



**Adolf von Harnack; Johann Anselm Steiger, ed.**

***Einleitung in das Neue Testament: Berliner Vorlesung  
im Wintersemester 1899/1900***

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As many students of modern theology know, in the winter semester of 1899/1900, Adolf (from 1914: von) Harnack gave a famous series of lectures in Berlin on “Das Wesen des Christentums,” published almost simultaneously in English as “What Is Christianity?” In these lectures, the great church historian, in the prime of his academic career, set before the cultured German public a vision of the essence of Christianity that came to serve as an almost canonical encapsulation of the Protestant liberal theological tradition.

Much less known is that Harnack offered a concurrent set of lectures that semester, devoted to a systematic “Introduction to the New Testament.” In fact, Harnack had often lectured on the New Testament since the 1870s, and no less than sixteen times in Berlin between 1891 and 1923. Despite extensive work on the New Testament from the 1890s onward, Harnack did not publish his New Testament lectures in his own lifetime, and this edition owes its existence to the editor’s fortuitous discovery of a set of lecture notes by Harnack’s student Carl Richard Schenkel in a Heidelberg antiquarian bookstore in 1994. While some of Harnack’s contributions to New Testament study are well known (the six volumes of Harnack’s *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament* were translated into English by J. R. Wilkinson in the early twentieth century<sup>1</sup>) this is a

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1. *The Sayings of Jesus: The Second Source of St. Matthew and St. Luke* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1908); *Luke the Physician: The Author of the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1908); *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1909); *The Date of the Acts and of*

welcome addition to our understanding of the historian's stance on the New Testament as a whole.

Johann Anselm Steiger has produced numerous editions of early modern or modern texts, and his editorial care is evident throughout. Readers of this volume might wish to begin with the "Nachwort des Herausgebers" (203–18) before reading the main text. There one learns of the existence of two other records of Harnack's New Testament lectures produced by two students, Heinrich Wolfgang Seidel and Richard Groeper, respectively. Steiger suggests that Schenkel's text appears the closest to Harnack's own presentation and so follows it throughout, though a systematic comparison of the transcripts remains a desideratum. The editor has clarified the text substantially with careful emendations on virtually every page of the manuscript, as well as a useful glossary of persons mentioned in the lectures, together with full indices and bibliography.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to the main text, we find something like an extended outline of Harnack's lectures rather than a verbatim transcript of everything that Harnack might have said. At many points we do have paragraphs of full sentences, but these are often juxtaposed with numbered lists of significant bullet points or bibliographic asides. The lectures fall into two uneven parts. After a brief introduction to the task of *Einleitung* and a survey of the textual transmission of the New Testament (5–14), Harnack treats in part 1 the formation of the canon (*Kanongeschichte*) of the New Testament (15–44), before turning, in part 2, to a more systematic survey of the formation of the individual books of the New Testament (45–202).

Harnack's summary of the formation of the canon of the New Testament distills views that he expressed at length elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> He surveys evidence for early citation of New Testament texts and suggests that some smaller collections may have been known by the late second century (e.g., he suggests that a four-gospel collection was known in Rome by around 180). This second-century emergence is due in part at least to the struggle with Gnosticism: "Die Großkirche mußte infolge des Kampfes mit den Gnostikern sich auch zur Bekenntniskirche ausbilden auf Grund des wahrne geschriebenen Wortes" (29). But it

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*the Synoptic Gospels* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911); *Bible Reading in the Early Church* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912); *The Origin of the New Testament and the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1925).

2. Though note the error in the Greek printing on 22 l. 18; the "improvement" from Baur to Bauer on 134 l. 9 appears to me a corruption, since F. C. Baur is more readily associated with *Tendenzkritik* than Bruno Bauer.

3. For a brief overview of his debate with Theodor Zahn in particular, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 23–24.

is not until the fourth century that we find the full emergence of a list of authoritative books that corresponds to our modern New Testament.

In the second and longest section of the lectures, Harnack surveys the individual writings of the New Testament with a view to answering the classic *Einleitungsfragen*: author, date, provenance, situation, integrity, authenticity, and so forth. He proceeds in roughly chronological order, beginning with Galatians and the Thessalonian correspondence, then proceeding through the other Pauline letters, before treating Acts, the Synoptic Gospels, the Catholic Epistles and the Johannine writings in turn.

To point out only some of the most notable of the many positions here embraced: Harnack rejects arguments for the inauthenticity of 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians, departs from many of his contemporaries in declining to see Rom 16 as a later addition to the letter, and views the Pastoral Epistles as non-Pauline letters composed around 115 CE that expand on a genuine core preserved in 2 Timothy. Harnack also advances his famous thesis, which he must have published at roughly the same time as he offered these lectures, that Prisca and Aquila wrote the letter to the Hebrews. The author of Acts is not interested in internecine ecclesial squabbles (contra Baur and others) but rather carefully used a series of sources (including a Jerusalem-centered Petrine source, an Antiochene source, and the source underlying the “we-passages,” which might have been composed by Luke himself) to compile a reliable history. Matthew and Luke used Mark (who, in turn, relied on at least oral tradition) and a shared sayings source that Harnack refers to as τὰ λόγια: “Die Redequelle wahrscheinlich von einem Augenzeugen die schon Marcus gekannt hat, eine Quelle die von Matt. dem Apostel sehr wohl herrühren kann” (144). First Peter was originally written by a student of Peter and erroneously ascribed to the apostle in the mid-second century; 2 Peter depends not only on Jude but also on the Apocalypse of Peter and so should be dated at the earliest to the mid-second century. The author of the Apocalypse should be identified with the author of the Johannine Epistles and Gospel, and the Fourth Gospel makes best sense against the background of “Jewish-Greek philosophy of religion” such as we find in Philo.

Throughout these lectures we find Harnack unsurprisingly employing his patristic erudition to adjudicate questions of attestation or early tradition. One also finds invocation of Gnosticism or Marcion repeatedly in these lectures: the former as, for example, the background to Colossians or Jude, the latter as a fascination who shows up in sometimes unexpected ways, for example, the three major turning points in the interpretation of Romans: Marcion (!), Augustine, and the Reformation (70). Further, as the editor wryly observes, we might suspect that Harnack’s sympathies for Marcion also

explain the jolting fact that Harnack only once cites a discrete Old Testament text in the entire set of lectures (206).

Christoph Marksches has pointed to the striking discrepancy between the volume of Harnack's New Testament work and the scholarly disinterest in that portion of his oeuvre. He suggests this may be in part due to Harnack's notable oscillation between extreme positions, radical-critical on the one hand, and conservative-traditional on the other, in a peculiar combination of views that never quite found a home in mainstream New Testament scholarship.<sup>4</sup> That characterization certainly holds true for these lectures, fascinating as they are. Harnack's erudition is on display at every turn, as he advances independent hypotheses about New Testament problems in critical dialogue with the great interpreters of the nineteenth century, but in the end the book is most interesting for what it tells us about Harnack. This book supplies a welcome glimpse into Harnack as an instructor, and in a time when the lines between New Testament and early Christian studies are once again blurry, it allows us to see a major historian of early Christianity wrestling with the Christian church's foundational scripture, even if the results in hindsight are admittedly mixed. Harnack's New Testament work certainly deserves more attention than it has hitherto received, and we can thank the editor for supplying one more avenue for facilitating that attention.

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4. See Christoph Marksches, "Adolf von Harnack als Neutestamentlicher," in *Adolf von Harnack: Theologe, Historiker, Wissenschaftspolitiker*, ed. Kurt Nowak and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 365–95, esp. 365–67, 394.