

**PAUL AND HIS  
INTERPRETERS, A  
CRITICAL HISTORY**

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Paul and his interpreters, a critical history by Albert Schweitzer

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PAUL  
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A CRITICAL HISTORY

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## PREFACE

*THE present work forms the continuation of my History of the Critical Study of the Life of Jesus, which appeared in 1906 under the title "Von Reimarus zu Wrede."<sup>1</sup>*

*Any one who deals with the teaching and the life and work of Jesus, and offers any kind of new reading of it, ought not to stop there, but must be held under obligation to trace, from the stand-point at which he has arrived, the pathway leading to the history of dogma. Only in this way can it be clearly shown what his discovery is worth.*

*The great and still undischarged task which confronts those engaged in the historical study of primitive Christianity is to explain how the teaching of Jesus developed into the early Greek theology, in the form in which it appears in the works of Ignatius, Justin, Tertullian and Irenaeus. How could the doctrinal system of Paul arise on the basis of the life and work of Jesus and the beliefs of the primitive community; and how did the early Greek theology arise out of Paulinism?*

*Strauss and Renan recognised the obligation, and each endeavoured in a series of works to trace the path leading from Jesus to the history of dogma. Since their time no one who has dealt with the life of Jesus has attempted to follow this course.*

*Meanwhile the history of dogma, on its part, has come to place the teaching of Jesus, as well as that of Paul, outside the scope of its investigations and to regard its own task as*

<sup>1</sup> Sub-title: "Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung." English translation "The Quest of the Historical Jesus." London, A. & C. Black, 1910, 2nd ed. 1911.

*beginning at the point where the undisputed and general Hellenisation of Christianity sets in. It describes therefore the growth of Greek theology, but not of Christian theology as a whole. And because it leaves the transition from Jesus to Paul, and from Paul to Justin and Ignatius, unexplained, and therefore fails to arrive at any intelligible and consistent conception of Christian dogma as a whole, the edifice which it erects has no secure basis. Any one who knows and admires Harnack's "History of Dogma" is aware that the solid mason-work only begins in the Greek period; what precedes is not placed on firm foundations but only supported on piles.*

*Paulinism is an integral part of the history of dogma; for the history of dogma begins immediately upon the death of Jesus.*

*Critical theology, in dividing up the history of the development of thought in primitive Christianity into the separate departments, Life of Jesus, Apostolic Age, History of Dogma, and clinging to this division as if it were something more than a mere convention of the academic syllabus, makes a confession of incompetence and resigns all hope of putting the history of dogma on a secure basis. Moreover, the separate departments thus left isolated are liable to fall into all kinds of confusions and errors, and it becomes a necessity of existence to them not to be compelled to follow their theories beyond the cunningly placed boundaries, or to be prepared to show at any moment how their view accords with the preceding and following stages in the development of thought.*

*This independence and autonomy of the different departments of study begins with the downfall of the edifice constructed by Baur. He was the last who dared to conceive, and to deal with, the history of dogma in the large and general sense as the scientific study of the development of the teaching of Jesus into the early Greek theology. After him begins, with Ritschl, the narrower and more convenient conception of the subject, which resigns its imperial authority over the departments of study dealing with the Life of Jesus,*



*Primitive Christianity and Paulinism, and allows these to become independent. In the works of Ritschl himself this new departure is not clearly apparent, because he still formally includes the teaching of Jesus, of Paul, and of primitive Christianity within the sphere of the history of dogma. But instead of explaining the differences between the various types of belief and doctrine, he glosses them over in such a way that he practically denies the development of the thoughts, and makes it impossible for a really scientific study of the teaching of Jesus and of Paulinism to fit into the ready-made frame which he provides.*

*Ritschl shares with Baur the presupposition that primitive dogma arose out of the teaching of Jesus by an organic and logical process. The separate disciplines which began after them have shown that this assumption is false. Of a "development" in the ordinary sense there can be no question, because closer investigation has not confirmed the existence of the natural lines of connexion which might à priori have been supposed to be self-evident, but reveals instead unintelligible gaps. This is the real reason why the different departments of study maintain their independence.*

*The system of the Apostle of the Gentiles stands over against the teaching of Jesus as something of an entirely different character, and does not create the impression of having arisen out of it. But how is such a new creation of Christian ideas—and that within a bare two or three decades after the death of Jesus—at all conceivable?*

*From Paulinism, again, there are no visible lines of connexion leading to early Greek theology. Ignatius and Justin do not take over his ideas, but create, in their turn, something new.*

*According to the assumption which in itself appears most natural, one would be prepared to see in the teaching of Jesus a mountain-mass, continued by the lofty summits of the Pauline range, and from these gradually falling away to the lower levels of the early Catholic theology. In reality the teaching of Jesus and that of the great Apostle are like two separate ranges of hills, lying irregularly disposed in*

*front of the later "Gospel." Even the relation which each severally bears to primitive Christianity remains uncertain.*

*This want of connexion must have some explanation. The task of historical science is to understand why these two systems of teaching are necessarily independent, and at the same time to point out the geological fault and dislocation of the strata, and enable us to recognise the essential continuity of these formations and the process by which they have taken their present shape.*

*The edifice constructed by Baur has fallen; but his large and comprehensive conception of the history of dogma ought not to be given up. It is wholly wrong to ignore the problem at which he laboured and so create the false impression that it has been solved. Present day criticism is far from having explained how Paulinism and Greek theology have arisen out of the teaching of Jesus. All it has really done is to have gained some insight into the difficulties, and to have made it increasingly evident that the question of the Hellenisation of Christianity is the fundamental problem of the history of dogma.*

*It could not really hope to find a solution, because it is still working away with the presuppositions of Baur, Ritschl, and Renan, and has already tried three or four times over all the experiments which are possible on this basis, without ever attaining to a real insight into the course of the development. It has approached this or that problem differently, has given a new version—not to say in some cases a perversion—of it; but it has not succeeded in giving a satisfactory answer to the question when and how the Gospel was Hellenised.*

*It has not even attained to clearness in regard to the condition in which the Gospel existed prior to its Hellenisation. It has not ventured to mark off with perfect distinctness the two worlds of thought with which the process is concerned, and to formulate the problem as being that of explaining how the Gospel, which was originally purely Jewish and eschatological, became Greek in form and content. That this could really have come about, it takes to be a priori*

*impossible. It therefore seeks to soften down the antitheses as much as possible, to find in the teaching of Jesus thoughts which force their way out of the frame of the Jewish eschatological conceptions and have the character of universal religion, and in the teaching of Paul to discover a "genuinely Christian," and also a Hellenic element, alongside of the Rabbinic material.*

*Theological science has in fact been dominated by the desire to minimise as much as possible the element of Jewish Apocalyptic in Jesus and Paul, and so far as possible to represent the Hellenisation of the Gospel as having been prepared for by them. It thinks it has gained something when in formulating the problem it has done its best to soften down the antitheses to the utmost with a view to providing every facility for conceiving the transition of the Gospel from one world of thought to the other.*

*In following this method Baur and Renan proceed with a simple confidence which is no longer possible to present day theology. But in spite of that it must still continue to follow the same lines, because it has still to work with the old presuppositions and the weakening down of the problem which they imply. The result is in every respect unsatisfactory. The solution remains as impossible as it was before, and the simplifications which were supposed to be provided in the statement of the problem have only created new difficulties.*

*The thoroughgoing application of Jewish eschatology to the interpretation of the teaching and work of Jesus has created a new fact upon which to base the history of dogma. If the view developed at the close of my "Quest of the Historical Jesus" is sound, the teaching of Jesus does not in any of its aspects go outside the Jewish world of thought and project itself into a non-Jewish world, but represents a deeply ethical and perfected version of the contemporary Apocalyptic.*

*Therefore the Gospel is at its starting-point exclusively Jewish-eschatological. The sharply antithetic formulation of the problem of the Hellenisation of Christianity, which it was always hoped to avoid, is proved by the facts recorded in the Synoptists to be the only admissible one. Accordingly,*