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# Who Wrote What When: The Bible, Science and Criticism

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According to the traditional (or 'whig') interpretation of history, sometime in the seventeenth century science was born in the form that we know today, in a new spirit that can best be summed up by the motto of the Royal Society: nullius in verba, take nobody's word for it. In the next few centuries this new critical way of looking at reality was instrumental in the creation of a coherent view of the world, and of that world's history, which was found to be increasingly at odds with traditional claims, most famously in the case of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. By the end of the nineteenth century, the divide between science and religion was described by means of words such as 'conflict' and 'warfare,' the terms used by John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White in the titles of their respective books: *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) and *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896).

It is probably no coincidence that both authors just cited in the abstract are American: their ideas still echo in America where this view of the conflict may have partly been inspired by the militant anti-Catholicism of protestant America (in the case of the first book), but it is in the United States that this particular battle is still being fought today. Millions of dollars are invested each year by well-meaning philanthropists and religious apologists in order to show that there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of by mere scientists.

The continuing commotion about the teaching of creation science and/or intelligent design in American schools has only managed to strengthen this enlightenment view of the history of science, although historians and scientists such as Stephen Jay Gould have claimed that the relationship between science and religion was, and is, much more complicated than this simple picture suggests.[1] The fact that the mutual misunderstanding of religion and science is, to a large extent, a North-American phenomenon should not blind us to the fact that in Europe too, anti-scientific ideas are being promoted, not just through Muslim channels of communication, but increasingly also by American evangelical churches

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and institutes. In both cases, scientific nonsense is used to promote faith-based ideas that are premised on the opposition between the current scientific consensus about, on the one hand, the beginnings of the universe and the evolution of life on earth, and on the other hand, the traditional teachings of the holy books of Christianity and Islam. This leads to the impression that science and religion clash because what is written in the Bible and Quran does not conform to the realities that have been discovered independently by science. In reality, the story is not only more complex but also more interesting: when we look closely at the current debates among fundamentalist Christians, and especially at their polemics with dissenting groups in their own ranks, with the more liberal churches and with what they themselves call the 'secular culture' that they oppose, we can see that the focus on fighting a certain form of what is perceived as 'secular' or atheist science serves to hide a fundamental anxiety about the very nature of the Holy Texts that are so central to their beliefs.[2]

Medieval philosophers studied two books, the Book of Nature or the world, and the Book of God, the bible. God was the author of both, so they were believed to tell the same story. We tend to think that it is in science that Europe excelled, beginning in the seventeenth century, and thus in the study of the book of nature, but in the same period Europe also played a pioneering role in the critical study of God's book and in textual studies in general. Especially in the early phase of the scientific revolution, the study of nature and the study of texts were not seen as separate realms, but parts of a single continuum. Often enough, the same people were involved in what, since C.P. Snow, we have learned to consider as two separate cultures. Isaac Newton was spending almost as much time on his chronological and biblical studies as on the work for which he later became the most renowned scientist of his century and of whom Alexander Pope could write: 'Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night./God said "Let Newton be and all was light."' While Newton was enlightening his contemporaries on the laws governing the solar system, he was also carefully studying the bible.

Richard Bentley, the most important classical scholar of this time, was instrumental in convincing Newton to bring out a second and corrected edition of his *Principia* in 1713 to which the author now added a comment that constitutes a version of the argument from design: 'This most beautiful System of the Sun, Planets and Comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.' Bentley not only borrowed Newton's scientific argument for the existence of a Deity, he was also among the first to introduce the famous Cambridge scientist's findings on gravity to a larger audience, not accidentally in the form of a series of lectures designed to combat atheism and freethinking and also not accidentally as part of an endowed series of lectures paid for by the natural philosopher Robert Boyle as a forum for scientists for the defense of Christianity against atheists, Deists, heathen, Jews and Mohammedans.[3] The Boyle lectures were discontinued in 1965, but it may be a sign of the times that they were revived again in 2004.

At the turn of the seventeenth century freethinking, deism, materialism and atheism were believed to be rampant, a danger to public and private morality. The word 'free-thinker' had first been used by the philosopher Berkeley to dismiss John Toland's claim in 1696 that Christianity need not be 'mysterious' in a book that also called for religious tolerance, a claim that was important enough to have the book publicly burned by the

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Dublin authorities. The word was adopted by Toland's more adventurous contemporaries and it must have had a certain currency by 1713 when it appeared in the title of Anthony Collins's 1713 controversial book *A Discourse of Freethinking, Occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Freethinkers*. The subtitle of the book shows that freethinking was becoming more than the philosophical musing of one or two individuals. Freethinkers and deists both believed that, like other forms of enquiry, religion needed to be a rational pursuit and that even revelation (and thus the biblical texts) could not be 'against reason'.

Historians of classical scholarship have described this same period as the birth of a new form of textual and historical study (Wilamowitz, Pfeiffer, Grafton)[4] and that general development could only have occurred after the invention of printing, just as this new information technology also played a decisive role in the rapid spread of the findings of the new sciences, as Elizabeth Eisenstein has shown.[5] We should remember that before printing, all the writings of even the most brilliant minds were constantly in danger of being damaged as the result of bad copying or, when they weren't copied at all, they could disappear altogether. It is only with the invention of printing that perfectly identical copies of a single work gave a fixed and more-or-less final form to a text. Before the middle of the fifteenth century no two texts of the same work were ever identical and a 'work' by an author was not a fixed sequence of textual marks but at most a cloud of possibilities. This may have been troublesome to readers of literary or philosophical works who wanted to know what Plato or Sophocles had written, but what about legal or religious documents that also existed in clearly different versions? When we look at the use of documents in medieval and early renaissance polemics, we find that in almost all of them faulty or forged documents of some sort were being used and sometimes (as an outsider) one gets the impression that not a single document written in the Middle Ages was really what it purported to be: forgery seems to have been the rule, not the exception.[6]

Most famous in the medieval context was the controversy between the Eastern and the Western churches about the crucial phrase 'filioque' which had been added to the Creed in the Western church and which became one of the major causes of the Great Schism of 1054 that continues to divide the Western and Eastern Churches. The issue was theological but textual too: did the Creed adopted at Nicaea really include the word in italics: 'Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum, et vivificantem: qui ex Patre *Filioque* procedit.' [And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father *and of the Son*.] The theological relevance of the addition of a single Latin word was of enormous importance for the theological definition of the nature of the different persons of the Trinity (with the Holy Ghost proceeding not from the Father alone, but also from the Son). The precise definition of the Trinity had been a major problem in the first four Christian centuries and the *filioque* controversy caused serious problems not just during the Great Schism, but it continues to be problematic in the relationship between the western and orthodox churches. In one of the theologically most liberal churches, the Church of England, the omission of the phrase from the liturgy was first requested at the 1978 Lambeth Conference (the governing council) and again in 1988, but the request has not been implemented and the proposal was silently dropped in 1998 and 2008.

When a theology is based on a revelation that is thought to be of divine origin, care for the exact form of the revealed texts is of the utmost importance: why would one accept a

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mere human's version of God's message? Most revealed religions have rules about copying the scriptures, which are supposed to guarantee the complete reliability of not just the original revelation, but also of the copying process. In a manuscript culture there are always differences between the first form of the text and all its later copies and this is also true for the Christian bible, one of the foundational documents of Western culture. But before we can look at the ways in which the bible has been read and studied, we must first agree on what that book is.

As its Greek plural title, *biblia* indicates, the bible is not a single work but a collection of writings that only became a single book in a process that took a long time. First of all, the exact selection of books in both the Old Testament and New Testament and the order in which they appear have never really been settled and something similar is true for the exact nature of the text. This is obvious when we compare the different versions in use in different Christian communities and it is also true in the case of the Jewish bible, which forms the basis of what Christians call the Old Testament, a loose collection of texts considered to be special by most Jews at the beginning of the Common Era. The core of this collection is certainly the Torah, the first five books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri and Deuteronomy, but the rest of the selection is hazy at best: some of the books that are included in modern Jewish bibles are only tangentially religious, such as Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, and 20 centuries ago there were certainly other books in circulation that are not included in the rabbinical bibles in use today. The Hebrew bible as it is read today by religious Jews is a collection of texts that did not have an existence as a single object until it was first published in the form of a codex, and the texts themselves date from different time periods and were written by different people for different audiences. In some cases, careful study can even reveal different layers within the same text (representing additions by later writers that altered the original meaning).

These different and sometimes contradictory voices in a supposedly single text are the result of the fact that, like all religions and like all cultural institutions, Judaism witnessed a series of historical developments, and we know from the evidence of the scrolls found at the Dead Sea site of Qumram, that the period between the first century before and the first century after the Common Era showed a particularly rich variety of different Jewish religious groups, all different from the later rabbinical form that we know today. Most important for Christian readers is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Jewish writings that was probably made in Egypt and that was used by Hellenistic Jews there and in Palestine (parts of it were found in Qumram). It is this Greek version that is the only version of significance for the Christian writers of the New Testament when they refer to the Jewish scriptures.

Although to some extent most modern versions of the New Testament are forms of a version of the text that has been called the *Textus Receptus*, a Greek text of the New Testament that is ultimately based on an edition made by Erasmus. It is this text that formed the basis of most protestant translations, most famously the King James Version that is so beloved by American fundamentalists that some of them end up claiming divine inspiration for the process of translation. But Erasmus's text was not meant to be an original, neither for the whole bible nor for the individual books of the gospels and epistles (which is something else entirely). Erasmus based his edition on just a few late

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Greek manuscripts and these were assembled haphazardly. This is obvious in at least one case: the end of the book of Revelations (and thus of the whole bible). For this, Erasmus did not even have a manuscript, so he translated that part back into Greek from the Latin Vulgate version.

At first reading, the earliest Christian writings, such as the letters of Paul, do not seem meant to represent the word of God: they are letters after all, sent by a leader of the church to his followers in the different communities that he had founded. For these earliest Christians (writers and primary audience) the only Scriptures they knew were the Jewish books of the bible and we can't even be sure exactly which of these books were in use among them. But at some point the Christian books themselves acquired a more universal status, and at a still later stage these texts were beginning to be considered as divine in origin (although again we don't know which texts were given that status). It is only in a relatively late Christian text such as 2 Timothy 3:16 that we read: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' Probably the most famous of the injunctions about the unchangeable nature of the text is to be found at the very end of the New Testament, in the Book of Revelations. After Jesus himself has said that he is the alpha and omega, the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, he makes the following statement, in the King James translation:

> For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.
>
> And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Apoc 22: 18–19)

It is at least mildly amusing that these verses are part of the text that the first editor responsible for the *textus receptus*, did not find in his manuscript and so had to back-translate from Latin into Greek: one can only hope that the 'plagues that are written in this book' were not 'added' unto Erasmus. Even more ironic is that both of these claims about the nature of the Christian texts are not just late, but that they appear in texts that were certainly not written by the persons to whom they are traditionally ascribed: most biblical scholars now agree that Paul is not the author of the second letter to Timothy and that the Book of Revelation was definitely not written by the apostle John.

It should be clear that in a religion of revelation, the status of texts is not a trivial problem. When it is claimed that the text in front of you is the Word of God and that it is literally true (or 'inerrant' as fundamentalists prefer to say), you simply cannot afford to have different versions of that Word. Yet all surviving versions of sections of the bible that we have show small and larger variations, both in the form of the text and in the choice of which works were included. We know that the early Church Fathers were aware of textual corruptions and they certainly knew that heretics were all too willing to change or even create new Scripture. This is clear in the correspondence between the two most important Latin church fathers, Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome, who had the added problem of working with a Latin version of scripture that they knew was a translation from the Greek, partly original (in the case of the New Testament), but partly

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itself a Greek version (the Septuagint) of a selection of Hebrew books. Saint Jerome, the translator of part of what later became the standard Latin edition of the bible (commonly called the Vulgate), was well aware that there were important differences between the existing old Latin translation and the Greek and Hebrew originals. And if there were more than one version, which of these represented what God had wanted to say?

In the first three centuries, the church fathers were writing in the context of a Roman empire where Christianity was a growing minority religion, so they had to defend their position both against Greek philosophers who ridiculed Christianity and against Jewish opponents who had a different interpretation of partly the same scriptures, and against a whole series of dissenting 'heretics' who were sometimes using different (sets of) holy texts or different versions of the same texts. In a number of books, Bart Ehrman has discussed what he calls the 'orthodox corruption' of Scripture as part of the early Church's battle against dissension and heresy.[7] Sometimes these textual discussions went to the core of the Christian doctrine, as in the virgin birth of Jesus, which was based on an interpretation of a prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.' But the word *parthenos*, virgin, that appears in the Greek translation of the book of Isaiah, is *almah* in the Hebrew original and as Jews did not tire of pointing out, the word only means young woman or maiden and has nothing to do with virginity. Since we know that the earliest gospel, Mark's, does not refer to the birth of Christ at all, we can assume that the idea of the virginity of the Messiah's mother arose relatively late in the development of the new religion. Since this involves one of the central doctrines of the young church, it became crucial that the verse in the Old Testament was translated 'correctly'.

Examples such as these demonstrate that religions based on a written revelation are faced with a central hermeneutical problem: like all other cultural institutions, religions change, while the texts on which they claim to be based remain stable. In the two rather different cases of the Jewish and the Christian bible we have a good sense of the ways in which these religions learned to cope with that problem: on the one hand troublesome books or sections of these books were normalized (adapted to the new ideas) by means of commentaries (in the case of the Jewish bible these are called *midrashim* and in the case of the Quran the *hadith* play a similar role) or by means of not-so-faithful translations that explain what the text means (not necessarily what it says). From the Hellenistic culture in which they lived, Jews and Christians also adopted the use of allegorical ways of reading that had been developed by the Greeks to make the primitive image of the Gods in Homer more palatable for a later philosophically more sophisticated audience. If a text or part of a text did not make sense (or made the wrong sense), it was permissible to re-interpret that literal meaning as a more or less veiled allegory of a deeper philosophical truth. This strategy was often adopted by the Christian apologetic writers when they had to defend their religion against attacks from Greek philosophers such as Celsus and Porphyrius, who claimed that the bible was incoherent and philosophically naïve.

These issues ceased to be purely theological or academic as soon as Christianity was adopted by the Roman Emperors. From that point on, these issues became issues of state, already forcing the first Christian emperor to bully the bishops into resolving as best as they could the remaining doctrinal problems about the exact nature of the Trinity, leading

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to a formulation of the Creed that became orthodoxy and that, as a result, turned all the alternatives, such as Arianism, into heresies. The decision itself had little to do with religion and everything to do with politics: we know that emperor Constantine may not have been convinced by the theological arguments of his bishops, because at the end of life he let himself be baptized by an Arian bishop.

The next millennium of Christianity and thus of a Christian Europe is marked by the occasional realization that the Word of God had been transmitted in mysteriously divergent ways, although of course this was not immediately evident in the fragmented world of the early Middle Ages, when different versions of the same book would only rarely end up in the same place, and it is not a coincidence that we have to wait until Charlemagne tried to re-create the Holy Roman Empire that we have reports of an attempt to create a standard version of the bible text: after all, under the Emperor everything was standardized: the mint, education, writing and also religion. We know from his correspondence that the scholar Alcuin was engaged, on the orders of the Emperor, on the emendation of the Old and New Testament, and although we have no direct knowledge of what it was that Alcuin did to the text, scholars now speak of an Alcuinian family of Latin bibles produced at Tours. But in a manuscript culture where books keep being copied, in the long run such attempts at standardization are bound to be in vain. During the next few centuries scholars kept having to revise existing copies of the bible on the basis of comparison with other copies they had available. The results were so-called correctories, lists of variants from Latin and Greek manuscripts and from the writings of the Church Fathers, to be used in correcting new copies of the bible. Again, it is no coincidence that it was in the cosmopolitan scholarly atmosphere of the University of Paris that the need arose for a universal order and selection of the different bible books and for a division in chapters that made reference and correction much easier than before.

In the fourteenth century, the establishment of universities and other intellectual centers had led to a renewed interest in all kinds of texts, their transmission and study. The political and religious rivalry between the popes in Avignon and their counterparts in Rome led to more controversy and polemics, and thus to a renewed interest in all kinds of texts, among them the letters of Cicero, which were collected avidly in order to develop and encourage a new elegant writing style in Latin. The renewed interest in ancient texts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that we call humanist and which began before the invention of printing, almost automatically led to a new interest in textual variants, in the correct form of these works and in the question of their authenticity. Humanist writers collected manuscripts of Greek works and Latin texts, which they edited, corrected and, if necessary, attributed to somebody else. According to the old view of history, their work led to a new appreciation of antiquity, but as many more recent historians have pointed out, their interest was not restricted to pagan works: a lot of energy also went into collecting and editing early Christian works, especially the works of the early church fathers and other early documents of the church, which had mostly survived in the form of glosses, but were now being edited and published in their full form: Erasmus is a good example of this trend, publishing both the first biography and the first complete edition of the works of Saint Jerome.

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Although pagan Latin and Greek texts did have an influence on the emerging culture of the renaissance, the impact of the study of Christian texts was probably more important in the long run, because writers such as Erasmus were using the same methodologies in assessing the authorship, date and provenance of the Christian texts as were used in studying Cicero's letters or other pagan works. Early on, this led to some astonishing feats of literary detection, as when the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla showed that the famous Donation of Constantine (in which the emperor gave dominion of the Roman Empire to the pope, forming the basis of the pope's temporal powers) was a forgery.

Needless to say, after Erasmus (who applied Valla's methods to other Christian texts, including the New Testament itself) the careful study of the bible and of other early Christian texts became crucially important in the debates between the Church of Rome and the reformers. Like Islam and Judaism, Christianity is based on a written revelation, which makes it in itself historical, and the reformers claimed, like all preceding and following challengers of the orthodoxy, that they were only trying to reconnect with the original Christianity, a version of the humanist *ad fontes*, the return to the sources that had been Erasmus's motive in bringing out editions of the patristic writings. In the next centuries this would lead to a renewed interest in accurate texts of the earliest Christian writings, with the massive undertaking of the editions of the church fathers by the Maurist fathers in a period of about 80 years, starting in 1665.[8] It was one of these Maurists, Jean Maubillon, who in 1681 published *De re diplomatica libri VI* in which he founded the science of palaeography, classifying handwritings in historical periods.[9]

The simultaneous study of the two books, the Book of Nature and the Book of God, led many a scientist astray, if only because the two Books were supposed to contain the same story. The rational and experimental principles employed in the study of nature were not yet applied in the study of the Bible. The result of this pre-critical and pre-historical trust in Scripture was that Bible verses were often used as evidence, leading scientists in very wrong directions, not only in the famous case against Galileo's theory about a heliocentric universe but in nearly every field of scientific endeavor. Arguments from the bible were just as important as experimental findings and it is strange for us to see that Newton agreed with Richard Bentley that his theory of gravity supplied a convincing argument for the existence of a deity.

Quite a few of the important scientists (or natural philosophers, as they were still called), were not just active in fields that we would now recognize as scientific in the strict sense of the word, but also in what we would now consider as part of the humanities. When we look at the seventeenth century, where most people would situate the beginning of modern science, we see that three of the most important scientists of the time were active in both of what we now consider as two completely separate fields.

Some scientists, most famously Isaac Newton, had non-conformist views on the Trinity, which were based on a thorough study of the biblical texts (which contain no references to the orthodox view). In 1690 he wrote 'An Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture', in which he showed that the famous Comma Johanneum, a proof text for the Trinity, which Erasmus had already exposed as a late addition to the Latin traditions of the biblical text, was indeed a corruption. The book could not be published during Newton's lifetime: denying one of the central tenets of

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orthodox Christianity was a capital crime. Denying the truth of the orthodox view of the Trinity was an especially dangerous form of heresy, as the Spanish scholar Miguel Serveto Conesa found out. This scientist, who was the first to describe pulmonary circulation, more than half a century before William Harvey) had the distinction of having been condemned to death both by the Catholic inquisition and by Calvin in Geneva, who had him burned at the stake with what was presumed to be the last copy of his book.[10]

Only nine years after Newton finished his book, an 18-year-old student was hanged in Edinburgh for blasphemy in general and his rejection of the Trinity in particular. This does not mean that Newton was an atheist, as this Thomas Aikenhead probably was, but his interest in corruptions to the Bible was limited to the two proof texts for the Trinity (which are now accepted by all textual scholars and they have been deleted, in the case of the first, and emended in all modern editions of the bible). This was not the scientist's only venture into terrain that had nothing to do with his more traditionally 'scientific' endeavors in calculus, gravity or optics.

Newton was also very active in another humanist discipline, chronology, the science that attempted to synchronize the implicit chronology of the bible and that of the non-biblical ancient sources, some of which Newton considered to be just as sacred as the bible. In addition, Newton was especially interested in the Temple of Solomon, the dimensions of which he believed represented a number of deep truths about the nature of reality. But he went even further in his interest in the prophetic value of the Bible, writing an equally unpublished guidebook with 'Rules for interpreting the words and language in Scripture' and claiming that (despite what other writers had been claiming) according to his calculations the world would certainly not end before 2060.

The second inventor of modern calculus was also active as a reader of scripture and to some extent as a biblical scholar, and Leibniz was very much aware of the circular reasoning involved in the authority of the bible: we know that the Church holds the truth of Scripture, because it says so in the Bible and the truth of the Bible itself is historically guaranteed by the Church, who was responsible for the form that this book has today.

These discussions were not just important for the debates between the theologians belonging to the different Christian churches, but for the state too, as the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to demonstrate: no wonder that Baruch Spinoza in his *Tractatus* had argued for a new and free reading of the bible. It is in the protestant tradition of bible study that the historical principle in the course of the nineteenth century led to a number of astonishing results about the nature of the Christian founding texts that would lead some of these scholars out of religion and others to formulate a liberal form of Christianity that accepts the findings of the Higher Criticism (as it was called), which is the perspective taken by most mainstream Christian churches today.

It is a neglected contribution of European scholarship that the same critical and rational principles that were applied in the study of the Book of Nature, had been developed and were being used in the study of the Book of God, in some cases even by the same people. Just as the scientific view of the world has been and is central in a knowledge-based (and not tradition-based) society, the same is true for the critical interpretation of all texts, including religious messages and, in essence, for the same reason: both the hard sciences and humanist enquiry start from a methodological atheism, the assumption that

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in the course of the attempt to understand part of the world, it is better not to introduce supernatural events or divine interventions, because these, as William of Ockham already knew, do not help us understand what is happening or why something is happening. On the contrary, they stand in the way of an explanation by simply introducing a new level of complexity.

Spinoza may have been the first to call for a new and critical interpretation of Holy Scripture, he was certainly not the first to provide more literal readings and it was especially in the England of the early part of the eighteenth century that these ideas led to much more radical statements. Orthodoxy became an increasingly embattled position, especially as regards the problem that had been central in the earliest creedal debates: Arianism seems to have been rampant in the British Isles.

The Anglican priest Samuel Clarke had given two series of very successful and very influential Boyle lectures in 1704 and 1705, in which he attempted to establish the philosophical foundations of a Christian faith. Clarke was a scientist who had studied Newton's work in detail and who corresponded with Leibnitz in defense of Newton, but he also published editions of the first 12 books of Homer's *Iliad* and an annotated edition of Caesar's *Commentaries*. If Clarke is still known today, it is as part of the history of theology, as one of the scholars who is thought to have opened the way to a rejection of traditional Trinitarian notions (and thus to an acceptance of Arianism) with his study *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, in which he tackled the thorny theological problem head-on, with far-reaching consequences.

Especially interesting is that the structure of the book is that of a scientific study. Appropriately, in a book about the Trinity, there are three main parts. First Clarke lists all the references to the Trinity in the Old and the New Testament, 1251 numbered passages in all, but he does so in a systematic manner, moving from three chapters on 'Of GOD the FATHER', to 'Of the SON of GOD' and 'Of the Holy SPIRIT of GOD' to a final chapter: 'The Passages wherein the Three Persons of the ever-blessed Trinity, are ALL mentioned together.'

The second part offers a systematic exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity in the form of a set of 55 propositions based on the scriptural evidence in the first part, with additional support of the writings of the Church fathers and of contemporary authors on the subject, but in each case the propositions are accompanied by references to the numbered bible passages. In the final and third part of the book Clarke collected all references to the Trinity in the liturgy of the Church of England and he distinguished those parts that contradicted (or seemed to contradict) his scriptural view of the doctrine of the Trinity. The relevance of the third seems to have been mostly ecclesiastical, but it is clear from the first two parts (with the copious cross-references), that Clarke saw his work as a theologian in terms of a rational enquiry based on the facts of the case (the scriptural evidence). Among the list of scriptural passages, Clarke quotes the *Comma Johanneum*, as number 1248. But it is accompanied by a note to the phrase 'And these three are One' that the word translated in the last position is in Greek and cannot refer to a person: 'One and the same *Thing*, One and the same *Testimony*' and he cautiously adds: 'Though it ought not indeed to be concealed, that This Passage, since it does not certainly appear to have bee found in the Text of any Greek Manuscript, should not have too much stress laid upon it in any Controversy' (Ref. 13, p. 238).

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Most importantly, Clarke stressed the unity and primacy of God, the Father whom Jesus keeps referring to and who seems to be the only absolutely independent divinity in both the Old and the New Testament, and this is clear from the not quite innocent structure that he gave his first part of scriptural evidence, only ending with the relatively few mentions of the three persons of the Trinity. His possibly heretical ideas could also be seen in the very titles of his first three chapters, where we begin with God the father, but then move on to 'the SON of GOD' and the 'holy SPIRIT of GOD,' two formulations that suggest that these two are aspects of God and not entirely independent of Him. In the detailed discussion in Part Two it is clear that Clarke, like Newton before him, has problems with the meaning of the term *homoousios*, which had been translated by the Latin word *consubstantialis* to describe what Father, Son and Holy Ghost have in common, but which had been under attack from the earliest theological controversies as being non-biblical.

Despite the fact that, as Thomas C. Pfizenmaier has shown, strictly speaking Clarke was not an Arian, his views on the Trinity were sufficiently unorthodox to be unacceptable to the established church. For that reason he had been advised by well-meaning friends against publishing his views and his book was followed immediately by a torrent of reactions by friends and foes. The trouble for Clarke was that his views might well have been scripturally sanctioned, but they were clearly different from the official positions of the Church of England. It was only because the Church hierarchy itself was divided (on this and on most other theological and political issues) that Clarke escaped an official censure.

Like Samuel Clarke, Richard Bentley was an establishment figure and, also like Clarke, he had written his Boyle lectures as an attempt to demonstrate the validity of Christianity on purely rationalist grounds, laying the foundations, in fact, for the argument from design, a rational and 'scientific' form of Christianity that would become dominant and last well into the Victorian age. But he was also a classical scholar and it was mainly as a textual scholar and a historian that he had attacked Anthony Collins's freethinking, especially targeting the sloppy scholarship in Collins's attacks on the 30,000 textual variations in the New Testament that John Mill had identified in his 1707 edition of the Greek text. Bentley had always been interested in textual variation in the bible but he now began to consider a new edition of the New Testament.

In a letter to his potential patron, Archbishop William Wake, in the spring of 1716 'about those unfashionable topics, religion and learning,' it is quite clear what the problem is that this edition will address: 'Your Grace knows, as well as any, what an alarm has been made of late years with the vast heap of various lections found in the MSS. of the Greek Testament. The Papists have made a great use of them against the Protestants, and the Atheists against them both'. Bentley continues his argument that his efforts in the book against Collins 'made several good men more easy in that matter than they were before' (Ref. 14, p. 477) and then he suggests that the archbishop might consider supporting such an ambitious academic venture, for which project he began to raise money in 1720 with a subscription.

In another letter in 1717 to a concerned correspondent who had argued for the inclusion of the *comma johanneum* in such an edition, Bentley claimed that his proposed edition would be based on the manuscript evidence of manuscripts at least thousand years old with the purpose of reconstructing the form of the text as at the time of the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century, 'without the error of 50 words'. As a result, his

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correspondent need not worry about this text: 'But by this you see that in my proposed work the fate of that verse will be a mere *question of fact*' (Works III, p. 485). Bentley had in fact checked most of the manuscripts that were known at the time, one of which he had had for a long time, the *codex*; he also used the notes his nephew made on the *codex vaticanus* in Europe and, in fact, the first letter in his collected correspondence is a short note from Cambridge in which another scholar, after a request from Bentley (who was living in London at the time), describes in great detail the script of *codex bezae* and compares it with a reproduction in Jean Mabillon's *De re diplomatica*.

Although Bentley does not seem to have been overly religious himself, he did like a fight and the freethinkers and papists were popular enemies at the time. In his so-called religious lectures he almost never addressed issues that we would consider as religious, but when he did, he almost always showed a particular interest in textual issues, such as when his sermon against popery turns on a philological discussion of the original Greek text that leads to a better translation of a bible verse (2 Cor 2, 17), which he then applies to Catholics who are, according to Saint Paul 'corrupters of the word of God for filthy lucre'. When Catholicism would win world domination the 'two parents of the Reformation' would suffer: 'ancient learning and the art of printing' (p. 261), because the Catholics only used Latin and would restrict printing to 'fabulous legends' instead of scholarly studies (p. 262). At the same time, when he attacks freethinking, he keeps saying that it quite resembles popery: in his attack against Collins, *Remarks upon a Discourse of Free-Thinking*, he even writes that freethinking is nothing but another form of Catholicism: 'really a stranger would be tempted to think that *popery* rather than *atheism* is the secret cabbala of this *new sect*.' No wonder that Collins referred to the work on the bible by the Catholic priest Richard Simon, who attacked Scripture in order 'to confound the reformation by labouring the sacred text precarious' (Ref. 14, p. 361, emphasis in the original).

This is Bentley as the upholder of Anglican orthodoxy, but there was another side to him. In his historical and philological work, even on the text of the bible, he worked very closely with Catholic scholars, supplying the Maurists, for example, with a collation of the Greek *codex Alexandrinus*, in return for their help with collations of old Latin manuscripts that they were using for their proposed edition of the Vetus Latina, the older translation that we know existed before Saint Jerome's translation and that Saint Augustine preferred over the Vulgate. Despite the fact that the new edition of the Bible was supposed to be part of the fight against Catholics and freethinkers, Bentley was not averse to working with them, even when it involved the same edition of the bible.

On the first day of May 1717, Bentley gave a lecture as the new Regius Chair of Divinity (his election to that chair may have been one reason for his renewed interest in religion) in which he discussed the *comma johanneum*. His lecture has not survived, but the sources seem to agree that the great scholar rejected the reference to the Trinity, and given the rules that he later formulated to describe his proposed edition, he could not have done otherwise. Number 4 of *Dr. Bentley's Proposals for Printing a new Edition of the Greek Testament and St. Hierom's Latin Version* of 1721 reads:

> To confirm the lections which the author places in the text, he makes use of the old versions, Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, and Æthiopic, and all of the Fathers, Greeks and Latins, within the first five centuries; and he gives in his notes all the various readings

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> (now known) within the said five centuries. So that the reader has under one view what the first ages of the church knew of the text; and what has crept into any copies since is of no value or authority (Ref. 14, p. 488).

Bentley made it clear that he was not going to emend the bible, and although like John Mill and the Deists and freethinkers he repeated the number of 30,000 variations in the Bible text ('to the offence of many good persons'), he was able to reassure his audience that the real bible was safe: out of this confusion, as he writes in his prospectus, he can create a text with barely 200 variations that are meaningful (p. 361). At the same time: 'The author is very sensible, that in sacred writings there's no place for conjectures or emendations. […] He declares, therefore, that he does not alter one letter in the text without the authorities in the notes' which will also contain the 'common' versions already available: the received text of the Greek (Stephanus) and of the Latin (the Catholic Sixtus V and Clemens VIII edition). Changes to the text that are not supported 'by any copies now extant' (conjectures) will be given in the *Prolegomena*, 'in which will be a large account of the several MSS' (Ref. 14, pp. 488–489). This alone will make the projected work useful to 'the whole Christian name' (and not to a single sect): 'to last when all the ancient MSS. here quoted may be lost and extinguished' (Ref. 14, p. 489). This is followed by a material description of the proposed two folio volumes and by an example of the edition with the final chapter of the Book of Revelation, probably (as one of his many enemies pointed out in a pamphlet) to indicate that he had already finished most of the necessary editorial work.

Clarke and Bentley had been politically careful and were able to remain within the church, occupying a position that would be called latitudinarian and that in the next century would come to be described as 'broad church'. But not everybody was as nimble in this particular game. William Whiston was a brilliant churchman and scientist, successor of Newton as Lucasian lecturer in Cambridge (at the latter's invitation). Like Clarke and Bentley, he combined scientific and theological studies, offering a novel explanation of Noah's flood as the result of a comet. In 1707, Whiston had given the Boyle lectures, but his subsequent study of all the documents of the first two centuries of the history of the church led him to the conclusion that until the Council of Nicaea, the earliest Christians had been Arian. Because he had published these views not only in Latin but also in English, the Cambridge authorities banned him from the University and he would remain *persona non grata* in the English establishment, never becoming a member of the Royal Society, possibly because Newton felt that he too had been drawn into a controversy that he would have preferred to keep secret. In fact, Whiston had written about his findings to the archbishops of York and Canterbury and he added that he felt it his duty 'to propose the Consideration and Examination of these matters to the Christian World'.[11]

The anti-Trinitarian ideas also spread among the dissenting churches. In the course of the century most of the Presbyterians gave up the Trinity: 'By 1770 barely half the Presbyterian congregations were Trinitarian in belief; thereafter they rapidly veered toward Socinianism, and in due course became explicitly Unitarian'.[12] That movement away from orthodox Trinitarian beliefs was at least partly due to serious biblical study by polyvalent scholar/scientists such as Clarke, Bentley and Whiston, all theologians, but also scientists and textual scholars.

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By the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the protestant churches had adapted their doctrine to the new historical findings and, in most cases, the bible was newly edited and translated as a result of these findings. Especially in the United States, a rearguard battle was fought by groups of so-called fundamentalists who held that the bible was literally true, even when it contradicted modern historical or scientific findings. Nobody 20 years ago could have predicted that these fundamentalists would one day acquire such an important political influence in the most powerful nation in the world.

The scientific study of how texts are transmitted, the critical comparison of manuscripts and the historical evaluation of the old humanist questions of who wrote what when and why (which is, like the scientific revolution, a mostly European endeavor), provide a much stronger argument against religious fundamentalism than a defense of Darwin's evolution, which may be exactly why fundamentalists, for the most part, tend to be silent on this front. It is interesting to see that the mortal enemy of fundamentalism has changed over the last century, from liberalism to communism and now Islam, following closely the successive foreign policy issues of the United States. And it is interesting, although frightening too, that a Christian fundamentalism is ready to fight a Moslem fundamentalism, while both of them only exist because they reject the fundamental truth of all human communication: written messages have a history, and the older they are, the harder they are to decipher. Fundamentalists claim to know exactly the meaning of a text that the greatest specialists in Hebrew and Greek, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, specialists in classical Arabic, find extremely difficult to read and to interpret, precisely because we do not know exactly who wrote them, when and why. The only thing we know for sure is, paradoxically, that each of the three holy texts consists of a collection of different texts that were at a late stage gathered into a single whole, but in each case we don't know exactly by who and why. Europe has the duty to keep reminding the world of that deep truth. *Nullius in verba*.

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