

## THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC DISCOURSE: FAITH VS REASON

A MODERN-CRITICAL READING	A FAITHFUL/PRE-MODERN READING
<p><b><u>Composition</u></b> 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><b><u>Author</u></b> 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><b><u>Content and Value</u></b> 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><b><u>Addressees</u></b> The Bible and its world are far removed from us; there is a great divide between the ancient and the modern world.</p> <p><b><u>Language</u></b> 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><b><u>Methods of Reading</u></b> 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><b><u>Composition</u></b> 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><b><u>Author</u></b> The Bible was written by God (through human agency).</p> <p><b><u>Content and Value</u></b> 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><b><u>Addressees</u></b> 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><b><u>Language</u></b> 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><b><u>Methods of Reading</u></b> 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>

Adapted from Matthias Henze

## 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.