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Styles in Scholarship

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Through the Middle Ages and in the Reformation period everyone accepted the traditional authorship of the books of the Bible. But with Spinoza in the seventeenth century, and with Astruc a century later, there began a tendency to deny the authenticity of most of these writings. Did this change represent a more accurate scholarship? Had new evidence been discovered against the Pauline authorship of most of his epistles and against the traditional authors of the Gospels?

It could be that this new development was more a matter of style than scholarship, more a matter of effort than of evidence.

Let it be noted that the tendency to deny traditional authorship was not limited to the Bible. During this same period, culminating in the nineteenth century, the scholars denied the Platonic authorship of one dialogue after another; until in the 1870 edition of Uberweg's *History of Philosophy*, the summary of scholarly results allowed only five or six of the thirty-six dialogues to be thought of as genuine Platonic productions.

In teaching a graduate course in Plato, I assigned to an unsuspecting student Schleiermacher's criticism of some Platonic dialogues. After studying the material, and without benefit of more recent works, the student reported that Schleiermacher's arguments did not justify his conclusion. In fact the student failed to see how Schleiermacher could have been considered a good Platonic scholar.

The student was right. How right he was can be seen by looking in the 1920 edition of Uberweg's *Geschichte der Philosophie* (not translated). Here the summary of scholarly opinion casts doubt on only one or two of the thirty-six dialogues. Something must have happened to Higher Criticism between 1870 and 1920.

A similar recovery has been made in Biblical criticism also. Whereas only four epistles were thought to be Pauline in 1870, now the traditional view is almost completely accepted. The Gospels are now given reasonable first century dates, and even John is no longer considered a third century fairy tale.

In the case of John this result has been immeasurably aided by the discovery of a page of the Gospel that seems to have been written within the first century; but for the most part the change has been brought about not by the discovery of new evidence but by the discovery that the old evidence had

been discounted on the flimsiest of pretexts. So flimsy that a first-year graduate student could see through it.

Had the graduate student so expressed himself in Germany a century ago, he would never have been given his doctorate. He would have been out of style. Today also there are styles, and students who do not conform often suffer for it. How foolish some present day styles are, may not be evident for another fifty years or more. Even we who try to maintain the Biblical position may not be able to discern exactly what is wrong with contemporary anti-Biblical scholarship; but it is not difficult to see the past styles that had their day and have passed into oblivion.