

THREE SKEPTICS *and the* BIBLE

La Peyrère, Hobbes, Spinoza, and the Reception of Modern Biblical Criticism

JEFFREY L. MORROW

Biblical scholars by and large remain unaware of the history of their own discipline. This present volume seeks to remedy that situation by exploring the early history of modern biblical criticism in the seventeenth century prior to the time of the Enlightenment when the birth of modern biblical criticism is usually dated. After surveying the earlier medieval origins of modern biblical criticism, the essays in this book focus on the more skeptical works of Isaac La Peyrère, Thomas Hobbes, and Baruch Spinoza, whose biblical interpretation laid the foundation for what would emerge in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as modern biblical criticism.

“No other analysis has pursued the historical roots of biblical criticism in the sixteenth century so brilliantly as Jeffrey L. Morrow’s *Three Sceptics and the Bible*. He persuasively argues that the Thirty Years’ War affected La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza to develop methods of analyzing Scripture to promote their political agendas. Morrow’s erudite and persuasive study exposes the fallacy of regarding biblical criticism as an ‘objective’ approach to the Bible.”

—EDWIN M. YAMAUCHI, Professor of History Emeritus, Miami University

“In *Three Sceptics and the Bible*, Morrow digs deeply into the seventeenth-century works of Isaac La Peyrère, Thomas Hobbes, and Baruch Spinoza. He lays bare the tangled early modern political roots of contemporary historical approaches to the Bible. Anyone who cares about retrieving liturgical and spiritual-theological approaches to the Bible, without sacrificing the considerable contributions of historical criticism, will welcome this timely and painstakingly documented book.”

—WILLIAM L. PORTIER, Mary Ann Spearin Chair of Catholic Theology, University of Dayton

“Recently I heard someone ask an eminent biblical scholar why he was willing to give up the ‘objectivity’ of historical-critical scholarship for the ‘subjectivity’ of theological interpretation. Answering that he was not in fact willing to give up either mode of exegesis, the biblical scholar pointed out that neither mode enjoys a purely scientific ‘objectivity.’ Professor Morrow’s erudite and readable study of politics and exegesis in the seventeenth century makes this crucial point clear once and for all, particularly in his masterful retrieval of Isaac La Peyrère, whose significance might otherwise remain unknown. This book is a must-read for anyone who seeks to employ historical-critical scholarship today in a historically contextualized way—as the method itself demands.”

—MATTHEW LEVERING, James N. and Mary D. Perry, Jr. Chair of Theology, Mundelein Seminary

“Dr. Jeffrey Morrow has taken up the task that should have been inevitable: the historical criticism of historical criticism. His book is a thorough, fair, dispassionate intellectual history of three key seventeenth-century figures. The culmination of long years of research—tested by publication—this book demonstrates that the roots of biblical criticism are not in religiously neutral empirical science, but in a particular agenda that is essentially theo-political.”

—SCOTT W. HAHN, Michael Scanlan Chair of Biblical Theology, Franciscan University of Steubenville; coauthor, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture*

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Modern Biblical Criticism*

JEFFREY L. MORROW

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The first article was “The Politics of Biblical Interpretation: A ‘Criticism of Criticism,’” *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010) 528–45. The second article was “The Modernist Crisis and the Shifting of Catholic Views on Biblical Inspiration,” *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010) 265–80. I originally presented an early version of the second article at the St. Paul Center for Biblical Studies’ Letter & Spirit Summer Institute in 2008. I wish to thank *New Blackfriars* and *Letter & Spirit* for granting me permission to rework material from those pieces. I also include material from an earlier conference presentation, “Revisiting the Seventeenth-Century European ‘Wars of Religion,’” *The Ohio Academy of Religion Scholarly Papers* (2005) 66–80.

The second chapter is based on work I did in two of my previous articles dealing with the biblical exegesis of Isaac La Peyrère. The first of these articles was “French Apocalyptic Messianism: Isaac La Peyrère and Political Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27 (2011) 203–13. That material is incorporated, revised, and expanded, and is here, “Reprinted with permission from University of Toronto Press Incorporated (www.utpjournals.com).” The second article, which was an expansion of that first one, was “Pre-Adamites, Politics and Criticism: Isaac La Peyrère’s Contribution to Modern Biblical Studies,” *Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 4 (2011) 1–25. Both of these articles were based on an earlier version that was presented at the American Catholic Historical Association’s Spring Meeting at Princeton University in

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Introduction

THE COMPLEX HISTORY OF the interpretation of the Bible has often been narrated as a wresting from the magisterial domination of the Catholic Church's authoritative interpretation in order to place Scripture into the realm of scientific objectivity. In this conventional narrative, the supposed objectivity allows for an analysis of Scripture in its historical context in order to propose numerous authors for single books, identifiable editorial processes, and underlying intentions of the community from which these texts come. The easy acceptance of this conventional narrative has led to the hegemony of a particular biblical criticism within the academy. Biblical studies must be carried out using the provided framework in order to be acceptable to the scholars who have long been trained in the method of historical criticism and its related post-critical counterparts (feminist criticism, queer criticism).

In this present book I do not seek to debate the positive or negative significance of historical criticism on the overall field of biblical studies. Along with the founders of the historical critical method, I assume that there is indeed value in examining texts in their historical context. Historical criticism and its corollary criticisms have undoubtedly secured many gains for the field of biblical studies, for example, in detailing the understanding and significance of Jesus' Jewish background. This book does not seek to undermine the contributions of biblical criticism but rather to consider its origins in detail.

Hence the task of this project is to reexamine a conventional narrative through the close study of three figures of the seventeenth century who were instrumental in the beginnings of the historical critical method: Isaac La Peyrère, Thomas Hobbes, and Baruch Spinoza.

The many biblical scholars who have built upon the work of these three claim scientific objectivity in their embrace of the historical critical method. However, this method of criticism, like any form of interpretation,

has a history of development best seen in the context of the times and the overarching objectives of its founders. To some in the field of biblical scholarship and theology, this history is quite surprising, especially since the key figures are not known primarily for their work as Scripture scholars but as political figures. And, as this book indicates, political motivations were, in fact, at the heart of their new methods for biblical interpretation. La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza were highly interested in questioning the integrity of the biblical text so as to undermine its authority and consequently also to undermine the authority of the churches and the synagogue. Having done so, the authors were able to propose a different authority, namely, the modern nation state, which would have ultimate jurisdiction over the people, and would exclude the Church from involvement in secular and publicly religious affairs.

This work is interdisciplinary and hence has significance for several areas of scholarship: history, biblical studies, and theology. From an historical point of view, this project looks to La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza to examine and describe the beginnings of the historical critical method. As noted above, I take my cue from these authors themselves by seeking to understand their work in the larger context of the historical time period. The conventional historians of these figures are often concerned with political impact and do not often focus their attention on issues of religion or biblical interpretation; hence this examination fills in the gap by elaborating on the figures' influence with regard to Scripture scholarship. For those in the field of biblical studies, this work is significant, not because it challenges the numerous benefits of the historical critical method, but rather because it calls attention to the impossibility of objectivity in this area. This project hence invites a closer analysis of the origins and the potential inherent biases in the methods long regarded in the field as scientific and neutral. Many theologians regard the Bible as crucial to their theological work and look to the field of biblical studies to ascertain the conventional conclusions in this field and build upon them. For these theologians, this project is valuable as a first step toward reclaiming a more theological interpretation of the biblical text that does not necessitate the undermining of ecclesiastical authority or traditional interpretation, but, in contrast, holds the earlier biblical interpretation in high esteem. For all areas of study, this project is one of uncovering bias in order to reinvigorate conversation on this topic and to enrich the academic work in these areas. Hence it has potential to contribute to each of these disciplines by redirecting ongoing conversations as to the importance of historical context when considering method, as well as encouraging a reexamination of other methods of biblical interpretation, those often referred to as "pre-critical."

Most studies of the rise of modern biblical criticism and of the historical critical method begin their narrative in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the most recent and important exceptions to this trend examines historical criticism's late medieval origins in the fourteenth century.¹ Only a few scholars have located the origins of modern biblical criticism with textual critical works in the Renaissance.² Even fewer have emphasized the pivotal role of the seventeenth century particularly with regard to the newer conceptions of history.³ In short, very few scholars identify an early date for the origins of modern biblical criticism and the historical critical method.

However, numerous precursors to the modern historical critical study of the Bible may be found throughout history. Medieval Muslim studies of Jewish and Christian Scriptures are especially important, since many of the ideas found in their works were transported into the medieval Jewish and Christian world by such sages as Ibn Ezra and Peter the Venerable.⁴ The critique of traditional allegorical interpretations found in Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham are likewise significant and often overlooked.⁵ Travis Frampton has done important work underscoring the significant role Protestant Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin played in the history of the development of modern biblical criticism. Frampton's study, however, downplays the significance and denies the pivotal role of the seventeenth century in historical criticism's rise to near hegemonic status in the late nineteenth century.⁶

This book claims the seventeenth century as crucial to the development of historical criticism by focusing upon three figures from the seventeenth century whose works are interrelated: La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza. These three figures span four religious and denominational boundaries, and they therefore also prove interesting studies: La Peyrère, a French Calvinist who eventually converted to Catholicism; the Anglican Hobbes; and the Jewish Spinoza, who, after being expelled from the synagogue community, found himself lying more in the theological camp of the Dutch Collegiants.

1. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*.

2. E.g., Kugel, "Bible in the University," 143–65; Goshen-Gottstein, "Textual Criticism," 365–99; and Goshen-Gottstein, "Christianity," 69–88.

3. Although, for exceptions to this trend, see the works e.g., Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*; Dungan, *History of the Synoptic Problem*; Goshen-Gottstein, "Foundations of Biblical Philology," 77–94; and Reventlow, *Bibelautorität*.

4. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*.

5. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 17–59; and Minnis, "Material Swords," 292–308.

6. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism*.

4 THREE SKEPTICS AND THE BIBLE

Despite their diverse theological backgrounds, they had similar goals and employed similar methods.

Of course, it is always difficult to pinpoint the origins of an intellectual trend. My first chapter indicates my reluctance to overextend my claims by downplaying or denying the importance of figures and ages before the seventeenth-century intellectuals I examine in this study. Rather, I wish to emphasize the central place of the seventeenth century for the turn to history, as in the history behind the biblical texts. This turn became significantly more pronounced in figures like La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza than it had in prior centuries.

Hans Frei's classic study has shown that the eighteenth century is a key period for the birth of modern historical biblical criticism, where the tools forged in the seventeenth were honed and perfected and came to blossom in the nineteenth century.⁷ In the present study, I focus upon seventeenth-century biblical criticism so as to situate it in its broader historical and political context. One of the most neglected contexts in historical accounts of modern biblical criticism is the centuries-long church and state conflict.⁸

The age old conflict between the Catholic Church and European state rulers intensified after the Reformation in the early modern period, with the birth of modern centralized European states.⁹ The main battleground was threefold. First, episcopal appointment: who had the authority to appoint bishops, the Church, or the local governing authority? Second, ownership of land: was property owned by religious orders or the local Church, or the state? Third, direction of revenue: should taxes be paid to Rome, or only to state rulers? If we examine England, for example, we find that royal income in England more than doubled after the Reformation redirected money previously earmarked for Rome and monastic communities, which were forcibly liquidated by the state. The English Reformation's usurpation of church land was the original meaning of the word "secularize," and this often violent process became normative in many places.¹⁰ Moreover, English politics continued to dominate church state relations well after the Reformation.¹¹

7. Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. See also Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*; and Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*.

8. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*; and Dungan, *History of the Synoptic Problem*, are two of the few exceptions here.

9. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*; Marx, *Faith in Nation*; and Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 397–420.

10. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; and Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 56–67 and 94–107.

11. Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 128–39, 153–61 and 175–84; and Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination*.

Early modern France in the seventeenth century, which emerged victorious from its civil wars, also proves paradigmatic here. France had state appointed bishops, and this is perhaps one of the biggest contributing factors for the country's remaining Catholic following the Reformation.¹² This, moreover, provides the proximate background for La Peyrère who lived in the France of this time. The French Revolution unleashed a new saga in this conflict, with a century wherein the university was reconstituted, and the papacy so politically weak that two popes ended up in French prison, with one actually dying there.¹³

Finally, the nineteenth century brought these conflicts to a pitch with Italian desires for unification and with the German *Kulturkampf*.¹⁴ Throughout all of these conflicts, the papacy and Catholicism in general foremost appeared as obstacles to emerging European state powers, as a transnational authority over and above any state sovereign. As William Cavanaugh has demonstrated, and as we will see in this present volume, the so-called wars of religion had more to do with reconfiguring the power structures in Europe from the carcass of the medieval order. This provides the ultimate context for the story of biblical criticism's birth in modernity.

In this first chapter, "The Emergence of Modern Biblical Criticism," I will provide a concise overview of the history of biblical interpretation, highlighting the place of seventeenth century thinkers like La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza within the broader context of the rise of modern biblical criticism. The chapter begins with the polemical literature of antiquity, moves through the development of philological and textual studies in antiquity and the medieval period, and continues through the Renaissance, Reformation, early modern and Enlightenment periods. Its purpose is to provide background in order to situate properly the seventeenth century figures on whom this book focuses.

My overarching argument in this chapter is an underlying one for the rest of the book, namely, that one must understand the birth of modern biblical criticism in its historical framework, which is the political context of the church-state debate. It is the background of political authority and the role of the churches, particularly in modern Europe, that provides the ultimate backdrop for the development of modern biblical criticism, which emerged at the same time as early modern European states. In the wake of the carnage of the so-called religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth

12. Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 45–56, 86–94, 122–8, 148–53; and Portier, "Church Unity," 27–37.

13. Duffy, *Saints & Sinners*, 230–305; Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 168–75; Tavard, "Blondel's Action," 151–65; and Portier, "Church Unity," 27–37.

14. Gross, *War Against Catholicism*; Lease, "Vatican Foreign Policy," 31–55.

centuries, which were brought to an end by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, early modern political theorists like Hobbes and Spinoza, and early modern biblical interpreters like La Peyrère, sought an ostensibly objective method for interpreting Scripture that would bring an end to sectarian violence.¹⁵ The work of these seventeenth century scholars provided a foundation for the development of modern methods, which also claimed neutrality. The modern methods, moreover, progressively brought the study of the Sacred Page into the new state-sponsored secular universities. I conclude this chapter by emphasizing the pivotal role of the seventeenth century for launching the modern biblical critical project.

The figures in this book will be examined chronologically. Hence I turn in the second chapter, “The Biblical Criticism of Isaac La Peyrère in Context,” to the earliest of these seventeenth century exegetes, and I place his work within its broader historical and political context. Isaac La Peyrère is a man whose work is typically unknown by Bible scholars; many may never have heard of him at all. La Peyrère played an important role in the European politics of his age, as the secretary and diplomat for two successive Princes of Condé. He is arguably the most important non-royal political figure in France at that time, apart from Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin.

Richard Popkin and Susanna Åkerman have uncovered a plot among the Prince of Condé, Queen Christina of Sweden, and Oliver Cromwell to overthrow Louis XIV and place the Prince of Condé on the French throne.¹⁶ La Peyrère found himself in the middle of this plot, as an agent for Condé with Christina (patroness to both La Peyrère and Descartes) and with Cromwell, as he worked on his most important works in biblical criticism. La Peyrère’s historical and textual critique of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch made explicit arguments that had previously been more implicit in the works of earlier Jewish and Christian interpreters. His work was also significant in its turn to the history behind the text, a move that went beyond the Protestant Reformation exaltation of the literal sense of Scripture.

Most significant, as I will make apparent in successive chapters, is the relationship between La Peyrère’s works and those of Hobbes and Spinoza. La Peyrère’s influence is evident by those who followed him, especially Richard Simon, who used his work. In particular, La Peyrère is known, like Joseph Scaliger, for using documents from other cultures across the globe for reconstructing biblical history, as well as for contributing to source criticism, something which has earned his status as a pioneer of the historical critical method for interpreting the Bible. This chapter seeks to provide the

15. See, e.g., Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 117–25.

16. See, e.g., Popkin, “Millenarianism and Nationalism,” 78–82.

context for La Peyrère's method, but more importantly, for his conclusions. The chapter argues that these conclusions of La Peyrère's biblical criticism had important theological ramifications that were also political. That is, they undermined the authority of the biblical text itself, hence undermining traditional interpretation that accepted biblical authority, and consequently they undermined the Church that had supported traditional interpretation. From a political standpoint, these conclusions worked to transfer this authority to his French nationalistic messianic vision, and hence undergird his employer the Prince of Condé's political machinations.

In the third chapter, "The Biblical Criticism of Thomas Hobbes in Context," I turn to one of the most important but often overlooked figures in the advent of modern biblical criticism, namely the early modern English political theorist, Thomas Hobbes. In Hobbes's most famous work, *Leviathan*, he set out numerous examples of how he believed the Bible should be interpreted. Most of these interpretations simply supported his political arguments for the sovereignty of state rulers. Significantly, however, as with La Peyrère, Hobbes highlighted the importance of the history behind the texts much more than earlier generations of biblical interpreters had done. Prior to figures like La Peyrère and Hobbes, interpreters usually assumed that what was reported in Scripture was more or less what happened. La Peyrère and Hobbes, however, emphasized in new ways a distinction between the history behind the text and the stories within the texts themselves.

Importantly, at the time of his work, *Leviathan* (1651), he could not write texts on political matters without some attention to the Bible, which was still regarded as an important text. Like Peyrère, whom he might have known personally, Hobbes's biblical interpretation had lasting effects on biblical studies for years to come. Hence it is beneficial to note the historical context and theological and political motivations which inspired his methods and conclusions on the biblical text. In particular, Hobbes is noted for his move to naturalize the many miracles described in the Bible. Hobbes was invested in the state having ultimate authority, and there was hence little room for miracles, the supernatural, or anything that would point to a world beyond that governed by secular authority. Punishments beyond death (i.e., purgatory or hell) and rewards in an afterlife (i.e., heaven) posed a threat to the political sovereignty of the state-ruler. Hobbes composed his *Leviathan* while avoiding the English civil war through self-imposed exile in Paris. He moved in the same intellectual circles as La Peyrère, whose initial unpublished drafts of his work circulated widely. In fact, La Peyrère even received published criticisms long before Hobbes completed *Leviathan*, although La Peyrère's main work was not published until after Hobbes's initial

English edition.¹⁷ More important than La Peyrère's plausible role of influence on Hobbes, however, is the more likely impact of both Hobbes and La Peyrère on Spinoza.

In the fourth chapter, "The Biblical Criticism of Baruch Spinoza in Context," I consider Baruch Spinoza's foundational methodological arguments which furthered the modern biblical critical project. Spinoza has had a lasting impact on the field of biblical studies. In particular, Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) lays down an elaborate historical hermeneutic as a blueprint for the development of a scientific biblical criticism, the core assumptions of which are now a commonplace in biblical studies. The context for Spinoza's writing, however, was the political turmoil of the Dutch Republic and especially the Thirty Years' War, which ended just over twenty years prior to the publication of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. He sought to undermine traditional theological interpretations as found in Catholic, Calvinist, and Jewish traditions, in order to declaw religious institutions of wielding any authority in the secular realm. His method was ultimately at the service of creating a freedom to philosophize.

Spinoza was banned from the Jewish community in Amsterdam, and then he became one of the most important philosophical figures of his time. Jonathan Israel's works have shown Spinoza's pivotal role in the later European Enlightenment.¹⁸ Eventually, Spinoza laid down the foundational guidelines that would be followed by over three centuries of modern biblical critics, in his famous political work, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which implicitly supported a particular strain of democratic politics. Spinoza knew of both La Peyrère's and Hobbes's works, copies of both are still preserved in his library to this day; and the Latin edition of *Leviathan* was available before Spinoza published his own work. The role of secular history which remained more implicit in La Peyrère and Hobbes, became a focal point in Spinoza's arguments for what a scientific biblical criticism should look like. Furthermore, Spinoza adopted, expanded, and solidified La Peyrère's and Hobbes's historical and textual arguments against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. This was a source critical conclusion that became the bedrock of many of the eighteenth century's critical projects and a main focus of nineteenth century criticism.¹⁹

The fifth and final chapter, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Creation of Religion," considers the rise of historical criticism in the work of La Peyrère,

17. See, e.g., Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 383–431; and Pacchi, "Hobbes and Biblical Philology," 231–39.

18. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*; and *ibid.*, *Radical Enlightenment*.

19. Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*; and Freedman, "Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship," 31–38.

Hobbes, and Spinoza, in light of traditional Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation. It discusses especially the role of Jewish and Christian liturgies in traditional exegesis, and emphasizes the shift that occurred in the work of La Peyrère, but especially of Hobbes, and Spinoza, as the Bible began to be looked to, no longer primarily as a liturgical text, but rather as a book like any other, which needed to be read and examined by the same methods as other ancient texts. This chapter also explores the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, with their attendant redefinition of “religion” as a category, as a significant context for understanding the biblical hermeneutics these figures were constructing.

1

The Emergence of Modern Biblical Criticism

MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM HAS a long history, with deep roots stretching back prior to the emergence of modernity and the Enlightenment, prior to the Reformation and even the Renaissance, into the medieval period. Recently, Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker have made the case that modern biblical criticism begins to develop at least by the dawn of the fourteenth century, if not earlier.¹ Their recognition of the early roots of modern biblical criticism, and particularly historical criticism, is certainly one of the strengths of their volume. A further strength is in how well they communicate the many ways in which biblical exegetes sometimes unwittingly become partisans in a much older political conflict: throne vs. altar. In a moment of brutal honesty, Albert Schweitzer conceded that the historical critical method was at root, “an aide in the struggle for deliverance from dogma.”² Such methods became state-sponsored tools used in the states’ battles with the churches of Europe, and initially the Catholic Church in particular.³ It should come as no surprise that the very states who supported such academic projects most (Germany, France, England), were also states concerned at various times with episcopal appointments, seizing church land, and exiling religious orders.⁴

1. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*.
2. Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, 4. Schweitzer’s comment here is specifically in reference to historical criticism as applied to the quest for the historical Jesus.
3. The Catholic Church remained the primary target in these conflicts, but prior to the Reformation, it was the only show in town, as it were. No other religious leader vied for temporal rule the way that the Catholic pope did in medieval Europe.
4. Duffy, *Saints & Sinners*, 230–305; Gross, *War Against Catholicism*, 240–91; Duffy,

In this present chapter, I focus on the historical connection between politics and the biblical criticism which laid the groundwork for later historical biblical criticism. I begin tracing the roots of modern biblical criticism from medieval Muslim politics and polemics into the political world of medieval Christian theology. Next, I continue this trajectory into the Renaissance and Reformation, showing how the post-Reformation “wars of religion” shaped the foundations of early modern biblical criticism. Then I examine Enlightenment and nineteenth-century historical criticism, highlighting nationalistic motivations in such criticism. Finally, I provide an overview of the historical church and state conflict which provides an unrecognized context for understanding the history of modern biblical criticism. This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive account, but merely an introductory summary of this too often neglected historical genealogy of modern historical biblical criticism.⁵

MEDIEVAL POLITICAL PRECURSORS TO EARLY MODERN HISTORICAL CRITICS

Within both Jewish and Christian communities, certain hermeneutical assumptions and logical interpretive conclusions developed as the Scriptures were being canonized and rules for interpretation were being set forth. James Kugel maintains that there were at least four basic assumptions implied in the exegesis of early Jewish and Christian interpreters. He explains:

[1] They assumed that the Bible was a fundamentally cryptic text: that is, when it said A, often it might really mean B . . . [2] Interpreters also assumed that the Bible was a book of lessons directed to readers in their own day. It might seem to talk about the past, but it is not fundamentally history. It is instruction, telling us what to do . . . Ancient interpreters assumed this not only about narratives like the Abraham story but about every part of the Bible . . . [3] Interpreters also assumed that the Bible contained no contradictions or mistakes. It is perfectly harmonious, despite its being an anthology. . . . In short, the Bible, they felt, is an utterly consistent, seamless, perfect book . . . [4]

Stripping of the Altars, 383–85, 397, and 402–3; and Costigan, “State Appointment,” 82–96.

5. I encourage readers who would like to delve deeper into this history to consult Hahn’s and Wiker’s massive volume, *Politicizing the Bible*, as well as the extensive sources I mention in Morrow, “Enlightenment University,” 899–909, particularly 899–900n6, 900n7, 900–901n9, 903n13, 904–5n18, 906–7n22, and 908n23.

Lastly, they believed that the entire Bible is essentially a divinely given text, a book in which God speaks directly or through His prophets.⁶

Such views of Scripture came under attack even before the Christian period, and particularly on the issue of the divine origin of the Pentateuch. Early heretics attempted to curtail any Jewish claims to the divine authority of the Torah by attacking the history of its origins. The pre-Christian proto-Gnostic group known as the Nasarenes attempted to do this by denying the Torah's Mosaic authorship, which was assumed for the Pentateuch for much of Jewish and Christian history.⁷ Later, in the Christian period, the third century Roman Neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry also questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, as well as other traditional attributions of authorship and origin, in his polemical works against Christianity.⁸ These polemicists attempted to attack the history of Jewish and Christian claims concerning Scripture in order to denigrate their claims of the divine inspiration of Scripture.

One important, but often neglected, development that helped pave the way for the modern work of historical biblical criticism was the medieval Muslim appropriation of Gnostic, Roman, and Christian polemical literature attacking the Jewish Torah.⁹ Ibn Hazm (994–1064) is one of the earliest and most famous examples. He became one of the most important medieval thinkers to use philological analyses and historical arguments to deconstruct traditional Jewish and Christian views of Scripture, particularly regarding historical claims, and to attempt to curb all forms of spiritual interpretation.¹⁰ In his work, “Discerning between Religions, Ideologies, and

6. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 14–16. See also O’Loughlin, “*Res, Tempus, Locus*,” 95–111; *ibid.*, “Biblical Contradictions,” 103–26; *ibid.*, “Controversy over Methuselah’s Death,” 182–225; *ibid.*, “Julian of Toledo’s *Antikeimenon*,” 80–98; and Tabet Balady, “La hermenéutica bíblica,” 181–93. In the context of how these ideas develop in the medieval period, Thomas O’Loughlin explains that, “If a book is ‘in the canon,’ then any suggestion that the book’s contents lack inerrancy must be countered. In effect, this means that there must be no contradiction within the entire body of works on the list, and further implies that every sentence must be demonstrably consistent with every other sentence, which then entails that each sentence can be read consistently alongside any other sentence and whatever meaning is derived must be considered a valid extrapolation.” See O’Loughlin, “Inventing the Apocrypha,” 54.

7. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics*, 60.

8. Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 400; Kofsky, *Eusebius*, 30; Droge, *Homer or Moses*, 178; and Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 137 and 143.

9. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, xi, 18, 28, 30, 42n62, 45, 50, 59, and 63.

10. Al-Azmeh, *Times of History*, 114; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 57–96; Adang, *Muslim writers on Judaism*; Martínez Gros, “Ibn Hazm contre les

Sects,” Ibn Ḥazm employed a host of arguments deconstructing the Jewish Torah as well as the New Testament.¹¹

Ibn Ḥazm witnessed firsthand the brutalities of politics within the caliphate structure in Muslim Spain, as his family went from a position of favorable political status with the ruling powers, to political exiles while he was a child. As an adult, Ibn Ḥazm proved to be an accomplished Muslim jurist, as well as a philosopher, philologist, and even poet. Politics would reenter his life in a dramatic way when he found himself bypassed for an elite office in the caliphate that he believed should have been rightfully given to him. To add insult to injury, it was not simply to another skilled Muslim jurist that the office was handed, but rather it was given to the Jewish anti-Muslim polemicist, Shmuel Ibn Nagrela, known in the world of Judaism as Shmuel Ha Naggid (993–1056). This is the context for understanding Ibn Ḥazm’s polemical literature.¹²

Ibn Ḥazm’s polemical literature, which targeted competing Muslim philosophical and legal schools as well as those of other religious traditions like Christianity, included over one hundred pages of scathing polemics attacking Judaism. In retaliation to Ibn Nagrela, Ibn Ḥazm heaped opprobrium on his opponent, and particularly upon Judaism, and the Torah. In fact, Ibn Ḥazm even wrote a tract specifically aimed at Ibn Nagrela, which he entitled, “Refutation of Ibn al-Nagrela the Jew, may God curse him.”¹³ In his criticisms, Ibn Ḥazm not only anticipated, on the one hand, modern biblical historical and philological analyses, but, on the other, later anti-Semitic

Juifs,” 123–34; Adang, *Islam frente a Judaísmo*; Lazarus-Yafeh, “Tahrif,” 81–88; Adang, “Schriftvervalsing,” 197–8; Powers, “Reading/Misreading,” 109–21; Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie*, 49n1, 72–73, 309, and 319; Algermissen, “Die Pentateuchzitate”; and Goldziher, *Die Zâhiriten*, 123–4 and 132. Ibn Hazm’s work proved very influential, and it is likely that Ibn Ezra and Maimonides were responding to him, and Spinoza may even have relied upon his arguments in his own work on modern biblical criticism, *Tractatus theologico-Politicus*, as we shall see in chapter four of the present volume. See also Ljamai, *Ibn Hazm et la polémique*, 145–96; Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects,” 61–84; Guerrero, “Filósofos hispano-musulmanes,” 125–32; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 73 and 140; Freedman, “Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship,” 31–38; Abu Laila, “Ibn Ḥazm’s Influence,” 103–15; and Arnaldez, “Spinoza et la pensée arabe,” 151–74.

11. English translation in Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects,” 61.

12. On Ibn Ḥazm’s conflict with Judaism and with Ibn Nagrela, see Ljamai, *Ibn Hazm et la polémique*, 30, 32–33, 40, and 40n193; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 2–7, 129–31, and 145; Adang, *Islam frente a Judaísmo*; Adang, “Ibn Ḥazm de Córdoba,” 15–23; Martínez Gros, “Ibn Hazm contre les Juifs,” 123–34; and Rif‘at, “Ibn Ḥazm on Jews.”

13. The translation is from Adang, *Muslim writers on Judaism*, 67. For consistency, I changed Adang’s transliteration of Ibn Nagrela’s name.

diatribes. Indeed, it appears that Ibn Ḥazm may have coined anti-Semitic phrases involving adjectives like “dirty” and “repugnant” used as expletives modifying the designation “Jews.” R. David Freedman comments that, “. . . Ibn Ḥazm wrote with such fierce invective that he can scarcely say the word ‘Jew’ without a prefixed epithet like ‘stinking,’ ‘foul,’ ‘vile,’ ‘villainous,’ and that good old stand-by ‘dirty.’”¹⁴

One of the foundations of his vitriolic barrage was the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Although this is a commonplace in contemporary scholarship, we must bear in mind that Ibn Ḥazm was one of the first serious intellectuals to make such a claim; he predates Ibn Ezra (1092–1167) by several decades.¹⁵ Although his arguments clearly anticipated what modern scholars now take for granted, and they were sophisticated, based on rigorously philological analysis (most likely of Arabic translations of the texts), Ibn Ḥazm attacked the idea that Moses wrote the Pentateuch with the purpose of weakening Jewish claims to maintaining any divine revelation.¹⁶ His method of critique sought particularly for apparent contradictions, theological concepts which were untenable for traditional Muslims, and other such infelicities. As Camilla Adang writes, “In this manner Ibn Ḥazm systematically analyzed the entire Tanakh in search of insupportable propositions.”¹⁷

Another key criticism Ibn Ḥazm leveled against Judaism (and Christianity) was to attack allegorical interpretation. Ibn Ḥazm was completely opposed to allegorical interpretations, including of the Qur’an and Hadith.¹⁸ Ibn Ḥazm’s arguments critiquing the Hebrew Bible, as well as his other ideas concerning other religious traditions, were adopted by other medieval Muslims, most notably Averroës (Ibn Rushd), and these arguments even entered into Jewish and Christian discourse in the medieval period.¹⁹

14. Freedman, “Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship,” 33. Asín Palacios writes that, “The author of the books of the Pentateuch is, in the mind of Ibn Ḥazm, such an imbecile, that ‘the ox is more discreet, and the donkey more skillful than he,’ and the Jews are ‘the race most dirty, disgusting [asquerosa] and repugnant in the land’” (*Abenházam de Córdoba*, 193).

15. Lazarus-Yafeh maintains that it is likely Ibn Ezra was in fact one of the main medieval figures who transmitted Ibn Ḥazm’s thought to the Jewish and Christian European world (*Intertwined Worlds*, 73 and 140).

16. Freedman, “Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship,” 31–38; and Powers, “Reading/Misreading,” 109–21.

17. Adang, “Schriftvervalsing,” 199.

18. Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie*, e.g., 49n1, 72–73, 309, and 319; and Goldziher, *Die Zāhiriten*, 123–24 and 132.

19. This is even the case despite Ibn Rushd’s acceptance of allegory. Ljamai, *Ibn Hazm et la polémique*, 145–96; Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects,” 61–84; and

Averroës, over whom Ibn Ḥazm exerted a very strong influence, was even more important in the history of modern biblical criticism in that he placed philosophy and reason as judge over faith and theology. More precisely, Averroës maintained a hierarchy of knowers and of knowledge. Averroës was an important and influential commentator on the work of the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He noticed, as had others, that the teachings of the Qur'an were not always consistent with Aristotle's thought. Thus, Averroës reasoned that truth is known differently depending on the different abilities of the one knowing the truth. Philosophers stand at the pinnacle of his hierarchy. What this Averroist notion entailed was the "superiority of the truths of natural reason to those of revelation," and this led to what has been called the double truth approach of the "Latin Averroist" tradition.²⁰ This Latin Averroism found an important home at the University of Padua, from whence it spread throughout Europe, becoming especially popular in university systems.

Marsilius of Padua (ca. 1275–ca. 1342) and William of Ockham (ca. 1288–ca. 1348) continued this trajectory, relying in part on the tradition of Averroës mediated in the Latin west. Marsilius of Padua had imbibed Averroist philosophy under the influence of Latin Averroists at the University of Padua. Ockham made similar exegetical moves to Marsilius, particularly in their dual attempts to curtail allegorical interpretation; for Marsilius and Ockham, there could be no spiritual interpretation. Nominalist biblical interpretation then spread throughout Europe from the University of

Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, xi, 10, 44–46, 63–64, 68–69, 71–74, 136, and 140–41. On Ibn Ḥazm's influence on the Christian world in general, see Abu Laila, "Ibn Ḥazm's Influence," 103–15. Peter Abelard was likely influenced by such Muslim thought, perhaps only as mediated through Peter the Venerable who was intimately familiar with currents in the medieval Muslim world, and in fact was responsible for the first Latin "interpretation" (translation) of the Qur'an as well as a refutation of Islam. See, e.g., Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 71–72; Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 243; Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie*, 319; and Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba II*, 74 and 74n105. The connection with Abelard here is significant, since Abelard seemed to share important philosophical points in common with Averroës, particularly the role of reason as judge of faith. Non-Christian philosophers played an important role in Abelard's thought, and he was especially indebted to Epicurus. See, e.g., de Mowbray, "Philosophy as Handmaid," 15–16; Marenbon, *Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, especially 340–49; and Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 223–25, where Pelikan points out how Abelard's inquiry into authorship and authenticity of texts (which anticipated later text and source criticism) were tools Abelard employed to prune biblical interpretation from patristic interpretation. On p. 76 of his second volume, Asín Palacios makes an interesting comparison between Ibn Ḥazm's voluntarism and that of Scotus and Ockham, which Asín Palacios sees as similar.

20. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 23.

Paris to the Universities of Heidelberg, Vienna, Cologne, and elsewhere.²¹ Ockham's students sometimes brought with them a disdain for allegorical biblical interpretation, much like Ibn Ḥazm's, and laid a heavy emphasis on the *sensus literalis*. In a subsection entitled, "Modern Politics as Biblical Hermeneutics," John Milbank offers a lucid account of how the attacks on allegorical biblical interpretation, like Ockham's, served early modern politics.²² Milbank explains:

The traditional "fourfold," "spiritual" or "allegorical" interpretation assumed and demanded a literal, historical meaning: every Biblical *signum* referred to a *res*. However, it conceived the *res*, as a divine, "natural" sign, to have a plenitude of meaning which allowed the allegorical edifice to be erected. The literal, historical "violence" of the *res* in the old covenant effaced itself, not just vertically towards "eternal" meanings, but horizontally in the direction of the new reality of Christ-*ecclesia* with its charity, mercy and peace. This allowed the fullness of divine authority to devolve on Christ and then on the tropological interpretations of present Christians in the community of the Church.²³

Marsilius's and Ockham's critiques of allegorical interpretation and the spiritual sense of Scripture served court politics. Both Marsilius and Ockham resided at the same time under the protection of Ludwig of Bavaria who was in conflict with Pope John XXII. The conflict primarily had to do with control over Italian territories and thus with the temporal authority of the papacy. Marsilius supplied Ludwig with a theoretical justification for his desire for temporal sovereignty.²⁴ Marsilius's arguments involved both a theo-

21. *Ibid.*, 47–59; Barron, "Biblical Interpretation," 180; Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 152–3; Kärkkäinen and Lagerlund, "Philosophical Psychology," 36–39; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 17–20; Manekin, "Hebrew Philosophy," 294; Minnis, "Material Swords," 292–308; Antonietta, "Averroes y su influencia," 151–74; Rosenthal, "Heinrich von Oyta," 178–79, 182, and 183n5; Troilo, "Laverroismo," 44–77; Troilo, *Averroismo*.

22. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 17–20.

23. *Ibid.*, 20.

24. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 17–22, 24–29, 35–44, and 54–56; Miethke, "Der Kampf Ludwigs des Bayern," 39–74; Nehlsen, "Die Rolle Ludwigs," 285–328; Kraus, "Das Bild," 5–70; Thomas, *Ludwig der Bayern*; and Offler, "Empire and Papacy," 21–47. This immediate context is the proximate context for the history of medieval debates concerning papal infallibility. See, e.g., Shogimen, "Relationship Between Theology and Canon Law," 417–31; Heft, *John XXII*; Tierney, "Ockham's Infallibility," 295–300; Ryan, "Evasion and Ambiguity," 285–94; Tierney, "John Peter Olivi," 315–28; Tierney, "Sovereignty and Infallibility," 787–93; Heft, "John XXII and Papal Infallibility," 759–80; Turley, "John Baconthorpe," 744–58; Tierney, "Papal Infallibility," 275–77; Heft, "Historical Origins," 208–11; Tierney, "Ockham's Ambiguity

logical and a political critique of the papacy's claims to temporal authority. In effect, Marsilius desired to place state rulers over the Church within their realms, so that a council of state-appointed bishops could trump a pope.²⁵

Ockham's intent seems to have been to defend Franciscan poverty. Ockham was attempting to distinguish realms and defend his idea of Christian perfection which he thought John XXII was challenging. It might seem ironic that Ockham's admonition for the Pope (and clerics) to embrace poverty was an implicit, even if unintentional, call for wealth to be taken out of the hands of the church and placed in the hands of state rulers like Ludwig of Bavaria. Consciously or not, Ockham's challenge to the papacy supplied Marsilius with further means of defending his theo-political ends. In Marsilius's and Ockham's attack on the spiritual sense of Scripture, which they saw as supporting the papacy, in favor of simply a literal-historical approach, we can detect another politically motivated attempt at biblical criticism which supported state politics; in this case, the politics of their protector, Ludwig of Bavaria, who opposed the pope.²⁶

The broader historical and political context here is illuminating.²⁷ An important component in the main context here is the Franciscan poverty debate, i.e. the debate over ownership and use among clergy, like the Franciscans, who took a vow of poverty, but needed to use books, and thus libraries, etc., for various aspects of their religious life, including study for preaching. Pope John XXII entered the theological fray by denying the distinction between use and ownership. Under his predecessors Gregory IX, Nicholas III, and Clement V, such a distinction was permitted, and, under Nicholas, the idea was that the papacy owned the material possessions which Franciscans merely used. The conflict raged within the Franciscans between the Conventuals and the Spirituals. The Conventuals prudentially attempted to apply Franciscan norms to their current obligations, whereas the Spirituals were bent on reforming their order in the face of what they took to be abuses of de facto wealth and luxury among their brother Fran-

Infalibility," 102–5; Ryan, "Ockham's Dilemma," 37–50; Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*; Tierney, "Origins of Papal Infallibility," 841–64; and Ratzinger, "Der Einfluss des Bettelordensstreites," 697–724.

25. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 26, 33–34, and 37–39.

26. *Ibid.*, 35–36 and 54–56; and Minnis, "Material Swords," 292–308.

27. In what follows below, I draw heavily from the magisterial account Hahn and Wiker have provided in their recent work, *Politicizing the Bible*, in their volume's second chapter, "The First Cracks of Secularism: Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham," 17–59. Hahn and Wiker are among the very few scholars who recognize the important contribution of both Marsilius and Ockham to later developments that paved the way for modern historical biblical criticism. I also rely upon and Minnis, "Material Swords," 292–308.

ciscans who had taken vows of poverty. John XXII demurred against the idea that the papacy owned these possessions, declaring that the Franciscans owned what they used. Moreover, upset with what he took to be the Spirituals's abuses against their vows of obedience, he called them to obey.

At the same time, John XXII was also at odds with Ludwig of Bavaria. Various factions within German realms supported different individuals who were vying for leadership within those realms. Some supported Ludwig, whereas others supported Frederick I. These political factions thus were in conflict over who would rule as German emperor, a dispute which appeared hopelessly irreconcilable. In light of this impasse, John XXII requested both Ludwig and Frederick to abdicate rule, and he, the pope, would take over in the interregnum. When John XXII reopened the poverty debate his predecessor Pope Nicholas had closed, Ludwig quickly condemned John as a heretic, using the Franciscan conflict with the pope as a political means of attacking the papacy.

Complicating matters further was the actual wealth and luxury of the papal court in Avignon, which made it likely that the papal court could not help but feel the sting of the Spiritual Franciscan critique. Although the Conventuals, and in particular Michael of Cesena, the Franciscan's Minister General, would probably have applauded Pope John's call to the Spirituals for obedience, they were outraged by Pope John's reopening what they thought had been a closed debate, a debate they had won under his predecessor. Marsilius and Ockham found themselves right in the middle of these controversies, as they both came to reside under Ludwig's protection from John XXII.

It is with Marsilius that medieval Muslim Averroist philosophy became important, and eventually exerted a significant influence on later biblical criticism. Marsilius likely imbibed this philosophy while studying at the University of Padua, but almost certainly later as rector at the University of Paris, which was also a major Averroist center in the west. The politics of Marsilius's famous work, *Defensor Pacis* (completed in 1324) were grounded in the notion that reason is to be separated from faith. His primary concern is to secure civil peace, which indeed became the main goal, the highest good, for Marsilius. Marsilius used Scripture whenever he was able to twist its interpretation to serve merely secular ends. In the end, the secular state Marsilius envisioned was to be in control of biblical interpretation. Moreover, for Marsilius, the state should have control of the church offices, so that the state can control ecclesiastical decisions. Additionally, Marsilius asserted a sort-of early conception of *sola Scriptura* where the Bible supplanted church authority and tradition, but it was a Bible authoritatively interpreted, not by the individual, but the state ruler and state

appointed exegetes. In his view, the Old Testament no longer played a role for Christians, nor should recourse be made to a spiritual sense of Scripture, but to a literal sense alone. These latter rejections were based on Marsilius's understanding of how pro-papal exegetes used the Old Testament as well as allegorical interpretation to support the authority of the papacy. Marsilius never intended for the *Defensor Pacis* to remain a merely theoretical work, but rather it contained a practical means of subordinating the papacy to the state. Thus, Marsilius jumped on the contemporary Franciscan anti-John XXII bandwagon and made a case for an absolute poverty of clergy grounded in Marsilius's exegesis, in an attempt to remove any form of temporal authority from the papacy with the goal of allowing civil rulers to wield absolute temporal control.

Ockham would eventually join Marsilius, both literally under Ludwig's protection, and ideologically, but with a different and more spiritual purpose. Ockham got into trouble with John XXII, and fled Avignon, along with Michael of Cesena, to the protection of Ludwig, from which Ockham attacked the papacy of John XXII and succeeding popes. In contrast to Marsilius, however, Ockham never completely subjected the Church to the state. Instead, he emphasized the separation of powers (sacred from secular). Because Ockham saw an extraordinary need for church reform, he argued for the ability and necessity of secular rulers ruling over sinful prelates. Tied to this concept was Ockham's emphasis on the role of biblical *periti* (experts) or specialists who should be in charge of biblical interpretation. This would play itself out later in the history of biblical criticism, especially in and after the Enlightenment. For Ockham, the specialist or expert is has authority over a council, over the pope, and even over Catholic tradition, when it comes to biblical interpretation. Finally, Like Marsilius, Ockham would place emphasis on the literal sense, but his understanding of the literal sense differed from more traditional notions (as, e.g., found in Aquinas); for Marsilius and Ockham the literal sense was a reading of Scripture wherein the words of Scripture signified particular realities, as the authors intended, in the way any other human work signified realities.²⁸

28. On Aquinas's biblical interpretation, and especially his understanding of the literal sense, see, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.1.10; Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, 4.1; Aquinas, *In psalmos Davidis expositio*, prooemium; Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 10–11; Boyle, "Authorial Intention," 3–8; Yocum, "Aquinas' Literal Exposition," 21–42; Wawrykow, "Aquinas on Isaiah," 43–71; Baglow, "Rediscovering St. Thomas Aquinas," 137–46; Baglow, "Sacred Scripture," 1–25; Baglow, "Modus et Forma," especially 5–51; Hahn, "Search the Scriptures," 12–15; Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 41–45 and 84–85; Torrell, "Quand Saint Thomas," 179–208; Waldstein, "On Scripture," 73–94; and Kennedy, "Thomas Aquinas." Latin texts from Aquinas are taken from the Corpus Thomisticum.

REFORMATION POLITICS AND EARLY MODERN
RELIGIOUS WARS

This conflict between state rulers and the Church, with a particular focus on the papacy, would only increase as the centuries went by. Between Ockham and the Reformation a whole host of critical tools were developed. In many ways the Renaissance period saw the development of new scholarly tools in philology and textual criticism that would place Scripture study, with a renewed emphasis on the *sensus literalis* on a firm footing. Lorenzo Valla (1406–1457) proved pivotal in his devastating critique of the authenticity of the *Donation of Constantine*, which, alongside the allegorical interpretation of the “two swords” (Luke 22:36), had been used to buffer temporal papal authority. Even before Valla, however, new pre-Reformation shifts were taking place in England with the work of John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–1384).²⁹

Wycliffe’s metaphysical realism grounded his entire theo-political, and thus, exegetical project. Wycliffe was upset about the popularity of nominalist philosophy, but he was also disconcerted about ecclesiastical corruption. Although Wycliffe never learned Greek or Hebrew, philosophically he thought such study was extremely important for proper biblical interpretation. In a very Marsilian and Ockhamite fashion, Wycliffe passionately argued that the state had an obligation to control the civil realm and should thus take control of the Church’s temporal goods. In effect, Wycliffe argued for the Church’s disendowment by the state. As with Luther’s later teaching on two kingdoms, Wycliffe made a distinction between two types of dominion, “civil” and “evangelical.” Based on his discussion in a series of writings—e.g., *De Dominio Divino*, *De Civili Dominio*, and *De Officio Regis*—Wycliffe argued forcefully that a civil ruler must remove any Church holdings when clerics misuse such holdings, or when the holdings are “inordinate,” thus assisting clergy in their transformation to being more like the poor Christ himself.

In their chapter devoted to Wycliffe, Hahn and Wiker explain the important background context of English messianic nationalism which illuminates Wycliffe’s milieu, and will shed further light to the background of the English Reformation. As we shall see, something similar occurred with French messianic nationalism when we turn in our second chapter to our

29. In what follows, I again draw heavily from Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, in their volume’s third chapter, “John Wycliffe,” 61–115; and also Reventlow, *Bibelautorität*, 55–67. The sections in these two volumes are the only scholarly treatments, of which I am aware, that adequately situate Wycliffe within this important context in the history of biblical criticism. His significance becomes quite apparent later in Hahn and Wiker’s volume when they arrive at the English Reformation, and below we will discuss this significance as well.

discussion of Isaac La Peyrère. Wycliffe must be situated within this broader context of rising English nationalism which moves the earlier Marsilian focus from imperial political power to Wycliffe's concern for English national rule. For understanding Wycliffe's biblical exegesis, it is important to look at his work, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*. Here Wycliffe depicts Jesus as the true Word of God, in contrast to the Scriptural texts which are not the Word of God, but merely are informed by Christ the Word. Wycliffe made it abundantly clear that he saw his metaphysical realism, his philosophy, as a necessary prerequisite for proper exegesis. It is from his philosophical position, informed by his socio-political context, that Wycliffe buttresses his arguments for the state's forceful disendowment of the Church with passages from Scripture. Within this context, Wycliffe savagely critiqued religious orders, and particularly monasteries, which tied up so much land, and represented, for Wycliffe, the Church's corruption. "Court theologians," such as Wycliffe would become, were necessary, so he argued, to aid the state in its job of putting Church authorities in their proper place.

Eventually, Wycliffe's views spread and paved the way for the Protestant Reformation and what would come in later biblical scholarship. Wycliffe's ideas survived, particularly in Bohemia among those Bohemians who came to England during the Bohemian Queen Ann's marriage to England's King Richard II. In Bohemia, Wycliffite theology and exegesis exerted a tremendous influence on John Hus, and his Hussite followers. Both movements, the English Lollards (followers of Wycliffe) and Bohemian Hussites, sparked violent revolution and were thus put down as threats to their respective states. Nominalists, whose philosophy was directly opposed to that espoused by Wycliffe and Hus, were instrumental in attacking Hussites. Hahn and Wiker eruditely make the case that, "Although Wycliffe was a declared enemy of Ockham, insofar as he set forth an almost Marsilian argument he had the unintended effect (as did Ockham) of reinforcing the secularizing, politicizing thrust of Marsilius's thought."³⁰

An even more neglected figure than Wycliffe in the rise of modern biblical criticism during this time period is Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). What occurred in the Renaissance was also the replacement of traditional authority with the authority of specialists. The Renaissance turn to textual criticism followed the logic of Abelard's approach to the Church fathers, but involved more careful textual analysis, and was an important step in attempting to establish a standard text for Scripture. Such scholarship also initiated a trend, already present in Ockham, of elevating the scholar over the

30. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 113.

Magisterium.³¹ Machiavelli's political thought is an area that is well known by scholars. The role played by his interpretation of Moses for furthering his political ideas, and the extent of his influence on biblical interpretation, e.g. on Hobbes's and Spinoza's biblical criticism is less recognized. Machiavelli is especially significant for his early turn to the history behind the texts, which would become the central move Hobbes and Spinoza made in the seventeenth century.³²

Machiavelli's social and historical context in Florence of the latter-half of the fifteenth century is essential to understanding his oeuvre, and thus his contribution to the later development of historical criticism. The universally recognized instances of the corruption of the papacy and of some members of the clergy constitute the necessary background to this social and historical context. Machiavelli universalized the hypocritical lives of his contemporary Renaissance popes, assuming the same of all religious leaders, and then he read such religious hypocrisy back into the lives of biblical figures like Moses. Unlike what was to come later with figures like Spinoza, Machiavelli did not think such hypocrisy was always bad; in fact he encouraged it. Machiavelli presented the reader with Pope Alexander VI as a paradigmatic prince, for example. It was after being tortured during his imprisonment that Machiavelli would pen his most famous work, *The Prince*. Significantly, by this point, Machiavelli already had a wealth of personal political experience: he served as a secretary in Florence; as a formal representative of Florence he had numerous dealings with Cesare Borgia, Alexander VI's son; he sought to create an effective army for Florence; and, perhaps most importantly, as a Florentine diplomat he was able to travel with Pope Julius II in battle; and he travelled to the German Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I on behalf of Florence.

Machiavelli's writings prove very important for understanding the future fate of modern biblical criticism.³³ In *The Prince*, Machiavelli seeks to

31. Lawee, "Isaac Abarbanel," 203–4; Eriksen, "Some Sociopolitical," 102; Fried, *Donation of Constantine*, 28 and 30–32; Snobelen, "To us there is but one God," 116–17; Maddox, "Secular Reformation," 539–62; Geerken, "Machiavelli's Moses," 579–95; Marx, "Moses and Machiavellism," 551–71; Fubini, "Humanism and Truth," 79–86; Kugel, "Bible in the University," 143–65; and Goshen-Gottstein, "Christianity," 69–88.

32. In my analysis of Machiavelli that follows, I draw heavily from Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, from their fourth chapter, "Machiavelli," 117–46; as well as from Hammill, *Mosaic Constitution*, 31–66; Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*; Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude*, 11–37 and 45–111; Lynch, "Machiavelli on Reading the Bible," 29–55; Eriksen, "Some Sociopolitical," 102; Maddox, "Secular Reformation," 539–62; Geerken, "Machiavelli's Moses," 579–95; and Marx, "Moses and Machiavellism," 551–71.

33. With the notable exception of Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, wherein

effect a transformation of politics from its ancient otherworldly orientation (as in Plato's *Republic*) to a wholly this-worldly focus where the ultimate purpose is to preserve political authority, temporal power. Machiavelli seeks to secularize all politics for the very Marsilian goal of terrestrial peace. In order to do this, Machiavelli effects a wholesale transformation of biblical interpretation. The biblical Moses is placed in the context of pagan political leaders, effectively secularizing his role within Scripture. Moses is no longer a leader called by God to mediate God's covenant with the Israelites, but is transformed in Machiavelli's exegesis into solely a civil leader, a secular prince. With his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli is consciously trying to create a modern critical history. Within this account, Machiavelli shifts the question from religious veracity to its political utility. In Averroist fashion, Machiavelli sees religion as politically useful to keep order and control of a population, even though it is false. Whereas Averroës had a hierarchy of knowers (with philosophers at the top of the pyramid), Machiavelli focused on the political use of religion by princely rulers who use religious concepts to keep people in check.

With its emphasis on *sola scriptura*, the Protestant Reformation, which began during Machiavelli's lifetime, took trends, particularly from Ockham, and then went further than Renaissance thinkers in challenging the contemporaneous understanding of patristic interpretation. The Reformation itself played an important role in continuing the trajectory set by Nominalism and Renaissance philology. With their emphasis on the literal sense and their denigration of traditional Catholic spiritual exegesis, Protestant Reformers furthered the move towards modern biblical criticism, severing ties with the Catholic Magisterium as the locus of biblical interpretive authority.³⁴ The Reformation attack on allegorical interpretation furthered the

they devote an entire chapter to Machiavelli, few histories of modern biblical scholarship even mention Machiavelli in passing. Indeed, the most mention he receives in the standard works on the history of biblical scholarship, is in Sæbø's ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament II*, specifically in Eriksen, "Some Sociopolitical," 102, where we read about Machiavelli, only in passing: "Only with Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540) and Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) do we encounter a more modern form of historiography that concerns itself with how causes work together to produce historical events. . . . In Machiavelli the study of history was motivated by an interest in the natural regularities that steer social and political processes. If factual accounts did not accord with a basic standard of accuracy, then one could not learn anything from history. Writers did not use history to exemplify wisdom they already possessed, but to find still hidden causal connections." Thus the following analysis of Machiavelli's writings in regard to his place in the early formation of what would become modern historical biblical criticism draws heavily upon the discussion in Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 127–42.

34. Barron, "Biblical Interpretation," 180; and Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism*, 23–42.

drive toward historical criticism, and the Reformation itself was not void of politics.³⁵ As Travis Frampton makes clear:

the Reformation was, at heart, politically engendered. What were the *protests* of Magisterial Reformers, if not political? Did Catholicism or Protestantism represent the *kingdom* of God on earth—and if the latter, which of its divergent forms would be representative? What part were churches of the Reformation to have in the numerous, religiously disparate European states? In the end, were leaders like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin satisfied with the Catholic Church, wanting only to reform church practice and dogma? Why did so many Lutheran and Reformed churches vie against Catholicism—and at times against each other—in order to become the established church of the (representative) state? Certainly the vision of Protestants did not exclude the political sphere!³⁶

Indeed, it seems unlikely that it is a mere coincidence that the regions of Europe which remained Catholic through the Reformation had prior concordats limiting the pope's authority in their realms, and that the Protestant Reformation was most successful in realms where no such means of limiting the pope's reach existed.³⁷ At its core, however, the Protestant Reformation could never be completely severed from the changing political order. Western Europe was undergoing its bloody transformation from complex feudal space to modern centralized states which would ultimately subordinate the Church to the state.³⁸ As we shall see further below, the case of England is paradigmatic where support for the Reformation was driven by state politics, and all opposition was crushed.³⁹

35. It should be noted, however, that it might be more accurate to say that the Reformers broadened the *sensus literalis* rather than completely abolished the spiritual sense of Scripture, even when, like Calvin, they explicitly attacked the idea of a spiritual sense. See, e.g., Raeder, "Exegetical and Hermeneutical Work," 371–73; Steinmetz, "John Calvin," 282–91; and Muller, "Hermeneutic of Promise," 68–82.

36. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism*, 13.

37. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 166–67; Duffy, *Saints & Sinners*, 175 and 199; Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 400–1; and Skinner, *Foundations*, 59–60.

38. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 123–80; Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism*, 13; Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 243–74; and Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 397–420.

39. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 377–523; Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 128–39, 153–61, and 175–84; Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 84–151; and Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination*, 41–125 and 157–207.

In this context, Luther's role in the Reformation and in the transformation of biblical interpretation is important to consider, even if only briefly.⁴⁰ Luther confessed Ockham to be both the greatest philosopher and Luther's own master, among whose followers Luther numbered himself, and whose teachings he claimed to have completely imbibed. Such nominalism aided in Luther's severing of faith and reason, which eventually would lead to modern biblical scholars de-Hellenizing Scripture. The primary political context with the German Reformation was an extension of the throne vs. altar conflict we already encountered with Marsilius and Ockham, who were likewise embroiled in the Germanic politics of Ludwig of Bavaria. In Luther's time, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I had machinations of ruling the region that would later become Italy, including the Papal States, but was also in conflict with the German electors, including Frederick III, Elector of Saxony and soon to be protector of Luther. Frederick was also frustrated by the papal taxes and other financial revenue that was redirected to Rome, and was likewise in conflict with his local bishops, most of whom were from the German nobility.

In light of this historical situation, and the long history stretching back to Marsilius and Ockham, Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* and his call to reform must be situated within the broader context of the history of the call to reform already recounted, beginning with the poverty debate. The *Ninety-Five Theses* fit quite well within the guideposts of Catholic orthodoxy.⁴¹ The complicating economic and political factor was that moneys for indulgences bled out of German regions and flowed to the papacy. Thus, Luther's challenges to reform on that matter of indulgences fit conveniently into German national aspirations and to anger against Rome that had been fomenting for quite some time. It was with Luther's turn to Scripture as sole authority (the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*) that the search for a method to replace Catholic tradition became earnest, and it was in the wake of theological divisions, each faction defending itself through Scripture that Luther handed over the body to the state. Luther turned to the state, much like Wycliffe before him, to control the public secular realm. But it was because of Luther's understanding of the "priesthood of all believers" and

40. In what follows on Luther, I draw heavily from Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, their fifth chapter, "Luther and the Reformation," 147–219; Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism*, 23–42; Scribner and Dixon, *German Reformation*; Marius, *Martin Luther*; Brecht, *Martin Luther*; García de Haro, *Historia teológica del modernismo*, 119–29 and 157–234; and McSorley, *Luthers Lehre*.

41. See, e.g., Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 158–59 and 159n55; Anderson, *Sin*, 162–63; and Anderson, "Redeem Your Sins," 66–69 and 68–69n71.

his grounding in no authority aside from Scripture, that the peasants who rebelled saw Luther as their inspiration.

Luther's declaration *sola fide* (justification by faith alone) became his hermeneutical key for unlocking Scripture's meaning, and thus Luther's idea of "promise" replaced the traditional role of typology. Upset with justifications of papal authority from spiritual exegesis, against which Ockham had earlier written as well, Luther severed Scripture's intimate bond with the liturgy, and erected sharp dichotomies between the "letter" and the "spirit," the "law" and the "gospel," and, importantly, the "Old" and "New" Testaments. Although Luther explicitly placed an exegetical emphasis on the literal sense, Hahn and Wiker rightly caution that, "It is misleading . . . to assume that the importance of Luther as an exegete is his focus on the literal account of Scripture; rather, his importance consists in substituting the dialectical mode of exegesis for the traditional fourfold meaning of Scripture."⁴² Luther began to support state involvement in enforcing his version of orthodoxy. He found this necessary in the wake of the multiple radically diverse interpretations and positions that were emerging, at least ostensibly inspired by him. Luther thus began to affirm a form of Erastianism, wherein the state controlled the church, at least in the appointment of ecclesiastical officials. This is the origin of Luther's doctrine on "two kingdoms," church and state. Luther separated the realm of the secular from the realm of the sacred, as had Marsilius and Ockham before him, and thereby unwittingly aided in the construction of a newly emerging secular realm where the political could be severed from the ecclesiastical and wield autonomous temporal authority.⁴³ Given this, it should come as no surprise that many German princes welcomed Luther's teachings. After all, in the wake of the Peasants' Revolt (which claimed to be inspired by Luther), Luther advised the civil rulers to demolish rebels without clemency. R.W. Scribner and C. Scott Dixon provide an interesting comment on the reception of Luther and the sociology of the fate of the Reformation in Germany:

After a brief period of mass enthusiasm, it [support for the Reformation] retreated to being a minority phenomenon. At a crude estimate, during the first generation of the Reformation, up to mid-century, and perhaps even during the second, probably no more than 10 percent of the German population ever showed an active and lasting enthusiasm for reformed ideas. Where massive numbers were "won" after 1526, to what became

42. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 177.

43. See, e.g., *ibid.*, 201–6; Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 399–400; Skinner, *Foundations*, 15; and Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius*, 6.

the new church, it occurred involuntarily, through a prince deciding that his territory should adopt the new faith. When we speak of the extensive hold “Protestantism” had on Germany by the second half of the sixteenth century . . . this was because there were large numbers of “involuntary Protestants” created by the princes’ confessional choices.⁴⁴

In the context of Luther’s contribution to later biblical criticism, it is also significant that Luther developed a notion of a “canon within the canon.” He explicitly exalted the Gospel of John, St. Paul’s epistles (particularly Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians), and First Peter, above all other portions of Scripture. After the Reformation (i.e., later within the history of modern historical biblical criticism), exegetes progressed from Luther’s sifting through the canon to distinguish authentic books from less authentic (or even inauthentic) books, to sifting through individual biblical books themselves, for the authentic “kernels.” Luther’s task was doubtless already made possible by earlier works like Abelard’s *Sic et Non* relating to the authenticity of sayings from Scripture and the church fathers.⁴⁵ As we already saw, however, in Luther’s attempt to aid the German princes in their battle with the papacy he unwittingly handed over interpretive authority to secular rulers. Hahn and Wiker underscore the ironic result:

[I]nterpretive differences created a kind of industry of textual scholarship, producing more and more questions that only scholars had any hope of resolving. This had the interesting but entirely unintended effect of removing biblical interpretation from the hands of the common man to whom it had just been given, and handing it to academic experts, thereby creating an exegetical elite that duplicated the function of the Catholic *traditio* in defining interpretation authoritatively.⁴⁶

From Luther we must turn briefly to the English Reformation that erupted during his era.⁴⁷ It is often forgotten that historical criticism was born in the

44. Scribner and Dixon, *German Reformation*, 34. Something similar can be said for the English Reformation, as we shall see below, and as is illustrated in Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

45. For a critical edition, see Abelard, *Sic et Non*. See also the comments in Pernoud, *Héloïse et Abélard*.

46. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 218.

47. In what follows I draw heavily from *ibid.*, in their sixth chapter, “England and Henry VIII,” 221–55; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; Vázquez de Prada, *Sir Tomás Moro*, 164–209, 233–82, 307–17, and 354–70; Wegemer, *Thomas More on Statesmanship*, 161–82; Wegemer, *Thomas More*, 97–108, 128–70, 182–92, and 210–17; and Reventlow, *Bibelautorität*, 161–312.

world of English Deism prior to its entrance into the German academy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the English Reformation (inspired in part by the German Reformation and the earlier Wycliffite trends of the Lollards in late medieval England) emerged Deist biblical criticism that would later transplant itself in the academic culture of Germany in the Enlightenment and nineteenth century. One of the elements, although certainly not the only one by any means, which proves important for understanding the English Reformation is King Henry VIII's "Great Matter," concerning his desire to marry Anne Boleyn. In this context it is important to recognize, as Hahn and Wiker point out, that, "the infamous divorce from Henry's first wife was not the cause but the occasion for the creation of the official Church of England."⁴⁸

The king's "Great Matter" has several ironies, not least of which is that Henry VIII had previously argued against divorce. The Christian ban on divorce was one of the chief marks, according to Henry, that set apart Christian marriage from non-Christian marriage. Henry entered into this early debate on account of Luther. Luther and other Protestant Reformers (including Philip Melanchthon and Martin Bucer) had been considering divorce and even polygamy (or at least bigamy) as permissible under certain circumstances. One infamous case in this regard involved Philip of Hesse's desire to marry a second wife. The Reformers were able to make arguments in favor of divorce and bigamy precisely by desacramentalizing marriage. In this context Henry VIII wrote a robust defense of marriage as a sacrament. Henry of course had numerous mistresses, and his "Great Matter" became so great when Anne Boleyn refused to be his mistress, settling for nothing less than the crown as his bride.

The early English translation of the Bible and the work of William Tyndale was likewise an important contribution to the English Reformation, and it further aided Henry VIII's politics. Influenced by Luther and Melanchthon, with whom he spent time in Wittenberg, Tyndale propagated Protestantism in England from abroad. His English translation of Scripture became hugely influential, but was suspect within Catholic circles because of the theological bent of his translation. Henry VIII initially opposed Tyndale's translation. Because of the influence of Anne Boleyn, upon whom Henry had already cast his eyes, however, Henry VIII read (at least portions of) Tyndale's 1528 *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, which argued that a Christian had an obligation, laid upon them by none other than God, to obey his temporal sovereign, even over and against the papacy. Unsurprisingly, Henry became most pleased with this treatise.

48. Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 223.

A significant turning point in this history was when King Henry became convinced that he had biblical backing for annulling his marriage to Queen Catherine and taking Anne Boleyn as wife, namely Lev 18:16's prohibition of taking a brother's wife (since Catherine had been the wife of his late brother), with the added punishment that the couple in such a sinful state shall remain childless (Lev 20:21). Thus, Henry blamed his lack of a male heir through Catherine as due to God's punishment for his having taken his brother's wife, even though his brother was dead. This "Great Matter" unleashed a torrent of exegesis, both in England and on the continent, over what course Henry could and should take. Due to Anne's becoming pregnant with Henry's child, the king married her out of the public's eye, and later, through the aid of Thomas Cranmer, then Henry's appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, the English state annulled Henry's marriage to Catherine. It is difficult to overestimate the dramatic shift that took place with this action: Henry's marriage was annulled by the state and not by the papacy. As Hahn and Wiker underscore, this "marks the turning point at which the Church *in* England becomes the Church *of* England."⁴⁹

Although almost completely ignored in the scholarship, with some notable exceptions as in the work of Hahn and Wiker, the available evidence suggests the strong influence of both Machiavelli and Marsilius on Henry's English Reformation. A number of the apologists of the Henrician reform policies utilized Machiavelli's and Marsilius' works, e.g., Richard Morison, who used Machiavelli in Morison's attempts at helping to create and then to legitimize Henry's reform, and also Thomas Starkey, who turned Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis* into a blueprint of Henry's political reform agenda. Furthermore, many of these future Henrician apologists congregated around Reginald Pole in Averroist Padua where they were immersed in such political philosophical discussions. Thomas Cromwell, one of the key members of Henry's inner circle, was likely influenced by Machiavelli as well, and Cromwell himself was responsible for getting Marsilius' *Defensor Pacis* published in English. The Marsilian program of subordinating the Church to the state found complete expression in Henry's state church. Thus we see how Marsilius', Machiavelli's, and Wycliffe's combined influences set the stage in England for Henry's reform, which would in turn lay the seedbed for Hobbes and the future Deist exegesis which would follow upon John Locke and John Toland.

It is in the seventeenth century, however, that we find the most important transition which led to the rise of the historical critical method for

49. Ibid., 236.

interpreting Scripture.⁵⁰ The works of Isaac La Peyrère, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, and Fr. Richard Simon are pivotal here.⁵¹ These four figures would build a foundation to launch modern biblical interpretation far into the future, into the twenty-first century. This present volume focuses on the first of those four figures, La Peyrère, Hobbes, and Spinoza. I will thus only mention a few important highlights concerning those three figures below, since the remaining chapters in the volume will treat them more extensively. Before turning to these exegetes, however, we should note one further intellectual contribution that undergirds modern biblical criticism, namely René Descartes (1596–1650).⁵²

Descartes emerges as important particularly for his role in laying the intellectual groundwork for the hermeneutics and exegesis that would develop in his wake, and he is far more important here than for his particular use of Scripture, especially since Descartes blatantly laid aside the Bible in his philosophical program. It is his emphasis on method itself, as well as for the particulars of his method that constitute the significance of Descartes. The political focus of what came before, in figures like Marsilius and Machiavelli, now received a cosmological and epistemological foundation from thinkers like Galileo and Descartes. The seventeenth century “wars of religion” is extremely important for understanding Descartes, but also the figures who came after, especially Hobbes and Spinoza.

The “wars of religion” emerge as an essential context for understanding the biblical criticism that was generated and forged in the seventeenth century.⁵³ As Jon Levenson explains:

It is no coincidence that the early pioneers of biblical criticism—Hobbes, Spinoza, Richard Simon—lived in the aftermath of the Thirty Years’ War. Through the famous formula *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose’s realm, his religion), the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which ended that war, established the superiority of the state over religion in fact and provided a hospitable climate for a theory to the same effect.⁵⁴

50. Goshen-Gottstein, “Foundations of Biblical Philology,” 77–94.

51. Goshen-Gottstein, “Textual Criticism,” 376.

52. In what follows on Descartes, I draw heavily from Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, from their seventh chapter, “Descartes and the Secular Cosmos,” 257–84; Kennington, *On Modern Origins*, especially 105–22; Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought*, especially 197–211; Gaukroger, “Nature of Abstract Reasoning,” 91–114; Lachterman, *Ethics of Geometry*; and Popkin, “Cartesianism and Biblical Criticism,” 61–81.

53. In this discussion on the European “wars of religion,” I draw on an earlier conference presentation, Morrow, “Revisiting the Seventeenth-Century,” 66–80, as well as on Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 123–80; Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 243–74; and Cavanaugh, “Fire Strong Enough,” 397–420.

54. Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 117.