

Further reading

R. Roberts, *Is the Bible the Work of Inspiration?*
Available online: <http://www.christadelphian.uk.com/Booklets/Is%20the%20Bible%20the%20Work%20of%20Inspiration.pdf>.

E. Whittaker and R. Carr, 'Spirit' in the New Testament, Testimony Magazine publications.

E. Whittaker, *For the Study and Defence of the Holy Scripture*, Testimony Magazine publications.

The Word of the LORD endures for ever

Andrew Walker

There's nothing like human beings for inconsistency. It may seem unlikely, but it was the same developments in society and in human thought that—in God's wisdom—led to the conditions where the Truth could be rediscovered and grow, as also led to the development of the rationalist/humanist way of thinking that so undermines true Bible teaching. This article looks primarily at 'higher criticism', which runs counter to the Divine authorship of Scripture; and it draws parallels with other developments, such as Darwinism, that also underpin an increasingly godless society.

THE ENGLISH tradition of biblicism goes back to the late Middle Ages. In the fourteenth century, Wycliffe preached the doctrine of *scriptura sola*: the sufficiency of Scripture in practice as compared with the traditions of the church. This was an early manifestation of a growing tradition of biblicism that had begun earlier, but took root in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Wycliffe's translation of the New Testament and part of the Old Testament into English from the Latin was followed in the sixteenth century by Tyndale's translation, making the Bible more widely available in England.

The English Reformation, as schoolchildren know, was partly the result of Henry VIII's marital arrangements; but the distribution of Bibles in the vernacular became widespread in the seventeenth century. Famous figures such as Isaac Newton and John Milton were students of the Scriptures in their own right. The tradition of reading and discussing the Scriptures, and strong religious debate, continued in the English-speaking world right through the following centuries. It helped create the conditions—by God's providence—in which the rediscovery and preaching of the Truth

in the nineteenth century could take place. Sadly, those conditions are fast disappearing.

A humanist strand

Long before English as a language was born, or the English even existed, Plato articulated his theory of Forms, in which objects within our experience are but representations of a true mystical "Form". Thus a triangle drawn by a geometer would always be to some extent imperfect; but in the transcendent world of Forms

there is a perfect triangle, of which each earthly triangle is an imperfect representation. The Neo-Platonists (following Plotinus [A.D. 205–270]) took this idea and translated Plato's Forms into ideas in the mind of God. Plotinus organised the ideas or forms into a hierarchy, with the highest being the "Good". Each subsequent layer was an imitation of the next higher form. Thus was created a "chain of being", with the lower forms being terrestrial objects, which themselves were organised in a hierarchy.

This way of thinking became common in educated men from the Renaissance onwards, and it influenced philosophers, scientists and writers alike. The Genevan naturalist Charles Bonnet (1720–1793) devised a chain of being for the natural world rising from inanimate things through insects, fish and animals to man. Above man were angels and, ultimately, "the Eternal". A thread can be traced through Linnaeus, Buffon, Lamarck and Lyell to Darwin.¹ By the eighteenth

1. This paragraph depends heavily on *Darwinian Impacts* by the Australian academic David Oldroyd.

and nineteenth centuries, the idea of the chain of being was increasingly seen as a *natural* taxonomy, explaining the world in terms of what was observable, and Darwin's *Origin of Species* offered a powerful scientific argument which disposed of the need for a God.

Humanism in Biblical studies

In parallel with these developments among the natural sciences, similar developments took place in the worlds of philosophy, political economy, anthropology and, later, psychology. Enlightenment rationalism, originally a comfortable bedfellow with belief in a Divine Creator, later evolved on a diverging track, with society at large being based on the essentially godless, humanistic thinking that underpins the laws, ethics and culture of twenty-first-century Western society. Biblical studies were subject to similar developments; scholars sought to explain the text of Scripture by reference to a chain of transmission.

The great Renaissance humanist Erasmus—a significant New Testament textual scholar—sought to apply techniques to Scripture that were aimed at ascertaining the text as it had been first written in the original languages. He is credited with having been the first to apply higher critical methods in the sixteenth century. ('Higher' criticism is the name given to analysis that seeks to determine the origins of a text, whereas 'lower' criticism's goal is to establish the most accurate form of a text from variants of the original.)

This was a time of great interest in the text of Scripture. In Tübingen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries German scholars applied a historical-critical method to the text of parts of the Bible, treating the Bible as they would any other literary work to determine its human origins. Unsurprisingly, as it developed, 'higher criticism' became associated with freeing Biblical studies from dogmatic religious studies. Although the heyday of these techniques has passed as interest in textual studies has waned, their impact is still widespread.

Higher criticism

There are two main branches of higher criticism: source criticism and form criticism. *Source criticism* posits that there were multiple sources that the writers of Scripture drew on. This has been applied particularly to the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Gospels. So, for example, chapters, verses and even parts of verses have been assigned to the various presumed sources. The origins of the

Pentateuch are said to be various earlier texts dubbed J, E, D and P, with the Pentateuch itself appearing in its present form after the Exile. *Form criticism* looks at the *sitz im leben* (cultural context) of sections of Scripture, often proposing a cultural context of what, say, Israel's worship would have been like by analogy with what the conditions are thought to have been from other (for example, Canaanite) sources. Examples of the shortcomings of this approach are set out below.

A basic supposition underlying documentary hypotheses and form criticism is that there has been evolutionary development of religions from primitive to advanced (paralleled in anthropology by the so-called ascent of man). Thus, what are now regarded as more primitive elements were separated out by the critics and assigned earlier authorship than supposedly more advanced elements. Personification of Wisdom in Proverbs, for example, was regarded as more advanced, and therefore reflected a time later than Solomon—in fact it was said to be due to Hellenistic influence in the fourth and third centuries B.C. But Near Eastern scholars have now turned up many examples of personification in early writings from Egypt, Mesopotamia and elsewhere, demonstrating that the higher critics' presumptions were incorrect.

The Pentateuch

Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (1878) is a comprehensive exposition of form criticism as applied to the books of Moses. The earliest parts were said to be the Yahwistic (J) and Elohist (E) parts. The Yahwistic elements—those using the name Yahweh—had an authorship different from those which used the term Elohim (God), and accounted for the supposed double accounts of the Creation and the Flood. He suggested that later additions, such as the supposed Priestly (P) contributions from the time of the Exile in Babylon, accounted for alleged anachronisms.

As with many flawed theories, source criticism has some elements that are not entirely untrue. For example, it is true that the Law of Moses as set out in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers is to some extent a codification of what has gone before, not an entirely new revelation in all respects. This can be seen as early as Genesis 4:4, where Abel had been taught what an acceptable sacrifice was: he brought "of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof". God had no doubt instructed this as an acceptable way of bringing a sacrifice—later codified in the Law of Moses (Num. 18:17).

Similarly, the law of ox-goring in Exodus 21 closely matches the Babylonian laws (in Hammurabi's Code) from several hundred years previously. This does not mean that Hebrew laws were necessarily based on man-made Babylonian laws; it could equally mean that they both drew on an earlier Divine source of laws. Such a proposition is, of course, a version of source criticism—but with a Divine element and origin rather than a human one.

It has been alleged that there are anachronisms in the Pentateuch, which mean that it could not all originate from the time of Moses. For example, the mention of domesticated camels in the story of Abraham could not be accurate, because the camel was not domesticated until some time later. However, it has subsequently been shown from contemporary records that the camel was already domesticated by Abraham's time.

As for the supposed join-marks in the Pentateuch, where two different accounts have been stitched together, the classic example is the creation account, where Genesis 1:1–2:4 is ascribed to the Priestly (P) source, as being less concrete and more theological than the supposed second account in 2:5–25, which is attributed to the Yahwistic source (J), where man and his destiny are the centre of interest (and the Divine Name is used throughout).

That there are two elements to the Creation account is not in doubt—indeed, they are necessarily complementary to one another: chapter 1 gives the basic mechanical facts, ending with the creation of man; chapter 2 deals with God's *purpose* in creating man, as a natural progression from chapter 1. The use of His Name in chapter 2—the name denoting His purpose in His dealings with human beings—is hardly surprising.

From the ancient Near East there are other single-author ancient documents that take a similar approach, that is, a summary general outline followed by a more detailed treatment of a major aspect, with different literary styles used in each part. Examples are the Karnak poetical stela, in which Amun addresses Tuthmosis III, first in outline then in more detail. Similarly, royal inscriptions from Urartu (Biblical Ararat) start with summaries of defeats of enemies, followed by a repeat of the same victories in detail. No one suggests that these inscriptions have dual authorship at different times.

Do the differing styles of Genesis 1 and 2 (or indeed between other parts of the Pentateuch) imply different authorship? Without doubt, where

a document is put together from a number of different sources, different stylistic elements can show through. But it is not automatically right to use the same argument in reverse (that is, to assert that differences in style inevitably imply multiple authorship). Common sense and experience tell us that writers are capable of writing in a number of styles, and may do so for different reasons—usually because the subject matter demands it. Again there are other examples of ancient literature where this is the case.

One argument put forward for differing authorship is the use of different forms of the personal pronoun 'I' in Hebrew. The great Hebrew scholar S. R. Driver claimed that one form of the pronoun ('*ani*') was typical of source P, whereas the longer form ('*anoki*') typified sources J and E. However, another scholar (W. J. Martin) has argued that the different forms are used to convey different aspects of meaning, and do not imply different authorship.²

Another higher-critical suggestion is that, as Exodus 6:3 appears to say that the Divine Name was not known before it was revealed to Moses at the burning bush, earlier references to the Name must have originated from a different hand. W. J. Martin's solution is simple:

"There is, however, another possible translation which would eliminate all conflict with the remote context. The phrase, 'but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them' could be taken in Hebrew as an elliptical interrogative. The translation of the whole verse would then run: '*I suffered myself to appear (Niph'al) to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El-Shaddai, for did I not let myself be known to them by my name YHWH?*' . . . There is strong support forthcoming from the grammatical structure of the following sentence. This is introduced by the words 'and also'. Now in Hebrew common syntactical practice demands that where 'and also' is preceded by a negative it also introduces a negative clause and vice-versa, otherwise we would be faced with a *non sequitur*. In this instance the clause after 'and also' is positive, hence one would expect to find the preceding clause a positive one. The translation of the clause as an interrogative would thus remove any illogicality".³

2. W. J. Martin, *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch*, Tyndale Press, 1955.

3. W. J. Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.

The Psalms

Hermann Gunkel was an exponent of form criticism in the early twentieth century. His book *Die Psalmen* (1926) was a major work, influencing others (for example, J. H. Eaton, *Psalms* [1967]). Thus the “cultic”⁴ use of the psalms was emphasised, and cultic elements were assumed from them. For example, it was proposed that many of the psalms revolved around an autumn ‘New Year’ festival in which the king went through a ritual death and resurrection. This was likened to practices in other Near Eastern countries that were supposed to have similar cultic elements. Psalms containing the phrase “the LORD is king” (47, 93, 96, 97, 99) (retranslated “the LORD has become king”) were used to support this idea. Other psalms were regarded as pilgrimage psalms chanted on the approach to Jerusalem; the songs of degrees (or ascents) were seen as processional psalms, also used at the autumn festival. The ‘I’ of the psalms was the spokesman of the assembly, not the individual writer.

This views the Psalms as the uninspired reflection of a society’s cultic practices rather than the inspired outpourings of great and godly men. It tends to see Israelite religion as simply a natural product of ancient Near Eastern conditions, rather than writings set in a real and particular historical context of God’s dealings with His people. If, in contrast, we see the songs of degrees as a collection compiled and partly written by Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, we gain a window on the work of God with Judah at that time that helps us to understand the picture painted in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and Isaiah. Explaining the Psalms in terms of the historical background in the time of David etc. offers an appropriate and valid approach as compared with the reconstruction of a presumed, but unverifiable, cultic *sitz im leben*.

Isaiah

The authorship of the book of Isaiah has since Doederlin (1775) been said to be the work of two or three authors (chapters 1–39, 40–55 and 56–66). The theory was spelled out in detail by Duhm and Marti in the 1890s. The mention of Cyrus by name in chapters 44 and 45 has, for example, been seen as conclusive evidence that that section must have been written after the Exile. As Gray says in the *International Critical Commentary on Isaiah* (1906), “even a superficial critical survey of the Book must discern that so much is subsequent to his [Isaiah’s] age that it is incorrect and misleading to speak or think of *the Book* as the work of

Isaiah”. This underpins the view that the subject matter and perspective of the two (or three) parts is very different.

Does it matter if Isaiah is by different authors writing at different times? Would it undermine our faith if Isaiah 44 was written after the Exile, 200 years after chapters 1–39? Probably not. But as a matter of fact, it is poor scholarship to assert that parts were obviously written later when (a) New Testament authors on seven occasions ascribe passages from chapters 40–66 as from the pen of Isaiah; and (b) there is good textual evidence for the unity of the book as a whole.

This latter argument is worth pursuing here. Some readers will be aware of the late Rachel Margalioth’s excellent book, *The Indivisible Isaiah*.⁵ Originally written in Hebrew, the book was published in English in 1964. It sets out in forensic detail how the parts of Isaiah fit together linguistically. Phraseology that occurs in both parts of Isaiah but occurs rarely elsewhere in the Old Testament suggests strong links across the whole book. Take the example of the designations of God. The phrase “the Holy One of Israel” occurs frequently from chapter 1 to chapter 60, but is otherwise rare in Scripture.

Mrs Margalioth gives the same careful treatment to designations of the people of Israel, introductory prophetic formulas and many other significant constructions. The overall conclusion of single authorship in the eighth century B.C. is inescapable and reinforces the evidence that Isaiah’s message was truly prophetic in foretelling events after the Exile. Incidentally, Mrs Margalioth’s book is useful for expositors in pointing up links across the book of Isaiah in the Hebrew text that are not immediately apparent from the English.

The Gospels

The application of source criticism to the Synoptic Gospels came about through attempts to reconcile the events, wording and order of Matthew, Mark and Luke (the so-called Synoptic Problem). The most common source-critical theory is that Mark is the earliest Gospel and that Matthew and Luke each drew on both Mark’s Gospel and another early, now lost, source known as ‘Q’, which contained sayings of Jesus. Other hypotheses have

4. Part of the new vocabulary of the higher critic. Another example is “clan”. Both “cult” and “clan” have a more primitive tone than “worship” and “tribe”.
5. *The Indivisible Isaiah* (Sura Institute for Research, Jerusalem, 1964).

been proposed, such as Griesbach's Two Gospel hypothesis, which is that Matthew was written first, and Luke then used it in preparing his Gospel. Then Mark merged the two in a procedure that mostly followed where Matthew and Luke agree in order except for discourse material. Many other variations have also been proposed. This suggests that, if scholars cannot agree which Gospel elements are derived from which, then the theory itself may be unsound.

In 1921, Rudolf Bultmann applied form criticism to the Gospels in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. He suggested that the Synoptic Gospels were needed to pass on the Palestinian tradition to the Hellenistic church (that is, the Gentile ecclesias, in order to make Jesus a "cultic deity" for the Gentiles). He regarded the Gospels as "expanded cult legends". It can be seen from this that he was less interested in the factual truth of the records and more interested in how they functioned in a religious sense.

This approach—away from truth as a concept and more toward religious experience—particularly underpins modern (non-evangelical) Christianity. In the late 1970s a group of British academics published *The Myth of God Incarnate*, which caused a scandal at the time because it attacked deeply held dogmatic positions in the established churches about the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. One of the authors drew explicitly on Bultmann in seeing the Jesus Christ of the Gospels as a religious construct of various authors: "Jesus Christ can be all things to all men because each individual or society, in one cultural environment after another, sees him as the embodiment of their salvation".⁶ In other words, it is the varying experiences of believers in different cultures that are important, not the historical truth and accuracy of the original Scripture text.

How are we to approach the Gospels in the light of source criticism and form criticism, which are now endemic in most religious traditions? One of the awkwardnesses is that there *are* differences between the Gospel accounts. For example, Luke 12, which is in the second half of Jesus' ministry, repeats (but not exactly) much of the material that is placed in the so-called Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Perhaps we should try to avoid endeavouring to shoehorn the three Synoptic Gospels together as if they were all part of the same narrative. Jesus' teaching was repeated no doubt many times, and the material in Luke 12

and Matthew 5–7 would have been given on many occasions, with variations.

It is possible that neither Matthew nor Luke was seeking to give a verbatim account of a single occasion. Certainly Luke's Gospel brings together teaching, probably from different times and places, to illustrate the themes that he is developing (for example, from Luke 9 onwards the theme of the spiritual journey up to Jerusalem). It was not that Jesus actually undertook a single such journey from that point in his ministry onwards, but that in his mind he was preparing for his lifting up in sacrifice, and his thinking and actions from that point tend in that direction.

Similarly, the fact that two cleansings of the temple are recorded in different Gospels at different times does not mean that they must be one and the same event. What more natural than that Jesus should cleanse the temple once at the beginning of his ministry (as recorded by John) to set the scene for his ministry and to establish his credentials as his Father's Son. It is not surprising that he should repeat the deed in his final week (as recorded by the other Gospel writers) as he challenged the Jewish leaders daily to the point at which they were forced to deal with this uncomfortable preacher at a time which was inconvenient for them.

Darwinism as religion

Returning to Darwin, it is interesting to note that a similar process has taken place with Darwinism as has taken place with Western Christianity. As the "chain of being" described above developed, the progress of human thinking moved from assumption of a Divine origin and oversight of the creation to an increasingly naturalistic account, so that, by the late nineteenth century, it was acceptable to describe the origins and development of life on earth without reference to a Divine agency; and by the late twentieth century—in the UK at least—such assumptions had become the norm. This has been matched and is perhaps accounted for by the development of popular, if not scientific, thought, whereby Darwinism has been accepted as the dominant philosophy of life.

This is not an original observation. Professor Michael Ruse has observed, "one should be sensitive to what I think history shows, namely, that evolution . . . akin to religion, involves making

6. Frances Young in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (SCM Press, 1977) p. 42.

certain *a priori* or metaphysical assumptions, which at some level cannot be proven empirically".⁷ Ruse is a Darwinist, and accepts natural selection as an explanation of the origin of species. But he recognises the social power of the evolutionary idea that, through some of its exponents, has gone well beyond the purely scientific.

For example, he quotes the American biologist Edward O. Wilson as saying that the "decisive edge enjoyed by scientific naturalism will come from its capacity to explain traditional religion, its chief competition, as a wholly material phenomenon".⁸ Ruse wisely says, "popular evolutionism—often an alternative to religion—exists . . . We who cherish science should be careful to distinguish when we are doing science and when we are extrapolating from it". In the UK, readers will be familiar with the populist atheistic statements by Richard Dawkins criticising creationism as unscientific, but arguably committing the same crime of being unscientific himself.

A reminder that Darwinian natural selection is a theory, and one with serious flaws, is contained in the recently-published *What Darwin Got Wrong*.⁹ In it the authors, both of them evolutionists, say in effect that much of the scientific community is wilfully blind to the weaknesses of Darwinism. For example, optimal biological structures may

come about through processes other than Darwinian natural selection, and there is no single mechanism for the establishment of phenotypes (biological characteristics). None of this in itself disproves evolution; nor is that my purpose here. What it does is reveal evolution for what it is: a theory, and one that is serving human, sociological purposes, not necessarily pure scientific objectives.

Conclusion

Readers will see from the examples given in this article that, on a number of fronts, arguments brought forward to play down or remove the Divine hand from the authorship of Scripture, and from the creation of life on earth, flow from the same humanistic development of thought. I hope I have been able to demonstrate, albeit only in outline, that the reasons for believing in the Divine, unified authorship of Scripture are powerful.

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7. Professor Michael Ruse, speech to American Association for the Advancement of Science, 13 Feb. 1993.
 8. *On Human Nature* (Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 192.
 9. By Jerry A. Fodor & Massimo Piatelli-Palmarino, (Profile Books, 2010).