

PREFACE

Documentary Evidence

Have you heard the joke about the minister, the rabbi and the imam? I suspect not, because we have not reached the level of community relationships that enable us to comfortably include imams in our humour. Jokes often have a dynamic that comes from three directions, so we are content with “the rabbi, the minister and the priest,” even though two are Christian. They are usually on the golf course together, out in a boat, or arriving at the pearly gates, and some humorous angle of their shared Scriptures makes for convivial merriment. The relationships between Muslims, Christians and Jews are not funny, at least not yet, but the relationships are beginning to get more comfortable, beginning with clerics and those more active in spiritual matters, and it is the shared

Scriptures that are the main bases of an increasing bond which may soon have wider manifestations.

The Bible is always news, both for scholars and people at large, and this is as true in the twenty first century as ever. We will begin at the beginning with the Jewish Torah, often called the *Pentateuch* (five scrolls) by Christians and others. Over the last 150 years *the Documentary Hypothesis* about its composition has shown the Jewish Torah to be a rich spiritual tapestry woven together from various source documents, known as “J,E,D & P,” by a final editor known as “R,” the “redactor.” This hypothesis, in some version, held almost absolute sway for well over a century, went through a brief period of question and doubt near the end of the last century, and has been revived and reinforced in the new century. Such is the weight of evidence at this point that in *Forensic Scriptures* I propose to revise the description of the “hypothesis” to have it called simply *The Documentary Evidence* of the sources of the Pentateuch. We will review the hard evidence, consider circumstantial evidence in passing, and float a few possibilities for future investigations of the Torah, the Gospels and the Qur’an.

This inquiry, intended as much for the seminary student as for the intelligent lay reader, is therefore an overview of the argument as presented in both the academic classroom and the congregational study group in recent years. New resources are now showing Christians, who always regard the Hebrew Scriptures as foundational, how recent Jewish studies illustrate the ways in which the writings of the Torah / Pentateuch helped shape messianic theology. Stunning new paradigms from Muslim sources about the roles of women in producing the Scriptures of Qur’an and the Hadith, and how these may be applied to Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, are also detailed in this book, which

presents the Bible with the help of the kind of forensic evidence made available by professional investigators in court cases carried by the popular media. We begin with what we know and what we might reasonably assume. To briefly illustrate, let me paraphrase the legend on the cover which also hints at future possibilities. The order is changed for reasons that may become apparent.

J The J document, named for its use of the divine name Yahweh, (Jehovah) was written in Jerusalem soon after the kingdom David bequeathed to his son was split by Solomon's own lackluster sons into Israel in the North and Judah in the South. One of the women who produced such Scripture might well have been not merely an "author," but also the compiler and editor who left her own stamp and the marks of educated sisters and foreign sisters-in-law on materials in the archives of the Royal House of David. In his 1990 bestseller, *The Book of J*, American literary critic, Harold Bloom, popularized the notion that the material known as the J source was most likely written by a woman, who he tentatively identified as possibly a daughter of David.

This possibility was first raised by the current master of criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures, Richard Elliott Friedman, in the first edition to his masterpiece, *Who Wrote the Bible*, published three years earlier in 1987, and referenced by Bloom, who failed to acknowledge this particular debt. Sadly, the questionable scholarship in the rest of Bloom's book earned the scorn of much of the academic establishment, which accounts for the widespread dismissal of the notion of female authorship of J highlighted by Bloom, perhaps the single most valid notion of his career. But a persuasive new paradigm from the Muslim world makes it seem increasingly possible that Friedman's

conjecture and Bloom's instincts may have been correct about women as household scribes in ancient palaces and leadership households.

E In the north, God was respectfully identified by the more ancient and generic word, "El" or Eloh (or "Allah" in Arabic) until the story records God's revelation of his name, Yahweh, to Moses. The memory of Moses plays a role among the Levitical priests in the old northern capital, Shiloh, akin to the dominance of David in the south among the Aaron priests in the Jerusalem temple. J was written in Jerusalem about 850 BCE, showing how both theology and temple worship from the days of the nation's founding in the desert pointed toward the Davidic throne and the temple, both at Jerusalem. The document known as E appeared as a response some fifty years later to validate the northern kingdom, its Mosaic theology and the Levitical priesthood at Shiloh, the first capital of the Hebrew nation during the conquest era and a site they were possibly promoting as a central shrine for the new northern kingdom.

D The Deuteronomical source is from that same Levitical school after they moved south to Judah following the collapse of Israel in the North, decimated by Babylon in 721 BCE. To establish their place in the Southern Kingdom, this circle brilliantly amalgamated J&E into one document with political instinct and skill modern people rarely associate with the ancients. They were apparently as keen about their newly developed literacy as the first computer generations have been about similar cut and paste features of their new technology. Old King Hezekiah, and later, young King Josiah welcomed the Levites as a counterbalance to the Aaron priesthood, then powerful in national politics. The Levites annotated an ancient Mosaic law book in their possession, "found" it in the Jerusalem temple during renovations, and promoted it along with J&E as a "second law" or "deutero-norm" and got a popular response. Their circle included Jeremiah and his secretary, Baruch, who may have also produced Joshua, Judges, I&II Samuel

(prophet-priest from Shiloh) and I&II Kings (about monarchs north and south, good and bad). Deuteronomy was updated after Judah also fell, its temple desecrated, and its king tortured and marched away in chains. This concluding book of the Pentateuch then reflected God's promises about the temple and the messianic assurances about leadership (regarded then as David's line) as an eternal hope, and universally applicable, the way such prophecies were later received by Christians, both Orthodox and Gnostic, as well as by Muslims whose image of the messiah is surprisingly close to the Gnostic tradition in certain particulars.

P For some time, the priestly source was thought to consist of documents compiled in exile in Babylon, connecting temple worship with desert experiences of the tabernacle, and perhaps blended immediately with J&E, and with Deuteronomy appended as an anchor. The jury is now out on the date of P, with recent examination of the evidence pointing to pre-exilic dating of material that originally formed just a single document, paralleling J&E in content, but with a more sacerdotal or sacramental emphasis by the Aaron priestly establishment. Their spiritual agenda, as they understood it, was to protect their prerogatives in Jerusalem against the more populist religious trends represented by the Levites, whose influence was growing at court and among the people. Believers recognize that each of these authors or schools contributed material that is inadequate or incomplete in and of itself, but which reflect facets of the divine intention for this work.

R The redactor, or final editor of all this material must now be seen as a literary genius. Increasingly presumed to be Ezra, and so regarded in antiquity, the redactor wrote almost nothing himself. He evidently knew the history of J&E being successfully combined in what is actually a very intricate fashion, politically and religiously acceptable to all parts of the earlier community. Ezra faced a similar situation when the

Jewish aristocracy, priesthood and civil service returned from the Babylonian Exile to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, the temple and the state in concert with the local Jewish farmers, Levites and others. To meld these broad, diverse and mutually suspicious groups, Ezra even more skillfully blended the P parallels into J&E and then added the beloved D material as a conclusion to the compendium because it was the last to be massaged, possibly by a Levite who was still on the scene.

Ezra's work, possibly the most intricate masterpiece ever produced in world literature, earned him the appellation, "The Second Moses" in the Jewish Talmud. It was accepted so completely that for over two thousand years people all over the world took the Torah compendium, known as the Pentateuch, to be by one author. This was presumed to be Moses himself, who was perhaps rightly regarded as the originator of these traditions, though he lived 500 years before there was a written form of Hebrew. The Torah, as the foundation of Jewish culture, and of at least a hundred national cultures since, now stands as a cornerstone of an emerging world culture and a subject of fascination by student and scholar alike.

The critical techniques developed for the study of the Torah / Pentateuch occupy approximately a third of this book. They have also been applied to the study of Christian Scriptures over the last century, though not in a format accessible to the laity until recently, and presented in amplification here. Our focus in Christian Scriptures will be on the first three books of the New Testament, the so-called synoptic gospels, as depicted in a resource that inspired my own diagram as described above, namely *A Diagram of Synoptic Relationships* and briefly extending some findings about possible female influence in the writing of the gospels to other parts of the New Testament.

Out of this expanded textual criticism something new is emerging as a result of a determined critique seeking to understand the role of women in scripture, certainly “behind the scenes” and “between the lines” but also as divinely inspired authors of primary materials in the Old and New Testaments. The basis for application of these same techniques to the study of the Qur’an represents a breakthrough that is welcomed by Muslims in particular, as well as by Jews and Christians, now becoming aware of how much the Qur’an reveals about the Bible, including the almost stunning conclusion of this investigation presented as a Muslim Template which can be applied to other Scriptures.

A generation ago, Christians went through a phase of regarding their faith as more Greek than Jewish, thanks to then current assessments of Paul’s contribution or dominance. This was followed in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty first century by scholarship which resulted in the recovery and renewed appreciation of Jewish influence in both the New Testament and the church. Now Jews and Christians together are moving forward in a new quest to uncover the ancient and long interplay between themselves and their Muslim cousins, with seemingly dramatic results so far, as described by this book and its launch conference.

The book is in three parts. Part One, *Opening the Hebrew Scriptures*, Part Two, *Opening the Christian Scriptures*, and Part Three, *Opening the Muslim Scriptures*, are designed so that they can be read separately, after the common introductory material, by students of the various departments. Enough material is repeated in summary for students in each department to grasp the whole. The frequent recapitulations may also serve general readers in reviewing concepts that may be new to them. However, students

studying only Part One or Part Two should also visit the exercises described at the beginning of Chapter Eighteen in part Three.

In summary, let me say that I do not intend to introduce very much here that is new, but rather to report a consensus of critical opinion at the beginning of the twenty first century that is strong enough to be presented as “documentary evidence,” as opposed to “hypotheses,” and to point toward the sources of that evidence. At the same time, and at a more modest level, there are three or four elements here that are rather new, and of a critical nature.

From the Hebrew Scriptures I offer the *Diagram of Sources of the Pentateuch*, long overdue as an aid to students, Jewish, Christian and, increasingly, Muslim. For Christians, I offer a tentative opinion about the authorship of a gospel document called “Q,” which points towards potential answers to some longstanding questions. For Muslims, there are two things, perhaps because in these times the place of Islamic tradition in world culture looms large. In the first instance, this book and its launch conference offers Muslims an entrée into the disciplines of scriptural criticism, as practiced by Jews and Christians, that does no violence to the traditional Islamic understanding of the origins of the Qur’an. In the second place, there is a recognition that from the Muslim community comes, unexpectedly to many, what, in Canada, we might call the *pièce de résistance* of this book, a *tour de force* or the *coup de grâce* in the quest to identify the substantial role women must have played in scriptural production, both as authors, and in certain circumstances, “behind the scenes” and “between the lines.”

Yet let us not be overly sanguine about the impact of such studies. The denomination to which I belong, The United Church of Canada, launched a “New

Curriculum” for Sunday School and adult classes back in the 1960s, in which critical techniques were introduced to the laity. The fallout from negative reactions caused or coincided with a fifty percent drop in the number of children attending Sunday School and, after a temporary increase, practically decimated the adult study program. Perhaps we are more ready now, but fifty years after that breakthrough/debacle, in an attempt to measure any benefits, I asked all the board chairs, women’s group presidents, chairs of trustees, Sunday School superintendents and other local church leaders I could find, “Who wrote the first five books of the Bible?” A few guessed it might be David, some said “God,” nobody said it was Moses (so let’s not be nervous about challenging that pious myth), but most said they had no idea and did not much care.

These current leaders of congregations large and small, urban and rural, trained in the New Curriculum, after hearing my summary of critical opinion, told me that they were more interested in the stories and their meaning than in the question of authorship. When pressed, they insisted that these days they are less concerned about confrontations between liberals and conservatives in these debates, than in Moses’ confrontation of Pharaoh, and less anxious about theories constructed by critics than about the golden calf constructed by Aaron, in terms of challenges and parallels in their own lives. Yet they seemed to know that Adam and Eve are corporate and symbolic names for humanity, and none of them were disturbed in the least that the Bible opens with two creation stories that are often in conflict. If they have a concern it would be that we should be more articulate in presenting evolution as in fact an “intelligent design.” People in the religious mainstream know more about some things and care less about others than I could possibly have guessed. They are almost certainly correct in their priorities.

However, as Islam, another branch of Abraham's family moves into the Western world in force and grows faster than the established branches, there is a new urgency to the task of critical analysis as a tool to increase popular understanding. The upshot of such criticism in the twenty first century is to illustrate that God's people have been through this before, the migrations, the alien populations, the refugees, the new beginnings, even the terrorisms and most especially the discoveries about each others' Scriptures. As we move together, and with others, toward a new world culture in a global village, scriptural criticism may indeed help us, even if these techniques never do affect the value of the stories themselves, as lay people in my own church and elsewhere have always appreciated, scholarly opinion about authorship and origins notwithstanding.

We open with a review of *The Documentary Evidence* concerning the Torah, or Pentateuch, we move through the Gospels to see how critical techniques apply to the New Testament, and on to the application of these same Scriptural principles in the study of the Qur'an and other revered documents of Islam. Since this is all about Scripture, one important element of understanding about discussion of Scripture in this family must be put in place first.

I have otherwise well-informed Christian and Jewish friends who have almost a surfeit of goodwill toward Muslims, but who remain ignorant of the essential character of a basic Islamic tenant concerning the Qur'an. Some of these people are respected colleagues with years of experience in interfaith activity, but whose Muslim friends are hesitant to confront them on this hurtful matter, out of respect.

We know that Muslims love the Qur'an and regard it as containing the very words of God. We often fail to recognize the importance of that essential aspect of Islam, when

we casually refer to the influences on Muhammad as his “sources” for the material in the Qur’an. Muslims view these influences in a reverse manner, regarding items and stories revealed clearly in the Qur’an and recorded accurately there, as having been partially revealed previously, and recorded in a frequently garbled fashion. We can perhaps accept that as their view, but this one Islamic doctrine requires a sensitivity that many other matters under discussion do not, at least not in the same measure.

When Jews dialogue with Christians, they may not accept that Jesus is the Son of God, but they recognize that most Christians hold that doctrine as the *sine qua none*, that without which there would be no Christianity, and so they do not constantly belabor the point or belittle the notion. Likewise, not many Christians subscribe to ethnic identity as the cornerstone of their faith experience, though some denominations are colored in this way. Yet down through the ages the Jewish identity has been communal and ethnic in an essential way unlike anything to which Christians subscribe. The *sine qua none* for Jews is the covenant community, without which there would be no Judaism, religious or secular. To be in dialogue even while constantly inferring that Jews should get over this, or that they should assimilate into the societies around them, would be offensive to the point of outrage. Current Jewish-Christian dialogues have been built on understandings of these parameters that have taken centuries to work out.

Since the similar *sine qua none* in the Muslim involves Scripture (capitalized here in deference to their practice, regardless of the Chicago Manual of Style), Christians and Jews simply must proffer a similar status of unique respect to their doctrine of the Qur’an, even while Muslims in dialogue must concede an acceptance of the Jewish communal identity and at least a recognition of the Christian doctrine of Christ.

For Muslims, the practice of Jewish and Christian scholars casually attributing the Qur'an to "sources" is similar to constantly reminding Christians that sensible people cannot possibly relate to their belief that God physically had a son, or to be continually insisting to Jews that if they would assimilate like other ethnic groups, their troubles would go away. Even at the risk of belaboring the point, a new sensitivity to the Muslim understanding of the nature of their Scripture, a designation they use in reference to only the Qur'an, is essential. In spite of Muslim attempts at tolerant goodwill, I believe without some greater accommodation on this point, the conversations can go no further than the present impasse, where we are limited to polite discourse but little progress.

Of course there will be critics, Jewish, Christian and others, including dissident Muslims, who may continue to insist that the Qur'an is a compilation from other sources, some hundreds of years before Muhammad and many a hundred years later. But for the family discussion to proceed on a basis of mutual respect, it is not necessary to challenge the traditional Muslim understanding of their Scripture in order to experience the full benefit of critical analysis on the basis outlined in this book. If the more scholarly discussion ever moves beyond that point, Christian and Jewish scholars should be prepared to simply follow or respond to Muslim colleagues with respect to any developments, just as they have learned to do with each other in large part.

The resolution to this question provided in this book has been vaguely mooted by others elsewhere, but not quite developed in the manner extolled in the foreword by one of America's foremost Muslim communicators as having "*brilliantly opened up the possibility of reviewing Islamic holy writ from a critical perspective without doing violence to traditional Islamic teaching concerning the uniqueness and completeness of*

the Qur'an.” While I am humbly and incredibly honored by this description, I repeat it here only to underline and clarify the point that what non-Muslims are inclined to regard as “sources,” Muslims simply regard as previous revelations of the same material.

To Muslim belief, with a certainty equal to the centrality of Christ to the Church and of the covenant community to Jews, these revelations were given freshly to Muhammad, with an awesome holy cadence and with clarification from God. This would be held by Muslims even if it may be illustrated that Muhammad might have heard such stories earlier in their previous corrupt / accurate / garbled / inspired / versions. He may have brought an awareness of some of the previously revealed material to the cave where he received it afresh in the same manner as he brought his ability to understand the Arabic language in which the revelations were presented.

Once their understanding of the freshness and uniqueness of the Qur'an is acknowledged, Muslim scholars are free to work with their Jewish and Christian counterparts in the analyzing and critiquing of the material, both as it appears in the Qur'an and in the Bible. No critical compromise is required, and the analysis can proceed on the basis of the evidence in much the same manner as atheists like Freud and Asimov have contributed positive insights to Jewish and Christian understandings of certain Biblical texts, without necessarily adopting the belief context of those with whom they discussed these matters. Indeed, we can do even better as respectful fellow-believers within the great family of Abraham, Shrar and Hagar, but before proceeding to the treasures this approach may reveal, our scholars need to check their attitudes as rigorously as some of the more prejudiced commentators in the media and people in the streets. This is a prerequisite for reading this book and for the conference that launches it.

I am still sometimes asked how is it possible to be fully appreciative of each other's scripture and completely comfortable in one's own scriptural skin at the same time. Believers who are confident in their own tradition should be able to practice the Golden Rule of Religion described by Joy Abdul-Mohan in the foreword to this book with benefit to themselves. Just as learning a second language does not require forgetting or forswearing one's mother tongue but actually enriching it, there is a delight in being open to spiritual experiences that ring true for others as a means of growth within one's own tradition. We may all be surprised at how much we learn.

For that matter, Hindus, Buddhists and others in the orient have their own Scriptures, which represent the other side of the equation. While the Scriptures of Abraham's family of Jews, Christians and Muslims are revelations of the Divinity reaching toward humanity, the other major Scriptures reflect the aspirations of humanity reaching toward Divinity, a worthy subject, but beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

Material often covered in footnotes is integrated into this text because in many cases my book is about the material referenced. Readers will find a full amplification of such resources in the bibliography.

Meanwhile, there was this rabbi, this priest and this imam. They had just come from the golf course and were in a boat, soon to arrive at the pearly gates, when a funny thing happened