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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Wellhausenism Evaluated After A Century Of Influence

By Raymond F. Surburg

Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) was a famous German Lutheran higher critic who influenced Biblical and Oriental studies for many generations during the second half of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries. Hans Joachim Kraus wrote of Wellhausen:

With his philological, literary-critical, and historical investigations Wellhausen founded a school which has determined for decades the picture of Old Testament science. However all work performed outside his school and beyond it is inconceivable apart from the solid foundation on which Old Testament science in numerous, and till the present unchangeable, accomplishments was founded.¹

In describing the importance of Wellhausen Hahn wrote:

His position in Old Testament criticism is somewhat analagous to that of Darwin in the intellectual history of modern times. The central idea which he made common property had already been broached by others before him, but he gave the theory its classical formulation and applied it with assurance to a wide range of data, assembled in a comprehensive synthesis and unified by a dominant theme. What was new and original in Wellhausen's presentation was the way in which he combined the various lines of argument by his professors and drew the conclusions toward which the literary and historical criticism of a century had been tending.²

According to William Neil, Biblical criticism on the European Continent achieved a considerable measure of stability in the nineteenth century. Two men were responsible for this in Old and New Testament studies, respectively, namely, Julius Wellhausen and Adolf Harnack.³ Ronald E. Clemens in his recent *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation* has no less than forty-one references to the work and influence of Wellhausen when he discusses the contributions of various scholars to the field of Old Testament studies.⁴ Hermann Gunkel, by comparison, is mentioned only twenty-six times by Clemens in connection with his contributions to twentieth-century Old Testament studies.⁵

It will be the purpose of this essay to set forth Wellhausen's views and their influence on his contemporaries as well as on

those following him during the last one hundred years and also to evaluate Wellhausen's views and influence.

I. Wellhausen's Life and Academic Activities⁶

Wellhausen was born at Hameln, the son of a Protestant pastor. He was raised by his father in an orthodox Christian environment. He went to Goettingen in 1862 to study theology, to prepare himself for the pastorate in the denomination of which his father was a member. He threw himself with enthusiasm into his theological studies, but before long he abandoned the orthodox Christianity of his youth and simultaneously began to experience a time of great despair. At first he had no interest in critical studies. He devoted his energies to a study of the church chorals and to the reading of medieval sermons. At Goettingen Wellhausen met Albrecht Ritschl, with whom he struck up a warm friendship; but inasmuch as he could not understand the former's theology, Wellhausen was unaffected by Ritschl's thought. In 1870 he received his licentiate and for the two years following acted as a private tutor.

It was Heinrich Ewald (1805-75), eminent Hebrew scholar and Orientalist, who changed Wellhausen's despair and created in the latter a love for studying the manner in which the history of Israel developed. By chance Wellhausen came to read Ewald's *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*. Ewald's presentation of the history of Israel fascinated Wellhausen, because the former was no dry historian, but a lecturer who depicted historical relationships in glowing colors. In the estimation of Wellhausen, Ewald portrayed the religious content of the Old Testament as an entity that had developed and occurred in history. It was this procedure which sparked him to undertake the project of setting forth the history of the Old Testament as an historical process within which Biblical religion had grown and ripened. Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* endeavored to do just that. The dedication of this book reads: "To my never-to-be-forgotten teacher Heinrich Ewald in thanks and honor." However, between the years 1866-70 there came a sharp parting of the ways between the two.

In 1871 Wellhausen published his first book, a study devoted to the text of 1 and 2 Samuel,⁷ which is of importance because in it he dealt with the structure of the Pentateuch. At the age of 28, in 1872, he was called to the University of Greifswald, to a professorship in theology. In 1878, a hundred years ago, Wellhausen published his pioneer work, *Geschichte Israels*, I.⁸ Later on this book was renamed *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*. The book caused a great stir in orthodox circles and within four years time he resigned his professorship at Greifswald.

In 1882 he became associate professor of Oriental languages at Halle, and in 1885 was promoted to full professorship at Marburg. In 1892 Wellhausen transferred to Goettingen where he assumed a similar professorship. After giving up Old Testament studies he devoted his time and effort to Arabic studies, in which he had become interested during his stay at Halle. With his transference to Goettingen and contacts with Juelicher, Wellhausen entered the last phase of interest of his stormy career—studies in the New Testament area. With Juelicher, Adolph Harnack, and others, he wrote *Die Christliche Religion, mit Einschluss der Israelitischen-Juedischen Religion*. Wellhausen's views were applied by Johannes Weiss to New Testament criticism.⁹

Wellhausen died on January 7, 1918, surrounded by numerous scholars and admirers. Hans Joachim Kraus concluded his story of Wellhausen's life and influence with this evaluation:

He brought historical-critical investigation to an unsurpassable highpoint and helped to awaken scientific motives and tendencies that had slumbered since the time of De Wette and helped them to a breakthrough.¹⁰

II. The Contribution of the *Prolegomena* from a Critical Viewpoint

Ideas presented in this volume had, to be sure, already appeared in print elsewhere. But Hahn claims:

What was new and original in Wellhausen's presentation was the way in which he combined the various lines of argument developed by his predecessors and drew conclusions toward which the literary and historical criticism of a century had been tending.¹¹

An earlier work than the *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* was Wellhausen's *Die Komposition des Hexateuch*, 1876-71, and in the latter he popularized what was to become known as the Final Documentary Hypothesis. It took about one hundred years until the speculations and theories jelled into what became the Four-Source Documentary Hypothesis in its final form. This latter theory is often known as the Reuss-Graf-Wellhausen Theory. Eduard Reuss in a lecture given in the summer semester of 1834 had expressed the opinion that the basic Elohist document (E), rather than being the earliest of the documents out of which the Pentateuch or Hexateuch had been woven together, was the latest. Again in 1850 Reuss defended this view, but the Old Testament scholarly world ignored it.

The year 1866 may be said to be the turning point in Pentateuchal criticism because of Karl Heinrich Graf's work on the historical books. Both George and Vatke had proposed that the Levitical legislation was later than Deuteronomy and that the

materials found in Leviticus could not be earlier than the time of the exile. As early as 1862, Dr. J. Popper, a rabbi, had assigned Exodus 35-40 and Leviticus 8-10 to scribes who had lived after the time of Ezra. The effect of Graf's work was to bring to a climax ideas previously advanced by others. Graf taught that Deuteronomy was composed during Josiah's reign, and Graf's view presupposed that legislation was found in the Jahwist document. The Levitical laws found in Leviticus 18-26 were ascribed to Ezekiel. As far as the remainder of the Pentateuch was concerned, Graf followed the Supplementary Theory, maintaining that the basic document of the Pentateuch was the Elohist (E), which had been supplemented from the Jahwistic document (J), and the resultant work had been edited and redacted by the Deuteronomist.

Two German scholars, Riehm and Noeldeke; attacked this scheme at two principal points.¹² In opposition to the Supplementary Theory they held that the Jahwist was the main document and the Elohist the supplementer and that the Levitical legislation could not be separated from the Jahwist document. Graf accepted these criticisms and proceeded to modify his original position to the extent that the basic document was postulated as not the earliest but the latest portion of the Pentateuch. Prior to this reversal of position, the order of composition of the various documents of the Pentateuch had been PEJD; but now according to Graf the order was EJDP or JEDP. The appearance of Abraham Kuenen's *De Godsdiens van Israel* (1869-70) helped to strengthen and give further impetus to the acceptance of Graf's views. In 1874 August Kayser in his *Das vorexilische Buch der Urgeschichte Israels* had expressed views similar to those of Graf and Kuenen. For Kayser the Jahwistic document was the foundational document of the Pentateuch into which part of the Elohist document supposedly had been incorporated. Deuteronomy, originating in Josianic (seventh century B.C.) times, was bound up with the Jahwistic document. After this came Ezekiel's legislation, including Leviticus 17-26. The "Elohim" document (P) was from the time of Ezra. The last step was the incorporation of all these documents into the Pentateuch.

Julius Wellhausen in his epoch-making work, *Die Komposition des Hexateuch* (1876-77), must be credited with bringing this new theory to dominance and especially for its popularization. Edward Young, in describing this view put forth a century ago, wrote:

According to Wellhausen, the earliest parts of the Pentateuch came from two originally independent docu-

ments, the Jehovist and the Elohist. From these two the Jehovist compiled a work that was principally narrative. In Josiah's time came Deuteronomy, and the Deuteronomist incorporated this in the Jehovistic work and revised the whole, principally Joshua. The priestly legislation of the Elohim document was largely the work of Ezra. A later redactor then worked over the whole. Leviticus 17-26, while coming from Ezekiel's time, was nevertheless not the work of Ezekiel.¹³

Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels (Berlin, 1883) came to have a great influence on Old Testament studies and came to be regarded as one of the most important contributions to Old Testament study of the nineteenth century. In this book Wellhausen endeavored to show that the Mosaic legislation was not the starting point of Israel's religious institutions, but that the Mosaic legislation was a product of priestly thinking originating in the Hebrew community after the Exile. Hahn described the method employed in this work as follows:

By combining Graf's method of arranging the ritual laws in logical sequence with Vatke's program for studying the religious institutions of successive historical periods, he was able to show not only that there was an intimate connection between the succession of the law codes and the evolution of religious practices, but also that these parallel developments were intelligible only in the sequence which placed the Priestly Code and the priestly institutions at the end.¹⁴

In this work Wellhausen, therefore, seemed to confirm the views of Graf and on their foundation erected a detailed history of the cultus which endeavored to incorporate divergent data in a coherent and rational scheme.

A detailed analysis of the contents of Wellhausen's *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* may be found in Hans Joachim Kraus' *Geschichte der Historisch — Kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*,¹⁵ and in Hahn's *The Old Testament In Modern Research*.¹⁶ Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* represents an interpretation of Israel's history which Hahn states is "an example of the liberal approach to exegesis."¹⁷ Hahn claims: "Wellhausen omitted the theological interpretation entirely and emphasized the factor of historical causation instead."^{17a}

Emil Kraeling, in *The Old Testament Since the Reformation*, pointed out that Wellhausen was influenced by the reigning philosophical influence in Germany as it manifested itself during

the nineteenth century in terms of Hegelianism. In the area of theological interpretation Hegelianism was the order of the day. In describing the milieu in which Wellhausen pursued his studies and researches, Kraeling wrote:

Notably the evolutionistic approach that Hegel had applied was having its effect on all historical thinking. Biblical studies now took on a fresh hue, and particularly all efforts to deal with the story of religious development of Israel and early Christianity. Utilizing the results of the criticism pioneered by Eichorn and De Wette but proceeding evolutionistically in the spirit of Hegel, Vatke gave a brilliant presentation of the development of the Old Testament religion, on which Wellhausen fifty years later still bestowed the praise that it was the most important contribution ever made to the historical understanding of ancient Israel.¹⁸

One of the distinctive features of Wellhausen's position was his application of evolution to the literature and history of the Old Testament. His *Geschichte Israels I* (1878) marked the beginning, according to Kraeling, "of a completely secular and evolutionistic study of Old Testament sources."¹⁹ In the Wellhausen interpretation the prophets assumed much greater importance than had previously been accorded them. This prepared the way for the school of Comparative Religion (*Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), which depicted the development of Old Testament religion as beginning with totemism and animism, followed by polytheism, henotheism, and finally monotheism. Lothar Perlitt, however, contends that Wellhausen himself rejected the idea that he was influenced by Hegelianism and evolutionism.^{19a}

The scheme of Wellhausen found wide acceptance. The new Old Testament science inaugurated by the movement symbolized by Wellhausen sought to be and was scientifically respectable. "It applied methods that had been productive of great results in the study of classical and other literatures to the Old Testament literature."²⁰ Wellhausen's scheme was embraced in Germany by Kautsch, Smend, Giesebrecht, Budde, Stade, Cornill, and others. It was brought to the attention of the English-speaking world by a Presbyterian minister, William Robertson Smith, in the lectures which were later published as *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (1881). S. R. Driver in his *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* popularized Wellhausenism in England and in America. Native American scholars who showed the influence of Wellhausen were Benjamin Wisner Bacon of Yale in *The Genesis of Genesis* (1893) and *The Triple Tradition of Exodus* (1894) and C. A. Briggs in *Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*. (1893).

The reconstruction of the Old Testament history as set forth by Wellhausen is generally spoken of as the Graf-Keunen-Wellhausen Hypothesis. It needs to be distinguished from the Documentary Hypothesis, which forms its basis and without which the Wellhausian position could not stand. Young prefers to call Wellhausen's theory the developmental hypothesis.²¹ The developmental hypothesis is advocated in such volumes as W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Book of the Old Testament* (London, 1934) and Robert H. Pfeiffer, *An Introduction to the Old Testametrn* (New York, 1941).

The influence of Wellhausen on the younger scholars was profound and far-reaching. Hahn claims that for "a full generation he dominated Old Testament scholarship not only in his own country but in France, England, and America. All the more important histories of Israel, Hebrew literature, and of Old Testament religion, as well as a host of commentaries and introductions, were based more or less directly on the Wellhausen system of Old Testament criticism."²²

The commentaries, especially, in the series edited by Wilhelm Nowack and Karl Marti and in *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, represented this liberal Protestant type of exegesis at its best; neither theological nor homiletical in their emphasis, they were strictly critical and historical.²² The achievements of critical scholarship, spearheaded by Wellhausen and his followers was so great that Clemens claims: "that the Church was not ready for this may be seen readily conceded and is simply shown by the heresy trials to which Smith was subjected. Nevertheless the achievement of critical scholarship was in the interpretation of the Old Testament immense, so that by the turn of the century virtually all the major centres of theological learning in Europe had embraced its methods and its basic conclusions."²³

III. Evaluation and Criticism of Wellhausenism by Critical Scholars

1. Criticism by Critical Scholars in the Late Nineteenth Century

In the one hundred years which have elapsed since the publication of Wellhausen's Old Testament writings, various criticisms of his reconstruction of Old Testament history and Old Testament theology have appeared. Scholars committed to the historical-critical approach, as well as those opposed to the naturalism and nihilism associated with the liberal approach to the Old Testament, have subjected Wellhausen's views to criticism.

W. W. Graf Baudissin argued against Wellhausen that the essential basis of P was earlier than Deuteronomy, as did also Rudolf Kittel. In 1872 Eduard Riehm wrote convincingly against the stance that the P document is the latest part of the Hebrew Torah. In 1877 Franz Delitzsch attacked the idea of the lateness of the P document. The eminent Orientalist Noeldecke also refused to accept Wellhausen's dating of P.

Among Jewish scholars C. G. Montefiore in his Hibbert Lectures of 1892 accepted most of the Wellhausian views, but David Hoffman wrote against Wellhausen, basing his rejection on a study of the Halachah (i.e., the legal part of Jewish tradition) and endeavored to show the impossibility of the lateness of P.

In 1892 Klostermann rejected the Four-Source Documentary Hypothesis and replaced it with a new theory which, in the history of Pentateuchal Criticism, has come to be known as the crystallization hypothesis. He claimed what is given as the Mosaic Law in the Pentateuch experienced constant expansion as it was used in public worship. The laws regarding the tabernacle were expanded during the age of Solomon; again, during the reign of Josiah, expansions were made of which Deuteronomy was supposed to provide evidence.

2. Twentieth-Century Critical Evaluations of Wellhausenism

The twentieth century has likewise witnessed many attacks upon the views of Wellhausen and his school and followers. Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) was one of these scholars. In describing the interpretations of Israel's religious development against which Gunkel reacted, Clemens writes:

For Wellhausen, the interpretation of the Hexateuch, when understood critically, provided a key to the understanding of the whole development of Israel's religion. Nevertheless it offered, in his estimation, only a very limited guide towards a knowledge of the real beginning of Israel in the days of Moses and the patriarchs. In his scheme even the earliest of the Hexateuchal sources had not been composed before the middle of the ninth century B.C., and so it could tell us nothing of the nature of the oldest religion of Israel. Rather, as Wellhausen believed, it reflected the situation that had developed by the time of its composition. It was this conclusion that was challenged, and replaced by a more convincing alternative, in the work of Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932).²⁴

Hermann Gunkel, now known as the father of form criticism (*Gattungsgeschichte*), became convinced that there was a relationship between the Old Testament literature and that of the

non-Hebrew religions of the Near East. The claim of Gunkel that the Bible could have received influences from other peoples of the Near East was rejected by Wellhausen in an article entitled, "Zur apokalyptischen Literatur."²⁵

Gunkel did not completely reject the Wellhausen position, but he did believe that behind each of the major documents (J-E-D-P) there was a long literary history and that views reflected in these four sources of the Documentary Hypothesis were not merely those of the times at which the documents were composed. Thus, the composition of these documents was only the last phase in the history of the material they contained. The documents were preceded by an earlier stage when the materials were independent and were handed down by word of mouth. The documents were composed of different types of literary genre, called by Gunkel *Gattungen*, and the difference in the *Gattungen* was determined by the life situation that gave birth to the (*Sitz im Leben*). In assessing the contribution of Gunkel, Clemens claims that "by examining the narratives and laws separately as individual units, Gunkel believed that it was possible to recover a knowledge of a much earlier period of Israel's life than that in which the final composition of the source documents had taken place." In comparing their respective achievements Clemens continues:

Thus whereas Wellhausen's brilliant source criticism had brought to light four main layers, or stages, in the growth of the Hexateuch, each with its own reflection of Israel's religious institutions, Gunkel was able to carry this much further into obtaining a picture of greater depth than Wellhausen had achieved.²⁶

Another critical scholar to disagree with Wellhausen's understanding of the development of Hebrew history was Martin Noth, who utilized the methods and insights of Albrecht Alt. Noth incorporated his conclusions into a *History of Israel*,²⁷ a book which Clemens claimed became one of the most widely used textbooks in Europe. Noth used geographical and archaeological data and also drew information from rediscovered chronicles of Near Eastern nations. Noth presented a picture of Israel's history which differed considerably from that given by Wellhausen in his writings. In setting forth the differences between the two men Clemens says:

Whereas Wellhausen had concentrated almost exclusively upon Old Testament source material, and had aimed chiefly at offering a convincing and credible picture of the history of Israel's religious institutions, Noth strove for something that approaches very much closer to a 'secular' history of the people. Hence he considered much more extensively the

problems of Israel's political structure and development.²⁸

When Wellhausen was at the height of his influence, source analysis was the primary concern of Old Testament scholarship. The twentieth century has witnessed the development of form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and structural exegesis, approaches which rejected many of the basic assumptions and conclusions of Wellhausen. Various aspects of the Four-Source Documentary Hypothesis have been under attack by many scholars.

The article on "Biblical Criticism" in *The Pictorial Biblical Encyclopedia* states the following about the Graf-Wellhausen theory:

Recent research has questioned the extremes of the documentary analysis, rejecting many of the disconnected strands into which the biblical books are splintered, although a majority of modern scholars still make use of the classical theory. This, therefore, deserves to be understood side by side with the new schools and theories of research.²⁹

Again this article observes:

As archaeological discoveries provided a whole range of extra-biblical sources against which to assess the biblical narratives, a reaction set in against the too-neat, but unsupported theories of "documentary analysis" and its splitting of the Old Testament text into different disconnected strands.³⁰

Writing in 1955, Flack in his article on the Pentateuch stated:

In the past four decades the changes produced into Pentateuchal criticism have tended toward a distrust and even disintegration of the documentary hypothesis. Critics have posited not only divisions and alternations in the four principal sources, J, E, D, and P, but also numerous additional documents.³¹

Cyrus Gordon made one of the most important repudiations of the Graf-Wellhausen theory in an article in *Christianity Today*.³² In this article Gordon, a veteran Near Eastern archaeologist and an outstanding linguist, gave reasons why he as a one-time proponent of the JEDP theory came to see the theory's inadequacies. Gordon warned that the critical methodology was failing to take seriously the facts of the ancient Near Eastern *Sitz im Leben*, a failure which could only result in negating the truly authentic material in the Old Testament.³³

Yehezkel Kaufmann, eminent scholar of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has asserted:

Wellhausen's arguments complemented each other nicely, and offered what seemed to be a solid foundation upon

which to build the house of biblical criticism. Since then, however, both the evidence and the arguments supporting the structure have been called into question and to some extent, even rejected. Yet biblical scholarship, while admitting that the grounds have crumbled away, nevertheless continues to adhere to the conclusions. The critique of Wellhausen's theory which began some forty years ago has not been consistently carried through to its end. Equally unable to accept the theory in its classical formulation and to return to the precritical views of tradition, biblical scholarship has entered upon a period of search for new foundations.³⁴

IV. Attacks by Conservative Scholars on Wellhausenism in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The strongest attacks against Wellhausen were made by those who subscribed to the supernatural character of the Old Testament. It is not too difficult to see why Wellhausen in his day was called "der Umsturzler" (the overthrower), "Glaubensfeind" (enemy of the faith), and "Leugner der Offenbarung" (denier of revelation)³⁵ because his views were radically different from what the Old Testament taught and what also was believed by Christ and His apostles, as is clear from a number of New Testament passages.

Among conservative scholars who attacked Wellhausenism were Edwin Cone Bissel, who in *The Pentateuch: Its Origin and Structure* dealt with the weaknesses of Wellhausen's theory; and the Lutheran scholar Wilhelm Moeller, in 1889, published his *Historisch-Kritische Bedenken gegen die Graf-Wellhausenden Hypothese von einem fruheren Anhaenger*. Gerhardus Vos of Princeton Theological Seminary issued in 1886 *The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes*, in which he refuted the views of Wellhausen. Another professor of Princeton Seminary who attacked the views of Wellhausen was W. H. Green, professor of Oriental and Old Testament Literature. Following in the spiritual footsteps of men like Hengstenberg, Haevernick, and Keil, Green carried on the tradition of defending the Old Testament against its detractors. Green showed his analytical ability in dealing with Biblical issues in his earliest writing, *The Pentateuch Vindicated from the Aspersions of Bishop Calenso* (1863). Twenty years later Green replied to Kuenen and William Robertson Smith in his *Moses and the Prophets*. In the Newton Lectures of 1885 Green attacked the developmental hypothesis and published them as *The Hebrew Feasts*. In the opinion of Archer the most thoroughgoing refutation of Wellhausenism was made by Green. Thus Archer wrote:

The most thoroughgoing refutation of Wellhausen

hypothesis to appear at the end of the nineteenth century in America was furnished by William Henry Green of Princeton in his *Unity of the Book of Genesis* (1895) and *Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (1896). With great erudition and skill he showed how inadequately the hypothesis explained the actual data of the Biblical text, and upon what illogical and self-contradictory bases the critical criteria rested.³⁶

The most recent thoroughgoing critique of Wellhausenism has appeared in Gleason L. Archer's *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chapter 11 is entitled: "Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Hebrew History in the Pre-Prophetic and Prophetic Periods" and chapter 12 treats of "Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Hebrew History in the Priestly Period."³⁷ Edward Young has given a brief critique of the developmental hypothesis in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*.³⁸ Roland Kenneth Harrison likewise has given his own evaluation as well as a history of those scholarly efforts of the critics that have discredited basic Wellausian positions.³⁹

Critical scholars claim that there are at least four different criteria by means of which the JEDP documents can be separated from each other in the present text of the Pentateuch or even, as some contend, in the Hexateuch (the first six books of Old Testament).⁴⁰ These alleged criteria are the use of different divine names, the existence of contradictory accounts called doublets, differences in literary style, and differences in theological outlook.⁴¹

A number of conservative Christian and Jewish scholars have examined the arguments for these criteria and have refuted them. G. Ch. Aalders, formerly professor of Old Testament at the Free University of Amsterdam, dealt with these arguments in his book, *A Short Introduction to the Pentateuch*.⁴² Oswald T. Allis, professor at Princeton and Westminster seminaries, examined these four criteria and thoroughly refuted them in *The Five Books of Moses* (1943). Allis rejected the modern view that the Pentateuch is a late compilation from diverse and conflicting sources by the authors and editors whose identity was completely unknown.⁴³ Merrill F. Unger, former professor of Old Testament and Semitic Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, in his *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament* subjected the views of critical scholarship to a thoroughgoing critique and analysis from within the context of Scriptural supernaturalism. He has shown from the viewpoint of an inspired and infallible Scripture the untenability of adhering to the Final Documentary Hypothesis.⁴⁴

A number of Jewish scholars challenged the Wellhausen approach in this century. Umberto Cassuto made a frontal attack

upon the Documentary Hypothesis in eight lectures published in Hebrew in 1941, of which an English translation appeared in 1961.⁴⁵ Another scholar of the University of Jerusalem, M.H. Segal, has shown the weakness of certain aspects of the Documentary Hypothesis in a lengthy article.⁴⁶

The developmental hypothesis, as taught and advocated by the Wellhausen school, is essentially anti-supernaturalistic in character. The intervention of Yahweh-Elohim in the affairs of His chosen people is completely eliminated. Wellhausen presents the development of Israel's religion on purely naturalistic grounds. This means that there is no essential difference between the religions of the Near Eastern world — that the differences between the Old Testament religion and other religions is one of degree and not of kind. On the basis of powers allegedly found within the Hebrew faith, its religious conceptions developed without Yahweh having anything to do with them. The religion of Israel is to be dealt with as a researcher would handle and investigate any other body of religious data in the world. The uniqueness of the Hebraeo-Christian faith is repudiated as unacceptable. The traditional stance of orthodox Judaism that the Old Testament is the Word of God; the belief of historic Roman Catholicism and of historic Protestantism that the Old Testament was inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore is unique has been totally surrendered. The gulf between the historical-critical approach to the Old Testament and that of Christ and His apostles, as reflected in the New Testament, is unbridgeable. The two approaches are diametrically opposed to each other.

If the position of Wellhausen and his followers is correct, then we may ask with Young:

If this is so, why did Israel alone develop such sublime doctrines? There were deep thinkers elsewhere, and philosophers of ability also, but no other nation produced conceptions of God such as those contained in the Old Testament. For this the Christian Church, of course, has the answer. It is that God intervened in a special way in Israel's history. This is also the plain teaching of the Bible itself.⁴⁷

If the Final Four-Source Documentary Hypothesis is correct, then two of the legal documents of the Pentateuch are a fraud. Both the priestly legislation found in Leviticus and the Deuteronomic code, which are specifically attributed to Moses, are not written by him. The Biblical text states many times that Moses was given these laws by God and that he was the mediator of these law codes. Critics, however, claim that ascription of these law codes to Moses was simply a device employed by later writers to gain a hearing for these law codes and cultic practices. Such a

view undermines the moral character of the Bible and causes people to lose faith in the Scriptures as a reliable guide in matters of religion and ethics. Concerning this matter Young observed: "And the shocking nature of this assumption becomes particularly clear when we remember that it was none other than the Lord of truth who repelled the temptation of the evil one by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy."⁴⁸

V. Archaeology and Wellhausenism

When Wellhausen was erecting his hypothesis he based some of his arguments and conclusions concerning the historicity of the Old Testament upon the data archaeology had made available in the nineteenth century. For instance, it was assumed that writing was unknown at Moses' time and that therefore the Pentateuch could not have been written by him. However, since the days of Hupfeld, Graf, and Wellhausen, archaeological discovery has confirmed the use of alphabetic writing in Canaanite-speaking cultures of 1500 B.C. In fact, it is now known that there were in existence five different types of alphabetic writings which Moses could have used in writing the Pentateuch. Many of the assumptions and conclusions of the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis have been discredited by archaeology. Nations and individuals whose historicity was once questioned have been shown by archaeology to have existed as taught by the Old Testament. W. F. Albright wrote in 1941:

Archaeological and inscriptional data have established the historicity of innumerable passages and statements of the Old Testament; the number of such cases is many times greater than those where the reverse has been proved or has been made probable.⁴⁹

In the same article Albright asserted: "Wellhausen still ranks in our eyes as the greatest Biblical scholar of the nineteenth century. *But his standpoint is antiquated and his picture of the early evolution of Israel is sadly distorted.*"⁵⁰

Archaeological discoveries from Rash Shamra, ancient Ugarit, and now from Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla, provide evidence favoring the conservative interpretation of the Old Testament.⁵¹ For example, Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain were considered to be mythical, but now tablets from Ebla show that these cities existed before Abraham's time, during the period between 2400 and 2250 B.C. The people of Ebla seem to have known a god Yah in addition to Il or El. The separation of portions of Genesis from each other because of the use of Yahweh or Elohim seems out of order in the light of the inscriptional data from Ebla. A creation tablet has been found which is much closer

to Genesis 1, with its creation of nothing, than to the Enuma Elish Epic.⁵²

According to Bright⁵³ and Mendenhall,⁵⁴ Wellhausenism in its classic form has ceased to exist. Thus Mendenhall asserted: "Perhaps the most important gap in the field of Old Testament history is the lack of an adequate hypothesis to replace that of Wellhausen."⁵⁵ In the place of the regnant Wellhausian theory, new views have been proposed such as those of the Form-Critical School and the Traditio-historical or Uppsala School.⁵⁶ Although these new schools differ in some respects, they have one feature in common: they all reject the Mosaic dating and the full trust worthiness of the Pentateuch.

VI. The Effects of Wellhausenism on the Christian Church

For the last one hundred years the theological position of many Christian churches has been weakened through the use of negative Biblical criticism. In 1961 Bright wrote:

. it is impossible to make general statements regarding any phase of Biblical criticism today without running the risk of oversimplification. The whole field is in a state of flux. It is moving, certainly, but it is not always easy to say in what direction. Sometimes it gives the impression that it is moving in several mutually cancelling directions at once. Even upon major points there is often little unanimity to be observed. As a result, scarcely a single statement can be made about the field that would not be subject to qualification. Indeed, perhaps the only safe generalization possible is that the critical orthodoxy of a generation ago, with its apparent certainties and assured results, has gone, but that no new consensus has taken its place.⁵⁷

In 1963 Hans Wolff complained that the Old Testament was dead and was no longer preached from the pulpit.⁵⁸ Walter Wink claimed that "the historical criticism is bankrupt."⁵⁹ Thus he wrote:

Biblical criticism is not bankrupt because it has run out of things to say or new ground to explore. It is bankrupt solely because it is incapable of achieving what most of its practitioners considered its purpose to be: so to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.⁶⁰

Wink claims to be an ally of a group of scholars who have spoken out against a form of scholarship found in liberal Protestant seminaries which has "gone to seed but which, by sheer abundance of seeds, flourishes everywhere in the land."⁶¹

From a historical Lutheran stance Wellhausen's theological position is totally unacceptable because of its rationalism and its

denigration of the Bible, demoting the latter from its status as the Word of God to a collection of human writings. Wellhausen himself, whom we must respect for his integrity, recognized this fact. When he wrote to the Secretary of Cultural Affairs while he was professor of theology at the University of Greifswald asking for a transfer to another faculty, he stated:

Your Excellency will perhaps remember that I asked you at Easter-time 1880 to transfer me, if possible, to the philosophical faculty and that I tried to give you my reasons at that time: I became a theologian because I was interested in scientific work with the Bible; only gradually I realized that a professor of theology has the practical duty of preparing students for service in the Evangelical Church, and that I could not meet this requirement, but in spite of my discretion and reserve *made them unfit for the ministry*. Since that time my theological professorship has been a burden on my conscience.⁶²

FOOTNOTES

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6. Based on materials found in H. F. Kraus, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-239; Clemens, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-11.
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14. Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
15. Kraus, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-248.
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- 17a. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
18. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 19a. Lothar Perlitt, *Vatke und Wellhausen* (Berlin: Verlag Von Topelmann, 1965) pp. 159-164.
20. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
21. Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.
22. Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
23. Clemens, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
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26. Clemens, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
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28. Clemens, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
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