

Biblical criticism, both in its "higher" and "lower" forms, has been one of the major sources of the assault on traditional Judaism in the modern era. Most Orthodox scholars were usually preoccupied with the study of Talmud and its vast literature; few remained to organize the defense against the critics of the Book itself. Those who did, however, were outstanding thinkers, and they met the challenge brilliantly and conclusively. The fact that their works have been largely ignored does not detract from the validity of their thesis. Rabbi Max Kapustin, who here discusses their major contributions, outlines the general attitude he believes traditional Jews ought to adopt to Biblical Criticism. He is the Director of the Hillel Foundation at Detroit's Wayne State University. Ordained by the (Hildesheimer) Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin, and recipient of a doctor's degree in Semitics from Heidelberg University, he was instructor in Bible and Talmud at the Rabbinical College (Hoffmann Yeshivah) of Frankfurt a.M. He is the author of two works in rabbinics.

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A Traditionalist View

The justification or necessity for dealing with Biblical Criticism in these pages is not self-evident. Work on the Bible offers rich rewards even without taking into consideration so-called critical problems. For a modern example we have only to turn to S. R. Hirsch's great commentary to the Pentateuch now being made accessible to the English reader.¹ To broach critical problems to people with no genuine concern is unnecessary, perhaps even undesirable. Yet whenever problems do arise, it is necessary to take cognizance of them. The "established results" of Biblical Criticism have become part of the intellectual baggage acquired

by the average college graduate. He has been most probably exposed to a course in the "Bible as Literature," or something of that nature. These courses are usually taught by people relying on secondary sources in which the critical approach is predominant. Hence, there must be a response to this challenge. It must come on thorough grounds and avoid superficial apologetics.

First, it is necessary to define the concept of Biblical Criticism as such. In itself it merely represents a scientific methodology. It is a method of biblical study which in principle contradicts the approach to the *Tenakh* (Bible) which has been cultivated in traditional Judaism from time immemorial to our own days. For the Bible critic, the Torah is not word for word and letter for letter direct divine revelation. Neither are the writings of the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) or the *Ketuvim* (Hagiographa) divinely inspired, products of the *ruach ha-kodesh* (holy spirit.) For the critics this literature represents documents which at best may be valued as the works of certain individual personalities, representing the "Hebraic genius."

This is the result of so-called Higher Criticism. It has been attained by using certain assumed or actual contradictions and various linguistic or stylistic characteristics to split up the whole biblical literature into an unlimited number of sources of varying age. (For our purposes we shall limit ourselves to the Pentateuch.) Denials of the Mosaic authorship occur at an early period as we can see, for example, in the polemics of the Church Father Origen (died 254 C.E.) against the pagan philosopher Celsus. Ibn Ezra to Genesis 36:31 quotes a Rabbi Yitzchak, who attributes this verse to the time of King Jehoshaphat, a view which Ibn Ezra himself violently rejects.² Spinoza, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, also offers extensive arguments denying that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. The real turning point came with a book by the French physician, Jean Astruc (died 1766), who tried to prove that in composing the Pentateuch Moses made use of two major sources called E and J respectively, since they allegedly use either the Tetragrammaton J-H-V-H — or *Elohim*. The use of different divine names as criteria for recognizing different sources has remained an important, if not the only, factor in the critical approach until to-

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day. Most important in establishing the documentary theory was K. H. Graf, and his followers, Abraham Kuenen and J. Wellhausen. The Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis assumes as major sources J, E, P (the Priestly Code) and D (Deuteronomic literature). Sometimes these sources are said to run parallel to each other, sometimes they are intertwined, in some instances they are complementary, in others contradictory. At some time this crazy quilt was shaped into a semblance of order by a fictitious character usually designated as R (Redactor) representing the final editorial effort on the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately, R did a rather inadequate job, since he left so many contradictions, supplying the critics with stuff for their hypotheses. This whole process is supposed to have lasted from the 9th century B.C.E. to the time of Ezra in the 5th century, when all these documents and the Book of Joshua were combined into what is called the Hexateuch, with P being the youngest post-exilic source. It has been pointed out frequently³ that the Hegelian theory of historical evolution which dominated the 19th century, has motivated a conception of Israelite history which stipulates a rising curve in theological concepts culminating in the pure monotheism and universalism of the Prophets, in contradistinction to the polytheistic and henotheistic beginnings. To fit this theory, large portions of the Torah had to be allocated to post-prophetic times. The Torah, by and large, had to be unknown to the Prophets. This, of course, meant the destruction of some of the most fundamental axioms of the Jewish tradition which posits the line from the Abrahamitic to the Sinaitic revelation.

The theory of multiple sources is the beginning and end of all critical biblical research, whether in Jewish or non-Jewish circles. Next to it, the so-called lower criticism dealing with textual problems plays a relatively unimportant role. The latter concerns itself with the form of the biblical text and its supposed restoration to the original version. Words which are difficult to explain are traced to errors in transmission and are corrected accordingly. Expressions, sometimes phrases or whole verses, which are difficult to fit into an existing or still to be construed context, are omitted and others substituted.

What should be the approach by traditional Jews to this whole

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area? The answer is to be found in the clear and binding position of the tradition, combined with an objective scientific evaluation of Biblical Criticism. The works of David Hoffmann in German are classics in the field. (Rabbi Hoffmann was a famous Bible and Talmud scholar, Halakhist, and Orthodox representative of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, particularly in the field of the Halakhic Midrashim. He succeeded Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer as Rector of the "Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin" until his death in 1921. His works on Bible include *Die wichtigsten Instanzen gegen die Graf-Wellhausensche Hypothese*, I (1904) and II (1916); *Das Buch Leviticus* and *Das Buch Deuteronomium* I and II, left incomplete and published posthumously. The last two works, on Leviticus and Deuteronomy, have been translated into Hebrew and published by Mosad Harav Kook.) Every acceptance of multiple sources within the Torah in whatever form is incompatible with the foundations of our faith. This is basic. We are told that this is an unscientific dogma. In answer to this it should be pointed out that the whole system of hypotheses employed by the critics has, in a very real sense, become congealed into dogmas. It is the tragedy of critical biblical research that these dogmas have interfered with a better understanding of the Bible from within. Real connections and complementary texts have been neglected in order to satisfy preconceived theories which were regarded as infallible. This introduced an element of recklessness into textual research so that "nearly every book of the Old Testament has been stigmatized as a literary forgery by at least one scholar."⁴ It is well-nigh impossible to pierce this dogmatic shell of the critics. Works of Jewish scholars, such as Hoffmann and others, who refuse to share the general pre-suppositions of the critics, usually receive the silent treatment. This also holds true for non-Jewish scholars with a more traditional attitude. Hoffmann's commentaries — the one on Leviticus was called by Joseph Halevy, the great French orientalist, the most important contribution to the understanding of Leviticus since Rashi — are virtually unknown even to the specialists. The more recent gigantic commentary on Genesis by Benno Jacob (*Das erste Buch der Tora*, 1934) has not elicited the reaction it deserves. The reviews, particularly in

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the non-Jewish scholarly periodicals, more or less limited themselves to the exegetical part, ignoring the painstaking point-by-point refutation of the multiple-sources hypothesis.

Concerning textual criticism, Hoffmann has made the definitive statement for us. He points to the careful exactitude with which each word, indeed each letter, of the Bible, has been handed down. "The *masorah* or the traditional writing of Holy Scripture, according to the testimony of our sages, is as old as Holy Scripture itself," writes David Hoffmann. "Even if we had to concede that in certain places the text has not remained inviolate, we must, on the other hand, concede that we are lacking all means to restore a text written under *ruach ha-kodesh*. Every conjecture, no matter by how many exegetical and historical and critical arguments it may be supported, does not offer us even the probability that the Prophet or the writer of Holy Scripture wrote in this form and not as in the text before us."⁵

Beyond this there is another factor which, for reasons of scientific integrity, considerably weakens the right to make textual emendations. We believe that a deeper understanding of the biblical texts becomes impossible if every difficulty is treated with the convenient method of emendation. This will be understood by anyone who ever attended an "Old Testament" seminar at one of the German Universities where this method was developed into a fine tool. It was frightening to observe how its free use choked off every effort to penetrate to the real meaning of the text and how it produced downright scientific carelessness.

Having said all these things, we must add a word of caution. We must guard against the temptation of a one-sided evaluation of all aspects of non-Jewish "Old Testament" scholarship. It is an unfair generalization to dispose of it in its totality as a means for the depreciation of the Jewish religion. This is neither historically nor factually correct. The *bon mot* of calling it "higher anti-Semitism" has only limited validity.

Certainly there is a pronounced tendency to minimize the importance of our biblical literature in favor of the "New Testament." There is the dogma of Christian theology which insists on a gradual development of the Israelite-Jewish religion reach-

ing its climax in the world of thought of the "New Testament." This is inevitable in a field where a majority of the scholars is recruited from Christian theologians. However, among them we find many who have thought and written profoundly and beautifully about our Holy Scriptures. Above all, we must not forget that we are infinitely indebted to non-Jewish Bible scholarship for a wealth of linguistic, historical, and archaeological material which must have an impact upon our exegetical work and which cannot be neglected.

It is well known that the position of the traditional Bible student has been made considerably more "comfortable" during the last quarter of a century. The stranglehold of doctrinaire criticism has been broken and many of its dogmas have been shattered. Our growing knowledge of the biblical environment has enabled us to view many stories, incidents, and attitudes not as literary fancy but as plausibly historical. Modern archaeology has corroborated as genuine the setting for many biblical narratives, particularly for the patriarchal age. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob today are figures of flesh and blood, whose claim to historicity cannot be denied. The rigid application of evolutionary stereotypes to the religion of Israel is being seriously questioned and rejected to a significant extent. Yechezkel Kaufman has made a most impressive effort to show that the Torah precedes the literature of the Prophets.⁶ This has brought into serious question some important textual datings by the documentary theory.

In the area of textual studies, the Masoretic text has grown in scientific stature and respectability, and is increasingly preferred over the previously highly-touted versions, particularly the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Greek Septuagint, and the Syriac Peshitto.⁷

Granted all this, we should be less than honest were we to maintain that the basic critical approach to the Bible, as outlined above, has vanished into oblivion. The present conservative trend in biblical scholarship has tended to shrink the abyss separating critical from traditional biblical scholarship, and has considerably strengthened the position of the Jewish tradition. One of the more faithful followers of Wellhausen has referred

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to "a far-spread mood" to reject the multiple-sources theory.⁸ It is, however, a far cry from the claim, so glibly bandied about by some of the popularizers within and without our ranks, of having demolished the critical argument in its totality.

We must accept and utilize the recent positive phenomena in this whole field, but never forget the line of demarcation we have drawn in the beginning. This must be the basic approach. It should go a long way towards buttressing the traditional position while at the same time enabling us to live in peace with our scientific conscience. The case for the unity of the Pentateuch today does not have to rely on the authority of tradition alone. It is supported by sound scientific argument. The evidence for the possibility of Mosaic authorship is mounting. For us it constitutes our heritage of truth, standing on the indivisible unity of Written and Oral Torah. In the last analysis we, as Jews, must seek our own way to make this heritage our own, using and developing the materials and methods provided by millennia of work on the Hebrew Bible. Traditional institutions of higher Jewish learning might well ponder the imperative need to incorporate within their curriculum systematic biblical studies in this two-fold pattern. This, in time, will relieve the embarrassing scarcity of modern biblical scholarship among the committed adherents of the Jewish tradition. To look down with smug condescension upon the whole critical effort is an attitude which all too often merely hides lack of knowledge and inability to argue effectively. We, too, see many problems, some of them already indicated in our own tradition, some of them which have been sharpened by some modern criticism. Differences of opinion will come with the attempted solutions. As Jews loyal to Torah, we do not claim for ourselves the capacity to master, with our insufficient means, the deep and total understanding of a literature which flows from other spaces toward higher ultimate goals.

Many a problem which has for many years defied integration into the larger framework of our faith, has since been solved without doing violence to the tradition. If this can—not yet—be done satisfactorily then we have the courage to live with a problem without closing our eyes to it.⁹ The *teiku* of the Talmud

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gains a deeper and more comprehensive meaning when seen in this light. This attitude, to be sure, is possible only on the basis of a pure and well-structured faith. Here we face the important challenge for sound theological foundations. Only such foundations can become the premise for our work on the Bible. We stand on Talmud and Midrash, on our great commentaries, and on the implications of our classical philosophical systems. But beyond these it is our duty to examine other constructive ideas wherever we may find them. A deeper Jewish understanding of our sacred literature is our goal and reward.

NOTES

1. For an interesting tribute to Hirsch's work from a non-Orthodox point of view, see F. Rosenzweig in *Martin Buber und Franz Rosenzweig, Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, pp. 46 ff. (The first part of Hirsch's commentary — consisting of four volumes on the first three books — has been translated by Isaac Levy and is being distributed in the United States by Bloch Publishing Co. In all probability, a review of this commentary will appear in a future issue of *TRADITION* — *Editor*).
2. He resolves the chronological difficulties in Genesis 12:6 and Deuteronomy 1:1 by exegetical means.
3. So the Danish Semitist, J. Pedersen, quoted by Efraim Urbach, "Neue Wege der Bibelwissenschaft" in *Monatsschrift fuer Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1938, vol. 82, p. 1. Extensive use has been made of this summary in preparing the present essay.
4. William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Second Edition, 1957) p. 78.
5. Urbach, *op. cit.*, p. 15, note 20 quotes H. S. Nyberg and his comparison with the methods of classical philology as examined by Wilamowitz and others both for lower and higher criticism. Limitless conjectural criticism has been replaced by a much greater respect for the traditional text. See also Rosenzweig, *op. cit.*, p. 47: "The readiness, in principle, for philological textual changes is neutralized by a philological timidity, also in principle, and an everlasting distrust towards the necessarily hypothetical character of scholarship."
6. *Toldot ha-Emunah ha-Yisraelit*, 8 vols. (so far). An abridged English translation under the title *The Religion of Israel* has just been published by Moshe Greenberg. See *Ibid.*, p. 1f: "The Torah . . . is the literary product of the earliest stage of Israelite religion, the stage prior to literaray prophecy. Although its compilation and canonization took place later, its sources are demonstrably ancient — not in part, not in their general content, but in their entirety, even to their language and formulation."

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7. See Ch. Heller, *Ha-Nusach ha-Shomroni shel ha-Torah* (1924).

8. G. Beer, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 1935, No. 10, col. 619.

9. See Rosenzweig, *op. cit.*, p. 52: "This does not mean a distinction between 'Science' and 'Religion'. . . . When Science and Religion refuse to know each other, but in reality do, neither Science nor Religion is worth much." We consider this formulation quite acceptable without identifying ourselves wholly with Rosenzweig's position. To read R (Redactor) as *Rabbenu* lacks ultimate importance unless this reading implies *Mosheh Rabbenu* himself.