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Why Should A Jew (or anyone) Read the Bible?

How audacious is the Bible! What gives those words the right to claim to be God's Word? Perhaps the right is given from the first chapter of the Bible, which begins, "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth" No author but God could have written such words that bore witness to the unfathomable beginnings of the world! Other accounts of the beginning of the world have been discarded as myth, while the book of Genesis is still read as our creation myth. Until, perhaps, this generation. For the first time in human history, scientists are writing theories of the origin of the universe that are based on empirical observations. Scientists themselves may not be claiming truth to their theories, but there is a sense that it may be possible to explain the origin of the universe with data, and not myth.

Perhaps the right of the Bible to claim Divinity is derived through its description of human origins. How is it possible for man to understand our own origins? The only author who could make that claim is God. Along comes Darwin and revolutionizes our understanding of our own origins and our significance on earth.

Perhaps the right is derived from the tradition that God revealed the Torah at Mount Sinai. When God spoke, the entire community heard something, but were afraid, and so trusted Moses as the prophet to record the words. The Torah includes the phrase "And God said to Moses," and so Torah is God's word. Or perhaps Torah was composed by different authors, in different times and places. The tools of literary criticism tell a story of traditions that originate in cultures outside of Judaism, of

political motivations, and composite documents. Why is God's word as mediated through Moses different from this essay if I were to include at the beginning of this document, "And so God said to Ari..."? I would not expect my dear reader, though, to continue reading if I claimed prophetic status. How audacious I would be!

Perhaps the audacity of the Bible has become too much for modern Jews. Most Jews do not even read the Bible – religiously or otherwise. "And God said" can paralyze the sensitive reader without the tools to understand that claim. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a world-renowned scholar of Talmud and a prominent figure in Orthodoxy, began a lecture at a Conservative synagogue in Los Angeles by saying, "It is permissible, for all Jews, to study the Torah." Laughter followed, but I am not sure our ignorance is funny. At the University of Florida, I enrolled in a course titled "Hebrew Scriptures" along with about 250 other students. About five or six of us were Jewish. The Jews knew the Hebrew, and the non-Jews knew the Scripture.

Why should anyone who accepts the finding of Biblical Criticism choose to accept the truth claims of the Bible more than any other book? If the Bible is written by human beings, what right does it have to serve as the basis of Judaism or any other religion? If the Bible was penned by humans but inspired by God, how would one know?

This paper represents my research into the various responses to the dilemma

posed to the religious Jew from the critical study of the Bible. I seek to offer a range of viable responses with the hope that the reader will be inspired by at least one of them to meaningfully interact with the Torah as a modern critical Jew. I will also offer my own evaluations of the different approaches, though I seek only to claim accuracy in my evaluation to the extent that it convinces you, the reader.

To organize these responses, Ian Barbour's four ways of relating religion and science are useful. Just as biology is the field of science that challenged the notion of man's divine origin, so too biblical criticism challenges Torah's divine origin. Barbour proposes that when religion and science meet, the four ways of relating are: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration.

I will summarize the four views very briefly, with the caveat that broad claims are rarely perfect for individuals, and it is certainly possible to see value in one way or another over the course of one's life, or even at one time on different particular points of relating.

An adherent of the conflict model would contend that religion and science are necessarily at "war" with one another. Religion and science are not only incompatible, but they are a threat to one another. Barbour places scientific materialists and religious fundamentalists in this camp.

An adherent of the model of independence would see religion and science as each having value, but in entirely different ways. "Science is based on human

observation and reason, while theology is based on divine revelation."<sup>1</sup> Science can tell a person *how* something objectively works but not *why*, or the inner significance of something. Science should not speak of meaning, and religion should not speak of the operations of the natural world.

Barbour states, "*Dialogue* starts from general characteristics of science or of nature rather than from particular scientific theories..."<sup>2</sup> This is not placing science and religion on exactly equal grounds, but rather suggests that science is not absolutely objective nor religion absolutely subjective. There is an area of overlap where religion can learn from science and science can benefit from experiential data previously held to be in the domain of religion.

"The final group of authors holds that some sort of integration is possible between the content of theology and the content of science...In a systematic synthesis both science and religion contribute to the development of an inclusive metaphysics."<sup>3</sup> The integration model is something like speaking of the messianic age when everything is known and understood. It is a time when there is little or no separation in talking about how and why things are, in which there is a true oneness to the universe.

I will be examining the particular intersection of the religious narrative of Torah's origins (Revelation) meeting the narrative proposed by biblical critics. Before I am able

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1. Ian Barbour. Religion and Science New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997 p. 85.
  2. *ibid.* 90
  3. *ibid.* 98

to discuss interaction, it is necessary to summarize some general Jewish views of Revelation without recourse to the critical narrative, and the somewhat easier task of summarizing the narrative proposed by biblical critics.

### Revelation: How does God reveal in the Jewish Tradition?

Revelation is not only the revelation of the Bible, but rather the idea of God "revealing" something to humans. There are several levels within the Bible on which this happens. As I have stated earlier, the most traditional of Revelation narratives is that God dictated the entire Bible. This view is still held in the Orthodox community and is the narrative that is most challenged by various claims of authorship. While this is the current "traditional" model of revelation, it is by no means the only model of revelation found in the tradition. Louis Jacobs, a prolific author of Jewish thought and theology with a talent for organizing complicated ideas into coherent paragraphs, outlines a few different "traditional" views of revelation:

"The traditional view of revelation is that the whole of the Bible was conveyed by God to man. A term like 'conveyed' is, of course, vague. In the middle (*sic*) ages and even earlier the difficulty of ascribing vocal organs to God was acknowledged so that expressions such as "And the Lord spoke to Moses" were not taken literally.. The Rabbis recognised various degrees of inspiration, i.e., the inspiration of the Torah (the Pentateuch) is of a higher and more direct nature than that of the prophetic books. This is sometimes expressed by saying that the Torah was given by God Himself in direct fashion whereas the prophetic books were given by means of "prophecy" (*nevuah*) The books of the Hagiographa were of a lesser order still and were thought of as being conveyed not by means of prophecy but by the "holy spirit" (*ruah hakodesh*). But in the Rabbinic view, once the canon of sacred Scripture had been fixed (albeit that the term "canon" is never used in the classical Jewish sources), it embraced all three divisions of the Bible... all these belong to what the Rabbis call "the Written Torah" (*Torah She-*

Bi-Ketav). In addition the expositions and derivations from Scripture found in the Rabbinic literature were thought of as revealed. They were given verbally in the first instance to Moses and then handed down from generation to generation, with provision for various additions and adaptations to new circumstances as they arose."<sup>4</sup>

Like most important theological ideas, revelation is complicated and far from monolithic in the rabbinic tradition. Jacobs summarizes how there are differing "levels" of Divinity within the text. This leads to a kind of hierarchy of importance or holiness, signified by how direct the revelation of the text was. No traditional narrative could conceive of the possibility that even a part of the text is not Divine on some level. The denial of any Divinity in the text would constitute a break with God in the tradition. There are several possible narratives that respond to the interaction of God and human beings in the revelation of the Bible.

Rabbi Elliot Dorff organized some of those narratives using Jewish denominations as a guide:

	1) SOME EXPONENTS OF THE APPROACH	2) THE NATURE OF REVELATION
Orthodox	Berkovits, Lamm	<i>Verbal Revelation:</i> The Torah, including both the Written and Oral traditions, consists of the exact words of God. He gave it all as one piece at Sinai, and we have those words in hand.
Conservative I	Leeser, Kohut, Schechter (?), Roth	<i>Continuous Revelation:</i> God dictated His will at Sinai and other times. It was written down by human beings, however, and hence the diverse traditions in the bible.

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4. Louis, Jacobs. A Jewish Theology pg 199-200.

Conservative II	Bokser, Gordis, Routtenberg	<i>Continuous Revelation:</i> Human beings wrote the Torah, but they were divinely inspired.
Conservative III	Existentialists: Jacobs, Schorsch, Heschel, Gillman  Objectivists: Lieber, Dorff	<i>Continuous Revelation:</i> The Torah is the human record of the encounter between God and the People Israel at Sinai. Since it was written by human beings, it contains some laws and ideas which we find today.
Conservative IV (=Reconstruction tendency)	Kaplan, Eisenstein, Green, Teutsch, Schulweis	<i>No Revelation:</i> Human beings wrote the Torah. No claim for divinity of the product.
Reform	Petuchowski, Borowitz, 1937 Guiding Principles 1976 Centenary Perspective	<i>Progressive Revelation:</i> The Torah is God's will written by human beings. As time goes on, we get to understand His will better and better. (= "progressive revelation") <sup>5</sup>

The way a Jew understands the origin of the Bible impacts everything about that Jew's Judaism. It is rare that a prospective rabbinical student to a Conservative seminary does not consult this chart before interviews. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a prospective student to be asked by another prospective student, "Which Conservative are you?", and the understood response is to come from this chart. The purpose of this exercise for Rabbi Dorff is to apply these differing modes of revelation to authority of the Bible and one's subsequent view of *halakhah*.

This paper is similar in that I am also organizing differing Jewish views of revelation into categories, but different in its application. The purpose of this effort is

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5. Elliot Dorff. Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to Our Descendants pgs 98-99

not to offer how the theological understanding of the Bible impacts the method of *halakhah*, but rather how a modern Jew is to approach the Bible as a worthwhile text to live by in the sense of its being an influential book that is read and studied as such - or not. This is not about the rabbinic system of *halakhah*; this is about the theological consequences of the Torah's critical deconstruction and evaluating possible ways to respond.

Rabbi Dorff's chart is a useful starting point to think about how different denominations might understand not only the authority of the Bible's laws and ideas, but also how Jews with different narratives of revelation would respond to the truth claims of the Bible from the tradition and critical scholars.

#### The Narrative of Biblical Critics<sup>6</sup>

The traditional narrative of revelation is rooted in religious myth. Once rationalism became the primary mode of thought, it was not too long until scholars began applying the scientific method of reasoning to the Bible itself. One of the first Jews to do this consciously was Baruch Spinoza. In Spinoza's case, he was labeled a heretic and exiled from the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Spinoza and later biblical critics began to read the Bible as they might read any book, dropping all notions

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6. The material on the different sources is primarily taken from the Encyclopedia Judaica article, "Pentateuch." by Richard Elliot Friedman, Shawna Dolansky Overton and Louis Isaac Rabinowitz

of theology or received tradition. Their original project was to reconstruct the origins of the Bible.

Two types of critical readings initially emerged. Textual or "Lower" criticism is the comparison of differing manuscripts. Since the Bible was originally copied by hand, differences exist among varying manuscripts. Sometimes those differences are significant. This type of criticism opened the door to the more theologically problematic type of criticism.

"Higher Criticism," also known as the documentary hypothesis, utilized a close reading of the text to discriminate different sources. "The overriding goal was historical: to determine what had actually taken place, and to recover the actual persons and events of the Bible as they had been preserved in the various stages of biblical tradition.<sup>7</sup> The source critical approach holds that over time, different authors composed different sections of the Bible. Using doublets (two variations of a story), terminology (specific vocabulary ascribed to an author), and linguistics, scholars have been able to discern and generally agree upon a narrative of composition. The primary authors of the Pentateuch are designated, J, E, P, and D. The dating of these various sources is a matter of debate, but there is general agreement that there are at least four sources that are referred to as J, E, P and D.

J and E likely were written between 922 and 722 BCE, during the time of the

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7. Jewish Study Bible New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2004 pg 2084.

divided monarchy. The author J wrote in Judah, while E wrote in Israel. The two texts were edited together at some point by a redactor, known as RJE. This editing likely happened after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE.

The Priestly Author, P, likely composed these sections of the Torah during the reign of King Hezekiah, 715-687 BCE. The author of the P text was seemingly motivated by priestly concerns, and wrote versions of the same stories that were included in RJE, but with more attention to ritual detail.

The source known as "D" was composed and compiled during the 7th century BCE. The book of Deuteronomy has a distinct vocabulary and value system, and it sometimes "duplicates and sometimes contradicts stories and laws found in JE and P."<sup>8</sup>

Though there are other minor sources, the final, and perhaps most important piece of this story is the Redactor, known as "R." This editor took all the sources, J, E, P and D, and edited them together. This took place after the Babylonian exile, in the time of Ezra and Nehemia (5th century BCE). The redactor could very well have been Ezra or one of his contemporaries. The final product of the Redactor is the Torah that we have today, with all the signs of the various authors and editors.

The critical eye assumes multiple human authors. The traditional eye assumes Divine dictation or at least varying levels of Divine inspiration.

Barbour's models will help clarify different responses to the challenges presented

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8. Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol 15, 2nd edition, pg 740.

by these two fundamentally different narratives.

### Conflict

While browsing the shelves in the AJU library, I came across a book called, Science in the Light of Torah. The title of this volume is revealing. Science is "enlightened" by Torah, and not the other way around. I read the preface to get a sense of what the aim of the volume was:

For a number of generations, mankind has been lured by the self-aggrandizement of Western humanism to look at the Bible through a supposed "light" of science. The *Haskalah* movement took upon itself to transplant this misperception of the Enlightenment unto Jewish minds. The Authorship of the Torah, the Creation of the universe, the very existence of our souls, and our accountability to God have been questioned under the pretense of scientific progress and enlightenment. This questioning resulted in the spread of atheism and nihilism; it converted boys fresh from yeshiva into Marxist revolutionaries and turned tender Jewish children into brutal fighters for an imagined universal social justice. Paradoxically, this erosion is continuing - even now, when Marxism is collapsing both in theory and in practice. Somehow, the idea still persists that "science makes us atheists." This arrogance breeds uncertainty and anxiety, the breakdown of family life and moral values, and a spiraling increase in drug abuse and violence.<sup>9</sup>

If divine authorship of Torah is questioned, then a whole host of social woes will inevitably ensue. Science calls the authorship of Torah into question. Science is the reason that "tender Jewish children are brutal fighters for an imagined universal social justice," as if universal social justice were something to fear. Arrogance leads to uncertainty and anxiety, which leads to drug abuse and violence. The questioning of

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9. Herman Branover. Ilana Coven Attia, eds. Science in the Light of Torah CITY, PUB 1994, p. xv.

assumptions is the danger itself. The editor seems to think that what really should be questioned is not the assumptions of Torah, but the assumptions of science. Torah holds the only real Truth that one can be certain of. With Torah, there should be no anxiety or uncertainty.

Knowing the background of the authors is an important piece of information whenever discussing this subject. A basic assumption of this kind of project is that the author of the work is at the very heart of what kind of author-ity it will hold. Thus the biography and stated influences are relevant here. The editor describes himself and his co-contributors as follows:

senior scientists engaged in research and university teaching. Every one of us had examined the differences between the genuine science we worked in and the pseudoscience or "scientism" pervading the mass culture we lived in. We all had found our way to strict Torah observance through the teaching and personal guidance of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson... Our point of view, our measuring stick, and constant value come from the Torah. We believe that the scientific interpretation of empirically observed new phenomena should be analyzed by the Jewish scientist from a Torah perspective also... Obviously the conflict ultimately will be resolved through the advance of science in favor of the Torah because the Torah is the blueprint of the universe.<sup>10</sup>

This is a group of scientists who found that a form of science that was not actually science was replacing religion as the purveyor of value. Through Lubavitch, they came to believe that the "constant value" should come from the Torah. Because they are scientists (even before the preface of the book their names are displayed with their academic credentials) they have the authority to debunk the popular myths about the truth claims that science apparently makes regarding religion.

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10. *ibid.* xvi

The editor refers to an idea that the Torah is the blueprint of the universe, which is worth tracing back to its source in Midrash Rabbah:

<p>Another interpretation: 'amon' is a workman (<i>uman</i>). The Torah declares: 'I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He.' In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED (I,1), BEGINNING referring to the Torah, as in the verse, The Lord made me as the beginning of His way (Prov. VIII, 22)<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>ד"א אמן אומן, התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אומנתו של הקב"ה, בנוהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין, אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן, והאומן אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו, אלא דיפתראות, ופינקסאות יש לו, לדעת היאך הוא עושה חדרים, היאך הוא עושה פשפושין, כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה, ובורא את העולם, והתורה אמרה בראשית ברא אלהים, ואין ראשית אלא תורה, היאך מה דאת אמר (משלי ח) ה' קנני ראשית דרכו.</p>
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Torah is not only God's direct word, but is the very design of the world. Torah exists prior to and is superior to the world. It is a natural consequence that science will eventually be resolved in the "light of Torah." For Torah is the ultimate truth, and our science is not yet advanced enough to comprehend it. The book's general tactic is to attack science by casting doubt on some of the core scientific claims that seemingly undermine Torah. For example,

Science is no less a matter of faith than religion. Science assumes that there are internal associations between successive phenomena and, moreover, that the sequence of phenomena is significant. Science supposes...science assumes..Science posits that certain laws defined for masses of dimensionless points, lines with no width, and infinitely short time intervals embody objective truth about a real external world...Without accepting these assumptions, the natural sciences as we know them today would be impossible. These are reasonable assumptions, but they are not necessarily true a priori...I am only trying to emphasize that their acceptance is based on faith.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Midrash Rabbah 1:1 (Translation: Soncino)

12. Avraham Kushelevsky. "The Religious Foundations of Science," in Science in the Light of Torah pp. 11-12.

This is the same kind of attack on science as the supposed attack on religion that comes from science. If data obtained through reason or science cause a Jew to question even the most basic of assumptions that undergird the Jewish religion, then a Jew should point out that even the most basic assumptions about science are not beyond questioning.

Attacks of this sort on science are taken by most as absurd. Most rational minds would reject the claim that accepting the data of science is equivalent to accepting the claims of Torah. Perhaps this is why I had never heard of these authors before pulling the book off the shelf.

I have heard of Rabbi Norman Lamm, who is the Immediate Past Chancellor of Yeshiva University, an Orthodox ordaining institution. He is a surprising candidate to be placed in the conflict model. Lamm is one of the foremost proponents of encountering secular knowledge through a philosophy termed *Torah U' madda* (Torah and secular knowledge/wisdom/science). In a book by that title, Lamm explains: Torah Umadda is thus an effort, not at all unprecedented in the history of normative Judaism, to expand the area of religious interest to include all of creation, and to bring all of humanity's cultural creativity and cognitive achievements within the perimeters of Torah. The intersections of Torah and Madda are not always clear; indeed, they are more often than not elusive and indeterminate.<sup>13</sup>

Though Lamm advocates encountering secular knowledge, Torah remains primary.

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13. Norman Lamm, Torah Umadda Northvale, NJ. Jason Aronson Inc. 1990 p 12

Any "outside" wisdom or knowledge is only foreign if it cannot be brought within the superseding boundaries of Torah. Science can stand next to Torah as a source of truth in the world. However, one cannot question the Torah itself. That question is beyond the pale.

In 1966, Commentary asked leading rabbis and scholars a series of five questions on the state of Jewish belief. The first of those questions was regarding the sense of divine revelation. Of the many excellent essays, Norman Lamm explains why he rejects literary criticism of the Bible:

Literary criticism of the Bible is a problem, but not a crucial one. Judaism has successfully met greater challenges in the past. Higher Criticism is far indeed from an exact science. The startling lack of agreement among scholars on any one critical view; the radical changes in general orientation in more recent years; the many revisions that archeology has forced upon literary critics; and the unfortunate neglect even by Bible scholars of much first-rate scholarship in modern Hebrew supporting the traditional claim of Mosaic authorship - all these reduce the question of Higher Criticism from the massive proportions it has often assumed to a relatively minor and manageable problem that is chiefly a nuisance but not a threat to the enlightened believer.<sup>14</sup>

There is no reason to worry about Biblical Criticism debunking the traditional narrative of revelation if Critical scholars criticize and debunk each other! This is perhaps one of the most compelling criticisms of the critical approach. Without evidence that is strong enough to elicit universal agreement, even among those who begin with the assumption of human authorship, there is no compelling reason to accept the critical narrative of authorship over the traditional narrative of revelation.

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14. In Commentary, August 1966

Lamm is not adverse to reading and participating in a conversation of outside knowledge and Torah, but he holds Torah as primary to outside knowledge. Torah is its own category of knowledge that supersedes any other kind of knowledge. If the essence of Torah is corrupted by outside knowledge, it must be discredited. Biblical criticism falls into this category. Lamm thus falls into the conflict model in regard to biblical criticism.

#### Why should a Jew study the Bible as a source of Truth: Conflict

The Bible is the Divine Word of God, and it is the only reliable source of Truth. The myth of verbal revelation is no more or less fallible than the myth of scientism, that is, the belief that whatever "science" claims is automatically true. Jews should study the Bible because God commands us to study the Bible. Since the Bible is the blueprint of the world, one can come to know all Truth through its study.

#### Summary and Evaluation: Conflict

- The argument from conflict thus can be constructed,
1. Science in general is suspect in light of a primordial Torah that specifies all truth. Science does not offer the same kind of truths that science claims to. Those who think that science is perfect do not understand science and are guilty of believing in "scientism."
  2. Even if some scientific disciplines have something to offer, biblical criticism is not a science. Critical scholars argue among themselves. They are as guilty of placing faith in unprovable assumptions as those who believe Torah is the exact word of God by the hand of Moses.
  3. Divine revelation is superior to any claim of biblical criticism. To reduce the Torah to anything else is an attack on Judaism and can and must be discredited.
  4. Failure to believe in God's authorship of the Torah will corrupt the youth.

In my evaluation, this argument has some merit, and many problems. There is great power in the certainty of absolute truth. The disillusioned scientists I quoted found comfort in the Truth that this vision of Torah offers. Uncertainty and anxiety are the result of the assumptions that other human beings tout as truth in science. "Science" has produced many ideas that have turned out to be incorrect. Science does not "prove" anything: it only disproves. When something from the world "outside" of Torah fits or enhances Torah, then it should be incorporated, but anything that is contrary to Torah must be incorrect. One who lives with this kind of certainty finds a wonderful community of like-minded people, and there is great appeal in this. The assumptions are so well integrated that articulation of ideals and beliefs is not only possible, it is rather simple. Even if the assumptions are acknowledged openly, the solution of faith is sufficient for the believer. Certainty leads to purpose and commitment. The Jew who believes in the divinity of the Bible will be motivated to study Torah, observe *mitzvot*, commentaries, Talmud, and codes. The Jew who believes in the divinity of Torah will have a well-developed language to contextualize experience, and a community to reinforce that language.

Lamm has a fundamentalist view of the Torah, but not that Torah is the sum total of everything in the universe. It is entirely possible to believe that the entire critical approach is an attack on Torah and still allow for other areas of "outside" knowledge to

dialogue with and even complement the Torah - as long as Torah itself remains primary. The challenge to the Torah exists, and the solution is to reject and discredit the challenge.

This approach can work only if one is willing to ignore the many claims that are agreed upon within the critical world. Just because there is disagreement over the dating of the "P" source does not mean that the "P" source never existed. An argument about the details of the documentary hypothesis does not undermine the entire system. The uncertainty that accompanies the academic or scientific approach does not automatically mean that the academic-based approach is inferior to the faith-based approach that claims absolute certainty.

Most Jews who are raised in American public schools will not accept on faith the claims of religion, simply because society values questioning assumptions. Every schoolchild learns that people used to think the world was flat, and now we know it is round. Common knowledge can be wrong. There is an imperative to question even the most basic assumptions about the world. For our *ba'al teshuvah* scientists, they questioned what they saw as the false basic assumptions of science.

Referring back to Rabbi Dorff's categorization of different denominations and the nature of revelation, Lamm falls into the category of "Orthodox". If one is persuaded by the argument of the conflict model, it is likely that such a person would be comfortable in an Orthodox community. As I will demonstrate in the next section, not all Orthodox

Jews necessarily ascribe to the conflict model.

The vast amount of thought and scholarship that has been contributed by academics to the knowledge of the Bible cannot be ignored simply because there is some disagreement among them. Anyone who has read the epic of Gilgamesh alongside the story of Noah cannot ignore the implications without a conscious effort. That conscious effort will be described through the work and person of James Kugel, a preeminent Bible scholar and religious Jew.

### Independence - James Kugel

The adherent to the independence model would like to accept both the religious narrative of divine revelation and the critical narrative, but locate those different narratives in different realms of life. This person would see no difficulty, on one hand, in examining and analyzing the content of the Bible using the tools of literary critics to determine and describe the authors of the Bible thereby discrediting the notion that God gave Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, and, on the other hand pray without reservation, "זאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל על פי יקוק ביד משה" "this is the Torah that Moses placed before the children of Israel, by the mouth of Adonai, through the hand of Moses."

James Kugel, a professor of Hebrew at Harvard University and author of many

scholarly books on the Bible, falls into this category. He articulates his personal tension, pursuing modern scholarship that contradicts traditional faith, in How to Read the

Bible:

I am a believer in the divine inspiration of Scripture and an inheritor of many of the traditions of ancient interpreters cited in this book, indeed, a keeper of the Jewish sabbath, dietary laws, and all the other traditional practices of Orthodox Judaism. But I am also someone who has spent most of his life studying and teaching modern biblical scholarship. That puts me right in the middle of the dilemma to which this book is devoted.

...Knowing about the discoveries of modern scholars may certainly cause many people (as it has me) to think about Scripture in a somewhat different way. But what Scripture is, and how it is to be read, cannot ultimately be separated from still larger questions, questions about our very way of thinking about God, and about ourselves in relation to Him. ...What I would like to do, therefore, is to present a fairly representative, detailed sample of what ancient and modern scholars have had to say about the Bible, and then conclude by examining the question that this survey raises, sketching out one or two of my own thoughts about how a person might go about honestly confronting modern scholarship and yet not lose sacred Scripture in the process. In the meantime, my advice to readers is: keep your eye on the ancient interpreters.<sup>15</sup>

Kugel then goes on to examine major themes of the Bible presenting both ancient traditional interpretations and the findings of modern scholarship.

As an example, I will summarize how Kugel reads the Bible in the first chapter, which naturally examines the creation story in Genesis 1-3. He first presents traditional sources explaining the meaning thus: "In their reading it becomes a profound lesson about human sinfulness and the reason for our death."<sup>16</sup> Then he presents the findings of modern scholarship, referring to the disparate sources and particular agendas. He concludes the chapter as follows:

The ancient interpreters' understanding of these chapters was uplifting, even sublime: in them, God explained the most basic facts of our existence...But according to modern biblical

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15. James Kugel.. How to Read the Bible New York, NY. Free Press 2007 p 46.

16. *ibid.* 52.

scholars, to understand these stories in such a way is largely wishful thinking...What modern biblical scholars say about the Bible is often not sublime or uplifting. Indeed, if they are right and what the Bible is really about is different authors with their particular interests and programs, if it has to do only with contradictory details and hunter-gatherer societies and folkloristic motifs, then why bother with it at all?<sup>17</sup>

Kugel thus restates the central challenge of the work. Instead of developing an answer to the challenge early in the book, he goes on to examine much of the rest of the Hebrew Bible in a similar way. The last chapter of the book is titled, "After Such Knowledge" and seeks to explain the contributions and challenges of the critical method. Kugel again couches the dilemma in the difference between modern scholarship that uncovers a very human Bible, and the ancient interpreters who developed a system of interpretation of a divine Bible that was not at all given in the words of the Bible itself. Kugel points out that the way that the Bible is read is always filtered through the ancient interpretations.

As promised, Kugel does not provide a "magic bullet" to solve the dilemma of a divine Bible and modern scholarship:

...now that the genie is out of the bottle and modern scholarship has discovered everything it has discovered about the text's original meaning, what is to become of the Bible? The first step in formulating the answer to that question, it seems to me, is to understand that the answer must depend very much on who is doing the asking. I do not think it can ever be the same for both Christians and Jews...<sup>18</sup>

There is no way for Kugel to offer a universal solution to the dilemma for everyone.

Different faith traditions hold different assumptions about the nature of the Bible. Thus

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17. *ibid.* 57.

18. *ibid.* 672

there is no one answer he can offer. He thus offers several, but I will focus on his suggestion specifically for Jews, and his own personal struggle.

Judaism is not predicated on the literal interpretation of the words of the Bible, but rather the Oral Torah's authoritative interpretation of them. The simplest meaning of the text is not what the text says, but rather what the rabbis of the Oral Torah says it means. The starting point for biblical scholarship is to completely disregard the interpretations of the Oral Torah. This leads Kugel to the conclusion,

**My own view, therefore -- though others may disagree -- is that modern biblical scholarship and traditional Judaism are and must always remain completely irreconcilable.** Individual Jews may, for one reason or another, seek to speculate about how different parts of the Bible came to be written or about the historical circumstances and original purposes of its various components, but none of this speculation can have any part in traditional Jewish study or worship; indeed, the whole attitude underlying such speculation is altogether alien to the spirit of Judaism and the role of Scripture within it. Nothing in the present volume is intended to suggest otherwise<sup>19</sup>

In Kugel's system, Biblical criticism should not and cannot have any effect on traditional Judaism. It is not that criticism undermines the assumptions of Judaism, but rather that it has an entirely different set of assumptions. Even if biblical scholars were once trying to understand or contribute to religion, by abandoning the method that made Judaism what it is they also abandoned the ability to influence traditional Jewish study or worship. Kugel can be both an Orthodox Jew who reads the Bible through the eyes of ancient interpreters and a modern scholar who reads the Bible through his own eyes and the eyes of other scholars, but he is essentially reading two different books

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19. *ibid.* 681

with the exact same words.

To further illustrate the point, I will quote two more passages from the book that I think exemplify the inner compartmentalization inherent in Kugel's approach.

James Kugel - the Orthodox Jew

The last page and a half of the book are entirely italicized. He acknowledges before the italics began, that it is difficult to to be engaged "in exploring 'what really happened', and how the Bible came to be written, but I would not mistake such things for what is foremost."<sup>20</sup> What is first and foremost seems to be the connection between human beings and God. Kugel first addresses prayer and Scripture and then the challenge of locating the word of God in Scripture.

On the Scripture and prayer Kugel places them as opposite: words *from* God in contrast to words directed towards God. But both kinds of words make a connection. It is the quality of Scripture that gives people a place to work out their "deepest inner fumbblings and mumblings..they fill up with all that is most important: they become the theater of the soul."

On divinity in Scripture, Kugel writes:  
I suppose I have my suspicions about this verse or that one, but I really do not believe it is my business to try to second-guess the text's divine inspiration...Even if I could somehow distinguish divinely inspired words from ordinary human ones, such an exercise would be pointless from the Bible's standpoint.<sup>21</sup>

These two passages represent the inner struggle Kugel is constantly involved in.

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20. *ibid.* 688.

21. *ibid.* 689.

Even though Kugel might have his suspicions about where divinity is located, the tradition he is part of forbids such a question. The world of prayer and religious Judaism must remain separate from his scholarly pursuits.

### James Kugel - The Unapologetic Bible Scholar

Just as Kugel refuses to take his knowledge of the Bible and apply it theologically to the presence of divinity within it, he also lambasts mercilessly those scholars who do. He chooses the venue of the internet to carry out this part of his book. There is one page that references the website where an appendix to the book can be found. This may be conjecture, but the very fact that this was not published in the book could be representative of his internal separation of religious and scholarly ways of reading the Bible. The title of the appendix is telling of its contents, "Apologetics and Biblical Criticism Lite." The article quotes specific examples of commentators referring to the biblical scholarship but then trying to maintain a traditional view.

Apologetics are a sign of an underlying anxiety. The anxiety in this case derives from the inescapable fact that, in the light of all that modern scholarship has discovered, the Bible necessarily looks very different from the way it looked only a century or so ago. Yet these commentators still want it to be the Bible in the old sense – divinely inspired (at least in some attenuated way), a guide to proper conduct and proper beliefs, a book of truth and not falsehood, as free of error and internal contradiction as possible, in short, despite everything they know, a book still worthy of being called the Word of God. Their repeatedly apologetic remarks give the lie, I think, to the claim that people schooled in modern scholarship, even those at the forefront of biblical research, have entirely made their peace with its implications. **They may sometimes sound blasé, but the truth, it seems to me, is that most of them are simply doing the best they can to have it both ways, to have their Bible and criticize it too.**<sup>22</sup>

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22. jameskugel.com appendix 1, pg 12-13.

Kugel leaves no doubt where his heart lies in biblical criticism and the Bible. In the world of criticism the Bible as a religious document unequivocally is lost. Any attempt to engage in apologetics for the traditional sources is not really biblical criticism, it is "biblical criticism lite." The Bible as a religious document exists in the realm of religious practice, but not in connection to Biblical criticism.

### Why a Jew Should Study the Bible: Kugel

As a Jew, the reasons to study the Bible are similar to what was suggested in the conflict model. The religious Jew should study the Bible as the word of God, and as the source of religious truth. However, as an academic scholar of the Bible, it should not matter what religion you may affirm. The Bible should be read as a significant sociological document, a historical document which reveals much about life in the Ancient Near East, a literary masterpiece, but not a religious document. If religious dogma is part of the academic/scientific process of scholarship - that scholarship is tainted. Either way of reading the Bible however, is important.

### Summary and Evaluation: Independence

The argument from Kugel, at least for the Jewish community can be summarized as follows:

1. There is a challenge to the religious authority of the Bible from the findings of Biblical criticism.
2. Those findings, though difficult for the believer to hear, are not going to go away, and thus they should be explored.
3. Judaism only understands the authoritative reading of the Bible through the lens of the rabbinic tradition and oral Torah.
4. Biblical criticism necessarily disregards the Oral Torah as a precondition for the

critical study of the Bible.

5. Therefore the two worlds cannot and should not interact. They are entirely independent.

This approach has great appeal for those most intimately involved in Bible criticism. I have often wondered what would compel a person to study the Bible so intently if not for some religious motivation. Expert knowledge of Biblical Hebrew, contemporary Semitic languages of Akkadian and Ugaritic, familiarity with the archaeological findings of the ancient Near East, the attention to minute details within the text -- these are not skills that are attained without intense dedication. The Orthodox Jewish community, which identifies with a completely divine Torah, naturally has the greatest number of serious students of the Divine Word. Kugel was raised in this community, and had no desire to reject the community of believers in verbal revelation, even if he himself chooses to separate that belief from his intellectual pursuits. Another example is Ziony Zevit, removing his kippah while teaching the Bible in a university setting, and praying in a modern Orthodox synagogue. It is entirely possible to practice Judaism as an Orthodox Jew and adhere to the independence model. However, the independence model is not a natural fit for an Orthodox Jew - intellectual bifurcation is not easy to explain. Looking again at the way Rabbi Dorff categorizes the nature of revelation by denomination, none seems a natural fit for the independence model.

The independence approach shares with conflict the conclusion that the critical study of the Bible undermines its religious foundations. The difference is that

adherents to the independence model believe that the two approaches are so fundamentally different as to be able to separate them completely. The historical reality of the text has nothing to do with its religious meaning. From the perspective of religion, it matters not if there is a clear parallel between the structure of the covenant with God and Israel described in Torah and a suzerain treaty in other contemporary cultures. When the Bible is read as a Jew, it describes the covenant between Israel and God, as interpreted throughout the generations of authoritative interpreters. When the Bible is read as a scholar, the way the structure of the covenantal text parallels the suzerain treaty and the similarities between the Torah and other ancient Near Eastern texts are paramount.

Though Kugel clearly identifies as a scholar and religious Jew, he acknowledges the internal difficulty of this approach. That internal struggle is exactly what led him to write How to Read the Bible. I sensed throughout that he desires to hold on to both the traditional and critical approaches, but was unable to mix them.

This model holds the best potential for a full religious life in a community of committed Jews, and at the same time the intellectual honesty and rigour that accompanies the academic study of the Bible. There is no need to sacrifice either world, as long as they remain separate. There is theological consistency in the narrative of verbal revelation, which motivates a community of Jews to commit to Judaism, and also a much higher degree of intellectual consistency in the historical narrative of the

documentary hypothesis. What the adherent to the independence model sacrifices is internal consistency. We have seen how Kugel struggles with this challenge. Yet, he nonetheless chooses to keep his intellectual life and his spiritual life independent from one another.

Despite the clarity with which Kugel keeps the two worlds apart from one another, a part of him still requires a way to understand his world as a whole. That desire leads us to the models of dialogue and integration, which begin with the idea that the human authors of the Bible were somehow inspired by God.

### Dialogue and Integration

The categories of dialogue and integration are not as simple to describe as conflict or independence. The conflict model draws clear battle lines; either you believe that God revealed Torah to human beings, or you believe that people wrote the book we call the Bible, and God has no part in it whatsoever. The choice is either/or, not both/and. The independence model draws the same lines, but there is no battle. One can believe in divine revelation from a religious point of view, and human authorship from an academic point of view - but the two points of view are incompatible.

Dialogue and integration begin by asserting that the two points of view are compatible in some way. How exactly biblical criticism and revelation are compatible is the area of discussion here, and the possibilities are numerous. Adherents to dialogue

and integrationists reject the narrative that Rabbi Dorff labels "Orthodox", namely, verbal revelation. The claim that Moses is not the sole author or even a historical figure is a challenge that can be addressed within the tradition. The Torah itself does not claim that Moses received the entire Written and Oral Torah. The claim that J, E, P and D were somehow revealing God's word through divine inspiration is a convenient solution that will be a common thread moving forward.

Those thinkers I place in the category of dialogue accept the findings of biblical criticism, but find a way to sidestep the challenges. There is truth to both divine and human authorship, but the text is treated as divine. Sometimes the findings of biblical criticism impact the way a certain text in the Bible is understood, but that truth exists in dialogue with the truth of a Divine Torah. Integrationists seek an approach that in some way completely integrates the religious tradition and the critical approach.

### **Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber**<sup>23</sup>

Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) and Martin Buber (1878-1965), were two giants of Jewish philosophy and theology, and each contributed unique ideas furthering Jewish thought. They were also good friends. They worked together to translate the Hebrew Bible into German in such a way that it maintained the rhythm and structure of the

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23. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. Scripture and Tradition

original Hebrew. What unites them for the purposes of this paper is that they both accepted the claim of multiple human authorship as historically true, but still were able to read the Bible as a sacred and unified whole.

Rosenzweig accomplished this with a clever rereading of the significance of the "R" or redactor source. In his own words:  
We too translate the Torah as one book. For us to it is the work of a single mind. We do not know who this mind was; we cannot believe that it was Moses. **We name that mind among ourselves by the abbreviation with which the Higher Criticism of the Bible indicates its presumed final redactor of the text: R. We, however, take this R to stand not for redactor but for *rabbenu*. For whoever he was, and whatever text lay before him, he is our teacher, and his theology is our teaching.**<sup>24</sup>

Notice that Rosenzweig is not attributing divinity to the text, but is giving the text the significance of divinity. The "R" who redacted the text together is *rabbenu*, our rabbi. The term "our rabbi" could be read as, "our communal authority in interpreting God's will." The specifics of who that Rabbi was or the sources that were compiled and edited are insignificant to the final product. To fully understand Rosenzweig's response and method, this postscript is apparently necessary:

Knowing how printed material is read, I would like to add a word to the printed version of this letter - a word that, for the reader who wishes to learn from what is read what the writer means, is wholly unnecessary. But such a reader exists only in the presence of a manuscript; printer's ink has the magical power to transform such a reader, indeed all readers, so that they know even from the title - even, indeed, from the name of the writer - precisely what they will read, and will read nothing but what they already know. So this note is necessary after all. **What is said in the letter does *not* imply a distinction between *Wissenschaft* and "religion."... If *Wissenschaft* and religion seek to know nothing of each other, but do know of each other, then neither is of much use.** There is only one Truth. No honest man can pray to a God whom as a scientific scholar he denies. No man who prays can deny God. I do not mean that the

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24. *ibid.* 22-23. (emphasis mine)

scientific scholar perceives God in his test-tube or his notebook. But the contents of test-tube and notebook cannot exist without God... It is not belief that is opposed to knowledge, but believing knowledge to unbelieving knowledge. Or rather, since it is the legitimation of believing knowledge that it includes unbelieving knowledge, while unbelieving knowledge has no access to believing knowledge: knowledge both believing and unbelieving as opposed to knowledge that is only and restrictedly unbelieving. Or, in the case of the letter printed above: an attention both to the new inquiries (concerning "R") and to the old (concerning "J," "E," and "P") as opposed to an attention restricted to the latter. The word "believing" does not here mean a dogmatic self-commitment but a total obligation embracing the entire person. In this sense, the heretic too can be a believer, and the orthodox an unbeliever<sup>25</sup>

The opening words of this postscript point to Rosenzweig's awareness of how printed words can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted.<sup>26</sup> Rosenzweig knew exactly what he meant as he wrote the words, and he also could foresee how a reader might think him to believe that is dismissive of the findings of biblical criticism. He then emphasizes that an approach that seeks to dismiss either religion or a scientific approach is not useful. Rosenzweig does not understand his project to be dismissive of either the findings of the documentary hypothesis or the unity of the text.

By stating "There is only one Truth," Rosenzweig might have understood himself to be engaged in the project of integration or synthesis, rather than dialogue. However, Rosenzweig's own consciousness of how he may be misunderstood points toward why I am inclined to place Rosenzweig in the dialogue model. It is not clear to me to what extent Rosenzweig relied or utilized the critical approach or documentary

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25. *ibid.* 25-26 (emphasis mine)

26. Rosenzweig perhaps was also alluding to how the printed Bible itself has been interpreted and understood in so many different ways. The title of a book, the name of the author, predisposes a reader to understand a text in a particular way, even if the author did not intend that reading. This is helpful in understanding how Rosenzweig understand his approach to reading the Bible.

hypothesis in his translation project. Thinking of "R" as "Rabbenu" dismisses the theological challenges of multiple authorship without addressing those challenges head on. Rosenzweig may feel his is an integrated response, yet there is no integration of how various authorship changes the way the text should be read.

The section of the postscript regarding the believing knowledge and unbelieving knowledge explains the reason why Rosenzweig chooses to read the Bible as he does. A person with believing knowledge is one who accepts on faith alone, with no attempt at legitimating that knowledge through the scientific method. The one with restrictedly unbelieving knowledge does not believe in anything, but may know much. The religious approach Rosenzweig is advocating includes both unbelieving knowledge (that which is derived from an academic approach to the Bible) and believing knowledge (a religious reading of the unity of the Bible). This is why he chooses to read the text as a unity, with "R" as the last and final word. For only after approaching the Bible from the place of unbelieving knowledge (J,E,P and D) can one have true believing knowledge (R).

This approach led Rosenzweig and Buber away from the challenge of author or author-ity, to the question of how the Bible was experienced and read. Buber phrased the project this way:

The Jewish Bible is the historical document of a world swinging between creation and redemption, which, in the course of its history, experiences revelation, **a revelation I experience if I am there**. Thus we can understand that the resistance of the man of today is that of his

innermost being.<sup>27</sup>

Revelation can only happen if the Bible is read. If there is a part of Torah, either from the written or Oral Torah, that an individual never reads, never hears, never experiences, that part of the Torah is not only meaningless to that individual, it is practically non-existent. The potential for God's word to be revealed through the Bible is only actualized in the dialogue between the text and the person. The question should not be how the original revelation took place, but rather - are you present enough with the Bible to continue to experience revelation?

Rosenzweig's approach to revelation is too complex to fully address it in this work. The concept of revelation is central to his *magnus opus*, The Star of Redemption.

A short selection from the work will be helpful to understand how critical scholarship might have influenced his approach to the Bible:

Revelation commences with "I the Lord" as the great Nay of the concealed God which negates his own concealment. This "I" accompanies revelation through all the individual commandments. In the prophet, this "I the Lord" creates a tool of its own and a style of its own for revelation. The prophet does not mediate between God and man, he does not receive revelation in order to pass it on; rather the voice of God sounds forth directly from within him, God speaks as "I" directly from within him. The master of the great plagiarism of revelation lets God speak and passes the revelation which occurred to him in secret on to the dazed assemblage. Not so the true prophet. He does not let God speak at all. Rather, he no sooner opens his mouth than God already speaks. Hardly has he uttered his "Thus saith the Lord," or the even briefer, even more hurried "Oracle fo the Lord" - which even dispenses with the verbal form - before God has already taken possession of his lips...Only an "I," not a "he," can pronounce the imperative of love, which may never be anything other than "love me!"<sup>28</sup>

For Rosenzweig there is no possibility of a direct verbal word from God. God as

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27. *ibid* (emphasis mine)

28. Franz Rosenzweig. The Star of Redemption. Canada. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, INc. 1971 p. 178

"I" speaks directly from within a person. Revelation happens through the dialogue between a person and God within that person. The only divine imperative revealed is "love me." As far as the Bible itself, Rosenzweig frames revelation this way in a series of letters between Rosenzweig and Buber on Revelation and Law:

The primary content of revelation is revelation itself. "He came down" [on Sinai] - this already concludes the revelation; "He spoke" is the beginning of interpretation, and certainly "I am."<sup>29</sup>

The entire Bible is thus interpretation of the fact of revelation. God speaks to another from within, and the Bible is an interpretation of that fact.

#### Why Should a Jew Study the Bible? Rosenzweig and Buber

A Jew should study the Bible not because it is the direct word of God - that is irrelevant to the point that it has given the Jewish people spiritual fulfillment for generations. The Bible has the potential to continue to be a source of spiritual fulfillment - but only if it is read.

#### David Weiss-Halivni<sup>30</sup>

David Weiss-Halivni takes a similar approach to Rosenzweig and Buber, but puts a name and narrative to the author. To summarize, Weiss-Halivni proposes that the perfect Torah, verbally revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai, was lost in the exile from Israel. The reason we were exiled was a result of our sins, what he terms "*chate'u*

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29. Franz Rosznweig in a letter to Martin Buber printed in On Jewish Learning New York, NY. Schocken Books 1955. p. 118.

30. Weiss-Halivni, David. Revelation Restored Boulder, CO. Westview Press 1997.

*Yisrael*" The manuscripts that came with the sinning Israel were composite and full of mistakes. Ezra the scribe found those composite documents and compiled them together, thus becoming the Redactor. Since the texts were composite copies of copies, there are mistakes, what he calls a "maculate Torah" - but they are the closest we have to the original verbally revealed Bible. Since Ezra had prophetic status, the final product is to be treated as the direct word of God, even though there are imperfections and mistakes. "The idiosyncrasies of the text become more comprehensible when traditional understandings are combined with the findings of critical scholarship."<sup>31</sup> Ezra, and subsequent tradition, maintained the imperfect Torah for nobody has the status to change even a word that may be God's word.

What Weiss-Halivni adds to our conversation is how one may accept the findings of critical scholarship and still articulate a completely traditional approach to the Bible. Weiss-Halivni does not need to segregate his knowledge of biblical criticism with his religious approach to the Bible. However, the findings of biblical criticism have very little, if any effect on his approach to the authority or authenticity of the Bible.

#### Why Should A Jew Read the Bible - David Weiss-Halivni

Weiss-Halivni fully acknowledges and utilizes critical scholarship, but ultimately the text as a whole is the best, if not the only way to reach God:  
The awareness of maculation in the transmission of the Torah itself, and of consequent

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31. *ibid.* p. 75.

difficulties in interpretation, instills a sense of humility, revealing human frailties and weaknesses so great that God's words were tainted by them - and indicates that whatever human beings touch has the potential for corruption. **Yet despite the tainting, these words are still the most effective way of becoming closer to God, approaching his presence. We cannot live without these words - there is no spiritual substitute - but while we are living with them, we are keenly aware that we are short of perfect, that along the historical path we have substituted our voice for the divine voice.** We are condemned to live this way.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, a Jew should study the Bible because the Bible is the closest we have to a divine voice, and is the most effective way of becoming closer to God. Even if critical scholars uncover maculations in the text, the text is still to be accepted as wholly divine.

### Arthur Green<sup>33</sup>

Green is the last author I will place in Barbour's dialogue model. What unites all these thinkers so far is their ability to acknowledge and accept the truth claims of biblical criticism, yet they are not religiously challenged by those claims. Green opens his most recent work in Jewish theology by acknowledging how critical scholarship challenged his faith for many years. At this point in his life, he wrote this book having moved past those challenges:

The biblical scholar's understanding of the text's complex origins and editing are a level of truth that I recognize as valid. In my religious life, however, I continue to embrace the text as a whole, as sacred artifact rather than as historical document. **I enter into the text as a participant in an unending conversation among generations of Jews, enriched but essentially unfazed by critical perspectives.** I recognize this as a postmodern perspective. I rejoice in my renewed freedom to be a living participant in the hearing, articulation, and constant reinterpretation of Torah that has been the creative lifeblood of our tradition for many

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32. *ibid.* p. 89. (emphasis mine)

33. Arthur Green. Radical Judaism

centuries.<sup>34</sup>

The section I highlighted in the above quotation points towards how Green sometimes is enriched by critical perspectives, and sometimes ignores critical perspectives. This is not altogether new for the purposes of this work. What Green added for me was a unique approach to the nature of revelation:

The personified God, I have admitted quite clearly, is a mythical projection. A literal belief in a God who speaks the words of Torah is indeed far from what I have in mind.

And yet I have already identified God as a speaker. In saying that the creative force within Being calls out "Where are you?" to every human being, surely a call that is not in words and comes from a place deeper than language, I have already begun to build the bridge that will carry us from silence to Torah. Let us return now to the accounts of "Creation," old and new. In the old tale, God calls out to Adam, "*Ayekah*" – "Where are you?" Making the shift from the old to the new "Creation" story, I have chosen to read this as the call of God from within, the animating spirit of the whole great evolutionary journey, calling out to every human to participate fully in it, each in our distinctive way. It is our ability to hear and respond to this call, transformed because of the evolution of the human brain, including conscience, that lets us dare claim to be *tselem elohim*, the image of God, in a way other than the rest of creation... I am suggesting that the silently spoken "where are you?" is the essence of revelation. To be a religious human being is to recognize that call and to seek to respond to it. It is given new iteration in Sinai's two commandments "I am" and "Worship nothing else," but it essentially remains unchanged. All the rest of Torah (here used in the broadest sense), with all of its shaping and patterning of our lives, with all its intricacies and ambiguities of language, is a traditional storehouse out of which we form and enrich our *response* to that challenge.<sup>35</sup>

Green connects the quality of creativity directly with the content of revelation.

The whole of the Divine Torah is the call to responsibility and creativity. I will return to this point later in this essay.

#### Why Should a Jew study the Bible? - Art Green

The Bible remains the sacred artifact that is the starting place for Jews to meet the

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34. *ibid.* 85

35. *ibid.* pps. 92-94.

Divine call to creativity. When a Jew reads the Bible, he is participating in a process of interpretation and reinterpretation that has existed for generations.

### Summary and Evaluation: Dialogue

1. The Bible is the work of human authors, at different times, for different reasons
2. This effects the way I read the Bible, but does not completely undermine the traditional narrative
  1. For the Redactor can be understood as "Our Rabbi," and divinity is heard through the relationship with the text(Rosenzweig and Buber).
  2. The traditional text is the best approximation of the original Sinaitic verbal revelation and has divine status because of Ezra's prophetic status and the community's reliance on the text (Weiss-Halivni).
  3. The knowledge of criticism enriches but does not harm or overwhelm a religious approach to the text (Green).
3. The tradition is informed by criticism, but there are valid ways to sidestep the theological challenges.

These three approaches are representative of the wide range of possibilities that result once anything besides direct verbal revelation is entertained. The ability of the bible to make truth claims is very different for Green than Weiss-Halivni. I think this range of responses is both potentially compelling and disheartening. The dialogue model as I have presented it holds the advantage of not having to abandon either the traditional or academic approach, but at the cost of consistency.

### David Frankel (Integration)

David Frankel is a professor of Bible at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem with

whom I had the pleasure to learn. The content of the course was following Frankel's radical rereading of the Bible to come to new understandings and narratives. He was willing to break the text of the Bible any way that made logical sense to him. For example, he demonstrated a tradition within the Bible that Caleb led the people into Israel, not Joshua. Frankel did not stop at presenting the narrative as a historical tradition within the text, a place where an academic Bible scholar working in the independence model might stop, but asked of his students to draw religious meaning from the newly revealed narrative. I asked him if he had written down his aims in anything published. This is a selection from an epilogue to an unpublished book he wrote:

Can biblical criticism have a place in contemporary Jewish hermeneutics, theology, ethics, and education? Are, for example, early versions of the present biblical text, such as some of the ones presented in this book, and the more humanistic theologies that they sometimes reflect, of exclusively academic interest? Is their value limited to the aid they provide in reconstructing the history of ancient Israelite religion? Is their contribution to an appreciation of the Bible *as Torah* (= instruction; teaching) limited to the provision of the textual context against which the final form of the biblical text was formed? Or might the contemporary Jew of faith legitimately appeal to these or other reconstructed textual forms (assuming, of course, that the reconstructions are deemed sufficiently convincing) as genuine biblical voices, commanding, at the very least, an earnest hearing and devout reflection?...

The critical approach allows us to see that many of the texts that are morally or religiously problematic to us were also morally and religiously problematic to other biblical authors and editors. Through critical analysis we may continue the Rabbinic process of distinguishing the chaff from the wheat, and turning the wheat into flour. This process may allow us to be creative partners in the development of Torah. Perhaps in this way the Jewish people of today can continue to pursue their lofty mission of becoming the “great nation” they were destined to be.<sup>36</sup>

As can be seen, Frankel desires to have biblical criticism play a central role in

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36. David Frankel epilogue to unpublished work

continuing the Rabbinic process of developing Torah. This is integration starting from the world of biblical criticism. The narrative that develops from the critical eye could be more authoritative or true from a religious perspective, as long as the reconstruction is "deemed sufficiently convincing."

Frankel in essence, is "doing" biblical criticism. The difference between his approach and the approach of Kugel is that he thinks his findings (and presumably, other scholars findings) have religious import, whereas Kugel would have kept the two worlds separate. Frankel is not offering apologetics for a traditional read of the text, what Kugel would have called, "Biblical criticism lite," but is offering a serious critical analysis that can radically change the traditional narrative.

What Frankel would find to be "sufficiently convincing" from a religious perspective is not clear from this work. I can testify that in his class, I was convinced that he really grasped a narrative that was not readily apparent. Yet, each person would have to decide, based on rather complicated argumentation, whether a narrative that results from the critical analysis is more or less religiously compelling than the traditional narrative.

This approach brings all the benefits of the critical approach; it is unapologetically utilizing all the tools of critical scholarship to uncover layers and narratives within the Bible that were previously hidden. By applying the knowledge that results from a critical read to have religious implications, he brings the critical

enterprise to its natural conclusion in the model of integration.

This has all the strengths of both a religious and critical approach, but also all the weaknesses. One must accept not only that the Bible should be religiously compelling, but that a critical read of the Bible that is not rooted in religious tradition is somehow religiously compelling.

#### Why Should a Jew Study the Bible? - David Frankel

A Jew should study the Bible with a critical eye to continue the Rabbinic process of developing Torah. Through developing Torah, Jews can become a great nation.

#### Elliot Dorff - Integration from a traditional point of view<sup>37</sup>

Rabbi Elliot Dorff has authored many books that systematically address the theologic challenges of modernity. Frankel approaches integration from the perspective of biblical criticism. Rabbi Dorff approaches integration from the perspective of the tradition. He begins by acknowledging the truth claims of biblical scholarship yet he still believes the Torah is a divine document. Dorff then summarizes the idea that is behind his theory of revelation:

In my view, revelation can occur in any event from the most common to the most unusual: what marks an event as a revelation of God is not that the event itself is of a special character but that it is interpreted as such by a human community...**Whether it is a revelation of God or not depends on whether the Jewish community accepts it as such...**Moreover, the Jewish community determines not only what events shall count as revelations but also how those

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37. Elliot Dorff, For the Love of God and People pp 29-37.

revelations are to be interpreted and applied.<sup>38</sup>

The Bible is divine not because God dictated it in any way, or even necessarily inspired the authors directly, but rather that the Jewish community interpreted the Bible to be divine revelation.

The epistemological question of how one could know if something is divine or not is immediately presented and systematically addressed. What follows is selections from Rabbi Dorff's argument. I will address each of the points in the order that Rabbi Dorff presents them:

1. Human moral, intellectual, and aesthetic faculties distinguish human beings from the animals, in degree if not in kind. As such, these capabilities are a touch of the divine within humanity in the root sense of "divine" as power, for they enable human beings to know, feel, and do things that other animals cannot.

Dorff's first building block of how revelation happens is the unique capabilities of human beings distinct from other animals. In Dorff's model, human beings seem to be the only animal capable of receiving revelation. The human capacity for morality, intellect, a sense of the aesthetic, and the ability to create relationships is what I think Dorff would label *בצלם אלהים*, "in the image of God." This is the human being's ability to access divinity.

Having established how a human being can access divinity, Dorff then address the context in which that human being measures that divinity:

2. The structure of the world is an objective base that serves as a criterion for the evaluation of any philosophic theory or moral code; and because I hold that the world was divinely created at least in the sense that its creation involves powers beyond our control, I think that

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38. *ibid.*

God informed us about divinity and the world and gave us Jewish law in an *indirect* way - specifically, by creating the world in such a way that certain formulations of thought and practice fit the pattern of creation better than others. They are in that sense, wiser than any alternative ways of thinking and acting.

Here Rabbi Dorff engages in a form of the teleological argument. He is characteristically straightforward about where he is making assumptions, and the limit of those assumptions. Human beings did not create the world. Whatever force created the world could be considered *divine* in the sense that human beings are able to interpret the world in terms of better or worse. For Rabbi Dorff, Jewish law is a pattern that is "better" than any other.

Now that the characters of the human/divine drama have been defined, Dorff moves to discuss what we can know of the results of their interaction:

3. I maintain, however, that the specific *content* of human theological ideas and codes of practice is created by human beings and hence is subject to error and change. Revelation occurs *in events that human beings interpret to be revelatory* of truths or norms of conduct; therefore, any event could be a source of revelation, although some may be more impressively so than others. I would also want to stress that, within Judaism, it is the Jewish community of the past and present that decides which events are revelatory and what the content of that revelation is, and that this communal check prevents revelation from being simply the figment of someone's imagination.

Human beings did not create the world, but we did create the way we interpret and shape the world around us. The most important criterion of whether an event is revelatory is simply that human beings interpret that event as revelatory of truth or norms of conduct. Rabbi Dorff again makes special emphasis that the Jewish community of the past and present "decides" the content of God's revelation. This "communal check" is important to define the boundaries of what can be considered a

Jewish revelation and what is not. This is a point to which I will return shortly.

Dorff's next point concludes the part of his argument about the truth claims of the Bible:

4. This approach helps me integrate the Documentary Hypothesis (that is, the claim that the Torah is made up of four separate documents written at different times and later edited together) and other claims of modern biblical and rabbinic scholarship with a serious, but intellectually honest claim that the Torah is nevertheless divine.

Though Rabbi Dorff was not consciously working in Barbour's model of integration, he clearly is drawn to an integrated approach. The Documentary Hypothesis is intellectually a central part of how Dorff understands the Bible. Yet he is proposing a way to ascribe divinity to the text in an integrated manner.

5. I observe Jewish law (that is, Jewish Law has authority for me) both because it is the way *my people* have understood *the demands of God* in the past and do so now because of its own intrinsic wisdom as a program for satisfying human needs, acting morally, and maximizing human potential in the world as we know it. Similarly, Jewish philosophic views from the Bible to modern times have special relevance to me because they represent the way my people have understood God, human beings, and the world...

Because I identify conscientiously as a Conservative Jew, the "community" whose ideas and practices define God's word for me in our time is the body of Conservative rabbis and laypeople who actively live Conservative Judaism in what they think, say, and do.

Rabbi Dorff now carries his method through from the abstract to the personal. For Rabbi Dorff, who is a conscientious Conservative Jew, the community of leaders in the Conservative movement is the "communal check," in practice, of how he would imagine God's will.

Yet, Rabbi Dorff is one of the foremost leaders that define God's word in our time in what "they" think, say and do. So he himself acknowledges both his personal participation in the process and also his personal limits:

6. When a particular law is not moral or wise, I must be prepared to change it in consort with the rest of the Conservative community, taking due regard of the weight of tradition in the process. The same is true for specific Jewish beliefs. Evaluating traditional laws and concepts must be done deliberately, and commitment to the tradition requires that the burden of proof rests with the one who wants to change it. Moreover, the need for communal concurrence should help guard against precipitous changes. No mechanism can guarantee wisdom in such evaluations, however, and no simple rules can be applied to determine when to change an element in the tradition and when not to do so. That is why we must entrust such decisions to a committee that is called on to use their collective *judgment*. We clearly use our own individual experience and reason when responding to the tradition; but for Judaism to retain continuity and coherence, we must discuss our evaluations with the other members of our community and make decisions as a group. This does not guarantee wisdom; but since human beings are not omniscient, this method is the one that holds the most promise for us in knowing the true, the good, and the holy.

Rabbi Dorff tries to walk a fine line on this point. On one hand, he strongly desires the community to be the primary decision making body in matters of tradition, and on the other hand we "clearly use our own individual experience and reason when responding to the tradition."

It is a matter of fact that each individual uses experience and reason in their particular response to Judaism, but Dorff advocates in theory for personal judgment to be suspended in favor of a communal judgment.

7. Even though for lack of knowledge I must suspend judgment as to what actually happened at Sinai, there are elements of the texts attributed to that event that induce me to attach a divine quality to them. These include their scope, their inherent wisdom, and especially the demonstrated viability of the tradition that they fostered over the centuries and throughout many regions of the world. This clearly does not mean that Judaism's understanding of life is the only possible one... In the end, all descriptions of the world and how we should live in it must be subjected to the same criteria of truth we use to test theories in history, economics, science, literature and any other academic discipline - namely, their clarity, their adequacy to the facts, their consistency, their coherence, and their moral import. To assert the authority of Jewish beliefs and norms of conduct, in other words, we must be prepared to subject them to the same standards of truth and goodness that we would use in evaluating any other civilization's view of the world and its pattern of action.

When I do that, the amazing adaptability and endurance of Jewish law and ideology

over the ages in a wide variety of places indicate to me that Jews have apparently hit on a pattern of life and thought that fits the structure of human beings and nature well, and so I ascribe truth to Judaism's claims. In fact, it appears to me that Judaism fits the structure of reality so well that I doubt that it could simply be the product of human minds.

Rabbi Dorff rules out authority of the Bible based on experiential knowledge of revelation at Sinai - an impossibility without a time-machine, and is left with revelation based on philosophic categories that do not rely on authorship for authority. The excellent philosophic quality of the Biblical text leads Rabbi Dorff to ascribe divinity to the text.

8. Revelation, though, is ongoing. The Written Torah is our constitution, and as such has special significance and authority for us. Jewish law, however, is not equivalent to that in the Torah, even though much of it is based on the Torah... Revelation happens each time any of us reads the Torah again and sees new meanings in it. Hence the traditional blessings one recites when called to the Torah speak not only of God having given us the Torah... but of giving it to us now.

The Written Torah as the Jewish constitution is why it has special significance Rabbi Dorff suggests that revelation happens "each time any of us reads the Torah again and sees new meanings in it." In other words, the Bible is to be read as a basic source of ongoing revelation.

### Why Should a Jew Study the Bible? Elliot Dorff

The Bible is the core text a Jew can read to experience revelation. Its ability to serve as a constitution for diverse communities over a long period of time proves its worth as a document to continue to rely on, and provides reason enough to attribute divinity to it.

### Summary and Evaluation: Integration

1. The Bible was written by people at different times, yet it is still central to religion
  1. By reading the Bible through the lens of biblical criticism, one can derive new and better religious significance than the Bible as we currently have it (Frankel).
  2. The historical origins of the Bible are irrelevant to the authority of the Bible. The Bible is divine as long as the community continues to recognize it as divine (Dorff).

### Revelation as Ongoing Inspiration To Create - Ari Kaiman

#### **Background**

The genesis of my response originated while writing my first *davar Torah* as a rabbinic intern, which happened to be on *parashat Balak*. I decided to speak on the obvious fable-like quality of the story of a talking donkey, and suggested that there was no need to read the text as historical truth. I posed the question aloud, "What makes the Torah different than any other good story?" My answer, which felt deeply original, was this,

Ibn Ezra has called our intelligence the "angel which mediates between us and God". God created us that way, *b'tzelem elohim*, the only creatures besides God with the capacity for creation, for creativity. How do I know that Torah is holy, that our Torah is right from God? Because I believe that the measure of Godliness in creation is it's ability to inspire us to new creation. And there is no other book I know that has inspired more creation than Torah. Just try and imagine all of the art, all of the music, the libraries of books that have all been inspired by Torah. Even what we are doing right now, the act of *drasha*, of searching out what the Torah is saying to us, we are involved in the Godly act of creation.

This paragraph is where the entire idea for this paper originated. My goal was to articulate this idea in a more philosophically cogent way. I originally planned to start with this argument;

1. Human beings are created *b'tzelem elohim*, "In the image of God." God is the

Ultimate Creator. To be in the image of God means to have a unique capacity of creativity different than other animals.

2. The measure of Godliness or divinity in anything created is its continuing capacity to inspire human beings to new creativity or new way of understanding creation.
  1. I believe no other creation has inspired more creativity than the Bible, and thus continues to be Godly.

I had originally envisioned this work to be an exposition of my own response to the theological challenges of biblical criticism. In order to develop and deepen my response, I began to research the different responses that were already published by authors I had (mostly) heard of. I came up with the idea to categorize these different responses and offer my own in that framework, as a way of better understanding my own response.

What I found in my research was that my approach, which felt originally inspired, was strikingly similar in methodology to my teacher, Rabbi Dorff. Dorff begins as I did by articulating a special quality for human beings different than other animals, though he does not use the Biblical phrase, *B'tzelem Elohim*. The measurement of Divinity or revelation for Rabbi Dorff is "in events that human beings interpret to be revelatory of truths or norms of conduct." Which is similar to my measurement of continuing capacity to inspire human beings to new creativity. There are important differences between my approach and Rabbi Dorff's approach that I will address. However, it is important to honor that my inspiration in addressing the theologic

challenges presented by biblical criticism may have originated in studying Rabbi Dorff's approach.

I cannot know with certainty the extent to which my teacher planted the seed that grew into my theory of Revelation, or if the moment I wrote the sermon I was experiencing a Divine Revelation. If I attribute my theory of revelation as inspired by Rabbi Dorff's methodology, than I believe that God was working through Rabbi Dorff as he wrote the words that inspired these words. If my theory happens to inspire others to create their own view of revelation, than God will have worked through me as well.

### **The Creativity of Revelation - an Theory of Revelation based on Genesis:1-3**

How is it that the Universe came to be? This mystery animates the religious consciousness to a belief in a cause. The cosmology of Genesis 1 places God as the first cause of the Universe we experience. The story takes its place among all narratives that attempt to explain how there is anything at all in our Universe. That there is seemingly order in such a way that our human species benefits greatly. As Rabbi Yishmael famously held, "The Torah speaks in human language." Without human language, there is no way humans could have created or experienced the Bible. The creative forces behind the Bible constructed a myth that helps me articulate how I understand God to reveal God's will in the world through human creativity.

In Genesis 1, the character of God engages in a number of actions that create the

universe. Through analyzing God's actions and human actions in the Genesis story (in bold) I hope to demonstrate my theory of revelation, that is, how divinity and humanity meet.

The first of God's actions in the Bible is divine speech; "וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי-אֹר" And God **said**, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."<sup>39</sup> When God speaks, God creates. The words are the creative force behind the existence of the entire Universe.

The next of God's actions is "seeing"; "וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאֹר כִּי-טוֹב" God **saw** that the light was good."<sup>40</sup> God "seeing" we discover, is really a moral evaluation. God created something by speaking, and then evaluated that creation by seeing it.

"וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ"; And God **separated** the light from the darkness."<sup>41</sup> The act of separating or distinguishing points to a different kind of creative act. Both light and darkness exist, but by distinguishing one from the other something new is created.

"וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְיוֹם וַלְחֹשֶׁךְ קֶרָא לַיְלָה" God **called** the light Day, and the darkness He **called** Night."<sup>42</sup> Having spoken creation into existence, God morally

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39. Genesis 1:3

40. Genesis 1:4

41. *ibid.*

42. Genesis 1:5

evaluates by seeing, creates further by separating, and concludes the first day of creating by another verbal act - calling the creation a name. Giving light and darkness names allows those entities to have significance.

This pattern of (1) saying something into creation, (2) seeing/evaluating that it was good, and (3) calling the creation a name to give it significance, repeats for the first few days of creation, giving full meaning to Day, Night, Sky, Earth and Seas.<sup>43</sup> The construct basic reality of existence from a human perspective is created with speech and named by God. After calling the dry land "Earth" and the waters, "Seas" on the third day, God stops giving names to the creation that God is saying into existence. In Rabbi Dorff's schema, this might be considered the "objective base that serves as the criterion for evaluation any philosophic theory or moral code" Human beings have seemingly no part of these parts of creation.

When the narrative arrives to the first sentient beings, a new verbs are used in the pattern, "וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּיִמָּנוֹת הַגְּדֹלִים" - God **created** the great sea monsters...<sup>44</sup>

"וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ" - God **blessed** them **saying** be fertile and increase<sup>45</sup>

There is something different about living creatures than other parts of creation. The

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43. The other verbs that are attributed to God in this chapter, but are less significant to the pattern I am establishing are; ויעש אלקים את הרקיע - God **made** the expanse (1:7), ויעש אלקים את-שני המארות - God made the two great lights (1:15), ויתן אתם אלקים - and God **set** them (1:17)

44. Genesis 1:21

45. Genesis 1:22



finally, God created man in His image.

Being in God's image must mean that human beings are similar to God in a way that is different than other creatures. What God does, human beings also do.

Therefore, Human beings are creative by speaking; human beings evaluate if something is good; human beings give significance to creation by naming; human beings somehow make and create; human beings bless.

So far, I have only quoted from the first chapter of Genesis, which biblical critics generally agree to be written by the "P" source. The second chapter contains a different creation narrative, generally understood to have been written by the "J" source. In this version Adonai God forms (ויצר) man from the dust of the earth and blows into his nostrils the breath of life. Adonai God plants a garden and places man in it. From the ground Adonai God causes to grow (ויצמח) trees that are good for food, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Adonai God placed man there to tend to the garden, and not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Adonai God then says, "לא-טוב הִיּוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֲעֲשֶׂה-לוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֹגֵדוֹ": It is **not good** for man to be alone; I will **make** a fitting helper for him."<sup>48</sup> Then man begins to use the divine, creative power within him;

Adonai God, "formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever **the man called each**

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48. Genesis 2:18

**living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts;** but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then **the man said**, 'This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one **shall be called Woman**, for from man was she taken.' Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh."<sup>49</sup>

Man speaks and thus assigns significance and meaning to various parts of creation through the divine power of language. This is where "J" fills in the names that God did not assign in the "P" version of creation. The first man is creating by speaking and name-giving. Additionally, the theme of the biologic act of creation and birth is recalled.

The third chapter continues the "J" narrative, now focusing on the quality of good and evil. Once both man and woman eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adonai God calls (ויקרא) to them saying, "איכה, where are you?"<sup>50</sup> This is a different use of the same word that has proved to be central to our narrative of divine and human power. This is the call of relationship, as in when one "calls" to another.

When God hears that the man and woman ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, his response is to tell them the consequences. The woman would experience painful childbirth. Though I am not a doctor or biologist, the reason childbirth is

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49. Genesis 2:19-24

50. Genesis 3:9

painful is because human beings have rather large brains, with more capacity for reason, emotion, and the knowledge of morality (good and evil). The consequence for the woman is both about the act of creation (childbirth) and morality (the large head that is a result of growing intelligence). The consequence for man was toiling the ground, and "by the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat."<sup>51</sup> Bread does not exist except for the ability of human beings to use human technology to turn wheat into bread. The consequence for man for a deeper knowledge and ability is the need to use that knowledge and ability. God's final word on the matter of good and bad, is this, "הָיָה כְּאִדָּם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע - Now that **man has become like one of us**, knowing good and bad..."<sup>52</sup> Morality is a divine quality. That human beings have morality is part of what it means to be **בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים**, in the image of God.

The two common themes "P" and "J" authors that connect humanity and divinity are creativity and morality. Thus, for me, *the measure of divinity in anything, is (1) its ability to inspire creativity, and (2) its ability to guide a person to a good moral decision.*

### Why Study The Bible - Ari Kaiman

Whatever a person reads or experiences as inspiration to create can be understood as God revealing to that individual. Revelation is experienced primarily on

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51. Genesis 3:19

52. Genesis 3:22

an individual basis. This is why reading and teaching Torah in a community is no guarantee that everyone in that community will be inspired to create or live moral lives. Rather, each individual will experience the Bible in a unique way, sometimes hearing God's inspirational voice, and sometimes not. However, the Bible as a whole has served as the direct inspiration for countless books, art, music, etc.

The Bible has inspired generations of Jews to live creative and moral lives. If you are Jewish, this is reason enough to give the Bible a chance to inspire you to create and live morally as well. If a person is born into Islam, the Quran is an appropriate place to look for inspiration. If a person is born into the cult of Harry Potter, perhaps The Sorcerers' Stone is an appropriate place to start looking for inspiration. The measure of divinity in anything created is its ability to continue to inspire creativity and morality.

If one person was inspired to create a philosophy of life based on Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling (the author of the Harry Potter series) would appropriately be considered to have transmitted God's will to that person. To the extent that philosophy of life was moral and inspiring to others is the measure of the extent of divinity within the Harry Potter series. Since that has not happened yet, though I enjoy the novels very much, I do not think of Harry Potter as a primary source to hear God's voice.

One could make the argument that Christianity and Islam are daughter religions of Judaism - Jesus and Mohammed essentially inspired by God through the Bible. If

that premise is accepted, the reach of the Bible as a source of inspiration is incredibly large. However, I do not think this argument is necessary as a proof of my theory of revelation.

Everyone has experienced the drive to create. Language is the primary medium of human creativity. I continually find inspiration to create and write from the Bible, but also from the creations of authors like Rabbi Dorff and Art Green. Rabbi Dorff's methodology was highly influential to my own methodology. Art Green's emphasis on individual human creativity is central to my theology. Their creations have a measure of divinity to the extent that they inspire me to create and live moral lives. Everything has the potential to be a source of divine inspiration, from a finger-painting by a 3 year old to a beautiful sunset. An academic article and a mystical poem are both potential sources of divine inspiration.

I give the Bible a privileged status over other books because I am Jewish, and because it has proven its worth as a source of inspiration and fount of creative energy.

### Evaluation

My theory of revelation seeks to ground the experience of divinity in the present moment instead of an imagined past. I do not rely on dogma or faith alone to establish the claim of divinity, but rather the encounter with the text. The challenges of biblical criticism led me to evaluate what divinity means if human beings wrote the Bible. It

does not matter that it was written by human authors. What matters is that it continues to inspire human beings to creativity and moral action. As long as the Bible continues to inspire human beings to creativity and moral action, the Bible remains divine. The moment that it ceases to inspire creativity or moral action, the Bible ceases to be a divine text. For many today, the Bible is not a Divine text, simply because it is not inspiring, and in places perceived to be immoral. If I were to read the Bible and found it uninspiring, or immoral, it would cease to be divine for me as well. I continue to read the Bible as a whole because of its earned and privileged status in Judaism, and because of my own life path as a teacher of Torah, but if I am uninspired or morally offended, it is unlikely I will choose that section to teach others. If a section of the Bible is not read or experienced, inspiration from that section is not possible.

I can only hope that when I read the Bible, I will be inspired me to create and teach. I pray that in my transmission of the Bible I am successful in inspiring others to create and live moral lives. If I am successful in this task, then I will have a measure of divinity within my own work.

There are real challenges to my approach. Some may object that the Bible only has the status of divinity when an individual finds inspiration within it. For some people, a self-help book that inspired a person to live a better, more creative life would be "more" divine than the Bible. I must respond, yes. For that person, at that moment,

the self-help book holds more divinity than the Bible. However, I think it is unlikely that the self-help book will hold up under the pressure of time to remain as inspirational as the Bible has. Individuals tend to gravitate toward texts that are relied on by other individuals. The call to relationship brings human beings to documents that have proven to be inspirational over generations.

Another challenge is identifying the source of inspiration. I myself discovered several sources of inspiration in the course of my research for this paper. Some were clear to me, such as my sermon on *Balak* was inspired while reading the Bible. Others were less clear how influential the inspiration was, like Rabbi Dorff's methodology being so similar to (what I thought) was original to me. All I can do is the best I can to attribute inspiration where it is due. By attributing inspiration to a source, I lend that source my vote of confidence in its holding a measure of divinity within it.

Some may object to the central role of the individual in determining divinity. They may argue this can lead to a kind of anarchy and Judaism that is not recognizable as an organized religion. I agree that there is the potential for that to happen in my system. However, I deeply believe that one knows where to start looking for inspiration based on the community one is raised in. Each individual does have the choice to find inspiration outside of a community, but then loses the community that is formed from looking at a common source.

## Conclusion

All these authors have the potential to inspire you to approach the Bible in a world where a strong claim could be made that people, not God, wrote the Bible. If you find your own inspiration in any of these authors and find yourself looking for inspiration in the Bible, than that author has held a measure of divinity for you. I myself have found more clarity and direction in my own approach to the Bible, and hope that this document holds a measure of divinity itself. I pray that God continues to work through all of us, inspiring us to continually create and lead moral lives.