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**Schüle, Andreas**

***Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Genesis 1-11)***

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In this study of the development and theology of the primeval history, Schüle argues that Gen 1–11 has a decidedly intertextual orientation in that each of its thematic units (creation, flood, and origin of the nations) engages in a dialogue not only with the Torah but also with the prophetic and wisdom traditions of the Hebrew Bible. The primeval history, which exhibits a clear “canonical consciousness,” was thus specifically developed not only in order to offer reflections on the beginning of the world but also to provide a prologue to (or portal into) the canon of the Hebrew Bible consisting of Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

In the first chapter, Schüle offers a survey of the history of research, focusing especially on the problem of the Yahwist. He notes that recent scholarship has come to the conclusion that Gen 1–11 has had a different history of transmission from the rest of the Pentateuch and that J, because of its heterogeneous character, is best understood not as a coherent source in its own right but as a collection of successive additions (“Fortschreibung”) to and a commentary on P.

Chapter 2 looks at the “genealogical theology” of P. Schüle in this context argues for the view according to which P has appropriated the genealogical material of an older written source, the so-called “*toledot* book,” from which it also inherited the “*toledot* formula.”

This formula normally functions as an introduction to what follows, but in 2:4a it is typically regarded as the conclusion to the preceding P narrative. Against this understanding, Schüle maintains that the formula here too is used as an introduction, only in this case to a non-Priestly text, which is intended to be a critical commentary on the Priestly conception of humankind as the image of God as found in Gen 1:1–2:3. The *toledot* formula in 2:4 also marks the distinction between two modes of time: that of creation and that of the creatures, whose independence is thereby underlined.

Schüle argues that the variations in the use of the *toledot* formula in P (i.e., as an introduction to genealogies and narratives) do not indicate the presence of different sources or textual layers but are best explained by the assumption that the formula plays different roles within the Priestly account of the primeval history. It also serves to present the primeval history as an integral part of the Priestly Genesis, avoiding establishing any categorical differences between the primeval and the patriarchal history. The development of the nation of Israel in Egypt, by contrast, is not part of this *toledot* history. As Schüle notes, “no genealogical line leads to Moses” (55).

In the third chapter Schüle turns to what he calls the “natural theology” of P, understood as a type of theology that is based on rationality and seeks to articulate the contents of a religion in a way that makes them widely accessible. This he finds exemplified in the Priestly version of the primeval history, which does not intend to be a demythologization of or even a polemic against foreign literary materials. Instead, it pursues apologetic interests (according to Schüle, one of the hallmarks of a natural theology), seeking to achieve recognition for Israel’s religion within the multiethnic context of the early Persian Empire. It is for this reason that P adapts Mesopotamian mythological accounts of the origins of the world that would have been widely known well beyond Israel.

Schüle points to terminological correspondences and thematic similarities between Gen 1:1–2:3 and key periods in the Torah’s account of Israel’s history (i.e., the patriarchal era, exodus, and Sinai), suggesting that the primeval history was meant to serve as an introduction to the Torah. He pays particular attention to P’s understanding of humanity as the image of God, which, he suggests, is defined relationally in that P does not speak of human beings as individuals but as persons who find themselves in a variety of relational constellations. As regards God, P’s creation account presents him as distant and only occasionally present. Being not involved in the ruling of the world, he retreats after the sixth day of creation, whereas the world, which is judged to be very good, does not have any deficit that would require God’s continual presence.

Another key issue of Gen 1:1–2:3 is the divine commission to humankind to rule over the earth (the *dominium terrae*), concerning which it is frequently proposed that P has

democratized the ancient Near Eastern concept of the king as God's representative on earth, applying this royal prerogative to all "Adamites." According to Schüle, however, a comparison of Gen 1 with the inscriptions of Darius I suggests that the notion of kingly rule has *not* been adopted by P and that the implication is precisely that the ancient Near Eastern king is not to be the model for the *dominium terrae* in Gen 1:26–28. Its function is best understood by asking what it is that is to be subdued, and this Schüle identifies as chaos and violence. Noting that the earth of Gen 1 is not so much a *creatio ex nihilo* as a *creatio ex tumulto*, he argues that the human propensity for violence is a vestige of the primordial condition (the initial *tohu wabohu*) that has been repressed but not eradicated and that it is this propensity for violence that needs to be subdued or prevented. However, since the divine commission to rule over the earth is not repeated after the flood (see Gen 9:1–2), Schüle concludes that the *dominium terrae* has been abrogated and replaced by God's law, which he interprets as a form of the immanent presence of God. Thus, as regards the *dominium terrae*, this is now considered to be part of a failed world order that has not been reprimed, whereas the introduction of God's law after the flood prepares for the lawgiving at Sinai.

Chapter 4 is devoted to P's prophetic theology. Schüle's starting point here is the assumption that the transmission history of prophets and law is best seen as contemporaneous (*pace* Wellhausen), which raises questions regarding possible interdependencies between P and prophetic theology. Two key notions discussed in this context are the focus on God's word (in creation and history) and God's breath as the limit to chaos. Schüle's investigations ultimately lead him to conclude that P operates with the understanding of a theological-hermeneutical cohesion of Torah and prophecy and that Priestly and prophetic theology share the vision of the reality-constituting word of God, thus focusing on its creativity rather than its "communicativity." According to Schüle, patterns of thought and speech that are characteristic of prophecy are of fundamental importance also in the development of the Torah, which suggests that the canonical cohesion of both traditions reaches back to their common origin rather than having been achieved by means of later redactional links.

With chapter 5, the focus shifts from Gen 1:1–2:3 first to humankind in Eden (Gen 2:4–3:24) and then to the Cain tradition in Gen 4. Concerning the theme of the former story, Schüle maintains that this is best described as wisdom and its ambivalent consequences. The text is about the attainment of wisdom, of competences that characterize the independent, mature, and thus wise human being. Yet this positive portrayal of human wisdom (Schüle points out that terms such as *חָכְמָה* are used positively throughout the Hebrew Bible) is developed against the foil of human acquisition of wisdom being only partial and coming with a hefty price tag, including hardships, pain, and mortality. Reading Gen 2–3 against the literary background of the Adamic myth in Ezek 28 and the

Mesopotamian *mis pi* ritual, Schüle also argues that the text is a commentary on the notion of the *imago dei* that is intended to clarify to what extent human beings are—and to what extent they are not—the image of God.

The story of Cain in Gen 4 Schüle interprets as wisdom reflection on the origin of the violent human being (the “Gewaltmensch”), noting that the text portrays humanity as being vulnerable to the influence of sin, a vestige of the primeval chaos and a force they are meant to dominate and subdue (משל). Cain exemplifies the fate of those who are immune to instruction and understanding and thus hardened turn into their own undoing as well as that of their fellow human beings. It is in this passage that sin is mentioned for the first time, and it is its feminine personification in 4:7, a verse that Schüle regards as a later exegetical gloss, that turns the woman’s desire for the man in 3:16 into a symbol of sin, thus encouraging an interpretation that regards Gen 2–3 as a story of the fall. Schüle again detects evidence of wisdom thinking here, and he suggests that against the background of Prov 1–9 Cain becomes the paradigm of the man who succumbs to the allure of sin as the foreign woman.

Wisdom influence is evident also in the deed-consequence nexus apparent in Gen 4. Whereas in P there is no self-regulating moral world order (thus requiring the notions of God as lawgiver, judge, and savior), according to the Cain story those who exert violence become part of a dynamic that leads them away from God into circumstances in which violence expands continually without anyone—not even God—being able to contain it. It is thus the moral world order envisaged in Gen 4 that makes it impossible for the violent human being to prevail and enjoy life before God.

According to Schüle, the Eden and Cain stories together form a literary unit that was initially transmitted independently from its current context. They are characterized by a mythical geography consisting of three concentric circles: the garden of Eden at the center and surrounded by the land of Eden, which itself in turn is surrounded by the land of Nod. Whereas the garden is God’s own sphere of life, Nod refers to the parts of the world beyond the divine sphere where violence and boundless retaliation rule. As the stories indicate, humans cannot live in the garden of Eden and must not live in Nod. It is on the Adamah in the land of Eden where they are supposed to live before God and subdue harmful forces, such as their own desire and the foreign power of sin. This they have been enabled to do by means of the wisdom and insight acquired in the divine garden.

Taken together, Gen 2–4 form the entrance portal to a wisdom reading of the Torah. They engage critically with the prophetic theology of P and especially its concepts of the *imago dei* and the *dominium terrae* by focusing on tangible human experiences, including

hardships, pain, endangerment, envy, and rage but also human independence and the ability to shape their own destiny and be morally responsive. The stories reflect on the limits of wisdom, not least with respect to humanity's relationship with God, and they, like Job and Ecclesiastes, make the point that the acquisition of divine wisdom does not exclude the possibility of some level of alienation from God.

The sixth chapter investigates the angel marriages in Gen 6:1–4. Assuming Greek influence, Schüle argues that the passage coordinates the biblical creation account with the chronology of Greek mythology, which also knew of a race of heroes that preceded the current human race. He understands the text as the final account of the creation of humankind, which shows that it assumed its proper identity as being fundamentally different from the sons of God and the **נפלים** only gradually. Another key contribution of the passage is its reflection on humanity's finitude.

In chapter 7, Schüle moves on to the story of the flood. Noting that the focus is on the soteriological elements, such as the floating ark, which is at the center of the concentrically arranged passage, he points out that for P the flood is not so much a story of destruction as an account of the rescue and preservation of God's creatures. Concerning the development of the flood story, Schüle maintains that P, the oldest textual layer, has been adapted and revised in two steps. The P account itself focuses on a degenerated and restored world. It speaks, first of all, of a world full of violence, a world that is no longer able to survive. In destroying this world, God merely puts an end to a development that had been fundamentally self-inflicted. However, the actual focus is not on the destruction of this world but on the promise of a new beginning. Key features of this new creation are the blood laws in 9:4–6, which are designed to prevent a new proliferation of violence, and the covenant in 9:8–17, which guarantees the continued existence of the world.

The first revision of P, which Schüle describes as a commentary, exposition, and "Fortschreibung" of the existing text, interprets the flood as a divine punishment and redefines Noah's righteousness as no more than a relative one (in contradistinction to P, which regards Noah as the ideal human being epitomizing the *imago dei*). Schüle also maintains that, in questioning the ideal painted by P, this textual layer performs a function that is analogous to that of the Eliphaz speeches in the book of Job, which similarly challenge the portrayal of Job in the book's prologue. Both texts seek to answer the question of how justice and a life that is valid before God may be achieved in the face of the reality of human wickedness. Additional interests of this commentary on P include the purpose of sacrifices as a means of drawing near to God and the issue of purity.

The second revision is closer to P in its theology, differing only in certain details, such as its categorization of the animals and its understanding (shared by Ps 104) of the divine

spirit as the breath of life, which animates not only humans but all creatures. This textual layer, another commentary on P, thus uses the narrative context of the flood story to reflect on the conditions of human life.

Chapter 8 continues Schüle's investigation of the flood story, considering it in connection with the prophetic theology of history. Schüle again begins with the Priestly text, which, in contrast to the non-Priestly material in Gen 2–4; 6:1–4, is not interested in the question of the origin of evil. The focus rather is on the incomprehensibility and absurdity of the world destroying its own fabric of order and stability by means of violence (כח), which is a key term also in the prophetic literature. This, among other reasons, leads Schüle to conclude that P's interpretation of the fate of the world is based on the prophetic view of history. Rather more complex is P's understanding of the dispersal of human beings after the flood (Gen 9:19), which, in contrast to prophetic theology, is understood positively in that it is not seen as part of the causality of guilt and punishment but as divinely intended.

Schüle next moves on to the Noachic covenant, which he compares to the new covenant in Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 36:26–28; and Isa 54:7–10 (where, as he rightly notes, the term "covenant" is not used). In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the difference of the new covenant is that it can no longer be broken, whereas the Isaiah passage is distinctive in that nothing is expected from Israel. There are no mutual obligations, just as in the Noachic covenant in Gen 9, which leads Schüle to conclude that P here developed the Deutero-Isaianic covenant conception.

P therefore employs prophetic speech forms and patterns of thought in order to interpret the mythological past, explaining the period before the flood according to the tenets of the prophetic theology of judgment while understanding the world after the flood as an eternal and unbreakable covenant. Both the prophecy of judgment and the prophecy of salvation are thus already preconfigured as complementary elements in the primeval history.

Turning to the non-Priestly reception of the flood story, Schüle emphasizes its stress on God's remorse in contrast to P, where God always remains true to himself. Here too he detects prophetic influence (see, e.g., Jer 18:7–10), but he also compares the text with Mesopotamian sources that speak of the gods' regret at having created human beings, which is eventually superseded by the decision to allow them to co-exist with the gods. There are significant differences between the Mesopotamian texts and the non-Priestly material, as Schüle rightly points out, but he also argues that both understand the flood as a transition from one era to another that is marked by a different attitude of God/the gods toward humankind. Whereas in the mythical past humankind as a whole was punished

for its wickedness, such retributive action no longer occurs in the present. Although the human heart is still evil, no further universal sanctions are threatened against humanity.

In the prophets, the transition from the old era to a new one marked by a renewed relationship between YHWH and Israel is associated with God manipulating the human heart (Jer 31) or even granting a new heart (Ezek 36). These conceptions, Schüle maintains, are criticized in Gen 8:20–22, a passage that adopts a perspective similar to that of Eccl 9:3, according to which the human heart is and remains evil. The non-Priestly material also does not speak of God as showing remorse or changing his mind, as envisaged by both P and the exilic and postexilic prophets. Instead, the focus is on God's mercy (rather than his justice), which guarantees the continued existence of the cosmic order.

The non-Priestly material thus follows the prophecy of judgment in understanding God as a just avenger of sin. However, the present and future eschatology of the prophecy of salvation, with its expectation that the Torah will fill and control the human heart, is replaced by wisdom reflection on the finite, fallible, and only of relative justice capable human being. Yet God, who prior to the flood had acted in line with a clearly defined deed-consequence nexus, now promises this imperfect world its continued existence. In these notions, the non-Priestly material thus offers a solution to the problem of theodicy that explains why God's good creation is marred by evil without God intervening against it.

Chapter 9, entitled "The History of the Nations," looks at the curse of Canaan and the table of nations. As regards the former, Schüle understands Gen 9:20–27 as a caesura that divides the primeval history into two major blocks: 1:1–9:19 and chapters 10–11. He observes four motifs that refer back to the earlier block: nakedness and shame; cultural achievements (such as agriculture and viniculture); the curse; and social ethics (concerning the relationships between husband and wife, siblings, and parent and child). But Gen 9:20–27 also prepares for the following history of the nations, which means that the passage concludes the primeval history proper while at the same time introducing the history of the nations and thus also that of the patriarchs.

In defining Canaan's status as that of a slave who cannot own any possessions, Gen 9:20–27 establishes that the land that had been promised to Israel had never been the property of others. This perspective differs from the understanding found in P, where Abraham is portrayed not as occupying the land but as settling in it as a neighbor of the Canaanites. Genesis 9:20–27 also differs from the Deuteronomistic ideology of the ban, but it does share the view advocated in Judg 1:21–35, which also envisages a scenario whereby the Canaanites are allowed to live in the land as Israel's slaves. As regards the curse of Canaan

in Gen 9, Schüle additionally notes that it not only reduces the Canaanites to the status of slaves but also portrays them as morally suspect, as people who must be shunned.

Japheth, the area of the imperial powers Persia and Greece, on the other hand, is portrayed in a more positive light, which, according to Schüle, suggests that our passage represents a stream within postexilic Judaism that had no problems with Israel's incorporation into the structure of the major empires while at the same time struggling to accept inhabitants of their own cultural region that did not follow YHWH.

A different perspective concerning Persia is found in P's table of nations, which concludes the Priestly version of the primeval history by pointing out in language that is reminiscent of the creation account, where plants and animals had been created each according to their kind, that humankind has now spread out over the earth according to its families, languages, and territories. Thus, following plants and animals, humankind has now also developed according to its creational design. Interestingly, however, Persia is not mentioned in the table of nations, which Schüle interprets as a sign of P's disapproval of Persia's imperial hegemony.

In chapter 10 Schüle looks at the story of Babel, which he understands, in contrast to a common trend in Old Testament scholarship, as one coherent story about humanity as a whole. He also disagrees with the position that regards the text as a criticism of humankind's desire for its own deification, noting that the passage actually talks about humanity's resistance to its own dispersal, something that in the context of P is regarded as positive, as something that is in line with God's aims for his creation. Thus, it is not the yearning for its deification but humanity's resistance to its creational destiny that is censured in the tower of Babel story.

Based on his exegetical observations, Schüle furthermore argues that Gen 11:1–9 is not about the evolution of a multiplicity of languages, an understanding that could only have developed because of the text having been read in conjunction with the table of nations, but about the confusion or collapse of the one language shared by all of humanity and thus also the collapse of its communion and social life. It is this collapse of communication that ultimately leads to the dispersal of the human race.

Schüle next turns to an investigation of the ways in which the tower of Babel story is connected with its context. Based on literary and thematic parallels with the garden of Eden story, he concludes that Gen 11:1–9 talks about humankind's advances beyond boundaries set by God. The possession of divine wisdom has enabled them to realize aims and ambitions that were meant to be God's prerogatives. In connection with the story of Cain, where the establishment of a city is a symbol of human life in separation from God,



the story of Babel becomes the place that humans create as a defense against violence because of their separation from God. When read in the context of P, the dispersal feared by humanity turns into a positive concept: it is the process by which humankind populates the entire earth, thus satisfying the will of the creator God. But in contrast to P, in Gen 11:1–9 this does not happen automatically or voluntarily.

According to Schüle, the story of Babel is best understood as a reflection upon the human desire to conglomerate in the form of empires and the fact that the evolvment of human life is inevitably bound up with these imperial powers. This includes painful experiences such as dispersal. However, the text also anticipates a divine intervention that will put an end to these empires and their imperial power. The tower of Babel story, which is another commentary on P, thus reflects on the loss of Jewish autonomy during the postexilic period. Whereas in P the notion of the dispersal of humankind is at the heart of the Priestly theology of creation and promise, Gen 11:1–9 offers a more realistic account of human dispersal understood in the context of the hardships of historical reality. Yet it is to this dispersed humanity that the prospect of God's intervention is held out, and this will be exemplified in the story of Abraham and his family, who experience God's salvific presence under the conditions of a dispersed world.

Chapter 11 is devoted to some final conclusions, such as that the primeval history is the result of theological reflection that continued over a period of several hundred years, forming in the process an image of the beginning of the world and at the same time the prologue to the Old Testament canon. As such, the primeval history engages in a dialogue with the Torah, Prophets and wisdom, blending the distinctive perspectives of these distinct literary corpora. However, Schüle also stresses that the primeval history does not incorporate all the voices found in the canon of the Hebrew Bible, as can be seen from the fact that it is decidedly noneschatological, nonnationalistic and “un-Deuteronomic” in its orientation.

Schüle provides extensive bibliographies, which, although generally helpful, are unfortunately scattered throughout the book. This sometimes makes it difficult to find the bibliographical details for a particular source, a problem that is somewhat aggravated by the fact that there is no author index. There are, however, a reasonably detailed subject index and an index of biblical references. The book is generally well produced, but it would have benefited from more careful proofreading.

As the above summary has shown, Schüle is not preoccupied exclusively with literary-critical questions, although he does advocate his own conclusions concerning the development of the primeval history, most notably in arguing that the non-Priestly material is best understood as a commentary on P. However, Schüle's main interest

appears to be in the theology of the text, or perhaps we should better say the *theologies* of the text, that of P and that of the non-Priestly material, respectively. It is this focus that makes his study a stimulating book deserving a wide readership. Of course, the persuasiveness of his conclusions depends to a large extent on how far one is inclined to follow him in his literary-critical decisions. Or to put it differently, a canonical reading of the primeval history might arrive at different conclusions. Another area for potential disagreement might concern the parallels with the Torah, the Prophets and the wisdom books that Schüle adduces (as well as the texts he does not mention). However, these questions should not detract from the fact that this is a stimulating and insightful investigation of the primeval history.