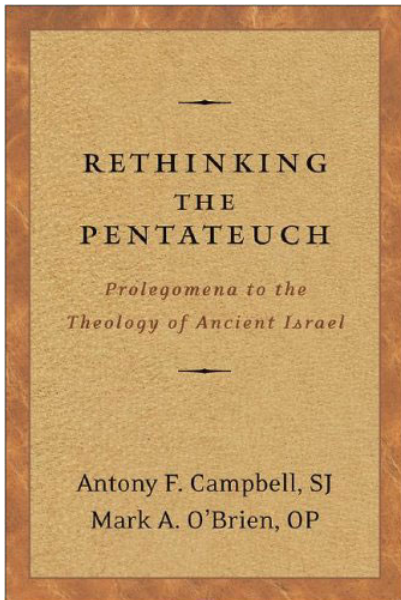


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Campbell, Antony F., and Mark A. O'Brien

Rethinking the Pentateuch: Prolegomena to the Theology of Ancient Israel

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005. Pp. xv + 183.
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Thomas Römer
University of Lausanne
Lausanne, Switzerland CH-1015

It is a difficult task in the present situation of pentateuchal research to envision a comprehensive introduction to the Torah that would reflect the complexity of the present discussion without confusing the reader. Campbell and O'Brien, who are well known for their book *Sources of the Pentateuch*, published twelve years ago, have taken up this challenge. Contrary to their former work, they no longer adhere to the classical Documentary Hypothesis but seek now to offer a “complementary alternative,... not an obligatory replacement” (5). The alternative view, which they call a “user-based approach,” is quite briefly presented (11–104). Four appendices at the end of the book (107–55) provide more details and supplementary arguments. In the fourth appendix the authors present an analysis of Gen 1–Exod 40 and Num 1–24 indicating the origin of the different documents underlying these texts.

The authors claim that biblical texts were composed in the service of a number of functions. With regard to the Pentateuch, the narrative sections would have been written down for the use of ancient storytellers, who could then expand the stories from the original texts, which they used as sort of an *aide-mémoire*. Campbell and O'Brien are less interested in the ritual and legislative parts of the Torah (a typically Christian attitude) and deal with the book of Leviticus in less than one page (87) claiming that “its unmoving focus on the life of the postexilic community gives Leviticus a unity of its own and

withdraws it from the purview of the discussion here.” To the reviewer this appears to be a puzzling statement.

The view that the authors adopt about the formation of the Pentateuch comes quite close to the hypothesis of independent larger units combined only at a very late stage, an idea that R. Rendtorff put forward as early as 1976 and that is nowadays gaining support in Continental scholarship, though with numerous modifications. More specifically Campbell and O’Brien advocate a model in which the books of Genesis, Exodus–Numbers, and Deuteronomy underwent an independent formation before being combined into a unified composition.

As for Genesis, the authors first claim that there is no P text in the whole book (11). Nevertheless, they state that the passages traditionally assigned to P may stem from “priestly circles associated with the Jerusalem temple or other circles with similar interests” and thus conclude that “there is no P in the Pentateuch; there is priestly writing, of course—by a variety of priestly thinkers” (15). This is also a curious assertion, since the idea that P is not an individual author but rather a priestly group or a “school” is nothing new in pentateuchal debate. In fact, one does not find compelling arguments in the book against the existence of “P texts.” On the contrary, the authors’ position appears unnecessarily to complicate the issue, especially when they argue in the first appendix that “the so-called P account of the flood most probably cannot have the same origin as Genesis one” (111). The contrary is true. The comparison with Mesopotamian creation accounts, which the authors do not consider, clearly shows an intrinsic link between creation and flood, and this same link exists between Gen 1 and 6–9*. Campbell and O’Brien also acknowledge that the construction of the mobile sanctuary accomplished in Exod 40 appears as the conclusion of the creation account that began in Gen 1, but they nevertheless assert that this does not require the same author for Gen 1 and Exod 40 (87 n. 146). It seems much easier to accept a priestly link between the books of Genesis and Exodus.

Campbell and O’Brien, who rightly focus on the independence of the Genesis tradition, never answer the decisive question of the identity of the redactor responsible for joining the Genesis traditions to the Moses stories. As for the Abraham cycle, the authors distinguish different materials (Abraham family tradition, Abraham-Lot collection, Rebekah tradition, Abraham tradition, El Shaddai tradition, tradition pool). To the vague term “Abraham tradition” they attribute the late texts of Gen 15 as well as 12:10–20 and 20:1–18. This is puzzling, since Gen 20 is either a doublet or, more probably, a later rewriting of Gen 12. The El Shaddai tradition starts in Gen 17, continues in Gen 23 and 25*, and reappears in the Jacob cycle, in texts often attributed to P. The expression “El Shaddai tradition” reminds one of the work of Jacob Hoftijzer on the patriarchal promises

(1956), although the authors do not mention him. The Jacob cycle was originally independent from the Abraham story, and the construction of a single family comprising Abraham, Isaac and Jacob “may have been created from a diversity of traditions” (56). The Joseph story is rightly located in the Egyptian diaspora (62). It may have ended originally in Gen 46:1*, 6–7* and was only later expanded to serve as a bridge between the patriarchs and the exodus.

Regarding the Moses traditions, Campbell and O’Brien distinguish between an “exodus narrative” starting in Exod 3 and ending in Exod 15, and a sanctuary narrative, which would open in Exod 6 and come to an end in Exod 40. As in the case of the “El Shaddai tradition” in Gen 12–36, this narrative actually corresponds quite closely to the Priestly texts of Exodus (see the list on p. 149). The obvious link that Exod 6 creates with Gen 17 is explained by the idea that the author of Exod 6 knew the El Shaddai tradition. In my view, it is more plausible to attribute both texts to the same redactional (and Priestly) layer, which buttresses the link between Genesis and Exodus. The status of the book of Numbers remains somewhat in limbo. According to Campbell and O’Brien, Num 1–10 is not a logical continuation of Exod 40. It may stem from a group close to the authors of Ezek 48, which is keen to affirm the priority of Judah (92–93). All of Num 1–24 is finally attributed to a “tradition pool” (154–55), which was later reworked as a continuation of the sanctuary narrative and as a link to the book of Deuteronomy. The last book of the Torah on which the authors comment quite shortly (97–101) should be understood today as a response to Gen 1. Here Campbell and O’Brien switch from their concern with “users in ancient days” (17) to present-day readers (97).

This short study contains very interesting observations and ideas, but it is also sometimes difficult to understand because the authors tend to leave so many options open. This position is in a way commendable, but it is also sometimes quite confusing. Regrettably, the authors never address the important issue of the political, historical, and theological circumstances in which the Torah came into existence. Even if the subtitle of the book speaks of “Prolegomena,” this question should not have been eluded. In the end, Campbell and O’Brien have written an interesting book that should be read by scholars interested in pentateuchal issues. I would not recommend it, however, as a handbook.