

THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC DISCOURSE: FAITH VS REASON?

| A MODERN-CRITICAL READING | A FAITHFUL/PRE-MODERN READING |
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| <p data-bbox="191 382 792 403"><u>Composition</u></p> <p data-bbox="191 411 800 646">The Bible - a fallible, heterogeneous and <i>miscellaneous</i> work – is an exceedingly diverse collection of separate books, an anthology of cultural materials spanning a millennium. A good many units were originally independent of each other, circulating in distinct circles. The Bible is a <i>contingent</i> collection of various forms of literature, most of which are comparable to similar forms of literature in the ancient Near East.</p> <p data-bbox="191 688 272 709"><u>Author</u></p> <p data-bbox="191 718 776 802">The works now contained in the Bible originated from <i>different</i> concrete individuals and were composed in <i>different</i> cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts.</p> <p data-bbox="191 844 409 865"><u>Content and Value</u></p> <p data-bbox="191 873 800 1012">The Bible is <i>a</i> history of an ancient people, with other competing histories; it is therefore of relative value (<i>descriptive</i> reading of Scripture that, along with other information – like archeological evidence - tells us about history).</p> <p data-bbox="191 1054 321 1075"><u>Addressees</u></p> <p data-bbox="191 1083 800 1167">The Bible and its world are far removed from us; there is a great divide between the ancient and the modern world.</p> <p data-bbox="191 1209 305 1230"><u>Language</u></p> <p data-bbox="191 1239 768 1411">In terms of structural linguistics, the texts of Scripture derive from any number of conditioning linguistic factors. These, as a set of open possibilities, constitute <i>the potential of biblical language</i>. The meaning of the biblical text is thus discerned through proper literary, linguistic and historical study.</p> <p data-bbox="191 1579 418 1600"><u>Methods of Reading</u></p> <p data-bbox="191 1608 800 1810">Since the Bible was written through human agency, it can be studied like any other work of literature. Its claims are never self-validating, and the certainties of its revelation are invariably vulnerable to the ongoing revelations of history (<i>dichronic</i> reading of Scripture that demands our knowledge of the text’s original setting).</p> | <p data-bbox="831 382 1424 403"><u>Composition</u></p> <p data-bbox="831 411 1424 495">The Bible is a perfect, homogeneous and <i>harmonious</i> work. It is without mistake or contradiction. As a supra-intended whole, it is self-referential.</p> <p data-bbox="831 688 912 709"><u>Author</u></p> <p data-bbox="831 718 1424 739">The Bible was written by God (through human agency).</p> <p data-bbox="831 844 1042 865"><u>Content and Value</u></p> <p data-bbox="831 873 1408 957">The Bible is <i>the</i> story of God's dealings with us; it therefore has <i>normative value</i> (<i>prescriptive</i> reading of Scripture).</p> <p data-bbox="831 1054 961 1075"><u>Addressees</u></p> <p data-bbox="831 1083 1424 1138">The Bible is addressed <i>to us</i>. It is immediately relevant, and it is written for <i>our</i> (mostly moral) instruction.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1209 945 1230"><u>Language</u></p> <p data-bbox="831 1239 1424 1537">The Bible is quite literally the "Word of God." It is a <i>single</i> communication, a single message in an intricate code, a complex system of written signs. This communication is intrinsically so far above the pitch of human minds that, to be made available to our senses at all, the "Word" has to be <i>decoded</i>. The biblical text is <i>cryptic and compact</i>: the true meaning is <i>hidden</i> in the text. The interpreter will listen carefully for the <i>single</i> hidden "will" that had expressed itself in the deliberate selection of every word of the text.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1579 1058 1600"><u>Methods of Reading</u></p> <p data-bbox="831 1608 1408 1747">Since the Bible is God's word to us, it is <i>in a class by itself</i>. Its claims are based on revelation and are not subject to historical or other forms of external verification (<i>synchronic</i> reading of Scripture that does not address the context of the text).</p> |

The “Map” for Teaching Bible

From Barry Holtz, *Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and Practice*
(New York:JPS, 2003), pp. 92-94.

1. **The Contextual Orientation** – Determine the meaning of the texts within its own times as best we can.
2. **The Literary Criticism Orientation** – Perform a literary reading of the texts using tools of modern criticism.
3. **The Reader-Response Orientation** –Focus on the reader’s experience in encountering a text (Subset of literary approach).
4. **Parshanut, the Jewish Interpretive Orientation** – Be concerned with the way that various classical commentators understand the text.
5. **The Moralistic-Didactic Orientation** – Discern the “message” (or messages) that specific texts offer for our own lives.
6. **The Personalization Orientation** – Aims at the contemporary meaning of the text (like the Moralistic-Didactic Orientation), but in a less didactic and directive fashion (political, psychological, spiritual orientation).
7. **The Ideational Orientation** – View Jewish sources as a kind of “philosophical” text in which are embedded key moral and theological ideas.
8. **The Text Leads to Action Orientation** – Learn in order to observe mitzvot.
9. **The Decoding, Translation and Comprehension Orientation** – Comprehend the text in a basic manner including memorization.