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Winds of change? Recent developments in Old Testament exegetical methodology in Germany.

ABSTRACT

In this article some of the latest trends in German exegetical-methodological discussions are introduced. After a short introduction on the history of German biblical scholarship, reference is made to Rolf Rendtorff's question whether the paradigm is changing. In the next three sections the exegetical approaches of three contemporary German Old Testament scholars are introduced in order to argue that winds of change are definitely blowing. These scholars are Erhard Blum, Christof Hardmeier and Helmut Utzschneider. Although in different fashions, these three German scholars all plead for more attention to the final form of the biblical text and for an integration of synchronical and diachronical exegetical perspectives.

INTRODUCTION¹

The research history of biblical scholarship in Germany is a truly remarkable story.² Not only are many of the great names of Old Testament scholarship, such as Wellhausen, Gunkel, Von Rad, Westermann, Zimmerli, etc German scholars, but the voluminous books and commentaries by German scholars impress students and teachers in libraries all over the world. Their meticulous analyses of the Hebrew texts, and their well-developed knowledge of the biblical and cognate languages astonish many a foreign student doing research in Germany.

However, some of the fiercest scholarly criticism is also directed against German biblical scholarship. Criticism ranges on a spectrum from the blunt accusation of historical-criticism as being a “cut-and-paste” method employed to destroy the Bible, to the more nuanced criticism against the historical-critical methods with regard to the value it attaches to the final form of the text, its view on textuality, its awareness of contextuality, etc. Whereas those representing the first-mentioned side of the spectrum aim at resisting historical criticism as an approach that, according to them, denies that the Bible is a divinely inspired book of faith, the more nuanced criticism on the other side of the spectrum often aims at contributing to the further development of exegetical methodology.

1 The financial support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation towards this research is gratefully acknowledged here. The opinions expressed here are that of the author, and not necessarily that of the Humboldt Foundation. I also would like to express my appreciation towards Proff Blum, Hardmeier and Utzschneider for the personal discussions I could have with them during July 2002.

2 Cf Rogerson (1996) and Jonker (1996, 81-92).

Since the 1930's with the advent of the New Criticism in literary science, especially the Anglo-Saxon biblical scholarship has developed into another direction than the German scholarship with its strong diachronic emphasis. The literary character of the biblical texts was emphasised, and the role of authorial intention and diachronic insight into the compositional history in the interpretation process have been minimized or completely ignored. Text-immanent readings of the biblical texts shifted the focus of interpretation to the synchronic structures in biblical texts.

Criticism against traditional historical criticism did and does not only come from outside Germany. The majority of German biblical scholars of the twentieth century spent their energy developing and refining those theories that were formulated by historical critical scholarship (e.g. on the history of origin of the Pentateuch, etc), and they contributed to the further development of their exegetical methods. However, the basic assumption behind all these methods remained, namely that the history of origin of the biblical texts is fundamental to their interpretation, and that the primary focus should be on the pre-stages of the texts.

Certain voices from within German scholarship started questioning these basic assumptions, however, in the last decade or three. Although these voices are isolated by the still dominant historical-critical paradigm, it seems as if the debate on exegetical methodology is regaining momentum. To my mind, the role of one scholar, Rolf Rendtorff cannot be underestimated in this regard.

IS THE PARADIGM CHANGING?

Rendtorff (1992), in an article with the title "The paradigm is changing: Hopes and fears", continues the plea he has started in other earlier publications³, namely that the final shape of the Old Testament should be taken more seriously. He stresses "that taking a synchronic approach to the text in its given shape is a task Old Testament scholarship has neglected too long and too intentionally. Scholars still seem to be proud of knowing things better than the final redactors and compilers" (1992, 19).

In this article Rendtorff argues that the move away from the traditional documentary hypothesis with its analytical approach of determining the underlying sources (introduced by Wellhausen in the nineteenth century), did not start with the newer literary methods influenced by modern literary theory. This movement can be traced back, according to Rendtorff, to Gunkel already. Gunkel's view on the sources, namely that they are collections of oral traditions, and that their authors were not individuals but schools of narrators, was incompatible with the Wellhausenian idea of literary sources or documents. To strengthen his argument about Gunkel, Rendtorff refers to two other prominent German scholars who were deeply influenced by Gunkel, namely Von Rad and Noth. He argues that Von Rad, in particular, drew the line beginning with Gunkel much further; namely, to the final stage of the shaping of the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch, as he called it, ...). Von Rad's question was: how did the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) reach its final form? "The main achievement of this new approach was to shift the focus from the internal literary problems to an understanding of the organizing structures and ideas of the books" (Rendtorff, 1992, 8-9). Rendtorff argues furthermore that Noth's theory on the Deuteronomistic History moved in the same direction. His thesis is thus that the tradition-historical approach, as an

3 Cf e.g. Rendtorff (1986). In this article he summarizes his view: "Old Testament scholarship now is in a stage of transition, and we cannot know whether there will be a new paradigm or if the near future will be characterized by a plurality of approaches and methods" (1986, 302).

offspring of form criticism, consistently led to the question of the final shape, be it of a book, or even of larger entities within the Old Testament.

This does, however, not mean that Rendtorff is of the opinion that diachronic analyses are without any value. "... I want to say ... that we should try to relate new, mainly synchronic aspects, to older, mainly diachronic insights, for what was observed in careful studies during the last two centuries was not entirely wrong. It is obvious that some, or even many of the observations that led to diachronic decisions had a certain validity. The question is how to handle those observations and what consequences to draw from them. (T)he consequences for reading the book of Genesis as a whole, the Pentateuch as a whole, and the canon of the Hebrew Bible as a whole will be more fascinating if we go beyond the diachronic observation of diversity to the search for the inner, or even overarching unity." (Rendtorff, 1992, 20).

Rendtorff followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Gerhard von Rad. But Rendtorff, while occupying the chair for Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg, has also influenced many younger scholars. One of the most prominent of these younger scholars is Erhard Blum, presently occupying one of the chairs for Old Testament in the Protestant Faculty (Evangelische Theologie) at the University of Tübingen.

HOLISTIC DIACHRONICAL EXEGESIS: ERHARD BLUM

Blum has dedicated his dissertation⁴ to a study on the composition of the patriarchal narratives, and has continued this approach in his *Habilitation* on the composition of the Pentateuch (with the focus on Exodus to Numbers)⁵. His publications have attracted much attention, not only because of the excellent quality of his work, but also because he developed Rendtorff's views to their full consequences. His work has stirred new methodological discussions - something that he himself finds positive. In the introduction to his *Habilitation* (1990, 1) he values the crisis in Pentateuchal scholarship as an excellent opportunity for dialogue on methodological issues. According to Blum this dialogue should not be silenced too early. It is an opportunity to reflect on long accepted hypotheses, as well as a chance to examine self-critically the unquestioned assumptions of their methods. He sees his work as a contribution in this regard. His work, according to Blum (1990, 2), does not follow the characteristic line of Pentateuchal discussions, namely just to propose new theories about the historical origin of the Pentateuchal materials, but rather presents a new footing and description for the diachronic composition of the Pentateuch.

Within this context Blum expresses his excitement (1990, 2-3) about new directions in Pentateuch research which do not focus primarily on the question of historical origin of the materials (as is the case in current German scholarship), but rather on the overall form of the transmitted texts. These new directions are practised, either as a result of a scepticism on the possibilities of diachronic analysis, or because of the definite intention to focus the exegetical discussion on the long-neglected synchronic interpretation of the transmitted texts. His view is that the traditional analytical *Literarkritik* and the more holistic literary interpretation of the newer approaches represent different perspectives on the biblical texts. These perspectives are, however, not mutually exclusive. Although redaction criticism already represents a development in the direction of viewing texts as literary units, the diachronic-analytical interest still prevailing in German biblical scholarship precludes scholars from observing texts holistically.

4 Cf Blum (1984).

5 Cf Blum (1990).

However, this does not mean that the diachronic perspective on biblical texts can be ignored or neglected. According to Blum, an exclusively synchronic analysis of e.g. a complex work such as the Pentateuch is at risk of being superficial. A holistic observation of texts (“ganzheitliche Textbetrachtung”) will, according to Blum, definitely encounter signs of the history of the texts. These “fault lines” are, however, not viewed by him primarily as tensions that will prompt diachronical analysis. The signs of the diachronical development of the texts rather form part of the synchronical manifestation of these texts. A thorough holistic observation will encounter tensions and indications of the text’s history if there are any of these in the texts. Furthermore, such an approach keeps in mind that a transmitted text with its internal (diachronic) complexity was not necessarily constructed to represent a unitarian or harmonizing complex of meaning. It could well be that the (diachronic) tensions belong to the synchronic meaning of a text (cf Blum, 1990, 3-4).

Blum’s point of departure is therefore the overall compositional relations that formatively constitute the text as a whole (cf Blum, 1990, 4). The overall compositional units are, however, not just a point of departure to get to the constituent parts as quickly as possible. The greater overall constructions that stand at the end of the compositional processes should get its due attention. The overall synchronic constructions should be the focus of the study to get a better idea of the contours of meaning and appropriation that the diachronic formation of the texts left. On a methodological level it thus means that synchronic and diachronic perspectives are integrated into a holistic approach in order to reveal the three-dimensional character or relief of the texts⁶. The end form of the text should not in the first place be seen as a deposit of historical layers, but rather as a relief rich in contours that was formed by many contributing hands (*Gestaltungswillen*).

With regards to his study of the Pentateuch, Blum therefore starts his study (1990) with the proposal that the end form of the text consists of two great compositions: (i) a comprehensive priestly composition, as well as (ii) a D-composition that was integrated into the priestly composition (although more or less the same time and context of origin can be presupposed)⁷. It may seem that this distinction is not much different from the traditional diachronic analysis. However, according to Blum, the direction of questioning is the opposite in his approach. It is not the case that synchronic perspectives are merely integrated into a reconstruction of the history of transmission. Diachronic studies rather serve as preliminary work (*Vorarbeiten*) to understand the end form of the text of which the relief of meaning is the primary focus of our exegetical effort (Blum, 1991, 53).

Blum is furthermore convinced that the intention of expression (*Aussageintention*) of texts remains one of the elementary orientation points in the interpretation of texts. According to him the traditional historical criticism has taken this point for granted, while those practising the newer literary methods often disregard or ignore this issue. One should, however, understand “intention” correctly. Blum does not introduce a mental or psychological intention here, but rather associates the “intention” of a text closely with the contours of the text itself. A holistic approach that integrates synchronic and diachronic perspectives, is, according to Blum, capable of revealing this intention.

It is clear from this description that Blum does not deviate completely from traditional historical-critical scholarship. He rather attempts to integrate newer synchronic approaches into a holistic approach. This integration is, however, not done just for strategic reasons. It reflects his

6 Cf also Blum (1991, 53): “Synchrones Verstehen der Endgestalt des Pentateuch schliesst notwendig ein Bild ihres diachronen Profils ein.”

7 Cf Blum’s (2002) recent discussion with newer end form hypotheses.

deep conviction that the direction of questioning should be turned around, and the end form of the text with the indications of intentions embedded in these texts, should get proper attention.

This line of thought can also be seen in the approach of Christof Hardmeier. Although his dissertation was done under Hans-Walter Wolff, he was also exposed to the views of Rendtorff in Heidelberg.

TEXT-PRAGMATICAL EXEGESIS: CHRISTOF HARDMEIER⁸

It is Christof Hardmeier⁹, in particular, who introduced the text-pragmatic approach to Old Testament exegesis. Hardmeier, who was educated in the Swiss-German historical-critical tradition of interpretation, has made a methodological discussion with the form criticism (*Formgeschichtliche Methode*) one of the two foci of his dissertation¹⁰. In this work he critically evaluates the text theory (*Textverständnis*) which is implicit in form criticism in particular, but also in biblical exegesis in general. He has elaborated on his methodological assumptions in many articles¹¹, in his *Habilitationsschrift*¹², as well as in his latest methodological handbook¹³. In his *Habilitationsschrift* he pursues the following aim: “Our theoretical task is therefore to develop criteria to analyse narratives as integral unities and to identify their communicative function, as well as their situational referents and backgrounds of origin” (translated from Hardmeier 1990c, 5).

Hardmeier (1978, section 1.3.2) is critical of traditional linguistics in his formulation of text theory¹⁴. He accentuates the following two points: (i) interpretation should not operate primarily on sentence level, but rather on the level of text; (ii) interpretation should regard texts as being on the theoretical level of *langue*, and not of *parole*. Hardmeier understands language in a pragmatic sense, namely that language primarily functions in textual communication that sets out to achieve something in a specific context.

He consequently applies S J Schmidt’s communication-oriented text definition to the interpretation of Biblical literature, and regards Schmidt’s distinction between text linguistics (which is oriented towards the description of linguistic signs) and textual theory (which is oriented towards the function of linguistic signs) as important for this enterprise.

Influenced by certain works on empirical narrative analysis he formulates the aim of empirical narrative research to be the description of the relationship between textual form (*Textgestalt*) and textual/narrative function (*Erzählfunktion*).

On account of these theoretical presuppositions, Hardmeier formulates a text-pragmatic approach for Old Testament exegesis¹⁵. This approach can be summarized as follows. Many

8 This section is an adapted version of chapter 1 of my book (Jonker 2003). My gratitude is hereby expressed towards the Gütersloher Verlagshaus that gave permission for the re-use of parts of the mentioned book.

9 Currently occupying one of the chairs for Old Testament at the University of Greifswald, Germany.

10 The dissertation was published in 1978 under the title: “Texttheorie und biblische Exegese.”

11 Cf. Hardmeier (1979, 1981, 1985, 1990b, 1996, 1998, 2000).

12 Published in 1990 under the title “Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas. Erzählkommunikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremiaerzählungen in II Reg 18-20 und Jer 37-40”.

13 In his recently published methodology (Hardmeier 2003) he brings together his views in one volume. In an appendix to this volume (Hardmeier 2004) summaries are provided of his previous publications, including his dissertation and *Habilitation*.

14 Cf. Hardmeier’s summary of the text and communication theoretical presuppositions of his approach in ch 3 of his recent methodological handbook (2003, 47ff).

15 Cf. especially Hardmeier (1990c, 60-86) where the criteria are explained in detail, and where his critical interaction with literary scientists is presented.

conclusions with regard to the communicative intent¹⁶ can be drawn from written texts and from the way in which these texts employ language. The assumption is that the unity construction of a text (*Gesamtgestalt*), which always means more than the sum of the constituent parts, is a function of its pragmatic background. The description of the surface structure is therefore not an aim in itself, but is undertaken in order to uncover (*aufdecken*) the intention or function of the text within a communication situation.

On account of the description of the textual form according to text-pragmatic criteria, it is normally possible for the exegete to reach conclusions on the pragmatic (in)coherence of a text as a whole. If textual coherence cannot be established within a given textual unit, diachronic solutions are sought. The text-pragmatic approach therefore does not exclude diachronic arguments and conclusions. However, this approach retains a synchronic perspective, until it becomes apparent that textual incoherence cannot be explained without reference to the history of textual growth.

A next stage in the text-pragmatic approach would therefore be to form hypotheses about the possible intentions of the text, as well as the communication situation within which it was embedded (*Funktionsbestimmung*). These hypotheses have to be based on the macro-communicative structure of the text itself (that was described in the analysis).

Subsequently, the different contexts within which the text is embedded should be studied and described. Expressions in texts, as well as texts as a whole, are all embedded in bigger text-internal and text-external contexts. These bigger contexts can be identified along the contours of the macro-communicative structure of the particular text. The hypotheses on the intentions of the text should then be verified against the background of these wider contexts. If the relationship between the proposed function of the text and specific text-internal¹⁷ and -external contexts¹⁸ cannot be plausibly described, other possible contexts have to be sought. This process of contextualisation (*Kontextualisierung*) commences in the innermost text-internal contexts, and circles out (according to the macro-communicative structure) to eventually include the historical, social and cultural text-external contexts.

16 Communicative intent refers here to both (a) the purpose of the act of communication and (b) the communication situation, partners and effect associated with this act of communication. Text-pragmatic analysis thus has the pragmatic background of texts as its object of study.

17 Hardmeier defines *text-internal contexts* as those textual contexts and relationships that belong to the texture of the same synchronic textual unit. Such a textual unit may even comprise quite comprehensive works of literature, such as the Priestly Pentateuch or Deuteronomistic History. In determining the text-internal contexts of a narrative, one has to start from the innermost circle of the sentence- and text-syntactical environment in order to determine the illocutive-pragmatic aspects of every expression, as well as of every minimal argumentative or functional unit. The analysis should proceed to determine how minimal argumentative or functional units are embedded in the macro-structural texture (*Textur*), and how these macro-structural units function as part of greater compositions. The shifts in function of the embedded textual units should be observed on each level.

18 As functional textual unit, every text is part of the social discourse that is embedded in historical, social and cultural contexts. According to Hardmeier the interaction of these *text-external contexts* with the texts should also be determined. With reference to regional, as well as historical, social and cultural data, the "closer" associations should be preferred to those of farther proximity. The investigation of text-external contexts also include possible intertextual relationships with texts from a different diachronic literature historical environment, as well as texts (inner-biblical, or extra-biblical) from the same synchronic environment. Archaeological and iconographical data can be of great importance in this respect. Cf. Hardmeier's summary of this aspect in section 5.5 of his recently published methodological handbook (2003, 155ff).

From the above it is clear: The text-pragmatic method concentrates on a synchronic description of textual units in order to determine their communicative structures. The description of these structures assists in determining the (in)coherence of texts. For each coherent textual unit the possible function or intention within a presumed communication situation is postulated. By relating the textual units plausibly to different text-internal and text-external contexts, the interrelationship between the textual units as part of social discourse is indicated.

LITERARY-AESTHETICAL EXEGESIS: HELMUT UTZSCHNEIDER

Although Utzschneider¹⁹ has made methodological comments in many of his publications, he has nowhere else formulated his approach so clearly than in his 1999-article with the title “Text - Reader - Author. Stocktaking and prolegomena of exegetical methodology”, as well as in his (together with S Ark Nitsche) methodology handbook (2001). The assessment in the mentioned article concentrates on German exegesis. The point of departure for his formulation of an exegetical theory is the crisis in German exegesis which can be described on three levels: (i) A loss of consensus and the resultant neglecting of theory (*Theorievergessenheit* or *Theorievermeidung*). This loss of consensus cannot only be explained by the different views of individual scholars and schools. It probably also has to do with the multi-interpretational possibilities opened up by the texts themselves. This in itself necessitates a renewed discussion on exegetical methodology - a discussion that is evaded by German biblical scholarship, according to Utzschneider. (ii) Although many attempts have in the past 25 years been made to integrate new insights from the literary and text-theoretical sciences into biblical exegesis, these attempts have normally been regarded with great skepticism. One reason for this is that these discussions normally tended to be so heavy with theory, that almost no time and space for practising these theories could be found. (iii) The third crisis has to do with the loss of acceptance of traditional German biblical scholarship in the world. With the advent of contextual forms of exegesis, such as liberation hermeneutics and feminist interpretation, it increasingly became clear that these approaches were much more interested in the relationship of biblical texts with concrete contemporary contexts, that an exclusive focus on the historical origin of these texts became less and less interesting. This fact, according to Utzschneider, also necessitates renewed methodological reflection.

The challenge to exegetical discussions, according to him, is to devise a system of coordinates within which new questions can be asked to traditional methods, and according to which the integration of newer scientific developments and tendencies into traditional methods can take place, as well as the discussion with so-called contextual approaches can be conducted.

In his formulation of his text theory Utzschneider discusses the inefficiencies involved in the traditional distinction between diachronical and synchronical text observation. Traditional diachronical observation regards texts merely as objects or media of communication between authors and readers. Texts therefore have no independent existence. Furthermore, traditional diachronical observation tend to underestimate or even neglect the text as it is. The main focus is on the different texts that can be distinguished in the pre-history. Synchronical analysis, on the other hand, tend to isolate texts from the communication situations in which they functioned and still function. The following should rather be regarded as coordinates when formulating a text theory: (i) the independence of texts should be admitted; (ii) the communicative relating of texts to readers should not be ignored; (iii) texts should not be restricted to the authorial situation of

19 Utzschneider is professor for Old Testament at the Augustana-Hochschule in Neuendettelsau.

origin. Within these parameters Utzschneider prefers to regard texts as aesthetic subjects. Texts function according to this model also without real historical authors, although they certainly have real authors. The focus of this text model is rather on the relationship with a recipient. Texts as aesthetic subjects interact with recipients, and meaning is primarily generated by means of this interaction. Tensions in texts and their multi-layeredness are then also not indications of different sources or pre-stages in the first place, but rather of the aesthetic multiplicity of historical experiences included in the text. The multiplicity of experiences has, however, grown into the aesthetic unity of the text. "Provided the text has grown historically, the aesthetic plurality reflects a diversity of historical experiences. This diversity could, however, grow into an aesthetic unity. The end form of the Pentateuch is therefore not – neither from a literary nor a historical perspective – to be regarded as a mere snapshot of the time and perspective of the last author or redactor. It is rather a summation of the diversity of historical experiences behind the complex text. The life of the text should not be regarded to be punctual, but rather epochal" (translated from Utzschneider, 1996, 15).

Utzschneider (1999, 237-238) draws the following conclusions from his text theory²⁰: (i) Old Testament exegesis can no longer understand itself to be a historical discipline. Insofar as exegesis concentrates on the descriptive observation of texts (in the form they come to us) and on the role of the reader in the constitution of meaning, exegesis should be seen as a literary-aesthetic discipline. (ii) Simultaneously, however, exegesis also remains historical. The historical aspect of exegesis is, however, not limited to the situation of origin of the Hebrew Bible (*Produktionsästhetik*), but it applies to all communication and reception contexts (*Rezeptionsästhetik*). As historical discipline it therefore covers from the first identifiable readers to the contemporary recipients and interpreters²¹. (iii) Exegesis can and should not substitute the reading of the Bible within and outside the church. Although the distinction between scientific exegesis and application should still be made, exegesis should aim at application.

Utzschneider is probably the one scholar of those discussed here who has moved the farthest away from traditional historical-critical exegesis.

CONCLUSION: WINDS OF CHANGE?

The intention of this article was solely to serve as an introduction to a selection²² of the newer approaches in Germany. Space does not permit extensive evaluations or criticism of them. However, the following remarks may serve as a conclusion to the discussions presented above:

- All three these scholars welcome the present debate on exegetical methodology, and do not regard it to be counter-productive.
- Although with different motivations, all three these exegetes call for renewed attention to the synchronical structures of Biblical texts. They all react against what could be called an overly-analytical *diachronism* in traditional historical-critical studies. The end form of the text forms the focus of their analyses. This re-appreciation of the overall constructions in the texts, should be evaluated positively.

20 Cf also the introduction to his methodology handbook, especially section 2 in ch 1 (Utzschneider & Nitsche 2001, 17ff).

21 Cf ch 7 of his methodology handbook (Utzschneider & Nitsche 2001, 213ff).

22 Other recent works by Dohmen & Stemberger (1996) and Oeming (1998) were not discussed here. Oeming, in particular, also accepts the plurality of exegetical approaches, and shows how these approaches illuminate different dimensions of the biblical texts.

- The historical dimensions is, however, not neglected by these exegetes. Diachronic analysis has its place in the approaches of Blum and Hardmeier, in particular (although in another fashion than in the traditional historical-criticism). Utzschneider also claims that his method is historical, but this aspect is not well-integrated in his approach. His appreciation for the historical dimension is closely linked to his view that exegesis is rather reception aesthetics. He is interested in the ancient receivers of the texts, but the composition and transmission of these texts play a minor role in his approach.
- Hardmeier, and particularly Utzschneider, emphasise that Biblical exegesis should not be practised merely as academic discipline, but that the functioning of the Bible in faith communities should form the orientation of our Biblical interpretation. Blum does not give clear indications of how he views the relationship between Biblical exegesis and faith communities.
- Hardmeier and Utzschneider both depart from certain text-theoretical presuppositions that determine their methodological proposals (and which make them more prone to exclusivistic claims). Blum seems to work more inductively: he does not start with a text-theoretical presupposition, but rather studies the final form of the text in order to come to conclusions about the overarching theological structures in the texts.

Are winds of change blowing through German Old Testament scholarship? To my mind, this question can indeed be affirmed. Whether these winds will bring about a paradigm shift, is, however, another question. Maybe we should listen, in conclusion, to Rendtorff again: "... there is much discussion about 'a change of paradigm'. Certainly, the paradigm within which Old Testament scholarship has worked for more than a century, namely the old German *Literarkritik*, has lost its general acceptance. It is no longer possible to maintain that serious Old Testament scholarship has to be indispensably tied to this set of methodological principles. So far there is no alternative concept that has been generally accepted. According to Thoms Kuhn, one could say that there are different models used by certain groups of scholars, but none of them has won general acceptance. Old Testament scholarship now is in a stage of transition, and we cannot know whether there will be a new paradigm or if the near future will be characterized by a plurality of approaches and methods. Therefore, it makes no sense for some scholars or groups to claim that their own method, as time-honoured or even brand new, is the only correct one. At the same time, it would not be wise of those working with new approaches to ignore completely the questions posed by former generations of scholars without scrutinizing their legitimacy and their usefulness in highlighting certain aspects or solving certain problems in the given text. Surely, continuity as such is of no value. But a loss of communication among Old Testament scholars by mere discontinuity of approaches could do much harm to international and interreligious endeavours towards a mutual understanding of our common Hebrew Bible" (1986, 302-303).

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