

tions and judicious applications make this a most useful volume, which will be ideal for those new to the study of the Reformation, those who might doubt the relevance of studying church history and theology as well as those who wish to enjoy a refreshingly well-written study, which will bring the Reformation alive and make it relevant to the present day.

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Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness

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SUMMARY

Investigating the rise of historicism and focusing in particular on the German biblical scholar and theologian W.M.L. de Wette and the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, Howard argues that historicism and secularisation do not represent the major breaks with the Christian heritage that they are often assumed to be. This is a rich and fascinating book, which, in addition to serious reflection on theological and philosophical developments as well as the rise of historicism, offers some intriguing glimpses into the lives of its main protagonists.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Howard argumentiert in dieser Untersuchung zur Entstehung des Historismus, die sich vor allem dem deutschen Bibelwissenschaftler und Theologen W.M.L. de Wette sowie dem Schweizer Historiker Jacob Burckhardt widmet, dass die Phänomene des Historismus und der Säkularisierung keineswegs die großen Brüche mit dem christlichen Erbe darstellen, als die sie häufig verstanden werden. Dies ist ein inhaltsreiches und faszinierendes Buch, das neben bedeutenden Überlegungen zu theologischen und philosophischen Entwicklungen sowie zur Entstehung des Historismus auch einige interessante Einblicke in das Leben seiner Hauptdarsteller gewährt.

RÉSUMÉ

Prenant pour objet d'étude l'avènement de l'historicisme, l'auteur s'intéresse au bibliste et théologien allemand W.M.L. de Wette, et à l'historien suisse Jacob Burckhardt. Il défend la thèse selon laquelle, contrairement à ce qu'on considère souvent, l'historicisme et la sécularisation ne constituent pas une rupture majeure avec l'héritage chrétien. L'ouvrage est riche et fascinant ; outre qu'il apporte une réflexion sérieuse sur l'évolution de la théologie et de la philosophie, ainsi que sur l'apparition de l'historicisme,

il nous fournit quelques renseignements surprenants sur la vie de ses principaux promoteurs.

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Investigating the rise of historicism and focusing in particular on the German biblical scholar and theologian W.M.L. de Wette and the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, Howard argues that historicism and secularisation do not represent the major breaks with the Christian heritage that they are often assumed to be. He demonstrates the centrality of inherited theological patterns of interpreting experience in the thought of Burckhardt, one of the key representatives of the emerging modern secular historical consciousness.

In the introduction Howard puts forward his main thesis, arguing that the 'shadows of theological presuppositions and attitudes, albeit in secularized forms, are ultimately more significant than the radical break that notions of religious crisis and apostasy seem to entail' (p. 7). He also discusses various definitions of historicism and points to weaknesses and self-contradictions in historicist thought. Modern secularisation, 'a complex process in which religion came to lose its authority over other social institutions' (p. 17), is traced back to the legacy of the Reformation and its stress of the importance of independent inquiry into the biblical texts.

Chapter one focuses on de Wette, situating his early thought in the cultural contexts of the late German Enlightenment, early romanticism and nineteenth-century historicism. Howard shows that de Wette's theology and exegesis epitomise a unique blend of Enlightenment historical-critical traditions in biblical scholarship, Kantian epistemological concepts and the aestheticising tendencies of the philosophies of Schelling and Fries. De Wette is said to embody the fundamental tension between wishing to preserve the true content of Christianity and embracing the critical spirit of *Wissenschaft*. This led him to embrace the philosophy of Fries, who offered an intellectual basis for the validity of metaphysics and religion by limiting the scope of reason. De Wette applied his insights to biblical interpretation, distinguishing between knowledge (*Wissen*, the mode of cognition applicable to the spatio-temporal world), belief (*Glaube*, which relates to a noumenal, infinite reality outside the phenomenal world) and aesthetic sense (*Ahnung*, 'cognition through pure feeling', which bridges the chasm between knowledge of the finite and faith in the infinite).

The second chapter looks at de Wette's time at the University of Berlin, arguing that his theology was worked out in conscious opposition to Schleiermacher. De Wette was particularly critical of Schleiermacher's willingness to minimise the importance of past expressions of faith (especially pre-Christian ones), his definition of religion, which he thought drove a wedge between religion and moral action, as well as his tendency to underrate aesthetics. Outlining de Wette's application of Fries's philosophy, Howard notes that

according to de Wette 'radical criticism of sacred texts could proceed . . . once one recognized that criticism's epistemic range was limited to *Wissen*; it could not encroach on the religiously more important categories of *Glaube* and *Ahnung*' (p. 65).

Howard then discusses the impact of de Wette's criticism and theology on Strauss, who in *Das Leben Jesu* applied his theory of myth (as something whose relation to historical events is elusive and irrelevant) as well as the Enlightenment distinction between reason and history to the Gospel stories. Strauss was also indebted to Reimarus, who considered historically mediated knowledge of God a contradiction in terms and pioneered the distinction between the historical Jesus (whom he regarded as a typical Jewish apocalyptic visionary) and the Christ of faith (who he understood to be a construct by Jesus' followers). Chapter three also analyses the knowledge-faith tensions of the 1830s when the critical demands of *Wissenschaft* conflicted with orthodox theological convictions. Howard notes that *Das Leben Jesu*, more than any other cultural production of the time, made transparent the intellectual tensions 'between the worldview of traditional Christianity appropriated in faith and expressed in symbolic forms, and the world of "modern consciousness" acquired through experience and reason and expressed as scientific and historical knowledge' (p. 86).

The fourth chapter then takes us to 'pious Basel', as Howard informs us about its cultural-religious history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, stressing that it was 'one of the most entrenched centers of anti-Enlightenment religiosity in Europe' (p. 112). Other foci are Burckhardt's father's humanist, orthodox and highly pastoral theological convictions, which stood in stark contrast to de Wette's critical positions, the circumstances surrounding de Wette's coming to Basel as well as his far-reaching influence, which ultimately led to the complete transformation of the theology department and indeed the university at large into a centre of *Wissenschaft*. Burckhardt's encounter with de Wette's historical criticism as a student at the University of Basel is examined, as are the resulting religious crisis and Burckhardt's eventual decision to give up theology

in favour of history.

In the final chapter, Howard highlights the 'Augustinian residuum' in Burckhardt's thought, contending that, despite his avowed secularism, there is a pronounced pre-modern undercurrent stemming from his conservative religious background. Drawing particular attention to Burckhardt's cultural pessimism, which was atypical for the nineteenth-century with its confidence in science and utopian social formulas and its optimistic belief in progress, Howard rejects the widely accepted claim that sees this as a Schopenhauerian influence, arguing instead that it is a secularised pre-modern inheritance from the idea of original sin. 'The ruins of [Burckhardt's] faith . . . furnished him with an incredulity toward the optimizing tendencies and the epistemological confidence characteristic of Rankean, Hegelian, Comtean, and Marxian approaches to history alike – in a word, to the very foundations of modern historical thinking' (p. 139). According to Howard, Burckhardt's awareness of human epistemological limitations has earned him a near hagiographical status as a proto-post-modern in the eyes of many historians and philosophers. He also lauds him for his social realism, which enabled him to foresee many of the problems that, much later, would manifest themselves in the modern totalitarian state.

This is a rich and fascinating book, which, in addition to serious reflection on theological and philosophical developments as well as the rise of historicism, offers some fascinating glimpses into the lives of its main protagonists. It makes a compelling case for Howard's claim that the avowedly secular phenomenon of historicism also exhibits traces of inherited theological patterns for interpreting experience. My only quibbles would be that chapter three, with its discussion of Strauss and the new christology, hangs somewhat in the air, that the use of footnotes would have been preferable to endless pages of endnotes and that there is no conclusion that sums up the argument of the book as a whole. Yet, this should not deter anyone from this important study, which truly deserves to be widely read.

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