Time for a Change!

Why Pentateuchal Research is in Crisis

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Edward L. Greenstein compared the various models for the Pentateuch to the descriptions of different parts of the anatomy of an elephant, each provided by one of *five blind men who are unaware* that the animal is one and the same and that many sinews hold it together.[1] Nearly 20 years later, Georg Aichele and his colleagues have taken up this image for Biblical studies in general and applied it to other approaches, too.[2] One may even go one step further and compare the investigations of the Pentateuch to an elephant that has grown excessively and become so oversized that nobody can handle it.

This is the situation we face today. The *number of publications* in this field outweighs by far what a scholar is able to read; as a result, any new contribution will always be 'deficient', inevitably failing to take into account many other studies which might be relevant to the topic.[3] More fundamentally, there is a *dichotomy in the approaches* to Pentateuchal studies. The opposition between diachronic methodologies and a synchronic access to the texts leads to two 'parallel worlds' whose representatives are often critical and suspicious with respect to positions of the 'other' side, sometimes even hostile or dismissive right from the outset.[4]

A further problem arises in the *frequent changes of position*, occasionally even by the same authors,[5] sometimes going around full circle.[6] These are only a few of

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1 Greenstein, "Formation," 153.
2 Aichele, Miscall, and Walsh, "Elephant," 387.
3 This makes any publication vulnerable, subject to the criticism of not looking at the entire picture.
4 See, e.g., the objections of Carr, *Reading*, 23–24, against those not dealing with transmission history. The other way round, scholars applying a synchronic approach often do not read diachronic studies.
5 The well-received *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* of E. Zenger *et al.* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, nine editions till 2015, the last two edited by C. Frevel) may serve as an example. From the first edition (in 1995) to the fifth (in 2004) the presentation of Pentateuchal research has changed three times. This is quite odd for a book aimed to be a lasting orientation for a wide audience of students and scholars, expecting them to change their mind every five years because of 'newer' insights by the experts.
6 A case in point is the discussion about the end of the Priestly writing (P^g): The option of Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, 8, to see it in Deut 34, returns 50 years later with Frevel, *Blick* – for an overview of the various positions brought forward meanwhile see Zenger, *Einleitung*, 196–203. Another example of the return of earlier theories is the 'revival' of the documentary hypothesis by B. Schwartz, J. Stackert, J. Baden and others.

the main issues: others are the enormous number of hypotheses to explain the growth of individual texts, and, even more, the Pentateuch as a whole; the fragmentation of fairly small texts into many, often tiny layers and/or editorial processes[7]; the suggestions as to what historical "Sitz im Leben" should be attributed to them; the assumption of redactions, textual developments, and "Fortschreibungs-prozesse" without external data, etc.

How should we tackle this 'elephant'? I will first list some of the promising changes that have occurred in Pentateuchal studies within the last 30 years, and then focus on the reasons for the ongoing problems in this field. Finally, I shall suggest some ways by which the present impasse might be overcome.

Before doing so, I want to clarify some issues, in order to *avoid misunderstandings*:

a) Historical and critical investigations of the Bible *have contributed immensely* to a deeper and more appropriate comprehension of it, and they still do so. I, too, want to see biblical texts with their historical roots and grasp their meaning by reflection and discussion of various interpretations and positions.

b) My criticism (in parts 2 and 3) is not directed, *in principle,* against any form of diachronic investigations. It focusses more on those studies which do not seriously engage with the observations brought in by authors with a synchronic approach. Personally, I see Deuteronomy and the variety of the law codes[8] as one example of texts pointing to diverse origins.

c) The Torah contains many very different texts. My remarks mostly have in view the *narratives in Genesis and Exodus*, as they were the initial reason for distinguishing sources and are still a very disputed field. Nevertheless, some statements are also applicable to other areas, even to prophetic books such as, for example, Jeremiah.

d) Next, I have to admit that the topic is so large that I can *only touch on some of the relevant points*, skipping over much of the important literature. I ask pardon in advance for omitting reference to many major contributions.

e) Finally, the breadth of the topic is such that I can only *present a very general view of it*, not going into very much detail or discussing all aspects of an issue. The examples represent only a selection; obviously there would be many more, and perhaps even more pertinent ones.

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7   A relatively recent example is Berner, *Exoduserzählung*. He distinguishes, in Exod 3 alone, twelve different stages of development (103–105).

8   For a critical investigation of their relationships see Kilchör, *Mosetora*. – I thank him and the other organizers of the conference for the invitation to deliver the keynote speech.

1. Promising changes

(i) There have been a number of developments in recent years that give some cause for hope. The first one is the *reduction of sources*, a sign that exegetes are paying more attention to the bonds that hold the Pentateuch together. Julius Wellhausen suggested a model of four documents, JE, D, and P,[9] and this paradigm has dominated the understanding of the Pentateuch for nearly a century. Erhard Blum has significantly contributed to the topic,[10] by suggesting that there are essentially only two main "Kompositionsschichten," K^D and K^P. This tendency has continued, and in present-day discussion some influential scholars consent in accepting merely one layer, mostly understood as being "P," and distinguished from other material, designated "non-P," the latter being difficult to define more exactly.[11] As a result, we are left with a main stratum and a body of other texts, the status of which – as a whole – escapes identification, as it varies so much in itself.

(ii) The second positive outcome of Pentateuch scholarship in the past decades is the recognition that the originally proposed first layer, J, seen as stemming from early Monarchic times, is, in fact, *quite late*.[12] In the sequence, ever more texts were regarded as being exilic or postexilic, and a majority of exegetes in Europe today view at least the final redaction / version of the Pentateuch as emerging some time in (late) Persian times, maybe with Ezra around 400 BC. This provides a more appropriate historical and social setting for large parts of the Torah, including its laws, in the community of the Second Temple.

(iii) The ongoing disputes about how to explain the Pentateuch and its development have led to another, third, major change. This is the *greater degree of (self-) critical reflection and a humbler stance*[13] towards the outcome of our scholarly endeavours. Even scholars trained in historical-critical research have become more aware of its limits.[14] This leads to a more careful method of proceeding[15] and, in the end, hopefully, to more and longer-lasting results.

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9 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, v. He had precursors in Karl-Heinrich Graf, Abraham Kuenen, and others (cf. Zenger, *Einleitung*, 103–106).

10 Especially relevant is Blum, *Studien*.

11 For a recent discussion about this development around P and its interpretation see the contributions in the collective volume of Hartenstein and Schmid, *Abschied*.

12 One of the first proponents of this position was H. H. Schmid, *Jahwist.* For an early positive evaluation of it see the review of van Seters, "Recent Studies," 667–672, who himself had opted for a similar view a year earlier (idem, *Abraham*).

13 Frevel, in his review of *Abschied von der Priesterschrift?*, 1211, realizes "… vielleicht so etwas wie eine neue Bescheidenheit". Similarly, Marx, "Méthodes," 337, invites "… à un peu d'avantage d'humilité".

14 Some examples are the critique of Seebass in the review of the Genesis commentary of his friend L. Ruppert, 1289: "… unbedingt der Nachweis der Notwendigkeit eines Eingriffs erbracht werden sollte"; the call to caution with regard to "redactions" by Krüger, "Anmerkungen," 62–63. – Even Erhard Blum, in an oral remark towards the end of the Pentateuch

(iv) The aspects mentioned above about the transformation occurring within Pentateuchal studies also show up in a new effort to *combine the two 'opposing' methodological approaches*. The aim of the Herder commentary series, initiated by Erich Zenger, proposing a "diachron reflektierte Synchronie,"[16] has meanwhile (spring 2017) borne fruit in more than 35 volumes, the most recent ones, by Eckart Otto, systematically applying both synchronic and diachronic analyses.[17] Another similar, bilingual project, is the International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament / Internationaler Exegetischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (IECOT / IEKAT), of which several books have already appeared.[18]

These and other developments in Pentateuchal studies are *hopeful signs*. Change is on the way, but slowly, not systematically, and sometimes with regressions.[19] The increased awareness of the continuing problems will lead to further reflection, intensified discussion,[20] and stronger efforts to open new ways, hopefully leading to deeper insights.

2. Reasons for the ongoing problems

2.1 Historical roots

When we try to trace the origins of the present state of research, one can find many reasons for it. Historically, the critical analysis of the Pentateuch started in the time of the Enlightenment ("Aufklärung"), marked by a *rationalist approach* to the Bible, which emphasized human reasoning and the individual over established authorities, traditions, and communities. This attitude gives priority to one's own thinking, set-

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conference in Jerusalem in May 2014, expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of Pentateuchal research after so many years of investigations by so many people.

15 So Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 232, recognizes the need for "… a duly cautious use of this criterion" (viz. of the names for God).

16 This is the formulaic expression used in E. Zenger, *Dokumentation* (Freiburg: Herder, n.d.), 3, and more often.

17 E. Otto, *Deuteronomium 1,1–4,43*, and another three volumes on Deut.

18 Utzschneider and Oswald, *Exodus 1–15*; Dietrich, *Nahum – Habakuk – Zefanja*; Redditt, *Sacharja 9–14*, among others. All of them apply, for every unit, in sequence, a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

19 See, e.g., the 'revival' of the "Urkundenhypothese" by B. Schwartz, J. Baden, *et al.* (end of note 6), or Berner, *Exoduserzählung*. Another recent example is Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*; she distinguishes, in Gen 50 alone, more than ten isolated motifs (469–511).

20 The remark of Aichele, Miscall, and Walsh: "… we are intensely aware of the present division within biblical studies and are disturbed by the fact that it is rarely if ever openly discussed" (Aichele *et al.*, "Elephant," 387) is pertinent in this regard.

ting it above what is to be investigated, in this case, God's word in human words.[21] Otto Schwankl, in his essay on the state of biblical research, named this bias of the exegesis, because of its origin, "Gen-Defekt" (genetic defect).[22] This does not mean that we have to leave aside critical reflection, but invites us to see the possible limitations of such investigations and try to overcome them.

Another feature is connected with the historical background of the literarycritical approach, a major objective of which is to detect the *'original' version* of a text. What was 'first' gains priority over later developments which are often suspected of changing the earlier meaning by adding new, sometimes even contrasting, elements. Going back to the roots seems to provide access to the 'authentic' message. This may explain the desire to trace the origin of a biblical text. If it were possible, it would make sense and be laudable; yet there are a number of difficulties, as the following exposition will show.

2.2 General problems

a) Disparate material

The Pentateuch is an agglomeration of various genres, traditions, narrative blocks, collections of laws, etc. What originally may have had separate origins has been *transmitted as a whole*.[23] As this 'unification' process belongs to a period prior to the earliest extant manuscripts, we have no secure access to any phase before the divergent materials were gathered into what now appears as 'scrolls' / 'books' and, in its entirety, as Pentateuch / Torah.[24]

As a result of that, we are left with an *impasse*. In research we need 'differences' as a criterion for establishing another source (e.g. discerning 'P' from its surroundings), yet the text itself – deliberately – presents disparate materials intricately linked, and therefore as *'divergent unity'*, of prose and poetry (Exod 14–15),[25] of law and narration (e.g. Exod 19–24), etc. Trying to separate them, in order to attribute them to various layers, inevitably must lead to an ambiguous procedure which

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21 I do not say that this is done deliberately; often it may be done un- / subconsciously. However, it influences the *overall access* to the biblical texts, holding modern 'logic' and criteria in greater esteem than what is to be interpreted, thus attributing more authority to one's self than to the Bible. – The remarks by A. Marx and C. Frevel about the need for humility (see note 13) show a growing awareness of this problem and its root.

22 Schwankl, "Fundamentum," 177.

23 Sarna, *Genesis*, xvi, uses for that, with respect to the Book of Genesis, the expression "unified document".

24 Obviously there is a need to go beyond Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch and include the following books (Joshua, etc., up to Kings), too, as many motifs point to them as prolongation or fulfilment.

25 For their inner connections, also in other texts like Deut 32; Judges 5, etc., see especially Watts, *Psalm*.

fails to respect the 'integrated' character of the text.[26] So any proposal to divide it is flawed right from the beginning, as it has to use a measure and a method which are *in contrast* to the investigated object.

b) The optimism about reconstructing earlier versions / traditions

Historical-critical investigations presuppose the *ability* to reconstruct textual developments. Benjamin Ziemer has convincingly shown, using the examples of the Book of Jubilees and the Temple Scroll, that it is impossible to deduce from them what Genesis and Deuteronomy, their respective 'sources', looked like.[27] These are two extant cases, from biblical times, to which we have access and through which we can receive insight into ancient writing procedures. They strongly caution against any assumption that we, today, are able to gain access to earlier forms of biblical texts with any acceptable degree of verisimilitude.[28]

One must conclude, therefore, that there are *two fundamental difficulties* with the literary-critical approach to the Pentateuch. From the point of view of the text, the divergence of the materials brought together in it is so interwoven that it opposes a division into layers or an attribution to earlier traditions. From the point of view of developments in extant, comparably old documents, a reconstruction of previous stages of biblical texts seems excluded – unless we get new, external data, it seems impossible to say anything about the prior textual stages with certainty. We may try to speculate about earlier phases in the genesis of these texts, but such research remains on the level of hypotheses, and has rarely led to acceptable results.

2.3 Obstacles in the path of investigation

Besides the fraught historical origin of Pentateuchal criticism and the general difficulties, there are a number of inherent problems with its methodology.

a) Imprecision of the terminology

As I perceive it, one of the main causes for the lasting troubles in Pentateuchal studies is the *vagueness of the terms* used. We may take as an example some recent publications on "P," the Priestly writing, which is supposed to be the "last stronghold"[29] for those applying historical-critical analyses. The book *Abschied von der*

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26 Berman, *Inconsistency*, has shown that in a paradigmatic way especially in Part III: "Renewing Pentateuchal Criticism," where he deals with the history of interpretation of Exod 2:1–10 and Gen 6–9 as examples.

27 Ziemer, "Diskussion" – The same seems to be true for the Gilgamesh-epic. The Akkadian version does not allow us to reconstruct its earlier versions, as Hallo, "Das Buch Genesis," 60f, shows.

28 This is not to say that biblical texts did not undergo textual developments; the argument addresses our ability to *responsibly* reconstruct them.

29 Thus in my review of the book *Abschied von der Priesterschrift?*, 105: "letzte Bastion", and

Priesterschrift? (see note 11) shows a disconcerting variety of positions among scholars who are experts in the field. This applies to the extent of the passages attributed to P, to its character, and to its historical setting. As a result, they are all talking about different things, albeit using the same term "P." Furthermore, the language, the themes, and the style[30] of these texts diverge quite a lot. "P" thus seems to be something of a chameleon.[31] In present-day discussion, it can change its appearance, its vocabulary, its main interests – nobody has ever defined it clearly in a way that has found general acceptance. Besides that, the dispute about whether it is a source, or should be seen as connected with editorial processes, displays profound disagreement about how to interpret these texts.

The 'vagueness' applies also, and even more, to the "*Yawhist.*"[32] The tendency today to call it "non-P"[33] rather than "J" is an indication of the growing awareness of how the application of this term to the texts subsumed by it is insecure.[34] The discussion about "J" shows similar features to that about P, with a still higher level of divergence. The uncertainty is further increased with respect to the "*Elohist,*"[35] and the labels "D" and "dtr" are similarly open to definitions and understandings.

What is true for the various sources, is even more applicable to the *higher levels of the composition process*. The term "redaction" in particular serves for some of today's exegetes as a kind of 'grab bag', covering almost any intervention by the ancient writers, thus permitting them to explain omissions, additions, changes, etc. Similarly, theoretical concepts like "Fortschreibung", source, tradition, "Ergänzung", "Bearbeitung" are often used without being clearly defined, and without there being any opportunity neither to verify nor to falsify these theories based on external data. This common practice of proposing theories about the genesis of Pentateuch texts is highly speculative, works on a meta[2 (or even 3)]-level and is, assuming one agrees with its presuppositions and the general legitimacy of the procedure, unas-

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similarly Frevel in his review of the same book, 1210: "Fels in der Brandung".

30 One of the few exegetes describing P's style of presentation is McEvenue, *Narrative Style*. However, he concentrates merely on three, and debatable texts, of which two are intertwined with other elements (The Flood Narrative, and the Spy Story in Num 13–14), and the last one, Gen 17, is, even in his eyes, "the least narrative" (177). Indeed, a comparison with Gen 1, the first generally assumed "P"-text, reveals a quite different "style" and theological character, thus raising the question of its connection to the other supposed "P"-texts.

31 G. Fischer, "Need," 66.

32 Ska, "Yahwist." He shows the variety of perceptions of "J" offered over the last two centuries and states at the end the lack of a thorough investigation of "J's style, ... compositional devices and patterns," etc. (23).

33 See Frevel's review (note 13), 1212: "Nicht-P," and similarly many others.

34 This – negative – designation follows logically from what showed up above as "disparate material". It is hard to find a common denominator for all the relevant texts.

35 One of the major defenders of this theory is Graupner, *Elohist*. He sees E's "Kerygma" in the affirmation that the kingly God is *Yahweh* (390), in strange contrast to the preferred use of אלהים in this source.

sailable. It repeatedly puts forward new suggestions which lead to further discussions. This 'play' can continue ad infinitum.

b) The criteria

Traditionally, the major criteria for distinguishing sources fall into three distinct groups: stylistic variations, the different names for God, and duplicate narratives, or repetitions.[36] As has long been recognized, there are problems with all of them, and they have already received extensive criticism. I shall, therefore, give only a brief treatment of the problems.

(i) Different vocabulary and style may be required *according to the topic or intention*. Thus the Song of Moses in Exod 15 is the fitting answer of praise for God's rescue in the chapter before. Some *toledot* in Genesis are needed to bridge long time periods (Gen 5; 11:10–26); other *toledot* serve to show connections among 'relatives' (Gen 10; 11:27–32; 25:12–18; 36) or to introduce narrative blocks (Gen 2:4; 6:9; 25:19; 37:2). Despite their different functions, they are necessary, taken together, for the structuring and understanding of the entire book. An author or composer of a book may have many reasons to vary the language.[37]

(ii) The biblical God has *only one 'name'*, יהוה, as revealed to Moses in Exod 3:14–15. The other expression, אלהים "god(s)", is a common term used to designate beings belonging to the divine sphere. It may be applied to Yhwh, too, in various forms,[38] and the change between 'name' and general noun, with or without article, seems to indicate specific nuances, according to context and speaker.[39] It thus cannot be taken as a criterion for differentiating layers without further arguments.

(iii) Nicholson adduces, as an example of duplicate narratives, the stories about Hagar in Gen 16 and 21. Although he also recognizes differences between them, and discusses at length various options, he suggests, in a rhetorical question, that Gen 21 had an editor who took it from an independent source.[40] It is, however, very hard to see how Gen 21 can be regarded as a kind of 'repetition', being so *dissimilar* from Gen 16. In addition, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael is 'needed' for the further development of the narration. In an analogous way, apparent 'duplicates' (e.g. Gen 12:10–20; 20; 26:1–11) serve precise functions within their respective contexts.[41]

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36 Sic, among many others, Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 228–237. The latter criterion is often used in a more general way, as 'repetitions'. Brodie, *Genesis*, 5–6, gives a longer list of six "arguments against unity," adding especially "internal contradictions".

37 Besides this, the use of the vocabulary is often not consistent. Frevel, *Blick*, 341f, for example, postulates the end of P^g in Deut 34:8, but is unable to argue for it with specific words. He has to admit that there are "keine präzisen literarkritischen Schnitte und redaktionskritischen Zuweisungen" possible, which is equivalent to a dismissal of the criterion.

38 The dominant use is without article, beginning in Gen 1:1. האלהים "the God" starts with Henoch in Gen 5:22, 24. Both terms are to be understood with reference to Yhwh in most of the cases, yet they are not his 'name', as other divinities may also be designated so.

39 Exod 3–4 is especially relevant in this regard; see G. Fischer, *Jahwe*, 224–228.

40 Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 232–237.

41 For the texts mentioned see I. Fischer, *Erzeltern*.

To sum up, what had already emerged as a problem in dealing with the "disparate material" (2.2, a) continues here with the main criteria applied in historical-critical research. They all are *subject to intense criticism and are more than ambiguous* when used as reasons for distinguishing sources.

c) Implementation of the research

Besides the general problems and the ambiguity of the criteria, there are also difficulties with the *manner in which the investigations are carried out*. These show up in various ways.

(i) Among the promising changes, I have listed a growing dialogue between the two opposite approaches. The reality, however, is that there is still *widespread negligence* of the 'other' position. This is especially true on the side of the dominant historical-critical scholarship. Major 'synchronic' commentaries on Genesis[42] are, by and large, not taken seriously in present-day discussions and diachronically oriented studies.[43] In contrast, all of the previously mentioned commentaries (see in note 42) discuss the arguments of the historical-critical approach, sometimes at length and in detail.[44] Thus there is an imbalance in dealing with synchronic scholarship by the 'other side'. This is evident in many areas: in the organisation of congresses, the nomination / invitation of speakers, the major publications, etc.[45] As a consequence, the prevailing impression is coined by diachronic positions, and there is little debate or real confrontation with the other side.[46]

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42 E.g. those of B. Jacob (see note 49 below), U. Cassuto, G. Wenham (Word), V. P. Hamilton (NICOT), N. M. Sarna (JPS; cf. note 23), T. L. Brodie (see above note 36), and others (cf. the studies of Jan P. Fokkelman on Genesis), who are convinced about the 'unity' of the book or reluctant in accepting sources to explain it.

43 See for examples the commentaries of C. Westermann (BK; he knew Jacob's and Cassuto's commentaries), L. Ruppert (FzB) and H. Seebass, as well as recent monographs by W. Bührer (Am Anfang ...), the studies of N. C. Baumgart and E. Bosshard-Nepustil on the Flood Narrative, and many others.

44 B. Jacob dedicates 100 pages at the end of his commentary to it (949–1048).

45 Further examples: Houtman, *Pentateuch*, has proferred the most profound investigation of Pentateuchal theories and arrived at the conclusion that source criticism cannot explain how the Pentateuch came into being (419: "... dass die Quellentheorie keine befriedigende Antwort auf die Frage nach der Entstehung des Pentateuch zu leisten vermag") – as this result is 'unwelcome', his study is seldom quoted and still more rarely accepted. – T. Römer, in his article "Pentateuchforschung" (Wibilex, December 2015, based mainly on the respective part of his *Einleitung* from 2013), refers comprehensively to some main developments of the research, yet bypasses almost completely the synchronic positions for the actual discussion, thus producing a one-sided, biased picture.

46 A common practice is the affirmation of a "consensus," e.g. about the existence of "P," neglecting all the researchers strongly opposing it (see those commenting on Genesis mentioned in note 42). Carr, *Reading*, 43, perceives a "... remarkable level of long-standing consensus." The contributions in the volume *Abschied von der Priesterschrift* (note 11) and Römer (the article quoted in the previous footnote) go into the same direction, not taking seriously the objections

(ii) The recent discussion of two possible 'origin traditions' of Israel, one of the Patriarchs, the other of the Exodus,[47] offers another example of a problematic procedure. In order to be able to separate these traditions, one has to declare all hints at the Exodus in Genesis (e.g. 15:16; 46:4, etc.) as redactional additions. This means that the evidence in the text speaking against the thesis is "neutralized" and ascribed to another layer.[48] Such a practice is *"circular reasoning"*, first sidelining contrasting arguments and then concluding that the proposed theory is correct. This does not exclude the possibility that there may have been two different 'origin traditions', but it shows that proving it with some degree of probability presents a problem.

(iii) The discordant state of Pentateuchal studies offers a great opportunity for an open discussion, to try to clarify the different viewpoints and find out the reasons for them, thus providing a more balanced background for further research. However, often 'schools' proceed on their established path, affirm their hypotheses in a continuing stream of new publications, and *rarely engage seriously* with contrasting positions. As the last 200 years have shown, the field is so disputed that such one-sided perspectives and/or presentations cannot become lasting contributions; they only prolong the present state of dichotomy.

We may thus conclude that the way in which the study of the Pentateuch is proceeding shows wide-ranging deficiencies. The disdain for synchronic interpretations and the sometimes optimistic proposals of new theories, based on weak arguments and without critically cross-checking them, are further roots of the ongoing problems in the field. Instead of propagating a non-existent "consensus," the field of Pentateuchal studies displays a fundamental breach in methodology and an antagonism towards other views. Unless these are addressed seriously and without preconceptions, there will never be a solution.

3. Avenues to pursue, new and old

There can be no way back to pre-critical exegesis. Historical backgrounds and critical investigation have enriched our understanding of the whole Bible enorm-ously. We have to continue along this 'old' and well-trodden path and yet find a way to make Pentateuchal studies *fruitful again*.

In doing so, we have to *overcome the weaknesses* of the literary-critical approaches, especially if they are short on (self-) 'criticism' and rather more specula-

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to this hypothesis of P, neglecting and denying the contrasting actual state of research.

47 See especially K. Schmid, *Erzväter*.

48 Several authors have therefore criticized the proposed theory, e.g. Krüger, "Anmerkungen," 61f.

tive than 'historical'. With this in mind, I want to address three issues in this final part: first, a closer look at 'P' is clearly necessary; secondly, some comparisons for understanding the Torah may open alternative perspectives to the widely assumed research paradigms of textual developments; and finally, some pointers to potentially rewarding new avenues will be offered.

3.1 Understanding 'P' as the key

Once again, I start by guarding against a possible misunderstanding: I do *not deny the existence of connections, similar interests and motifs* between the texts traditionally ascribed to the "Priestly writing". Some of them have certain characteristics that point to common intentions. Instead, I want to propose that we look at them from another angle, giving more weight to the way in which they relate to their immediate contexts and perceiving them in their specific functions within the whole.

After that clarification, I now share the knowledge and firm conviction gleaned from decades of dealing with Pentateuch studies. As long as one holds firmly to P, assuming its existence in whatever form, whether it be a source, a layer, or a redactional reworking, there will be, in my estimation, *no adequate solution* to the problems of Pentateuchal research. After nearly 200 years of trying in vain to find an answer, based on the assumption of this hypothetical Priestly stratum (in whatever form), we have still not arrived at definitive results, and the impasse because of the fundamental problems underlying this theory has become obvious. Therefore, it is time to attempt to formulate an explanation without it. As a *counter-proposal*,[49] I suggest daring to do away with it altogether!

In the following, I want to present some observations which will demonstrate that *taking 'P' out of the picture* eases the interpretation and can be more convincing:

a) There is widespread acceptance among historical-critical researchers about the attribution of the "*Toledot-formula*" to P. Yet, even in its first instance, in Gen 2:4, one encounters the problem that it has to be taken, as is true for every other occurrence, as the beginning of the next unit[50] which decisively is "non-P." Some other cases of the *toledot*, too, raise questions about their ascription to P, i.e. where they start narrations (e.g. Gen 6:9; 25:19; 37:2). Furthermore, if one were to remove these formulas from the Book of Genesis, many necessary connections and binding motifs would be missing, and it would be hard to understand it.

b) The *genealogy in Exod 6:14–27* is regarded as largely belonging to P. It is framed by a kind of repetition, bringing in Yhwh's address to Moses ordering him to speak to Pharaoh (Exod 6:10–12, 28–30), which is generally attributed to another

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49 This suggestion is not new. It follows Benno Jacob's position, e.g. in his commentary *Das Buch Genesis* (1048), and others who similarly get along well and in an illuminating way without P.
50 Hieke, *Genealogien*, 49–50; also Jacob, *Genesis*, 71–74.

source. The difference between the verses before the genealogy and after it lies in the argument about Moses' authority over the Israelites. In V 12 Moses sees it as a problem, in V 30 he does not mention it at all. This indicates that his lineage given in V 16–20 is a solution to his missing authority.[51] The individual units of Exod 6:12–30 (viz. V 10–12/13, 14/16–27, 28–30) are strongly interlinked and need each other; it is improbable that they belong to different sources.[52]

c) The two small examples above demonstrate the *'double', ambiguous charac-ter* of the so-called 'P'-texts. On the one hand, they are *essential for the structure* of the whole[53] and must not be dismissed. On the other hand, as in the case of the genealogy in Exod 6, they look like *'additions'*. At first sight they do not seem to be necessary, yet they contribute to the inner coherence of the text on a more refined level, and therefore they are definitely needed.[54] This ambiguous appearance of the so-called 'P'-texts may be one reason for the endless debate as to whether they are a source or a redaction.

Instead of that, what is regarded as 'P' *adheres indissolubly* to the surrounding texts.[55] In Exod 1–15, the 'P'-elements form, together with the other units / materi-als, such a dense fabric that it is impossible to extract them without destroying the narrative.[56] The same holds true for the Book of Genesis; removing what is seen as 'P' would make it fall apart into a series of unconnected pieces, hard to understand in their sense and logic.

An illustration from literature sums up the situation: the famous fairy-tale of Hans Christian Andersen, *"The Emperor's New Clothes,"*[57] describes different percep-tions, or rather public statements of perceptions. Instigated by initial pronounce-ments and intensified by a process of common imagination, the nakedness of the Emperor is declared as "new clothes." The apparent 'naiveté' of a young child sees reality without the preconceptions of adults influenced by public opinion and thus helps others to perceive and express the truth.

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51 Marx, "généalogie," has shown that very clearly.

52 G. Fischer and Markl, *Exodus*, 98, based on the previous studies: G. Fischer, "Exodus 1–15," and idem, "Keine Priesterschrift," both new in idem, *Anfänge*, 128–137 and 138–167, here 136 respectively 143.

53 This is valid e.g. for Gen 1:1–2:3; 17, the *toledot*-formulas and –texts, Exod 6:2–9, etc. Another problem not discussed here is the thematic orientation attributed to P. Several times it is hard to see explicit 'priestly' interests in the P-texts, cf. Weimar, *Studien*, VII: "Ganz entgegen dem eingebürgerten Namen handelt es sich bei der Priesterschrift um einen wesentlich prophetisch inspirierten, ganz und gar unkultischen, geradezu utopischen Geschichtsentwurf."; this raises the question whether the label 'P' is appropriate at all.

54 For the Flood narrative, see J.A. Berman, *Inconsistency*, 236–268, among others.

55 Marx, "Méthodes," 333: "... les textes sacerdotaux ..." collent "à ces autres écrits ... et les suivent pas à pas ...".

56 G. Fischer, "Exodus 1–15," 161.

57 Originally in Danish: "Keiserens nye Klæder", first published in 1837.

In my view, a similar process is necessary with respect to'P'. It is a *chimera* leading scholars in a false direction. Instead of giving attention to the many and strong bonds these texts have with their surroundings and which are clearly observable, the hypothesis of the Priestly writing impels scholars to give preference to speculations and interpretations that are highly debatable and have many arguments against them.[58]

3.2 New paradigms

Up to now it is clear that the "paradigm change," referred to in the title of the conference and this book, has *not yet* taken place. Nevertheless, in recent research, there are several developments and tendencies emerging (mentioned in 1 above) which give us reason to hope that this might happen soon. *New models* will play an important role in such a change and it will be necessary to leave behind the paradigm of a successive, reconstructible textual development which has taken place over the centuries, from the earliest stages to the final form.

Thomas L. Brodie, in his commentary on the Book of Genesis (Genesis as Dialogue, 2001, 36), has dealt at length with questions of its unity. In his preface (xiv), he quotes an article of André Chouraqui[59] who compares the construction of Genesis to the precision of *assembling a computer or a rocket*. Brodie himself also uses other comparisons, "body-like complexity" (11) and "pyramid" (80).

All of Brodie's suggestions point in one direction, namely the *deliberate com-bi-nation of various, even contrasting, elements into one highly functional entity*. The same holds true, on a small scale, for a clockwork mechanism, or, in larger dimensions, for a house. They are both made of different materials, may even originate in distinct times and places; however, in each case, as they are extant now, all the separate components come together to form a unity and, in combination, contribute to the overall formation of the clock and the house, so that each, as a whole, is able to fulfil its function.

In various cultures, there are further models which might help us to understand what the 'different materials / elements / interests' of the Pentateuch aim to communicate. The following examples and comparisons are intended to point to similar phenomena in other areas of inventions, communication, and artistry, in order to get ideas for or insight into *possibly analogous features* in biblical literature. Assuredly,

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58 The review of *Abschied von der Priesterschrift?* by Frevel uses two images for 'P', which, in combination, – unwittingly – reflect the situation. He speaks of 'P' as "Fels in der Brandung" (= a rock in the surf, 1210) and of the "forschungsgeschichtlich gewichtige[n] Tanker 'Priester-schrift'" (= the tanker ship 'Priestly writing', weighty in the history of research, 1212), thinking that the latter is still afloat; yet, in reality, like the "Exxon Valdez" in Prince William Sound on March 24 of 1989, the tanker 'P' is set on a course to seize up on rocks, break apart and spill its contents.

59 Chouraqui, " Traduction," 455.

there is a difference between the various modes of expression of the human mind. However, they show common features and might help us to perceive biblical texts more accurately.

Let us first have a look at *visual arts*. In Ancient Egypt, artists often presented human figures in a combination of two perspectives, from the front for one eye, shoulder and the upper part of the body, and from the side, as profile, for face, pelvis and feet.[60] Orthodox icons, also, frequently mix different points of view, e.g. depicting buildings with a foreshortening technique, yet not using it for other parts of the icon.[61] In a similar way, modern painters may combine several perspectives.[62]

Music offers further analogies. The concertos of Johann Sebastian Bach or symphonies of Ludwig van Beethoven consist of 'voices' for many different instruments, and may include a choir. The different movements often involve changes of rhythm (3/4, or 4/4 time etc.) and/or key (from major to minor, or reverse), sometimes even within themselves. Likewise, there may be changes of *tempi*, and sound intensity (*piano, forte*, ...). There are repetitions, or reversions of motifs, contrasting melodies, and occasionally pauses, with no music at all – this kind of 'mixing' on various levels is not a sign of multiple composers, but of one mind creating a piece of art.

Architecture contributes another example of the importance and, at times, necessity of employing several perspectives. In order to construct a building, a ground plan does not suffice. It has to be supplemented by floor plans, roof design, scale drawings, basic specifications for the main components of the building, not to mention details of interior and exterior trims, and so on. Biblical techniques, like the parallelism characteristic of Hebrew poetry, or the combination of 'diptychs',[63] may likewise try to render a more adequate, complete vision of a complex reality, consisting of many aspects. The delicate blend of two units, or even more perspectives, conveys a rich message.

In conclusion, a reflection on the literary character of the Pentateuch, especially on the origin of the word "text", may also be helpful. The Latin root is *textus*, indicating a mesh, texture, netting. The web may be composed of several fabrics, threads going in various directions, and any number of colors.[64] Nevertheless, despite com-

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60 Brunner-Traut, *Frühformen*. She calls this kind of raffiguration "Aspektive" (5–13, and more often, with conspicuous examples on pp. 35–38).

61 Florenskij, *Perspektive*. The full title renders the main idea of his book: "the reverted perspective".

62 An example is Joan Mirò's picture "Personages et chien devant le soleil" from 1949 (in the Kunstmuseum in Basel), showing one figure in upright position, the other figure upside down, and the dog portrayed in yet another direction at the right-hand side, as if he would walk from the bottom to the sky.

63 For this feature in Genesis see especially Brodie, *Genesis*, 16–19, and more often. Many exegetes observe two narrations of creation (Gen 1:1–2:3; 2:4–25), two accounts of sin (Gen 3 and 4), etc.

64 In this, and some other cases above referring to mostly modern comparisons, one may be able to trace back the origins of the individual elements, as information about its sources might be

prising all these different elements, the text / web is *primarily a single entity*, and to take any part away from it would destroy its unity and possibly render it dysfunctional.

3.3 Time for a change

Pentateuchal research, in its prevailing form throughout the last century, resembles calculations where the result / sum cannot be correct. When one realizes this, one has to go back to the start, and check the individual operations, in order to discover the reasons for the false outcome. Similarly, we today have to *examine our methods and possibly correct them*.

There *will be opposition* to that, as the examples of C. Houtman's study (see note 45) or the Genesis commentaries (mentioned in note 42) show. The literary-historical approaches are still dominant, and scholars not willing to play the diachronic 'game' are likely to encounter many difficulties and setbacks, and to find their work ignored or sidelined. Frequently a preference for literary-historical investigation is also the condition for an assignment.

Pentateuchal studies have changed a lot in the past century. The secondary literature has multiplied to such an extent that nobody can read it completely. Several publications are so voluminous – one of the most recent ones, FAT 111, even exceeding 1200 pages – that it is hard to process all the material presented. In addition, the rate of publication of new books and articles has greatly increased. Pentateuchal research has become *like an 'elephant'* which can no longer be handled by a single person.

But this mainstream approach, which has, to a considerable extent, become unfruitful and irresponsible, must change. We might get a hint of this from the terminology used. 'Pentateuchal' research refers by its very name to the "five parts", indicating a "divisive" approach. Instead of that, we should be *serving the Torah*, which in the original means "instruction, teaching," and thus urges us to learn from it by focussing on its contents. A phrase in the Book of Jeremiah might be particularly interesting in this context. Jer 2:8 reads: "... those handling / grasping the Torah do not know me", and is a divine accusation which directs those who study the Pentateuch towards an inner relationship with God, as a precondition for interpreting it correctly.[65] This should be a foundation for our research and for our responsibility

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available today. This stands in contrast to biblical research where, normally, such access to possible roots is not at our disposal. Valuable exceptions are those cases, where biblical texts draw on earlier ones, like the Books of Chronicles on the Books of Genesis, Samuel and Kings, or the Decalogue in Deut 5 on the one in Exod 20; for the latter see Markl, *Dekalog*, 184f, 209, and more often – I am grateful to him for a critical reading of a first draft of this paper.

65 For Jer 2:8 and its significance see G. Fischer, "Relationship," 900. – התורה in Jer 2:8 refers, with a high probability, to "the Torah," and not simply to some other instruction; it is thus very relevant for all those dealing with the five books of the Pentateuch.

and duty as exegetes to comply with the force of the Torah's messages and to make them accessible to a broad audience.

The Torah still offers *promising fields* for future research. There is no need to sidestep into daring, unfounded speculations. The texts, as they are, contain many indications of responsible groups, their interests and aims, and thus, indirectly, hold clues to their theological, historical and sociological backgrounds. The combinations of different, sometimes even conflicting passages and positions invite complementary interpretations, and investigation into their mutual relationships and their functioning. Repetitions and closely connected wordings ask to be understood in their respective contexts. Studies of these and other similar areas will help to penetrate the dense fog that obscures research of the Torah and lead us to perceive it, in the end, as a huge, beautiful, brightly lit cathedral.[66]

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66 Cf. G. Fischer, "Wege aus dem Nebel? Ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchkrise," *BN* 99 (1999): 5–7, new in idem, *Anfänge*, 279–282, esp. 282. Other articles in the same book are also relevant to the topic, besides those mentioned in note 52 above, especially "Zur Genese der Genesis," "Exodus 3–4 'revisited'," and "Zur Lage der Pentateuchforschung". – I am grateful to Mrs. Felicity Stephens for having corrected the English of this article.

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