

THE MULTIPLE STREAMS OF SKEPTICAL INFLUENCE ON THE INCIPIENT BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN LATE 17TH CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas in the introduction to a volume on Renaissance and Reformation Steven Ozment can remark that "The study of the Reformation still awaits a Moses who can lead it through the sea of contemporary polemics between social and intellectual historians and into a historiography both mindful and tolerant of all the forces that shape historical experience,"¹ the same cannot be said of the historical studies of the origin of biblical criticism² in the seventeenth and eighteenth

¹ Steven Ozment, ed., *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 6.

² A word of clarification is in order. Contemporary scholarship is often prone to use terms like "pre-critical reading" and "critical reading" of the Bible without paying sufficient attention to the historical usage of the term "criticism" or to its own theoretical biases. For most modern scholars, biblical criticism really refers to "higher criticism," or the employment of the "historical-critical method" in studying the Bible, a method whose

centuries, not that *Moses* could help much (pardon the pun). Scholarship seems to have confined the study of the subject mainly to intellectual history: biblical scholarship as it is done by scholars, churchmen, thinkers, philosophers, etc. Moreover, despite being a vast topic involving multiple personalities in vastly different geographical, political, and social milieus, the mainstream historiography seems to be remarkably consistent in that it assumes a twin source for the origin of modern biblical criticism: the Reformation and the Enlightenment.³ The most common assumptions

systematic application is often associated with Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791), whose basic working assumption is that the books of the Bible have to be interpreted from a rigorously historical perspective without dogmatic biases, and examined and explained in its ancient setting as a witness to its own time, and not primarily as intended for latter readers (see R.A. Harrisville & W. Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 14; also W.G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans S.M. Gilmour & H.C. Kee, [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972], 65). However, this usage begs the question of whether any biblical scholarship can be labeled biblical criticism prior to mid-eighteenth century at all. In fact, Richard Simon (1638-1712), no mean scholar and no conservative according to his Protestant and Catholic contemporaries, regarded biblical criticism as a scholarly activity to correct "errors which the passage of time slipped into the Sacred Books." (Preface of his *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament* [Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1689], cited and translated by J.D. Woodbridge in *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 188 n. 73). Thus it refers to literary-textual activities whereby authentic and inauthentic texts are identified and separated, and intellectual claims judged as true or false. As such biblical criticism has been practised since the first centuries of Christianity and continues to be practised today. One must admit that the modern usage of the term "criticism" is theory-laden and the term "pre-critical" often pejorative. For an account of how the original positive goals of criticism turned destructive onto itself during the middle of the seventeenth century, see Klaus Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century* (ET of 1966 ed.; London: SCM Press, 1990). The biases and misconceptions generated by the hegemony of modern critical exegesis were addressed in a seminal essay by David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980-1981): 27-38. See also R.A. Muller & J.L. Thompson, "The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, edited by R.A. Muller & J.L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 335-45.

³ This understanding is pervasive, although emphases and nuances vary. Representative authors include Ludwig Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche* (Jena: Hermann Dufft, 1869); Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1886); Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (London: Lutterworth, 1955); S.L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Kümmel, *History*; Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Peter

within this historiography are two: (1) The transition of authority engendered by the Protestant rejection of the ecclesial authority to *sola scriptura* stimulated interest in the text and legitimated the idea of individual reading which was readily taken up by the Enlightenment skeptics. This Reformation heritage is generally regarded as having matured during the eighteenth century German Enlightenment in the university circles via an engagement with the earlier skeptical traditions as contained in English and French deism.⁴ (2) The development of biblical criticism was greatly fostered through the confrontational and controversial climate from the Reformation on into the seventeenth century.

In this paper, it will be argued that while Reformation Protestantism was vulnerable to exploitation by skepticism due to its rejection of an overarching structure of ecclesial authority and its adoption of the formal principle of *sola scriptura*, it was by no means constructed, nor intended,

Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1979); Jack B. Rogers & Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Hans Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3d ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982); Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1984); John H. Hayes & Frederick C. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); Harrisville & Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*; etc. Nevertheless, dissenting voices exist. See Jean Steinmann, *Biblical Criticism* (London: Burns & Oates, 1959); and H. Daniel-Rops, *The Church in the Eighteenth Century* (London: J. M. Dent, 1964). The latter regards the Reformation as merely adding an impetus to the trend already discernible in the Italian Renaissance during which the humanist mind, confident of its own prowess, began to cut itself loose from "the traditions, the observances, and eventually the very dogmas of Christianity." (Daniel-Rops, *Eighteenth Century*, 1) In other words, the prime moving force leading to the irreligion of the eighteenth century is not the individuation of the Reformation, but "the doubtful heritage" of skepticism. Patrick J. Lambe ("Critics and Skeptics in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters," *HTR* 81 (1988): 271 n. 1) is inaccurate in attributing Klaus Scholder (*Critical Theology*) with the majority position. In fact, Scholder attributes modern historical criticism to neither the Reformation, nor the Enlightenment, which he regards as not having introduced anything new on the issue, the most important positions having already been staked out in the second half of the seventeenth century (Scholder, *Critical Theology*, 2, 143). This is all the more significant since the mainstream position is held by predominantly liberal Protestant scholars whereas the dissenting accounts come often from the Catholic camp.

⁴ The Reformation/pietism-English deism-German Protestantism axis is particularly highlighted by W. Neil in his essay "The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible, 1700-1950," in Greenslade, ed., *Cambridge History*, 3.238-293; also Frei, *Eclipse*; Reventlow, *Authority*; and Kümmel, *History*.

this way.⁵ It is instructive to note that two of the most important figures in the rise of modern biblical criticism towards the end of the seventeenth century, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and Richard Simon (1638-1712), are in fact not Protestant.⁶ In reality, there exists multiple sources of influences contributing to the development of modern biblical criticism, and one of the most important factors is the influence of skepticism, itself a confluence of several sources.

Nevertheless, it is necessary at the outset to further substantiate why the theologies of the Protestant Reformation cannot be blamed for the irreligion that is inherent in a higher critical reading of the Bible.⁷ The first thing to note is that many critics argued as if the principle of *sola scriptura* opened up the floodgates that fed directly into modern critical exegesis. The comment by Kümmel is typical: "In this way the Bible, which had hitherto been tacitly understood as an expression of the teaching of the Church, was suddenly set apart and the religious interest so directed to its proper understanding that biblical exegesis came to occupy the center of attention as the most important task of all theological activity."⁸ This, coupled with an insistence on a hermeneutic which rejects allegorical interpretation and demands a single, literal sense

⁵ One must be careful here in drawing causal implications. It would be equally rash to claim that post-exilic emphasis on the keeping of the Mosaic Law inevitably led to the kind of Pharisaic legalism Jesus condemned in his own days without a consideration of attendant factors.

⁶ Simon, a one-time Oratorian, is called "the founder of the science of New Testament introduction" by Theodor Zahn in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed., 1896-1913, vol. V, 263, cited by Kümmel, *History*, 41. Spinoza, an excommunicated Marrano Jew, is called "wenn nicht der Vater, so doch der erste grosser Vertreter der historischen Bibelkritik." (O. Biedermann, *Die Methode der Auslegung und Kritik der biblischen Schriften in Spinozas theologisch-politischem Traktat in Zusammenhang mit seiner Ethik* [Erlangen: Jacob, 1903], 58-59, cited by Peter C. Craigie, "The Influence of Spinoza in the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament," *EvQ* 50 [1978]: 24. See also Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* [New York: Schocken Books, 1965], 35).

⁷ Craigie makes it clear that current higher-critical scholarship does not have a "God-hypothesis" as a precondition, in agreement with Spinoza ("Influence of Spinoza," 30-31). The presuppositional incompatibility between faith and historical criticism is further reinforced by Barry D. Smith in "The Historical Critical Method, Jesus Research, and the Christian Scholar," *TrinJ* 15 (Fall 1994): 201-20. A similar point, but from the opposite direction, is made by the "post-Christian" New Testament scholar Gerd Ludemann. See his recently published work titled *Great Deception: And What Jesus Really Said and Did* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1999).

⁸ Kümmel, *History*, 21.

of the text, is said to have to lead to a historical exegesis of the Bible when consistently pursued. However, the logic of the argument is not clear. For one thing, *sola scriptura* was not a Reformation innovation. Zwingli denied as much when charged by the Catholics.⁹ There were medieval precedents, and the conciliarists staked similar claims with the Bible against the pope.¹⁰ Indeed, Kümmel later acknowledges that "a comprehensive historical consideration of the New Testament could *only* come into effective play when men had learned to look at the New Testament entirely free of all dogmatic bias and, in consequence, as a witness out of the past to the process of historical development."¹¹ (italics mine) In other words, the Reformation doctrine of Scripture alone is insufficient for the development of higher criticism unless accompanied by a strong measure of religious skepticism (as, perhaps, exemplified by the deists). It is a well-known conundrum in European history regarding the remarkable closure of Germany to the roiling intellectual challenges mounted against traditional theological constructs like the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of Scripture that were raging throughout the rest of western Europe from the Thirty Years' War through the first half of the eighteenth century. The *sola scriptura* of Lutheran orthodoxy did not open up German Christianity to the kind of attacks seen elsewhere as in England, Holland, and France. The relative immunity of the German theological scene to the critical spirit of the wider European arena is just as surprising as the rapid waning of the influence of Protestant orthodoxy after the middle of the eighteenth century. Historically, then, *sola scriptura* alone was neither necessary (as shown by the works and premises of seminal figures like Spinoza and Simon) nor sufficient for higher criticism. Moreover, the double radical discontinuity between the Reformation and its medieval past on the one hand and the post-Reformation scholastic Protestantism and the Reformers on the other simply cannot be maintained.¹² In addition, one should not confuse

⁹ *The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli, Together with Selections from His German Works*, ed. S.M. Jackson, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 250.

¹⁰ See Roland H. Bainton's essay, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *Cambridge History*, 3.2.

¹¹ Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *Cambridge History*, 51.

¹² This is the major thesis of Richard A. Muller's second volume of his trilogy on Post-Reformation Reformed theology: "many of the discussions of the history of Scripture ... have subscribed to the erroneous assumption that the medieval scholastics devalued or ignored the biblical foundation of theology or, at the very least, approached

Luther's sense of the whole Scripture as witnessing to Christ with the Barthian concept of Scripture as a witness to the Word or to revelation. For Luther, Scripture witnesses to Christ because Christ is the fulfillment of Scripture, which is properly God's revelatory Word. For Barth, Christ is the Word and Scripture becomes God's Word only in the event that Christ is being revealed.¹³ As far as the Reformation doctrine of Scripture is concerned, discontinuity does not exist between the Reformers and the Protestant orthodoxy of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but a gap does lie between the Reformers and the neo-orthodoxy of the twentieth century.¹⁴

The second thing to note is that the Reformers are firmly committed to the clarity and perspicuity of Scripture.¹⁵ For example, there is a divergence in view between Erasmus and Luther concerning the clarity of Scripture. While both acknowledged his indebtedness to humanistic philology in furthering clarity in the understanding of Scripture, Erasmus regarded parts of Scripture as obscure and beyond comprehension, whereas Luther insisted that Scripture was clear. In fact, Erasmus attributed the obscurities and apparent contradictions in the language of Scripture not to God's wish to accommodate his language to limited human language, but to human error or human design.¹⁶ In his words, "the authority of the whole of Scripture" would not "be instantly

the text so uncritically that theological and philosophical considerations consistently overrode textual and exegetical concern. ...The problem of the text and canon of Scripture debated by Reformers and humanists alike is rooted firmly in medieval discussion. ... it must also be recognized that we are dealing with a long history of approach to the text rather than with a sudden and historically discontinuous biblicism." See his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2, Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 11-12, hereafter referred to as *PRRD*, v. 2.

¹³ Muller regards this oversight as the main reason why there are "theologians who would relate the Reformation to neo-orthodoxy and drive a wedge between the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestantism." (Muller, *PRRD*, v. 2, 55-56).

¹⁴ See John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), chs. III, V.

¹⁵ There is again a continuity between the Reformers and the post-Reformation scholastics on this aspect, a point conceded by Rogers and McKim (Roger and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 182-83).

¹⁶ It needs to be pointed out, though, that this is Erasmus' later position, especially in response to the criticisms of Johann von Eck. In his earlier position, Erasmus seems to still subscribe to Augustine's *modus loquendi* ("special way of speaking") in dealing with difficult texts in the Bible. See G.R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 57-58.

imperiled...if an evangelist by a slip of memory did put one name for another, Isaiah for instance instead of Jeremiah, for this is not a point on which anything turns." A book does not "forthwith lose all credence if it contains some blemish."¹⁷

Luther, however, distinguishes two kinds of clarity in *On the Bondage of the Will*. External clarity pertains to the grammatical clarity of the words as they illumine Christ, and is indisputable except as it is obscured "due to our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars," and "not to the majesty of the subject."¹⁸ As such humanistic studies (philology, etc.) serve to clarify external clarity. Specifically, the Reformation doctrine of Scripture was broadly undergirded by the practice of what Paul O. Kristeller called "sacred philology,"¹⁹ in direct continuation from the rich philological heritage of the Renaissance, whose crowning achievement was found in the publication of "a flood of Bibles."²⁰ Internal clarity, however, is only achieved by those who have the Spirit. This double sense of clarity of Scripture comes from Luther's dual anthropology of *simul iustus et peccator*, and serves as a barrier for human speculation, for the human intellect is regarded as soteriologically impotent. His distinction between the outer word (*res significans*) and the inner, spiritual meaning (*res significata*) came from Augustinian hermeneutics which he refined, and underlied his debate

¹⁷ Erasmus, Letter 844, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 6.27-36, eds. R.J. Schoeck and B.M. Corrigan (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1974).

¹⁸ J. Pelikan and H.T. Lehman, eds., *Luther Works* (St. Louis: Concordial/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-86), 33.25. Hereafter, *LW*, followed by volume and page.

¹⁹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 79.

²⁰ The sentiment of the Reformation wunderkind Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) is instructive. As early as his Wittenberg lectureship in the fall of 1518, he has taken the *studia humanitatis* to be the basis of a correct understanding of the Holy Writ and progress in piety. Thus a decline of learning was associated with a decline in piety. "When the old disciplines were deserted...holy matters were neglected." "As soon as good letters were replaced by bad, pristine piety underwent a change as it was subjected to ceremonies, human customs and laws, decretals, chapters, addenda, and glosses twice removed." (*Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, ed. R. Stupperich [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Mohn, 1951-1975] III: 38, cited and translated by E. Rummel in *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995], 141). A useful survey of the role of Renaissance philology in Reformation exegesis and hermeneutics can be found in the attractive work by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible: The Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), especially chapters 1 & 2.

with Erasmus on free will on one hand and the debate with Zwingli on the Eucharist on the other. More importantly this was at the root of his disagreement with the papacy. In all cases Luther accused his opponents of postulating the obscurity of the external word in order to place themselves as judge over Scripture, making themselves both subject and source of the *res significata*.²¹ In dealing with God's works and words, Luther maintains that we are to render our reason and all cleverness captive, we are to blind ourselves and let ourselves be led and taught, so that we do not become judges of God's words.²² As will be seen, this is the chief bone of contention between those who maintain a high view of Scripture like the Reformers and those who for whatever reasons become skeptical of the words and message of the Bible. It is for this reason that Luther's hermeneutical method finds little resonance in the empirical methodology of emerging science or in the Enlightenment "return-to-the-subject," because it is by design dependent on an authority outside of itself and even outside of the bounds of human reason and feeling.²³

Having argued that it is really a *non sequitur* to claim that the Reformation scriptural principles inevitably will lead to the skeptical development of higher criticism, it remains to be shown that the source of skepticism bubbling in the seventeenth century is not one but many. At the very least the shape of skepticism is a lot more multifaceted than is often presented in mainstream liberal Protestant historiographies of the origins of higher criticism. The major property of the skepticism developed in the early sixteenth century that allows it to be so virulent is its ability to apparently form a stable amalgam with other intellectual commitments of the skeptic. As we shall see, it can coexist peacefully with the fideism of Montaigne and Charron, the rationalism of Descartes and Spinoza, and the empiricism of Locke and Hume.²⁴

²¹ Priscilla Hayden-Roy, "Hermeneutica gloriae vs. hermeneutica cruces: Sebastian Franck and Martin Luther on the Clarity of Scripture," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 81 (1990): 64.

²² Pelikan and Lehman, eds., *LW*, 37.296.

²³ For an analysis of Luther's position regarding reason, see B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), especially part two.

²⁴ The last two figures are beyond the scope of this paper. It should be noted that the skepticism of Spinoza is different from the others, at least in its outworkings. Spinoza is properly a religious skeptic, whereas the others are firmly committed to the Catholic faith.

FAILURE OF THE HUMANIST PROGRAM

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) is often credited as the most important figure in the sixteenth century revival of ancient skepticism.²⁵ According to Popkin, a *crise pyrrhonnienne* was brought about by his reading of the works of Sextus Empiricus, a Greek physician living around 200 A.D. who compiled the only extant account of Pyrrhonism in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, which was published in 1562 by Henri Estienne in a Latin translation.²⁶ The skepticism of Pyrrhonism differs from that of the Platonic New Academy in that the former doubts everything, including the assertion that man could not attain truth or certainty, a position held by the New Academy. For the Pyrrhonists, a suspension of judgment is the result, a philosophical tranquility is the goal.²⁷ However, Montaigne's Pyrrhonism both pre-dates and post-dates his essay "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," the central chapter of his *Essais* in which he popularized Sextus.²⁸ It is thus more important to examine the

²⁵ See Richard R. Popkin, *The History of Skepticism From Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), ch. 3.

²⁶ Although the reformers were well aware of the Pyrrhonian tradition through their study of ancient rhetoric and dialectic. Melanchthon was a case in point. In discussing the use of commonplaces (see below) in scholastic dialectics, he made the following remark circumscribing its useful and legitimate function: "Those who have taught dialectic in the right way see limits within which one must stay in defining and arguing... Nor do tricks and contentious argumentation deserve to be praised as acumen and subtlety, since they have nothing good in them and have no useful application to life. ...Just like the other arts, dialectic has been established and developed for creating certainty...the person who is skilled in teaching dialectic and has gained more confidence by being able to confirm or refute a thesis, sees the rationale behind his work and with his mind at ease embraces truth more firmly. He gives thanks to God for the light of the intellect, refraining from imitating the Pyrrhonists who work out tricks to destroy the truth." (see E. Rummel, *Debate*, 187, citing *Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia in Corpus Reformatorum*, vols. 1-28 [Bad Feilnbach, Germany: Schmidt Periodicals GMBH, 1990; repr. of Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834-1900], 13.616; hereafter referred to as *CR*).

²⁷ For a short, readable account of Pyrrho's skepticism, see Arne Naess, *Scepticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), chap. 1. A more detailed and technical account may be found in the dissertation by Guy O'Gorman King, "Pyrrhonism Sextusian: A Development" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1982; repr. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985). See the next section in the outworkings of its effects during the Reformation controversies.

²⁸ A point conceded by Popkin himself (Popkin, *History*, 43). Thus the notion of a "crisis" must be modified. A large part of the "Apologie" was written in 1575-1576. The *Essais* was first published in 1580, and Montaigne continued to revise and expand the *Essais* until his death in 1592. An account of the reception and influence of the *Essais*, with special emphasis on Montaigne's religious views, may be found in Alan M. Boase,

root cause of Montaigne's skepticism which found philosophical confirmation in the writings of Sextus.²⁹

According to Schiffman, the roots of Montaigne's skepticism lie in the failure of the Renaissance humanist education system in balancing its normative component against its skeptical component as Western society faces a growing appreciation of the diversity and complexity of the world. A central component of the humanist program of education is the so-called "commonplace" (*loci or loci communes*), the words or ideas acceptable to all listeners and embodying the traditional wisdom of society.³⁰ These are passages of general application, a leading text cited in argument, used precisely because it will be recognized as generally authoritative. For example, the title of the first chapter of *Essais*, "By diverse means we arrive at the same end," is a commonplace, a maxim that serves as a guide to argument or conduct.³¹ At the same time for Montaigne, it also serves as a heading classifying the contents of a chapter.

The Fortunes of Montaigne: A History of the Essays in France, 1580-1669 (London: Methuen, 1935).

²⁹ This is the position taken by Zachary S. Schiffman in his "Montaigne and the Rise of Skepticism in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 499-516. The discussion here largely follows that of Schiffman.

³⁰ The meaning of "commonplace" could be rather technical. For a brief discussion of what it means, see Walter J. Ong, "Commonplace Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger and Shakespeare," in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 1500-1700*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 92-93, and the references there.

³¹ Another illustration of the use of commonplaces again came from Melanchthon, taken by Rummel from *CR*, 13.641: "We often use the commonplaces, not in investigating, but in choosing things. Their list is fixed, since with the Church as our teacher, things must not be invented. After all, we do not create doctrine. Rather, when a section of the heavenly teaching is considered as a proposition, the prudent exegete chooses certain principal points, and the commonplaces show in what order these are to be explained, the definition that needs to be sought, the partitions to be made, the causes to be found out, the effects of indication." Erasmus' description is more straightforward: "Now I shall speak of a method which may be of exceptional benefit if it is used dexterously. It is the method of devising a number of theological commonplaces (*locos theologicos*), either thinking them up yourself or taking up those provided by someone else, and arranging what you read under these headings, in pigeon holes, so to speak, so that when you need to put your finger on what you want, it will be readily available. For example, you might jot down something on the subject of faith, fasting, suffering evil, helping the sick, on ceremonies, on piety, and on other things of this kind." *CR*, 13.143-44, citing Erasmus' *Methodus*, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Hajo and Annemarie Holborn (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933), 158-59.

To illustrate, at the beginning of the chapter Montaigne gives the commonplace: the vanquished can save himself by submitting to the victor and begging for mercy. However, he also indicates that defiance in the face of defeat sometimes achieve the same end.³² Montaigne then cites diverse examples that would illustrate both sides, drawing the conclusion that pleas of mercy move weak hearts whereas acts of bravery move strong hearts. Hence whoever is in the mercy of an enemy should judge the quality of that man's heart and act accordingly. However, he then goes on to undermine it by giving an example that contradict the commonplace,³³ thus demonstrating that, ironically, we can arrive at diverse ends by the same means. Montaigne's real conclusion is that man is complex enough that a uniform judgment on his character is impossible. As a result, he overturns his commonplace title for the chapter.

The important feature about this chapter, though, is his specific mode of arguing in undermining commonplace, which is the Aristotelian method of arguing *in utramque partem* (from both sides). The method was used by the Academic skeptics to establish verisimilitude in matters where truth cannot be ascertained, reasoning that the probability of a proposition increases in proportion to the improbability of its contrary. However, using the same method, Montaigne argues that one will arrive at too many contradictory answers concerning human reality because of its diversity and complexity. Thus an even more radical skepticism than that of the probabilistic skepticism of the Academy is entertained by Montaigne. The original purpose of reasoning *in utramque partem* serves not to discover new norms but to apply accepted ones to particular problems. Montaigne found that the process actually leads him to new conclusions that are troubling for commonplace thought. His reasoning would cast him adrift without any norms for guidance. In other words, the crisis of skepticism is due to the breakdown of commonplace thought. Without a prior philosophical framework to justify his dilemma, however, Montaigne tends to dismiss his difficulty in reasoning *in utramque partem* as a personal idiosyncrasy.³⁴

³² Schiffman, "Montaigne," 501.

³³ He recounted that Pompey had once spared an entire city out of admiration of the courage of one man; whereas Sulla, after witnessing a similar display of virtue, spared neither the individual nor the city.

³⁴ He actually ridiculed his meditations as "chimeras and fantastic monsters", written to make his mind "ashamed of itself." (Montaigne, *Essais*, 34.) All references to the

However, reading Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* around 1576 provides Montaigne with a precedent and philosophical support for his own inconclusiveness, which he realizes resembles that of Pyrrhonism: "Their expressions are: 'I establish nothing; it is no more thus than this, or than neither way; I do not understand it; the appearances are equal on all sides; it is equally legitimate to speak for or against.'"³⁵ Ultimately, Montaigne's skepticism is built upon his anthropology, for he is now certain of only one thing: that he is merely a man. His understanding of the vanity, weakness, and ignorance of man allows him only of one possible position: that of fideism.³⁶ Unlike his later followers like Charron, Montaigne's purpose is not to attack the Protestant position nor to call Christians back to the Catholic Church, but to show them that they are mere creatures incapable of knowing God's will. He writes in the closing lines of the "Apologie" "Nor can man raise himself above himself and humanity; for he can see only with his own eyes, and seize only with his own grasp. He will rise, if God lends him his hand; he will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own means, and letting himself be raised and uplifted by divine grace; but not otherwise."³⁷

Essais are from Albert Thibaudet & Maurice Rat, ed., *Oeuvres complètes de Montaigne*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: 1962). Translations are adapted by Schiffman from *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

³⁵ Montaigne, *Essais*, 484.

³⁶ Popkin summarizes three forms of skeptical crises that Montaigne dwells on: (1) theological crisis: a criterion for religious knowledge is impossible, we could only accept tradition, i.e., the Catholic rule of faith; (2) humanistic crisis: the discovery of the New World and the rediscovery of the plethora of viewpoints of ancient thinkers leads to a suspension of judgment of truth; (3) scientific crisis: given human weakness, the reliability of sense knowledge, the truth of first principles, and our knowledge of the nature of the real world all come under suspicion. (Popkin, *History*, 53). It is uncanny how Montaigne still describes the struggles of the postmodern person more than four centuries later.

³⁷ Cited by Schiffman, "Montaigne," 514. The skepticism of Montaigne is such that he could be understood as a total skeptic, doubting everything, or a serious defender of the Catholic faith. Scholars have not agreed even on Montaigne's own intention (Popkin, *History*, 54). While most seventeenth century critics considered him to be a fideist (i.e., one who professes religious faith but maintains skepticism about human knowledge), his eighteenth century readers tended to consider his skepticism universal (see Donald M. Frame, *Montaigne in France 1812-1852* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1940]). What remains true is that it could be readily adopted by others to undermine all religious faith. The crucial step of "freeing" philosophy from religion allows Spinoza to apply skepticism strictly to religion alone, leaving the Bible wide open to criticism.

Thus one may regard Montaigne as a Pyrrhonist even before he read Sextus, primarily due to his dissatisfaction with the commonplace humanist education program utilizing Aristotelian disputation method of *in utramque partem*. The influence of Montaigne will be widely felt due to the wide popularity of the *Essais* and the more organized presentations by figure like Pierre Charron (1541-1603) during the Catholic Counter-Reformation attacks in the next generation.³⁸ However, Montaigne remains a person ahead of his time. The criticism of the inability of the humanist curriculum to impart certain knowledge will be Descartes' opening shot in his 1637 *Discours de la Méthode*.³⁹

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NEW PYRRHONIAN SKEPTICISM

Even though Montaigne's skepticism was created by the inability of commonplace thought to explain human reality and to provide guidance for conduct, subsequent focus was nevertheless on his popularized account of Pyrrhonism. This is especially true of his disciples: Father Pierre Charron, Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus (1582-1652), and Father François Veron (1575-1649). The utilization by these Catholic leaders of the Pyrrhonist arguments in their disputations against Calvinism in France will open the door that eventually would undermine the Catholic faith itself.⁴⁰

Of the three names mentioned above, Veron is the most virulent and successful in debating against and demoralizing Protestants.⁴¹ But

³⁸ It is of interest to know that Montaigne's *Essais* was not put on the *Index* until 1676, when the Catholic Church finally perceived the danger of its arguments along with Cartesianism. By then Spinoza had already published anonymously his *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* and two years later Simon would publish his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*.

³⁹ See Edward J. Kearns, *Ideas in Seventeenth Century France: The Most Important Thinkers and the Climate of Ideas in Which They Worked* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 36-37.

⁴⁰ Popkin calls the employment of Pyrrhonism a "two-edged sword that can be used against any argument for Catholicism as well as any argument for Calvinism." ("Skepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 51 [1960]: 87).

⁴¹ So much so that he was freed from both his duties as a teacher at the Jesuit Collège de La Flèche (where Descartes was a student at the time!) and those of his order to be the official arguer of the Faith of the King of France. (Popkin, *History*, 70.)

even before Veron came on the scene, the Jesuit theologian Juan Maldonat (a friend of Montaigne) has already developed a dialectic undermining Calvinism on its own grounds by raising a series of skeptical difficulties.⁴² The assumption being that if the Reformers deny the traditional rule of faith (i.e., the Church), they would be set adrift in a sea of skeptical despair. Posing Scripture as the alternative rule of faith is useless because the Reformers could not even agree among themselves. However, Veron advanced the battle-line even further by not only calling into question the Protestant rule of faith, but also by using Pyrrhonic arguments to subvert the certainty of the rational procedures and evidence used by Calvinists to justify any statement of a religious claim. If the Reformers argue that meaning of Scripture can be obtained by reading with the aid of reason, and that logical inferences can be drawn from such readings to formulate their articles of faith, Veron would object that any reading is uncertain and may be mistaken, unless there are infallible rules of interpretation. Moreover, the use of reason in reading is an innovation, for the rules of logic came from a pagan (i.e., Aristotle), and not resident in Scripture itself. Even if rules of inferences are inherent in the human mind, mistakes are unavoidable. Thus Veron's Calvinist opponents cannot possibly be certain of the truth of their articles of faith.⁴³ It should be noted that Veron, unlike Montaigne or Charron, insisted that his Pyrrhonism was not used to undermine human reason or human senses, but just the uses of human reason and human senses in religious matters. However, as soon as such arguments are used by one side, they can be used by the opponents with equal effectiveness against the Catholics in their inability to discover religious truths for they would have the same difficulty in ascertaining the meaning and truth of what Popes, Councils, and Church Fathers had said. Ultimately, the French Counter-Reformers would have to embrace the fideism of Pyrrhonic skepticism, as Montaigne has done, in order that the machinery of Pyrrhonism would not wreak havoc on a religion that depends on human

⁴² Example questions would include: How can one tell true faith from false faith apart from the teaching of the Church (i.e., what is the rule of faith)? If Luther and Calvin reject Church traditions, how can they avoid rejection themselves? If the Church can err, can't Luther and Calvin also? Who is going to tell what Scripture says? If the Church errs, why turn to one person rather than another in order to find the rule of faith?

⁴³ Veron's arguments can be found in his *Methodes de Traiter des Controverses de Religion* (Paris: 1638), Part 1; and in *La Victorieuse Methode pour combattre tous les Ministres: par la seule Bible* (Paris: 1621). The former is really a collection of his works. These arguments are labelled "the new machine of war" by the Counter-Reformers.

reason to decide what is right or wrong in religion. As long as the Counter-Reformers stayed within the refuge of an unquestioned faith in the Catholic tradition, that is, as long as God was on the Catholic side,⁴⁴ they could blast away cheerfully at the Reformers.

The realization that this alliance between Pyrrhonism and the French Counter-Reformation could actually lead to the destruction of religion was perhaps muffled in interest of destroying Calvinism intellectually in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Nevertheless, there were voices of opposition.⁴⁵

The alliance of the French Counter-Reformers and Pyrrhonism has sown its own seed of destruction in at least two fashions. On one hand, the doubt of the ability of human reason to settle questions of theology and religion inevitably implies a separation between revelation and reason. This tendency is implicit from Montaigne through Maldonat to Charron in varying degrees, and quite explicit in Veron's claim that he is not attacking human reason, but reason as applied to religion. By late seventeenth century, the separation between reason and revelation would have been exploited by Spinoza (in his terms, "freeing philosophy from theology") to deny outright the possibility of revealed religious knowledge. The separation between reason and revelation would entail for Spinoza not the inability for reason to adjudicate between religious rights or wrongs, but the absence of cognitive content to revelation. "Revelation and philosophy stand on totally different footing," in the sense that "Revelation has obedience for its sole object."⁴⁶ Thus prophecies are reduced to mere uninteresting opinions that are at best morally certain, and miracles are impossible, because nature is the realm of reason, and as such "cannot be contravened, but that she follows a

⁴⁴ A phrase used frequently by Popkin to describe the fideism of the Counter-Reformers. See "Skepticism," 79, 80.

⁴⁵ Father Mersennes and Father Garasse were two examples in the early seventeenth century. However, Mersennes soon turned his attention to the new science and Garasse's effort was condemned by the Sorbonne and silenced by the Jesuit order rather than appreciated. Even Descartes, who offered a positive theory to demonstrate the existence of God and the immortality of the soul via rational doubt to replace the Pyrrhonic skepticism and fideism of his time would have his works condemned later on in the century by the Jesuits.

⁴⁶ Benedict de Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 1. *A Theologico-political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 9. Hereafter, *TPT*.

fixed and immutable order."⁴⁷ In addition, Scripture, being a book, belongs to nature and is properly under the domain of reason. The Bible is then no different than any other book and should be studied as such. This is the bedrock of modern higher criticism.

On the other hand, the confidence of a fideistic refuge in tradition could mean that even the unreliability of Scripture is of no consequence to faith. The arrogance of this kind of fideism finds its culmination in Richard Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* of 1678,⁴⁸ who claims that "The Catholicks, who are persuaded their Religion depends not only on the Text of Scripture, but likewise on the Tradition of the church, are not at all scandalized to see that the misfortune of Time and the negligence of Transcribers have wrought changes in the holy Scriptures as well as in prophane Authours: there are none but prejudiced Protestants or ignorant people that can be offended at it."⁴⁹ Thus Simon felt free to use the most accurate available texts and methods of philology, *together with* the methodology of Spinoza to expose the obscurities of the Bible. His critical approach was to be followed by the influential movement of Deism in all its various aspects.⁵⁰ Towards the end of the seventeenth century, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, when France was once again "*toute Catholique*," the effect of a century of leaning on the skeptical basis of faith would lead to, in the ensuing period of French enlightenment, the application of the same skeptical tradition to Christianity by Voltaire, Diderot, and others.

⁴⁷ Spinoza, *TPT*, 82.

⁴⁸ Popkin calls it the "crowning achievement of the 'new machine of war'." ("Skepticism," 85.)

⁴⁹ Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Book I, ch. i. English translation "by a Person of Quality" (London: 1682). Cited in John M. Creed & John S. B. Smith, ed., *Religious Thought in the Eighteenth Century Illustrated from Writers of the Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 223. In addition, there was strong cross-fertilization of Simon's thought by Spinoza (see John D. Woodbridge, "Richard Simon's Reaction to Spinoza's 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus'" in *Spinoza in der frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, eds. Karlfried Gründer and Wilhelm Schmidt Biggemann, (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1983), 201-26.

⁵⁰ These would include Locke (*The Reasonableness of Christianity*), Anthony Collins (*Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*), and Thomas Woolston (*Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*). See Norman Sykes, "The Religion of Protestants," in *Cambridge History*, 3.195-96.

THE INFLUENCE OF CARTESIANISM

It has been Popkin's major thesis that Cartesianism was a major contributor to the development of modern irreligion through the application of Cartesian methodology and the Cartesian standard of true philosophical and scientific knowledge to the evaluation of religious knowledge.⁵¹ But this must be set in the context of Descartes' (1596-1650) milieu, during which the Catholic-Reformed controversies in France were manifesting a crisis of skepticism with the Catholics increasingly resorting to a fideistic reliance on Church traditions in their Counter-Reformation polemics as described above. At the same time, even the best humanist university program was unable to provide a figure like Descartes a sense of certainty of knowledge. The struggle of Montaigne with commonplace thought then was becoming increasingly commonplace by the time of Descartes.

In the autobiographical part 1 of the *Discours* Descartes wrote that what he derived from his studies at the Jesuit College of La Fleche was largely an attitude of skepticism. He was horrified to find himself entangled in doubt and faced with a growing awareness of his own ignorance,⁵² and he preferred fideism over rational Christianity, because simple folks ("*idiotas ac rusticos*") are as well able to get to heaven as all the disputing monks, who by their disputes created all the heresies and sects to begin with.⁵³ In other words, Descartes also experienced a *crise pyrhoneienne* like Montaigne due to the impotence of the Aristotelian system of disputations to gain new truths. His solution is the method of universal doubt, leading to the subjectively certain knowledge of the *cogito*, thereby inferring the existence of God as the objective guarantor of our subjective certitude. The goal of his method is the search for clear and distinct ideas, whose truth is then guaranteed by God.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Richard H. Popkin, "Cartesianism and Biblical Criticism," in *Problems of Cartesianism*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon, et al (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), 61-82.

⁵² Descartes, *Descartes: Discours de la méthode, avec intro. et remarques de Gilbert Gadorffre*, 2d ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 6. See Kearns, *Ideas*, 36.

⁵³ Kearns, *Ideas*, 37.

⁵⁴ For a concise exposition of the Cartesian method and goal, see Kearns, *Ideas*, 32-82, or Popkin, *History*, 172-92.

Descartes insisted that he was not dealing with theology, nor was he challenging its accepted conclusions. Rather, his purpose was to provide positive assurance of knowledge to combat skepticism. In matters of faith he remains largely fideistic. That is to say, his method does not enable him to arrive at the kind of God found in Catholic theology. Thus by employing the Cartesian method only for gaining natural knowledge, the Christian Cartesian could keep their faith while developing the new science.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there is nothing inherent in the Cartesian method to prevent its being applied to Scripture. In fact, as soon as the authenticity of the existing Biblical text was breached by something like the pre-Adamite theory of the French Millenarian Isaac La Peyrere (1596-1676),⁵⁶ it is not difficult to apply the method of interpreting nature to the interpretation of Scripture. This is in fact what Spinoza did.

Spinoza's method involves subjecting the truth of scriptural statements to rational analysis based on clear and distinct ideas of God or nature, a distinctively Cartesian procedure. When the truth of scriptural statements cannot be demonstrated, then they are to be interpreted in terms of scientific knowledge (philology, history, psychology, etc.) to account for the occurrence of such items, though they cannot be proved to be true. As it turned out, application of this method turned up little cognitive content in the Scripture, which consisted of basic moral truths. Thus the Bible is open to scientific investigations as human history. Thus Revelation is reduced to morality, and the rest is just like any other human literary product.

Two decades later, the deist John Toland would learn about Cartesianism through Jean LeClerc and apply the Cartesian criterion of clear and distinct ideas to the "Mysteries of Christianity" in his most influential work *Christianity Not Mysterious*.⁵⁷ The consequence is devastating, for if the doctrine of Trinity cannot be amenable to a Cartesian analysis in terms of clear and distinct ideas, then it must be

⁵⁵ Popkin, "Cartesianism," 63.

⁵⁶ The most comprehensive English work on La Peyrère is R. H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1595-1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).

⁵⁷ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious; or, a Treatise Shewing, that there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, nor above it: and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery* (reprint ed., New York: Garland, 1978).

discarded.⁵⁸ Thus the above examples show how the application of Cartesianism to Scripture may generate a skepticism about traditional religious claims without the ability to provide a way to overcome it through the discovery of some clear and distinct ideas. Nevertheless, Cartesianism was still used by figures like Pierre Bayle, Pierre Jurieu, and Bishop Stillingfleet to defend the claim that there was genuine religious knowledge.⁵⁹

JEWISH ANTI-CHRISTIAN ARGUMENTS

The last stream of skeptical input considered in this paper comes from Jewish anti-Christian arguments.⁶⁰ Since the first century Jews have argued against Christianity as the fulfillment of Judaism. The power of Christendom essentially limited the influence of these arguments to sectarian concerns. However, the strong efforts to convert the Jews by Christian millenarians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the erection of the Inquisition drove Jews to flee outside of their influences. The establishment of a free Jewish community in Amsterdam allowed the Jews to present their side of the story in relative security. The best of these Jewish anti-Christian polemicists had scholastic and humanist training, and many were forced Christian converts previously. They arrived in The Netherlands knowing little or no Hebrew, and were not acquainted with the established Talmudic answers or the tradition of rabbinic answers since the Middle Ages. Nevertheless they were able to produce anti-Christian literature using the intellectual tools at their disposal, and many of them took a rationalistic approach in their polemics against Christianity.

⁵⁸ This is the response given by Bishop Stillingfleet on the potentially devastating conclusions by allowing Cartesianism to intrude into Biblical criticism. (Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* [London: 1697], 232-33.)

⁵⁹ See discussion in Popkin, "Cartesianism," 75-80.

⁶⁰ See Richard H. Popkin, "Jewish Anti-Christian Arguments as a Source of Irreligion from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* ed. M. Hunter & D. Wootton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 159-81. On the history of Jewish-Christian polemics, see Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument: A History of Theologies in Conflict* (London: 1963), and Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Disputations and Polemics," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Jerusalem: 1971-1972), 6.79-103. On the history of Jewish influence on Christian movements, particularly the heresies, see Louis Israel Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York: AMS Press, 1966).

At first Jewish polemical literature was only written and not printed, owing to an aversion to scandalizing the Christian who lived around the Jews. They were primarily circulated within the Jewish communities. However, increasing contact between Jews and Christian dissenters intensified the developing skepticism among deists and proto-atheists regarding the truths of Christianity.⁶¹ Moreover, some of these arguments were heard in debates and eventually became a part of the irreligious arsenal of the Enlightenment. In particular, the rationalistic flavor of the arguments would find welcome ears by groups like the deists, whose most famous writer during the period is Anthony Collins. His *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724) shows his familiarity with some of the Jewish anti-Christian materials.⁶² He even complained of the unavailability of the Spanish manuscript *Providentia Divina de Dios con Israel* by Saul Levi Morteira, who was the master of Spinoza and this work is regarded as the foremost book they have against Christianity, and the Jews were under pain of excommunication to lend it to any Christian.⁶³ The central theme in these writings appeared to be that the Old Testament prophecies were not literally fulfilled by Jesus,⁶⁴ as a result there is no connection between the Old and New Testaments, and Christianity is groundless.⁶⁵ Other arguments directly attacked the nature of the New Testament in comparison with the superiority of the Old Testament. An extended excerpt from the writings of Morteira is instructive here.

...I say, then, that considered thoroughly, we will find that all those differences which exist between natural matters, executed by God's hands, and artificial ones, created by human hands, exist between the Law of Moses...and other Laws to

⁶¹ Popkin, "Jewish Anti-Christian," 165. This is the central thesis of Popkin's paper.

⁶² "All the books written by Jews against the christian religion, ...chiefly attack the New Testament for the allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament therein, and that with the greatest insolence and contempt imaginable on that account, and oppose to them a literal and single interpretation as the true sense of the Old Testament." (Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* [London: 1724]), 82.) See also the selection in *Critics of the Bible 1724-1873*, ed. John Drury (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41.

⁶³ Drury, *Critics*, 41 n. b.

⁶⁴ The often raised objection is that fulfillment could only be obtained by some kind of allegorical interpretation of the passage under consideration, and thus disputable and unlikely.

⁶⁵ This is one line of Collins' attack in his *Discourse*.

which are attributed divinity, [but are] produced by human hands. The first difference is that the natural ones have the cause of their perfection within themselves, and the artificial ones seek [it] in various places outside themselves...the Gospels, as an artificial work, an act of human hands, followed another fashion and looked for support from many external sources, as they depend upon every artificial thing... The second difference which exists between natural matters and artificial ones is that the natural are examples which proceed from the divine Idea and the artificial are copies which seek their [validity] by imitating something else. This same difference we will see exists between the Law of God and the Gospels. The Law of the Christians... As an artificial thing, its total intent is to resemble and to copy everything that exists in the world in order to accommodate itself to all who rely upon its Messiah... In particular they admitted paganism...translated from others what they discussed and believed. Thus it was... that they taught themselves that a Woman had conceived without coupling with a Man, and that a God had done this work, and that he who was born of such a birth was divine... And not only did the Christians imitate the Gentiles in the conception, incarnation, and birth of their God, but they even resembled them in his death and passion, ...and in the manner [of]...the removal [i.e., resurrection] of his body; thus as the Gentiles did for their Gods, the Christians did for their own. ...We advanced this argument in order to better set right...what many Christians wrote, demonstrating an infinite number of fallacies which exists in nearly all the books of the New Testament..."⁶⁶

It is readily noticed that besides being rationalistic in tone, some of the arguments actually anticipated the wholesale historicizing tendency of eighteenth century biblical criticism, which was to culminate in the syncretistic outlook of the *Religiongeschichtliche Schule* in the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century, though, the use of some of the Jewish arguments led the deists to challenge Christianity as the fulfillment of Judaism and hence as a supernatural religion. Since the deists would resist becoming Judaic, their only open option is to ethicize the scriptural religion of their version of Christianity, anticipating a similar tendency in their liberalistic forebears two centuries later.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Saul Levi Morteira, *Tratado de la Verdad de la Ley de Mosseh y Providencia de Dios con su Pueblo* (Amsterdam, MS, n.d.), fols 219[b]-223[a]. ET by Ralph Melnick. Both the Spanish original and the English translation are reprinted in the Appendix R of his *From Polemics to Apologetics: Jewish-Christian Rapprochement in 17th Century Amsterdam* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 66-69.

⁶⁷ Popkin, "Jewish Anti-Christian," 179.

Another person under direct influence from these anti-Christian literature is Spinoza, himself a Marrano Jew. It was already mentioned earlier (in a footnote by Collins) that Morteira was his one-time teacher.⁶⁸ As a Marrano Spinoza was familiar with the use of evasive language and the concealment of offensive ideas against Christianity in straightforward language.⁶⁹ Spinoza could easily incorporate anti-Christian arguments into the *Tractatus* to bolster his case for dealing with the Bible as an ordinary book (see earlier discussion).

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction of this paper it was argued that Reformation was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the development of modern biblical criticism towards the close of the seventeenth century. Instead, the critical factor prompting a higher critical attitude towards the Bible came from a general breakdown of the utilization of commonplace thought in the academic training of scholars towards the end of the sixteenth century into the seventeenth century. This, coupled with the rediscovery of Pyrrhonic skepticism and its popularization by Montaigne and in the hands of the French Counter-Reformers in their controversies with Protestants essentially led to an environment a lot more conducive to treating the Bible critically. Both Spinoza and Simon can be understood in such a combined environment, and their positions were greatly consolidated by the herculean efforts of Descartes to overcome skepticism (ironically!) through his method of universal doubt and criteria of clear and distinct ideas. The independent stream of constant opposition by Jewish anti-Christian literary activities also contributed to the strength of reducing Christianity to an ethical religion, void of all supernatural character, facilitating the study of the Bible in a critical fashion.

⁶⁸ However, the liberal and atheistic tendency of Spinoza finally caused Morteira to place him in *Herem* while sitting on the Bet Din.

⁶⁹ For Spinoza's Marranism, see the two-volume work by Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). The practice of dissimulation of the Marranos and other groups is given by Perez Zagorin in *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Gerard Reedy remarks that "The Enlightenment does not give birth to critical awareness of the sense of Scripture; the period from 1650 or so on does, however, seem to exhibit an intensified interest in the area."⁷⁰ He is right on the mark. In fact, this paper has pushed the antecedent factors to even a bit earlier. All these go to show that the time has come for the mainstream historiographies of the rise of biblical criticism to be revised.

ABSTRACT

While mainstream historiography generally assumes a twin source for the origin of modern criticism: the Reformation and Enlightenment. This paper argues that the Reformation doctrine of Scripture alone is insufficient for the development of higher criticism unless accompanied by a strong measure of religious skepticism. This paper points out that there exists multiple sources of influences contributing to the development of modern biblical criticism, and one of the most important factors is the influence of skepticism, itself a confluence of several sources. The factors include the general breakdown of the utilization of commonplace thought in the academic training of scholars, the rediscovery of Pyrrhonic skepticism, its popularization by Montaigne and in the hands of the French Counter-Reformers in their controversies with Protestants, and the constant opposition by Jewish anti-Christian literary activities.

撮 要

主流史學研究普遍假設現代聖經批判學有一個合併的溯源：改教運動和啟蒙運動。本文則認為除非加上極大的宗教懷疑主義，否則單是改教運動的唯獨聖經原則，根本不會導致高等批判學。本文指出就現代聖經批判發展而論，其實有多個溯源，最重要的因素之一是懷疑主義所造成的影響，而懷疑主義本身又是由多個源頭所匯聚。影響聖經批判發展的因素包括：學術界以通用範圍培訓學者的做法之式微；皮羅學派懷疑主義的再現，並其在蒙田及法國反改教者跟新教徒的爭論下之風行；以及猶太人反基督教文學活動的持續反對。

⁷⁰ Gerard Reedy, "Spinoza, Stillingfleet, Prophecy, and 'Enlightenment'," in *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1987), 59. He followed by saying that "If in nothing else, the period offers an epochal change in the work of Richard Simon, a French Oratorian, on the text of Scripture and, by implication, the senses of Scripture as well."