The career of the Hegelian theologian Bruno Bauer is marked by his sudden turn from a reasoned defender of Christianity into one of its most extreme critics. His radical interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, which he first used to defend orthodox biblical hermeneutics, ultimately led him to become, as one of his admirers said, the 'Robespierre of theology'. As the leader of the so-called 'Young Hegelian' school, Bauer was one of Hegel's most gifted students. However, his condemnation of theology in general and his thesis that the New Testament was merely the fictional product of an unknown author contributed to the general distrust of Hegelianism among religious thinkers. Although his many theological and historical writings now remain largely unread, his 'Critical Philosophy' and his radical atheism exerted a strong influence upon Marx, who was his student and friend, and is still evident in such contemporaries as Jürgen Habermas.

In 1835, David F. Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu (Life of Jesus)* was published (see Strauss, D.F. §1). For Strauss, the New Testament was fundamentally a literary creation generated out of the Messianic expectations of the Jewish people, having little or no historical foundation. The miracle stories were merely pre-Christian 'myths'. The orthodox Hegelians, whose careers were threatened by Strauss' claim that his work was inspired by Hegel, asked Bauer to refute Strauss. Bauer's reply to Strauss, which appeared in a series of articles, attempted to demonstrate that such gospel miracles as the Virgin Birth were the necessary consequences of the historical development of human self-consciousness. Bauer's refutation contained the seed of Bauer's own radical view of the Gospels: that they were merely the fictional creations unconsciously designed to satisfy the needs of the religious mind for some external salvation.

In 1838, Bauer first formulated his own view of the relationship between philosophy and religion in a two-volume work: *Die Religion des Alten Testaments in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung ihrer Principien dargestellt (The Religion of the Old Testament Presented in its Historical Development and Principles)*. This work continued