



UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)

di A. Pisani

Schede autori Sotto attacco

Richard Simon

Richard Simon (13 May 1638 – 11 April 1712) was a French biblical critic.

He was born at Dieppe. His early education took place at the college of the Fathers of the Oratory. The kindness of a friend enabled him to study theology at Paris, where he showed an interest in Hebrew and other Oriental languages. At the end of his course he was sent, as was usual, to learn philosophy at the College of Juilly. But he was soon recalled to Paris, and employed in the preparing a catalogue of the Oriental books in the library of the Oratory. His first publication was his *Fides Ecclesiae orientalis, seu Gabrielis Metropolitae Philadelphiensis opuscula, cum interpretatione Latina, cum notis* (Paris, 1671), the object of which was to demonstrate that the belief of the Greek Church regarding the Eucharist was the same as that of the Church of Rome. Simon entered the priesthood in 1670, and the same year wrote a pamphlet in defence of the Jews of Metz, who had been accused of having murdered a Christian child. It was shortly before this time that there were sown the seeds of that enmity with the Port-Royalists which filled Simon's life with many bitter troubles. [Antoine Arnauld](#) had written a work on the Perpetuity of the Faith, the first volume of which dealt with the Eucharist. Simon's criticisms aroused lasting indignation among Arnauld's friends and admirers. He also aroused the ill-will of the monks of the Benedictine order when, in support of a friend who was engaged in a lawsuit with the Benedictine monks of Fécamp, Simon composed a strongly-worded memorandum. The monks complained to the new general of the Oratory. The charge of Jesuitism was also brought against Simon, on the grounds that his friend's brother was an eminent member of that order. The commotion in ecclesiastical circles was great, and Simon's removal not only from Paris but from France was seriously considered. A mission to Rome was proposed to him, but he saw through the intention, and declined. He was engaged at the time in superintending the printing of his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*. He had hoped, through the influence of Père la Chaise, the king's confessor, and the duc de Montausier, to be allowed to dedicate the work to Louis XIV, but, as the king was absent in Flanders at the time, the volume could not be published until he had accepted the dedication, though it had passed the censorship of the Sorbonne, and the chancellor of the Oratory had given his imprimatur. The printer of the book, in order to promote the sale, had caused the titles of the various chapters to be printed separately, and to be put in circulation. These, or possibly a copy of the work itself, had happened to come into the hands of the Port Royalists. With the intention of harming sales of the work, which was known in theological circles to have been long in preparation by Simon, the Messieurs de Port Royal had undertaken a translation into French of the *Prolegomena* to Brian Walton's Polyglott. To counteract this, Simon announced his intention of publishing an annotated edition of the *Prolegomena*, and added to the *Critical History* a translation of the last four chapters of that work, which had formed no part of his original plan. Simon's announcement prevented the appearance of the projected translation, but his enemies were all the more irritated. They had now obtained the opportunity which they had long been seeking. The freedom with which Simon expressed himself on various topics, and especially those chapters in which he declared that Moses could not be the author of much in the writings attributed to him, especially aroused their opposition. The powerful influence of Bossuet, at that time tutor to the dauphin, was invoked; the chancellor, [Michael le Tellier](#), lent his assistance; a decree of the council of state was obtained, and after a series of paltry intrigues the whole impression, consisting of 1300 copies, was seized by the police and destroyed,



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and the animosity of his colleagues in the Oratory rose to so great a height against Simon that he was declared to be no longer a member of their body. Full of bitterness and disgust, Simon retired in 1679 to the curacy of Bolleville, to which he had been lately appointed by the vicar-general of the abbey of Fécamp. It was proposed to republish the work in the Netherlands. Simon, however, at first opposed this, in hopes of overcoming the opposition of Bossuet by making certain changes in the parts objected to. The negotiations with Bossuet lasted a considerable time, but finally failed, and the *Critical History* appeared, with Simon's name on the title page, in the year 1685, from the press of Reenier Leers in Rotterdam. An imperfect edition had previously been published at Amsterdam by Daniel Elzevir, based upon a manuscript transcription of one of the copies of the original work which had escaped destruction and had been sent to England, and from which a Latin and an English translation were afterwards made. The edition of Leers was a reproduction of the work as first printed, with a new preface, notes, and those other writings which had appeared for and against the work up to that date.

The work consists of three books. The first deals with questions of Biblical criticism, properly so called, such as the text of the Hebrew Bible and the changes which it has undergone down to the present day, the authorship of the Mosaic writings and of other books of the Bible, with an exposition of Simon's peculiar theory of the existence during the whole extent of Jewish history of recorders or annalists of the events of each period, whose writings were preserved in the public archives, and the institution of which he assigns to Moses. The second book gives an account of the principal translations, ancient and modern, of the Old Testament, and the third contains an examination of the principal commentators. He had, with the exception of the theory above mentioned, contributed nothing really new on the subject of Old Testament criticism, for previous critics as Louis Cappel, Johannes Morinus (1591-1659), and others had established many points of importance, and the value of Simon's work consisted chiefly in bringing together and presenting at one view the results of Old Testament criticism. The work encountered strong opposition, and that not only from the Church of Rome. The Protestants felt their stronghold—an infallible Bible—assailed by the doubts which Simon raised against the integrity of the Hebrew text. J. le Clerc ("Clericus") in his work *Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande*, controverted the views of Simon, and was answered by the latter in a tone of considerable asperity in his *Réponse aux Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande*, over the signature "Pierre Ambrun," it being a marked peculiarity of Simon rarely to give his own name.

The remaining works of Simon may be briefly noticed. In 1689 appeared his *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament*, consisting of thirty-three chapters, in which he discusses the origin and character of the various books, with a consideration of the objections brought against them by the Jews and others, the quotations from the Old Testament in the New, the inspiration of the New Testament (with a refutation of the opinions of Spinoza), the Greek dialect in which they are written (against C. Salmasius), the Greek manuscripts known at the time, especially Codex Bezae (Cantabrigiensis), etc. This was followed in 1690 by his *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament*, where he gives an account of the various translations, both ancient and modern, and discusses the manner in which many difficult passages of the New Testament have been rendered in the various versions. In 1693 was published what in some respects is the most valuable of all his writings, viz. *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament depuis le commencement du Christianisme jusques a notre temps*. This work exhibits immense reading, and the information it contains still valuable to the student. The last work of Simon that we need mention is his *Nouvelles Observations sur le texte et les versions du Nouveau Testament* (Paris,



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1695), which contains supplementary observations upon the subjects of the text and translations of the New Testament.

As a controversialist Simon displayed a bitterness which tended only to aggravate the unpleasantness of controversy. He is thought to have been a rational man, not sentimental, with a strong vein of sarcasm and satire in his disposition. He died at Dieppe on 11 April 1712, at the age of seventy-four.

Works

Factum, servant de responce qu livre intitulé Abrégé du procéz fait aux Juifs de Mets, Paris, 1670.

Histoire critique du Vieux Testament, Paris, 1678; A critical history of the Old Testament (1682), available at archive.org.

Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament, Rotterdam, 1689.

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Histoire critique des principaux commentaires du Nouveau Testament, *ibid.*, 1693.

Nouvelles observations sur le texte et les versions du Nouveau Testament, Paris, 1695.

Le Nouveau Testament de notre Seigneur Jésus Christ, traduit sur l'ancienne édition, avec des remarques litterales et critiques sur les principales difficultés, Trevoux, 1702, v. 4.

References

For the life of Simon:

Life or "éloge" by his grand-nephew De la Martinière in vol. I. of the *Lettres choisies* (4 vols., Amsterdam, 1730)

K. H. Graf's article in the first vol. of the *Beitr. zu d. theol. Wissensch.*, etc. (Jena, 1851)

E. W. E. Reuss's article, revised by E. Nestle, in *Herzog-Hauck, Realencyklopädie* (ad. 1906)

Richard Simon et son Vieux Testament, by A. Berm's (Lausanne, 1869)

H. Margival, *Essai sur Richard Simon et la critique biblique au XVIIe siècle* (1900).

Jean-Pierre Thiollet, *Je m'appelle Byblos* (Richard Simon, pp. 244-247), Paris, 2005. ISBN 2 914 266 04 9

Cfr.: Wikipedia.en - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Simon - This page was last modified on 10 June 2010 at 04:56. - Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License.

«Con Richard Simon, e la pubblicazione della sua *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678), la critica acquistò coscienza del suo potere [...] Quest'arte particolare, la quale ormai pretende di uscire dall'uso erudito per dimostrare davanti a tutti la propria potenza ha il suo fine in se medesima: stabilisce il grado di sicurezza, di autenticità dei testi che studia, senza tenere conto di quanto non la concerne, vale a dire, per esempio, della bellezza da preservare o della moralità da salvaguardare. Se si esercita su qualche libro sacro, essa intende ignorare la teologia, la quale non è di sua competenza. Non deve né attaccarla né difenderla; per lei, essa non domina il testo; nessuna autorità può far sì che un testo non sia esattamente quello che è. Se qualche passo contrasta con il dogma, ed è autentico, quel che conta non è il dogma, ma lo scritto. Se qualche passo è necessario a un dogma, ed è apocrifo, va lasciato cadere. Si tratti dell'*Iliade*, dell'*Eneide* o del *Pentateuco*, i principi della critica son sempre i medesimi; essa rifiuta l'a-priori; dal momento in cui si trova



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davanti a caratteri scolpiti nella pietra o scritti sopra una pergamena o tracciati su della carta, essa è sovrana assoluta, sola signora delle proprie operazioni. Essa si fonda sulla filologia: la quale, da umile ancella, diventa ora regina.»

Cfr.: Paul Hazard, *La crisi della coscienza europea*, Torino, Einaudi, 1946, p. 191-192.

«Padre Richard Simon, membro della congregazione dell'Oratorio, fu il più colto ed eterodosso critico dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento : le sue opere sono massicciamente basate sulle fonti ebraiche, anche se in seguito, denunciato dal vescovo Bossuet, per eccesso di prudenza si sentì costretto a bruciare molti dei suoi manoscritti. Quando i censori francesi vietarono la pubblicazione dei suoi libri, questi trovarono rifugio nelle imprese editoriali protestanti in Olanda, dove furono pubblicati, con suo divertimento, sotto una varietà di pseudonimi. La *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* di Richard Simon era riuscita a superare l'esame delle autorità francesi ed era già pronta per la stampa nel 1678 quando Bossuet, accortosi tardivamente della natura eretica di questa avventura nella critica biblica, sopprime l'edizione. Due anni dopo, tuttavia il libro fu pubblicato ad Amsterdam. La reazione dei diversi ordini religiosi cattolici di fronte a nuove interpretazioni di un passo biblico dipendevano spesso dallo stato delle dispute tra giansenisti, gesuiti e oratoriani. Simon non era un personaggio tale da evitare le liti ecclesiastiche, accettando di rimanere un oscuro studioso isolato. Quando un cristiano intendeva confutare l'interpretazione biblica di un altro, solitamente attribuiva l'epiteto ingiurioso di "giudaizzante" all'avversario... Nel mondo cattolico padre Simon scrisse la più completa apologia in difesa della consultazione dei rabbini nella sua *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, nella quale incluse attente valutazioni dei principali commentatori rabbinici oggetto del suo studio... Le critiche rivolte da padre Simon ai commentatori rabbinici sono da considerarsi moderate in confronto agli attacchi che sferrò contro gli studiosi cristiani suoi contemporanei e rivali, senza distinguere tra protestanti e cattolici.»

Cfr.: Frank Edward Manuel, *Chiesa e sinagoga. Il giudaismo visto dai cristiani*, Genova, ECIG, [1999] , p. 171 e seguenti.

Per quanto concerne il problema della cronologia universale, il **filogiansenista** padre Simon, come peraltro Baruch Spinoza, si trova sulla stessa posizione di gesuiti quali il p. **Martini** e degli scrittori **libertini**: il *Genesi*, e più in generale il *Pentateuco*, non può essere considerato come la pietra di paragone per giudicare la validità di tutte le storie profane né tanto meno come la cronologia-principe universale. Sergio Zoli definisce la sua *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* "una delle pietre miliari della critica biblica eterodossa moderna, e più in particolare, unitamente al *Tractatus* di Spinoza uno dei testi più rappresentativi del libertinismo seicentesco"

Vedi anche: [Profilo di Richard Simon nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani](#)