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# “LE PLUS ARISTOCRATIQUE DES GOÛTS” MODERNIST, ORIENTALIST AND ANTI-SEMITIC BIBLE READINGS IN LATE 19<sup>th</sup>-CENTURY BELGIUM<sup>1</sup>

Karim SCHELKENS

As a Catholic Church historian, I have often considered the modernist crisis as a crucial period of transition *within* Roman Catholicism, marked by painful struggles and circling around attempts at reconciling scientific methodology with the Christian faith tradition<sup>2</sup>. More precisely, the modernist crisis constitutes the transition of a church that seeks a way of dealing with modernity, and its critical spirit and attitude. An attitude that, among others, has led to the development of the historical critical method, now applied to the very sources of Christianity. As the eminent church historian Yves Congar (1904-1995) put it: the collision within the Catholic Church between the hierarchy – including the so-called ‘traditionalist’ theologians defending it – and those who would eventually be labeled “modernists” was the consequence of the discordance between the doctrines imposed by the magisterium on the one hand, and the conclusions of a

<sup>1</sup> I am greatly indebted to several persons for their willingness to revise and comment on the foregoing manuscript. In particular, I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Bart Coppein, Prof. Didier Pollefeyt, and Prof. Marcel Poorthuis. Also, I wish to thank Mrs. Hermione L’Amiral, for allowing me to access the files on Picard in the Archives of the Belgian Senate [ABS], and Mr. Jan Anckaer for granting me access to the Belgian Library of Parliament, which holds one of the rare collections of the *Journal de Bruxelles*. Prof. Leo Kenis has given his kind permission to make good use of the Faculty of Theology Archives [AFT], and Mr. Jo Landuyt has made it possible for me to investigate material documenting A.J. Delattre’s career in the Jesuit Archives [ABSE]. I have also been able to make use of sources in the Archives of the Diocese of Bruges [ADB] and in the Archives of the Catholic University of Leuven [AKUL].

<sup>2</sup> K. Schelkens, “The Louvain Faculty of Theology and the Modern(ist) Heritage. Reconciling History and Theology”, 856-891. This is also the case with many other church historians; see for instance the landmark study of É. Fouilloux, *Une église en quête de liberté*; T.M. Looze, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism*. I should also mention, for the more social component of Catholic modernism, excellent studies such as the one by É. Poulat, *Intégrisme et catholicisme integral*.

historico-scientific study of the documentation referred to by that same magisterium as the foundation for their doctrinal statements<sup>3</sup>.

Long before the official condemnation of modernism in the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis*<sup>4</sup>, the Catholic hierarchy's defensive attitude had already been felt under Pope Pius IX, who, in his 1864 *Syllabus errorum* and his encyclical, *Quanta cura*, condemned principal 'modern errors' such as rationalism, gallicanism, socialism, naturalism, and liberalism. Both aforementioned 1864 documents were issued precisely one year after the appearance of Ernest Renan's (1823-1892) notorious and immensely popular *Vie de Jésus*<sup>5</sup>. These papal doctrines would remain the blueprint of an overall defensive and, at times, outright aggressive ecclesiastical style, one that would only be fully abandoned during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Naturally, this present contribution will not and cannot offer a full overview of the Catholic modernist crisis, neither will it offer a stylistic analysis of the church's attitudes and announcements in the same era. Rather, within the vast context of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catholicism, I have chosen to present a single case study in detail, limiting itself to a twofold manner: First, the present article will not discuss the developments in France, no matter how major their importance, but rather focus on three Belgian characters, each involved with biblical interpretation in a very particular fashion. None of these protagonists have been the object of sufficient and/or recent study within the particular context of modernism, and I hope to make clear that each of them deserves further study. A second limitation: I will not enter into great detail regarding the actual theological relevance of the topics, but I will focus rather on the interactions and/or differences distinguishing my *dramatis personae*. As mentioned above, when defining "modernism" as a research topic, church historiographers tend to restrict the problematic to an exclusively Roman Catholic affair. To compensate for its bifold limitations, the present study will lessen this restriction and put a non-Catholic, and even non-religious, protagonist in the heart of the story. By inserting and highlighting the role of a notorious Belgian lawyer and politician such as Edmond Picard<sup>6</sup>, I will expand the perspective of modernism beyond the ecclesiastical

<sup>3</sup> Y. Congar, *La Tradition et les traditions*. Paris: Cerf, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Pius X, *Litterae encyclicae Pascendi*, 622-639.

<sup>5</sup> E. Renan, *Vie de Jésus*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863. On Renan's work, see F. Laplanche, "Renan et l'exégèse biblique", 87.

<sup>6</sup> For the part on Picard, I am greatly indebted to the pioneering research done by B. Coppein in his dissertation, *Edmond Picard (1836-1924), actor en getuige van een veranderend Belgisch rechtsdenken in Europees perspectief aan het einde van de negentiende eeuw*. Also see B. Coppein, "Edmond Picard (1836-1924), avocat bruxellois et belge par excellence de la deuxième moitié de la XIXe siècle", 225-237.

confines, yet remain fully attentive to the critical questioning of the sources of Christian faith proper to the era.

#### EDMOND PICARD (1836-1924)

Edmond Picard<sup>7</sup> remains – both within political and legal history – something of a *cas unique*. Born in 1836 into a Brussels family of five children, he was the son of François-David Picard (1803-1869)<sup>8</sup>, a francophone lawyer at the bar of the Brussels Court of Appeal, a personal friend of Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen (1796-1862)<sup>9</sup> and a professor of law at the recently established *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB) – teaching mostly courses in Civil Law. His mother, Marie-Josèphe Moens, came from a Flemish background, and was known to be a devout Catholic<sup>10</sup>. These background factors would profoundly shape Picard's personality, turning him into a combination of an eloquent rhetorician with a tendency toward mysticism. Picard lost his Catholic faith during his period as a student at the ULB, yet never became an advocate of radical anticlericalism. That said, Picard was also known to be quite a hardheaded, provocative and rather adventurous character, who experienced difficulties with secondary school discipline, causing him to drop out at the age of seventeen and become a sailor. Nevertheless, he returned to the bench in 1850 and turned out to be a gifted Law student, who obtained his doctorate in 1860, *summa cum laude*, and defended his aggregational dissertation four years later<sup>11</sup>. After that, he inscribed at the Brussels bar and became a trainee with the later Justice Minister, Jules Lejeune (1828-1911). His career in law evolved rapidly, and after a period as a lawyer at the Court of Appeal, he went on to become an attorney at the Court of Cassation in Brussels in 1880, a function he would keep until 1920. During this period, he initiated the edition of his *opus magnum*, which is found in the *Pandectes belges* and contains an overview of Belgian Law from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the dissertation by Coppein, my main secondary sources on Picard are: F. Ringelheim, *Jurisconsulte de race*; J.P. Arnoldi, *Edmond Picard, sénateur socialiste*; and P. Teitelbaum, *Edmond Picard et l'antisémitisme*. For general biographical information, see R. Warlomont's "Picard, Edmond-Désiré", 644-658; and L. Dupont, "Edmond Picard, 1836-1924", 97-107.

<sup>8</sup> On Picard's wider background, see G. Kurth, *Notice sur la famille Picard*, 17-18.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Despy-Meyer, "Un homme au service d'une cause. Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen et l'Université Libre de Bruxelles", 75-92.

<sup>10</sup> See the dossier on Picard in the ABS, which also contains data on his family and files regarding his interventions in the Senate.

<sup>11</sup> E. Picard, *Essai sur la certitude dans le droit naturel*.

20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet Picard was all but a one-sided personality, and some other elements of his biography cannot be left unmentioned before we head into the issues of biblical exegesis. For instance, in 1875 he solicited for the chair of Criminal Law at the Université Nouvelle, which, much to his disdain, he did not obtain. In reaction to the doctrinal-liberal course taken by that university's Administrative Board, protests arose in the early 1890's. One sees Picard figured among those who founded the *Université Nouvelle de Bruxelles* in 1894<sup>12</sup>, where he would teach 'Encyclopedia of Law', 'Legal History' and 'Civil Law'. This indicates that, politically speaking, he did not at all support the doctrinal wing of the Belgian Liberal Party<sup>13</sup>. It did, however, have some consequences for his political undertakings; since 1882 Picard had already run for Senate on several occasions<sup>14</sup> within the Liberal Party, yet his opinions were clearly too progressive to obtain a seat. When the Belgian Workers Party was founded in April 1885<sup>15</sup>, he joined the Socialist ranks, and finally, in 1895 he became a provincial Socialist senator on behalf of the Provincial Council of Hainaut, where he would remain until 1908. At that time, he left the Party, as he had become highly contested for several reasons: Picard was less anticlerical than most of his Socialist Party members, but on the other hand, he was much more nationalist orientated – whereas socialism tended towards internationalism. On top of that, he had always supported King Leopold II's politics of colonization in the Congo, and he had become a virulent anti-Semitic. It is precisely these elements which bring us to the matter that interests us here: Picard's role in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Belgian biblical exegesis. From this point onward, this contribution will only indirectly refer to Picard's legal thought and its values, and rather focus on his extraordinary interest in biblical matters, which is strongly connected with his socialist interests and his anti-Semitism.

For a large part, the origins of Picard's anti-Semitic opinions are to be traced back to his participation in a diplomatic journey to the pre-colonial Sultanate of Morocco between December 1887 and March 1888. The mission itself was of lesser importance, but Picard travelled a lot, triggering his later critics to state that: "il visite le pays comme un jardin zoologique,

<sup>12</sup> See Picard's 1894 work, *Une nouvelle université à Bruxelles*.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the political turmoil of the era, P. Lefevre, "De liberale partij als organisatie van 1846 tot 1914", 75-82.

<sup>14</sup> In the year 1882, Picard published his *Profession de foi politique* in Brussels, explaining the reasons why he entered the political field; posing as a progressive liberal, this had already been prefigured in his opinions expressed in *La Liberté* in the years between 1865 and 1867.

<sup>15</sup> On the larger socio-political historical background of this study, see C. Strikwerda, *A House Divided*; and L. Wils, "De politieke ontwikkeling in België 1870-1894", 164-206.

observant, avec l'oeil de l'ethnologue averti, la race sémitique dans son milieu naturel, sous ses deux espèces, l'arabe et la juive"<sup>16</sup>. The first-hand experience of another civilization would prove to be a lasting impression on Picard, who kept a full diary of his journey that eventually led to a report published as a series of articles in *L'Art Moderne*, a periodical co-founded by Camille Lemonnier (1834-1913) and led by Picard<sup>17</sup>. Later on, these reports were published in one volume, under the title *El Moghreb al Aksa*<sup>18</sup>. Picard's initial bedazzlement was soon replaced by feelings of awe and even disgust for the state of the prisoners in Tanger, for the central role of the Quran in the practice of Moroccan law<sup>19</sup>, for the state of medicine, for the place of women in society, and so on. On top of that, his shaking experience with the poverty of the Arab population was soon contrasted by an experience of the richness and wealth found in the Jewish quarter of Méquinez. Soon, Picard started to theorize on his experiences and concluded that the entire Semitic race was void of civilization. In the years to come, Picard would develop his theory, outlining an entirely revised version of world history based on racial antagonism and inspired, among others, by the work of French Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931)<sup>20</sup>. In Picard's mind, race had become a key factor in order to understand and describe the evolution of law and civilization as a whole. And, it is precisely his interest in tracing large patterns on the evolutionary aspect of humankind's social and legal organizational structures that led him to develop a large anti-Semitic theory, which he would make public on several occasions from then on. The first and most fundamental publication in that direction would be his essay *Le droit et la race*. The essay was published as an introduction to the *Pandectes belges* in 1891<sup>21</sup> and seeks to connect the alleged "Jewish problem" with the so-called "social problem". Picard did so by outlining a world history of struggle between the Aryan and the Semitic race, all the while presenting the Jews as a race that acts as a parasite upon others and underlining that racial conflict would be unavoidable where both races were present in the same area.

<sup>16</sup> Ringelheim (1999), 46.

<sup>17</sup> Picard was well versed in contemporary art and literature and belonged to a circle of people, among which we find Maurice Maeterlinck, Georges Rodenbach, Émile Verhaeren, etc. *L'Art Moderne* had been established as a social counter movement to the *L'Art pour l'Art* movement connected with the *Jeune Belgique* group of artists.

<sup>18</sup> E. Picard, *El Moghreb al Aksa: Une mission belge au Maroc*, 1893.

<sup>19</sup> Picard (1893), 275-276.

<sup>20</sup> G. Le Bon, *La civilisation des Arabes*. See also the biography written by E. Picard, *Gustave Le Bon et son Oeuvre*, 32 and 64.

<sup>21</sup> E. Picard, *Le droit et la race*, ix-li.

The issue that is most relevant for this paper is that when constructing this version of world history, Picard also discusses the Jewish origins of Christianity. He distinguishes three phases in humankind's evolution beginning with the Greco-Persian Wars. The ancient struggle between the Greek and the Persian civilizations is taken to be an initial era of clash between two types of civilizations, with the Persians being identified by Picard as representatives of the Semitic race:

Les guerres médiques mirent en présence, avec évidence le principe aryen et le principe sémite. Le conflit demeure devant la postérité avec sa dominante: le maintien ou la destruction de l'indépendance hellénique, c'est-à-dire la continuation de la civilisation aryenne ou la substitution à celle-ci de la civilisation asiatique.

Second comes the era of the Punic Wars, with the Roman civilization constituting the Aryan side. And third, the rise of Christianity as a decisive factor shaping civilization and creating societal structures. When discussing this third era, Picard's logic ultimately leads to far-fetched implications: Picard denies the Jewish roots of Jesus of Nazareth, claiming Jesus to be an Aryan, even though he lived in the region of Judea<sup>22</sup>. On behalf of this type of reasoning, which is also found in the writings of Schopenhauer, Picard stressed the fact that the Christian doctrine had been largely rejected by the Jews and had proven to be most influential and successful in European, so-called "pagan", areas. These regions, he claimed, had been populated with Indo-Europeans and thus, Aryan descendants. Therefore, Picard argued, the Church's adoption of the Old Testament books into its biblical canon is a historical aberration. To some extent, Picard figured among some authors of the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* who gradually developed into Marcionite and anti-Semitic tendencies. In the end of his essay – harkening back to literature such as the notorious book *La France Juive*,<sup>23</sup> authored by the French Catholic convert Édouard Drumont (1844-1917)<sup>24</sup> –, Picard offered radical options to "cleanse" the civilization

<sup>22</sup> In some German circles, this would eventually lead to a total draining of Jesus' Jewishness, with authors writing about blonde Galileans with blue eyes, etc. This has been well demonstrated by S. Heschel in *The Aryan Jesus. Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*.

<sup>23</sup> É. Drumont, *La France juive*.

<sup>24</sup> Drumont was the founder of the *Ligue antisémite de France*. Interestingly, Picard had sent a personal copy of his own *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme* to Drumont with a handwritten note on the inside, reading: "À Monsieur Édouard Drumont qui plus précisément que tout autre a su en ce siècle donner au problème sémitique sa véritable importance et sa juste orientation". Cited in Coppein (2010), 317. More information on anti-Semitism



of his day. He listed solutions to the “Jewish problem”, even proposing the exclusion of Jews from public functions, barring their financial freedom, etc:

La suppression de l’influence juive et, pour y parvenir, la destruction des fortunes juives, par une législation réformatrice de la Bourse, par la répression de la spéculation stérile, par l’organisation de pénalités sévères contre l’agiotage, par l’application impitoyable des responsabilités et du devoir de restitution contre ceux qui s’enrichissent aux dépens d’autrui et sans fournir aucun équivalent augmentant le patrimoine social commun. L’exclusion, aussi, des juifs des fonctions gouvernementales.<sup>25</sup>

Picard was not the first to connect the Jewish people with the notions of wealth and power. It is clear that this connection was not rare in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Socialist milieus<sup>26</sup> and often drew upon Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Arnold Ruge (1802-1880) and their description of the Jews as an adequate illustration of capitalist exploitation, as published in their 1844 pamphlet, *Zur Judenfrage*<sup>27</sup>. Still, other than Marx, Picard maintained the combination of both economic and religious anti-Semitism – portraying the Jews as a divisive people and entering into lengthy argumentations on the value of Jewish religious history and practices. On that domain, Picard judged the “Catholic solution” of converting the Jews to Christianity to be useless, for it remained superficial<sup>28</sup>. In the end, the particularity of Picard’s position lay imbedded in an overarching juridical perspective. However politically, religiously, and economically colored his anti-Semitism may have been, its foundation relied upon Picard’s consistent tying of ethnological arguments with his Socialist doctrine of justice<sup>29</sup>.

in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century France is found in G. Noriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France*, 207-283. Drumont’s writings were influential on a larger European scale; on this, see the pages studying ‘international Anti-Semitism’ in M. Poorthuis & T. Salemink, *Een donkere spiegel*, 56-59.

<sup>25</sup> Picard (1891), xlix-l.

<sup>26</sup> See K. Weissmann, *Der Nationale Sozialismus*, 76-92.

<sup>27</sup> K. Marx & A. Ruge, “Zur Judenfrage”. On Picard’s connection between the Jewish problem and the social problem, also see W. Van Rooy, “Ideologie en ideologie-inconsistentie”, 66-88, on p. 86: “One of the most fascinating individuals involved in the anti-Semitic movement, and, one who also contributed seriously to the misunderstanding concerning the alliance between anti-Semitism and socialism was Edmond Picard.”

<sup>28</sup> Picard (1891), xlii.

<sup>29</sup> See Coppein (2010), 304-306, esp. 304: “Zoals [Picard] ook later in *Le Droit pur* zou doen, gaf hij meteen aan het ras als de belangrijkste motor van de evolutie van de rechtstotaliteit te beschouwen: ‘Or, d’après notre conviction profonde, il n’est point, pour l’organisation et l’avancement du Droit, de facteur plus puissant et plus décisif que la race.’”



But let us return to the subject of biblical interpretation. Most of the aforementioned issues were picked up again in an extended version one year later with the publication of Picard's notorious *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme*<sup>30</sup>. In this book, he sketched a broader picture of his world historical view and touched, *ipso facto*, upon the value of the Old Testament and its (ir)relevance for the study of Christian origins. Picard was hardly the only person at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to promote a scission between the Old and the New Testament, and to cut off Christianity from its Jewish origins. Influential theologians, such as Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), would also later defend this position, thereby reclaiming the ancient position of Marcion. However, in Picard's case, this stress, laid upon the discontinuity of both testaments, did not come as a result of critical historical research. Rather, its breeding ground rested in Picard's highly emotional reactions emerging during his Moroccan journey and his tendency towards facile generalizations. This, combined with his juridical interests, led to the theory of the clash between the Aryan and the Semitic races. When applied to the origins of Christianity, his *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme* contains passages such as:

Assurément aujourd'hui cette conception enfantine de l'histoire [the notion that Christianity has evolved out of Judaism] n'est plus admissible, et ce qui apparaît entre l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament, ce n'est plus un rapport de continuité, traditionnelle, mais un abîme profond, comme l'est toujours celui qui sépare les races.<sup>31</sup>

The Semitic race, moreover, was not only comprised of the Jews but, as mentioned above, also the Arab Muslim populations of Northern Africa. On that account, Picard went so far as to claim that the Quran was the effective continuation of the Semitic Old Testament, not the New Testament. As for Christianity's Aryan nature, having reconfirmed the Aryan origins of Christ, Picard went on to stress the role, and mostly the successes, of the apostle Paul and his mission to the gentiles as a crucial element in his favor. Stressing Paul's conflicts with the Jews, he made clear that the Christian Aryan religion was naturally more successful among Indo-Europeans, and from there on spread throughout Europe:

<sup>30</sup> E. Picard, *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme*. Significantly, this 1892 book was published in a second edition after Picard's death, at the beginning of the Second World War in 1941, when Belgium fell under Nazi rule and Picard's dubious heritage was picked up by the German occupiers to be used as propaganda.

<sup>31</sup> Picard (1892), 127-128.

Dès que la famille chrétienne commença à s'élargir, ce fut justement chez des gens non israélites, et partant non circoncis, que la foi nouvelle trouva le plus d'accès. Les obliger à se faire circoncire était impossible, car ils regardaient cette bizarre opération, transformation et vestige des sacrifices humains faits autrefois à Moloch, comme ridicule et déshonorante pour eux. [...] C'est à Corinthe que la vie apostolique de Paul atteignit son plus haut degré d'activité, toujours dans le sens d'un détachement du Judaïsme.<sup>32</sup>

Gradually, it appears, Picard was becoming aware of the fact that the terrain of the study of the Ancient Near East was something of a hot topic among biblical scholars, certainly in France. Picard developed an ever increasing interest in studies published by authors, such as Renan, who would become an influential source for several varying currents, including the historical-critical, the Aryan (Indo-European) and the Socialist approaches of Ancient Near East literature<sup>33</sup>. Next to Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, his 1869 book, *Saint-Paul*, had become a constant point of reference, allusion and citation<sup>34</sup>. Also, Picard would become a strong defender of the works by a lesser-known French orientalist, Eugène Ledrain (1844-1910). Ledrain, himself impressed by Renan as well as by the harsh and authoritative ecclesiastical opposition against the latter, had been an Oratorian priest, but had resigned in favor of a position as a professor of Orientalism at the Paris *École du Louvre* and conservator of the oriental collections at the Louvre Museum. Much under the influence of Renan and of French rationalist tendencies, Ledrain had initiated the large project of a new French Bible translation on the basis of the Hebrew and Greek texts. In itself, this is not a striking issue, yet this particular translation was presented as an edition void of any religious influences and presented as *La bible rationaliste*. Ledrain, being of the opinion that: "les juifs, et en général, les sémites, ne se sont guère élevés jusqu'à notre conception des rapports de l'univers avec la Divinité"<sup>35</sup>, opened the first volume of his translation as follows:

Restent en face l'un de l'autre le catholicisme et la liberté. Mais, dans la question biblique, le premier fléchit déjà. Après avoir enseigné que, dans le texte, les mots eux-mêmes sont inspirés, il en est venu à n'admettre l'inspiration que

<sup>32</sup> Picard (1892), 162.

<sup>33</sup> On Renan's influence in the Low Countries, see Th. Salemink & M. Poorthuis, *Lotus in de lage landen*.

<sup>34</sup> Picard's way of dealing with Renan was quite selective, and he picked up in his same selective manner on Renan's views of the organization and foundation of the Nation State, as rendered in the latter's 1882 speech at the Sorbonne: *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* On this issue, see the account given by Coppein (2010), 324-338.

<sup>35</sup> E. Ledrain, "Préface", ii-iii.

pour la pensée, non pour les mots. Une opinion assez récente restreint l'inspiration aux idées religieuses et morales, de telle sorte qu'il ne peut y avoir, dans la Bible, ni une erreur de dogme, ni rien de contraire aux principes de mœurs.<sup>36</sup>

In his “traduction indo-européenne”, Ledrain attacked all of the above and tried to strip the biblical text from its supernatural and mythological proportions, an early attempt at demythologization. His bible translation was perused by Picard precisely as a source for his own speculative approaches, which were made public in a series of further publications, such as the 1893 essay *Contribution à la révision des origines du christianisme*. And in 1896, Picard published his *Le sermon sur la montagne et le socialisme contemporain*. In the latter pamphlet, he went to great lengths – altering the original sequence of the text – in order to prove the congruence between contemporary Socialism and Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount”. In later years, Picard would continue to hold his views, even after his contested refusal to join a group of Belgian writers in their support of Émile Zola’s (1840-1902) famous *J'accuse*<sup>37</sup>, which defended Jewish captain Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935)<sup>38</sup>. At this point, we bring to a close the first part of our contribution and turn to the reactions upon Picard’s exegetical endeavors from the side of the Catholic theological milieu.

#### ALBIN VAN HOONACKER (1857-1933)

Although Edmond Picard never professed a genuine anti-religious attitude – an attitude often found both in the right wing of the Liberal Party or in some circles of the Socialist Party –<sup>39</sup>, his environment did not quite connect him with the altogether different milieu found in Louvain’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century Faculty of Theology. Also, Picard maintained a sense of anticlericalism. That said, it should immediately be made clear that an entirely Roman Catholic environment such as the faculty was not void of anti-Semitic

<sup>36</sup> E. Ledrain, *La bible rationaliste*, vi-vii.

<sup>37</sup> E. Zola, “J’accuse”, 1. On the issue of Dreyfusism in Belgium at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Coppein (2010), 313-318.

<sup>38</sup> Picard would defend his own views in the socialist journal *Le Peuple* on January 27, 1898; and in the same year he would publish a series of 19 articles in the same journal, entitled *L’Antisémitisme scientifique et humanitaire*. These articles were jointly published in his 1898 volume, *L’Aryano-Sémitisme*.

<sup>39</sup> Anticlerical tendencies were certainly and openly present, and peaked somewhat as a result of the late 1870s school struggle. See J. Lory, “La résistance des catholiques belges à la ‘loi de malheur’”, 729-747.

sentiments either<sup>40</sup>. Certainly, after the Damascus-incident of 1840<sup>41</sup>, we note the appearance of a series of articles in the Liège *Journal historique et littéraire*<sup>42</sup>, drafted by the Louvain theologian and later Bishop of Bruges, Jean-Baptiste Malou (1809-1864). In these publications, Malou illustrated the historical foundations of the antagonism between Jews and Christians, underlining that whereas Christians do not intend to harm the Jews, the latter are instructed by the Talmud to attack Christians<sup>43</sup>. This is one example. On the other hand, professors such as Jan-Theodoor Beelen (1807-1884) took an opposite stance and stressed the significance of the study of Judaism in Christian theology. But, the period that is of interest to us is a later one. Whereas Beelen had given biblical exegesis a strong philological orientation and established the Louvain Orientalist School, this tendency faltered somewhat after his retirement in 1875. And one notices that during the 1880's, the only theologian teaching and studying biblical exegesis was Thomas-Joseph Lamy (1827-1907)<sup>44</sup>, who severely attacked biblical-criticism, describing it as "un travail de démolition rationaliste"<sup>45</sup>. Without much exaggeration, Lamy can be described as a representative of the traditional Catholic point of view, who endorsed the policies expressed in the *Syllabus errorum*. This becomes quite clear from his negative reception of several of Renan's books – whom he had known personally during his period of study at the Paris *Bibliothèque Nationale*<sup>46</sup>. As the only Belgian theologian to devote serious attention to the book, Lamy's *Examen critique de la Vie de Jésus de Renan* leaves no room for doubt: Louvain hardly made attempts to go along with the new currents in biblical exegesis<sup>47</sup>. In fact, it

<sup>40</sup> A more general picture of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catholic anti-Semitism in Belgium is offered in L. Saerens, "De houding van de Belgische katholieken tegenover de joden", 76-93.

<sup>41</sup> J. Frankel, *The Damascus Affaire*. On February 5, 1840, the Italian Capuchin friar, Tommaso, had been kidnapped and murdered. Soon, rumors spread that this was a ritual murder committed by Jews, and shortly thereafter, seven Jews were arrested and confessed under torture.

<sup>42</sup> See J.B. Malou, "Doctrines des juifs sur le mal qu'il peuvent faire aux chrétiens", 445-458.

<sup>43</sup> On this episode, see L. Kenis, "Tussen filologie en polemiek", 49-60.

<sup>44</sup> On Lamy, see P. Ladeuze, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Mgr Lamy", cxxxi-clix; and L. Kenis, *De Theologische faculteit te Leuven*, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> T.J. Lamy, "Jésus Christ devant la critique", 707-732, esp. 711.

<sup>46</sup> L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Notice sur Thomas-Joseph Lamy", cxxxiii. Also see the statement by J. Coppens, in his *Son Excellence Mgr Paulin Ladeuze*, 200-201: "Lamy n'avait pas été dénué de science ni de talent, mais il s'était en quelque sorte arrêté à la réfutation d'Ernest Renan. S'obstinant à se placer à un point de vue principalement polémique et apologétique, il avait perdu de vue la tâche d'un professeur d'université."

<sup>47</sup> T.J. Lamy, *Examen critique de la Vie de Jésus de M. Ernest Renan*. This is a revised version of his commentary, published as T.J. Lamy, "La Vie de Jésus par M. Ernest

would take a young priest from the Diocese of Bruges, Albin Van Hoonacker<sup>48</sup>, to both pick up the threads left by Beelen and to challenge Picard's statements on the value of the Old Testament.

Van Hoonacker, came from a Catholic family and was born in Bruges in 1857. After having studied at the Collège Saint Louis in his hometown, where he studied Latin and Greek, he entered the Minor Seminary at Roulers, where he studied Philosophy. Immediately thereupon, he entered the Major Seminary of the Diocese of Bruges for his theological formation. On December 18, 1880, Van Hoonacker was ordained to the priesthood<sup>49</sup>. Soon thereafter, the then Bishop of Bruges, Mgr. Jean-Joseph Faict (1813-1894) – well known for openly criticizing all forms of Roman Catholic traditionalism during Vatican I – sent Van Hoonacker to Louvain where he prepared a doctoral dissertation in fundamental theology on the doctrine of creation under the direction of Prof. Antoine Dupont (1836-1917).<sup>50</sup> He successfully defended his dissertation in July 1886. After a short period of parish work at Courtrai, he was sent back to Louvain to become sub regent of the Holy Spirit College, and ... to improve his knowledge of Oriental linguistics. Soon, Van Hoonacker became well versed in Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic. In these years following the defense of his doctoral dissertation, he soon took an interest in studying the role of historical criticism in Catholic exegesis and started distinguishing between apologetics and biblical criticism. In one of his first studies, Van Hoonacker entered the methodological fray with an attempt to find a *via media*, positioning sound Catholic biblical criticism in between the Scylla of apologetic and traditionalist bible approaches, and the Charybdis of rationalism<sup>51</sup>. That way, he distanced himself somewhat from the Leuven exegete Lamy. As a result, Van Hoonacker also became a talented practitioner of biblical criticism, which he applied mainly to the Pentateuch and to the study of the Minor prophets; this would eventually develop into his main expertise. However far apart their worlds may have been, it is precisely by the end of 1880 that both Van Hoonacker and Picard began spreading their publications in the field of biblical studies. Picard, remaining an amateur scholar, did so in the periodicals *La Réforme* – a periodical

Renan”, 470-485. Lamy's commentary has recently been studied by W. De Pril, “La Vie de Jésus d'Ernest Renan”, 494-528.

<sup>48</sup> On Van Hoonacker, see K. Schelkens, “Albin Van Hoonacker”, 1485-1491.

<sup>49</sup> ADB: Biographical dossier Van Hoonacker.

<sup>50</sup> See H. Jacobs, “De roermondenaar Antoine Dupont”, 227-248.

<sup>51</sup> See A. Van Hoonacker's 1889 volume: *La critique biblique et l'apologétique*, in which he repeated the loyal yet critical position he had already presented in his earlier articles, entitled “Coup d'œil sur la critique biblique rationaliste”, and “La critique biblique et l'apologétique”.

of the progressive liberals – and *L'Art moderne*. Van Hoonacker entered the public domain via the publication of articles in *Muséon* – the orientalist periodical founded by Charles-Joseph de Harlez (1832-1899) –, clarifying that he had not only well read the French authors of his era, but could just as well enter into debate with the positions taken by the Protestant orientalist scholars, such as Johann Gustav Stickel (1805-1896) at the University of Jena and Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891) at Leyden University.

On the occasion of the appearance of the fifth volume of Ledrain's *Bible rationaliste* in 1889 and while dealing with *Les prophètes*<sup>52</sup>, Picard published a lengthy article praising Ledrain's non-clerical approach to historiography. Picking up on this thread, Picard took great effort in underlining the liberty of the prophets *vis-à-vis* the Jewish people and its cult and re-defined their stance in terms of both a political and a racial stance. More precisely, against the background of his own peculiar views on world history as being an antagonist history, Picard opposed the Judaic "stagnated civilization" – pointing to the cultic massacre of children for Jehovah, etc.<sup>53</sup> – to that of the "Persian-Aryan" Assyrians. In an inspired *tour de force*, Picard went as far as identifying the Jewish Jehovah with the deity of Baal-Moloch and claimed that "Baal-Moloch, jusque là le Jéhovah régulier, savoure tranquillement ses rations périodiques de petits enfants, absolument comme on le vit longtemps à Carthage, et rassasie ses regards du spectacle excitant des orgies sémitiques." Subsequently, he argued that Amos (and in a later phase, also prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah) turned against the Jews for their lack of civilization, thus installing a split between the prophets and the Jewish people, allowing him to somehow "rehabilitate" the prophets as being non-Semitic. The prophets, Picard concluded, were correct in attacking the Jewish cult and therefore cannot be counted among the Semite populations; rather they are put under the Aryan camp, which Picard links to the Assyrian civilization<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Ledrain (1889), 5, where Ledrain claims that: "Les gens des tribus s'en allaient donc voir les prostituées saintes... Les filles d'Israël se livraient même, paraît-il, à ceux de leur nation et aux étrangers."

<sup>53</sup> Picard, *Les prophètes d'Israël*, 12-27.

<sup>54</sup> Picard (1889), 45: "L'initiative des prophètes concorde avec l'apparition sur la scène judaïque des Assyriens. Au contact d'une civilisation plus raffinée, l'horreur du culte meurtrier avait envahi ces coeurs d'élite connus sous le nom de prophètes." This reveals something of the nature of Picard's brand of anti-Semitism, which is never purely racial or ethnological. He admits to the possibility that the prophets, of Judaic descent, being exiled, join the ranks of the Persian civilization and opposed themselves to the Jewish civilization.

The spreading of such disinformation soon prompted a reaction from the *Journal de Bruxelles*, a newspaper marked by its Catholic signature. However, in searching for someone to counter Picard's allegations, they quickly realized that Lamy was not the man for the job. Via the Roman Catholic milieu of Bruges<sup>55</sup>, they were directed to another candidate, namely the young Albin Van Hoonacker. The latter did not hold an official chair in biblical exegesis, but his dissertation had already proven that he was well acquainted with Old Testament exegesis. In a full page *Supplément* to the Sunday issue of the *Journal de Bruxelles* of July 7, 1889, the young doctor presented his Catholic peers with the problematic character of Picard's writings, which were described in the front page editorial (clearly alluding to the *El Moghreb al-Aksa* series in *L'Art Moderne*) as being a piece of "impressionisme marocain". Thus, the earliest polemic on Picard's anti-Semitic biblical reading found its way to the public. And, in his anonymous refutation, Van Hoonacker took an interesting and rather peculiar approach for a Catholic biblical scholar of his age: From the very outset, he chose to refute Picard's positions from the viewpoint of the French rationalist literature upon which Picard claimed to base himself, thereby endorsing the value of French biblical criticism to a large extent. Van Hoonacker discussed at length the discordances between Picard's views and the positions of authors such as Renan and Gustave Tridon (1841-1871)<sup>56</sup>, as well as those of protestant biblical scholars such as Abraham Kuenen and Julius Wellhausen. Combined with all of this, he peruses his own expertise in the field of prophetic history, constantly attacking the lack of scientific quality in Picard's writings:

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that various circles of liberal Catholics were active at the time in Bruges. Among them, one finds the lawyer, Maurice Dullaert (1865-1940), who – shortly after Van Hoonacker – would also attack Picard's writings. Dullaert, who had close contacts with the Bruges priest and rector of the Bruges Beguinage, Hector Hoornaert (1851-1921), would be among those seeking literary renewal, among others via publications in *Le Magasin Littéraire et Scientifique*. A few years after Van Hoonacker, Dullaert openly attacked Picard's anti-Semitism. In his 1892 brochure *L'antisémitisme de M. Edmond Picard*, the Bruges lawyer takes, more than Van Hoonacker, a theological stance pointing to the fact that Picard's opinions imply a theory of polygenism (i.e. the denial of the "fact" that all humanity comes from one single couple: Adam and Eve). He himself defended a critical version of monogenism. Also, Dullaert challenged the logical consistency of Picard's views: "La thèse de M. Picard a ceci de très particulier que, si elle confère à ses adversaires le droit de la combattre, elle prive ses champions de la possibilité logique de la défendre". On Dullaert, see A. Van den Abeele, *De Balie van Brugge*, 168.

<sup>56</sup> Gustave Tridon, who died in 1871, had written an anti-Semitic pamphlet entitled *Le Molochisme Juif*, which had been posthumously published in 1884. This was then quickly picked up by authors such as Drumont and Picard for use within their own writings and argumentations.



La Réforme s'étonne que les cléricaux ne soufflent mot; je le crois bien, les cléricaux, non plus que les rationalistes, ne connaissent rien de cette fantasmagorie imaginée de toutes pièces par les savants de la Réforme. M. Picard s'extasie devant la tactique de ces grands hommes, les prophètes du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle; cette tactique, dit-il, est parfaite d'adresse et de diplomatie. M. Picard a-t-il lu une page d'Amos ou d'Osée? S'il l'a fait, il aura constaté que ces grands hommes supposent comme la seule religion légitime le culte du Jéhovah qu'ils prêchent. Ces prophètes ne cessent de répéter que les Israélites abandonnent Jéhovah pour se prostituer au culte des divinités étrangères<sup>57</sup>.

Further on, Van Hoonacker chronology attacks Picard's lack of chronological precision and inverts Picard's argumentation by showing – with references to the work of French archaeologist and assyriologist François Lenormant (1837-1883)<sup>58</sup> – that not the Jews, but rather the Assyrians held cruel cultic habits, which lingered for generations. After listing a series of examples, the juvenile Bruges biblical scholar argues:

Voilà, mon cher monsieur Picard, l'influence des Assyriens sur les idées religieuses et le culte des Hébreux. L'apparition des Assyriens sur la scène judaïque provoque une recrudescence violente des coutumes monstrueuses qu'autrefois l'exemple des Phéniciens et d'autres nations voisines avaient introduites en Israël, au mépris de la loi et malgré les menaces des prophètes de Jéhovah.

After that, he ends his lengthy attack, repeating that he has been able to refute Picard simply by sticking to the rationalist approach of the Bible<sup>59</sup>. In general, Van Hoonacker's exposé is sharp and quite polemic<sup>60</sup>, but it remains far from any traditionalist or apologetic exegetical stance. Significantly, Van Hoonacker did not once refer to the authority of the church, nor did he approach biblical literature as being a part of divine revelation. Bearing in mind the fact that he deliberately steered away from doctrinal issues, one is surprised by Picard's reaction to all of this in a letter, dated July 9 1889, and published in *Réforme*, in which he states:

Je n'essaierai pas de répondre à votre docteur en choses saintes. Pour discuter utilement il faut au moins quelques points de départ communs. Or, il n'en est pas, dans la science, entre ceux qui ne suivent que la raison et ceux qui se

<sup>57</sup> Van Hoonacker, *Supplément au Journal de Bruxelles*, 7 July 1889.

<sup>58</sup> Fr. Lenormant, *Histoire des peuples de l'Orient*, 95.

<sup>59</sup> Van Hoonacker (7 July 1889): “Nous nous arrêtons. Nous avons pu, pour faire justice des allégations gratuites de M. Picard, nous en tenir en général au point de vue de la critique rationaliste elle-même. Aussi-bien, il s'agissait seulement, comme nous l'avons dit en commençant, de montrer le vide de ces tirades sonores.”

<sup>60</sup> Van Hoonacker may have learned this from the director of his doctorate, Dupont, who was quite known for his sharp polemic attitude. See Kenis (1992), 466-467.

prosternent devant la révélation. [...] Mes autorités ne sont pas les siennes: je consulte des sources qu'il brûlerait, s'il pouvait, et leurs auteurs aussi. Sa bible n'est pas la mienne, je n'admets que la traduction de Ledrain, qui à elle seule est une démolition des singulières naïvetés que la foi chrétienne a introduites dans ce livre arabe, si contraire à notre civilisation.

Picard proceeded to cite a letter from Ledrain to himself, and then repeated his perspective on the discontinuous relationship between the Old and the New Testament. Far more relevant is that Picard's reaction tends to alter the tone of the polemic, causing it to shift from a discussion on methodology into an ideological debate, carried with arguments *ad hominem*<sup>61</sup>. On Friday, July 12, Van Hoonacker offered a short reply, explaining that he had explicitly abstained from all references to the revealed character of the Scriptures; this only triggered yet another harsh, but elaborate, reaction from the side of Picard – published in the *Journal de Bruxelles* on July 17, 1889. By that time, both authors had dug themselves deep into their trenches, and no real dialogue was being advanced. From his side of the divide, Picard stressed once again the value of the writings of Tridon and certainly of Ledrain's approach to biblical criticism, and ... underlining, once again, the importance of the Vedantic literature as the cradle of Indo-European psychology and civilization. As a result, Van Hoonacker returns to his stances and responds again in a striking non-theological fashion. He stays fully on the domain of history and presents himself as a historian. Not a single use is made of theological or ecclesiastical arguments, which, for a Catholic biblical scholar in his day, tends to stand out. Only in the last paragraph of his response does he turn political, all the while retaining full confidence in historical methodology, stating that:

Il n'est pas impossible que, fatigué des banqueroutes répétées du libéralisme, le monde ne redevienne encore une fois juif et chrétien. C'est alors surtout qu'il sera bon que l'histoire désintéressée de ces grandes choses ait été faite, car la période des études impartiales sur le passé de l'humanité ne sera peut-être

<sup>61</sup> E. Picard, *Lettre à l'éditeur du Journal de Bruxelles*, 1889: "À la grande douleur des chrétiens, les origines arabes de leur belle religion ont été, en ce siècle, scrutées et débattues avec une rigueur scientifique impitoyable. Le vrai commence à transparaître et à se répandre. Ni la colère des uns ni la résignation des autres n'arrêtent cette évolution. De plus en plus l'Ancien Testament se détache de nous pour retourner au sémitisme, son légitime propriétaire, et peu à peu les beaux chants traditionnels du Rig-Veda aryen se révèlent comme la seule expression antique de la race dont les Européens sont issus. [...] J'ai à peine la prétention d'aider par quelques nouveaux aperçus, consciencieusement médités, à cette transformation qui irrite et scandalise votre docteur au point qu'il oublie la décence obligatoire entre adversaires loyaux. Je le lui pardonne en Jésus-Christ, l'aryen par excellence et le maître à imiter assurément en bien des choses."

plus bien longue. Le goût de l’histoire est le plus aristocratique des goûts, il court des dangers. [...] Et maintenant que M. Picard, que nous pouvons admirer au Palais et même ailleurs, nous laisse tranquille sur le terrain de l’histoire: ‘ce sera pour lui très sage et très reconfortant pour nous’<sup>62</sup>.

And still, the real battle was yet to begin. On July 19, Picard reacted with another letter, this time demanding to know the name of his adversary. Also, he mocked the attitude of a Catholic theologian who dare not make himself known, while, at the same time, making constant references to the “impious Renan”. This time, Van Hoonacker was forced to come out in the open: No longer did he stay on the safe ground of historiography, but he decidedly entered the theological fray, now revealing his position – tantamount to the entire modernist debate in Catholic milieus – regarding the importance of reconciling scientific methodology with the tradition of the Christian faith. Against the a-religious portrait of Christ as the Aryan role model, Van Hoonacker stated that Christianity is simultaneously a science and a historical fact. Christ, he illustrates, is either a vulgar imposter or the center of creation. He then goes on declaring the status of theology as a science, claiming its central position within the world of sciences:

La science est impossible, et elle est stérile, sans la tradition. La science de la religion chrétienne est plus vaste que celle du droit et que toutes les autres sciences parce qu’elle est la science maîtresse. Pour la posséder à fond il faut de longues années d’études austères et désintéressées, sans dilettantisme. Nous n’en avons pas la prétention d’en être maître, mais nous avons la certitude absolue de son éternelle royauté. Au poste de combat qu’il a plu à la Providence de nous assigner, nous croyons remplir un devoir vulgaire en ne perdant aucune occasion pour démontrer la divine supériorité du christianisme et la terrestre supériorité de ‘bons docteurs’ tels que nous, contre l’incroyance. C’est ainsi que nous comprenons notre apostolat<sup>63</sup>.

The polemic ends in an ideological clash, and not without consequences for the Bruges priest. At the time when Van Hoonacker was still drafting his final response – published in the *Journal de Bruxelles* on July 22 –, his actions were being closely studied by some well-placed Belgian Catholics. For instance, the newly appointed Rector of the Catholic University of Louvain, Jean-Baptiste Abbeloos (1836-1906), who was trained as an orientalist scholar in the tradition of Beelen<sup>64</sup> and was once

<sup>62</sup> Van Hoonacker (17 July 1889).

<sup>63</sup> Van Hoonacker (22 July 1889).

<sup>64</sup> Abbeloos had been proposed as a possible successor to Beelen, but was never appointed due to the resistance from the Bishop of Liège, De Montpellier. See Kenis (1992), 415-416.

named as a candidate to succeed the latter, paid particular attention to Van Hoonacker.<sup>65</sup> Much in line with the editorial board of the *Journal de Bruxelles*, Abbeloos was aware both of the attacks on the foundations of the Christian faith from several sides, as well as the lack of expertise in the field of biblical criticism and oriental studies at the Louvain Faculty of Theology. Abbeloos took swift action, and on July 20, 1889, he wrote to Cardinal Pierre-Lambert Goossens (1827-1906) and the Belgian bishops, addressing several propositions on the issue of staff changes at the university. The longest part of that letter dealt with the theological faculty and the state of biblical scholarship within it. With Lamy as the sole exegete in mind, he wrote:

Au cours des dernières années le mouvement scientifique, en créant de nouveaux besoins, nous a mis en présence d'une lacune profonde dans l'enseignement théologique. Les études historiques, philologiques, et religieuses sur les anciens peuples de l'Orient se sont portées sur la littérature sacrée de l'Ancien Testament et sur les institutions du peuple hébreu. Les attaques incessantes et vigoureuses dirigées contre l'Église avec des armes nouvelles trouvent malheureusement, en Belgique comme ailleurs, des échos de plus en plus inquiétantes, et sans contre-partie suffisantes; elles menacent de la façon la plus directe les fondements traditionnels de la foi religieuse.<sup>66</sup>

Next, Abbeloos proposed to establish a new chair at the faculty, with someone teaching "*l'histoire critique du peuple hébreu*", the relationships between the Judaic people and its neighboring civilizations, its religious institutions, etc. Students in theology would be obliged to take the course. At the end of his proposal, he wrote: "je propose de le confier à Mr. le Docteur Van Hoonacker, qui s'est signalé déjà par plusieurs travaux de critique biblique de grande valeur". Ten days later, the Belgian bishops met and unanimously accepted the proposal<sup>67</sup>. As of the next academic year, Van Hoonacker would hold the chair of "*Histoire critique de l'Ancien Testament*" and would teach courses on Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic at the Louvain Faculty of Theology<sup>68</sup>. In the years to come, he would turn out

<sup>65</sup> A. Cauchie, "Abbeloos (Jean-Baptiste)", 38-39.

<sup>66</sup> AAM: Provincialia 19: Letter from J.B. Abbeloos to the archbishop Goossens, July 20 1889.

<sup>67</sup> AAM: Provincialia 19: Réunion de NN.SS. les évêques, 29-30 July 1889: "M. Van Hoonacker est nommé professeur extra-ordinaire de la faculté de théologie".

<sup>68</sup> ADB: Notice de la *Patrie*, August 1889: "dans leur réunion tenue lundi dernier, NN. SS. les évêques ont confié au jeune et savant ecclésiastique la chaire de critique biblique. Il s'agit pour M. Van Hoonacker d'inaugurer un enseignement spécial, pour ainsi dire nouveau, en Belgique."

to be a key personality in the evolution of the faculty together with colleagues such as Paulin Ladeuze (1870-1940). In later years, Van Hoonacker debated openly and kept a personal correspondence with alleged Catholic modernist protagonists such as Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938)<sup>69</sup> and, at times, the young Alfred Loisy (1857-1940)<sup>70</sup>. And, in 1901, much to his own surprise, he was appointed as one of the first consultants of the Pontifical Biblical Commission<sup>71</sup>.

As was the case with many others of his generation, Van Hoonacker would suffer personally under the modernist crisis. Firstly, the work of one of his most brilliant students, Hendrik A. Poels (1868-1948), was attacked and put under suspicion due to the actions of the Bishop of Haarlem, Caspar Joseph Bottemanne (1823-1903), and a Belgian intransigent Jesuit scholar, Alphonse Delattre<sup>72</sup>. Later on, Van Hoonacker himself would be warned by Marie-Joseph Lagrange of the imminent risk of his work being put on the Index of Forbidden Books. Thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Joseph-Désiré Mercier (1851-1926), this would eventually be avoided<sup>73</sup>. Here again, Delattre’s critical reviews of Van Hoonacker’s *Les Douze prophètes* played a dangerous role<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> On Lagrange, see the book by B. Montagnes, *Marie-Joseph Lagrange*. On the later quarrels between Lagrange and Delattre, see Montagnes (2005), 106-112.

<sup>70</sup> ATF: Archive Van Hoonacker, correspondence. Also see Van Hoonacker’s “Lettre au R.P. Lagrange”, 186-192.

<sup>71</sup> On the establishment of the Biblical Commission, see A. Vanhoye, “Passé et present de la Commission biblique”, 261-275.

<sup>72</sup> On the quarrel between Delattre and Poels, also see G.P. Fogarty, “Biblical Scholarship at the Catholic University of America, 628-630. Later on, Poels’ own defense was made public in an edition by F. Neiryck and H.A. Poels, entitled *A Vindication of My Honor*.

Furthermore, it should be stated that Poels, in a noted article on “De belangrijkheid der geschiedenis van ‘t Oude Israël” published in the periodical *De Katholiek* on January 10, 1898, had defended the same view as Louvain professor, Van Hoonacker, stressing the continuity between the Old and the New Testament. Poorthuis & Saleminck (2006), 146-148.

<sup>73</sup> See Van Hoonacker’s correspondence with Lagrange in ATF: Archive Van Hoonacker. Also see the articles by F. Neiryck, “A. van Hoonacker et l’Index”, 293-297 and J. Lust, “A Letter from M.J. Lagrange to A. van Hoonacker, 331-332.

<sup>74</sup> A.J. Delattre, *Un peu d’exégèse. À propos d’un nouveau commentaire des Douze prophètes*. In this 1909 work, Delattre viciously attacks Van Hoonacker’s exegetical approaches, claiming that they are not in line with the hierarchy’s expectations toward Catholic biblical scholarship and lack doctrinal content and value. Delattre finally condemns Van Hoonacker’s 1908 book *Les douze petits prophètes traduits et commentés*, as an example of modernist biblical criticism. Yet, even when fully completed, Delattre’s book was never published since it had been barred by the Jesuit’s internal censure procedures. See the correspondence on this in ABSE: Papers Arthur Vermeersch. In ARSI: Prov. Belgica 1910-1919. Scriptores. In Sectio II: P.A. Delattre contra R.D. Van Hoonacker, one also finds a folder containing correspondences and documents regarding this issue. In the wake of this quarrel, Van

## ALPHONSE J. DELATTRE S.J. (1841-1928)

It has been briefly mentioned that the Belgian Jesuit Delattre<sup>75</sup> was among those behind the attacks on the “Louvain School” of Exegesis in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>76</sup>. Delattre, who was ordained a priest on September 8, 1876, spent a period of study in Beyrouth from 1886 until 1888 and became well versed in biblical studies and Assyriology. He specialized mainly in Old Testament exegesis and published several works on Chaldean and Persian history<sup>77</sup>, yet never quite accepted the methods applied by authors such as Van Hoonacker. Upon his return to Belgium, he was appointed professor of Exegesis at the Louvain Jesuit College, and, like Van Hoonacker, he figured among the first generation of consultants to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Nevertheless, the two Louvain exegetes were far from being allies. On the contrary, even while Delattre endorsed the study of antique sources and linguistics, he thought it to be a primordial task for all Catholic exegesis to safeguard revealed doctrinal truths and refused to question them as a result of historical criticism. Therefore, both his exegetical and other writings<sup>78</sup> bear the mark of Catholic apologetics, and Delattre – defending the Roman school in the tradition of Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816-1886) – would openly attack several Catholic exegetes for being led astray: be it into liberalism, socialism, modernism, americanism, ... or even harnackism<sup>79</sup>. Not only did he cause difficulties to exegetes such as Poels<sup>80</sup>, but he also attacked the position of

Hoonacker also decided not to publish a manuscript he had prepared on the veracity of biblical narratives. This text would be published posthumously by J. Coppens as “Quelques notes sur Absolute und relative Wahrheit in der heiligen Schrift”, 201-336. More background information is given in L. Courtois’ *Paulin Ladeuze (1870 - 1940)*, Vol. IV, 752-754.

<sup>75</sup> A short biographical notice is given in É. De Moreau, “Delattre, Alphonse”, 533.

<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Delattre highly valued the works of the aforementioned Louvain exegete, Beelen. See the rather hagiographical, but nevertheless interesting, biographical overview in V. Dubar, *Le révérend père Alphonse Delattre s.j. (1841-1928)*, 34-34.

<sup>77</sup> For more biographical information on Delattre, see Dubar (1928). See for instance A.J. Delattre’s 1877 book *Les chaldéens jusqu’à la formation de l’empire de Nabuchodonosor*; and his 1883 volume on *Le peuple et l’empire des Mèdes jusqu’à la fin du règne de Cyaxare*; finally, we refer to his 1900 *Coup d’oeil sur la civilisation Assyrio-Babylonniene*.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, his 1898 attack on ‘Americanism’ in A.J. Delattre, *Un catholicisme américain*, and a repeated version of it in his article “Encore l’Américanisme”, 535.

<sup>79</sup> See Delattre’s quite aggressive and anti-Protestant stance in his 1908 *Préludes d’une refutation de l’Harnackisme*.

<sup>80</sup> Delattre cites and attacks Poels’s 1899 volume entitled *Critiek en Traditie, of de Bijbel voor de Roomschen*, on numerous occasions in his vast attack on Lagrange’s “modernist methodology”. See A.J. Delattre’s 1904 *Autour de la Question biblique*, 175-181.

Van Hoonacker’s Louvain colleague in the field of New Testament Exegesis, Paulin Ladeuze<sup>81</sup>.

Known as a polemicist writing dozens of “conservative” pamphlets, Delattre entered into a dispute with Ladeuze on the orthodoxy of the exegetical methodology as developed and applied by Lagrange<sup>82</sup>. In 1904, in reaction to Lagrange’s work on the historical method in Catholic exegesis<sup>83</sup>, Delattre published his controversial book *Autour de la question biblique*, where he accused Lagrange of being a “modernist” in the tradition of the founder of the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, Msgr. Maurice d’Hulst (1841-1896)<sup>84</sup>, and of neglecting the doctrinal demands set forth in Leo XIII’s 1893 encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus*<sup>85</sup>. Delattre’s attacks constituted a prefiguration of the official positions that would be taken in Pius X’s *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili*<sup>86</sup>. We set out mentioning these attacks because they immediately illustrate some difference between the aforementioned positions and methodologies of protagonists such as Van Hoonacker on the one side, and Delattre on the other side. Another reason would be simply to point to the existence of an intersection between these personalities. But there is more. Notwithstanding the aforementioned differences between the Louvain scholars and the Belgian Jesuit Delattre, there does exist a point of convergence: Some years after Van Hoonacker’s “providential” polemics with Picard, Delattre entered the same domain and attacked Picard’s historiographical and biblical essays.

<sup>81</sup> On Ladeuze and his particular role and position in the modernist crisis, see the aforementioned unpublished doctoral dissertation by Courtois (1998). Parts of this have been made public in studies by Courtois, such as “Aux origines de la crise moderniste en Belgique”, 485-503.

<sup>82</sup> L. Courtois, “Paulin Ladeuze (1870-1940): Parcours d’un exégète progressiste”.

<sup>83</sup> M.J. Lagrange, *La méthode historique, surtout à propos de l’Ancien Testament*, 1903.

<sup>84</sup> Maurice d’Hulst’s 1893 article, “La question biblique”, 201-251, had been one of the factors that had triggered the promulgation of *Providentissimus Deus*. See C. Theobald, “La Question biblique”, 345-382.

<sup>85</sup> Delattre (1904) on p. 210, offers accusations towards Lagrange sounding: “Par malheur, l’écrivain conçoit l’Écriture comme un ensemble d’écrits remplis d’erreurs qu’il appelle matérielles, mais que les livres inspirés sont censés offrir sous la même rubrique que la vérité pur. L’idée qu’il donne de l’histoire biblique primordiale est digne seulement de l’Écriture interprétée selon la norme du bœuf volant”. Also see p. 344: “Je n’aurai pas eu le temps de faire observer que tout le fait des cent exégètes tant loués dans l’Encyclique *Providentissimus Deus*, est reprouvée, par le R.P. Lagrange en vertu d’un principe qu’il prétend tirer de cette même encyclique!”

More information on the methodological and doctrinal disputes of the era are found in C. Theobald, “L’exégèse catholique au moment de la crise moderniste”, 387-439.

<sup>86</sup> S. Congregatio Sacrae Romanae et Universalis Inquisitionis, *Decretum Lamentabili*, 470-478.



In 1893, when Picard continued to spread his convictions in yet another essay, entitled *Contribution à la révision des origines du christianisme*<sup>87</sup>, he prompted Delattre's reaction. Delattre, a polemicist by nature, wrote his own brochure, *Un essai biblique de M. Edmond Picard*, a year later. Delattre takes up a double angle in his reactions: On the one hand, he attacks, like Van Hoonacker, the very foundations of Picard theories with a particularly large section devoted to attacking the lack of quality and precision in Ledrain's biblical translations. Stipulating ardently that "les savants, même les plus hétérodoxes la dédaignent profondément; elle n'existe pas pour eux", he mocked the fact that Picard himself was unable to read Hebrew and was relying on a worthless source<sup>88</sup>. The second part of his essay deals with the issue of Picard's analysis of the massacre of children and the Baal-Moloch cult. Here too Delattre remained very close to the position of Van Hoonacker and offered a detailed counter argumentation, equally attacking the work of Tridon. Only in the final clauses does he clearly distance himself from Van Hoonacker's position in a more open attack on rationalist exegesis<sup>89</sup>. In his over-all approach, one notices that Delattre adopts the same apologetic methodology as he uses when attacking his fellow Catholic exegetes: He refuses to enter into a broad discussion of the value of the entire work of argumentation under suspicion. Rather, he constantly discusses and attacks bits and parts of the writings of his opponents, treating them as a *pars pro toto*. And Delattre's attacks did not end there. Three years later, Picard having called him "un redoutable raseur"<sup>90</sup>, the latter took on his adversary in a much more elaborate way, refuting Picard's opinions in a book of about two hundred and fifty pages entitled *Le cerveau picaresque*<sup>91</sup>. In it, Delattre repeats the criticisms he had in his earlier attacks, making use of his vast knowledge in Assyriology and Hebrew; but this time, he goes beyond a mere discussion of facts, sources and methodological differences. As he would later do with Lagrange, Delattre now insisted that Picard was not merely a lost case as an exegete, but also a heretic from the viewpoint of Christian doctrine.

In his *cerveau picaresque*, Delattre deploys a variety of tactics. He attacks, as he did before, the foundations of Picard's theory, meanwhile accusing the latter of being outright ignorant in the field of biblical studies:

<sup>87</sup> E. Picard, *Contribution à la révision des origines du christianisme*.

<sup>88</sup> A.J. Delattre, *Un essai biblique de M. Edmond Picard*.

<sup>89</sup> Delattre (1894), 45: "On opposera les théories rationalistes. Elles m'ont jamais effrayé, et j'en ai fait assez sentir la faiblesse. Mais nous ne pouvons les refuter toutes à propos d'une brochure aussi chétive que la 'Contribution' dont nous nous sommes peut-être déjà trop occupé".

<sup>90</sup> E. Picard (11 March 1894).

<sup>91</sup> A.J. Delattre, *Le cerveau picaresque*.

M. Picard admire et fort naïvement s’imagine imiter à ses heures la vie monacale, comme un idéal de vie simple conçu par le cerveau arien. [...] M. Picard, avec la bonne opinion qu’il affiche, ignore bien des choses qu’il devrait savoir<sup>92</sup>.

Himself being adept at scholastic philosophy and logical argumentation, Delattre attacks the inconsistency and illogical character of Picard’s writings. But foremost, the Catholic apologetic character of the Jesuit’s attack jumps out. He accuses Picard of neglecting the importance of the story of the Adam’s fall, therefore denying the biblical basis of the doctrine of original sin. Further on in his book, Delattre attacks another curious pamphlet, published by Picard a year earlier and containing an analysis of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, which tended to present the Aryan Jesus Christ as a role model for contemporary socialist activism<sup>93</sup>. Here, Delattre goes to great effort to show that not only had Picard’s New Testament exegesis twisted both the sequence and the meaning of the Greek text, but he also attacked socialism as such. Finally, Delattre accuses Picard of denying the Trinity: “À vous en croire, la sainte Trinité serait une invention ecclésiastique, ajoutée au christianisme de l’Évangile: votre dire, vous le sentez, commence à tourner à votre honte”<sup>94</sup>.

Thus, this time, the game is played on the doctrinal field, going as far as accusing Picard of defending a pantheist position<sup>95</sup>. Delattre’s entire book is one long diatribe against Picard’s positions, condemning them in great detail and, in contrast to Van Hoonacker, constantly stressing the importance of defending the doctrinal truths found in the Bible as a source of divine revelation. Delattre always remained an advocate and a vehement defender of a purely doctrinal interpretation of the Christian faith, as can be felt in his attacks on Van Hoonacker, Ladeuze and Lagrange. And clearly, years before these “antimodernist” attacks, he conceived of his role in the same fashion when dealing with Picard. The overarching interest from Delattre’s perspective is, in the end, an epistemological one. The question of truth and its defense forever remains at the core of Delattre’s actions<sup>96</sup>. Where the latter is concerned, I can conclude this final part of my study by citing the final words of *Le cerveau picaresque*:

<sup>92</sup> Delattre (1897), 36-37.

<sup>93</sup> E. Picard, *Le Sermon sur la Montagne et le Socialisme contemporain*. Picard defended the same opinion in his *Comment on devient socialiste*, 142-143.

<sup>94</sup> Delattre (1897), 156-157.

<sup>95</sup> Delattre (1897), 174. The Syllabus of errors (1864) had already condemned Pantheism.

<sup>96</sup> Dubar (1928), 33: “Le fougeux controversiste n’était mu que par une seule passion: l’amour de la Vérité. Il déployait la même ardeur non seulement à redresser les excès de l’hypercritique des protestants et des rationalistes au sujet du texte ou de l’interprétation de la Bible, mais aussi envers des exégètes catholiques qui lui semblaient subir leur influence.

Citoyen Picard, vous avez écrit: 'Mon cerveau restera celui du penseur!' Après tant de preuves, on a bien le droit de vous dire: Votre cerveau restera le cerveau girouette, tournant à tous les vents de la fantaisie la plus saugrenue<sup>97</sup>.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

What can we make of all of the above? Returning to my opening clauses, it is, for a start, clear that the entire above sketched story deals with the questioning of the sources of the Christian faith. In that sense, the subject fits soundly within the picture often portrayed of the Catholic modernist crisis. At stake in this story was the clash between various methodologies in approaching the Scriptures and the way in which these contrasting biblical hermeneutics affected the core of the Christian faith tradition.

Having said this, it is striking that the methodological questioning of the Bible does not only emerge from within Roman Catholic theological milieus, but also from outside of those circles. In this particular case study, the key figure turns out to be a non-Catholic and rather a person belonging to the fields of political and legal history. This fact in itself constitutes an interesting occasion for an expansion of the problematic of "modernism" well beyond the borders of intra-ecclesiastical theological dispute and for the inclusion of broader societal interests. Moreover, it is revealing to see the close connection between the rise of biblical criticism within Catholic theology, the academic rise in orientalist studies and its doctrinal consequences on the one hand, and the rise of anti-Semitism on the other hand. On the periphery, some of the key players of the modernist crisis have been mentioned, yet this was only done briefly.

Finally, one of the crucial results is that it proves the statements that have been made in somewhat older secondary literature on Van Hoonacker and his professor's chair at Louvain, namely that the official integration of critical biblical exegesis within the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Theological Faculty, comes as a direct result of Van Hoonacker's polemics with Picard. Given the openness of attitude, Van Hoonacker took his appointment in 1889 to be understood as a first and crucial step towards the later appointment of Ladeuze as an exegete at that same faculty. That said, it is clear that my contribution on this matter cannot be more than a first attempt, touching upon elements and issues that require further study.

Si en discutant leurs opinions il poussait la franchise jusqu'à la rudesse et même la dûreté, personne ne contestera qu'il était toujours objectif et qu'il appuyait sur des jugements sur de solides raisons. C'était un joueur redoutable."

<sup>97</sup> Delattre (1897), 94.

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