

DIRECTIONS IN PENTATEUCHAL STUDIES

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Introductory Note

The editor of *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*, Alan Hauser, asked me to build this contribution on my article ‘The Paradigm is Changing: Hopes—and Fears’ (1993). Prior to that article I had some opportunities to deal with current pentateuchal problems. I am listing those titles in the bibliography. The purpose of this article will be to ask in what direction—or directions—pentateuchal studies have moved or developed in the last two decades and what might be the future directions. In order to clarify certain developments, I will begin with a brief reflection on the situation during the time when the ‘newer documentary hypothesis’ was commonly accepted.

When the Paradigm Worked

It has become almost a truism to say that pentateuchal studies are ‘in crisis’. What really is in crisis, of course, is not those studies themselves, but the foundation on which they were built. Until two decades ago, that foundation, the ‘documentary hypothesis’, was commonly accepted and seldom questioned. According to the ‘documentary hypothesis’, the Pentateuch was formed from a number of originally independent ‘sources’, which only at the end of their transmission were brought together by certain ‘redactors’. Notwithstanding all kinds of variations, the great majority of scholarly work done in the field of pentateuchal studies took the main elements of that hypothesis as its foundation and starting point for certain new observations and for

refinements of the hypothesis. The basic hypothesis remained unchallenged. Thus, the documentary hypothesis worked as a ‘paradigm’ according to Kuhn’s definition (1962: beginning on p. 43; see also Rendtorff 1993: 36).

Of course, there have been some divergent positions, held by scholars who belonged to minority groups in one sense or another. To mention two of them: Cassuto and Jacob, two outstanding Jewish scholars, argued for a reading of the Pentateuch that took it as a unity. It would go beyond the scope of this article to describe the differences between Jewish and Christian Bible scholarship in the early decades of this century. But it is obvious that these Jewish scholars took the ‘classical’ (source critical) approach to the Bible and in particular to the Pentateuch as a specifically Christian—strictly speaking, Protestant—way of reading. Jacob even considered source criticism to be a kind of destruction of the text:

By rashly dismembering a meaningful organism in which all parts are related to each other it [i.e. the method, R.R.] becomes totally unable to understand the coherence and to comprehend the real mode of composition of the book. . . . Genesis is *a homogeneous work*, planned in *one* spirit, reasoned out and worked through (1934: 9-10).

Another Jewish authority, Kaufmann (1960), did not reject source criticism as such, but opposed one of the pillars of the documentary hypothesis since its redefinition by Wellhausen: the late dating of the ‘Priestly Code’ (‘P’, see below). This was indeed a crucial point because Wellhausen himself had declared that the late dating of this source had become his most fundamental insight in pentateuchal studies. He reported the moment when he learned (in 1867) ‘that Karl Heinrich Graf placed the Law later than the Prophets. . . . I readily acknowledged to myself the possibility of understanding Hebrew antiquity without the book of the Torah’ (1883: 3-4). This shows quite clearly that taking ‘P’ to be the latest of the sources of the Pentateuch was of fundamental relevance for the whole hypothesis. I will follow up on this question later.

Another minority group that did not accept the majority position was the ‘Uppsala School’. With regard to the Pentateuch it was Engnell in particular (1960) who developed a concept of ‘oral tradition’ of the biblical texts. According to Engnell, the biblical traditions were transmitted orally for a long time, and were brought together in written form only near the end of that process. This led Engnell to the claim

‘that the break with the literary-critical method must be radical; no compromise is possible’ (p. 21). Nevertheless, he accepted the existence of a ‘P-work’ as being the last tradent and ‘publisher’ of these materials. Obviously there is a certain relationship to Noth’s understanding of the function of ‘P’ (see below); but because Engnell abandoned the rest of the sources, his concept remained an outsider position which could not be integrated into the scholarly debate within the framework of the documentary hypothesis.

Internal Inconsistencies

Looking back, it is obvious that at no time has the documentary hypothesis been a consistent theory unanimously accepted by all of its adherents. Actually, it has been a rather loose frame embracing all kinds of different views and opinions. The main element of this frame, as mentioned above, was the conviction that the Pentateuch was not a literary unity, but was composed of a number of ‘sources’ that originally existed independently of each other in written form and were later brought together by one or more ‘redactor(s)’. In the framework of this hypothesis the ‘redactors’ were taken as less important—and sometimes even less intelligent—than the authors of the ‘sources’. That means that the Pentateuch as a whole in its present form usually did not come in view.

The postulated number of sources differed among scholars and schools. Leaving aside the generally accepted separation of Deuteronomy (D), there was actual agreement only on two points: first, that there were one or more source(s) from an earlier period in the history of Israel; and second, that there was one source from a later period. Wellhausen’s main insight had been that those pentateuchal texts showing ‘priestly’ characteristics belonged to this later source which therefore soon would be called ‘Priesterschrift’ or ‘Priestly Code’ or the like (P). Wellhausen himself made a distinction between the main narrative part of this priestly source, which he called ‘Q’ (for *quattuor* ‘four’: the book of the four covenants) and the collection of priestly laws, beginning with Exodus 25 and running through Leviticus and Numbers, which he called ‘Priestercode’ (Wellhausen 1899: 1, 134). This distinction is of particular interest because it reappeared in different forms in some more recent approaches (see below).

Aside from the generally accepted separation of Deuteronomy, the only element of the documentary hypothesis that was actually accepted by all adherents of the hypothesis was the general definition and singling out of 'P'. The number and character of the rest of the sources has been a field of wide disagreement. Wellhausen himself had defined one earlier text corpus which he called 'JE' (*das jehovistische Geschichtswerk*, 'the Jehovistic history work'); within that work he distinguished two earlier sources, namely 'J' (the 'Yahwist') and 'E' (the 'Elohist'). Nevertheless, he insisted that they did not run independently parallel to each other, but, rather, the 'Elohist' 'had been preserved only as an ingredient of the Jehovistic work' (1883: 8), and that therefore the two sources are often not clearly distinguishable from each other.

The majority of Wellhausen's successors were much more rigid in their attempts to separate sources. They launched many variations of the basic concept in the following decades. On the one hand, the 'Yahwist' was split into two (or even more) sources. Smend Sr (1912), Wellhausen's colleague in Göttingen, divided this source into 'J1' and 'J2'; Eissfeldt (1922) called the former 'L' (*Laienquelle*, 'layman's source') keeping 'J' for the latter, while Fohrer (1965) called the former 'N' (*Nomadenquelle*, 'nomad's source') and the latter 'J' as well. Those subdivisions were not widely accepted, but for decades the two standard textbooks on 'Introduction to the Old Testament' in German by Eissfeldt (1934) and Fohrer (1965) presented this understanding of the older Pentateuchal sources in opposition to Wellhausen's rather sceptical definition of 'JE'.

The pendulum could also swing in the opposite direction, as when Volz and Rudolph (1933; Rudolph 1938) questioned the existence of the 'Elohist' altogether. Thus, in the first half of this century the German Bible student had to learn that there were one or two or three earlier sources in the Pentateuch and that it was very difficult to be precise about the number of sources, but that nevertheless the documentary hypothesis was beyond any doubt.

With regard to the *character* of the sources there were also considerable variations. In Wellhausen's concept the 'Jehovist' as a combination of two sources could by definition not be a clearly definable author. Other scholars like Gunkel (1910) and Gressmann (1913) went further and would not consider the earlier sources as the work of individual authors at all, but rather as the work of *Erzählerschulen* ('schools of narrators'). The work of von Rad (1938) brought a basic change.

He was interested in the *theology* of the earlier layer of Pentateuchal traditions—a question that had not previously been raised within the framework of the documentary hypothesis. The impetus for such a question did not arise out of the exegetical discussion itself, but was stimulated by a newly arisen theological interest in the Bible in the time after the First World War. Von Rad called the assumed main theologian, who in his view had collected and reformulated the earlier Pentateuchal traditions, the ‘Yahwist’, but he declared explicitly that the question of why and how other sources had been added to that work was beyond his scope (p. 68; ET: 74). Thus, von Rad’s ‘J’ was not really one ‘source’ among others, but its author was the great theologian who had formed the basic structure of the Pentateuch. Other scholars tried to find specific theological conceptions in ‘E’. Procksch (1906) wrote a whole book on this source. Later authors felt able to speak only about ‘the Elohist fragments’ (Wolff 1969, followed by Smend Jr 1978: 82). Westermann, in his commentary on Genesis (1981), came to the conclusion that there was no definable source ‘E’, while McEvenue (1984) found in the ‘trilogy’ of Genesis 20–22 a particular ‘Elohist’ theology. In these studies the point of view shifts from literary analysis to theological interpretation.

There was considerable discussion about the relationship between the two earlier sources: did one of them depend on the other (mostly ‘E’ on ‘J’); or were they totally independent from each other? Noth (1948) claimed that both of them were built on a *gemeinsame Grundlage* (‘common basis’) which he called ‘G’ (pp. 41–42), thereby inventing a kind of pre-source, as others did before him. His proposal did not find wide acceptance.

Another point of discussion and disagreement was the question of where the ‘J’ source ended. This included the issue of whether there had been a ‘Pentateuch’, a ‘Hexateuch’ or only a ‘Tetrateuch’. Proposals concerning where the ‘J’ source ended ranged from Num. 14.8a through Joshua 11, Joshua 24, Judg. 1.26, 1 Kings 2, 1 Kings 12 up to 1 Kgs 14.25 (see de Pury 1992: 1016). This is a particularly strong indication of the uncertainty and fragility of the whole hypothesis, because each of those decisions included a different idea of the character and intentions of ‘J’ and even of the Pentateuch.

As mentioned above, the singling out of ‘P’ was accepted by all adherents to this theory. But this is only half the picture. What was generally accepted was simply the distinction of ‘priestly’ texts from the rest

on the basis of their language and topics. But what is 'P'? Wellhausen had defined it as a twofold work: the narrative parts, which he called 'Q', and the collection of priestly laws. Later scholars called these two parts 'P^g' (*Grundschrift*, 'basic source') and 'P^s' ('secondary parts'), or used even more letters for further distinctions. In opposition to this, Noth insisted that, since 'P' was a purely narrative work, it was therefore misleading to use terms such as 'P^s' or the like for the law elements. It would be better to designate these parts 'with any neutral term' (1948: 9). That means that, according to Noth, large parts of the Pentateuchal texts did not belong to any of the sources at all.

Nevertheless, the hypothesis of several originally independent sources seemed to be unquestioned. But how did the sources come together to form the present text of the Pentateuch? One extreme position was held by Eissfeldt. In a brief chapter of his *Introduction* (1956), he argued that the sources had been composed step by step, always by one redactor. Including the two main collections of laws, the *Bundesbuch* ('B') 'Covenant Code', and the *Heiligkeitgesetz* ('H'), 'Holiness Code', his list of 'sources' reads: L, J, E, B, D, H, P. The redactor who combined L with J is called R^J and so forth, so that the full list of redactors reads: R^J, R^E, R^B, R^D, R^H, R^P. Eissfeldt adds that this list is 'to a large extent hypothetical as the whole Pentateuchal criticism is a hypothesis, if indeed one based on weighty arguments' (p. 288).

Noth's concept represents the other extreme. His idea was that the two main elements, the already combined sources J and E on the one hand, and P on the other hand, had not been joined with one another in toto, but that the 'redactor' took P as the literary frame into which he inserted at fitting points certain elements from JE (1948:11). Thus, P became the basis of the whole pentateuchal narrative. One could speak about a maximalist (Eissfeldt) and a minimalist (Noth) conception of the work of the 'redactor(s)'. What held them together was again the basic assumption of one or more earlier, and one later 'source'. Finally, the thesis of Cross (1973) must be mentioned: that 'the priestly strata of the Tetrateuch never existed as an independent narrative document' but 'framed and systematized JE with Priestly lore, and. . . greatly supplemented JE' (pp. 324-25).

Something Happened

In the mid-1970s something happened. In retrospect two decades later, the situation could be summarized as follows:

After nearly twenty years of debate about the composition of the Pentateuch, in which sometimes the only consensus has seemed to be that the old four-source theory will no longer do, there are signs that substantial agreement has now been reached around the following theses:

1. The earliest major composition extending from the patriarchs to the beginning of the settlement in Canaan (or, more modestly, the earliest one we can now detect) was produced in a deuteronomistic environment, not earlier than the seventh century BCE, and probably not before the sixth century BCE.
2. The priestly (P) material comprises a supplement (or series of supplements) to this composition, not an independent account of Israel's origins that once existed separately from it and was secondarily combined with it by a redactor (Davies 1996: 71).

When compared with the earlier given characterization of the basic elements of the documentary hypothesis, this summary makes it quite clear that the main pillars of that theory are no longer taken as valid. First, there is no longer any clear-cut difference between 'earlier' and 'later' sources, and secondly, 'P' is no longer taken as an originally independent source.

The movement that led to the present situation did not begin at once, and there were quite different approaches and starting points at work. One major change was based on a reevaluation of the 'Yahwist'. Schmid (1976) interpreted this source not as a document from the times of the (early) kingdom, but saw it as 'very closely related to the style and the theological preoccupations of Deuteronomistic literature', as de Pury describes his reading (de Pury 1992: 1016). This line was subsequently developed by Rose (1981). The late dating of 'J' was actually an undermining of the foundations of the documentary hypothesis. Neither author explicitly denies a source critical approach, but their work makes it clear that the whole documentary hypothesis needs a thorough re-examination. In particular, Schmid no longer takes J as a work written or composed by one single author. Schmid rather proposes 'an (inner-)yahwistic process of redaction and interpretation' (1976: 167).

Almost at the same time, Van Seters (1975) developed a new understanding of the 'Yahwist', building on earlier brief accounts by Winnett (1965) and Wagner (1967). On the basis of a study of the Abraham tradition he came to the conclusion 'that the Yahwistic version of the tradition dates to the exilic period' (Van Seters 1975: 310). With regard to the discernible different layers of tradition he concluded 'that the literary sources are not independent developments of the tradition,

which were only combined by a series of later redactors. Instead, each succeeding source is directly dependent upon, and supplements, the earlier tradition' (p. 311). With regard to Genesis, Van Seters presented the following series of literary steps: 1. pre-Yahwistic first stage; 2. pre-Yahwistic second stage ('E'); 3. Yahwist A and B; 4. priestly A and B; 5. post-priestly.

In his later works Van Seters interpreted the Yahwist as a historian or historiographer whom he compared with historiographers in other parts of the ancient world (1983, 1986-87, 1992, 1994). Here he demonstrates a high interest in the personality of the Yahwist, comparable with von Rad. Van Seters explicitly mentions the relationship of his own concept with that of von Rad, and through von Rad also with Wellhausen: 'For von Rad the Yahwist is according to his form a historiographer, according to his intention a theologian' (1987: 15). 'With regard to the Yahwist von Rad actually against Gunkel returns to Wellhausen' (p. 30). However, the difference between von Rad and Van Seters is even more obvious than the similarity. For von Rad the work of the Yahwist belonged to the Solomonic period, which in, von Rad's view, was a time of high creativity and spirituality; for Van Seters the Yahwist worked under totally different circumstances in the exilic period. What made these two scholars comparable is their interest in the personality of the Yahwist as an author of high capacity. At this point it is evident that Schmid had a completely different view of the 'Yahwist'. He did not see the 'Yahwist' as an individual author, but rather saw 'an (inner-) yahwistic process of redaction and interpretation' at work (1976: 167). Nevertheless, these scholars worked in the same general direction by denying the antiquity of the 'Yahwist', thereby undermining a crucial element of the documentary hypothesis.

In the mid-1970s I had the opportunity to contribute to the pentateuchal discussion. In a paper at the Eighth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in Edinburgh 1974 (Rendtorff 1975) and later in a book (1977b), I presented a basic critique of the documentary hypothesis. My main intention was to show that from the point of view of tradition history there are no continuous 'sources' to be found in the Pentateuch. Instead, I tried to define a number of 'larger units', each of which has its own respective profile and history and which were brought together at a later stage. In that stage 'deuteronomistic' elements are discernible. Likewise, the 'priestly' texts are not to be seen as an independent 'source' but rather as a

Bearbeitungsschicht, ‘layer of reworking’. At this point the final shape of the Pentateuch came into view.

I was aware that at that time I could only ask some questions and that my observations needed elaboration. This was done in the following years by Blum. On the basis of my initial questions he developed his own methodology and presented in two thoroughgoing books (1984, 1990) an alternative concept for understanding the composition of the Pentateuch. The choice of the word ‘composition’ is significant for his approach in general. The intention is not to ‘divide’ the texts into supposed earlier parts (‘sources’ or the like), but to understand their given shape as the result of a deliberate compository work. This shows an interrelation between synchronic and diachronic aspects. Blum is not interested in diachronic analyses as such, but he pays careful attention to the obvious signs of diachronic elements in the texts, and he tries to understand the ways in which the texts or the elements of tradition have been brought together.

In Blum’s view the composition of the Pentateuch is mainly the result of two compository activities: one close to deuteronomistic traditions (‘KD’—‘K’ because of the German *Komposition*), and one with priestly characteristics (‘KP’). The latter was the final one that integrated the earlier. In this concept there are no ‘sources’ which had existed independently from each other before they had been brought together. Blum is, however, fully aware of the diachronic complexity of the given text of the Pentateuch and tries very hard to answer all kinds of questions related to that complexity. With regard to dating, Blum assumes that ‘KD’ already knew the Deuteronomistic History work but that ‘KP’ is not much later. Thus, both of them belong to the early postexilic period. Blum develops the interesting thesis that the Pentateuch had been authorized by the Persian government as the official law for the Jewish ethnos within the Persian empire (1990: 356).

Beginning in the mid-1970s alternative views of the emergence of the Pentateuch have been developed. These views clash strongly with the documentary hypothesis. Notwithstanding their differences in many details, the new approaches have two major points of agreement: first, the major ‘source’ or ‘composition’ of the Pentateuch is to be dated not earlier than the late preexilic period; secondly, the priestly layer is not taken as an independent ‘source’, but is understood in the context of the development and composition of the Pentateuch as a whole.

Reactions

These new approaches to the pentateuchal problems were not totally unexpected for the scholarly community. There had been a number of earlier signs of a certain uneasiness with the state of discussion in the field of source criticism. Nevertheless, the accumulation of attacks directed towards the documentary hypothesis not only caused many scholars to speak of a 'crisis', but also caused some to fear a period of 'anarchy' (Vermeulen 1981: 329) or to look for rescue (North 1982). However, as I noted above, the state of pentateuchal research prior to these new developments was anything but unified, or even clear. The documentary hypothesis was accepted as a theory in whose frame all kinds of approaches could be practised. Now the field is open to try new approaches even beyond the iron curtain of source criticism.

Of course, there was—and still is—a wide range of reactions. Some welcomed this crossing the borders as a liberation and opening of new horizons (e.g. McKane 1978). Others even asked with regard to the first elaborated new concept by Blum whether this might be *Un nouveau Wellhausen* (Ska 1991). Many took up the new proposals carefully and gradually. It seems to me impossible to make an inventory of the present situation in this field of Old Testament scholarship, especially because, in many cases, scholars mention their agreement or disagreement only in brief remarks or in footnotes. My own opinion is that Davies is correct in his above quoted statement that 'there are signs that substantial agreement has now been reached around th[os]e theses' (1996: 71).

There are still a number of different kinds of reactions to the new developments. In the following I will characterize some that are more or less representative. I will not try to achieve completeness (which would be impossible), but I hope to mention at least the major dominant positions.

I shall begin with *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. In the article 'Torah (Pentateuch)', Friedman presents the traditional source critical conception, giving broad arguments, in particular for the 'Elohists', and just mentioning the names of Van Seters and Rendtorff in one or two sentences, declaring that 'arguments for exilic or postexilic provenances cannot be substantiated' (1992: 619). (The bibliography contains

less than half a column for an article of 30 columns.) The article 'Elohism', by Jenks, also presents the traditional view, though he quotes Van Seters and Schmid and at least admits that a hypothesis 'still needs constant testing and is always subject to revision' (1992: 479). With the article 'Yahwist ("J") Source', by de Pury (1992: 1012-20), the reader enters a different world. The author gives a detailed record of the history of research with a broad paragraph on von Rad and Noth, and then goes into an explanation of 'The Calling in Question of J' and 'J in the Current Debate', where he discusses in detail the most recent developments in Pentateuchal research. Finally, he shows the open questions to be discussed in the future. An excellent bibliography is attached. These articles represent two extreme positions in present Old Testament scholarship: on the one hand a total denial of any significant changes; and on the other hand a taking up of the challenge and a careful working out of the directions for further research. (On the article 'Priestly ("P") Source', see below.)

There are, of course, many variations between these two extreme positions. In order to get a general idea of contemporary approaches I follow the useful classification given by de Pury (1992: 1017). He labels a first group 'Defense of the Classical Concept'. A number of scholars are named who expressed their defense of that position in books or articles, either as the main topic of those publications, or in the context of exegetical studies: L. Schmidt (1977; 1983: 90-95); W.H. Schmidt (1981; 1988; 1991); Scharbert (1983; 1986; 1989); Kohata (1986a; 1986b); Kreuzer (1989: 114-17); Berge (1990); Ruppert (1992). To this list I add some authors who defended particularly 'P' as a source in the framework of the classical conception: Koch (1987); L. Schmidt (1993); Campbell (1993); Otto (1995); Schwartz (1996). All these scholars—and, of course, many others—are convinced that the documentary hypothesis, with its main pillars 'J' and 'P' (and more or less as traditionally dated) still remains the basis for Pentateuchal research. Some scholars have written books on 'J' (Coote and Ord 1989) and 'E' (Coote 1991) as if nothing had changed. Recently a textbook was published that even presented the 'sources' as separated from each other, for seminary studies (Campbell and O'Brien 1993).

Other scholars developed new ideas, remaining partly in the framework of the documentary hypothesis even though in some cases explicitly discussing the new approaches described above. It is not the intention of this article to deal with those positions in detail, yet I want

to mention some of them in order to show how the scholarly field is broadening and how many interrelationships and overlappings are possible. Some scholars are concerned with a new definition of the 'Yahwist'. One position de Pury calls 'A Solomonic J with a Reduced Substance' (1992: 1017). Here he lists Weimar (1977; 1980), Zenger (1982; 1985), Vermeylen (1981; 1989) and Peckham (1985). I add Zenger (1989), who rejects the 'model Heidelberg' (including Rendtorff, Blum and Crüsemann) in favour of the 'model Wellhausen', but explicitly declares that 'the texts attributed to J have to be reduced' (pp. 327-28). Recently, Zenger presented a combination of an *Erzählkranzmodell*, 'model of narration circles' (instead of 'sources') and, for the later period, a *reduziertes Quellenmodell*, 'reduced source model' (p. 74). Here the letter 'J' assumes a new meaning. Zenger interprets the 'pre-priestly' Pentateuchal texts as a *Jerusalemer Geschichtswerk*, 'Jerusalem History Work', which he calls 'JG'. This he understands more or less like Wellhausen's *Jehovistisches Geschichtsbuch*, including elements of the traditional 'J' and 'E' sources. According to Zenger this earliest 'source' got its shape 'around 690 BCE in Jerusalem' (p. 112).

A third position could be called 'An Exilic or Postexilic J'. Here, Schmid, Rose and, especially, Van Seters must be mentioned. Whybray (1987), following Van Seters, also believes that there was *one* author of the Pentateuch and that he was a 'historian'. A quite different view is developed by Levin (1993). He sees the Yahwist as a redactor who composed a work of history out of different sources, writing in the diaspora with an anti-deuteronomic tendency against the restriction of worship to one sanctuary. De Pury also adds Vorländer (1978), who speaks about a 'Jehowist' whom he dates to the time of the exile, and Schmitt (1980), who sees in J a postexilic redaction of an earlier 'Elohistic' version of the Pentateuch. The last two positions had actually been worked out before the challenge of the mid-1970s. This demonstrates that already in the framework of the documentary hypothesis positions were emerging which, in my view, by their late dating of the pre-priestly sources undermined the basis of that hypothesis. Schmitt (1982) is still working in the framework of the documentary hypothesis, but is interested in relating his results to those of Van Seters, Schmid and Rendtorff (Schmitt 1982; see esp. pp. 185-87). Boorer (1992) also enters a discussion with some of the recent positions and concludes that the investigated texts in her view are pre-deuteronomic and that only the 'paradigms' of Wellhausen and Noth 'retain

credibility' (p. 437). McEvenue (1994), after discussing the concept of Blum and Rendtorff, sees at present 'the absence of a trustworthy hypothesis', but believes that 'it is still possible to pursue trustworthy interpretation' (p. 389). Also, Nicholson (1991) calls for 'a time of caution'.

The fourth and final position de Pury calls 'A Nonexistent J'. It should be emphasized that in the view of the scholars mentioned here (Rendtorff, Blum) there are no 'sources' at all as explained above, because these scholars organize the field of Pentateuchal research differently, with the main emphasis on the latest layers or compositions of the texts. This brings us to an important point. I mentioned above that in the period of the unquestioned documentary hypothesis the distinction of the 'P' texts from the rest was the only aspect that was generally accepted by all scholars. Actually, the same is true today even beyond the framework of this hypothesis. The question is rather whether the 'P' texts had been part of an individual source that existed independently from the other texts before being combined with them. Blum has shown that there is no simple alternative, but that 'P' is 'neither "source" nor "redaction"' (1990: 229). In many cases, 'P' texts are formulated with an obvious reference to the 'pre-priestly' texts with which they are now combined. In other cases they show a certain independence from those. Carr (1996), in an ongoing dialogue with Blum, emphasizes the aspect of independence and even reconstructs a 'P source' (pp. 117-40). He admits, however, that in many cases 'P' texts are reworked to fit into their current context. He defines his own approach as 'replacement of the source model for non-P materials with a mixed tradition and composition model' (p. 150). In my view this is an interesting example of a new orientation of pentateuchal research, in which a scholar can find his or her own way without being dependent on an all-dominating paradigm.

Excursus: A Special Kind of 'P'?

Looking at *The Anchor Bible Dictionary's* contribution on the Priestly ('P') Source (Milgrom 1992), the reader is confronted with a great surprise. The 'P' treated in that article seems to have no significant relationship to the other 'sources' of the Pentateuch. Almost none of the problems discussed thus far in this essay are mentioned, and almost none of the names central to our discussion are quoted. Instead, the rela-

tion between 'P' and 'H' is discussed throughout (the latter meaning the 'Holiness School', according to Knohl's doctoral dissertation [1988]). Therefore only those texts dealing with cultic and holiness questions are discussed. The rest of the texts belonging to the 'P' source (according to the history of pentateuchal research) are not mentioned, nor is the relation of 'P' to other sources discussed. Thus, this is a restricted view on one sharply defined segment of pentateuchal texts, beyond any relation to contemporary discussions on problems of pentateuchal research. The background of this isolated treatment of the cultic elements of 'P' is the discussion on the dating of 'P' in the school of Kaufmann (1960, see above p. 44) that has been linguistically refined by Hurvitz (1982). Milgrom's voluminous commentary on Leviticus 1–16 (1991) shows the same restricted view of 'P'. When I asked this question some years ago at an SBL meeting (1993), Milgrom answered: 'I feel pinned to the wall' (1993: 83), admitting the relevance of the question but not reacting to it in substance. The Israeli scholar, Schwartz (1996), discusses at length the interpretation of 'P' as a 'source' in the framework of the traditional Documentary Hypothesis without mentioning the problems of 'H' and its relation to 'P'. One might hope that in the near future the place of these 'P' and 'H' texts within the Pentateuch as a whole will be discussed; however, in the framework of this article on contemporary directions in pentateuchal studies I have to leave these questions aside.

The Pentateuch as a Whole

One of the most obvious results of the discussion of the last two decades is the tendency to date the 'pentateuchal' composition not earlier than the Babylonian Exile. At first glance, the weakening of confidence in a higher age of Pentateuchal texts may seem to be a loss. But at the same time it is a gain to understand that important texts of the Hebrew Bible got their final shape in exilic and postexilic times. Of course, this includes a farewell to the old-fashioned classification of early 'Israel' versus later 'Judaism', in which the latter (in the view of Wellhausen and others) was a mere degeneration that lost all the values of earlier Israel and did not have any spiritual strength of its own. Yet today, even independently from pentateuchal problems, there is quite a new awareness of the intellectual and spiritual vitality and creativity of this 'late' period of Israel's history (see e.g. Eskenazi 1993).

The Pentateuch itself contributes abundantly to a rediscovery of the richness of the religious and social life during this period. In recent scholarly literature we often find terminology like ‘the priestly Pentateuch’ or a distinction between the ‘priestly’ and the ‘pre-priestly’ or ‘non-priestly’ Pentateuch and the like. Whatever the particular approaches of the individual scholars might be, this terminology shows that the Pentateuch as a whole is viewed from the final stage of its development, giving that stage a high rank in the evaluation and interpretation of this important literary work. When some scholars emphasize more strongly the importance of the somewhat earlier ‘deuteronomistic’ stage of composition, they thereby express a high esteem for the rather late compository work that shaped the Pentateuch, and of necessity envisage the last step which leads to the comprehensive work that begins with the creation of the world and ends with the death of Moses.

When von Rad asked the question about the main theological concept of the Pentateuch (1938), he complained that among Bible scholars too little attention was given to the *Jetztgestalt*, ‘present shape’ or *Letztgestalt*, ‘final shape’ of the Pentateuch (p. 9). His intention was to take a step in the direction of getting the Pentateuch as a whole in view. Now, as scholars leave behind the documentary hypothesis and put the emphasis on the ‘composition’ of the texts, this is exactly what has come about. The question of the composition of the Pentateuch necessarily leads to a new interest in the final form(s) of the text.

One significant indication of this new interest is the fact that there are now books written on ‘the Pentateuch’ as a whole. (Earlier there had been very few, as e.g. Clines 1978). These books show an interesting combination of literary and theological aspects (Blenkinsopp 1992; Blum 1990; Crüsemann 1992). They demonstrate that the new interest in the Pentateuch includes both an intensive study of the literary structure and history of the texts that form the Pentateuch, and a not less intensive search for the theological concepts that guide the texts. In particular, the books by Blum and Crüsemann strongly focus on the final shape of the Pentateuch. In Crüsemann’s book this intention is clearly expressed in the title of the final chapter ‘The Pentateuch As Torah’ (pp. 381-425). This chapter ends with a paragraph on ‘The Unity of God and that of the Torah—an Approach for a Christian Reception of the Torah’ (pp. 423-25). In my view this interest in the ‘message’ of the Pentateuch, however multivoiced it might be, is one of the most important achievements of pentateuchal studies in the last two decades.

Other studies interested in the theology of the Pentateuch in general or its latest layer include Schmid (1989) and Janowski (1987, 1990).

I think the goal of all endeavours in studying the literary history and structure of the Pentateuch should be to understand it as a whole, especially as a theological whole. In my view this implies a 'canonical' reading of the biblical text. 'Canonical', as I understand it, means, not to ignore the diachronic depth-dimension of the texts, but rather to try to understand the text in its given form as a deliberately composed final unity, which should be taken seriously by the reader and interpreter. I believe that discussions of the relationship of diachronic and synchronic readings of biblical texts should be more thoroughgoing and nonbiased. The two approaches should not be taken as alternatives but as two interrelated, necessary ways of studying the texts.

For further reading on the recent history of Pentateuchal research see Knight (1985), de Pury and Römer (1989), Blenkinsopp (1992), Utzschneider (1994), Römer (1996), and Carr (1997).

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