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“Secularization, Objectivity, and Enlightenment
Scholarship: The Theological and Political Origins
of Modern Biblical Studies.”

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Secularization, Objectivity, and Enlightenment Scholarship

The Theological and Political Origins of Modern Biblical Studies

IN *VERBUM DOMINI*, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI addresses some of the dangers of the “secularized hermeneutic” often present in modern biblical criticism.¹ This is a topic that has long remained close to his heart as he has exhorted Catholic Bible scholars to study the roots of the methods they employ.² The academic study of religion and modern biblical studies in the university share a common origin, namely, the purported quest for objectivity.³ Both scholarly disciplines came of age in the nineteenth century, and especially in German universities. Thus, it should come as no surprise that two of the most common designations for the academic study of religion in the university are German in origin: *Religionsgeschichte* and *Religionswissenschaft*. For the purposes of this article, I will assume the history of the discipline of comparative religion along the lines Tomoko Masuzawa argues persuasively in her groundbreaking work *The Invention of World Religions*, and thus I will not spend time re-viewing that history.⁴ What I hope to accomplish in this article is to provide a partial response to Benedict’s call for a “criticism of criticism” by providing a genealogical account of the advent of modern biblical criticism underscoring the secularizing framework within