1. Introduction

In this year of commemoration of Charles Darwin the extremes tend to get special attention. Apparently, all evolutionists are to be considered atheists and all Christians are supposed to believe literally in the creation of heaven and earth in six days. Speaking for myself—and, I hope, for most of us—the truth may lay somewhere in between these extremes.

In the same way there are two extremist views as to the value and significance of the Old Testament. On the one hand it is considered God’s own infallible Word, which has come down to us as a kind of brick from heaven, outside history as it were, without being contaminated by the literature, history, culture and religion of Israel’s neighbouring ‘heathen’ peoples. On the other extreme it is considered to be without any (or only little) historical value, because it was the product of religious fantasy and was conceived only in a very late time, somewhere at the end of the Persian period or, preferably, still later.

In this case, too, my preference goes to the way in between: the Old Testament is for me the result of a historical process, which has gone on for centuries, of Israel’s coming to terms with its religious beliefs, in constant and fruitful interaction with its neighbours on all sides. As to this historical process, our Joint Meeting of 1994 in Kampen has given a balanced insight on both the synchronic and the diachronic positions, with the inevitable conclusion that the one as well as the other has its own merits. Though I am choosing here the diachronic option, as will be clear already from the title of my paper, this does not mean that I would deny

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2 Johannes C. de Moor (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (OTS, 34), Leiden 1995.
the importance of the synchronic approach or that I would not be open to the new insights which it has brought about.

My intention is to give an overview of some diachronic features of each of the main sections and subsections of TeNaKh, including, if possible, connections with the heritage of the neighbouring cultures. As I am happily aware of my lack of sufficient knowledge, in particular of the more recent publications on these subjects, I am proceeding here in a way like the proverbial ‘fool rushing in where angels fear to tread’.3

2. Case Studies

2.1. Primeval Stories

To begin with the beginning: creation stories have been known from peoples all over the world, inclusive of Israel’s neighbours. Our Bible has preserved two of them, both of supreme quality and—as far as I know—unparalleled in world literature. Generally speaking, I am an adherent of the traditional diachronic scheme of the four sources (the Documentary Hypothesis), if only because otherwise one would have to invent something similar in order to explain the various phenomena covered by it. In that view the first creation story, using אלהים, is the later one (P), which was added before the older, Yahwistic one (J; with added אלהים).4 As it seems, there are no direct parallels from the literature


4 So also Claus Westermann in his monumental commentary, Genesis (BK, 1/1 [Gen. 1–11]), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974 (‘1999), 271 (‘... dass wir dies [addition of אלהים] statt dem Verfasser einem Redaktor zuschreiben. N.B. the observation at the previous page that the combination does את אלוהים occurs only once elsewhere [Exod. 9:30] holds good for the Pentateuch only; it is also to be found e.g. 2 Sam. 7:25, Jer. 4:6, Ps. 72:18, 84:12, etc., cf. THAT, 1, 164 [W.H. Schmidt]). In the years I was engaged with Syriac manuscripts I came across ms 1341, which only gives parts of the text of the Peshitta, thus forming a kind of shortened edition of the Old Testament. A much later hand had begun to add the missing parts of the text in the margin, but abandoned this rather cumbersome task after having supplemented the text in a number of books (Cf. M.D. Koster, The Peshitta of Exodus: The Development of its Text in the Course of Fifteen Centuries [SSN, 17], Assen/Amsterdam