

The Need for a New Vision of the Torah

By Georg Fischer SJ (Innsbruck)

Research into the Pentateuch has made *immense progress* in the last two centuries, so that a much more accurate picture of the historical processes behind its formation has been achieved. Today it is commonly held that the Torah in its final form was extant in Persian times, around 400 BC, and that it is the product of a combination of various traditions and interests.¹ This represents a definite and lasting advance in OT scholarship and gives a more appropriate understanding of the texts of the Torah than was conceived up to the 19th century.

Yet there remain *many areas of disagreement*, affecting not only details, but fundamental issues such as the manner in which these books emerged as literature.² The main source for this ongoing debate is often attributed to the controversy over the correct approaches to the texts, that is, to the dichotomy between diachronic and synchronic methods. But this reasoning does not bear scrutiny, as by far the most areas of dissension show up among those attempting diachronic analyses.

The *effects* of this ongoing discussion are rather damaging. Even specialist scholars need years to inform themselves about just the essentials of Pentateuchal research, and are often left with a great number of uncertainties; for students and others, access and insight into this extensive and complicated field of the OT remain unattainable. This is not a desirable situation for anybody. It would be a great help if some foundations and guidelines could be established to provide a basis and orientation for study

* I would like to thank Mrs. Felicity Stephens for her assistance in correcting the English of this article.

1 See, for a general information, E. Zenger (Hg.), *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*,⁵2004, 60-135, especially 127-129.

2 These problems become even more complicated, when the same author changes his opinion within a relatively short time. Compare, e.g., E. Blum's interpretation of Exo 3-4 in *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189), 1990, 22-28, and his position in: *Die literarische Verbindung von Erzvätern und Exodus*, in: *Abschied vom Jahwisten* (Hg. J.C. Gertz u.a.) BZAW 315, 2002, 119-156, esp. 134-137, or the different presentations of the problem in the first, third and fifth edition of E. Zenger's *Einleitung* (see note 1).

in the midst of all this chaos. There is a real need for a new vision of the Torah.

In my view, some authors have succeeded in shedding *new light* on its texts, among them B. Jacob, J.P. Fokkelman, C. Houtman, R. Alter.³ The work of Houtman remains, up to the present time, the most extensive and penetrating investigation into the history of Pentateuchal theories, with the rather disillusioning result that the “theory of sources cannot provide a satisfactory answer to the question of the genesis of the Pentateuch”.⁴ His large Exodus commentary and the cited works of the three other authors show that the texts of the first two books of the Bible in their final form are meaningful, despite all their tensions and variations. It is an unfortunate loss to OT scholarship that their results have not really been taken seriously, although accessible for more than twenty years. I would like to follow up their approach with three major insights from my own research, and present with each a methodological reflection (indicated by →).

A) The inner coherence of units (Exo 3-4 as example)

The vocation of Moses was for a long time regarded as the classical example of the combination of two sources, the Jahwist and the Elohist (J and E).⁵ However, this *opinio communis* has been challenged;⁶ the account of Moses’ vocation is in itself a *well-wrought unit*, with a logical and precise progression of thought. A narrative analysis of Exo 3:1-4:17 can explain every detail as making sense in its place, in its formulation, and within the larger context.

The distinction of the *divine designations* יהוה and אלהים (ה) is often taken as an indication of different sources.⁷ Following the lead of F. Dornseiff, Houtman has insisted on the stylistic and theological use of the terms for God.⁸ They serve to express specific aspects of God. The ‘name’ יהוה often refers to the liberating God who engages himself in history for his people, whereas the designation. אלהים (ה) “(the) God” is mostly used to

3 To mention just their major contributions: B. Jacob’s commentaries on Genesis (Berlin 1934 = Stuttgart 2000) and Exodus (1992); J.P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis (²1991); C. Houtman, Der Pentateuch. Die Geschichte seiner Erforschung neben einer Auswertung (1994; Dutch original 1980); R. Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (1981).

4 Houtman, Pentateuch (n3), 419.

5 For example W.H. Schmidt, Exodus (BK II/1), 1988, 110-123.

6 G. Fischer, Jahwe unser Gott. Sprache, Aufbau und Erzähltechnik in der Berufung des Mose (Ex 3-4), OBO 91, 1989; Blum, Studien (n2); J. Kegler, Die Berufung des Mose als Befreier Israels, in: Freiheit und Recht (Hg. C. Hardmeier, among others), 2003, 162-188.

7 Still in Zenger, Einleitung (n1), 76f.

8 Houtman, Pentateuch (n3), 178 and 377ff.

talk about him more generally. In fact, both expressions occur necessarily together for identification (e.g. Gen 28:21), a central issue also in Exo 3.

Another criterion for the separation of sources is supposedly found in *tensions present in the text*. However, what was perceived as tensions, from an historical-critical viewpoint, can easily be explained as the different voices of the main characters and the narrator, or as development of a theme. God and Moses think differently in Exo 3:18 and 4:1; according to audience, God changes the wording of his message slightly (compare Exo 3:7f, to Moses, with 3:16f, to the elders of Israel), or adjusts his plans after Moses' insistent reluctance (in 4:14, with the co-commissioning of Aaron). The transition from Yahweh's messenger to God himself (Exo 3:2,4) corresponds to the increase in God's presence; the messenger of God establishes the first contact, and then God deals personally with Moses.

As a result, Exo 3-4 shows a *high degree of coherence* on various levels: development of motifs, growing communication between God and Moses, progression within the objections against the vocation, etc. All this points to one author constructing accurately his text, bringing together a variety of aspects into one composition.

→ Instead of relying on global theories that are difficult to prove conclusively and are thus objects of ongoing debate, it is *preferable to begin with single units*. They provide a good starting point for research. Investigating them, if possible without preconceptions, fosters a sensitivity to the concerns and peculiarities of the ancient writings and writers and offers a new understanding of them, e.g. discovering the first use of the confession "YHWH our God" in Exo 3:18 as a deliberate programme to unite the various groups of Israel.

B) P and its evasive features as 'surest' source/redaction?

The last decades have brought about a *collapse of the main pillar* of most Pentateuchal theories, namely J and its old dating.⁹ The title of a recent publication, namely "Abschied vom Jahwisten",¹⁰ its foreword and some articles in it show the shaky foundations of J and demand that we bid farewell to this concept.

⁹ Leading scholars for this opinion were H.H. Schmid, *Der sogenannte Jahwist. Beobachtungen und Fragen zur Pentateuchforschung*, 1976; M. Rose, *Deuteronomist und Jahwist, Untersuchungen zu den Berührungspunkten beider Literaturwerke* (ATHANT 67), 1981; and J. van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*, 1992.

¹⁰ J.C. Gertz (Hg., among others), BZAW 315, 2002.

Long before, the discussion about the Elohist had resulted in a general reluctance to accept it as a separate source.¹¹ After the dropping away of J and E, scholarship was left with D (Deuteronomistic material) and P (the Priestly writing).¹² As D cannot really be regarded as a source, especially not in Genesis and Exodus, we are left with just one source, P, as the only “survivor” of the classical theory of the four sources of the Pentateuch. For most of our colleagues, P is the *last, seemingly unshattered foundation* to hold on to.

But there are still *many unresolved issues* with regard to P:

– Its use of *vocabulary* is inconsistent and thus unpredictable. Exo 6:2-8 are normally taken as P.¹³ It speaks of “burdens” and “deliver” (נצל, סבלוה), referring thus to non-P texts like Exo 2:11; 3:8. For “possession” one would expect אחזה, as in Gen 17:8; yet Exo 6:8 has מורשה instead.¹⁴ The claim that P can be recognized by its characteristic vocabulary thus seems to be vain; P does not stick to it and shows overlapping with other texts.

– P changes its *presentation*. Exo 1:13f stresses the hardship of slave work by the double use of בפרך, “with rigor, ruthlessly”; it seems to be just a short addition for the first measure of the Pharaoh (Exo 1:8-12). Yet in Exo 6 nearly the whole chapter is generally attributed to P,¹⁵ especially Verses 2-8 (see above) and the long genealogy of Aaron and Moses in 6:14-27. P thus shows marked variations in its appearance; it can be long or short, adding just an accent or entire stories.

– P changes the manner of its *insertion into the context*. Gen 1 is a narrative, standing on its own, as would correspond to the character of a source. However in Gen 6-9, the flood story, the situation is completely different: P is not found here as coherent narrative, but contributes just some additional accents (e.g., the pure animals, the time structure, the sacrifice) and seems

11 A recent exception is the work of A. Graupner, *Der Elohist. Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte*, WMANT 97, Neukirchen 2002. For an evaluation of it, compare the review in ZKTh 126 (2004), 159f.

12 This insight led Blum, *Studien* (n2), to propose his two “Kompositionsschichten” K^D and K^P which for some time gained widespread attention.

13 But see, as one example, the warning voice of R.W.L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 1992, 26-35, showing Exo 6 not as a parallel, but a continuation of Exo 3.

14 The interchange of three different verbs for the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exo 7-11, moreover in various stems, is just another example that the classical distributions for the so-called A plague narratives@ in J, P, and eventually a redactional layer (e.g. F. Kohata, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift in Exodus 3-14*, BZAW 166, 1986, table p.126) are highly questionable.

15 We can leave aside the other character of verse 1 and the problem that verses 28-30 seem to be a repetition of Verses 10-12.

more like a redaction.¹⁶ One can never rely on the manner of P's appearance; it shows up in any guise.

– Where does *P* end? The uncertainties about P continue, when it comes to determining its end. The solutions cover many possibilities, ranging from Exodus¹⁷ to Joshua¹⁸, and have been thoroughly investigated in C. Frevel's habilitation.¹⁹ His conclusion comes back to the proposals of J. Wellhausen and M. Noth, that Deut 34 forms the end of P, yet it is achieved by a kind of methodological surrender: he has to concede for his contention of Deut 34:8 as end of P^B that precise source or redaction critical attributions are impossible and that diachronic analysis does not yield sense any more, because of the condensed character of the text (p. 341f).

Considering these observations, which could be prolonged extensively, we are left with a very unsatisfactory overall picture of P, on various levels.²⁰ *P appears to resemble a chameleon*, able to change in almost every way. Thus it allows for the interpretation of any finding according to one's own preconceived theory.

Instead of reckoning further with P as a source or a separate redaction, these texts traditionally ascribed to it can be more adequately regarded as *another perspective or style of narration by the same author* who is responsible for the whole narrative. He deepens, completes or broadens his narration, by commenting, reflecting or adding to it.²¹ Exo 1:13f establish by "with rigor" (see above) a relation to the laws in Lev 25 (specifically to Verse 53, the treatment of an Israelite slave by a foreigner; the expression also occurs in Verses 43, 46) and qualify the Pharaoh's behaviour as forbidden. In Exo 2:23-25 the narrator changes the perspective to God's perception, thus allowing the reader to gain insight into the real dominance of the divine master and gain fresh hope from it. The closest correspondence to Exo 6:2-8 is to be found in a D text, namely Deut 26:3-9, which

16 T. Römer, *Le Pentateuque toujours en question. Bilan et perspective après un quart de siècle de débat*, in: Congress Volume Basel 2001 (Hg. A. Lemaire), VT.S 92, 2002, 343-374, has dealt recently with this issue of P's interchange between source and redaction.

17 E. Otto, *Forschungen zur Priesterschrift*, ThR 62 (1997), 1-50; he takes Exo 29:46 as the end of P^B.

18 N. Lohfink, *Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichte*, in: Congress Volume Göttingen 1977 (VT.S 29), 1978, 189-225, here 198 n29 and 220, pleads for Jos 18,1 and 19,51 as last phrases of P; J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 1992, 237, stops similarly in Jos 18f (as also H. Seebaß).

19 *Mit Blick auf das Land die Schöpfung erinnern. Zum Ende der Priestergrundschrift*, HBS 23, 2000.

20 In the face of the various positions listed above it is hard to follow the affirmation of Römer, *Pentateuque* (n16), 346, that the "delimitation of the P texts presents relatively few problems" (translated from the French original). On the contrary, it is quite hard to find two scholars agreeing in detail on the extension of P.

21 G. Fischer, *Keine Priesterschrift in Ex 1-15?*, in: ZKTh 117 (1995), 203-211, esp. 209ff.

shows extensive use of the same vocabulary.²² This makes Exo 6 like the announcement of a programme whose fulfillment is confirmed by the creed in Deut 26.

Another sign that the so-called P texts were written by the same author as the rest of the narrative emerges from the simple test of checking whether they are necessary or superfluous for the understanding. If P stems from another author, one would expect its texts to be additional, or unnecessary. However, an analysis of the quoted passages from Exodus shows that all these passages are *appropriately inserted into their context*; if they are eliminated, the narrative loses essential clues and connections.²³ This means on the one hand that the narrative is neither complete nor consistent without these texts attributed to P, and on the other hand, that those “P” texts stand in close, indissoluble connection with the rest of the Exodus narrative, mutually dependent on one another.

Some comparisons from outside OT exegesis might make it easier to grasp how “P” texts are not to be regarded as separate source or as product of a different author, but as work of the same narrator of the whole of Exo 1-15 (at least, if not further).

– *Old Egyptian art* had a special way of representing human persons, combining two different viewpoints into one image, showing face, pelvis and feet in profile, yet one eye, shoulders and upper part of the body from the front. This canon of art for depicting a person is called “Aspektive”.²⁴

– A similar technique of mixing various – in ‘reality’ irreconcilable B viewpoints, or even combining them with additional elements of symbolic value in one picture, is used for *Russian icons*. Although knowing about the foreshortening and being able to do it, the great masters of iconography preferred another style for their works.²⁵

– *Modern novels* are also full of examples of the combination of differing viewpoints, even within a short space. When R. Schneider describes the birth of the main person in “Schlafes Bruder”,²⁶ he switches

22 The special Hebrew word for “possession” establishes a connection with Deut 33:4, besides seven occurrences in Ezekiel.

23 For our examples taken from Exo 1-15 see G. Fischer, Exodus 1-15. Eine Erzählung, in: M. Vervenne (Hg.), Studies in the Book of Exodus, BETHL 126, 1996, 149-178. I tried to show that the so-called P texts are needed because they answer open issues where they occur, and that their elimination causes problems for the coherence of the narrative.

24 For this concept, see the works of E. Brunner-Traut, e.g. Die Alten Ägypter, 1987; Ägypten, 1988, or, perhaps best, Frühformen des Erkennens. Am Beispiel Altägyptens, 1990.

25 P. Florenskij, Die umgekehrte Perspektive, 1989 (Russian original 1920), has amply described this technique and termed it “inverted perspective”. The famous icon of the Holy Trinity by A. Rublev may suffice as one example: The person to the left is sitting on a chair with unbalanced legs; above its head there is a building seemingly ‘foreign’ to the setting.

26 Stuttgart (Reclam) ⁶1995, 14-20; this novel has received many editions and translations and widespread attention. It serves here to show what *one* author can do within his text.

between the thoughts of the midwife, presented as interior monologue, and the pains of the mother, brought in as distanced, narrative commentary and monotonous repetition: “Die Seffin gellte vor Schmerzen.”²⁷ By this intertwining, Schneider arrives at an excellent portrayal of the loneliness of the mother and the indifferent stance of the midwife.

– *Architecture* provides a final comparison. When planning a building, one has to draw two sketches, a ground-plan and an elevation. Only both together allow one to imagine what it is going to be. Some people even need a third, three-dimensional design to enable them to get an idea of a project.

The examples given above serve to demonstrate that at various times, and in different cultures, human expression combines a *variety of modes and / or perspectives to present ‘reality’*.

Coming back to the OT, we may *perceive in another, new way* what seemed to be tensions or contradictions in historical-critical analysis. Instead of trying to detect and separate “P”-elements, we could direct our focus onto the texts as a whole – as they have been transmitted²⁸ – and attempt to understand them just as they are, as mixtures and combinations.

Let us take two examples from Genesis. The *two creation accounts* in Gen 1f are generally taken as P and J (or D) and often explained as opposites, yet they mutually enlighten one another. Gen 1:1-2:3 supplies us with the overall picture of God’s creation of the cosmos, while the rest of Gen 2 describes in more detail man’s relation to the earth and to the other sex. Both narratives could have been joined together, despite their inconsistencies,²⁹ by one person desiring to communicate a complex, nuanced picture of creation.

The *two covenants of Gen 15 and 17*, formerly labelled J and P, have given rise to a lot of problems, especially since Gen 15 was recognized to be quite late, as a “theological compendium”.³⁰ This makes it very difficult to see in Gen 17 (“P”) a later redaction with a divergent concept of the covenant, as it has been traditionally interpreted (conditional covenant in

27 P. 16f; to explain it in English: “Seffin” is used for the wife of “Seff” (a form close to Sepp, i.e. Josef, Joe); she yelled, screamed in pain / labour.

28 Even if one adheres to diachronic exegesis, one has to admit that at least the final redaction saw some sense in putting together the pieces in this way.

29 Listed e.g. by Zenger, *Einleitung* (n1), 77f. I don’t want to deny or to harmonize them, but I question in the light of the comparisons above the conclusion, drawn from such inconsistencies or discrepancies, to attribute them to two different sources, redactions or authors.

30 One may not follow all lines of argumentation of J. Ha, *Genesis 15. A Theological Compendium of Pentateuchal History*, BZAW 181, 1989, yet his main result remains valid. This is also true for the final stage of the text in the analysis of J.C. Gertz, *Abraham, Mose und der Exodus. Beobachtungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte von Gen 15*, in: *Abschied* (n10), Gertz (Hg.), 63-81.

Gen 15, versus unconditional in Gen 17).³¹ Taking both chapters as stemming from one hand or mind, the covenant and the whole narrative in Gen 17 can be viewed in the line of Gen 15, as its confirmation and intensification after the impasse, or deviation, in Gen 16.

The development from Gen 15 to 17 shows yet another aspect of biblical stories, namely their *dynamic dimension*. The multi-faceted biblical narratives may be likened to films, with their various view-points and changing foci.³² They create an animate, vivid representation of 'reality' and thus stimulate the reader to a higher level of involvement. The dynamic, eventful character of life and its conflicts stimulates a similar rendering in literature, as seen in the texts of the Bible. A reader has to expect a composition with movement, manifold aspects and tensions, similar to what men experience at all times. Regarded in this way, the discussed texts disclose a remarkable coherence and continuity in the midst of ongoing change.

→ Instead of attaching labels (like "P") to texts, it is more fruitful to try to grasp *how they communicate their message and function within their contexts*. Biblical presentations often challenge historical-critical concepts of texts, because they contain different perspectives within one narrative, partly as a result of their formation.³³

C) The figure of Jacob: the consistency of a developing character (Gen 25-50)

The apparent paradox, if not contradiction, of the superscription focuses on a necessary feature of character representation. To show the life of a real person, of a round character in technical terms,³⁴ an author has to *depict his*

31 This explanation is also unable to give due respect to Abram's behaviour in Gen 15 where belief and sacrifice are requested from him, thus coming close to God's demand for circumcision in Gen 17.

32 R. Zwick, *Montage im Markusevangelium*, 1989, has opened the field of biblical exegesis for comparisons with the analysis of films; B. Repschinski provided a description of this method in G. Fischer, *Wege in die Bibel*, 2000, 78-80, and an application of it to Exo 1-15 can be found in G. Fischer, *Filmtechniken als Verstehenshilfen für biblische Erzählungen. Am Beispiel von Ex 1-15*, in: P. Tschuggnall (Hg.), *Religion – Literatur – Künste III. Perspektiven einer Begegnung am Beginn eines neuen Millenniums*, 2001, 524-529.

33 "Formation" here does not refer to a longer span of time, but to possibly divergent interests, several groups, or various traditions whose elements the author has taken up and combined together. This comes close to the explanation of the Torah as "compromise document", so Zenger (Hg.), *Einleitung* (n1), 73 and 131f, among others, although it does not share their preconceptions of two separate strings of texts as its origin.

34 For this distinction in biblical studies see J.L. Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us". *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (SubBi 13), Rome 1990, 84f.

development over a period of time, showing how consistent traits run through changes and even clashes or ruptures

The *two toledot of Isaac and Jacob* demonstrate this in an exemplary fashion, concentrating on the figure of Jacob³⁵ / Israel over an extended period. The range from his birth to his death and burial covers the texts from Gen 25 to Gen 50 which means half of the long book of Genesis. Both toledot share many common features and a highly refined and ingenious narrative composition, even in details.³⁶

Together they present the elaborate picture of Israel's ancestor in a *wide-spanned, double-arched development*, showing the many transitions which take place in the course of Jacob's life. He is depicted changing from son to father and grandfather, from deceiver to one being cheated, from a person struggling to be the first to one who waits; in adapting to and living out his various roles, he becomes a model for reconciliation.³⁷ Even 'digressions' (like Gen 26; 28; 36; 38)³⁸ serve special purposes in the narrative; they provide an understanding for changes in the characters and help to explain subsequent events as their consequences.

The *inner unity and high degree of cohesion* does not allow for a composition originating from separate (literary) sources, although there might have existed various tales circulating in different groups.³⁹ Gen 25-50 thus seems to be the work of one author wishing to communicate his view of

35 E. Otto, Jakob: RGG⁴, 352-354, traces the possible historical background of the narratives about him.

36 Alter, Art, 42-44; 107-112 and more often; for the so-called Joseph-story P. Weimar has recently published a series of articles underlining their skilful composition and inner connections, among them "Fürchte dich nicht, nach Ägypten hinabzuziehen!" (Gen 46,3). Funktion und Bedeutung von Gen 46,1-7 im Rahmen der Josefsgeschichte, in: BN 119/120 (2003), 164-205; and: Die Josefsgeschichte als theologische Komposition, in: BZ 48 (2004), 179-212.

37 The theme of reconciliation in the Joseph story (up to Gen 45) has been explained by A. Schenker, Versöhnung und Sühne, 1981, 15-40; in three articles I have tried to pursue it, with regard to Jacob's development in Gen 25-35 in: G. Fischer, Jakobs Weg zum Angesicht des Bruders, in: Vielseitigkeit des Alten Testaments (Hg. J.A. Loader, H.V. Kieweler) (FS G. Sauer), 1999, 35-48 (beware of the false biblical quotations on p. 37f, a result of the book's redaction); for Gen 37-50 in: Die Josefsgeschichte als Modell für Versöhnung, in: Studies in the Book of Genesis (Hg. A. Wénin) BEThL 155, 201, 243-271; and for both phases of his life in: Jakobs Rolle in der Genesis, in: BZ 47 (2003), 269-280.

38 Some maintain e.g. for Gen 38 that it was later inserted or stems from another source. A. Wénin, L'Aventure de Juda en Genèse 38 et l'Histoire de Joseph, in: RB 111 (2004), 5-27, has recently and in depth demonstrated the necessity of its belonging to Gen 37-39ff. – The genealogies in Genesis, like the one in chapter 36, normally reckoned as P, have been shown by T. Hieke, Die Genealogien der Genesis (HBS 39), 2003, as having essential literary, social, political and theological functions in their contexts; this speaks against extracting them and attributing them to other sources.

39 An oral origin or transmission of some of these tales is quite probable, as R. Rendtorff and others assume; yet the way they are now transmitted points more to a highly artistic literary composition.

Israel's identity in the midst of internal struggles and its relationships with other nations, stressing the aspect of reconciliation for both. The narratives about Jacob resemble a clockwork composition, interlocking with the same precision in detail and in the overall movement. Simultaneously, they form a wide-ranging guide for living for all those also called "Israel" to follow.

→ There is no escape from the *task of explaining the whole text as it stands* and of taking it seriously, together with its tensions and seeming contradictions but also all its connections and its long-term developments.⁴⁰ Even if it were the product of some artificial combination, we are challenged to seek its meaning in the way that it has been transmitted.

Conclusion

The *examples* for this investigation have been taken *from Gen 1 to Exo 15*. In a strict sense, all conclusions are valid only for these texts, although similar features are observable in other areas of the Torah. In the three parts above we have arrived at the following results:

a) A narrative like Exo 3-4, divided for a long time by the tools of source criticism, deserves to be treated as an inseparable unit.

b) The "last stronghold" for Pentateuchal theories, the Priestly writing P, is in fact very weak. The texts ascribed to it are necessary components of their surroundings, and are more easily explained together with them as the product of the same author.

c) A figure like Jacob, in an extensive development over half of a book, draws attention to the large compositions. Special expressions, central characters, major themes, important motifs etc. serve as clamps connecting and binding together not only Genesis to Deuteronomy, but even further to 2 Kings.

These observations stand *in contrast to the classical theories* for the Pentateuch, challenging them in many respects:

- their presuppositions of various sources
- the assumption of a long span of time for the process of writing
- the underlying models of literary production⁴¹

⁴⁰ Methodologically it is essential to be aware of the condensed character of the Pentateuch, where nearly every expression and phrase stands in connection or correspondence with other passages; this requires an investigation of one text to take into account not only the unit, but at least the whole book, if not all the Torah, or even beyond, up to 2 Kings.

⁴¹ Up to now we have no convincing ancient parallel for a source theory. The Gilgamesh epic, investigated as an example by J.H. Tigay, *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, 1985, 21-52, differs more than it coincides. And the analysis of Y.T. Radday / H. Shore, *Genesis. An Author-*

– the hypothetical stages of the textual growth⁴²

Given this situation and all the uncertainties and inconveniences mentioned at the beginning, there is a *pressing need for a radically new approach* to the study of the Torah. I shall attempt here to outline some elements of it:

– Normally the *object of research and the method of investigation should correspond*. This would require one to concentrate more on the literary features of the Torah and its contents than to attempt to reconstruct a possible prehistory of it.

– The continuing impasse of the historical-critical approaches demands a *change in the method*. The steps indicated above, starting with single units, going on to discover their insertion into the contexts and finally taking into account the wider connections and developments might prove a more fruitful method.

– Many indications seem to point to *one mind being responsible for large parts of the Torah*.⁴³ The style of this person (or persons working together) is complex and dense, combining various aspects (human, legal, religious, ...) in one literary masterpiece, divided into several partly independent, yet connected scrolls.

– An essential trait is the *embedding of laws*, and collections of them,⁴⁴ *within narrative*. The surrounding narrations are necessary for the understanding of them, as part of the covenant with God, and even contain detailed links to them. This points to the Torah's function as religious orientation and at the same time as lawbook for a society, both aspects being connected.

– The *embedding is doubled*, occurring the first time (from Exodus onwards) as an event at Sinai, and being recalled a second time by Moses (in Deuteronomy, in Moab).⁴⁵ Whether this repetition was intended from the

ship Study (AnBib 103), 1985, esp. 189, on the vocabulary of Genesis shows that the speakers (God, humans, narrator) have more influence on the wording than the supposed sources.

42 Rarely is an exegete able to explain convincingly how the 'torsos' of the source-delimited texts have been handed down through such a long period, and by whom. Who could have been interested in transmitting these fragments of narrations which in itself remain insufficient and seem rather truncated, over centuries?

43 This comes close to the intuition of R.N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (JSOTS 53), 1987, 232f.

44 The relationship between the various legal collections is the subject of an ongoing discussion. Perhaps the most interesting contribution recently comes from D. Volgger, *Israel wird feiern. Untersuchung zu den Festtexten in Exodus bis Deuteronomium* (ATSAT 73), 2002, showing that the laws regarding particular feasts are interlocked and presuppose each other.

45 G. Steins, in his opening lecture (Osnabrück, 23.1.2003), called this conveniently "die anamnetische Doppelstruktur der Tora".

beginning, is hard to determine; in any case it poses the question about the origin of Deuteronomy.⁴⁶

– The figure of *Moses* connects the books from Exodus through Deuteronomy and does not allow for the assumption of an end before Deut 34. At the same time the promises of the guidance of the people into the country of their forefathers requires a continuation at least with Joshua; this means that the cut between Deuteronomy and Joshua is artificial.

– God's dwelling in the tent, as a model of the *temple*, plays a key role in the Torah, and the legislation about the cult forms its centre, in the book of Leviticus. This mirrors the background of its origin, and the main intentions connected with it.

These are just some suggestions by which research into the Torah could regain foundations and become more fruitful. However, there are still a lot of *questions left* unanswered :

→ How can we explain that Deuteronomistic phrases are already found in Gen, Exo? And why does Deut differ then so markedly from the previous books?

→ There is a continuous narrative thread from Gen through 2 Kings; yet neither the Torah as a whole nor the Deuteronomistic history seem to stem from one hand: Does this indicate a combined effort of single authors within a group, or the use of already existing texts or scrolls?

→ What is the relationship between Deut and the Deuteronomistic history? What comes first, and what does it mean for the Torah?

46 Certainly Deuteronomy holds the key for many of the contemporary questions about the Torah; for a discussion of it see especially E. Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch* (FAT 30), 2000.