

The  
Exegetical Labors  
of the  
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Volume 1: Genesis 1-9

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

Containing:

- I. *A Synopsis of Interpreters, Both Critical and Otherwise, of the Sacred Scripture*
- II. *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*

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# Preface to the *Synopsis*: Genesis-Esther

All men carry a sense of religion deeply etched in their minds, even those who either struggle, κατὰ δύνάμιν, *as far as they are able*, to shake it off, or represent themselves as having shaken it off. Various kinds of religions are in the world, of which most are vainer than vanity itself. The Christian religion alone merits the name of *religion*; only this one uncovers fully and plainly both the diseases and the miseries of human nature, and only this one makes known, and that with surpassing beauty, the genuine remedy of both. This religion, however, is to be sought, not out of the turbid pond of the philosophers, but out of the Divine Oracles, even out of the purest fountain of Sacred Scripture. To discuss extensively the surpassing excellence of the Sacred Scripture in this place, what would it be but to carry on the matter endlessly? Let that one saying of our Savior (and a more august saying is scarcely able to be contrived) be sufficient for all that have not completely cast off both Christianity and humanity, that, in searching the Sacred Scripture, we rightly believe that we are going to find that eternal and most blessed life.<sup>1</sup> He who despises the Scripture is worthy to perish in eternal death; he who rightly esteems the Scripture for its magnificence is not able long to prefer all the treasures of this exceedingly vain world above the Sacred Books. However, as that Divine Book rests, as it were, locked up in an ark of languages, languages not commonly known, it abounds as well in difficulties, difficulties neither few nor small; neither is it to be denied that there are many obscurities and ambiguities, whether in the words or in the sense, which men, either muddled and twisted in mind or corrupted in manners, readily pervert into opinions not only false, but also ruinous. Nothing can be more desirable to all those, to whom everlasting salvation is made dear to the heart, than to have this Book opened, which remains sealed to the majority of mortals, whether through ignorance or their own sloth, and to find a reliable guide or interpreter, who might open to souls, souls wandering through wastelands of errors, the true and safe path pointed out in the Sacred Volumes. Moreover, knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, as it is most useful, and in a certain measure necessary, to all Christians, so also, and especially, to theologians and ministers of the Church; in whom ignorance of the Scriptures is a most grave sin, and certainly scandalous; out of which, as out of a fountain, almost all fantasies and plagues, either of opinions or of morals, rushed forth, all which undermined and ruined the present state of both the Church and the ministry. This is certainly one origin of errors, and perhaps the principal origin, at least in men that are not

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:39.

malignant, for most true overseers of souls would not find it so difficult to know the entirety of the Sacred Books that they, being content to learn some bits of them (insofar as the course of studies and sermons requires), would gladly pass over the remainders ungreeted, as if God would have written something which would not need to be understood, or as if there might be a class of men whom He might have burdened to a greater degree, first to understand, then to explain, the Sacred, and indeed the whole, Scripture (as much as it is possible, through the weakness of human ability and the preoccupations of its function), than those whom the Divine Majesty has established as interpreters of His will. And if it is true (which is indeed most true) that the Sacred Text is the best interpreter of itself, and that the comparison of passages is preeminently useful in the mutual understanding of them, it is inevitable that they would slip into many errors, who, with that most fair framework of Scripture neglected, examine some parts of it exclusively, parts torn from the remainder. For this reason, many are the *παροράματα* / *errors*, unto the reproach of the ministry and the ruin of Christian people, of certain preachers in the exercise of their duty: sacred phrases distorted into an alien sense and doctrines faithlessly constructed by them, the fantasies of men peddled to the conscience of the hearers instead of the divine oracles, conscience bogged down by unnecessary scruples, or agitated by vain terrors, or deluded by false hope, or loosed from the just and necessary chains of genuine piety. So that one might resist these and innumerable other evils, learned and pious men in former generations of the Church applied their hands and minds to this work, with the result that they were conferring, by means of their laborious studies, the Sacred Scripture, or some part of it, unfolded. For this reason, there is so great a crowd of commentators, particularly in these latter generations of the Church, to which generations, by divine mercy alone, this blessedness arose in the midst of many calamities, with the result that the brightness of heavenly truth was shining forth more brilliantly, and the words and sense of the Holy Spirit in the Biblical Books were being thoroughly investigated and more solidly explained than had been granted in most of the preceding ages. Nevertheless, it is not to be denied that, among the most learned and painstaking commentaries of certain commentators, commentaries most worthy even of cedar and marble, a considerable amount of rubbish from other commentators creeps in, worthy of the leisure only of the author himself and of his squandering reader, which were not so much being worn away by the hands of the most studious as they were becoming prey to moths. And the multitude of interpreters is perhaps not less detrimental to the Church, or at least to the studies of theologians, than the multitude of doctors was once to Hadrian.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, since many

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<sup>1</sup> Dio Cassius' *Roman History* 69:22. Hadrian had always been strict in his dietary

candidates for theology are destitute either of the knowledge of the field so that they might discern the best interpreters, or of the judgment by which they might select the best, or of the endowment by which they might purchase them, or of the time or inclination by which they might diligently and fruitfully read them; it is unavoidable that the acquisition of sound knowledge of the entire Sacred Text be of very great exertion and of the highest difficulty. In addition, pondering the tendencies and methods of the commentators, I appear to have detected more than a few errors in many of them: these, by their prolixity, overwhelm and weary readers; those, by their brevity, envelop and conceal the sense: these, indifferent with respect to words and phrases; those, not discerning with respect to substantial matters (especially with respect to difficult and obscure matters, which chiefly call for the labor of the interpreter); these overflow in superfluities; those lack in necessities; most stuff each page of their books, not so much with their own thoughts, as with the interpretations of others a thousand times repeated.

Oftentimes meditating upon these and other things of the sort, and anxiously enquiring if any remedy might be applied to these evils, I finally settled into this train of thought: there would be some medicine for this disease and a definite lessening of the requisite studies, if someone suitable to the task would attentively read over the interpreters of better note (first, the critics, who inquire into words, phrases, and idioms with superior perception; then, others, who draw forth the substance and sense of the Scripture with greater precision), would, with the superfluities excised, select the remainder with prudence and judgment; and would, by a suitable method, arrange the collected remainder into a compendium, with things added where needed, so that the deficiencies might be supplemented with learned interpretations of various passages of the Sacred Text, which interpretations are found here and there in certain, most weighty authors. This I had often in my prayers, that someone skilled in the authors and issues and gifted with incisive judgment might undertake this work. Having been for a long time frustrated in this expectation, and burning with a most ardent desire for this kind of resource, since all others were drawing back from the charge as extremely difficult, I, however inferior, preferred to undertake it myself, rather than to have it undertaken by no one. Therefore, having implored Him, at the hand of whom is *πάσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον*, *every good gift and every perfect gift*,<sup>1</sup> and thinking over the matter anew and cleaving the soul, at

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practices; however, during a prolonged final illness, when his physicians refused to help him commit suicide, he began to consume food and drink unsuitable for his condition. Hadrian quoted the popular saying: “The multitude of physicians has slain a king.”

<sup>1</sup> James 1:17.

one time here, at another time there, here discouraged by the difficulty of such a great exertion, there moved by the utility and necessity of the work; finally, I communicated my thoughts with learned men, neither few, nor of low degree. To them I opened my mind quite fully; I revealed the authors chiefly out of whom I was desiring to compose my work; and I likewise exhibited a kind of rough outline of my plan. When I had thought the outline to have received sufficient approval from them, being confident of the counsels and encouragements of them, I put forth my hand with the help of God to this good work; and I committed a model of it to the press and sent it forth into the light. How favorable and candid have been the judgments of the professors and other theologians, both native and foreign, concerning this model! Not a few published their complimentary testimonies of them, far above my deserving and hope; others likewise conferred their approbation by most lengthy letters of favor given unto me, and they have been actively encouraging me unto the undertaking of the work, liberally promising their influence, if ever it should be of use. Urged on by their authority, and confident in divine aid, I eagerly undertook my plan, and after various inconveniences (to which it is not desirable here to refer), I have at last, although later than I had wished and hoped, brought to completion the first volume.

Now these are the books and authors from which chiefly I have composed this *Synopsis*.<sup>1</sup> 1. *Nine Volumes of Critical Interpreters of the Sacred Scripture*,<sup>2</sup> recently printed in London: in which, among many bits of minutiae (which can be ignored without any loss), useless repetitions (not only of substance, but also of the very same words), and other things alien to our plan, are some of the most valuable and excellent thoughts of the most learned men on the interpretation of Sacred Literature. I have endeavored to set them all forth briefly, and, according to my ability, clearly and faithfully. And since not a few verses and chapters of the Sacred Codex have been ingeniously and soundly, although dispersedly and confusedly, expounded in treatises which are contained in the two last volumes *Of Critical Interpreters*, I have brought back those annotations into the order agreeing, and the place appropriate, to each one, and I have relocated them to their chapters and verses toward which they

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<sup>1</sup> The following section of the “Preface to the *Synopsis: Genesis-Esther*” is invaluable and will repay the careful study of the student of the Sacred Text. It stands as a veritable “Who’s Who” of Reformation-era interpreters, most of whom, having written in Latin and having never been translated into English, are unavailable to the English-speaking world. Seeing that these Latin works have never been translated into English, it was necessary to provide English renderings of the Latin titles, so that the English-speaking reader might gain some insight into the subject matter of these works; but the reader, of course, will not be able to find these works under these English titles. The Latin titles have been provided in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> *Critici Sacri*.