Scholars have, for many generations, been interested in the formation of the book of Genesis. During the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, the source critical hypothesis decisively influenced scholars’ views about the origins of this book. And it continues to do so today, since many standard introductions still offer students the time-honored language of JEDP. For the purpose of this presentation, I allude to two volumes, one long and one short, which share the title of this lecture, “The Genesis of Genesis.” In 1892, Benjamin Bacon published a volume titled *The Genesis of Genesis*; it was “a study of the documentary sources” that made up that biblical book.¹ In it, he printed out the book of Genesis, using different fonts to identify the four separate sources. More than six decades later, in 1958, Otto Eissfeldt published a much smaller book with the same title, *Die Genesis der Genesis*, in which he offered a more popular version of his own source critical approach.² Though differing in size and in some details, these two books shared at least three perceptions. First, Genesis is made up of long, narrative sources that extend beyond Genesis into Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch. Second, these narrative sources arose independently – at different times and in different places. Later, they were combined in a more or less mechanical manner. Third, since Genesis was understood to be a combination of sources that yielded part of a longer story which extended into Exodus, neither Bacon nor Eissfeldt discussed Genesis as a book in its own right. In my judgment, all three of these views need to be revised.

In this paper, I would like to build on the scholarly work that has taken place during the fifty years after the publication of the second edition of Eissfeldt’s volume and to offer some programmatic proposals

¹ B. Bacon, *The Genesis of Genesis: A Study of the Documentary Sources of the First Book of Moses in Accordance with the Results of Critical Science illustrating the presence of Bibles within the Bible* (Hartford, CT: The Student Publishing Company, 1892).
about the genesis of Genesis. My proposals are these. The book of Genesis arose out of a process of theological conflict. The priestly material is far more than a parallel or separate version of events attested in the earlier traditions. Rather, it was written as a response and a challenge to the prior literature. In addition, there is a major break between Genesis and Exodus, a break evident in both the non-priestly and the priestly literature. Further, both the pre-priestly and the priestly literature in Genesis work together to create a coherent whole. The pre-priestly literature focuses on both humanity and Israel as families. That concern with family concludes at the end of the first biblical book. The priestly literature in Genesis is organized around two covenants (Gen 9:17) and the telôdôt formulae. These priestly elements are limited to the book of Genesis. Hence, I maintain that Genesis is not simply one portion of the larger Pentateuch; Genesis is a book in its own right.3

I. A Caesura between Genesis and Exodus

A significant number of scholars have recently raised serious questions about whether or not it is possible to speak about a Yahwistic or pre-priestly source that extends throughout the Tetratexch.4 Instead of long narrative strands, these scholars, following Rendtorff’s lead, have identified a number of literary complexes that arose independently and were integrated at a fairly late date. Those “large units” included the primeval history, the patriarchal story (itself made up of smaller entities), Moses and Exodus, Sinai, sojourn in the desert, and occupation of the land.5 It has proven difficult to discern literary (or other) features common to the non-priestly elements of these units. As a result, many scholars, though certainly not all, now hesitate to

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3 The term, book, is, of course, anachronistic, since books in the classical sense do not appear until the Greco-Roman period, so K. van der Toorn, Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

4 The arguments of R. Rendtorff in Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch (BZAW 17; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977) exposed the Achilles’ heel of the traditional source critical hypothesis. See, more recently, two volumes of collected essays J. Gertz et al. (eds.), Abschied vom Yahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002) and T. Dozeman and K. Schmid (eds.), A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation (Symposium; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).