

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND FORM-CRITICISM:
TOWARDS THE GENERATIVE FORCE OF LIFE-SETTINGS

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After working through Martin Buss's extraordinary study, *Biblical Form Criticism in its Context*, I have been thinking about what the concepts of 'Form' and 'Context' really mean in this amazing volume, and how this work challenged my own understanding of form-criticism. Undoubtedly, Buss strives for a comprehensive view of 'Context', situating 'Form' in the center of philosophical deliberations, as well as of social sciences, and psychology. Note the following passage:

As will be seen 'form' can be understood in varying ways. The varying conceptions reflect divergent philosophical positions, which are linked with different social orientations and with changes in patterns of perception, as they are studied in psychology (Buss 1999: 19).

The author visualizes and—as the study itself clearly suggests—performs an integral intellectual analysis of 'Form' in 'Context', ranging from Greco-Roman theories (ch. 3) through the medieval and enlightenment concepts (chs. 4–6) to twentieth-century form-historical avenues (chs. 7–13) to the biblical texts. Social conditions enveloping theoretical approaches along the way play an important role, to the point that, for example, German Nazism is considered a notable influence in exegetical theory. On the whole, it seems to me, Buss consciously focuses his analysis more on intellectual history, philosophical perceptions, theoretical systems, and not directly on social-scientific method. However, and this is the thrilling discovery in his work, Buss is quite conscious of the changes which have taken place in modern world-views. He really opens up new windows in the query for 'Form' and 'Content' in biblical exegesis. My only question is, whether or not any kind of 'intellectualization' of form-criticism does full justice to Gunkel's and Mowinckel's concepts, or, for that matter, to modern exigencies in regard to biblical interpretation and preaching. To put it more modestly: Are there perhaps other avenues to form-critical

exegesis and the definition of genre, starting from life and reality, as best recognized in social sciences?

Gunkel's and Mowinckel's Heritage

The two ancestors of form-criticism certainly were 'children of their time', especially in the sense that they firmly believed in the cognitive and volitional capacities of humankind. Man, even and especially in the gendered sense, was considered the grand ruler of his earthly destinies. Preponderance of the human mind over all other creatures seemed legitimate and promising. The future was open to the adventurous construction of an ever more brilliant, perfect world. Gunkel with enthusiasm contributed to the comprehensive handbook *Kultur der Gegenwart* ([Our!] Present-Day Culture), optimistically conjuring the progress of human achievements. In the wake of the German idealism of the nineteenth century both scholars believed in the supreme calling of the human mind to bear responsibility for, to fashion and re-create the natural world, to develop culture and ethical conscience, to dominate the world and bring it to its prime. All this was the mentality in vogue, the mood of the elites—at least before the First World War. Hermann Gunkel, born in 1862, was a real son of that century, while Sigmund Mowinckel, born in 1884, still antedates the Great War by 30 years. Other philosophies, grounded in abysmal, preposterous qualities of the human mind, like Nietzsche's, were like distant climatic rumblings that could not dent general optimism.

In the light of their natural, cultural and mental environments it is quite extraordinary that both great Old Testament scholars opened up a new vision of textuality, genre- and form-oriented perspectives and methods for an adequate exegesis of such lofty texts. There is no question that traditional values and concepts were still powerful in their thinking. The new impulses they created, however, point in a different direction. In particular, this is true for their ideas of text-genesis and text-transmission. Gunkel assigned his famous 'Sitz im Leben' first place among the three criteria of anonymously created genres of literature.¹ In his mind, the

1. Cf. Gunkel and Begrich (*Einleitung in die Psalmen* [1933]: 22-23). For the Psalms he postulates (a) 'Gelegenheit im Gottesdienst' (situation in worship); (b) 'Schatz von Gedanken und Stimmungen' (bundle of thoughts and moods); and (c) 'gemeinsame Formensprache' (common formulaic language). Cf. Buss 1999: 226-55, esp. 247: 'The practical life context, however, was treated as the logically primary one in a sequence that proceeds from the occasion to the content to the form of expression'.

recurring communicative situations of human groups were the fertile matrix of stable linguistic patterns, thus resulting in recognizable standard pieces of communication. Daily life itself, it appears, needed and provided, shaped and modeled the forms of verbal exchange and liturgical ceremonies. Life surely is an anonymous force of its own, very delicate and extremely robust, quite primitive and highly inventive. Early literature, Gunkel seems to say, has been shaped by life's mysterious ways. So much so that later poets, although speaking more for themselves than had earlier archaic poetry, still heavily clung to traditional patterns in order to articulate their own anxieties and desires.

Later on the individual availed him- or herself of the existing genres and tried to express through them his or her own sentiments... Antiquity, relatively little developed, as it were, had been much more dependent on the coercive customs, even in the literary field, than we are able to imagine (Gunkel and Begrich 1933: 28).

Individual consciousness, mind, spirit, *Geist*, laboriously emerged only in the course of human history to become the dominant power. (Following G.W.F. Hegel and other patriotic philosophers, hardly any German wanted to cast doubts on the common opinion, that the Spirit had come to its highest realization only in the contemporary Prussian Empire.) Biblical literature, for its part, reflects this development, but still is very much directed towards the archetypal modes of communication and forms of articulation. Protestant theologians in the nineteenth century by and large believed that Old Testament prophecy, Jesus the Nazarene, Saint Paul, some of the early church fathers like Augustine, and finally Martin Luther constituted the real progress of human liberation towards those self-determining and world-modeling positions, that God, the creator, had bequeathed to his representative on earth. Biblical witnesses, on the other hand, live from collective memory and glimpses of the spiritual realm, which, however, constitute an inexhaustible treasure of primeval force. Somehow, romantic preferences of the unstructured, mythical, mysterious past, of nature as the symbol of superhuman forces, of a fertile pre-historic cultural and religious 'soil' were operative in the thinking of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosophers and literates, all involved in overcoming rationalism and historicism: Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), genius of the first hour of romanticism; Friedrich

He lists seven places in Gunkel's writings between 1920 and 1927 which give a similar definition of genre (1999: 247 n. 112).

Schlegel (1772–1829), the theoretician of all-encompassing harmony; Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772–1801), powerful poet of life, death and darkness; Clemens Brentano (1778–1842), lifelong seeker of romantic fulfillment; the brothers Grimm (Jakob, 1785–1863; Wilhelm, 1786–1859), collectors of folk-tales and instigators of modern linguistics. Gunkel is to be seen in this line of spiritual history skipping back, in some areas of work, to the attitudes and insights of romanticism. He plowed the ground at his time in search of trustworthy foundations for life and faith, and he alerts us to the limits of rationality, while pointing to the fertile soil of subconscious and societal forces, collective experience and all the other agitations of relational social networks.

This latter point, then, proves immensely important for our discussion. Not only is rationality hidden behind texts, but so are moods, sentiments, spirituality, cultic ritual. It was most of all Mowinckel, Gunkel's pupil at Giessen University, who strongly emphasized this discovery of his master (much to the dislike of the inventor). For Mowinckel religion is a cultic affair throughout, and cultic rituals by and large constitute the creative matrix of religious texts (and faith as well!) besides pedagogical institutions.² Mowinckel was less bound than Gunkel to a progressive scheme of human development aspiring for spiritual or ethical perfection. Mowinckel, probably more than Gunkel, had quite early on internalized the modern sciences of religion, anthropology and ethnology. Thus he adopted new perspectives from his knowledge of ancient Near Eastern religions and worldwide tribal faiths. His interpretive methods were also influenced by several new fields of learning: anthropological, sociological, psychological, comparative religious sciences, and so on. He would argue more empirically than Gunkel, although his ultimate interests in fact were religious (but not so much dogmatic) in character. Trained as he had been by history-of-religion experts of the day like Vilhelm Peter Grønbech (Copenhagen), and Peter Jensen (Marburg), and deeply involved with the work of other great scholars in the fields of the phenomenology of religion and emerging ethnology (e.g. Johannes Pedersen, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, Chantepie de la Saussaye, James George Frazer,

2. Cf. Mowinckel (1953: 7): Although he emphasized three focal points of religion ('cultic life'; 'myth'; 'ethos') his emphasis clearly is on 'cultic life', which centers on real worship offered to the deities. 'The more we got to know so-called primitive religions, but also ancient culturally developed faiths, the clearer it became recognized, that for them cultic worship was of paramount importance' (and not, as in Protestantism, theological doctrine! [Mowinckel 1953: 8]).

Morris Jastrow Jr, Geo Widengren and Nathan Söderblom), he was not so much rooted in the philo-romantic tradition as was Gunkel, but in modern scientific reasoning and the fundamental debate about the place of religion in modern times.

For Mowinckel, religion was almost a human predicament, an innate capacity to open up to the address and revelation of the otherwise unattainable deity (Mowinckel 1953: 132-36). For him, this kind of divine encounter was to be distinguished from magical enterprises, which actually constitute forms of ancient science (and science does not have access to the religious dimensions of reality). Experiencing the divine normally takes place in worship services. Cultic practice, for its part, enacts the relationship between humans and God, partially in dramatic forms (Mowinckel 1953: 73-80; 1962: 106-92). Mowinckel's ideas about 'cultic drama', in fact, subsequently inspired quite a few scholars of the so-called 'myth and ritual' school in Scandinavia and England. Essentially, he argued that cultic ceremonies of smaller or greater dimension consist of human and divine actions:

On the one hand, cult comprises actions and words which so to speak rise from below towards the deity, from the congregation to God, to incite his activity, and on the other hand, it contains interventions from above, reaching out towards humans and mediating God's blessings. We may denominate the first category as 'sacrificial' and the latter 'sacramental' (Mowinckel 1953: 100-101).

Sacred action, in consequence, is the overarching category. Offerings made—in order to realize a favorable relationship with, and receive comfort and blessings from the deity—are transactions celebrated by a community, with accompanying words embedded in the liturgical action:

The words are, so to speak, the collateral text of cultic drama... Exactly because word and action are intimately aligned to each other, the text often remains fragmentary; it has to be supplemented everywhere by performance, in order to become intelligible (Mowinckel 1953: 112).

The human word has an important, integrated function: As the interpretive articulation of the community it 'pronounces the contents of action and symbols thus making them effective' (Mowinckel 1953: 110). Other kinds of words, coming from the divine itself, being mediated by cultic functionaries, certainly are potent, powerful elements of worship, as well (Mowinckel 1953: 112-13). In the course of time, both kinds of words indeed acquire a certain dignity of their own, the development being from mere dramatic action towards textual presentation:

Originally, performance of cultic drama was the authentic kerygma of the salvific presence of the deity. Cultic drama presented the message exactly by 'enacting' it. When the 'myth' grows into a firm, narrative molding, however, as e.g., in the Babylonian creation epic, sooner or later this epic form becomes 'sacred text', gaining 'canonical' status 'sanctified' by tradition and cultic custom. In that case the 'drama' is replaced by textual recitation, or else the text-reading becomes part of the drama (Mowinckel 1953: 113).

In Mowinckel's work, one can distinguish the different localization, function and genesis of texts from a cult-historical perspective as compared with most nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts of personal authorship and individual composition for private reading. Although Mowinckel is a long way from modern cultural anthropological research in ritual processes, and equally far from today's literary theories, for example reader-response models, he ushered in a new realm of textual appreciation.

This observation, finally, is valid for both Gunkel and Mowinckel. The old protagonists of form-critical studies discovered—each one in his own context and mental world—a text-generating place outside the realm of individual minds and personal dispositions. They perceived a hidden 'literary' manufactory in communal communication processes. Gunkel was, in the wake of romantic glorification of basic archaic and 'natural' potencies, much impressed with the moods and formative 'literary' forces of ancient people. Mowinckel, from a religious-historical vantage point, placed cultic ritual at the center of his attention. Coming from different directions, they converged at the same point: Biblical texts originally do not have individual authors as their point of reference, but ongoing, real life phenomena within some kind of communitarian frame. *Sitz im Leben*, life-situation, is the necessary and logical focus for the understanding of ancient, anonymous literature (Gerstenberger 1988: 20-31). Life itself, in its organized social forms from family groups to state organization, from open-air sanctuary to parochial communities in exile, is behind the biblical texts we are studying in our time. The oral and written genres recognizable in Hebrew Scripture, at least in their early phases, gave expression to ongoing communicative actions and interchanges of people of flesh and blood, living their religious and secular lives under the social, cultural, economic, political conditions of their times and places. Gunkel's and Mowinckel's emphasis on real life-situations, clad, as it were, in different motivational perspectives, continues to be one of the most stimulating reasons to continue pursuing form-critical analysis of the Hebrew Scriptures.³

3. The commentary-series 'Forms of Old Testament Literature' (Grand Rapids:

Modern Construction of Reality

In the second half of the twentieth century a remarkable paradigmatic shift occurred, at least in Western civilization. This move ties in with a general process of ‘secularization’, but should not exclusively be explained by such derogatory terms. To abandon finally, as it were, philosophical positions of idealism and neo-idealism is not a vote against religion although it may include anti-religious stances. The noteworthy break with hierarchically constructing the world from above, to convert transcendence into empirical immanence, to elevate scientific method into a significant role also in the humanities, has produced a new situation even in Old Testament research and particularly form-critical studies. What Gunkel and Mowinckel began with their attention to genres and life-situations may enter a new phase in our time. Under the influence of a thorough renewal of fundamental paradigms in biblical scholarship,⁴ as well as the creation of increasingly useful tools in social scientific research, Old Testament form-criticism will be revitalized. We may yet be able to reconstruct social stratifications in ancient Israel in order to gain a better understanding of genres and their messages as we have them in the Hebrew Scriptures. Since the field of social studies or humanities is so immensely large here I can merely indicate a few transparent changes in different fields of social research.

The sociologist Peter L. Berger and his co-author Thomas Luckman elucidate the point: Whether noticed or unnoticed by the general public our contemporary societies no longer rely so much on philosophical, religious or ethical systems to understand and neatly order the world, but they prefer a ‘social construction of reality’.⁵ We may add that, by now, it has become apparent that in real life the ‘social’ dimension has turned out to be dominated almost totally by economic concepts and values. This

Eerdmans) started in the late sixties, with Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker as chief editors, and still is an interesting effort to come to grips with genre analysis and determinations of life-situations. Compare my tentative attempt to distinguish between five layers of ancient Israelite social structures (2002).

4. Some scholars with solid justification speak of a fundamental ‘paradigm switch’ in biblical studies, cf. Ferdinand E. Deist, *The Prophets: Are we Heading for a Paradigm Switch?* (BZAW 185, Berlin: W. de Gruyter 1989).

5. Berger and Luckmann (1966). The authors themselves are cautious in trying to avoid a marxist–materialistic one-sidedness. They advocate an interaction between mind and social condition.

means that we find ourselves born into a given society which more likely than not defines itself by way of social and economic relationships and achievements. Reality, day-to-day life, functions most of all in accordance with societal demands and promises. Ultimate concerns are all but absent from ongoing life-processes, if we do not count, for the moment, sentimental moods on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Eve, memory of the dead and occasional festivities on account of some national or regional anniversary, or, for that matter, strong longings for esoteric comfort. Formative ideas in market-oriented societies revolve around success and happiness, with the threateningly destructive counter-forces of failure and serious sickness. There is no heaven nor afterlife, not much beauty, truth, goodness molding our lives. Reality and life are channeled by the parameters of society and its economy. Sociology is expected to dissect social structures and design plausible blueprints for society.⁶ Philosophers have to heed contemporary social conditions.⁷ The parameters of our intellectual world-views in general derive from social sciences not from pure philosophy and not at all from religious considerations. All this, evidently, does not mean that the construction of our world today along societal lines is anything less mental than in traditional models of the last century. But it does mean that the elements of construction are being culled from a different quarry—the humanities—and worked on by different tools, that is, scholarly methods. Spiritual concepts like those in idealist philosophies are outdated, and this fact has some consequences for form-critical studies of the Old Testament.

Social sciences extend far beyond sociology and philosophy. Some other disciplines under this category that already have proved very important for Old Testament research are anthropology, gender studies, and social psychology. Social psychology includes those branches of psychology that do not concentrate exclusively on the individual but recognize the social ties that bind all people, and sometimes investigates society as a whole. Horst Eberhard Richter is a good example. He is able to evaluate society at large as if it were a patient on the couch: In his treatise *Der Gotteskomplex* he proclaims Western society to have fallen sick since it turned its back on the orienting concept of God in the area of enlightenment. Human beings have become autonomous, he claims, trying to substitute the terrible loss of meaning by becoming gods themselves. Since they have been desperately experimenting to create anew the universe they

6. Cf. Luhmann (2000); and Beck (1986).

7. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer *et al.*

lost, all by themselves, they have been developing a sort of autism in their relationships to other beings. Other experts like Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Alexander Mitscherlich, and many others have scrutinized existing societal conditions from the perspective of psychic soundness. Their diagnoses help us to understand our own contextual dependency, our own grid of inquiries and conclusions (which is very valuable for a critical estimation of self-made exegesis and theology), and, who knows, they may give us the opportunity to classify the ancient societies and behaviors which have become accessible to us through biblical texts. There is a chance, then, that we might receive help even in our crucial endeavor to define literary genres in their contextual setting.

Gender studies and feminist treatises of societal relevance enhance our understanding of present-day hermeneutical situations as well as of ancient and contemporary social affairs. Exegesis—until the advent of a women's liberation movement in the sixties—had been a domain of male experts. In consequence, female participation in biblical stories, history, theology had been more or less ignored. Female voices, literary contributions, and possibly genres and forms had not been considered. The onesidedness of many a male interpretation became apparent with the rise of feminist exegesis. Exemplary research has been done by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Letty Russel, Phyllis Tribble, Athalya Brenner, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Luise Schottroff, Helen Schüngel-Straumann, Marie-Theres Wacker, Irmtraud Fischer, Silvia Schroer and many others.⁸ In the meantime, a different picture of ancient Israelite society and its development over a millennium has emerged, including female experience within various social layers.⁹ The new comprehension of social functions and structures, then, has a bearing upon the evaluation, functioning and interpretation of biblical texts.

Anthropological field studies have been going on for many decades now, yielding immensely rich insights, mostly into the life and customs of tribal organizations. It is no longer possible to take into account the huge amount of studies published from all continents. Classical cultural anthropology or social anthropology started in the twenties and thirties of the previous century, with work done by American and British scholars who made a point to live with the groups they investigated, sometimes for years. Their main interest was to describe empirically the social functioning of village

8. To mention but two relevant publications out of hundreds: Schüssler Fiorenza (1983); and Schottroff *et al.* (1995).

9. Cf., e.g., Carol Meyers (1988); Gerstenberger (1996); Perdue *et al.* (1997).

populations, including their daily work and leisure, their rituals and religious practices, their genealogical relations and their mythopoetic tradition. Thus, for example, Bronislaw K. Malinowski, Margaret Mead and R.F. Fortune worked on South Sea Islands; Clyde Kluckhohn, Gladys A. Reichard and Leland C. Wyman with the Navajo Indians in Arizona and New Mexico; and E.E. Evans-Pritchard and R.G. Lienhardt in the African Sudan. The brothers Vilas Boas in various functions accompanied Brazilian indigenous tribes, as did Nimuendaju (Curt Unkel) for four decades, while the multi-ethnic subcontinent of India was visited by scores of specialists. Some trained anthropologists also recorded the biographies of native people, uncovering a diachronic development in a given society of villagers. This list comprises only a few outstanding examples representing hundreds of anthropological field workers of many nations who have tried during the past 80 years to immerse themselves into strange and archaic cultures in order to chart basic phenomena about human social life. Such an objective, successfully pursued, proves to be very fruitful for Old Testament studies. We are able now, much more than Gunkel and Mowinckel would have dreamed, to make sense of rather complicated inter-human relations and ritual procedures, of symbolic systems and the place of religion in daily life.

Anthropological data, gained by direct observation of extant tribal societies, are, of course, a very special kind of evidence for our present discussion. There obviously is no way of directly relating facts and interpretations gained from study of modern cultures to texts and situations removed by millennia. But granting the general rule, that human groups in typical life challenges (distress, joy, death, survival, etc.) may come up with analogous reactions, we get an idea of what the choices were for ancient people living under similar conditions. Tribal structures or village relationships, interpersonal behavior in family circles, religious rites under guidance of a shamanistic expert, educational strategies, seasonal agendas of feasting and countless other goings-on in 'primitive' life become meaningful through the anthropologist's participation, observation and description. Certainly, we still remain a certain distance from tribal reality, availing ourselves, as it were, of the senses and recordings of mediators, which always run the risk of distortion and misunderstanding. On the other hand, modern anthropology as a scholarly, empiric enterprise brings us as close to ancient reality as one can ever hope to get, save by direct contact and lifelong cohabitation with an alien people, an option very few Old Testament scholars will want to choose. The contact with tribal life

through anthropological observation is, however, a real opportunity to ground our work with ancient texts on a more solid base. Anthropological constants, as the common human features and rules of behavior are called, help us to estimate more precisely what kind of life may have been led by Old Testament witnesses. The scarcity of written texts preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures can finally be complemented by a wealth of analogous information¹⁰ on tribal life around the world. Information on real life, for its sake, is a necessary presupposition of determining 'life-settings' of literary genres. Considering the paucity of anthropological knowledge at the time of Gunkel and Mowinckel we now have reason to relish great new opportunities for form-critical studies starting with careful reconstruction of life-settings in regard to given genres and forms of communal articulation.

The Old Testament and Ritual Studies

As an example of what can still be achieved in form-critical work I would like to sketch briefly the insights anthropological ritual studies have brought to the interpretation of Old Testament psalms.¹¹ The biblical Psalter preserves psalms from different times and life-situations. That much has been recognized from the early days of psalm-interpretation, as already the 'historical' superscriptions to some David songs testify. The details of specific rootings in life, however, have long escaped attention, because available analogous data were not sufficiently appreciated. Exegetes contented themselves with distinguishing psalms by content and mood (distress, joy, reflection) presupposing, as a rule, some uniform societal background, vaguely thought of as 'the people of Israel', and the all-important individual suppliant being a formal 'member' of the hymn-singing congregation. Classification of the texts as 'I'-psalms and 'We'-psalms did not clarify matters much because the first person singular could possibly refer to a leading functionary praying and singing as the representative of an assembly, while the first person plural would possibly signify a cultic functionary or head of an organized crowd speaking for the whole congregation and including him- or herself (cf. Neh. 9.9-37).

The tedious discussion about content, mood and personal pronouns in

10. The grand reports on Palestinian customs, institutions, life-situations done by Dalman (1928–35) belong to the same category of material; they are still geographically and culturally closer to the ancient Hebrews.

11. Cf. my form-critical commentary on the Psalms: FOTL, XIV and XV.

psalms—and in a wider sense about forms and genres and their life-settings—could be clarified only by comparative studies in regard to ancient extra-biblical texts, and modern anthropological investigations. Babylonian incantations provided an initial clue, and contemporary shamanistic healing practices provided refined confirmation of the real setting of so-called ‘complaints’ and ‘thanksgivings’ ‘of the individual’.¹² Authentic communal songs and prayers, on the other hand, can be identified on account of their use of ‘We’-language and in juxtaposition to anthropological ritual studies.¹³

Taking a closer look at ‘I’-psalms and their setting will further clarify this point: Modern notions of individualism as well as some biblical texts have misled the reader to believe that prayer in ancient Israel was a solitary act of individual supplication. Passages like 1 Sam. 1.9-16; Isa. 38.2-3; Jer. 17.18-23; 20.7-18, and so on seem to suggest that persons in utter distress held a kind of soliloquy before their God. Likewise, it is the impression drawn from biblical testimony, that individual prayer normally occurred at a sanctuary or at the temple in Jerusalem. Closer reading of the texts and, more importantly, analogous witnesses from outside the Bible lead to the following conclusion: As a rule, personal calamities (sickness, bad omens, social discrimination, bad luck, and so forth) that could not be resolved by available know-how (medicine or proper negotiations) had to be referred to a ritual expert. He or she would make a diagnosis of the case and propose a ritual, normally held at the home of the stricken person and in the presence of his or her family. The expert would determine rites to be performed near the house, possibly on its roof. He or she would also indicate the proper powerful prayer to be recited by the patient. Babylonian incantations carry comparable information of distinct ritual orientations as part of their complex texts.¹⁴ Anthropological studies, for example, of Navajo healing rituals, provide more detailed information about similar healing rites. The ceremonial place and implements have to be carefully prepared, the patient needs to be purified, the deities have to be invoked and asked for assistance, the remnants of contaminated substances (clothes,

12. Cf. Gerstenberger (1980); and Mayer (1976). For a discussion of the genre cf. Gerstenberger (1987), with individual analyses of psalms.

13. Examples of ritual research are: Victor Turner (1969); Roland L. Grimes (1982); Leland C. Wyman (1970; 1982).

14. The most recent edition of the *nam-bur-bi* series of ritual ‘dissolution of evil’ has been provided, together with a very extensive and thorough reconstruction of ritual proceedings, by the Heidelberg assyriologist, Maul (1993).

earth, figurines) are cleansed, etc. From analogous ritual procedures we thus gain a more colorful, realistic impression of the ritual performances that may lie behind individual complaints in the Psalter. If we then return to the psalms themselves we discover indications of small-group settings for individual complaints, and more impressively so, for family thanksgiving ceremonies. The participation of family and friends in complaint-prayer rituals is manifest, for example, in Pss. 35.13-14 (12-13); 4.3 (2); 11.2 (1); 41.6-10 (5-9), among others. Healing and rehabilitation are reasons to bring thank-offerings, possibly to the local sanctuary, to be shared with a large crowd of invited guests (cf. Ps. 22.23-27 [22-26]). The theological outlook of these rites of healing and rehabilitation reflects the small, intimate group of family members who implore, as a rule, their domestic protective deity.

Secondary social organizations, from village to state level,¹⁵ customarily develop rituals in accordance with their main functions for the people thus organized: rites consecrating public offices (shamans, war-chiefs, kings, priests, etc.), commemorating historical moments, promoting rain and fertility, mourning common calamities, celebrating victories, hallowing treaties and the common order, and such like. Cultural anthropology has always paid close attention to these functions of ritual, which go far beyond what the small-scale family unit would deem necessary or possible. Victor Turner, one of the pioneers of ritual research, for example, described the village rites of Zambia's Ndembu and neighboring tribes as illustrations for African ritualism in general (Turner 1969). The concrete rites of the Bantu subgroup, studied in minute detail, provide a window into the basic rules governing many tribal performances on that continent, even if a great many modifications occur in different ethnic populations. Thus, the problems of twin birth, 'liminality' that is, living in an undefined space between fixed states, in social or psychic ambiguity (e.g. puberty, truce, semi-nomadism, engagement for marriage, oscillation between matrilinear and patrilinear systems of lineage, etc.), of social tensions between in-groups, are reflected in an exemplary way by a number of rites under study. Interestingly enough, Turner hardly pays attention to the groups of ritual participants. He concentrates almost exclusively on the symbolic rites and words, regardless of who is present at the ceremony. Furthermore, very personal issues like the barrenness of a woman or fear of death

15. Israel, it seems, quite uniquely brought forth, in exilic/post-exilic times, a new type (perhaps paralleled by Zoroastrian communities?) of confessional-religious community, almost a type of parochial organization.

are treated from a communal perspective. The 'lower' level of familial organization, also called the 'primary social structure', does not enter much into consideration.

To adduce two more examples of rituals in secondary organizations: The Navajo tribe in Arizona and New Mexico has been studied for decades now, and the ritual aspects of their culture have always received a great deal of attention,¹⁶ as have the Hopis, living in an enclave of the Navajo Reservation.¹⁷ Intensive anthropological field-work has resulted, especially in the case of the Navajos, in the publication of source-material, for example, the cataloguing of a number of specific ceremonials.¹⁸ After the tribal wars ended, about 1868, a peace treaty with the United States government was signed, the result of which was the eradication of rituals employed as preparation for armed conflicts. Since then, rituals have focused on 'bringing the dangerous under control, exorcising ghosts, restoring harmony in the relations of an individual or a group with the world, and rendering a sick person immune to renewed contamination by the same supernatural factors' (Leland C. Wyman 1983: 537). Healing rituals for individuals predominate, which include a 'private' part, three to seven nights in length, during which the patient is 'sung over' in his or her *hogan* (Navajo block hut) in the presence of family members. On the last night of the ritual, however, the public is normally invited. The healing process and anticipated thanksgiving become a community affair. The Pueblo Indians (e.g. the Hopis), on the other hand, practice similar patterns of ritual, dances, prayers, performances, but their 'ceremonials [are] thoroughly integrated with their social organization...primarily for bringing rain and fertility with curing only secondary. Moreover, Pueblo ceremonials are conducted by organized priesthoods, religious societies, or other groups, and are carried out in an annual round according to a set religious calendar' (Wyman 1983: 537). In both communities, intricate rules have to be observed to guarantee a successful performance. For the Navajos, the textual basis for ceremonies is very elaborate: 'Knowledge of

16. Cf. Kluckhohn and Leighton (1946); and Reichard (1950).

17. Cf. Simmons (1942); Griffith (1983); the Pueblo people are treated in vol. IX, 1979, in greater detail.

18. Two scholars have been very efficient in this difficult task: Father Berard Haile, of the Franciscan Mission at Fort Defiance, Arizona, and Wyman (1970; 1982), of Arizona State University. Wyman also gives an informative purview on the 'Navajo Ceremonial System' in Sturtevant (Wyman 1983). More about this subject by Lamphere (1983).

several hundred songs is required for most chants. Prayers are said at intervals and communal prayer occurs at or near the close of ceremonies' (Wyman 1983: 550).¹⁹ The many studies of Navajo and Hopi rituals demonstrate an unbelievably rich ceremonialism and religious life, an intermingling of actions and words, with the purpose of expressing the faith of the groups concerned, and achieving the ends aspired for.

Conclusions

The work of the fathers (and a few mothers, like Hedwig Jahnow from Marburg) of form-criticism gave rise to an initial suspicion that biblical texts did not originate so much in the brains of individual writers and thinkers as nineteenth-century exegesis had presupposed. The seed of many texts, on the contrary, may have been communal life, especially worship services in various societal contexts. Life-situations of leisure, feasting, juridical procedures, socializing young people (i.e. primary education), higher learning, and so on may also have contributed to the genesis of different genres preserved in Hebrew Scriptures. Subsequent research after Gunkel's death, approximately from 1932 onward, succeeded here and there in confirming the vision of the founders of form-criticism, but by and large the idea of attributing popular and spiritual communication with the generative force of creating 'literary genres' has been put aside again in favor of personalized authorship of the genres at hand. A vivid indication of this kind of forgetfulness and repression of seminal ideas has been the extremely strange movement toward talking about genres being loosed from their life-situations and acquiring a 'setting' in books. To my mind, books do not create nor develop literary genres, people do, even if they should be writers or journalists. And social matrixes are so powerful that, even in our own, intellectualized and individualized times, text-production is still greatly influenced by social customs, expectations, orientations, even dictates. How much more so in ancient times, when literature primarily had been most certainly produced for communal purposes, as in the case of the Hebrew Bible.

If we allow societal influence too little impact on the genesis of Scripture and insist on working in the traditional mode, considering the important frames of reference for exegesis today, we are bound to run into problems. To interpret ancient texts exclusively as designs of private

19. Also, Gill (1977).

authors, as concepts born in the brains of individuals, as philosophical schemes and literary aesthetic constructs runs counter to a good number of theories of historians, literary scholars, and experts in social studies and the humanities. Indeed, the modern world has hardly been created by words alone or by rational devices, but by explosive action. Moreover, such an approach flatly contradicts the results of scores of social anthropologists and ritual experts, who insist—as did Gunkel and Mowinckel, but with immensely refined and expanded arguments—on the priority of communicative action. We may flatly say: The frame of reference for established genres is not individual thinking but communal interaction. Social anthropology at this point ties in with the general tendency in our secularized societies: The world is to be read as a whole. Philosophy is part of life. Philosophical reflection must not ignore nor depreciate human action. It is by doing more than thinking that we construct our realities, even our world-views. Would that humankind could strengthen its own good or ideal concepts of life, thus emancipating itself from its own erroneous and suicidal behavior. What we need is to learn to control action by will and intellect, including especially liturgical and ritual activity, which sometimes cause harm. In a sense, we still want to achieve what some thinkers are convinced we possess already. Martin Buss, the friend to whom these musings, in gratitude, are dedicated, certainly is and will be a scholar who opens the eyes of many contemporaries to new realities beyond traditional limitations.