

INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

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What is the Pentateuch?

The name ‘Pentateuch’ means literally ‘the work comprising five scrolls’, from Greek *pente* and *teukhos*, which can mean ‘scroll’. It has been used since at least early Christian times for the first five books of the OT, Genesis to Deuteronomy. The Jewish name for these books was usually and still is ‘the law’: Hebrew *tôrâ*, Greek *nomos* or *nomothesia* (the latter is literally ‘legislation’), and it is this name which appears in the NT: e.g. Lk [24:11](#), ‘What is written in the *law*, the prophets and the psalms’, where we meet the threefold subdivision of the Hebrew canon that continues to be used, with the substitution of ‘writings’ for ‘psalms’ as the third section. Cf. also the Greek Prologue to Sirach (c.132 BCE).

But there is a much deeper way of asking, and answering, the question, ‘What is the Pentateuch?’, one which goes beyond merely defining its external limits to enquire into its nature. In other words, what sort of a thing is this section of the Bible? This question can only really be answered after a full examination of the text, and one justification for the kind of detailed critical analysis which has been popular in modern OT scholarship is that it enables us to give a well-judged (if complicated!) answer to that question. It is a question of considerable theological importance, as can be seen from an introductory look at a few answers that have been given to it, some of which will be examined more fully later on.

Four of the five books in the Pentateuch deal with the time of Moses, and one recent suggestion has been that we should think of the Pentateuch as *a biography of Moses* with an introduction, that is, Genesis. This attempts to answer the question in terms of the literary genre of the Pentateuch.

Its main weakness, however, is that it puts Moses as an individual too much in the centre of the picture, important as he undoubtedly is as the leader of his people Israel. We might do better to call the Pentateuch the *story of Israel in the time of Moses*, with an introduction (Genesis) which sets it in the light of universal creation and history.

To many, however, this would not be theological enough to do justice to the strongly religious element that pervades the story from beginning to end. Gerhard von Rad suggested that the Pentateuch (or to be more precise, the Hexateuch, that is the Pentateuch plus the sixth book of the Bible, Joshua—see below) was an amplified creed, more specifically *an amplified historical*

creed, as will be seen in more detail later. The implication is then that the Pentateuch is a product and an expression of faith—it is preceded as it were by an implicit ‘I believe in God who...’, it is a confessional document, as one might put it. Of course the adjective ‘historical’ before ‘creed’ raises some problems, for example whether the story which the Pentateuch as a whole tells is real history, a question whose answer has important theological implications which critics of von Rad were quick to point out. But there are also problems of a simpler kind which relate specifically to its accuracy as a description of Genesis 1–11. Von Rad was, for much of his scholarly career, fascinated by the historical focus of so much of Israel's faith, and he tended to overlook or play down its teaching about God the Creator. This may well have been due to an understandable wish on his part not to allow a foothold in the OT for crude Nazi ideas about racial supremacy grounded in the order of creation which were current at the time he wrote his earliest works on the Hexateuch. It is, nevertheless, necessary to emphasize that the beginning of Genesis is not about history in the ordinary sense of that word, or indeed in any sense, and the idea that the Pentateuch is a ‘historical’ creed is in danger of losing sight of the important theological statements about creation in those chapters.

A different way of representing the theological character of the Pentateuch is of course the traditional Jewish expression: *the law*. This is as characteristic of Judaism as von Rad's emphasis on faith is characteristic of his Lutheranism. If it seems at first sight to focus too much on the second half of the Pentateuch, where the laws are concentrated, and to give insufficient attention to the ‘story’ character of the earlier books, it is worth saying that this problem has not escaped the notice of Jewish commentators, and a very early one, Philo of Alexandria, in the first century CE, had what he thought was a perfectly satisfactory answer to it. It is that while written law is indeed mainly found in the later books of the Pentateuch, the personalities who appear in Genesis, for example, constitute a kind of ‘living law’, since through their example, and in some less obvious ways, it was God's intention to regulate human behaviour, just as he does later by the written law. Another way of making the description ‘law’ more widely applicable involves going back to the Hebrew term *tôrâ*. Although commonly translated ‘law’, its original meaning is something like ‘instruction’, and it could be used of other kinds of instruction as well as law in the strict sense. For example, the word *tôrâ* is found in Proverbs, where the context shows that the reference is to the kind of teaching contained there, not to the law as such. If we use *tôrâ* as a description for the Pentateuch in this more general sense of ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction’, it can easily embrace the non-legal parts of these books as well as the legal ones. On the other hand, while *tôrâ* understood in this wider way does preserve an important truth about the Pentateuch (especially if it is thought of as ‘*The Teaching*’, with a capital T), it is in danger of being too vague a description to identify its distinctive character within the OT.

Another theological definition, which has the merit of combining the advantages of the last two, is to call the Pentateuch a *covenant book*, a document which presents the terms of God's relationship to his people, in the form of his promises to them and the laws which he requires them to obey. The support of the apostle Paul can probably be claimed for this description, for when he speaks of ‘the old covenant’ in 2 Cor 3:14 it is very likely that he means specifically the Pentateuch. He is clearly thinking of a written document, because he refers to the ‘reading’ of the old covenant, and the substitution of the expression ‘whenever Moses is read’ in the following verse points firmly to the Pentateuch (for ‘Moses’ as shorthand for ‘the books of Moses’ see Lk 24:27). A somewhat earlier Jewish reference to the Pentateuch as ‘the book of the covenant’

occurs in 1 Macc [1:57](#) . Despite the antiquity and authority of this description, it scarcely does justice to the narrative element in the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis.

A description which combines the literary and the theological aspects has been proposed by David Clines: he regards the Pentateuch as *the story of the partial fulfilment of the promise to the patriarchs*. This has the great advantage of highlighting the important theological theme of promise in Genesis, and of showing how Genesis is linked to the later books theologically, and not just by the continuation of the story. But of course it says nothing about Gen [1–11](#) , and one may wonder whether it takes enough account of the vast amount of legislative material in Leviticus and Deuteronomy especially.

One might legitimately wonder whether there can be any brief answer to the question which is not open to some objection or another! If nothing else these quite different descriptions, and the comments on them, should have shown that the Pentateuch is a many-sided piece of literature and one which has features which appeal to a variety of religious and other points of view. The final description that I will mention is that the Pentateuch is an incomplete work, a *torso*, because the story which it tells only reaches its climax in the book of Joshua, with the Israelites' entry into the land of Canaan. For von Rad, as we saw, the real literary unit is the 'Hexateuch', 'the six books', and he had many predecessors who also took this view. It was especially popular among the source-critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who believed (as some still do) that the sources out of which the Pentateuch was composed were also used by the editor or editors who composed Joshua. It is less popular today, because Joshua is generally treated as part of the long historical work which extends to the end of 2 Kings, the Deuteronomistic History. In fact since Deuteronomy formed the introduction to that work and, even when taken alone, its connection with the first four books of the Bible can seem very weak, some scholars therefore speak of 'the Tetrateuch', that is the four books from Genesis to Numbers, as the primary literary unit at the beginning of the Bible. From this point of view the Pentateuch would be not so much a torso as a hybrid, the combination of one literary work with the first section of another. If nothing else this view serves to underline the differences in character, concerns, and origin of Deuteronomy, as compared with the earlier books. Yet those differences should not be exaggerated, and it can be argued that Deuteronomy belongs as much with the Tetrateuch as with the books that follow it, and when we come to look at the theology of the Pentateuch in more detail that will become clearer.

The Documentary Hypothesis

To make further progress with our question, 'What is the Pentateuch?', we need to dig deeper and consider more closely how it came to exist and what kinds of material it is made up of. A useful way into such study is to review, critically where necessary, the main directions which Pentateuchal scholarship has taken over the past century and a half (see also Clements [1997](#) : ch. 2).

The year 1862 was auspicious for the development of Pentateuchal study in England and Germany. It was in that year that Julius Wellhausen went, at the age of 18, as a new student to the German university of Göttingen to study theology. That same year a young British student, T.

K. Cheyne, was also in Göttingen, and he was to play an important part in bringing Wellhausen's later ideas to prominence in Britain—he became a professor at Oxford. The year 1862 was also when a series of books by John Colenso, a Cambridge mathematician, began to be published, and so brought critical OT scholarship very much into the public eye in Britain only shortly after the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origins of Species* and the collection called *Essays and Reviews*. And yet by 1862 the critical study of the Pentateuch was already some 150 years old.

There is no need to amplify this statement here—the details are in most Introductions to the OT—except to say that particularly since about 1800 strenuous efforts had been made, chiefly in Germany, to discover the process by which the Pentateuch had reached its present form, and that at the beginning of the 1860s the leading scholars held to what was known as the Supplementary Hypothesis (*Ergänzungshypothese*). According to this, the original core of the Pentateuch was a document known as the Book of Origins (*Das Buch der Ursprünge*), which was put together by a priest or Levite in about the time of King Solomon. A distinguishing mark of this book was that in Genesis and the beginning of Exodus (up to ch. 6) it avoided using the name YHWH for God, and employed other words, especially *'ēlōhîm*, which means ‘God’, instead. This core, it was held, was expanded in the eighth century BCE, the time of the first great classical prophets, by the addition of stories and other matter in which the name YHWH was freely used from the very beginning. Later still, in the time of Jeremiah (7th cent.), the work was further supplemented by the addition of the major part of Deuteronomy and shorter sections with a similar spirit elsewhere, and so the Pentateuch reached its present form, before the Babylonian Exile. Wellhausen's teacher at Göttingen, Heinrich Ewald, had played an important part in the development of this theory and still held to it in its essential points in 1862, though not with the rigidity of some of its other adherents.

But changes were in the air. An important challenge to this theory had already been made by the publication in 1853 of a book by Hermann Hupfeld. Its main theses were: (1) that the so-called ‘original core’ contained some passages which were of later origin than the rest and represented a first stage of expansion of the core; and (2) that both these later passages and the passages which the Supplementary Hypothesis itself had distinguished from the core were not fragments picked up from all over the place but had been parts of large pre-existing narrative compositions which the compilers of the Pentateuch had drawn on as sources.

Hupfeld thus did two things. He refined the analysis of the Pentateuch into its component parts, which were now seen to be not three but four in number, and he replaced the idea of the expansion of an original core with a truly documentary theory of Pentateuchal origins. His four originally independent source-documents correspond closely in extent to those of later theories, three parallel narrative sources and the law-code of Deuteronomy (with some other passages related to it). His oldest narrative corresponds closely to what is now called the Priestly Work (P), the remainder of the Book of Origins is the later Elohist (E), and the source which uses the name YHWH is the Yahwist (J). Hupfeld did not depart from the dominant view at the time about the relative ages of the materials in these sources, and his position can be represented in terms of the modern symbols for them as P-E-J-D (for a fuller account of the sources as later understood see sections c.7 and G).

Hupfeld's new ideas did not succeed in displacing the dominant Supplementary Hypothesis, at any rate not immediately. But some time before 1860 Ewald had recognized the existence of a second Elohist and the character of J and E as continuous sources—which places him very close to Hupfeld. A. Knobel, though less well-known, had reached similar conclusions independently of Hupfeld about the same time, and over a larger range of texts. His work is ignored in most modern accounts of the history of Pentateuchal criticism (though not by Wellhausen) and deserves greater recognition. These scholars brought the *analysis* of the Pentateuch to a state which received only relatively minor modification at the hands of those such as Wellhausen, whose work was to become the classical account of Pentateuchal origins and indeed remained so until very recently. Hupfeld's contribution at least was fully recognized: Wellhausen, for example, wrote in his own work on the composition of the Hexateuch: 'I make Hupfeld in every respect my starting-point.' Where he and subsequent scholarship departed from Hupfeld was in the chronological *order* in which the sources were to be placed.

Two changes were in fact made. One, the placing of the YHWH-source—what we now call J—before the second Elohim-source—what we now call E—did not make a fundamental difference to the time at which either source was thought to have been written, and we shall not spend long on it. Once Hupfeld had made the separation between E and P it was really inevitable, as it was the supposed antiquity of the P texts which had led to the idea that the Book of Origins was the earliest source. When E was detached from this, it could easily be seen that in certain respects it had a more sophisticated approach to religion than the rather primitive J, and so it was natural to date it a little later.

The second change in order was much more decisive, in fact it was quite revolutionary. According to both the Supplementary Hypothesis and Hupfeld's theory, the oldest part of the Pentateuch was a Book of Origins that began with the account of creation in Gen 1 and included most of the priestly laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Doubts about the antiquity of these texts had already been expressed in the 1830s, but detailed critical arguments only began to appear in the early 1860s. One can see this in the work of the Dutch scholar Abraham Kuenen (1828–91), whose *Introduction to the OT* began to be published in 1861. Kuenen, who accepted Hupfeld's division of the Book of Origins into earlier and later layers, also held that the priestly laws in the supposedly earlier layer were not in fact all ancient but had developed over a long period of time, some of them being later in date than Deuteronomy. An even more radical conclusion had been reached by a German schoolteacher, Karl Heinrich Graf, who on 7 October 1862 wrote to his former OT professor, one Eduard Reuss, 'I am completely convinced of the fact that the whole middle part of the Pentateuch [apparently Exodus 25 to the end of Numbers] is post-exilic in origin,' i.e. it all belongs to the final, not the first, stage of the growth of the Pentateuch, after the writing of Deuteronomy. Wellhausen himself, looking back on his early student days, also in the early 1860s, wrote that he had been puzzled at the lack of reference to the allegedly very old priestly laws in the early historical books such as Samuel and Kings and in the prophets, though he had no idea at the time why this was. It was not until 1865 that these very new ideas came out into the open, when Graf published his views in book form. But while he maintained that all the legal parts of the Book of Origins were post-exilic in origin, he still held to the traditional early date for its narratives. In response to the appearance of Graf's book Kuenen now argued that the Book of Origins could not be divided up in this way, because the narratives were intimately related to the laws; so, if (as Graf had so powerfully demonstrated) the

laws were late in origin, the narratives associated with them in the ‘earlier’ part of the Book of Origins must be late too. Graf’s letter to Kuenen accepting the validity of this point survives—it is dated 12 Nov. 1866—and subsequently Graf put this change of mind into print in an article in which he responded to various criticisms of his book, though the article only came out in 1869 after Graf’s death. In this way the order (as represented by the modern symbols) P-E-J-D of Hupfeld was transformed into the J-E-D-P that became standard.

It is clear that Abraham Kuenen played a very important part in the development of this revised theory, although it (like Knobel’s contribution) is often overlooked. What is interesting is that Kuenen gave a great deal of the credit for the contribution which he himself was able to make to John Colenso’s series of volumes entitled *The Pentateuch and The Book of Joshua Critically Examined*. These books were one reason why an attempt was made to depose Colenso from the see of Natal, which he held, an attempt which was only the beginning of a long wrangle in the Anglican Church in South Africa. Much of what Colenso wrote merely echoed what was already being done in Germany, but in the first volume of the study he presented what seemed to him to be a devastating attack on the genuineness of the narratives of the Book of Origins and particularly the large numbers which they give for the participants in the Exodus (e.g. Ex 12:37), the very thing which had seemed to others a guarantee of the accuracy and antiquity of the source; on the contrary, argued Colenso, it was quite impossible that the numbers could represent real historical facts: they must be fictional. This argument so impressed Kuenen that he found no difficulty at all in regarding those narratives, as well as the priestly laws which Graf had examined, as a late and artificial composition.

It is evident from all this that the classical documentary theory of Pentateuchal origins owes little or nothing, as far as its origin is concerned, to Wellhausen: this was mainly the work of Hupfeld, Graf, and Kuenen, themselves of course building on much earlier work. To call it ‘the Wellhausen theory’, as is often done, is a misnomer, though a revealing one. What the new theory still needed, and what Wellhausen was to provide, was a presentation of it which would convince the many scholars who still held either to the Supplementary Hypothesis or to Hupfeld’s version of the documentary theory. The work in which Wellhausen did this so successfully was originally called *History of Israel. Volume I (Geschichte Israels I)*—when no further volumes appeared this was changed to *Prolegomena to the History of Israel (Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels)*—and it was published in 1878. It is still worth reading and its thorough attention to detail, its treatment of evidence from all parts of the OT, and the force and vigour of its arguments still make a strong impression on the reader.

Two criticisms are often made of it. The first is that it embodies a Hegelian view of history which has been imposed upon the data of the OT (so e.g. W. F. Albright and R. K. Harrison). This is not justified as a criticism of Wellhausen’s method of working, whatever similarities may be traced between some of his conclusions and those of Hegel-inspired history-writing. It is a complicated issue but essentially it seems that what Wellhausen did was to approach the Pentateuch as a secular ancient historian would approach his primary sources in an effort to discover their character and closeness to the events described: his presuppositions and methods are those of a historian rather than those of a philosopher, and not significantly different from those with which more recent historians have worked. Where he does refer to Hegel once it seems to be an implied criticism. The other criticism is that Wellhausen presented his theory in

isolation from knowledge of the ancient Near East, which makes it of no more than antiquarian interest: so Harrison again and especially K. A. Kitchen. Wellhausen did not of course have the benefit of knowing many of the archaeological discoveries of subsequent years, and what he did know he did not regard as of primary importance for interpreting the OT (unlike Gunkel: see below). But the main structure of his source-critical arguments has seemed to most subsequent scholars to be unaffected by these discoveries, rightly in my opinion. Where they have departed from them it has been because they sensed weaknesses in his treatment of the OT evidence, and not because of fresh evidence from the ancient Near East.

This brief historical introduction to the origins of the so-called Graf–Wellhausen theory about the sources of the Pentateuch should have removed some misconceptions about it, and in particular it has shown that far from being the product of one man's mind it was arrived at through a process of research and discussion which lasted over several decades and involved a number of different scholars in several countries. But it also begins to open up a topic of quite central importance at the present time when some very searching questions are once again being asked about the validity of what, for brevity, we may continue to call Wellhausen's theory.

The Logic of Source-Criticism

It is in fact possible to distinguish, logically at least and to some extent chronologically as well, four stages in the argument which led to the formulation of Wellhausen's account of the origins of the Pentateuch, and if we define them appropriately we shall find that they are quite generally applicable to all attempts to analyse the Pentateuch into its constituent parts, and indeed to all attempts at discovering what sources were used in biblical and other writings.

The first step was the acceptance that an enquiry into the sources of the Pentateuch was permissible at all, i.e. that it was *not ruled out by the tradition* which regarded Moses as the author of the whole Pentateuch. This tradition goes back to the NT and contemporary writings, though it is probably not implied by anything in the OT text itself. Clearly if this tradition is not open to question, there is little room for Pentateuchal criticism of any kind: one could only enquire into the sources that Moses may have used for the writing of Genesis, which is exactly what one early work of criticism, published in 1753, purported to uncover (Jean Astruc's *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse*). The reasons for questioning the tradition of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch are broadly of two kinds: (1) the relatively late date of the first appearance of this tradition (not at any rate before the Babylonian exile); (2) various data in the Pentateuch itself which seem to be inconsistent with it: an obvious one is the account of Moses' death (Deut 34).

The second step was the *analysis* of the text, the demonstration of its lack of unity in detail. In the eighteenth century, well before the formulation of the Wellhausen theory, theories had been developed to account for what seemed to be signs of composite authorship, or the use of sources. Some passages, such as the Flood Story, appeared to arise from the combination of two originally separate accounts of the same event. In other cases it seemed unlikely or even impossible that two separate passages could have belonged to the same continuous account, the

two creation stories for example. In the history of Pentateuchal criticism the distinction between this, analytical, stage of the enterprise and the next stage, synthesis or the attribution of passages or parts of passages to a particular source or layer of the Pentateuch, has not always been carefully observed. Indeed a clear distinction is perhaps not to be found before the handbook of Wolfgang Richter (*Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft*, 1971). But the two operations can and should be regarded as separate. To put it in a quite general formula: if ABCD represents a section of the Pentateuch, the assertion that A is of separate origin from B and that C is of separate origin from D is one thing; but the question of whether A belongs to the same source as C or D or neither, for example, is another question, and different answers to it will produce different theories about the larger sources of the Pentateuch.

So on what basis is it argued that the Pentateuch is of composite origin? Four main kinds of *criteria* have commonly been used:

1. Repeated accounts of the same action or story.
2. The occurrence of statements (or commands) that are incompatible or inconsistent with each other.
3. Vocabulary and style—the use of different words for the same thing, including e.g. different names for God; and variations of style.
4. The appearance of different viewpoints on matters of religion in particular, but also on other matters.

Two observations on these criteria should be made at this stage: their use will be clarified by an example later on.

- 1) The argument for disunity is strongest when several of these criteria occur together—so for example in the analysis of Gen 1–3 .
- 2) In recent years it has been generally realized that criteria 3 and 4 are of far less value for analysis, at least when they occur alone, than 1 and 2. Variations in relation to 3 and 4 may perfectly well occur within a single account (so Noth 1972 and Westermann 1984). In fact it is much more at the next, constructive, stage that such factors enter in, by suggesting which of the various fragments into which the Pentateuch has been analysed have a common origin, i.e. belong to the same source or layer.

The third step is the development of hypotheses about *the major constituent parts* of the Pentateuch and their interrelation. Various *models* are possible, of which the idea that a number of independent source-documents have been combined is only the best-known because it is the pattern exemplified by the classical Documentary Hypothesis of Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen. Other ‘models’ are possible, however, and indeed have been tried, such as that the Pentateuch is simply a conglomeration of small units put together by an editor (the Fragmentary Hypothesis) or that an original core was amplified by the addition of fresh material, either material that had previously existed independently as small units or new material that was composed for the first time for the purpose of modifying the existing core (a Supplementary Hypothesis such as that which was dominant in the middle of the 19th cent.). It is also possible, and in fact common today, to have a combined theory which exhibits features of all three models.

With all of these models (except the Fragmentary theory) there is the problem of *attribution*, deciding what material belongs to the same source or stage of supplementation. Sometimes this can be determined by what we may call narrative continuity: i.e. an episode in the story presupposes that an earlier part of the story has been told in a particular way. For example, Gen 9:6, 'Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind,' clearly presupposes the account of the creation of human beings in Gen 1:26-7 (note the reference to 'in his own image'), rather than that in Gen 2:7, and so they presumably belong to the same source or layer. Fortunately the character of the Pentateuch is such that this kind of argument can quite often be used. Where it cannot, one must have recourse to such factors as agreement over criteria such as 3 and 4 at c.2 above to argue that sections of the Pentateuch have a common source.

The fourth step is that of arranging the sources (or supplements) in *chronological order* and dating them. It is in this area that Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen made a real innovation. In relation to c. 1, 2, and 3 they did little more than refine the results of their predecessors, especially Hupfeld: but on this point they made a radical change from him, in arguing that the Book of Origins/First Elohist (P) was the latest, not the earliest of the four sources, and in dating it to the post-exilic period. How are such conclusions reached, in general terms? Along two main lines, which must still be taken into consideration in any discussion of the matter:

- 1) The *relative age* of the sources can be considered in various ways: Does one source or layer take for granted the prior existence of another one? Is one source obviously more primitive in its way of presenting events, or its legal requirements, than another? Numerous examples of both these kinds of arguments can be found in Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (1885). They can be cogent, but it must be pointed out that the argument from primitiveness to antiquity and from sophistication to lateness is a dangerous one, because it too quickly assumes that the religion of Israel developed in a single line with no setbacks or decline throughout its history or divergent patterns of religion coexisting at the same time. In practice the classical theory has relied much more heavily on arguments of a second kind.
- 2) The actual or *absolute dates* of the sources can be fixed by reference to evidence outside the Pentateuch. Such arguments can themselves be subdivided according to whether reference is being made to fixed points in the events of Israel's political and religious history (such as the Babylonian exile) as we know them from the historical books of the OT, or to doctrines (such as the demand for the centralization of worship in Jerusalem) whose first formulation we can date by reference to these same historical books and the writings of the prophets, for example. Even here it is fair to say that the strength of the arguments used varies, and where a link can be established with something like the Exile, it can still be difficult to deduce a very precise date for the source in question. But for all that, it has seemed possible to define in broad terms the time when the various source-documents were put into their definitive form. I emphasize that last phrase because when scholars assign a date to a source they are not saying that this is when it was suddenly created out of nothing. They recognize that much of the material in the sources is older than the sources themselves, it comes from earlier tradition. What they are looking for

when they date a source is the latest element within it, because that will show when it reached its definitive form.

An Example of a Source-Critical Argument: The Analysis of the Flood Story (Gen 6–9) into its Sources

Now we shall move back from theory to practice, and look at some of the detailed claims made by the classical theory associated with Wellhausen and the arguments that were used to support them. Historically, Pentateuchal source-criticism seems to have begun with the observation that Genesis opens with not one but two different *accounts of creation* (so already H. B. Witter in 1711): 1:1–2:3 (or 2:4a) and 2:4 (or 2:4b–25). The second repeats a number of events already described in the first, but not in exactly the same order, and with some notable differences in presentation. The difference that was to be put to most productive use in subsequent scholarship was, of course, the difference over the divine names: the fact that whereas the first account refers to God only by the word ‘God’ (‘*’ēlōhîm*’); the second used the compound phrase ‘the Lord God’ = YHWH ‘*’ēlōhîm*’, combining with the word ‘God’ the proper name by which Israel knew her God, YHWH.

According to the word used to refer to God, the second account of creation was referred to as ‘Yahwistic’ and given the symbol J. J was used (after the German form, *jahwistisch*) because the abbreviations were worked out in Germany and the ‘y’ sound is represented by ‘j’ in German. The first account could be and was for a time called Elohist (E), although this description of it was given up after Hupfeld's discovery that there were two major source-documents which avoided the name YHWH in Genesis. This source is known today as the Priestly Code, or Priestly Work (abbreviated as P), because of the prominent place given to priesthood and ritual in its later parts, particularly in the books from Exodus to Numbers. *The early history of mankind*, prior to the Flood, is also described twice, once in the form of a series of stories (chs. 3–4, 6:1–4), and once in the form of a genealogy (ch. 5). The first of these connects directly with ch. 3, while the second has various similarities to ch. 1, so they were attributed to J and P respectively.

In *the Flood story* (6:5–9:17) things are not so tidy. Does it belong to J or P? Uses of the name YHWH do occur, but only in restricted parts of the story (6:5–8; 7:1–5, 16; 8:20–2): elsewhere the word ‘God’ (‘*’ēlōhîm*’) is employed. Thus the story is hardly typical of P, which avoids YHWH, but yet it is not typical of J either, which uses YHWH much more consistently. What is one to make of this situation? Should one attribute the Flood story to a third source occupying an intermediate position with regard to the divine names between P and J? Or has either J or P changed its practice at this point?

Careful attention to the details of the story suggests that neither of these solutions is correct. We may note that there are a surprising number of repetitions or overlaps of details in it. Thus (1) vv. 5–7 describe how YHWH saw the evil which men did on the earth and declared that he would therefore destroy the human race. When, after three verses referring specifically to Noah, we come to vv. 11–13 we find another reference, this time to God seeing the corruption of ‘all flesh’ and saying that he will therefore destroy it. (2) The paragraph then continues with instructions to

Noah about how the ark is to be built (vv. 14–16), how Noah and his family are to enter it (vv. 17–18) and how he is to take a pair of every kind of living creature with him (vv. 19–21). And this, we are told, is exactly what Noah did, ‘he did all that God commanded him’ (v. 22). It therefore comes as something of a surprise when, in 7:1–4, we find YHWH telling Noah again to enter the ark with his family and the animals, and it again being said (v. 5) that Noah did as he was told. (3) By the time we get to the actual entry into the ark we are more prepared for repetitions, and we are not disappointed: 7:7–9 make explicit that Noah, his family, and the animals entered the ark, apparently with plenty of time to spare, as it was another 7 days before the flood started (v. 10). Then the rain began (vv. 11–12), and then we are told again that Noah, his family, and the animals all went into the ark, cutting it a bit fine this time we may suppose! It is a strange way to tell a story, and there are further curiosities to follow which we must forgo because of shortage of space, as we must do also with some details of the explanation which seems to be required to do justice to them.

But let us consider again the first two cases of repetition, in a slightly different way. We have in the paragraph 6:11–22 a speech of God to Noah with introduction and conclusion, a passage which makes perfectly coherent sense. But before it are two verses which parallel vv. 11–13, and after it are five verses which parallel vv. 17–22. And the striking thing is that whereas 6:11–22 use the word God (vv. 11, 12, 13, 22), the parallel passages placed before and after it use YHWH (6:5, 6, 7; 7:1, 5). That is, we seem to have here two versions of a part of the Flood story, one of them, like the creation account in Gen 2, using the name YHWH, the other, like the creation account in Gen 1, avoiding it and using *’ēlōhîm* instead. But instead of being placed one after the other, as with the creation accounts, the two versions of the Flood story have been interwoven, with sections from one alternating with sections of the other. This interpretation of the situation is strengthened by two additional factors:

- 1) Tensions or contradictions within the story which seem likely to be due to the combination of two different versions of it; e.g. the number of pairs of animals taken into the ark (one pair according to 6:19–20; seven pairs of clean animals, i.e. those that could be eaten, and of birds, but only one pair of the unclean animals according to 7:2–3).
- 2) The fact that when the whole story is analysed, one is left with two substantially complete accounts of the Flood, one showing affinities (including the name YHWH) with the second creation account and the other showing affinities with the first.

One or two details remain unclear but the majority of scholars are agreed on something very like the following analysis: (a) 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 7–10, 12, 16b–17, 22–3; 8:2b–3a, 6–12, 13b, 20–2 (= J); (b) 6:9–22; 7:6, 11, 13–16a, 18–21, 24; 8:1–2a, 3b–5, 13a, 14–19; 9:1–17 (= P). A more detailed presentation of the argument can be found in the commentaries on Genesis by S. R. Driver (1904: 85–6) and J. Skinner (1910: 147–50); cf. Habel (1971: 14–15).

This brief but important example will give an idea of how the analysis of the Pentateuch proceeds in the classical documentary hypothesis. It is work of this kind which lies behind the lists of passages belonging to J, E, D, and P in the standard introductions to the OT. There are, it should be said, some passages where scholars have not been unanimous about the recognition of

the sources, and here caution is necessary. The following sketch will give a general idea of what has been thought to belong to each of the four sources:

Genesis: Chs. 1–11 are formed from J (2:4b–4:26; 6:1–4 ; part of the Flood Story (see above); 9:18–27 ; parts of 10; 11:1–9) and P (1:1–2:4a ; most of 5; the rest of the Flood Story; 9:28–9 ; the rest of 10; most of 11:10–32); most of chs. 12–50 come from J (including 12–13; 18; most of 19 and 24), E (including most of 20–2 and 40–2), and P (17; 23; 28:1–9; 35:9–13 ; and most of the genealogies).

Exodus: Chs. 1–24 are again made up of extracts from J, E, and P. The only passages of any length which are clearly from E are 1:15–21 and 3:9–15 . P is the source of 6:2–7:13; 12:1–20, 40–51 , and various shorter passages. Traditionally the Decalogue (20:1–17) and the Book of the Covenant (20:22–23:33) were ascribed to E, but it is now widely doubted if they appeared in any of the main sources. Chs. 32–4 are usually thought to have been based on J and E (32 E; 34 J; 33 parts from both), but they may be all J except for some late editorial additions. Chs. 25–31 and 35–40 are all from P.

Leviticus: The whole book, together with Num 1:1–10:28 , is from P, though it is clear that already existing collections of laws have been incorporated in Lev 1–7 and Lev 17–26 (the latter section being known as the Holiness Code = H).

Numbers: The rest of the book, from 10:29 , is again a mixture of J, E, and P. E is most clearly present in the story of Balaam (ch. 23 and some verses in 22). P provided the sections of chs. 16–18 that deal with the revolt of Korah and the vindication of the Aaronite priesthood, most of 25:6–36:13 , and some other passages; again older documents (including the wilderness itinerary in ch. 33) have been worked in.

Deuteronomy: from the D source, with the exception of a few passages, mostly at the end. But an original core in 4:45–29:1 from pre-exilic times can be distinguished from a framework placed around it in the Babylonian Exile (so esp. chs. 4 and 29–30).

Fuller details can be found, (1) in commentaries, among which special mention should be made of the ‘Polychrome Bible’, published from 1893 onwards, in which the sections drawn from the various sources were marked in different colours, a custom which has been widely followed by theological students in their own copies of the Bible as an *aidemémoire* (The proper title of the series was The Sacred Books of the OT, gen. ed. P. Haupt. A less colourful way of achieving the same end is by using different typefaces, as in von Rad's commentary on Genesis and Noth's on Exodus in the Old Testament Library series, where the P sections are printed in italics and the rest in ordinary type); and (2) in a synopsis of the Pentateuch, like those which are produced to show the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels, though they are hard to come by in English (but see Carpenter and Harford-Battersby (1900), ii; Campbell and O'Brien (1993) gives the texts of the sources separately, but not in parallel columns).

A Second Example: The Dating of the Priestly Source (P)

The second example of source criticism to be given here concerns the dating of the sources (step c.4), and in particular *the claim that P is the latest* of the four. Wellhausen used two kinds of argument to establish this view. First he noted the almost unbroken silence of the older historical books, Samuel and Kings, with regard to the distinctive institutions of the cult prescribed by P (the tabernacle, detailed laws about sacrifice, the Day of Atonement, the limitation of full priesthood to the descendants of Aaron, and the development of tithing as a means of support for the priests). In view of the fact that these books have plenty to say about ritual, this must imply that these institutions were not yet known in the pre-exilic period. It follows that P could not yet have been written. The specific reference to ‘the older historical books’ is deliberate, so as to exclude the books of Chronicles. The force of this argument could only be felt when a true appreciation of the late date and largely fictional character of Chronicles had been gained, and the dating of P is closely connected with the study of Chronicles. Graf’s epoch-making essay of 1865 on the Pentateuch was published along with a study of the books of Chronicles, while Wellhausen devoted more than 50 pages of the *Prolegomena* to them. Chronicles does relate the existence of institutions characteristic of P in the pre-exilic period, and it was only when it had been shown that these elements of the Chronicler’s account were fictional that a clear view of the nature of pre-exilic religion could be obtained, and so the necessity of a late date for P established.

The second kind of argument was based on the relationship of the laws and narratives of P to the laws in Deuteronomy and the final chapters of Ezekiel. The origin of Deuteronomy in the eighth or seventh century BCE was generally regarded in the mid-nineteenth century as having been established beyond doubt by the critical arguments of W. M. L. de Wette and others, and Ezekiel was of course a prophet of the early sixth century. In a number of ways it was argued that the Priestly texts must be later than those in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. This is not just a simple evolutionary argument, saying that the practices referred to by P must by their very character lie at the end of a long process of development. The argument is rather that in some cases Deuteronomy and Ezekiel make no reference to features of P which one might have expected them to mention if it were indeed a document of pre-exilic origin; while elsewhere what Deuteronomy and Ezekiel prescribe would make no sense if P already existed.

As an example we will look at Wellhausen’s argument in the case of admission to the priesthood (1885: 121–51). The crucial points in the argument are set out in the first few pages of the chapter (pp. 121–7), but Wellhausen believed that they received some confirmation from the more thorough account of the history of the priesthood which follows. He begins by summarizing the regulations about priesthood in the P sections of Exodus–Numbers. He points out that there are two important distinctions made in them: the first between the Levites and the twelve secular tribes, which is vividly reflected in the arrangement of the camp in Num 2; and the second between the Levites and the sons, or descendants, of Aaron, which receives, to quote Wellhausen, ‘incomparably greater emphasis’. He continues: ‘Aaron and his sons alone are priests, qualified for sacrificing and burning incense; the Levites are *hieroduli* [temple servants], bestowed on the Aaronidae for the discharge of the inferior services.’ The unique privilege of the descendants of Aaron is underlined in the story of the Korahite rebellion in Num 16–18. The setting apart of the two priestly groups is the result of two separate acts of a quite different

character. First Aaron is chosen by YHWH to be a priest (Ex 28:1–5), and then later the Levites are given their role, by being offered at YHWH's bidding by the people as a substitute for their firstborn who, according to the law, belonged to YHWH (Num 3:40–4:49; cf. also ch. 18).

This picture of the demarcation of the Aaronide and Levite groups is located by P at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses—but how ancient is it really? Wellhausen believed that the answer was to be found in Ezek 44:6–16 , a passage from the early years of the Babylonian exile (40:1 refers to the year 573), which both refers to pre-exilic practices on admission to the priesthood and prescribes what practices shall be followed in this matter in the future. According to this account, in the pre-exilic temple in Jerusalem (‘my sanctuary’) the menial tasks had been performed by foreigners (44:8), a practice of which Ezekiel very strongly disapproved. And in the future, he says, these tasks are to be performed by Levites (vv. 9–14). Not however in accordance with a role assigned to them by the people in ancient times—of this explanation (the one given by P) Ezekiel says not a word—but as a punishment for their sins in the pre-exilic period. ‘They shall bear their punishment’, it says in vv. 10 and 12 (cf. v. 13*b*). This only makes sense as a degradation from a previously higher position, which was no doubt that of full priesthood, which the Levites had enjoyed previously to this (cf. v. 13*a*). That Levites were full priests in pre-exilic times is implied also by Deuteronomy (cf. ch. 18). To what is their punishment due? It is because they ‘went astray from me after their idols when Israel went astray’ (v. 10—cf. v. 12). This evidently refers to service at the high places or *bāmôt* outside Jerusalem: because those who had been priests at the Jerusalem temple, ‘my sanctuary’ (vv. 15–16), are explicitly excluded from blame and are to retain an exclusive right to full priesthood in the future: they are called ‘the sons of Zadok’ after Zadok the priest under David and Solomon. The antithesis between the Jerusalem temple, the one place of legitimate worship, and all other shrines had of course been at the heart of the reform programme of King Josiah (640–609) half a century earlier which, as described in 2 Kings 23 , was inspired by the somewhat earlier prescriptions of Deuteronomy (cf. esp. Deut 12:1–14). Ezek 44 is fully at one with Josiah and the Deuteronomists on this point though he differs from Deuteronomy on the extent of the priesthood for the future. He agrees with P that most Levites are to have an inferior role, but he gives a completely different reason for it and he has a different view about what they were originally meant to do.

The relationship between what Ezekiel says and the regulations of P is most forcibly expressed in two quotations, one from Wellhausen himself and the other from Kuenen. First Wellhausen: What he [Ezekiel] regards as the original right of the Levites, the performance of priestly services, is treated in the latter document [P] as an unfounded and highly wicked pretension which once in the olden times brought destruction upon Korah and his company [Wellhausen is referring to the (P) story of the rebellion of Korah in Num 16–17]; what he [Ezekiel] considers to be a subsequent withdrawal of their right, as a degradation in consequence of a fault, the other [P] holds to have been their hereditary and natural destination. The distinction between priest and Levite which Ezekiel introduces and justifies as an innovation, according to the Priestly Code has always existed; what in the former appears as a beginning, in the latter has been in force ever since Moses—an original datum, not a thing that has become or been made. That the prophet [Ezekiel] should know nothing about a priestly law with whose tendencies he is in thorough sympathy admits of only one explanation—that it did not then exist. (1885: 124)

The quotation from Kuenen uses an analogy which is particularly comprehensible in Britain: ‘If by reason of their birth it was already impossible for the Levites to become priests [as P lays down], then it would be more than strange to deprive them of the priesthood on account of their faults—much as if one were to threaten the commons with the punishment of being disqualified from sitting or voting in the House of Lords’ (ibid.). This was written before the introduction of life peerages! One may put the essential argument as follows: if P had been in existence in 573, Ezekiel surely would have developed his argument in a different way.

For these reasons, then, Wellhausen concluded that the regulations about the priesthood, which are absolutely central to P, could not have originated before Ezekiel, but only afterwards. Arguments of similar kinds were brought forward to justify a late date for other aspects of the ritual system prescribed by P. But how much later than Ezekiel was P to be dated? Quite a lot later, according to Wellhausen (ibid. 404–10). He took as his point of departure the statement in Ezra 7:14 that when Ezra came from Babylon to Jerusalem in 458 BCE he had the law of God in his hand. This Wellhausen understood to be a new law book, which consisted of the completed Pentateuch, incorporating not only the older sources J, E, and D but the Priestly Code, which had quite recently been compiled. He seems to have believed that the completed Pentateuch (and the new Priestly Code) must owe its authority to some act of authorization, and only Ezra's mission seemed to be available to meet this requirement. According to Wellhausen, Neh 8–10 describes Ezra's publication and the people's acceptance of the new (or rather partly new) law code, and these events are dated not earlier than 444 BCE (compare Neh 1:1 with 8:2). This, Wellhausen held, gave the approximate date when the Priestly Code was written up and combined with the older Pentateuchal sources. A different kind of argument which lends some support to this position was used by Kuenen: early post-exilic literature, such as the books of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, shows no awareness of the P legislation. The book of Malachi, probably from the early fifth century BCE, is especially significant, as it says quite a lot about priests, but calls them Levites, not sons of Aaron. By contrast the Chronicler, writing some time after 400 BCE is clearly familiar with P's regulations. So a date within the fifth century becomes likely on this argument too.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century a majority of scholars gradually came to accept the conclusions of the Newer Documentary Hypothesis, as the viewpoint propounded by Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen came to be known. In essence they held that the Pentateuch had been composed from four documents or sources, whose dates and places of origin were as follows:

- J - 9th Cent., Judah
- E - 8th Cent., Northern Kingdom of Israel
- D - 7th Cent., Judah
- P - 5th Cent., Babylon

There have, however, from the beginning been those who repudiated this position vociferously. In Britain and the United States today the best-known opponents of the theory are among conservative evangelical Christians. In an earlier generation scholars such as J. Orr and A. H. Finn, later E. J. Young and G. C. Aalders, and most recently K. A. Kitchen and R. K. Harrison, sought to minimize the force of such arguments as those which we have been considering. But opposition came from other quarters too. In the Roman Catholic church the theory became a

matter of controversy in the first decade of the twentieth century and the Pontifical Biblical Commission decreed in 1906 that the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was not a subject that was open to discussion. This ban lasted until the 1940s. Some Jewish scholars too have been resolutely opposed to the documentary theory, e.g. U. Cassuto and M. H. Segal of Jerusalem, but others have disagreed only at one particular point, the rejection of the idea that P is the latest of the documents (see below). Among Protestant Christian scholars there has been a further group consisting mainly of Scandinavian scholars, who, for a distinctive reason, have rejected many of the conclusions of the documentary theory. The leader of this group was I. Engnell of Uppsala, who wrote mainly in Swedish. Engnell proposed to replace the dominant theories by the use of what he called 'the tradition-historical method', which as far as the Pentateuch was concerned meant that its origin lay not in the combination of written sources for the most part but in developments that took place while the stories etc. were being transmitted orally, by word of mouth, a process which, according to Engnell, only ended at the time of the Babylonian exile or even later. The enthusiasm which Engnell's approach generated seems now to have waned, and it belongs for the most part to the history of Pentateuchal study rather than to its present concerns.

There have also been several modifications proposed to the classical theory. Some scholars have taken up a suspicion already expressed by Wellhausen himself that the J material in Gen 1–11 is not an original unity, and have gone on to argue that the whole of J is the result of the combination of two originally separate sources or the enlargement of the original J by additions. This is only a minority view, but it has obtained wide publicity through its presentation in two *Introductions* that were at one time popular, those of Otto Eissfeldt and Georg Fohrer. Eissfeldt called the extra source L ('Lay Source', because of the absence of cultic material) and Fohrer called it N ('Nomadic Source', because it seemed opposed to settled life), but both attribute much the same passages to it: e.g. in Gen 1–11 Fohrer ascribed a few verses in chs 2–3 to N, as well as 4:17–24 and 11:1–9, all it is said expressing the frustration of man's attempts to develop. Similar subdivisions have been proposed of the other sources, with more justification in the cases of D and P, but hardly so in the case of E.

In fact it has been repeatedly suspected that E is not a true source at all, that is that the passages attributed to it do not belong to a single continuous account of Israel's early history (partial rejection of step c.3 in the systematic presentation). Two German scholars, P. Volz and W. Rudolph, pressed the case for this view between the First and Second World Wars, and Noth was influenced by it to some extent, although he never gave up a belief in E altogether. The problem was that what were supposed to be the remnants of E seemed to show neither the completeness nor the theological unity that appears in J. However, important defences of the existence of E as an independent source have been put forward (Brueggemann and Wolff 1975: 67–82; Jenks 1977).

A further kind of modification, or rather extension, of the theory has been the claim that the Pentateuchal sources extend into the following books of the OT, the historical books. This is quite widely held for Joshua, but it was also maintained by some scholars for Judges, Samuel, and even parts of Kings (so Eissfeldt, C. A. Simpson). There are certainly some signs of duplicate or parallel narratives in these books, especially in 1 Samuel, but few scholars today accept this explanation of them.

Despite all these modifications and even rejections of the theory, the great majority of OT scholars were prepared, after the early years of debate, to accept it substantially as it left Wellhausen's hands. This was true, in recent times, of the major figures in Britain (e.g. Rowley, G. W. Anderson), Germany (von Rad, Noth, Weiser) and America (Albright, Bright). For close on a century the view that the Pentateuch was composed from the four documents J, E, D, and P, which originated in that order, belonged to what used to be called the assured results of Old Testament criticism. This was an unfortunate phrase, and it would have been better to speak of the dominant or most satisfactory theory: neither a proven fact nor mere speculation, but a plausible account of the phenomena of the text. It needs to be emphasized that Mosaic authorship is also a theory: all that we *know* is that the Pentateuch existed by about the fourth century BCE. And Mosaic authorship is a theory which seems to account less well for the phenomena than critical theories; so at least the majority of scholars have believed. And since this theory seemed a solid foundation to them, their fresh thinking about the Pentateuch was until recently generally not about source criticism but proceeded along two rather different lines of enquiry: (1) the study of the traditions, both narrative and law, in the *preliterary stage* of their history, before they were incorporated into the Pentateuchal source-documents; (2) the definition of the particular *theological content* of the different source-documents.

The Pre-Literary Origins of the Pentateuch

By 1900 the source-critical theory was in need of a corrective of a much more fundamental kind than any of those mentioned so far, for both historical and literary reasons. On the one hand there had opened up a significant gap between the dates attributed to even the earliest sources of the Pentateuch (9th–8th cents. BCE) and the period which they purported to describe, which ended about 1200 BCE or even earlier. How much, if any, real historical information had survived this passage of time? Was it necessary to conclude, as Wellhausen (1885: 318–19) tended to imply, that the sources could inform us only about conditions in the time when they were written? On the other hand, the investigations of the source-critics had isolated the Pentateuch from the life of the people of ancient Israel, and left the text as a product of writers and redactors who were to some extent created in the image of the scholars who studied them—an intellectual *élite* far removed from ordinary people. Was it really from such circles that the Pentateuch had ultimately originated? These are in fact very topical issues for biblical scholarship at the present time, when interest has reverted to the discussion of sources and especially the work of redactors or editors. Although there are some more positive aspects of the situation now, this preoccupation with the later, literary stages of composition poses exactly the same threat today to a historical and living appreciation of the Pentateuch as it did around 1900. Then the way forward was marked out by Hermann Gunkel, who was in fact much more of a pioneering, original thinker than Wellhausen. His correctives are as much needed today as they ever were.

In 1901 Gunkel (1862–1932) published a commentary on the book of Genesis, with a long introduction which was separately published and also translated into English under the title *The Legends of Genesis*. The change of perspective can very quickly and easily be seen if we compare the contents of this introduction with the introductions to other commentaries on Genesis which appeared in the years immediately before 1901, such as that of H. Holzinger of 1898. (In English Driver (1904) still shows the pre-Gunkel approach.) Holzinger's introduction

of some 18 pages included the following subsections: Content of the Hexateuch and of Genesis; Tradition about the Author; History of Criticism [i.e. source criticism]; the source J; the source E; the source P; the Combination of the Sources. This clearly reflects, almost exclusively, the preoccupations of the source critics. Although Holzinger was aware that the material in J and E was ultimately derived from popular oral tradition, as indeed Wellhausen had been before him, he was not apparently interested in, or perhaps capable of, exploring the character of this 'popular oral tradition'.

The contrast with Gunkel's introduction could hardly be greater. Its first subsection has a polemical title which sums up the whole thesis: 'Genesis is a collection of legends (German *Sagen*)'—the English translation waters this down to 'The Significance and Scope of the Legends'. Then follow sections on 'The Varieties of the Legends'; 'The Artistic Form of the Legends'; 'History of the Transmission of the Legends in Oral Tradition'. These four sections, all of them dealing with the stages of tradition prior to the written sources, comprise about 80 pages, that is over three-quarters of a much enlarged introduction. Only after this does Gunkel bring in two more traditional-sounding sections: one on 'Yahwist, Elohist, the Older Collections' (but note how what were 'sources' are now 'collections', reflecting the change of perspective); the other on 'The Priestly Code and Final Redaction'. An English commentary which shows the influence of Gunkel's work was J. Skinner's *International Critical Commentary*, published in 1910: sections 2–5 of the introduction are taken over almost directly from Gunkel.

There were in fact two basic changes of approach with Gunkel: (1) *chronologically*, he dug deeper, there is the concentration on the preliterate form of the tradition, instead of the written sources of Genesis themselves, as we have seen; and changes in the tradition at the earlier stage are regarded as a possible and indeed necessary subject for study; (2) but there is also, *analytically*, a transfer of attention away from long connected narratives to individual sections or episodes, each of which turns out to comprise a more or less self-contained story, which Gunkel believed had once existed independently of the larger narrative context. These two new departures are interconnected, but it may be said with good reason that the first of them led to *tradition criticism*, as particularly practised later by von Rad and Noth, while the second gave rise to *form criticism*, which is where Gunkel himself made his main contribution. In fact both of these methods were designed by Gunkel to reach a higher goal, a more adequate account of the history of Hebrew literature, and his work is most accurately described as literary history: he could see that source criticism alone would never do justice to the art of the Hebrew writers.

The general principles of Gunkel's form-critical work on Genesis are the same as those used by him elsewhere, for example on the Psalms. Briefly we may distinguish: (1) determination of the literary genre; (2) classification of the material; and (3) the reconstruction of its social setting (*Sitz im Leben*).

Gunkel begins by making the general point that history-writing as we know it, and as it is represented in the later historical books of the OT, is not 'an innate endowment of the human mind'. 'Only at a certain stage of civilization has objectivity so grown and the interest in transmitting national experiences to posterity so increased that the writing of history becomes possible. Such history has for its subjects great public events, the deeds of popular leaders and kings, and especially wars.' Apart from such political organization, the past is remembered and

cherished in the form of popular tradition, for which Gunkel used the genre-description *Sage* (pl. *Sagen*); ‘legend’ is a better English equivalent for this than *saga*, and perhaps ‘tale’ is best of all. The preservation of some historical memories in *Sage* is not ruled out—Gunkel speaks of ‘the senseless confusion of legend with lying’ in discussion of this issue—but at the same time strong emphasis is laid on the creativity of the story-tellers and it is significant that Gunkel followed up his remark that ‘Legends are not lies’ with ‘on the contrary they are a particular form of poetry’: this is perhaps a pointer to the kind of truth which he believed them to contain, it is more the truth of poetry, i.e. general truths about the (or a) human situation, than the truth of history. His argument that the stories in Genesis are to be classed as *Sagen* is quite a simple one. The basic difference, he says, between history-writing as a literary genre and *Sage* is that history-writing is a written composition, whereas *Sage*, as its derivation from the German word ‘to say’ shows, is a genre of oral tradition. The stories in Genesis, at least most of them, bear the marks of having been originally composed orally—he gives more detail later, but here mentions especially the existence of variant versions of essentially the same story (e.g. the patriarch who passed his wife off as his sister (Gen 12; 20; 26))—and therefore they are *Sagen*. In addition, the general lack of interest in political events, the long period between the events reported and their being put in written form, and the inclusion of numerous details that are, from a modern point of view, fantastic (such as Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt: Gen 19:26), serve to confirm the general description as *Sagen*. This description of the stories as *Sagen* has important consequences for Gunkel's understanding of them which he illustrates by reference to the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22: ‘The important matter [sc. for the narrator] is not to establish certain historical facts, but to impart to the hearer the heart-rending grief of the father who is commanded to sacrifice his child with his own hand, and then his boundless gratitude and joy when God's mercy releases him from this grievous trial.’ The positive implications of using such language about the Genesis stories were to be developed further by Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, iii. 1) as well as by Gerhard von Rad (in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis).

Gunkel went on to subdivide the *Sagen* of Genesis into various types, first of all making a sharp distinction between those of Gen 1–11, which tell of the ancestors of the human race as a whole, and Gen 12–50, which tell of the ancestors of particular peoples, especially Israel. Nowadays it seems appropriate to use the terms ‘myth’ and ‘legend’ to distinguish these two types of story, but they were not often so used by Gunkel. Gen 12–50 was further subdivided into *Sagen* of different types: the two main ones being tribal legends and aetiological legends. The former (1) can be either (a) historical, if they represent events in the history of tribes, such as the treaty between Abraham or Isaac and Abimelech king of Gerar (21:22–34; 26) or the migrations of the various patriarchs from one place to another; or (b) ethnographic if they represent tribal relations, as in the stories of Jacob and Esau. Aetiological legends (2) are those whose purpose is to explain the origin of some aspect of contemporary experience, and they subdivide into (a) ethnological legends, which explain why different peoples live where they do, e.g. Gen 19; (b) etymological legends, which explain the meaning of names, e.g. Beersheba in Gen 21:31; (c) cultic legends, which explain why a place is holy, or a particular ritual act carried out (32:32); (d) geological legends, explaining features of the landscape (19:26). These categories are not mutually exclusive, a particular legend may exhibit the characteristics of two or more of them, e.g. Gen 22. This is the analysis worked out by Gunkel for the first edition of his commentary in 1901: an important consequence of it was that, while the aetiological legends were of little or no

use for the historian, the tribal legends could (if read correctly) provide information about the history of the various tribes. In the course of his preoccupation with Genesis over the next few years Gunkel changed his mind over certain topics, and in particular he gave up the 'tribal' interpretation of groups (1)(a) and (1)(b) above and supposed instead that they too were based on folklore motifs and had no historical kernel at all.

Gunkel's account of the social setting of such stories is given in a chapter in which he attempts to formulate their literary character more clearly. 'The common situation which we have to suppose is this: In the leisure of a winter evening the family sits about the hearth; the grown people, but more especially the children, listen intently to the beautiful old stories of the dawn of the world, which they have heard so often yet never tire of hearing repeated.' It is to be noted, because of the contrast with von Rad and Noth, that it is a domestic scene that Gunkel reconstructed, not one of a cultic festival. He lived before the time when all (or nearly all) the OT was thought to be related to the setting of worship. In the remaining chapters he reconstructed the processes by which the originally separate stories were collected together, so as eventually to form the source-documents J and E—this is really *traditio*-history—and, as we have seen, went on to deal with the sources themselves and their combination together by the editors of the Pentateuch. Gunkel's views about the origins of Genesis have been enormously influential and have shaped subsequent research just as much as the documentary source-theory. They are not however satisfactory in every respect, as we shall see.

Form-critical study of the Pentateuch was extended to the stories involving Moses by Hugo Gressmann in 1913 and to the Pentateuchal laws by Albrecht Alt in 1934 (Alt 1966: 87–132: see further below), and many others followed them. But at the same time the study of the preliterary history of the Pentateuch began to be carried forward in a different way, which considered not isolated individual stories or laws but the overall structure of the Pentateuch, with its sequence of creation, patriarchs, Exodus, revelation at Sinai, wilderness wandering and conquest of Transjordan. Was this order of events, which already appeared in the J source, simply derived from the historical sequence of events; or was it to be explained as the result of some process or processes of development in the tradition which had oversimplified an originally more complicated story? We come with this to the *traditio*-historical work of von Rad and Noth (see on this especially Nicholson 1973).

Von Rad's very influential views on this subject are set out in a long essay published in 1938 and entitled 'The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch' (von Rad 1966: 1–78). The reference to form criticism in the title is at first surprising but is justified by the use, at the beginning of the essay, of the basic principles of that discipline, the difference being that von Rad suggested applying them to the Hexateuch as a whole (like others before and since he believed that the book of Joshua was intimately linked with the Pentateuch) instead of only to the short episodes or pericopae from which it was made up. So he asks first about the literary genre of the Hexateuch in its final form, and answers that it is essentially a statement of faith, a creed: not just popular tradition, or history, but a historical creed. Then he proposed the question of other and especially earlier examples of this genre, the historical creed, in Israel, and coupled with it the question of its social setting or *Sitz im Leben*. He found the answers to these questions given above all in the prayer prescribed in Deut 26:5–9 to be said at the presentation of the first fruits

of the harvest, in which the following ‘confession of faith’ bears a striking resemblance to the outline of the narrative of the Hexateuch:

A wandering Aramaean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number; and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

This ‘short historical creed’, as it has come to be called, was taken by von Rad to be a very ancient formula embedded in the Deuteronomic law book and one which had originally been composed for just the purpose which Deuteronomy gives it, namely to accompany a ritual action in the cult. This passage represented, according to von Rad, the first stage in the history of the genre ‘historical creed’, at the end of which stood the composition of the Hexateuch in its final form, and it indicated an originally cultic setting for the genre. This implied for von Rad that the origin of the Hexateuch too was bound up with the history of the Israelite cult, a subject which had already before 1938 come to interest OT scholars considerably, particularly through the work of Sigmund Mowinckel on the Psalms, and von Rad was in fact only developing suggestions made previously by other scholars about particular sections of the Hexateuch (Mowinckel on the Sinai pericope (1927), Alt on a covenant-festival as a setting for apodictic law (1934), and Pedersen on the link between Exodus and Passover (1934)).

At this point we move out of the strictly form-critical sphere into that of tradition criticism or tradition history. Von Rad noticed that the creed in Deut 26:5–9 does not mention the meeting with God at Mount Sinai among the events which it enumerates, and that the same is true of various other ‘credal’ passages in the OT, especially Deut 6:20–4 and Josh 24:2–13. On the other hand, the final form of the Hexateuch does give considerable space to events at Mount Sinai, and thus represents a departure from the original form of the creed. Even within the Hexateuchal narrative itself, von Rad believed, there were signs that the Sinai narrative had been artificially fitted into an original sequence, running from the Exodus to the Conquest, in which it did not appear. This sequence on the one hand and the Sinai narrative on the other at one time therefore existed quite independently of one another. As we have seen, von Rad had come to the conclusion from his study of the genre ‘creed’ that the origins of the Hexateuch were bound up with the history of the cult, and he proceeded in the next stage of his essay to develop this view by a detailed argument that these two blocks of tradition had been the theme-material of two different festivals celebrated in the period of the Judges at two different sanctuaries. The patriarchs–Exodus–Conquest sequence (which von Rad usually refers to as the ‘settlement-tradition’ from its concluding item, the possession of the promised land) belonged to the festival of Weeks or First-Fruits, celebrated at the sanctuary of Gilgal near Jericho, while the Sinai narrative belonged to a festival of the Renewal of the Covenant, referred to in the OT as Tabernacles or Booths, which took place at Shechem in the central highlands of Israel.

If that is so, the question arises as to when and by whom the two blocks of tradition were combined together. Von Rad's answer is that it was the author of the J source in the Hexateuch, whom he dates to the tenth century BCE, for in it, as traditionally reconstructed, the canonical sequence already appears. It is also to the Yahwist that the prefacing of Gen 1(2)–11, the primeval history, to the pattern dictated by the creed is attributed, so that this writer takes on immense stature as the originator of the canonical form of the narrative, and indeed in other ways too, which von Rad also spelt out at the end of his essay.

Noth's work on the Pentateuch (he did not believe that Joshua was so closely connected) is to be found above all in his book published in 1948 and later translated into English under the title *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1972). It sets out to be a comprehensive and systematic treatise, which builds on von Rad's work, but also introduces fresh ideas and draws in elements of Gunkel's work on particular passages. Beginning from the conclusions of source criticism, Noth observed that the canonical pattern of narrative from the patriarchs to the settlement appeared not only in J but also in E, and since it seemed unlikely to him that E simply imitated J (since sometimes one seems more primitive and sometimes the other), he proposed that both were drawing on a common source in which the canonical pattern already appeared. He seems to have been unsure whether to postulate a written source or just common oral tradition, but he proposed the symbol G (for *Grundlage*, 'foundation') to represent it. This is already an important departure from von Rad's view, since it implied that J inherited the canonical pattern from earlier tradition and was not himself the first to combine the Sinai narrative with the others, as von Rad had thought.

But in general Noth regarded von Rad's account of the preliterate history of the tradition as sound. He accepted the idea that the Sinai narrative had once been separate from the rest, and the early Israelite cult as the locus of preservation and transmission of the traditions. Von Rad was only at fault in that he did not take the process of analysis far enough for Noth. In Noth's view there were not just two originally separate blocks of tradition but five, which he generally refers to as 'themes'. These were the promise to the patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt (Exodus), the leading through the wilderness, the revelation at Sinai, and the settlement in the land of Canaan.

To understand what Noth has to say about the origin of these themes it is necessary to remind ourselves of his views about the earliest history of Israel. For him there can be no question of a history of Israel before the settlement in Canaan, because prior to the settlement various groups of semi-nomads existed quite separately and they only became 'Israel' when they combined together in a sacred tribal league or 'amphictyony' on the soil of Canaan. Whatever came before was not, could not be, the history or story of the 'children of Israel', but could only be the history or story of parts of what later became Israel. The arrangement of Noth's own book on the history of Israel is the logical consequence of this view: its first main chapter deals with the arrival in Canaan of those groups which were eventually to become Israel, and only in the third chapter are the traditions about the Exodus, the patriarchs, and Mount Sinai dealt with, under the heading 'The Traditions of the Sacral Confederation of the Twelve Tribes'. In Noth's picture these traditions could only have originated as the traditions of one of the constituent parts of Israel in each case: that is, the implication of the Pentateuchal texts themselves that they are talking about the origin of 'all Israel' is historically false. Further there is no reason to think that the same

constituent part of Israel was involved in the events of all the five themes, and it is quite possible that each theme derived originally from a different group, so that there was no original historical continuity at all between them.

Apart from these general considerations about the history of the tradition, Noth continued with the examination of the individual stories that had been begun by Gunkel and Gressmann, emphasizing their typical and legendary features. He seems to have held that the tradition began with five raw statements of faith corresponding to the five themes, of the form 'YHWH brought us out of the land of Egypt', to which only the slightest historical recollections were attached. These statements of faith then became the inspiration for a process of amplification by the creativity of story-tellers or bards, who developed the various episodes with which we are familiar.

One result of Noth's theory was his reluctance to regard any element of the tradition which represented continuity between the different themes as an early component of the story. The most celebrated example of this is his treatment of Moses, who of course appears throughout the central section of the Pentateuch, in the Exodus, wilderness, and Sinai themes. In all of this, Noth argued, Moses is dispensable and therefore a secondary element. He originally belonged in fact to the story of the settlement in Canaan, because his grave was located in land claimed by the Israelite tribes (cf. Deut [34:1–6](#) with Josh [13:15–23](#)), and those elements of the stories about him that are not likely to have been invented (his foreign wife, criticism of his leadership) therefore originally belong here.

While the views of von Rad and Noth have been very influential, they have also come in for criticism from many scholars. Among the counter-arguments the following may be mentioned:

- 1) Von Rad's reliance on Deut [26:5–9](#) may have too readily assumed that it is an ancient piece of traditional liturgy: its style is strongly Deuteronomic, and perhaps it was composed by the authors of Deuteronomy in the eighth or seventh century BCE.
- 2) Whether that is so or not, von Rad's reconstruction of the history of the genre 'creed' too readily assumes that shorter forms are earlier than longer ones, a common misconception of form critics; or to put it another way, that development invariably proceeds by supplementation and never by selection or subtraction. It is not necessarily the case that the 'canonical pattern' of the creed with Sinai included is later than the shorter form.
- 3) Even if Noth's historical views about the settlement are true, they do not in fact rule out the possibility that all the themes represent experiences of the *same* group of 'ancestors of Israel', so that there might be an element of historical continuity between them.
- 4) Noth too quickly disposed of Moses, who is very firmly linked with the Exodus, Sinai, and wilderness traditions and scarcely as 'dispensable' as Noth believed. But if he is allowed to remain in them, this is an indication of an original historical continuity between Exodus, Sinai, wilderness, and settlement.

In addition to these objections, which are widely current, it should be observed that many of Noth's arguments are only possible if it is assumed that the tradition possessed the degree of creativity ascribed to it by Gunkel and Gressmann: and it is not at all certain that it did, particularly as far as the tradition about the Exodus and subsequent events is concerned. In fact, a number of questions have been raised in recent years about the validity of some of Gunkel's inferences. Two questions in particular need to be asked: (1) Is Gunkel's overall description of the stories as 'legend' (*Sage*) adequate? (2) Was his growing conviction that Genesis lacked any historical basis justified? These are clearly related questions, for the historical reliability of the stories is bound to be affected by the type of stories that we suppose them to be.

The description 'legend' was arrived at by Gunkel by a deceptively simple process of reasoning: the stories originated before the Israelites organized themselves politically into a state, therefore they are oral compositions, therefore they are legends (*Sagen*), and their purpose is to convey experiences of human existence which are not to be equated with particular historical events. The attraction of this line of reasoning is that at its end there is something that certainly needs to be said if we are to do justice to the literary art of the Genesis narratives. But it is not a cast-iron argument, and cogent objections can be raised to it at virtually every point. To take only one point, is it really true that oral literature knows only the genre of *Sagen* as defined by Gunkel? Comparisons over a wider range than he undertook have suggested that oral literature is a much more varied phenomenon, with several different functions. Detailed studies of the text of Genesis itself also suggested weaknesses in Gunkel's description. He seems to have lost sight of the essential difference in character between the myths of Gen 1–11, which are pure imagination as far as the events they describe are concerned, and the stories of the patriarchs, where imagination is constrained by a particular historical situation.

The most comprehensive attempt to develop a new form criticism of the patriarchal stories has been made by C. Westermann, in the introduction to the second volume of his commentary on Genesis. Westermann's main assertion about the patriarchal narratives is that they are above all *family narratives*, not only in the sense that they are about family life but also because they are told and handed on by people who are the descendants (or think they are the descendants) of the chief characters in the story. In his commentary he makes a comparison between them and Galsworthy's 'family novels', *The Forsyte Saga*. Plato in the *Hippias Major* said that people in his day liked hearing stories of the foundation of cities; other classical parallels can be found in stories of the founding of colonies and in Virgil's *Aeneid*. According to Westermann, it is also possible to show that the aetiological stories and motifs, which are where creativity is at its greatest, belong to a comparatively late stage of the process of growth of the patriarchal stories. In the rest of the tradition, there is no reason why memories of quite ancient situations should not have been preserved, indeed this is to be expected. This is not to say that we can read Genesis as if it were a series of biographies: for the sequence of stories is less to be relied on than some of the stories themselves, and in addition there are some individual stories which owe a lot to later narrators with a particular theological point to make.

In looking at Westermann's fresh description of the patriarchal stories we thus encounter some pointers to a somewhat more positive historical evaluation of them than Gunkel allowed. To these archaeological evidence lends some support, though this must not be exaggerated. The claim that such evidence can prove the substantial reliability of the stories has rightly been

criticized by T. L. Thompson and J. Van Seters. There are no direct references to Abraham, Isaac, or anyone else in Genesis in contemporary Near-Eastern texts. But in a variety of ways certain details of the stories (though not others) can be shown to fit in with our knowledge from external sources of how life was lived in the second millennium BCE. That is, the stories of the patriarchs did transmit to ancient Israel and do transmit to us some authentic information about conditions of life, both external and internal, social and spiritual, in the time before the Exodus. Creative development there may indeed be, but it is not creation in this case out of nothing: it is an enlarging and deepening of the story of a family, or families, who came to be regarded as the ancestors of all Israel and the recipients of a divine promise whose fulfilment was believed to have been worked out in the life of Israel as a historical people.

Despite the various criticisms we have looked at, it needs to be remembered that, even if the answers have weaknesses, the questions posed by von Rad, Noth, and Gunkel about the preliterate stage of the tradition are still with us and are ultimately unavoidable. I have already mentioned Westermann's more fruitful treatment of the patriarchal stories from this point of view. There is nothing quite comparable yet for the Exodus and subsequent episodes—T. L. Thompson's work suffers from the same defect as Gunkel's—but B. S. Childs's commentary contains some useful material and G. W. Coats recently brought out an excellent study, based on a series of articles written over a period of some twenty years, which, in direct contrast to Noth's position, takes Moses as its central theme (Coats [1988](#)).

The Theology of the Pentateuchal Sources.

1. General Considerations

Twentieth-century scholars have been occupied by another development in Pentateuchal study, going beyond the analysis into sources: that is, the theology—or rather theologies, for they differ considerably—of the sources. In fact the realization of the differences is one of the main benefits of source-analysis. One may draw an analogy with what has happened in NT study of the Gospels—there too a source-critical phase and a form-critical phase have been followed by a phase that focuses on the theologies of the different evangelists. The theological study of the sources of the Pentateuch seems to date from von Rad's 'Hexateuch' essay ([1938](#)), in which he identified the author of the J source as a creative theological writer. The modifications which von Rad thought J had made to the tradition (combination of Sinai and settlement; addition of primeval history) were clearly an advance in theology and not just innovations on the literary level. It is now widely recognized that the interpretation of a particular Pentateuchal passage must take account of its setting within the context of the source-document to which it belongs and ask, 'How is the inclusion of this passage related to the author's overall purpose and plan?' Von Rad again is a good illustration of this at many places in his Genesis commentary, though he concentrates mainly on the J source. Further studies of this kind can be found in Brueggemann and Wolff ([1975](#)). Before looking briefly at each source in turn I want to make some general, and rather polemical, points about our method and aim.

First, the method must be addressed: how are we to determine the theology of a document which is essentially in narrative form? There are various possibilities:

- 1) The best-known studies of this topic have tended to concentrate either on *specific passages* that make clearly theological statements or on *expressions* which recur in a number of passages. For example, Gen 12:1–3 has been regarded as almost the motto of the J writer (so by von Rad, Wolff, and others), with special emphasis being laid on Abraham as the means of blessing for all the peoples of the earth. Other passages have also been thought to shed particular light on the theology of this writer: thus, in Gen 1–11; 6:5; 8:21 , and later on 18:22b–33 . Again, Wolff's brilliant study of the theology of E is largely concerned with the recurring expressions 'the fear of God' (20:11 , etc.) and God 'testing' or 'proving' someone (Gen 22:1; Ex 20:20). In the case of Deuteronomy the key terms 'covenant' and 'law' have often been picked out, or the demand for the centralization of the cult (Deut 12:1–14). Finally, in his essay on the theology of P, Brueggemann sees the declaration of blessing in Gen 1:28 as 'the central message in the faith of the priestly circle', which is recapitulated in later passages such as Gen 9:7; 17:20; 28:1–4; 35:11; Ex 1:7 . There is no doubt that this is a natural and useful approach to take, but if it is used alone as it sometimes is, it is in danger of producing an account of the theology of the sources that is both one-sided and oversimplified. For that reason it is very important to look also at two other aspects of the texts.

- 2) One of these is the *range of contents* of a particular source, that is, particularly, where it begins and ends. Again the study of the Gospels is an illuminating comparison, for they all begin and end at different points, at least if it is kept in mind that Luke's Gospel is only the first part of a 2-volume work. The different beginnings were already noticed by Irenaeus in the second century CE. The Pentateuchal sources also all begin at different points, but unfortunately the question of their endings is not so simple, and it is much argued whether J, E, and P did or did not go on to describe the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, while Deuteronomy can be said to 'end' at two very different places. Still, the different beginnings are clear enough, and they have important implications for the theology of the sources.

- 3) Also important is what I would call the *form* of presentation and the *arrangement* of the contents of the source, and in fact von Rad makes these factors fundamental for his exploration of the theology of the Yahwist. What I have in mind is first the general shape of the source—is it essentially a narrative or a collection of speeches? And what kind of narrative or speeches?—and then the more detailed structure of the contents.

Secondly, the aim must be decided: what is it that we are trying to do? I would see this as being to state the religious assertions that are made by *the document as a whole*, or at least in so far as it has been preserved. I say this over against the approach which seeks out only what is distinctive or what is new in a particular source. This has sometimes been the way of putting the question—it is in these terms that von Rad puts it in relation to the Yahwist—but (1) we then presuppose that we can make a clear distinction between the contribution of an author himself and what he inherited from his predecessors. This may sometimes be possible but frankly we are often not in a position to do that with any certainty when dealing with the Pentateuchal sources, and that is an important part of the reason why scholars have found it difficult sometimes to agree in this area. (2) In any case the theology of an author is shaped and expressed as much by

what he reproduces from earlier tradition as by the fresh insights (if any) which he brings to it himself.

One further point: the authors produced their work in particular *historical situations* and addressed themselves to those situations. It must therefore be part of our aim to discover what those situations were, i.e. to date the work, and to relate what it says to the events of its time. But since most of the evidence for dating comes from the theological themes that are prominent in the sources, this part of our task can only be approached after we have reached an understanding of its theology by the methods described above.

Two important features are common to all four sources of the Pentateuch: (1) they all alike seek to define the character of the relationship between YHWH and Israel; (2) they do this by reference to certain ancient events, among which the sequence patriarchs–Exodus–Sinai–occupation of the land is present in all of them. Nevertheless in their handling of these common features they differ considerably.

2. The Theology of J

J, in overall shape, is clearly a narrative. But what kind of a narrative? Some of the important events described would clearly justify von Rad's term, used of the Hexateuch as a whole, 'creed', but others, such as the stories of Abraham's or Jacob's exploits, do not fit this description very well. One might say then that there is a credal framework filled out with what might be called illustrative material. An alternative approach is to begin at the other end with the genre-description 'epic', and then qualify this by a term such as 'religious' or 'theological'. Somewhere at the convergence of these two approaches an accurate description is to be found. The narrative shape of J has led to the view that his theology, like that of other OT writers, is a theology of history, i.e. a witness to and interpretation of the acts of God in history. The question does of course arise as to how far the 'history' in J's account is real history, especially in Gen 1–11, and the recently coined term 'narrative theology' is more widely applicable. Either way, the difference between J's theology and a timeless, philosophical theology needs to be noted.

J begins with creation: but it is worth amplifying this to 'the creation of human beings', because in Gen 2:4–5 the references to the creation of the natural world are in a subordinate clause, and not part of the actual story, which begins only in v. 7: 'Then the Lord God formed man ...'. J's story is thus human history from its beginning to—wherever J ended! That we do not know for sure, but the occupation of the land of Canaan by Israel seems the most likely ending, whether, as some still think, that ending is preserved in the book of Joshua or not.

The contents of J can be subdivided into two parts: Gen 2–11, 'The Early History of Mankind in General'; and Gen 12 onwards, 'The Early History of Israel and their Ancestors'. An account of J's theology must address both parts of the document and, which is very important, the fact that they have been brought together. In Gen 2–11 we have a number of stories about the earliest ages of human history, which now have an interesting parallel in the Babylonian *Epic of Atrahasis*, which covers a similar span of early history. They do not pretend to present a complete history of these times, but only certain episodes with a particular importance for later generations. These episodes are presented either as the cause of a present state of affairs (human mortality, the need to work for a living, the existence of many languages, for example) or as paradigms of situations

that may occur at any time (the rivalry of brothers, the attempt to break through the limits imposed on man by God), or as both. Westermann points out how the family is often in view. Of course in all cases the context is theological, and the sequence of sin–punishment–mercy appears several times, both as the cause of the present state of the world and as typical of God's government of the world at all times.

J's presentation of the early history of Israel is shot through with the idea of election, that Israel is YHWH's own people, which he brought into being, protected, and settled in her land, to fulfil the promises which he had made to her distant ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That history too illustrates the themes of sin–punishment–grace (especially in the wilderness), but more especially that of YHWH as a powerful deliverer and provider of his people's needs: corresponding to this, faith in God is the primary virtue (Gen 15:6, cf. Ex 4:30–1; 14:13, 31). There are some passages, chiefly poetic, in this section which seem to relate to events of J's own time and are the basis for attempts to date him to the tenth century BCE: according to them Israel is destined to be a great nation, who will rule her neighbours and have a king from the tribe of Judah (Gen 24:60; 27:27–9; 49:8–12; Num24:15–19). Interestingly none of these passages is exactly in the form of a divine promise and perhaps this means that J did not regard political power as of the very essence of Israel's relationship to YHWH.

What is the significance of the combination of the two parts together? There has of late been a tendency to focus on the gloomy side of Gen 1–11, which ends, as von Rad points out, with the story of the scattering of the nations. Unlike earlier acts of judgement, this one is not mitigated by any word of grace and mercy. The word of mercy to the nations comes, according to this view, in a quite new form, in 12:1–3, where YHWH promises his blessing of Abraham's descendants, i.e. of Israel, and that 'in you [or: your seed] all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (12:3 —cf. 26:4; 28:14), i.e. that Abraham/Israel is destined to mediate YHWH's blessing to other nations. J's theology is thus universalistic: it looks beyond Israel to God's work in the wider world. There is however a snag with this interpretation (see the note on this verse), and that is that the crucial words in Gen 12:3 could be translated in a different way: 'by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves', that is, Abraham would be the standard to which all others would want to rise, without it being implied that this was in fact YHWH's intention for them (cf. Ps 72:17; and for the idea Zech 8:13). Then J is only speaking directly about YHWH's purpose for Israel. However that may be, we must certainly not make the mistake of thinking that Gen 1–11 serves in its present context only to indicate what the world needs to be saved from. In other respects, as we saw, it specifies the unchanging conditions under which human life has to be lived, as much in Israel as anywhere else, and shows YHWH's dominion as creator over the whole world. This is also a kind of universal theology and ethics, but it differs from the salvation-history kind that has been found in 12:3 etc. and is not dependent upon it. Other signs of a universal interest are the Table of Nations (ch. 10) and the use of Mesopotamian materials in the Flood story, as well as the Tower of Babel story in ch. 11, which seems implicitly to challenge the pretensions of the great world-empires of the ancient Near East, and especially those of Babylon. The approach is reminiscent of the wisdom literature in a number of ways. In this respect Gen 2–11 is not the antithesis to the kerygma of 12:1–3, law to gospel as it were, but displays God's wider work in creation and providence as the basis for his work in his own people's history.

3. The Theology of E

The E source survives to a much smaller extent than J. In *shape* or general character E seems to have been very similar to J, and what was said earlier about this in relation to J applies broadly to E. On the other hand the *range* covered seems to be less, for there is no evidence that E had any account of creation or the early history of the human race as a whole: it began its account with the patriarchs, specifically with Abraham. Most of Gen 20–2 is attributed to E, and it has commonly been thought that part of Gen 15, which describes the making of a covenant between God and Abraham, is also from E and indeed its beginning. It is certainly an appropriate place to begin the story of Israel's origins.

From Abraham on the contents of E apparently corresponded closely to those of J, with even greater uncertainty about whether it originally included an account of the occupation of Canaan or not. This means that the theological affirmations of E about the actions and character of YHWH are to a large extent the same as J's, and to save repetition it is possible to note just some important differences:

- 1) The most obvious difference is the lack of the universal perspective (in whatever sense) provided in J by the primeval history (Gen 1–11) and perhaps by Gen 12:3. For E God's purposes are in the main limited to his people Israel. Individual foreigners are, however, shown to have recognized the authority of Israel's God (cf. Abimelech in Gen 20 and Jethro in Ex 18). This is reminiscent of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17 and Naaman in 2 Kings 5, in prophetic stories from the northern kingdom, which is often seen as the environment in which E was composed.
- 2) It is apparently the view of E that the special name for God, YHWH, was not known to the patriarchs, but was first revealed to Moses (Ex 3:14–15: the same view is also held by P (Ex 6:2–3)). This has two effects: it links the beginning of Israel's religion particularly strongly with the Exodus and the mountain of God in the wilderness, and it makes a distinction between patriarchal religion and Israelite religion which, while not absolute, remains important. The character of God as conveyed in his name is given a rare, though elusive, exposition by E in 3:14: 'I am who I am', or 'I will be what I will be' (see the commentary).
- 3) On the subject of political power, E also includes passages which speak of Israel's great destiny (cf. Gen 46:1–4; Num 23:18–24), but it is noticeable that they do not give any special place to Judah, but rather celebrate the supremacy of the northern tribes Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Deut 33:13–17; also Gen 48:15–16). This is one reason for thinking that E originated in the northern kingdom (cf. Jenks 1977).

Each of these three features in which E differs from J is probably due to E's having retained the attitudes and presentation of the story which were current in earlier times, while J represents a new approach in each. Two other differences are more likely to be due to E's own contribution.

H. W. Wolff (1975) has noted the concern of E for 'the fear of God', as an all-embracing religious attitude (in addition to Gen 20:11 cf. 22:12; 42:18: Ex 1:17, 21; 18:21; 20:20).

E's narratives reflect a greater preoccupation than the corresponding passages in J with ethical standards of behaviour as the condition of God's blessing of his people. This is particularly clear if one compares the parallel stories in Gen 12:10–20J and 20:1–18E, where the latter passage includes Abimelech's protestation of his innocence and the implication that Abraham's behaviour is reprehensible. It would be even clearer if it were certain that the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant were included in E, as used to be thought, but this has been questioned in recent years, perhaps rightly.

4. The Theology of Deuteronomy (D)

Deuteronomy/D stands in great contrast to J and E in both its *shape* and its *range*, not to speak of its structure, whether one considers its original nucleus (4:44–29:1) or its amplified form. As regards its shape it consists not of narrative, but of a series of *speeches*, which can most adequately be described as preaching: they speak directly to the people in the second person and urge them to do certain things for reasons that are also stated. Events of the early history are generally referred to in passing and are not the main subject of what is being said. This leads on to the range of the contents: in the nucleus there is no attempt at a connected description of early history as found in J and E, but rather the portrayal of a single event in great detail, namely Moses' parting speeches to the Israelites as they are encamped on the banks of the river Jordan. The structure is consequently also quite different and has been a topic of major interest to scholars, who have related it to the liturgy of a festival for the renewal of the covenant (von Rad) or to the pattern of ancient Near-Eastern treaties (Weinfeld), or indeed to both. The amplified form (i.e. chs. 1–34 as a whole), on the other hand, is most probably the first section of a long *historical work* with a quite different range from J and E, extending through the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, commonly referred to as the Deuteronomistic History. So in neither form is D at all similar externally to J and E.

There is more common ground with the other sources, not surprisingly, when we come to look at its actual teaching, though here too there are new features. In the speeches of Deuteronomy the themes of the promise to the patriarchs, YHWH's deliverance and protection of his people, and his gift to them of the land of Canaan as a land full of every good thing, repeatedly appear. Thus far there is a real continuity with the older sources. The creation story, however, is ignored (though cf. 4:32), and the book is dominated by the theme of the covenant based on God's laws and obedience to them. This central concern is reflected in the title of the original core of Deuteronomy (4:45): 'These are the decrees and the statutes and ordinances, that Moses spoke to the Israelites...' (cf. Moses' opening words: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances that I am addressing to you today' (5:1)). The picture of Moses himself is changed: instead of being the inspired leader of his people in all kinds of circumstances, he has become above all what we might call a 'prophetic legislator'. The laws too in chs 12–26 go far beyond the most that can be ascribed to J and E and allude to many aspects of life, both private and national—in the latter sphere it is notable that they make provision for the offices of priest, judge, prophet, and king, and imply that public worship is to be concentrated at a single sanctuary, which is referred to as 'the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name' (e.g. 12:11). National prosperity, indeed survival in the land which YHWH has given, now depends upon observance of these commands (cf. ch. 28). It is not the connection of sin and punishment which is new in Deuteronomy but the explicit definition, in the form of a code of

laws, of what counts as sin in the sight of YHWH and the dire threats ('curses') held out in the case of disobedience.

The amplified form of D incorporates one additional theme of great significance to the community in exile, which is evidence of its origin in the sixth century BCE: this is the call to return to YHWH (cf. 4:27–31; 30:1–6). If sinful Israel, now under the judgment of YHWH, will once more be obedient to YHWH's law, then he will bring them back to Canaan and will even transform them inwardly so that they do not fail again (30:6), a thought that is closely related to Jeremiah's teaching of a new covenant and Ezekiel's of a new heart.

5. The Theology of P

As regards its *shape*, P stands somewhere between J and E on the one hand and D on the other. It does have a narrative structure, with its story extending from creation (this time explicitly including the natural world) to at least the eve of the Israelites' entry into Canaan. But in Genesis one can scarcely speak of a real story, as hardly any episodes are described in detail and the P material is mostly genealogies and chronological notes. And throughout this source long *speeches* (as in D) are very much in evidence, but this time in the form of divine revelations (or rather promises and commands) communicated to such figures as Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Not infrequently it is clear that a narrative episode is only there to reinforce what has been said in one of the divine speeches. So despite some superficial resemblance to J and E we are clearly in a quite different world. It is difficult to specify the genre of P as a whole. An anthropologist once suggested that because of his interest in myth, kinship, and ritual P could rank as the world's first social anthropologist! But anthropologists are only observers, while for P (which was probably produced by priests for priests) these things clearly have existential importance. Perhaps a report of a Liturgical Commission is a closer modern analogy!

While the theology of P is without doubt very largely a theology of ritual (especially priesthood and sacrifice), it does have a broader base. God/YHWH is the creator of the whole world (Gen 1), which he declared to be good and on which he bestowed his blessing. Humanity as such, male and female, is made 'in his image', a difficult phrase which should probably be translated 'as his image', implying that they are God's representatives on earth, to whom dominion over the earth is therefore naturally given (1:26). Gen 9:1–17, which incorporates the covenant with Noah and all living creatures (v. 10), amplifies this definition of the place of mankind in the world. Alongside these universal statements P also reaffirms the tradition of the election of Israel in her ancestor Abraham (Gen 17) and tells in his own way the story of the Exodus, the meeting with God at Mount Sinai, and the wilderness wanderings.

But already in Genesis P's interest in ritual can be seen: God himself, by his own example, inaugurates the sabbath (2:2–3); the instructions to Noah include the ban on eating meat with the blood, a basic element of Jewish food laws (9:4); and Abraham receives and obeys the command to be circumcised (17:9–14, 22–7). It is interesting that the three rituals given such great antiquity by P are all private, domestic rituals, which did not need a temple and could therefore be practised in the diaspora, in exile. There is some sign that P thought of four great epochs of revelation, beginning at creation (where God is called Elohim), Noah (again Elohim), Abraham (El Shaddai), and Moses (YHWH), and it used to be customary to speak of P as the Book of the Four Covenants, leading to the use (for example in Wellhausen's early work) of the

symbol Q (for *quattuor*, Latin for ‘four’). But in only two of the cases (Noah and Abraham) does P actually speak of the making of a ‘covenant’ (*bērit*), and other common features, such as the presence of a ‘sign’, are also hard to trace all through the series.

Be that as it may, the weight of P's emphasis certainly falls on the making, according to a detailed, divinely revealed plan, of the tabernacle, or desert shrine, at Mount Sinai (Ex 25–31; 35–40). This, or rather the altar outside it, was of course a place of sacrifice, and P has a lot to say, both practical and theological, about the ritual of sacrifice and the priests who were needed to carry it out. But this was not all. The name ‘tabernacle’ (*miškān*) means ‘dwelling-place’ (sc. for the divine glory) and it was also known as the ‘tent of meeting’ (i.e. for meeting with God). That is, what made the tabernacle a holy place, and an appropriate place to offer sacrifice, was that YHWH was in a special sense there, in the midst of his people. And that was its purpose. According to Ex 25:8 YHWH said to Moses: ‘And have them [the Israelites] make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.’ And after the work was finished (40:34), ‘Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.’ P's account of the relationship of YHWH to Israel, therefore, while it does not bypass other categories, is above all a theology of the divine presence in the midst of the people, which necessitates the construction of a sanctuary. For P God's presence is inconceivable without a sanctuary and its associated personnel and rituals. The people need also to know about what is holy and profane, what is clean and unclean, and it is a major part of the priests' task to instruct them in such matters: they are ‘to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean’ (Lev 10:10). This emphasis on the necessity of a sanctuary makes the most natural time for the composition of P the period between the destruction of the First Temple in 587/6 BCE and the completion of the Second Temple in 516, and not later, as Wellhausen and Kuenen thought.

Recent Questioning of the Classical Documentary Theory

The work on oral tradition and theological interpretation that we reviewed earlier was based on the assumption that the classical (Wellhausen) theory of Pentateuchal origins is correct. It would need at least considerable revision if that theory proved to be wrong, though no doubt some of the insights would survive. When a theory has come to support such a superstructure of further speculation, it is clearly important that its own foundations should be examined from time to time and possible alternatives to it should be considered. Perhaps this is one reason why recent years have seen a return of interest to the source-critical questions which the classical theory sought to answer. At the present time the study of the Pentateuch is a matter of discussion and controversy such as it has scarcely been since the time of Wellhausen and Kuenen. A variety of fresh approaches is being tried, and discarded ones revived, to seek a well-founded way forward in this most basic of all Pentateuchal studies. Much of what will be described in the following sections is still very much a matter for discussion.

The fresh approaches have taken two main forms:

- 1) New attempts to formulate the principles according to which study of the Pentateuch and other parts of the Bible must proceed, i.e. a concern with methodology; which has arisen

partly from the need to define more closely the relationship between source criticism and other methods such as tradition criticism and form criticism, and also partly from the impact on biblical studies of 'structural analysis' and other modern literary methods for the exegesis of texts (see esp. Barton 1984).

- 2) The development of particular alternative theories about the origins of the Pentateuch, involving a partial or total abandonment of the classical theory.

We have, then, two lines of research, reflection on method and the formation of new theories, which have sometimes reinforced one another but sometimes proceeded quite separately. For some evaluation of them in print see the *Introductions* of Soggin and Childs, and Whybray (1987). It is possible to distinguish six 'new directions in research' in this area.

1. An Earlier Date for P

First we have the view that P is not the latest of the four sources, from the exilic or post-exilic period, but is earlier in origin than D or at least contemporary with it. This view has recently been argued for at some length (Haran 1979). But it in fact originated with the Israeli scholar Y. Kaufmann as long ago as 1930 and it has been accepted widely among Israeli scholars, though hardly at all elsewhere. In the form that Haran presents it, this view holds that the composition of P is to be dated to the reign of Hezekiah, c.700 BCE, and that P was in fact the stimulus for Hezekiah's reforms of national religion reported in 2 Kings 18:3-5. As with Wellhausen, we find that the dating of P by Haran is based on the place which P's regulations seem to occupy in the history of Israel's religion, and Haran argues that, contrary to what Graf and Wellhausen had said, all the P regulations make sense, and some of them only make sense, if P was composed before the exile.

A 'sounding' can be made by considering what Haran says about the issue considered earlier in connection with Wellhausen's dating of P, namely admission to the priesthood. In order to show that P's regulations reflect pre-exilic conditions, Haran draws attention to the list of Levitical cities in Josh21, in which the descendants of Aaron appear as a distinct group, and are assigned cities in the tribal areas of Judah and the related Benjamin and Simeon, that is the southernmost tribes, while the other Levites are given cities in the other tribal areas. A number of scholars have argued, on grounds of historical geography, that this list is pre-exilic in origin, which would, if taken seriously, imply that the Aaronides were a recognizable group before the exile, and that they already then had an exclusive right to full priesthood (cf. v. 19) and not only afterwards. Nevertheless, while the list may have a pre-exilic basis, its present context is in a historical work of the exilic period (the Deuteronomistic History), so that it is not clear evidence of pre-exilic practices. Haran also claims support from references to Aaron in the older Pentateuchal sources J and E; but they do not present Aaron and his descendants as having the sole right to the priesthood, as P does. Nor is there any greater force in the passages cited to show the existence of Levites in subservient positions before the exile, as prescribed by P: 2 Kings 11:18 and 1 Sam 2:31-3. In the former case there are subordinate cultic officials but there is no indication that they are Levites, while in the latter case it is not actually said whether Eli's descendants were to be given any role at all, even an inferior one, in the future temple service.

An argument against Wellhausen's view which is perhaps more telling arises from statistics. P appears to envisage a large number of Levites compared with priests (cf. the tithing law), whereas the lists in Ezra and Nehemiah suggest that there were actually relatively few Levites in post-exilic times. This makes it difficult to believe that P originated in the time to which these lists refer. Even the force of this argument, however, is reduced if P is dated to the years of exile itself in the sixth century, as this would leave time for conditions to have changed before Ezra and Nehemiah, and more Levites than had at first been anticipated may have been able to lay claim to full priestly status by finding a genealogical link with Aaron, thus reducing the number of ordinary Levites. The nub of Wellhausen's argument was Ezek 44, and Haran does attempt a different interpretation of this which would leave room for an older distinction within the priesthood. But it does not convince.

In general, many of Haran's arguments seem to turn out on examination to be less conclusive than they at first appear. Moreover, it is surely revealing that Haran has after all to concede that 'it was only in the days of Ezra...that P's presence became perceptible in historical reality and began to exercise its influence on the formation of Judaism' (1979: p. v). To attribute a document nearly three centuries of existence before it became perceptible is rather unsatisfactory when set against the very explicit arguments of Wellhausen.

Other Israeli scholars have used different arguments to support similar views. Weinfeld has argued that D presupposes P at various points so that P must be earlier: but these turn out either to be in passages which are for other reasons not thought to be an original part of D, or else to concern regulations which there is every reason to think existed on their own before their inclusion in P, so that D may have known them without knowing P as a whole. Again, Hurvitz has examined the language of P and shown that the vocabulary includes many words characteristic of pre-exilic rather than post-exilic Hebrew. This need not mean that P is pre-exilic: it could be due to the use of traditional vocabulary in priestly circles—a not unheard of phenomenon—and in fact there are several cases where P's vocabulary seems closest to Ezekiel, an argument again perhaps for a sixth-century date. Further, Hurvitz's study of vocabulary must be viewed in the light of R. Polzin's work on syntax, which shows that in this respect P's language differs from that of pre-exilic writings and represents a transitional stage in the development to Late Biblical Hebrew, as represented by the books of Chronicles—just what would be expected from a sixth-century work.

It has not been established that this earlier dating of P should be adopted. Discussion of it has, however, been useful for two reasons: (1) it has emphasized that the P document did not emerge out of thin air, but in some passages is a compilation of older traditions, particularly laws; (2) it has brought to light one or two reasons for preferring a sixth-century date for the composition of P to the fifth-century one advocated by earlier critics.

2. Renewed Emphasis on the Final Form of the Text

A second feature of recent Pentateuchal scholarship has been the tendency of certain scholars to direct attention to what they sometimes refer to as 'the final form of the text', that is the form in which the Pentateuch actually appears in the OT, as distinct from the sources and traditions which lie behind, or beneath the surface of, the biblical text itself. Those who have advocated this approach are agreed that the style of scholarship which has been dominant in academic

circles for a century and more has been too preoccupied with questions of origin and sources, and has neglected the interpretation of the text in the form that became standard for synagogue and church for twenty centuries. In their view it is not so much a revision of particular theories that is needed but a completely new approach to the study of the Pentateuch. Indeed it is not only the Pentateuch that needs a new approach, but the whole OT (and perhaps the NT as well). Within this group of scholars it is possible, and perhaps useful, to distinguish two different kinds of concern for the final form of the text.

On the one hand there are those who emphasize the need to treat the Pentateuch as a work of literature in its own right, which means seeking to understand its present form, purpose, and meaning, just as one would with, say, a play by Shakespeare or a novel by D. H. Lawrence. A good example of this literary approach is David Clines's *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (1978): he is quite explicit (cf. ch. 2) about his debt to the general study of literature. Another kind of literary approach is represented by structuralist studies of parts of the Pentateuch which appear from time to time, and sometimes claim to be the sole representatives of a general literary approach to the biblical text, an impression that is far from being a true one. A good indication of the rich possibilities of such a literary approach to the Pentateuch can be gained from Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), which has been very well received.

To be distinguished from this literary approach there are those, above all Brevard Childs, who have urged afresh the need for exegesis to read the OT as the Scripture of synagogue and church, and who speak of a 'canonical approach' to the OT. Here too the exegete is thought of as having much to learn from an unfamiliar direction, and in view of the emphasis on the term 'Scripture' it is not surprising to find that it is the history of biblical interpretation, among both Jews and Christians, that is meant: the great (and not so great) commentaries and other works which grappled with the meaning of Scripture long before the modern historical approach was thought of. One can see Childs's high respect for the commentaries of the past in his own on Exodus, in which one section of the treatment of each passage is reserved for a consideration of them (see also Childs 1979 : chs. 3, 5).

Clearly both varieties of this development have a real attraction, which is due partly to the fact that they recognize important dimensions of the texts which are commonly overlooked in other OT scholarship, and partly to the fact that what they say seems so much simpler and more familiar than talk of sources and stages of tradition does. At the same time it is important to recognize their limitations, which mean that they cannot and should not take the place of traditional historical scholarship. Clines and Childs are both clear that their methods leave room for historical study of the origins of the Pentateuch, but they do not stress this point sufficiently. One can see the limitations as well as the advantages of their methods if one remembers the descriptions of the Pentateuch which lie at their foundation: on the one hand, a unified work of literature, on the other, Scripture. It is only questions arising out of these descriptions which the methods proposed are capable of answering: that is the questions of students of literature and of preachers and systematic theologians. For the answering of historical questions they are of little or no use: such questions are ones that can and should be asked, and they will be answered by the use of other, more appropriate methods. I think it is also necessary to go a stage further and ask whether Childs's canonical approach is really adequate, by itself, even for the answering of theological questions about the Pentateuch. Does it not involve turning one's back on matters of

enormous theological importance, such as the original message of the Pentateuchal sources taken one by one, and the relation of this to the historical situation which they addressed? For Childs the only historical situation which seems ultimately to matter is that addressed by the text in its canonical form, sometime in the post-exilic or even intertestamental period, and the only theological viewpoint which ultimately matters is that of the final redactor of the text. Is not a theological exegesis based on such principles going to be impoverished compared with what historically based exegesis has to offer?

This is also an appropriate place for a brief comment on R. N. Whybray's recent book, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (1987). It contains a review of recent (and not so recent) work on the Pentateuch, and as such it has many useful things to say. The conclusion is, however, rather different from that which will be proposed here: Whybray supports the more far-reaching criticisms of the Documentary Theory, and he takes the view that the final author of the Pentateuch, sometime in the post-exilic period, employed such a 'high degree of imagination and [such] great freedom in the treatment of sources' that source criticism of the traditional kind is not possible and one must limit oneself to the study of the final form of the text, but on critical rather than literary or canonical grounds. This view has found very little support among critical scholars, whose continued discussion of the composition of the Pentateuch from earlier material shows that they do not consider that the situation is as desperate as Whybray proposes. In particular it is remarkable that Whybray does not even seem to recognize the possibility of distinguishing Deuteronomy and the Priestly material from the remainder.

3. Redaction Criticism

Back in the world of traditional biblical criticism, it is necessary to consider the growing emphasis on redaction criticism. This can be defined as the study of the way in which *editorial processes* have shaped the Pentateuch. In early biblical criticism the redactor was chiefly thought of as a scribe who combined together older sources into a composite narrative, without contributing much if anything out of his own head by way of interpretation or additional material. He was what has sometimes been called a scissors-and-paste man. He was thought to have taken extracts from existing documents and joined them together, often in a rather careless way. The symbol R^{JE}, for example, was used to denote the redactor who combined the J source with the E source of the Pentateuch. Over the years the emphasis has changed, and when scholars speak of a redactor today they are thinking more often of a figure who may only have had in front of him a single document or account, and amplified it by the addition of words or sentences which would alter its overall meaning to present more clearly the teachings which he himself believed to be most important for his day. This development can be seen with particular clarity in recent study of the prophetic and historical books of the OT, but it has also considerably modified the way in which some scholars have seen the composition of the Pentateuch as taking place. It of course brings attention firmly back to the written stage of the tradition and sometimes there is an explicit polemic against the oral tradition approach. Some scholars in Germany have applied this approach to the detection of layers within the sources recognized by earlier scholarship (e.g. E. Zenger; P. Weimar). But, perhaps because of the importance of Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic editing in other parts of the OT, this approach often asserts that redactional work by the same 'school' of writers can be traced in the Pentateuch, or rather the Tetrateuch. This is particularly true of L. Perlitt's book, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament*, 'Covenant Theology in the OT', which made a big impression through the acceptance of some of

its theses by influential scholars (cf. Nicholson 1973). For our purposes what is most important is that Perlitt reckons with an extensive Deuteronomistic reworking of the chapters in Exodus which deal with events at Mount Sinai. According to Perlitt, all passages in these chapters which imply the making of a covenant between YHWH and Israel at Sinai belong to this redactional level, which he calls Deuteronomistic, because he believes that covenant theology is peculiarly the creation of the authors of Deuteronomy, and was imposed by them and their disciples on the other parts of the OT. Much of Perlitt's detailed work on the Sinai narrative is directed at showing that verses normally attributed to J or E do not belong to them, but are part of this later redactional layer, the result of which is to argue that covenant was not an original component of the Sinai tradition. There is something of a vicious circle in this argument. The references to a covenant in Exodus are said to be due to a late Deuteronomistic redactor—because the covenant idea is no older than Deuteronomy—but this can only be sustained by assuming that the verses in Exodus are due to a Deuteronomistic redactor. Little attention seems to be given to the possibility that the covenantal texts in Exodus are the seeds from which the Deuteronomistic theology grew. There is also a failure to notice important differences between the way that the Sinai covenant is presented in Exodus and the Deuteronomistic literature (cf. the critique of Perlitt in Nicholson 1986 : ch. 8).

However redactional explanations have been brought forward for other sections of the Pentateuch as well. Auld has argued that the passages at the end of Numbers which speak about plans for the conquest of Canaan and its division among the tribes are dependent on the passages in Joshua which describe these episodes, and did not form part of any of the main Pentateuchal sources (Auld1980). It has also been suggested that many of the notes of movement from place to place in Exodus and Numbers, which form a framework to the wilderness narrative as we now have it, were added in an 'itinerary-redaction', which made use of a full account of the wilderness journey preserved in Num 33:1–49 . On a more theological level it has been argued that the promises to the patriarchs in Genesis were greatly multiplied and enlarged by redactors working at a time when one of the themes of these promises, the possession of the land of Canaan, was threatened in the late monarchy or even the exilic period by the appearance of the great imperial powers of Assyria and Babylon. Nicholson, again, has argued that the Decalogue in Ex 20 did not originally appear there but was inserted by a redactor who took it more or less as it stood from its other occurrence in Deut 5 . Each of the theories has of course to be judged on its merits.

It is appropriate to refer briefly here to C. Westermann's massive commentary on Genesis. Westermann does not accept that there is any trace of an E source in Genesis. The passages usually said to have been derived from E, such as most of chs. 20–22 , he takes to be stories that had circulated separately before being added to the J narrative, which was already in a connected form. They are, in effect, supplements to J, and with Westermann here we are right back in the world of the supplementary theory of Pentateuchal origins. It is for that reason that he is included here, even though the additional matter is too extensive and too self-contained for the process of its inclusion really to be referred to as a redaction. In coming to this view, Westermann is taking up the approach advocated by W. Rudolph many years ago, and also followed by S. Mowinckel. It is not clear that he has made that approach any the more likely, but it remains an option that must be carefully examined. Wolff's essay on the theology of E, of course, noted some important

recurring features in the E material which suggest that it did come from a connected narrative or source.

With redactional explanations covering so much of the Pentateuch, it is not a big step to suggest that comprehensive redactional activity has sought to remould the whole Pentateuch into a new form. This is the direction in which William Johnstone has moved. He argues that the Pentateuch is the result of a Priestly revision of an original Deuteronomistic version of the story, which was based on Deuteronomy (he does not say on what else), so that a close parallel exists with the composition of the historical books, where the ‘priestly’ Chronicles is seen by most scholars as a revision of the Deuteronomistic historical books of Samuel and Kings (Johnstone [1998](#)). This leads straight into a wider questioning about the nature of P.

4. P as a Supplement, not a Source

Questions have been raised not only about the date, but about the nature of the Priestly Source. F. M. Cross and others have argued that P is not a separate source which once existed independently of J etc., perhaps as a rival version of the story of Israel's origins, but a series of supplements overlaid on the older narrative. According to this view, P was thus reworking the older narrative by expanding it with material of a new, generally cult-centred character, so as to shift the balance of the story in this direction. Like the elimination of E as a separate source, this is in fact an old view revived which can be traced back to P. Volz in the years between the two World Wars. It is also the view that was held by the Scandinavian scholar Ivan Engnell, whose views on oral tradition were mentioned briefly earlier. The important difference it makes is that the purpose of the P writer must now be investigated on the assumption that he reproduced the older traditions, e.g. about legislation at Sinai, as well as incorporating material reflecting his own special interests. It is, for example, then no longer possible to say, as some have done, that P knows nothing of a covenant at Sinai but only the founding of a pattern of ritual. P incorporated the older covenant-making story and had no need to add one of his own. One of the attractions of this view, and indeed of the other ‘supplementary’ theories, is that it appears to spare us the allegedly unreal picture of redactors sitting at their desks with scissors and paste, selecting half a verse from here and half a verse from there in the four sources to make the completed Pentateuch. There are also some passages, especially in the patriarchal stories, where the P material is so meagre that it seems at first sight unlikely that it ever existed alone, and unjustified to claim that it represents extracts from a fuller, now lost, parallel account of the events, and it might better be explained as amplification of an existing narrative.

And yet there are a number of passages which seem to defy explanation in these terms, and to require a hypothesis of the traditional kind, which allows for the existence of an independent P source (see especially Emerton [1988](#); Davies [1996](#)). These are passages where it is possible by analysis to identify both a relatively complete P version of the story and a relatively complete version from one of the older sources. The Flood story is a prime example, but there are others. A redactor would not compose duplicates such as we observed in the Flood story: whether it seems ‘natural’ or ‘likely’ to us or not, the only explanation which makes sense of the situation there is that he had two complete narratives of the Flood and combined them. Another point arises from the P passage Ex [6:2–3](#), according to which God did not make himself known to the patriarchs by the name YHWH but only as El Shaddai/God Almighty. This corresponds well to the beginnings of speeches in P such as Gen [17:1](#) and [35:11](#), but it conflicts directly with passages where the patriarchs show familiarity with the name YHWH, which are quite frequent

in J (12:8 etc.). It is hardly conceivable that P would have left such passages unamended if he had included them in his overall presentation. This implies that there is a continuing need to reckon with the independent existence of P prior to its combination with the other sources. But it also seems that there has been some minor editing of the completed Pentateuch by a Priestly writer at a very late stage which has introduced the vocabulary of P into older material (e.g. Ex 16:1, 17:1 , the phrase ‘the congregation of the people of Israel’), and this could help to explain the isolated ‘P’ verses in the patriarchal stories that were mentioned.

5. *A Late Date for J*

A further recent development concerns the dating of J. The first scholar to mention here is H. H. Schmid who argued in his book *Der sogenannte Jahwist* (1976) (‘The So-Called Yahwist’) that the composition of the whole of J took place after the rise of classical prophecy and is contemporary with the rise of the Deuteronomic movement. In his own words: ‘The historical work designated in research by the word “Yahwist”, with its comprehensive theological redaction and interpretation of the Pentateuchal material cannot derive from the time of Solomon, but already presupposes pre-exilic prophecy and belongs close to the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic shaping of the tradition and literary activity.’ He declines to give an absolute date but this view would put the composition of J in the 7th or 6th century BCE. How, briefly, does Schmid arrive at this conclusion? By two main kinds of argument: (1) he points to features in the J narrative which, according to him, are prophetic in character and are not found in literature before the classical prophets in the eighth century and later. For example, the ‘call of Moses’ in Ex 3 resembles the call-narratives found in the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but finds no earlier analogues. (2) He points to traditions in J which are noticeably absent from pre-exilic literature outside the Pentateuch: the meeting with God at Mount Sinai, Moses (with one exception), the patriarchs (with one or two exceptions), the unity of all Israel in her early history. The ‘silence’ of the other texts is strange if J (and E) had existed since the early monarchy, but is readily explicable if J did not originate until the late pre-exilic period.

The consequences of such a view for the history of Israelite religion are considerable. It implies that there was no connected written account of the early history of Israel until the seventh century BCE, and also conversely that the seventh and sixth century BCE made an even greater contribution to the shaping of OT tradition than has been recognized in the past, even more than Perlitt thinks. If one asks, ‘What then was the nature of Israelite religion before this?’, Schmid’s books on wisdom and the cult provide an answer: YHWH was seen above all as the creator of an order in the world, which wisdom sought to understand and the cult sought to maintain, very much like the gods of Israel’s neighbours. Israel’s specific faith in a God of history was the result of the insights of the prophets and the Deuteronomic school. But is Schmid’s late date for J correct? It is clearly as valid or invalid as the arguments on which it stands. They need careful examination. Let us look at the two main types:

- 1) The similarity between the call of Moses and, say, the call of Isaiah is undeniable, but it should not be exaggerated. Moses in J is not called to be a prophet in the later sense, but to lead his people out of Egypt, in a manner similar to that by which Gideon in Judg 6 and Saul in 1 Sam 9 were called, older narratives without doubt. In so far as there are real prophetic motifs, these can be attributed either to the old Moses-tradition itself or

to the influence of the early prophetic movement, which we know to have been active already in the tenth or ninth century. There is no need to come any later.

- 2) The 'silence' about certain Pentateuchal themes in other pre-exilic literature is remarkable but it really proves too much, for if taken with full seriousness it would imply not just that J was a late composition but that these themes were only invented in the late pre-exilic period, an extremely radical position which Schmid clearly does not wish to take up. And yet if he is ready to conceive that the prophetic and other texts might have failed to mention a tradition which nevertheless existed in oral form, surely it is not appreciably more difficult to conceive of their failing to mention what was written down, in J? Moreover, the silence is not, as Schmid has to recognize, total, at least in some of the cases. The prophet Hosea, for example, clearly refers to a number of events in Israel's early history.

Many of Schmid's arguments are open to criticism along one of these lines, and he has given no compelling reason why J should not have originated in the early monarchy or why it should be dated to the late monarchy or the exilic period. J is after all notably lacking in references to the great powers or the possibility of exile (contrast Deuteronomy).

Another scholar who dates the Yahwist very late, in the exilic period, is John Van Seters. In his first book-length study on the subject, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (1975), he did not date all of J so late. In fact he suggested that the Pentateuch had 'grown' through a series of expansions of an original core, and that core consisted of part of the J source. To this was added first E, then D, then the rest of J (the larger part of it in fact) and finally P. Even then, however, he was saying that the J material as a whole only came into being in the exile, shortly before P. In Van Seters' more recent work it is on this stage of composition that he has concentrated. Already in *Abraham* Van Seters was developing a series of arguments for a late date for the Yahwist: they include historical anachronisms, the use of formulae from prophecy and the royal cult, and particularly the prominence given to Abraham as the source of Israel's election. This, he argued, corresponds closely to the view of Deutero-Isaiah (see Isa 41:8 and 51:2), but it is a theme which is not yet emphasized in the late pre-exilic writings of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It does, of course, reappear in P, which is also exilic.

In his more recent books Van Seters has widened the textual base of his studies by looking at the rest of the Pentateuch, at least its non-Priestly sections. An important new stage in his work was *In Search of History* (1983). This actually has very little to say about the Pentateuch—it is mostly about the Deuteronomistic History. But in it Van Seters draws numerous comparisons between Old Testament history-writing and comparable literature from other cultures, and he particularly emphasizes the similarity with ancient Greek historians such as Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century BCE. From these comparisons Van Seters argued for a greater appreciation that the Deuteronomistic History was a literary work whose author was ready to write creatively where his sources did not provide what he needed, and in fact was the beginning, as far as Israel was concerned, of such historical literature. These findings have worked their way into his more recent work on the Pentateuch and strengthened his opinion that in J we are dealing with a highly literate, but also quite late, author. Actual Greek parallels to passages in the

Pentateuch have also come to play a more important part in his work, though Near-Eastern ones are still cited.

A good example of this work is Van Seters' study of Gen 1–11 (1993; see also *The Life of Moses* (1994)). He notes some parallels of form and substance between the Yahwist's primeval history and Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*, which is thought to have been written about 550 BCE. He sees this as representative of a 'Western genealogies tradition', which influenced the J author in Genesis about the same time. Some of the parallels are probably not very significant: it is difficult to see, for example, how similarities of form are likely to have been transmitted independently of content; and different communities could easily have brought their traditions together independently in similar ways. The most impressive parallel concerns Gen 6:1–4: the *Catalogue* is very largely about such divine–human liaisons which produced the 'heroes' or demi-gods of primeval times, and one passage suggests that a natural disaster may have been sent by Zeus to get rid of them (cf. the Flood). Van Seters sees several of the 'origins of civilisation' stories in Gen 2–11 as linked to 6:1–4 and modelled on the 'Western tradition'. In most cases it is possible to say that similar stories may have originated independently. But in the case of Gen 6:1–4 Van Seters may be right: this story is very much the odd one out among the stories in Gen 1–11 and perhaps it does have a distant origin. However, it may not be necessary to look as far as Greece for this: the Ugaritic myths include at least one description of a god having sexual intercourse with human women (Shachar and Shalim, *CTA* 23). A different kind of argument is used by Van Seters to place the composition of Gen 2–3 (J) in the exilic period. He sees these chapters as the end of a development which begins with a Babylonian myth about the creation of a king, dated to the seventh or sixth century: this, he argues, was the basis for Ezekiel's oracle against Tyre, which speaks of a mythical king who was once in the Garden of Eden but was expelled from it (Ezek 28), and Gen 2–3 in turn was a transformation of this oracle to describe the creation and fall of mankind generally. Hence Gen 2–3, and therefore J, would be later than Ezekiel. It remains possible, however, that the relationship between these three texts is a different one: Ezekiel may have combined motifs from a myth about the origins of kingship and Gen 2–3 or something like it. In that case Gen 2–3, and J, would be, as generally thought, earlier than Ezekiel.

6. *The New Tradition-Criticism*

But—and this brings us to the final issue that has been raised in the recent debate—was there a J at all? This is the question that has been asked—and answered in the negative—in a book published in 1977 (cf. Rendtorff 1990). In certain respects Rendtorff's arguments and conclusions are similar to those of the redaction critics and of Schmid, and in subsequent discussion they have been able to find quite a lot of common ground with him. For example, Rendtorff also believes that P never existed as a separate document, but should rather be described as a redactional layer or rather a series of redactional layers belonging to a late stage of the Pentateuch's composition. But Rendtorff has arrived at his views by a quite different route and maintains some theses which go far beyond the views of the other scholars.

The key to Rendtorff's approach is the high value which he places on tradition criticism. The origins of this method, which seeks to trace the history of the Pentateuchal traditions from their beginning to the stage of the completed Pentateuch, can be found in Gunkel's introduction to his Genesis commentary and it was taken further by von Rad and Noth in their famous works. Now

all these scholars regarded tradition criticism as a method which was complementary to and needing to be combined with source criticism, the JEDP analysis or something like it. And in this, according to Rendtorff, they made a serious error: to quote some words of his from an earlier paper, 'It must be said that adherence to the Documentary Hypothesis is an anachronism from the point of view of tradition-criticism.' That is, the two methods are not complementary, they are incompatible with each other. We may note, in passing, that this had been said before, by Ivan Engnell, the Scandinavian scholar, and his closest followers. In Rendtorff's polarization of source and tradition criticism the theses of Engnell have received, in part, a new lease of life.

Why does Rendtorff polarize the two methods? Because according to him, they represent the use of diametrically opposed starting-points in the analysis of the text. Source criticism begins from 'the final form of the text' and examines the question of its unity, and seeks to explain its apparent diversity in terms of the combination of parallel 'sources' (such as J, E, and P). Tradition criticism, on the other hand, starts from the smallest originally independent unit, say an individual episode in the story or a law, and seeks to explain how it was combined with other similar units to make a series to make a yet larger whole, and how editorial processes or redaction shaped the units until they reached their present form. So it is not a matter of doing source criticism first and then tradition criticism: you have to choose your starting-point and follow through the analysis until you reach the other end. As it stands this is not a very strong point: tradition criticism too has to start with the present text. The contrast of approaches could be put better by saying that traditional source criticism has been ready to believe that a sequence of narratives was a unity unless it was proved otherwise; whereas Rendtorff wants to say that prior to the present text narratives were not united unless that can be positively proved. This is not specifically a traditio-critical view: it is noticeable above all in fact in some of the newer revisions of source criticism, specifically in those emanating from the pupils of W. Richter.

Quite apart from this methodological point, Rendtorff is in little doubt that source criticism is a bankrupt business. In a chapter of his book entitled 'Criticism of Pentateuchal Criticism' he exposes at length the disagreements of source critics both about individual passages and about the number and nature of the sources they find. There is no consensus, he repeatedly affirms; there is no 'classical documentary theory', but several competing theories, none of which has been able to drive the others from the field. In particular the status of the J document, which according to von Rad gave the Pentateuch its canonical shape, is very doubtful. Is it one document or two (cf. its subdivision by Eissfeldt and Fohrer)? And more generally, what evidence is there of its unity? Here Rendtorff points to the method of elimination which lies so often behind the identification of J passages. First the easily recognizable P sections are eliminated from the existing Pentateuch, to reveal the older sources; then likewise the book of Deuteronomy (D) is removed; then E, marked by its use of Elohim in Genesis; and then what is left is called J. But how do we know that what is left is a unity? To give an analogy: how do we know that the Pentateuch is not like a basket containing many kinds of fruit, from which the apples, bananas, and oranges are removed, to leave—just pears? No, surely a mixture of these with peaches, grapes, strawberries, and so on.

It is not of potential disunity in a source-critical sense (i.e. two parallel Yahwist (J) strands, as with Eissfeldt and Fohrer) that Rendtorff is primarily thinking, but rather in a traditio-historical sense: what reason have we for thinking that the residue was a single continuous narrative

describing everything from creation to the conquest of the land, rather than a series of smaller-scale stories, one about the patriarchs, one about the Exodus, etc.? In fact Rendtorff believes that it is possible to show that the J material is in this sense definitely not a unity. This he endeavours to do by an examination of the various sections of the Pentateuchal narrative taken one by one: the sections bear a notable resemblance to Noth's themes—patriarchs, Exodus, Sinai, wilderness, and settlement. The primeval history seems to be passed over, but the same approach could be applied to it. Rendtorff's point is that the theological perspective of the editing is not consistent throughout but varies from one section to the next. Comprehensive theological evaluations of the whole history are surprisingly rare, and tend to be concentrated in what look like late passages.

In his book Rendtorff did not spell his argument out in full detail for all the sections, but he indicated his method of applying tradition criticism in a very detailed study of the patriarchal narratives. He begins with the observation (which is not new) that the theological texts of the patriarchal stories are chiefly concentrated in the 'promises': passages, that is, where YHWH makes a promise or several promises to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. The interrelation of the contents of these promise-passages to one another is extremely complex, and Rendtorff attributes it to a succession of stages of editing of the patriarchal traditions. At any rate it is clear that the promises are the major theological theme of the patriarchal narratives. Now von Rad had seen this and attributed the main body of the promises to the Yahwist, who he supposed inserted them to impress on the Pentateuchal material his theological understanding of Israel's early history: it was a history worked out under the shadow of YHWH's promise. But against this Rendtorff is able to show that this theme virtually vanishes at the end of Genesis, and is missing from JE passages such as Ex 3, which mention the land to which YHWH now says he will lead the Israelites without any hint that this had been promised long ago to their forefathers, time and time again! The conclusion he draws is that the development of the promise theme in Genesis is not the work of a J author who composed or compiled a document extending the whole length of the Pentateuch, but rather the theological enrichment of a story which did not extend beyond the limits of the patriarchal period itself. Only at the time of the Priestly redaction and a further stage of editing related to the Deuteronomic school is there any sign of the various sections of the Pentateuch being co-ordinated together into a continuous narrative. Prior to this there existed only shorter compositions which circulated separately and were edited separately—Rendtorff seems not to have any suggestion to offer about the social context in which this took place or the purpose that such compositions might have served, but clearly there are in some cases at least possibilities of an association with cultic festivals.

It is not clear whether Rendtorff's particular proposals will be able to withstand detailed criticism. The denial of a unity in J will have to contend not only with von Rad but with the more wide-ranging studies of G. Hölscher and H. Schulte. There are in fact various ways in which scholars might respond to the dilemmas with which Rendtorff has faced us, apart from accepting in full his own reading of the situation. But he has, whatever we may decide, exposed some tensions at the heart of modern critical method which need to be resolved. I do not myself think that tradition criticism is a very secure base from which to attack the literary-critical enterprise. It is a bit like trying to move a piano while standing on a tea-trolley!

Since it was first put forward in 1977 this view has been rather neglected. Rendtorff himself quite quickly lost interest in it: he was persuaded by Childs's arguments that attention ought to be

focused on the final canonical form of the text—a dramatic change for him—and he became particularly interested in the coherence of the book of Isaiah as a whole. His *Introduction to the Old Testament* (ET 1985) reflects this change of perspective, though it also shows that he retains some interest in older traditions and redaction criticism. A student of Rendtorff's, Erhard Blum, has continued some of his ideas in two large books on the Pentateuch (1984, 1990), but it is noticeable that he too increasingly concentrates not on the earliest stages of the tradition, when the stories of the primeval history, the patriarchs, the Exodus, etc. may have been told separately from one another, but on the stages at which they were already combined together: he investigates what he calls the Deuteronomistic Composition (KD)—which does not include the J portions of Gen 1–11—and the Priestly Composition (KP), which successively amplified the traditions from their particular points of view (cf. Johnstone 1990).

Review and Assessment.

In reviewing these recent developments it should be noted that by different routes quite a lot of scholars are coming to support more or less the same alternative to the older source-critical view. The developments outlined in the last four sections are increasingly merging into what is in effect the same understanding of the origin of the Pentateuch. This holds that:

- 1) The first major comprehensive Pentateuchal narrative was composed either late in pre-exilic times or in the Babylonian exile (7th or 6th cent. BCE), rather than in the early monarchy. Some prefer to speak of a 'late Yahwist' (Schmid, Van Seters), some of a Deuteronomistic narrative (Johnstone, Blum), but they are largely talking about the same thing and using the same arguments.
- 2) The Priestly Work never existed as a separate source, but involved the insertion into the older narrative of the specifically Priestly narratives and laws, so as to produce a work very like our present Pentateuch.

In each case the model or overall approach is a 'supplementary' one, that is, the old idea of redactors interweaving extracts from distinct sources, a verse from here and a verse from there, is abandoned and we go right back to the approach that was followed in the first half of the nineteenth century and think of a core which in successive stages was amplified until the present Pentateuch was produced: the major difference being—and it is a very significant one—that then what we call P was (part of) the original core, while now it represents the final stage of the process. An important theological consequence of the new approach is the increased prominence which it gives to the sections of the Pentateuch which contain or are associated with law, namely the Deuteronomistic and Priestly passages. It should be noted that theses 1 and 2 are in fact logically independent. It is possible to accept one of them and not the other, and some scholars have done and still do this, following the Wellhausen approach or something like it on the other issue. Thus Cross accepts 2 but not 1; and Schmid and Blenkinsopp hold 1 but not 2.

The supporters of the new views are not having things all their own way. Some difficulties with them have already been mentioned, and some further criticisms of thesis 1 have been made by E. W. Nicholson in a recent paper (see also Nicholson 1998). This thesis also fails, in its strongest

form, to do justice to the evidence of Deuteronomy itself. The very setting of Deuteronomy on the eve of the conquest of the promised land presupposes a tradition about Israel's origins; likewise there are many passing allusions to features of that tradition in the text of Deuteronomy which would only have made sense if the hearers of the Deuteronomic preaching had been familiar with a quite detailed account of the Exodus and so on. As for thesis 2, we have seen that some passages, such as the Flood story, are very difficult for it to accommodate.

So what are we to think? Which view will prevail? As far as 1 is concerned, I think we are at a stage when all the emphasis is on late elements of the Pentateuch, and some scholars write as though that is all there is. The arguments for lateness are of varying strength. For myself I am more convinced that the Decalogue is a late addition to the Sinai narrative in Exodus than that the idea of a covenant is a latecomer in Exodus, for example. But more important, I think we shall before long find more work being done again on what we may call for now the 'pre-Deuteronomic Pentateuchal narratives and laws'—their contents, their theology, and their origins. Then the Deuteronomic or late J layer (which may turn out to be 'thinner' than currently thought!) will be seen as more clearly that, rather than seeming to comprise the whole of the non-P part of the Pentateuch. On 2 an interesting mediating position has been put forward by R. E. Friedman (1981). He thinks that at a first stage there were independent P versions of certain parts of the Pentateuch, such as the Flood story; but the major composition of P as a whole took place at a second stage in very much the way Cross proposed, i.e. by supplementation of the older narrative. Where P texts from the first stage had to be worked into the older narrative, they were sometimes interwoven with the older version, as in the case of the Flood story. Blum, working in detail on certain passages, ends up with a partly similar view to this. Maybe it will be necessary to hold some such view to accommodate all the evidence—the case for supplementation has been argued to be particularly strong in relation to the Table of Nations and the plague-story by Van Seters—or maybe it will be better, in view of the coherence of so much of the P material, to retain the idea of an original, once-separate source, and explain the most intractable counter-indications by a further, still later layer of redaction.

But there are problems within the literary-critical method itself, arising from the fact that we now feel compelled to treat each unit separately for analysis. While it is quite clear that the Pentateuch is not a literary unity and that analysis can separate out parallel strands at numerous points, it is not so obvious that a rigorous approach to the assembly of the 'bits' leads automatically to the division of the Pentateuch into four or five major sources, such as traditional source criticism proposes. In other words the model for synthesis (step c.3) need not be a wholly documentary one. About the coherence and original independence of the bulk at least of the P material, it seems to me, there is little doubt, and equally about the separate character and development of Deuteronomy. However it is more difficult to be sure how the residue of the books Genesis–Numbers is to be thought of and Rendtorff's thesis of shorter works may well have a part to play, and equally processes of redaction which did not extend the whole length of the Pentateuch, but concerned only a particular range of the narrative.

We may conclude by returning, very briefly, to the question with which we began, 'What is the Pentateuch?', in the light of the modern study of the text which we have just reviewed. Whichever of the approaches that have recently been advocated prevails, or even if things eventually stay very much as they were, we must build into our view of the Pentateuch the fact

that it is the product of a long process of tradition. In other words we must recognize that its teaching, while organized into some sort of unity by the various redactors, derives from various periods in the history of Israel within which certain individuals or schools have contributed an especially creative shaping and rethinking of the traditions which they inherited. In varying degrees these individuals or schools deserve the name 'theologians'. To some extent the difficulty of finding a fully satisfactory description for the Pentateuch as a whole is due to the differing emphases of these writers. In a real sense, then, the Pentateuch bears witness to the whole history and life of Israel, and not just to the period which it purports to describe. As a comprehensive description I would suggest the following, which I think can apply to all stages of the composition of the Pentateuch:

'The charter of YHWH's people Israel, which lays down the founding principles of their life in creation, history and law, under the guidance of his word of promise and command.'

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