

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM  
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I consider myself to be a fundamentalist. I consider myself to be a fundamentalist because I search and research scripture—every book, every chapter, every verse and every jot and tittle—with anticipation that the Divine Light will be found therein. I consider myself a fundamentalist because in this searching and researching, I let scripture speak to me directly, unmediated by commentators and unhampered by scholarly polemic. I am deeply interested in what scholars have to say. I am fascinated by what archaeologists have discovered; I am impressed with the ingenious efforts that have been made by scholars to solve the riddles of the Pentateuch, and the sticky problems which envelop every book of the Bible; and I am indebted to them for the flood of light they have cast on the civilizations of the Ancient Near East.

Nonetheless, I read and re-read scripture as though there were no other sources for God's revelation to Israel—and with good reason. There is no other source, and there can be no other source because the religion of Israel and the history of the people of Israel are anomalous and unique. They are anomalous and unique because both the religion and the history of Israel are the outcome of a relationship with a single omnipotent God. Archaeological findings can flesh out our knowledge of sites and settings; scholarly studies of texts from Mari, Nuzu, Ugarit, and other centers of Ancient Near Eastern civilization, can provide us with the framework within which Israel's odyssey with God took place, but they tell us nothing of Israel's religion, of Israel's history, of Israel's uniqueness. The riddle of the Pentateuch cannot be unraveled from these texts because there is no equivalent to the Pentateuch among them. The problems enveloping the historical and the prophetic books of the Bible cannot be solved from Assyrian annals or from the sooth-sayings, and oracles of Israel's neighbors. Israel had one God; they had many. Israel's history is fraught with divine destiny and unified by it; the history of Egypt, of Assyria, of Babylonia is a record of human conquest and dynastic successions. And though the poetry of the Psalms echoes the sounds and the rhythms of Ugarit poetry, Yahweh riding the clouds, and having the earth as His foot stool is no mirror image of Ugarit's El. Since the religion and the history of Israel is anomalous, we look in vain elsewhere for analogies.

It is in this sense that I speak of myself as a fundamentalist. I search and research scripture to discover what scripture reveals of God, of Israel, and of their journey together without recourse to any other source. And what this search and research reveals to me is a highly complex relationship which involved multiple and seemingly mutually exclusive revelations of God's will. These multiple and seemingly mutually exclusive revelations are to be found side by side within the Pentateuch itself. A book by book, line by line, word by word reading of the Pentateuch reveals that God himself is the source of religious pluralism. In Exodus 33:7-11, we are given an unforgettable vignette of how

God revealed himself to Moses in a simple tent, face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. The verses read as follows:

How Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and he called it the tent of meeting...Whenever Moses went out to the tent, and all the people rose up, and every man stood at the entrance of his tent, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. And when all of the people saw the pillar of cloud descending and standing at the entrance of the tent, all of the people would rise up and worship, every man at the entrance of his tent. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his understudy, Joshua, the Son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent. (Exodus 33:7-11)

What utter simplicity! A camp, a tent, Moses, God in a pillar of clouds—and a conversation, face to face, as a person talks with a friend. And in the background, there is Joshua, Moses' understudy, who will someday be talking with God, even as Moses was talking with God now. There are no altars, no incense, no sacrifices, no priests, and no sound and fury. Only a tent, and two friends, talking with one another face to face. God, in this revelation, is the God of simplicity.

Yet on either side of this revelation, We find that God is the God of complexity. Beginning with Chapter 25 of Exodus and continuing through Chapters 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 1-12; 35:36, 37, 38, 39, 40 for a total of 4:45 verses aside from a huge number in Leviticus and Numbers, God commands Moses to build a Sanctuary/Tent of Meeting of surpassing splendor, a sanctuary within which Aaron and his sons are to offer up a vast array of sacrifices to God, whereby the Israelites might express their devotion and thankfulness to God, and whereby they might be shriven of their sins through God's altar and priesthood. Every item of the Tabernacle/Tent of Meeting, whether it be the frames of accacia wood or the veil of blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen, or the cherubim, or the ark, table, and lamp stand is lovingly spelled out. Every item that is to adorn Aaron, be it the ephod, the onyx stones the breastpiece, the coats, and the signet is caressingly depicted. So holy indeed was the work entailed in building the Sanctuary/Tent of Meeting that Moses himself erected the Tabernacle—laying its bases, putting in its poles, raising up its pillars, spreading the covering of the tent over it, putting the Testimony into the ark, and much else needed for its completion. And then when the work was done, and Tent of Meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle, Moses found himself barred from entering the Tent of Meeting because of the cloud and the glory of God (Exodus 40:34-35). The cloud which, when it was over the simple Tent of Meeting, signaled God's readiness to talk with Moses face to face, became the cloud which blocks Moses' access to Him. The bare and unadorned Tent of Meeting has been transformed into a splendid sanctuary. The tent of conversation has become a tent of sacrifice. It is no longer the Tent of Moses and Joshua, but the Tent of Aaron and his sons. It is Aaron and his sons who are adorned with beautiful vestments, offer the

sacrifices, and who expiate the sins of the people, Moses erected a Tent/Tabernacle for God and Aaron and not for God and Moses.

Thus God reveals Himself as the God of an elaborate cultus who demands that He be worshiped with sacrifices and He requires of the sinner expiatory offerings at the hands of His divinely ordained priesthood. God is the God of complexity.

Yet God's revelation with respect to the cultus and with respect to the Aaronide priesthood is not as clear-cut as these hundreds and hundreds of verses would seem to indicate. It is not clear-cut because when we read the book of Deuteronomy, we discover that Aaron and his sons are nowhere associated with the priesthood. Instead we find that the entire tribe of Levy, and not just the family of Aaron, are to enjoy altar rights. "The Levitical priests," Moses tells the people in Deuteronomy 18:1-2, "that is, all of the Tribe of Levy shall have no portion on heritage with Israel; they shall eat the offerings by fire to the Lord and His rightful dues. They shall have no heritage among their brothers; the Lord is their heritage as He promised them."

.So, too, in his farewell blessing to the people, Moses said of Levy, "Give to Levy thy Thumim, and thy Urim to the Godly one... They shall teach Jacob thy ordinances and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offerings upon thy altar. Bless, O Lord, his substance and accept the work of his hands...." (Deuteronomy 33:10).

The entire Tribe of Levy is to put incense before God and offer whole burnt offerings to the Lord. The entire Tribe of Levy, not just Aaron and his sons, were to teach Jacob God's ordinances and Israel His law. Yet in Numbers, Chapters 16, 17, 18, we read of how Korah and his fellow Levites were swallowed up in Sheol because they had dared to defy God by insisting on their altar rites, never was God so enraged! Never was He so punitive! Not even the building of the Golden Calf had so angered Him. Aaron and his sons alone are to enjoy the prerogative of the priesthood. The other Levitical families are to keep their distance from the altar and look to the menial tasks that had been assigned to them.

We are thus confronted with two revelations with respect to the priesthood: One bestowing the priesthood on the entire Tribe of Levy, and the other bestowing it exclusively on Aaron and his sons. And if we were to read through all of Deuteronomy, we would discover that the Tent of Meeting/Sanctuary of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers is nowhere mentioned in Deuteronomy; expiatory sacrifices nowhere provided for; and the Day of Atonement nowhere alluded to. We thus have in the Pentateuch two cultic systems, revealed by God, yet mutually excluding each other.

These two cultic systems for their part find themselves alongside a system that is not cultic at all. Sacrifices we are told in Exodus 21:24 are permitted wherever God's name has been mentioned, and they do not require a special priestly class to offer them up on the altar. In many verses of Exodus and Numbers, God gives Moses divine guidance, but does not proclaim immutable laws. He is an ever-ready God who leaves His options open-ended. He actively leads His people through His chosen spokesman, Moses. He is not pre-bound by commandments, statutes, and judgments ordained for all generations. God is free to deal with each new situation as it arises.

Yet alongside this unbound God we find the self same God promulgating laws that are to be ever-binding on Israel and on Himself. He spells out to Moses precise legislation for the Sabbath, for festivals, for the Tent of Meeting/Tabernacle, for the

sacrifices, for the priesthood, for ritual purity, for slaves, for torts and homicide, for social welfare, and for the conduct of warfare. As Lawgiver, God is self-constricting and self-limiting.

God is thus portrayed within the Pentateuch as simultaneously the God who is unbound and the God who is bound. He is pictured as both free and restricted.

And if we turn from the realm of law to the realm of ethics and morals, we likewise find multiple options. The patriarchs not only practiced polygamy, but they saw no evil in concubinage. Slavery is taken for granted as a legitimate institution throughout the Pentateuch, even though a Hebrew slave is encouraged to accept the freedom after six years of servitude. Total war is not only tolerated, but is mandatory: the Amalekites are to be wiped out unsparingly. The Amalekites and Amorites are signaled out for their hostility to Israel and are excluded from the congregation of the Lord for all time. Cruel and unusual punishments are inflicted by God on Korah and his company. A woman may be divorced at the whims of her husband, but she may not divorce her husband even for good cause.

And yet these notions are offset by those teachings which would have us love our neighbors as ourselves; show compassion for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger in the gate; leave the corner of the field and the gleanings for the poor; refrain from abhorring the Edomite, for he is your brother, or an Egyptian because you were a stranger in his land, harbor a refugee slave; refrain from taking a mill or an upper milestone in pledge, for you would be taking a life in pledge; return all property to its original owners in the jubilee year; spare the trees in warfare; suffer not the fathers to be put to death for the sins of their children, or the children for the sins of their fathers, but every man shall be put to death for his own sins; regard every individual—male or female—as having been created in God's image. ;

The God of wrath and vengeance is more than offset by the God of compassion, long-suffering, slow to anger, and full of loving kindness. But the other face of God cannot be effaced; it peers forth from the same texts. It claims the same divine authority. It is revealed, so we are led to believe by the same Moses.

So what are we to do, we who wish to know God, and seek what it is that He requires of us? Is God free to make known His ongoing will to his prophets? Or is He a Lawgiver who has revealed His will once and for all? Is He a God of wrath and vengeance or a God of loving kindness and compassion? Is He a God who is perhaps both free and restricted, wrathful and compassionate?

Even if we find it possible to mingle these opposites, we are still confronted with whether God wishes a simple Tent of Meeting, or an elaborate Tabernacle; whether He urgently demands sacrifices, or simply allows them; whether He requires a priestly class or permits anyone to offer a sacrifice. And if He does require a priesthood, does He insist that this priesthood consist of the entire Tribe of Levy or only of the family of Aaron? And since these three options cannot be exercised simultaneously, which of these options does God wish us to choose?

We are thus compelled to make a choice by scripture itself. And since scripture equivalently presents all three options as coming from God, it is we who must make the choice. Scripture itself thus reveals itself to be the source of religious pluralism.

This need to choose comes from a literal reading of the Pentateuch. It does not come from the provocations of biblical critics. Even if there had been no Graf-Wellhausen,

every earnest God-seeking searcher of scripture has to confront the fact that we have at least three mutually exclusive revelations in the Pentateuch: The open-ended on-going; the legislative non-priestly; the legislative levitical-priestly; and the legislative Aaronide-priestly. All four revelations are reported as having occurred in the wilderness and as having been commanded by God to Moses. Yet to opt for the simple Tent of Meeting is to exclude the elaborate Tabernacle; to opt for the levitical priesthood is to preclude the Aaronide priesthood from exercising their monopoly; to opt for the Aaronide priestly monopoly is to nullify God's command that the entire Tribe of Levy enjoy altar rites; and to opt for either the levitical priesthood or the Aaronide priesthood is to exclude the right of every individual to offer a sacrifice without the need for a priesthood at all. If we look to the Pentateuch for God's revelation, we are confronted with a range of choices.

And if we turn from the Pentateuch to the Prophets, we find that here we are likewise confronted with the need to choose between diverse and conflicting revelations. Are we to go along with Amos, Micah, and Isaiah who excoriate the sabbaths, the solemn assemblies, and the burnt offerings and plead for justice and righteousness. Or are we to follow the lead of Ezekial who draws a divine blueprint for a rebuilt temple, stresses the role of sacrifices, and insists that only the sons of Zadok should minister as priests?

And which end of days are we to anticipate: AMOS's? Isaiah's? Or Ezekial's? Is God equally the God of all peoples as Amos and Isaiah would have us believe, or is He pre-eminently the God of Israel as Ezekial seems to be conveying? Is God all-loving, all-compassionate, all-forgiving, as Hosea proclaimed, or is He vengeful, vindictive, and cruel, as so many of the oracles of doom picture Him to be? So what are we to do, we who turn for God's word to Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, Malachi, and all of the other prophets? We must weigh and measure, ponder and agonize — and then we must choose.

And when we turn from the prophets to the Psalms, we find ourselves no less perplexed. For there are Psalms which speak to us of God's loving tender care and concern for our suffering, our anxieties, our disappointments, our loneliness, our yearnings for divine companionship, and our hope that God will shelter us from the storm. On the other hand, there are Psalms that breathe anger and rage and pitiless vengeance: "Oh, daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall be he who requites you with what you have done to us. Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock." (Psalms 137:7-9)

The more then that we search out scripture, the more we are confronted by scripture itself with the plurality of revelations. Little wonder then that this plurality of revelations spun-off a plurality of Judaisms. Throughout the biblical period, the voice of a prophet never ceased. For every crisis, there was a prophetic solution. For every sin, there was a prophetic denunciation; for every fork in the road, there was a prophetic direction. During all of those many years, kings may have ruled and priests may have sacrificed, but only the prophets could proclaim. Thus, saith the Lord." God, it seemed, would always make His will known to Israel by raising up prophets like unto Moses.

But the time came when the voice of the prophet was heard no more. It slipped into silence suddenly and was never voiced again. From the day that Ezra proclaimed the Pentateuch as the immutable word of God, and the people bound themselves by oath to obey it, prophecy came to an end. There seemed to be no further need for the voice of God when the word of God had been spelled out for all time. It was sufficient to follow all of the commands set down in the Pentateuch and the well-being and the security of the

people would be vouchsafed. With the atoning altar, and the expiating priests, and God's living presence in the sanctuary, what could the prophet say that God had not already said?

The people of Israel made a choice, a choice fraught with significance. They did not opt for the simple Tent of Meeting or open-ended prophecy; they did not opt for a priesthood of the entire Tribe of Levy. Instead, they opted for the elaborate Tent of Meeting/Sanctuary, where only the sons of Aaron brought the whole offerings, the peace offerings and the guilt offerings to God. And by opting for this revelation in the Pentateuch, rather than opting for one of the others, the people silenced the voice of the prophet and subordinated the Levites to the Aaronides.

The people of Israel chose the Aaronide option. This choice is a matter of historical record. It has nothing to do with whether Moses was or was not the author of the Five Books of Moses. Whatever may have been Israel's prior choices, the choice made in the time of Ezra was a choice that doomed prophecy, and that ended the claims of the entire tribe of Levy to altar rites. After 445 B.C., there are prophets no longer, and we know from Ben Sira that in his day, the sons of Aaron ministered in a splendid temple, clothed in vestments of stunning beauty; offered atoning sacrifices for the people; and exercised exclusive authority over God's law and judgments.

Israel's choosing from among revelations brings in an historical dimension. The Aaronide system became normative in Judaism even though it had not previously been normative. What had been normative had been prophetic Judaism with, now more, now less, of an accommodation to priestly claims. An earlier normative form had thus given way to a later normative form, and the traditional mode of on-going revelation had given way to an immutable revelation. The prophets' access to God's voice was cut off. We are, therefore, confronted with the historical fact that the people of Israel had discarded indeed one mode of revelation for another, even though they preserved the revelation they had abandoned, as though it were equally demanding and binding. Thus, in the very act of choosing, the unchosen was neither discounted nor nullified. The unchosen was available for re-choosing—as indeed it was.

This re-choosing was carried out by the Scribes-Pharisees when they fashioned their own highly novel concept of revelation. For them, God had revealed two laws, the one written, the other oral, and not just one written law alone. This oral law, though believed by the Pharisees to have been transmitted by the prophets, is not one and the same as prophecy. The Scribes-Pharisees were scholars and teachers, not prophets. Though they claimed that their authority over the two-fold Law came from Sinai, they never claimed that God had spoken to them directly, as He had spoken to Amos. Yet, they did not hesitate to "reveal" that God had given two laws and not one, and that God had, so loved the Individual that He had revealed the Written and Oral Law to Israel so that the two-fold Law-abiding individual could look forward after death to the eternality of his soul and the resurrection of his body. Neither the Oral Law nor the promise of eternal life is spelled out in the Pentateuch or in the Prophets. Yet this absence did not keep the majority of the people from enthusiastically embracing these teachings of the Pharisees as God's revelation, and from acknowledging this revolutionary form of Judaism as a normative.

In appealing to the people, the Scribes-Pharisees dipped into Holy Writ and drew forth from it proof texts supportive of their novel teaching. In doing so, they re-chose

elements from the Revelations which the Jews, during the Aaronide priestly phase of Judaism, had discarded. The prophets as on-going revealers were seen as acting independently of the Pentateuchal Law and legitimately so. That was what the Oral Law was all about. The right to take the Law into one's hands as the occasion demanded had been given at Sinai, provided that one was a true prophet or a legitimate teacher of the two-fold Law. Indeed, the Scribes-Pharisees gave the prophetic spirit a new life by requiring that selections from the Prophets be read on the Sabbath in addition to the weekly reading from the Pentateuch.

The success of the Scribes-Pharisees in having their novel concept of revelation adopted as normative demonstrates once again the historical dimension of revelation. It was not only a new mode of Judaism displacing an earlier mode, but one which has regained normative for most Jews to this day. So that when we speak of Orthodox or Traditional Judaism in our day, we are speaking of a Judaism which believes that God revealed two laws and not one. It is thus not the biblical notion of revelation which prevailed, but a post-biblical notion which though it included the biblical subordinated it to the oral component of the two-fold revelation.

This Judaism of the two-fold Law and the belief in eternal life and resurrection spawn a whole variety "of religious forms which differ considerably from primordial Pharisaism. Among these were forms which absorbed neo-platonic and Aristotelean philosophy, and forms which spun out the mystical systems of the Kabbalah. All of these forms, however divergent, and however resisted, came to be acknowledged as legitimate even when not normative.

Even more impressive was the emergence of a form of Judaism in the 19th century which rejected the binding character of the two-fold Law, introduced the notion of progressive revelation, and elevated the ethical monotheism of the grand prophets above the priestly legalism of the Pentateuch. Though this form of Judaism did not become normative for the majority of the Jews, it did become normative for a very large number of them, especially in the United States.

In the light of this process within Judaism, the revelations in the New Testament which tell us of the life, ministry, trial, and purported resurrection appear as but links in a chain of revelations which begin with the Bible and move through the two-fold Law of the Pharisees and beyond. For when we turn to the New Testament, we find not one portrait of Jesus, but five—Paul's, Mark's, Matthew's, Luke's, and John's. Each has its own distinctive features, shading, nuances, and colorings. The Jesus of the synoptic gospels is easily recognizable as the same Jesus, a Jesus whose humanity envelops his divinity, yet John's Jesus is a Jesus whose divinity envelops his humanity. As for Paul, the life of Jesus begins with Jesus' resurrection and his redemptive power and he seems to have no interest in Jesus' life prior to his resurrection.

Each portrait of Jesus is different as is the meaning of Jesus' life, ministry, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Matthew would bind Jesus and his disciples to the Scribes-Pharisees who sit on Moses' seat, however reprehensible they may be, and demands, that every Jot and tittle of the Law be fulfilled. By contrast, Mark, Matthew, and Luke show no such absolute attachment. And as for Paul, the Law is the agent provocateur of sin.

Jesus is, at times the sweetest, gentlest, and the most compassionate of men, healing the sick, raising the dead, exorcising the demons, sitting with sinners, and seeking God's forgiveness even for those who had brought him to so painful an end for they knew not

what they were doing. And then there is the other Jesus who hurls invectives at the Scribes-Pharisees calling them hypocrites, white-washed tombs, vipers, sons of hell, and seeks for the blood of those responsible for his crucifixion and condemning to eternal damnation those who spurn his “unconditional” love.

As with the biblical revelations, the New Testament compels us to choose. If a Christian’s righteousness does not exceed that of the Pharisees, does he forfeit God’s Kingdom? Is Jesus’ death to be avenged? Is Jesus’ love unconditional? Is the Law the instrument of sin?

And choices were indeed always being made, as the waxing and waning of Christian hostility towards Jews and Judaism so eloquently testifies.

But this choosing is most evident in the history of Christianity itself. From, the very beginning, divergent communities crystallized around the differing portraits, the differing teachings, the differing meanings, and the differing anticipations. And these diverging communities spawned other diverging communities. Storms raged over the, rightness of their choice, or the wrongness. And as with Judaism, new revelations continued to break out. They took their place alongside the older revelations, or superseded them, or sputtered out.

History reveals of Christianity, no less than it does of Judaism, that the primordial revelations in both the Old and the New Testaments spawn religious pluralism of necessity, since they compel us to choose between divine alternatives. And because the passage of time bears witness to this choosing, history itself shows itself to be a mode of divine revelation. Until prophecy was phased out, one could believe that the voice of the prophet would never be still. Until the Scribes-Pharisees sat themselves in Moses’ seat, one could believe that the Aaronides would exercise authority unto all generations. Until the rise of Reform Judaism, one could believe that the observance of the Law was a divine demand. Until generations had gone by, Christians could believe that the Second Coming was near at hand. Until the time of Constantine, Christians could believe that the Church was immune to the trappings of power and the seduction of wealth. Until Luther, Christians could believe that the Catholic Church was the only Church of God. Until Judaism had demonstrated its power to survive as a developmental religion in the Christian world, Christians could believe that God had totally rejected His people.

History is thus a mode of revelation. It exposes eternal claims to the test of time.

But there is still a third mode of revelation, a revelation that becomes known to us through the powers inherent within the human mind. Our capacity for deductive reasoning and logical thinking enables us to elicit from a premise or a text all of the logical possibilities inherent within it. On a higher level, it is “capable of thinking thoughts never thought of before and of generating ideas that had never previously existed. On the highest level, it taps the mind of God and; draws from that inexhaustible creative source the laws of nature and the formulae of creation itself. Like history, this mode of revelation can weigh and measure certain claims and assumptions as to the natural ordering of the universe which are to be found in Holy Writ. At the same time, like all other sources of revelation, scientific claims are contingent on their sustainability. As with Holy Writ, the passage of time has found many of these claims wanting and superseded by claims with more powerful roots in the ultimate.

He have then three modes of revelation: through inspired religious teachers, through historical experience, and through the probings of free minds; And each of these have

been flawed. None of them has justified its claim to be absolute or total. Each flickers, flashes, and sparkles with divine light. God flashes through scripture when he reveals Himself to be the sole creator of the universe and of all that is or can ever be within it. God sparkles through scripture when He chooses to create a single individual, in God's image, after God's form and likeness, male and female, and chooses to entrust that individual with building a goodly and Godly world from the goodness and the Godliness already invested within it.

God shines through scripture when Amos calls for justice and righteousness to roll down like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24); has God ask, "Are you not like the Ethiopians to Me, Oh, people of Israel? Did I not bring Israel from the Land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Assyrians from Kir." (Amos 2:7) God shines through Hosea 11:8-9 when he reveals God's love and compassion: "How can I give you up, Oh, Ephraim! How can I hand you over, Oh, Israel? ... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy." And again, when Hosea speaks in Chapter 3:19: "And I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice and in steadfast love, and in My mercy. I will betroth you in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.

And still further, when Hosea speaks in Chapter 14:4-7: "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar, his branches shall spread out, his beauty shall be like the olive and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath My shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon."

We have divine light bursting through when Isaiah prophesizes in Chapter 19:23-25: "In that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of Hosts has blessed, saying. Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria the work of my hand, and Israel my heritage."

Or when Isaiah prophesizes that "the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ... and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The suckling child shall play over the whole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand into the viper's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountains; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord that the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Or when Isaiah asks, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undue the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry and He will say, "Here I am. "If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing or of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry, and satisfy the

desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the new day. And the Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like the spring water whose waters fail not..." (Isaiah 58:6-11)

Or when he sings of God's creative powers: "Who has measured the 'waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in the scales and the hills in a balance? To whom will you compare me that I should be like him, says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see. Who created these? He Who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing." (Isaiah 40:25-26)

God also flashes through the Psalms when the Psalmist speaks of the Lord as his shepherd (23), asks God to be mindful of God's mercy and steadfast love (25:6); calls upon-God to overcome the Psalmist's loneliness and affliction {25:16-18), is confident that God will hide him in God's shelter and conceal him under the cover of His tent. (27:5); sings the praises of the Lord, because God's anger is but for a moment, while His favors for a lifetime, one's weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning (30:4-5); declares boldly that God is his rock and fortress into whose hands the Psalmist may trust his spirit (31:3-5); compares the longing of his soul to a hart longing for flowing streams, so athirst is the Psalmist for the living God (42:1-2); is fearless because the Lord is his light and salvation (27:1); proclaims to all that the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament his handiwork (19:1); and marvels that God has made man only a little lower than the angels.

God likewise beams forth in Jesus' exhortation to love our enemies; do good to those who hate us; bless those who curse us; pray for those who abuse us; turn the cheek to those who smite us; do unto others as we would have them do unto us; lend to others, expecting nothing in return; refrain from judging and condemning others, lest we be judged and condemned; forgive others so that we may be forgiven. (Luke 6:20-37)

God's light is almost blinding when Jesus wracked in pain, lifts up his voice to his Father in heaven and asks Him to forgive his tormentors because they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34)

And surely God is speaking to Paul, when Paul speaks of love as patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude, demanding, irritable or resentful, vengeful or transient. And when Paul brushes aside the speaking in tongues of men and angels, or in displaying prophetic powers or in gaining all the understanding and knowledge that there may be, or in garnering all faith, and regards them as of no worth, if one has not love.

And is not God speaking through Paul when Paul shows us our torn, and twisted, and impulse-ridden selves, so desperately needing that God to share our agony, our desperation, and to save us with His boundless love.

God does speak through scriptures. The light which beams through these verses are not dimmed by the passage of time, nor are they darkened by the probings of the free and critical mind. They are beams of light which are as bright today as when they first burst forth. They sparkle with compassion, with goodness, with graciousness, with faith, with hope, and with love. They reveal to us a God who has made compassion possible, goodness possible, graciousness possible, faith possible, and love possible.

The light is there — always streaming to get through. But there is darkness there as well. For every beam of light, there is a shadow, for every illumination, there is darkness. The fullness of God's light is refracted, not reflected, by even the most sensitive of God-seekers. God's light is fractured. His divine sparks intermingle with particles of darkness. No matter how earnest the prophet or the teacher or the saint, he is finite, mortal, and subject to the power of human impulses, passions, and fantasies. All of our revelations are dependent upon human intermediation. We are confronted, of necessity, with divine light and human shadow intermingled in the records of revelation. We, not God, thus have the task of separating the one from the other.

And so long as the divine light can come to us only as refracted by human intermediation, we shall have need for multiple revelations and the need for a plurality of religious options. For what scripture teaches, and what history reveals, and what the scientific mind confirms is that the fullness of God is beyond finding out; that the mystery of God eludes unraveling; that the unshadowed light of God is for no human eye to see; and that God's justice, compassion, grace, and redemptive love are as real as we allow them to be. We need more revelations, not less; more religious options; more Truth-seekers; and more, not less, of God. For of this we can be certain that so long as God is God and man is man, neither the power of kings or princes, nor the pronouncements of ecclesiastics or of the zeal of preachers will bar the light of God from coming through to those with eyes, open to see, ears, bent to listen, minds, alert to perceive, and hearts yearning for love.

So I say to you, as Gamliel, Prince of the Pharisees, said to the sanhedrin almost 2,000 years ago when new revelations were threatening the established order, "Keep away from these men, and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them (Acts 5:38-39).

When the light is once again among us, shall we allow our obstinate humanity to blind us to redemptive divinity?