'Troubles' (*Wirren*) and the Politics of Protestantism, 1830–1833," *Church History* 88, no. 2 (2019): 409–39.

[22] Jan Rohls, "Liberale Romantik: Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, 1780–1849," in *Profile des neuzeitlichen Protestantismus*, vol. 1, *Aufklärung, Idealismus, Vormärz*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Gütersloh, Mohn, 1990), 233–50, at 234.

[23] For bibliography, see Rogerson, *W.M.L. de Wette*, 272–87.

[24] W.M.L. de Wette, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die Bibel Alten und Neuen Testaments*, vol. 1, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die kanonischen und apokryphischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Reimer, 1817), vol. 2, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die kanonischen Bücher des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Reimer, 1826), trans. and enlarged from the 5th ed. by Theodore Parker – without the portions on the Apocrypha – as *A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Boston: Little & Brown, 1843).

introduction: a subfield concerned with the character and composition of biblical writings as literary documents and with questions of language, text, and translation as well as authorship, date, and stratification. The work comprised short sections filled with copious notes followed by abundant bibliography on translations, editions, interpretations, and commentary. Having distinguished the introduction from other subfields – including biblical history, biblical archaeology, biblical geography, biblical chronology, auxiliary exegetical sciences, and biblical hermeneutics – the author expressed his aim to furnish necessary knowledge, as such inquiry 'initiates the interpretation of the Bible, i.e., instructs it in the correct point of view and furnishes the historical materials necessary for explication' (§5).

Both celebrated for and a celebrant of *Kritik*, de Wette has become so equated with it that his biographer Rogerson hails him the 'founder of modern biblical criticism' and another major study, by Thomas Howard, assigns him a leading role in 'the theological origins of nineteenth-century historical consciousness'. De Wette deemed the Bible a product of history and demanded it be analyzed as such: 'Since the subject of biblical introduction is the *history* of the Bible, its scientific character is therefore *historical critical*, i.e., the Bible is viewed as an historical phenomenon in line with other similar phenomena and subjected entirely to the laws of historical research' (§4). Inspiration and revelation entered the discussion only insofar as such notions appeared in the texts themselves: further questions belonged to the history of doctrine. For him, the highest aim of *historische Kritik* was 'the apprehension of the phenomena of the biblical literature in their genuine historical circumstances and peculiarities' (FW, vi).[25] De Wette defined and demonstrated that endeavor. In his words, 'The task of criticism is to determine what was originally written by the author [and] therefore establish facts' (§100). While the loss of autographs meant those facts proved ascertainable only indirectly, via probability on documentary evidence, the state of that evidence – registered in different circumstances over different periods – required the critic to know the material well and evaluate its assertions. When the sources proved lacking, criticism involved a third operation: conjecture. On the one hand, he argued for contingency. Biblical authors were conditioned by 'the general laws of thought' (§118), their imagination by circumstances of the day (§204),

[25] For his exegesis specifically, see Thomas Römer, "'Higher Criticism': The Historical and Literary-critical Approach – with Special Reference to the Pentateuch," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3/1, *The Nineteenth Century – A Century of Modernism and Historicism*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 393–423; Rudolf Smend, *Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wettes Arbeit am Alten und am Neuen Testament* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1958); Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 4, 231–45.

and their articulation by rules of language and rhetoric (§§119, 120), albeit with room for individuality (§121). He also discerned errors in the reproduction of biblical texts by accident, from misreading, mishearing, misremembering, and misunderstanding, and by design, from emendation, elaboration, and harmonization (§§83–84). On the other hand, *Kritik* could cut through layers of the past. With the goal of 'restoring the *original* reading', he called for 'separating older from younger, original from derivative', guided by a knowledge of the past and, with it, judgments of probability (§117, 270). Improbability, like the 'ridiculous' conception of a lions' den, and inaccuracy thus stretched Daniel beyond credibility (§255). Yet he demarcated what lay beyond its scope as well, including the reason for associations and additions or the role of coincidence and arbitrariness (§§250, 220, 310). Furthermore, he steered between allegorical interpretation – be it 'inappropriate' messianic interpretation of Psalms, symbolic reading of the lovers in Song of Songs, or the plague of locusts in Joel (§§267b, 276, 231) – and overhistoricization, when interpreters sought to squeeze any drop of factual blood from the textual turnip, as with Jonah and the fish (§236a). Fabulous elements in Esther, mythological aspects in Joshua, historical components in Judges meant not every story contained testimony to some meaningful past event (§§198, 167, 173). As another colleague recounted, de Wette had 'many a sharp and cutting word against those who treat the truth so lightly only to find confirmed in scripture their ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical presuppositions'.[26]

The *Introduction* introduced a large body of evidence to understand the Bible. First, the Berlin professor prioritized the Masoretic text, although he assigned only the consonants to criticism, allocating word division, punctuation, and accentuation to grammar and exegesis, albeit with attention to Jewish tradition (§97, 99). Second, he argued based on language, especially for questions of date and authorship, noting lexicon in Ezra-Nehemiah (§196), poor style in Ezekiel (§223), textual butchery in Isaiah (§212), and orthography in Chronicles (§190). Third, the critic incorporated translations, juxtaposing Greek and Hebrew recensions for the text of Jeremiah (§219). Fourth, he referred to manuscripts themselves, considering evidence from Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic for supplements in Esther (§200c). Fourth, the scholar adduced the 'spirit' of a book or its constituent parts, which related to content, from the 'Levitico-Deuteronomic' absent in Samuel to the 'anti-Israelite' in Kings, the 'mythological and Levitical' in Chronicles, and the 'dogmatic, moral' in Tobit or

[26] Daniel Schenkel, *W.M.L. de Wette und die Bedeutung seiner Theologie für unsere Zeit. Zum Andenken an den Verewigten* (Schaffhausen: Beck & Son, 1859), 5. The work was also translated into Dutch.

to that of 'arrogance, lust for revenge, and craving for conversion' typical of 'the later Jews' in Esther (§§180, 184, 189, 311, 198). Fifth, he employed explorations in the Middle East, drawing on C. Niebuhr's reports for the fate of Semitic languages and geography (§§32, 240). Sixth, the author allowed external evidence: Greek tragedy to understand the genre of Job (§285), historiography by Herodotus, Xenophon, Strabo to assess events in Isaiah (§209), and anthropology of Arabs, Persians, and Greeks to document human expression in proverbs (§264a). Seventh, he invoked ancient writers for supplemental information, early citation, and points of interpretation, not only church fathers such as Origin and Jerome or historians like Josephus and Eusebius but also the rabbis, citing, e.g., the Talmudic tractates Shabbat, Pesachim, Bava Batra, and Yadayim. He reproduced passages at length, relying on compendia à la J. Cocceius's 1629 *Duo Tituli Thalmudici Sanhedrin et Maccoth* (§319a). For de Wette, evidence was essential. 'Eichhorn's presumption is only a presumption,' he wrote on the question of Edom's demise (§235b). But not all evidence was equal. Neither tradition *qua* tradition nor ancient authorities *qua* authorities enjoyed any privilege. Age or quantity did not lend a datum, in and of itself, greater credibility (§116). He used as well as refused claims from patristic and rabbinic sources. Christians and Jews may well assign authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses, but their saying did not make it so (§164). Indeed, 'tradition and authority' proved inadequate for a secure, scientific knowledge of language (§37). Lofty lineage fell low: he lined up Rabbi Nathan, Gregory of Nazianzus, Luther, J. Hardoin, Reimarus, and Rosenmüller for thoughts on dating only to note their improbability 'for the more sophisticated expert of Hebrew language and literature' (§291e). In addition to delivering explicit judgments on some, he implicitly ruled out other evidence. Universal reason, individual inspiration, personal feeling, and direct revelation did not enter the equation for reading the Old Testament.

At the discussion table of de Wette were many seats. He included research far and wide: from Oxford with B. Kennicot on manuscripts and R. Lowth on poesy to London with I. Newton on Daniel to Franeker with C. Vitringa on prophets to Murrhardt with Schelling's father on Song of Songs, and to Nancy with A. Calmet on Maccabees. Yet his interlocutors extended over centuries (cf. §134). He drew deeply from the wells of Christian humanism, both those at the top like the Buxtorfs, Grotius, Melanchthon, and Scaliger and those further down, such as M. Bucer, J.J. Grynaeus, V. Strigel, and J. Mercier. Beyond the Christian study of Hebrew and Jewish literature, he regularly cited medieval Jewish commentators: whether I. Alfasi, Rashi, A. Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, D. Kimhi, I. Abarbanel, or E. Levita, though at times brokered by others, like J. Leusden's 1657 *Joël explicates*. De Wette placed himself in

dialogue with generations of interpreters, citing Porphyry, Hobbes, and Spinoza on the inauthenticity of Daniel (§255). However, contemporary Jews featured far less often and mostly for translations, for example, M. Neumann's of Nahum (§241). When referring to 'the Jewish spirit of triviality' (*jüdischer Kleinigkeitsgeist*) and 'the angsty meticulousness of the Jews', he may thus have been describing more than his opinion of ancient scribes (§§90, 97). Likewise, he held coeval Catholics at arm's length. True, he readily invoked the work of earlier interpreters and even some contemporaries, especially J. Jahn and J.L. Hug. But although he fully acknowledged the role of Catholics in the history of interpretation, his story of true, progressive, scientific knowledge became a Protestant one. 'All sense for historical truth disappeared after the first centuries', he wrote, 'and faith in authority and deference to the church devoured everything else' (§29). With the Council of Trent, which secured the Vulgate, 'entry into public church doctrine is forever closed to exegetical research' (§72c). This Protestant scholar praised other, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant scholars ('the Old Lutheran critical school') for imbuing into Old Testament criticism 'the necessary impartiality and cautiousness' (§98). After crediting the French Catholic R. Simon, he quickly moved to the German Protestants J.S. Semler, J.G. Eichhorn, and Michaelis: 'The science [of biblical introduction] is, in the current remit and character of its dealing, a product of modern critical Protestant theology, although an enlightened Catholic had given the first stimulus' (§6). More than anyone else, J.S. Vater brought an end to 'the long night of uncritical faith in tradition' regarding the Pentateuch (§164). So, 'only a papist criticism' could consider Baruch the author of his eponymous apocryphal work (§323). But by no means was every Protestant an ally: C.G. Thube and J.C. Harenberg produced works so uncritical as to be 'mostly unusable' (§259). De Wette offered comparatively more seats at the table for diverse exegetes, past and present, although the ones seated at his right hand were those most like him: contemporary, Protestant, German, critical.

5. Conclusion

Between 1815 and 1830, Paulus, Bretschneider, and de Wette produced interpretative guides for studying the Synoptics, the history of the Christian religion, and the Old Testament and Apocrypha, respectively. With these works, they advocated for current but by no means uncontroversial reading methods, applying the latest interventions in philosophy, philology, and history to understand biblical texts: as artifacts of a distant place but assets to modern Europe, as fallible yet credible testimony to a God behind the human past, present, and

future. This chapter, less describing what these writers said than analyzing what their writings did, has examined the sorts of evidence, the types of explication, and the kinds of interlocutors they not only permitted but also precluded for building arguments about the Bible. Ultimately, the courtroom of demonstration they aspired to construct identified one mode of biblical interpretation (their own) with the rational, scientific, and modern: versus Catholics, Jews, and some Protestants (i.e., the free and orthodox), whom they dismissed as irrational, unscientific, and medieval. In their account, moreover, that exegetical edifice conformed to the blueprints of the Protestant confession, erected on intellectual freedom, reasoned thought, biblical criticism, and philosophical reflection. More good work should investigate how these modes of argumentation and models of theological knowledge transformed what had come before and how they themselves would change in the coming decades, now centuries.

These three writers represented a formative stage of liberal theology as it would transform (in) nineteenth-century Germany. Fittingly, the titles of their dedicated chapters in the German volume *Profiles of Modern Protestantism* associate Paulus with 'Early Liberal Rationalism', Bretschneider with 'Liberal Late Rationalism', and de Wette with 'Liberal Romanticism'. Of course, the writings under analysis here constituted only part of their activity in 'Restoration Germany', not to mention their larger corpora and careers. If Paulus sought to synthesize theology with Kantian philosophy, Bretschneider essayed to apprehend the relations of religious and political, Catholic and Protestant, and German and French in contemporary Europe, while de Wette endeavored to discern the function of knowledge, faith, and presentiment (*Ahnung*) in religion. Each had to navigate the hazards of ecclesiastical and governmental politics – with the structural poles of rationalism and supernaturalism – and steer through theological waves stirred by pantheism, mysticism, aestheticism, and idealism. Yet their wider undertakings documented the troubled relationship of liberal theology and liberal politics, hinting at the conflicts and contradictions that would manifest themselves throughout the century and after. Although Paulus argued for his own critic, the unorthodox Strauss, to fill a chair in Zurich against resistance by church authorities on grounds of academic freedom, and for constitutional principles, he argued against civil rights for women, Jews, and the have-nots, which elicited a response by H. Heine in the poem 'Kirchenrat Prometheus'. Bretschneider, sensitive to confessional parties, theological schools, and dogmatic positions, could insist Christianity was no political religion – unlike Judaism, Greek and Roman paganism, or Islam – and hence acquiesce to different forms of governance while asserting French Catholicism was at fault for revolution and atheism. De Wette allowed himself not only to promote the Protestant tradition as the embodiment of

religious freedom but also to oppose citizenship in Basel for Catholics, Jews, and women. However, all three strove to construe their interpretation of the Bible as free and open, neutral and unpartisan, faithful and unthreatening – in matters of church and state alike. They had stakes in its success and experience in its failure. Scholars of modern German theology need not – must not – accept their sources' claims of scientific progress, political neutrality, or historical inevitability. Quite the opposite, the task remains to determine the possibilities and constraints that allowed one specific form of knowledge-production to emerge and ascend in concrete time, place, and circumstance.

6. Suggested Reading

Primary

Bretschneider, Karl Gottlieb. *A Manual of Religion and of the History of the Christian Church: For the Use of Upper Classes in Public Schools in Germany and for All Educated Men in General*. Translated by N.N. London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857.

de Wette, Wilhelm Martin Leberecht. *A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament*. Translated by Theodore Parker. 1st ed. 2 vols. Boston: Little & Brown, 1843.

Paulus, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob. *Exegetisches Handbuch über die drei ersten Evangelien*. 3 vols. Heidelberg: Winter, 1830–33.

Secondary

Gregory, Frederic. *Nature Lost? Natural Science and the German Theological Traditions of the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Howard, Thomas Albert. *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lichtenberger, Frédéric. *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Edited and translated by William Hastie. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889.

Biography

Paul Michael Kurtz is a cultural, intellectual, and religious historian and a research fellow of the Flemish Research Council (FWO) at Ghent University. His work centers on history of the humanities in Europe from 1770 to 1930, especially biblical, classical, and oriental studies. Most recently, Kurtz has published *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: The Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918* (Mohr Siebeck, 2018); "Defining Hellenistic Jews in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Case of Jacob Bernays and Jacob Freudenthal," in *Erudition & the Republic of*

Letters (2020); and "Is Kant Among the Prophets? Hebrew Prophecy and German Historical Thought, 1880–1920," in *Central European History* (2021).