Genesis 2-3 as ‘Historical Etiology’

Thoughts on a New Hermeneutical Concept

It is customary in Catholic theology to make a deliberate distinction between ‘inspiration’ and ‘revelation.’ A biblical text is, for those who read it, the word of God spoken to them, and in that sense it is revelation. But as regards the human authors of the biblical texts it is only true, in the first instance, that they are inspired. The way in which they arrived at their expressions and formulations, that is, what the process of inspired writing looked like from the human side, is another question. Here revelations (of the mystical type) can play a role, but it can also be the case that older traditions were simply incorporated or that the author’s own reflections and conclusions led to a particular statement or expression. Thus from the fact of inspiration itself we cannot draw any immediate conclusions about the concrete process by which a biblical text came into existence.

This approach to the theology of inspiration is particularly important in connection with the biblical statements about the beginnings of human history. For the way in which we suppose the biblical author arrived at these statements cannot fail to influence their theological interpretation. If the author of Genesis 2-3 was in a ‘vision,’ so to speak, moved backward in time some hundreds of thousands of years, and could be said to have ‘seen’ the events of that period in the true sense of the word, or if the author received a tradition that, by divine providence, had been preserved intact through millennia, and that ultimately rested on eyewitness testimony, the individual formulations and expressions must, of course, be evaluated quite differently than would be the case if the author, reflecting in some ways the notions of the origin of all things that were current in the writer’s own time, had independently drawn certain conclusions about an ‘original sin’ based on experience of the world contemporary to the author as well as on a faith in the one God of Israel and that God’s familiar way of dealing with the world, and had then given a concrete, narrative depiction of that idea in his or her own style. Even in this third case, the fact of inspiration, and with it the correctness of what is stated (to the extent that it is really a question of a statement of truth and not of its pictorial concretizing) is not impugned.

Only from the text itself can we determine which of the three cases mentioned above, or what other possible situation, lies before us. The matter therefore falls within the competence of exegesis. Many Catholic exegesis today have made a decision in favor of the third scenario as here described. A.-M. Dubarle, in particular, has done some thorough exegetical investigations of the question. H. Renckens, whose book on the biblical history of origins bears the significant title, ‘Israel’s visie op het verleden,’ [‘Israel’s view of the past’] has made this point of view accessible to a broad audience. At the same time, the dogmatic theologian Karl Rahner adopted this view as his own, refined its hermeneutical implications in sharper conceptual language, and placed the whole in a larger context of epistemological theory and theology. Rahner’s precise standpoint has now become the point of departure for exegetical examination of the question: L. Alonso-Schökel has applied the methods of stylistic analysis anew to the text of Genesis 2-3 from the points of view supplied by Rahner, and found them fully confirmed. In fact, he made a completely new discovery: that Israel’s salvation-historical theology of covenant, in particular, greatly influenced the composition of the account of the first human sin. We thus have here an excellent example of the

1. *Les Sages d’Israël*, Lectio Divina 1 (Paris, 1946); *Le péché originel dans l’Écriture*, Lectio Divina 20 (Paris, 1958). In this article, which relates to an internal Catholic problem, I do not wish to enter into a discussion of non-Catholic exegesis.


fruitful results that may follow from a cooperation between exegesis and dogmatic theology.

It is certainly desirable that this dialogue be continued. The more concrete the discussion becomes, the fewer problems will exist. Karl Rahner could have been expected to be willing to pursue the dialogue, since he promised a whole book in the series he edited, *Quaderniones disputatiae*, on the subject of the theological interpretation of Genesis 1-3. The remarks below are intended to do nothing more than aid in avoiding the sudden appearance of unexpected difficulties in this dialogue. I do not refer to difficulties concerning the subject itself, but as regards the terminology used in this discussion.

Karl Rahner introduced a new terminology to which he gave specific definition. Of course, every author has the right to choose his or her concepts as seems appropriate, and to define them as he or she wishes. But precisely when a dialogue between two different scholarly disciplines is in progress, it would be better for neither of the two partners to introduce terminology already in use in the other field in a new sense that deviates at the outset and by definition from the old meaning. Thus within dogmatic theology there may be no objection when Rahner refers to Genesis 2-3 as a 'historical etiology' and describes this 'historical etiology' as a 'literary genus.' But the conversation with exegesis is unnecessarily burdened by this, since in exegetical studies both words are already in use in other contexts and therefore have other referents. For example, the unease created among exegetes is apparent in the article by Alonso-Schökel mentioned above, at the point where he mentions Rahner’s terminology for the first time. He speaks of a 'terminologia personal, que los exegetas no encontrarán muy feliz.'

What Alonso-Schökel thus notes briefly should, in what follows, be made somewhat clearer, especially to our partners in this dialogue on Genesis 2-3 from the field of dogmatic theology, and to the audience. First let us briefly review Rahner’s terminological system.

(a) Rahner’s approach to the concept of ‘etiology’ begins with the following question: ‘Whence’ does the author of Genesis know the things he reports? He answers this question about ‘whence’ with an ‘as: He knows it as historical etiology’ (pp. 35-36).

(b) In his definition, Rahner starts from a rather broad concept of ‘etiology’ and progressively limits it. Etiology in the widest sense is the assigning of the reason or cause of another reality’ (p. 36). From there, without an intermediate stage, we are led to etiology in a narrower sense.’

This is ‘indicating an earlier event as the reason for an observed state of affairs or occurrence in human affairs, the observed state of affairs being the means whereby the cause is known’ (p. 36). Here the concept has been limited in three ways: (1) The reality to be explained by the etiology is an ‘observed state of affairs or occurrence in human affairs;’ (2) the proposed originating cause is ‘earlier,’ and therefore historical; (3) the historical origin cannot be known from one’s own recollection or through (reliable or unreliable) historical reports, but must be deduced from the effect that is to be explained. It is this third element that is most important for Rahner. He now seeks in his own field for the principle by which the concept can be further subdivided. He inquires, in a sense, about the success of the deduction from effect to cause. Depending on its failure or success, he distinguishes ‘mythological’ and ‘historical’ etiologies. The ‘reference back to an earlier event may [a] take the form of a figurative representation of a cause which, however, is only designed vividly to express and impress on the mind the state of things actually observed. That is mythological etiology, and it may be quite conscious and deliberate, or it may be accompanied by belief in the occurrence of the earlier event. Frequently in this matter without consciously realizing it the human mind hovers in an imaginative, meditative way . . . ’. Otherwise [b] ‘The reference back to an earlier event may . . . be genuine, that is to say, the

5. As one indication, we may cite the pointed plea of the exegete H. Haag (*Hochland* 53 [1960-61] 278) to dogmatic theology that ‘the teaching on the “dona praeternaturalia” be re-examined in light of our present understanding of the biblical narrative. He makes this request in the context of a review of Rencken’s book, where he finds it illogical that the author denies that human beings in Paradise were not subject to suffering, but still maintains that they were immortal. On the question of paradisical preservation from death, see the more recent work of the exegete V. Hamp, ‘Paradies und Tod’, in *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze*, Festschrift for J. Schmid (Regensburg, 1963), 100-109. He is much more cautious than Haag, but it is clear from the article that his reticence is occasioned not by exegetical reasons, but by church documents. This is obviously a point that requires further discussion.

6. The classification used in the bibliography in *LThK* (1957), 1012 gives the impression that the terminology had been taken from Rahner’s predecessors.

7. ‘Motivos sapienciales’ (see n. 4 above), 295.

8. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Karl Rahner for the interest with which he read a first draft of this article, for his objections and suggestions, and especially for the generosity with which he encouraged me to publish my ideas. That was some time ago, and the plan was to publish this article alongside the study by Alonso-Schökel cited in note 4 above. But I held it back so long as it would have been difficult for Karl Rahner to reply in a similarly public forum.

9. The page numbers in the following citations refer to O’Hara’s translation (see n. 3 above).
objectively possible, well-founded and successful inference of an historical cause from a present state of affairs. The state of affairs itself is more clearly grasped and the real cause and its consequence are seen in one perspective. The degree to which the true historical cause is grasped in its own concrete reality may vary considerably. Correspondingly, the manner in which the inferred cause of what actually exists is stated is almost inevitably expressed in a more or less figurative manner which . . . derives from the world of experience of the etiologist. This is historical etiology’ (pp. 36-37).

(c) Rahner thinks that he has thus defined a literary genre, for at the beginning of a later section he writes: ‘What follows if this concept of historical etiology is applied to the account in Genesis as being its literary character?’ (p. 39).

The following reflections are undertaken from three points of view: the literary field from and for which the concept of etiology is derived; the role of genuine historical reports in an etiology; the designation and treatment of etiology as a literary genre.

1. The Literary Province of Etiology

In Rahner’s work it is clear that he has created this whole system of concepts only with a view to the Genesis stories of Paradise and the Fall.

Thus the attribute ‘mythological,’ in contradistinction to the word ‘historical,’ makes almost no sense except in the case of etiological narratives that take place at the beginning of time or before time, and in which heavenly beings appear. Otherwise we do not ordinarily speak of ‘myths.’ But we would certainly not wish to call, for example, the etiological explanation of the name of ‘Edom’ in Gen. 25:30 a ‘historical etiology’ in Rahner’s sense; on the other hand, to call it a ‘mythological etiology’ would surely not be (altogether) appropriate either. It is clear that Rahner arrived at his not wholly adequate pair of opposites (historical vs. mythological) on the basis of a concrete situation within the history of exegesis: in contrast to the ‘mythological’ explanation of Genesis 2-3 prevailing in Protestant interpretation, he attempts to find a basis for a ‘historical’ interpretation, not in the usual sense of the term, but with a meaning that is nonetheless genuine. In the process, biblical texts other than Genesis 2-3 are scarcely taken into account.

In fact, Old Testament scholarship has been using the concept of etiology for quite some time, applying it to literary phenomena distributed throughout much of the Old Testament. Many narratives, especially those of an early period, are pointed toward the fact that, as an effect of the event narrated or in memory of it, a visible sign, a name, or a fixed custom continues ‘in this day’ (i.e., until the time when the narrative in question was formulated). Or sometimes it is stated - and we even have an instance of this type of etiological motif in Genesis 2 - ‘therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.’ The fixed formula ‘to this day,’ or a narrative conclusion introduced by ‘therefore,’ or both together (Gen. 32:32 [Heb. v. 33]) clearly indicate that the past is being described in order to explain something in the present. Here, that is, we find revealed an intention of the narrator, a purpose given by the narrator for telling the story. Whether this is always the only or primary purpose has to be determined by further literary analysis. Not only that, but literary analysis can, of course, sometimes uncover such an intention on the part of the narrator even when these fixed formulae are lacking. In any case: this intention on the part of the narrator is called ‘etiological.’ ‘Etiology’ thus refers primarily to the narrator’s intent. Two facts are significant: (1) the concept of etiology is, in the field of Old Testament studies, constructed on specific topical formulae that often appear in a narrative context, and (2) the concept is applied to a great many and widely varying types of texts in large parts of the Old Testament.

Hermann Gunkel demonstrated very skillfully how the formative addition to which there has always been another meaning in natural philosophy, also derived from antiquity is ultimately traceable to Callimachos of Cyrene (310-240 BCE). His major work was the Aí’tia, a “wreath of etiological sayings” (Rothe) . . . in which the origins of cultures and customs, festivals and games, sanctuaries and cities, the names of gods and heroes were traced to events of an earlier time, and in which the limits of mythical history were not always observed . . . His principal aim was to bring to light unknown sayings and to reveal new aspects of those that were known; in this he did not in any way limit himself to those whose origins or nature rendered them etiological in character, but he also knew how to subordinate other types of myths to these purposes’ (Herter, in Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Enzyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, Supplement 5 [Stuttgart, 1931], 408. In the scholarly fields mentioned, an etiological reference to the beginning, of time is regarded as only one among the possible types of etiology. The article ‘Atiologie,’ in Bächtold and Stäubli, Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens I (Berlin, 1927), 647-66 (Beth), does not, as far as I can see, include any myth concerning the beginning of time among its many examples. Realities that are given etiological explanations are normally cults, names, surprising individual phenomena, and, less often, the basic situation of human beings as such. But in the present article I intend to restrict myself to the use of the term in Old Testament scholarship.

10. The usage is similar to, if not precisely identical with that in the general field of religious studies and the study of folklore. As far as I can see, this use of the word (in
stages of a number of fields of learning can be discerned in the various classes of etiological motifs contained in Genesis. In Genesis 2-3, also, etiological intentions were determinative, in a number of places, for the concrete details of the narrative. But in some of these, at least, it is a matter of subordinated secondary motifs. It is not so easy to demonstrate whether the author’s primary and comprehensive intention was etiological, and if so, in what sense.

When starting from such a broad basis, we undoubtedly find it somewhat strange to encounter a concept of etiology that is directed entirely to a single text and its current and urgent hermeneutical problematic. In the long run we have to expect misunderstandings to arise when dogmatic theologians, with their concept of etiology in mind, run across the exegetical concept of etiology - and vice versa, of course. The situation is only made more peculiar by the fact that exegesis at the present time is in the process of developing a kind of concept of ‘historical’ etiology, but with an entirely different meaning.

2. Historical Reports in Etiological Narratives

To summarize at the outset: For Rahner, the crucial point about ‘historical etiology’ is that the fact narrated from the past is not derived from historical knowledge, but is deduced from the effect that is to be explained. Old Testament scholarship, on the other hand, is struggling at the present time to formulate a concept of etiology that permits us to suppose that the narrated fact from the past can be derived from genuine historical tradition and for that very reason can be historical. Of course, this problem is not acute in the case of Genesis 2-3, but arises primarily with regard to texts relating to the period of the patriarchs and the entry into the Land.

Rahner probably took the concept of etiology from a field in which this problem was not yet urgent. For we must admit that Old Testament scholarship (like other scholarly fields as well) for the most part couples the concept of what is etiological almost automatically with what is invented at a later time and therefore is unhistorical. The considerable skepticism about the historical value of the biblical narratives of the patriarchs and the appropriation of the Land is founded on this very connection, and such skepticism is still widespread today. The stories about the entry into the Land, in particular, contain a great many etiological motifs. But it is precisely in this area that, in recent years, a discussion has arisen, within which the relationship between etiological statements and the historicity of what is narrated has been hotly debated.

The events surrounding the occupation of the land of Canaan by the Israelite tribes are, in fact, accessible, at least in part, to historical-critical methods, as a result of archeological excavations and the possibility of comparison between different biblical traditions. It thus happened that new discoveries aroused debate over the long-held view that the etiological narratives were historically unreliable. Particular objections were raised by W. F. Albright and his students. Then, at the 1959 Oxford International Old Testament Congress, Martin Noth presented, in dialogue with these objectors, what is probably the best definition of the relationship between etiology and history:

Etiological narratives, of their very nature, have a relationship to history, since they explain a particular circumstance by means of some historical process. In individual cases, certainly, it is doubtful how close or distant the real relationship to history is. It is only on the basis of the observation that historical processes can leave visible or otherwise detectable traces that we can begin to imagine how etiological narrative came into being. In this process, it is

11. Genesis, HKAT (Göttingen, 1910). In the creation and Paradise stories are found the beginnings of philosophy and theology, as well as the history of cultures (XV-XVI). In the sagas of the patriarchs we find etiological sagas forming the origins of philosophy of history, etymological motifs as the origin of linguistics, cultic saga motifs (questions about the beginnings of cultic places and customs) as the origin of the history of religions, and geological saga motifs (such as the explanation of the origins of the Dead Sea) as the first stages of geology (XX-XXV).

12. Genesis 2:24 and 3:14-19 are individual etiologies (Eros, human being and serpent; the difficulties of pregnancy and birth; work and its pains; death).

13. According to G. von Rad it might be better to speak of theodicy. Ultimately it is a question of ‘acquitting God and his creation of the guilt for all the suffering and tribulation that have entered the world’ (Das erste Buch Mose, Genesis Kapitel 1-12, ATD [Göttingen, 5th ed. 1958], 81-82). Naturally, an intended theodicy also includes, as an internal factor, an intended etiology for all the suffering and tribulations of the world, but it is more comprehensive. In any case, a still broader etiological intention is evident in the structure of Genesis as a whole: the history of origins must be understood as one of the most essential elements in a theological etiology of Israel (G. von Rad, Théologie des Altes Testaments I [Munich, 2nd ed. 1958], 178. Translated by D. M. G. Stalker under the title, Old Testament Theology. I. The Theology of Israel’s Historical Origins [Edinburgh and London, 1962], 164).

14. The most important of those students was John Bright. See his Early Israel in Recent Historical Writing (London, 1956).
entirely possible that an accurate and concrete historical tradition could take the form of an etiological narrative. W. F. Albright, on the basis of a number of examples from ancient and modern times, has quite rightly indicated that historical memories are especially likely to be retained in a living form in oral tradition if they can be repeatedly connected to consequences of the historical process that are still known ... But on the basis of this observation of the recognizable continuing effects of historical processes it has also happened that some have moved in the reverse direction, so that, beginning with some remarkable phenomenon, conclusions are drawn about a historical process that appeared capable of explaining this phenomenon. In this case, as well, there is a relationship to history. First of all, the remarkable phenomenon itself, which forms the starting point, is a historical element; and the process by which the phenomenon is explained also rests on historical tradition. The question then is only whether the phenomenon and the process are really connected historically, or whether they have only been combined in hindsight, and whether the historical tradition that serves as an explanation is more or less concrete, or whether it is entirely vague. In general, it is not possible to discern from an etiological narrative the route that the tradition has taken, and how closely it is related to genuine history. We must reckon with a whole spectrum of possibilities.\textsuperscript{15}

The fact that the thing to be explained is the sole starting point for the discovery and construction of the explanatory event thus constitutes only a circumscribing limit for etiological narrative. In itself, etiological narrative is indifferent as regards the origin of its contents. We gain access to the essence of etiology as a literary phenomenon, like that in the Old Testament, by asking: Why is the story told? and not: How does the narrator know the things that she or he is telling? The latter question arises only at a later point, and goes beyond what is really meant by the word ‘etiology.’ Within this question, etiological narrative based on traditional knowledge of the past again appears as the original, and in some sense the ‘normal’ type. To my knowledge, the phrase ‘historical etiology’ has not yet been applied to this normal type, and it probably will not be so applied. Instead, in cases where it seems appropriate, we would prefer to speak of a ‘historically reliable etiology.’ Even so it remains awkward when

\textit{Theology of the Pentateuch}


the very similar-sounding expression 'historical etiology' is applied to the special case of Genesis 2-3, especially when, in the conceptual system being applied in this case, a historically reliable etiology, which deals with genuine traditions, can \textit{ex definitione} not be given the name 'etiology.'

It is interesting to note that, both in the case of Rahner dealing with Genesis 2-3 and in the case of Albright treating the narratives of the entry into the Land, what emerges is an effort to recover the historicity of biblical statements. Thus parallel but independent efforts have, in this instance, led to an opposite application of a particular terminology. In this case, however, the exegetes are probably not only \textit{in possession}, but they find it more difficult to surrender the field, since they have worked out their concept through a much broader process of induction than that of the dogmatic theologians, who started from a single case and gave no attention to any others. Externally, Rahner’s conceptual system in fact looks like an arbitrary, \textit{a priori} arrangement, only subsequently to be verified with reference to the phenomena.

3. Is Etiology a Literary Genre?

Rahner gives his ‘historical etiology’ its name, but in doing so he places himself in a contradiction to that very classification.

Rahner arrives at ‘historical etiology’ by distinguishing, within ‘etiology in the narrower sense,’ between ‘mythological’ and ‘historical’ etiologies. This is not the kind of distinction that is customarily used in separating literary genres.

Ordinarily, the procedure is to list differing characteristics of form, different life-situations (\textit{Sitze im Leben}), different typical contents and motifs, and the like. Here, on the contrary, the specific distinction appears to be - at least partly - between true and false. Let me explain.

Although it is very difficult to understand precisely what Rahner means by the word ‘mythological,’ one thing is clear: the mythological fabricates a fact at the beginning of human history, but does not attain to the reality, not even when it believes that it has arrived at the fact. ‘Historical etiology’ is ‘successful’ in its attempt to attain to a historical basis; ‘mythological etiology,’ on the other hand, is unsuccessful. The two ‘etiologies’ Rahner distinguishes thus function as successful and unsuccessful attempts, as true and false. Is it possible to distinguish literary genres in this way?

If there are two stories in the morning paper, parallel in structure, one of which (as later appears) is true, the other false, or, to use Rahner’s terms, one of which is ‘successful,’ the other ‘unsuccessful,’ nevertheless
both are examples of the same genre, ‘newspaper story.’ Truth or falsehood do not effect a division of the genre of the newspaper story into two subgenres of true and false, historical and unhistorical newspaper story. I can construct these expressions, of course, but in doing so I depart from the field of genre classification. The question of literary genre is certainly useful in determining what kind of truth is to be expected (historical report, religious statement, lyric utterance, etc.), but within the realm of truth circumscribed by the genre it remains the task of the individual text, in the sense of ‘yes’ or ‘no;’ to be true or false, ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful.’ The responsibility for this lies with such factors as the veracity or mendacity of the author, available evidence or error. This is at a different level from all the things that determine literary genre.

Thus if Rahner had intended to define a genre, he would not have introduced ‘success’ into the definition. We could even try out Rahner’s distinction between mythological and historical etiology without the characteristic of ‘success,’ and thus leaving aside the question of truth. We could say, for example, that etiologies of the type found in Genesis 2-3, which attempt to point back to the beginning of history within the framework of history itself, are called ‘historical etiologies,’ while the name ‘mythological etiology’ would be applied in cases in which the limits of history are ruptured and, to explain present circumstances, events are narrated that are to be conceived as happening in a kind of timeless time. Of course, if we did that we would get tangled up with the customary notion of myth. But what of it? Even so, this procedure would not be sufficient to give us a definition of the genre. Literary genres are positive facts. Consequently, the next question would be whether these two kinds of etiology can be found in a literary corpus, and in such a way that they can be distinguished from one another by means of definable external characteristics. Presupposing that all this could be accomplished, we could, of course, pose the question of truth to each individual text that could be classified within the genre of ‘historical etiology.’ In that case it would be - as is proper - not a question for the genre, but for the individual texts. If historians ask a question about truth, they use historical methods; if theologians pose the question of truth concerning a biblical text, they will also, according to the circumstances, need to keep in mind the matter of inspiration. That would be entirely proper in this case. On the other hand, it is quite improper to insert inspiration directly or indirectly into the definition of literary genres, something that seems at least threatened in Rahner’s case.

This brings us to a further point: Rahner makes no effort to discover formal or lexical characteristics, motifs, or other traits of the genre he is defining that are tangibly evident in the textual matter itself. While it is true that literary genres cannot be defined on the basis of such external features alone, still they cannot be so defined entirely without them. Literary genres develop historically, they grow over a historical period of time, and they also decline and disappear historically, giving way to other genres. Literary genres belong to the realm of ‘institutions,’ in the same sense that universities and states are institutions: like these latter, they cannot be defined without reference to some kind of material reality and tangible features. Without a reference to unique features of linguistic form, ‘literary composition’ would lack what is literary.’ But such references are entirely lacking in Rahner’s definition of ‘historical etiology.’

In particular, we ought also to observe that Rahner first develops the concept of ‘historical etiology’ hypothetically, and verifies it only at a second stage. This procedure could be regarded as legitimate in the field of research on literary genres as well. But Rahner does not go on to confront his concept with the biblical text in order to refine its content and make it concrete. Instead, he immediately sets it over against the irreducible demands of the church’s teaching. That again is, in itself, fully justified. But it certainly does not belong within the realm of genre research.

Thus we may conclude that Rahner’s opinion that he is talking about a ‘literary genre’ is refuted by his own way of dealing with the subject. But in the concrete case of etiology it is also true that, as regards the Old Testament, we have to ask to what extent ‘etiologies’ constitute a ‘genre.’

This is necessary at least if we understand ‘genres’ as fixed units with a clearly determinable purpose and Sitz im Leben, a clearly determinable type of content and form, appearing in pre-literary cultures and those in an early stage of literary development, and playing a major role in the Old Testament as well.

What is lacking in the etiological elements in the Old Testament is

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often the characteristic of independence or closure. They may have had such characteristics at an early stage of their existence, but now they often constitute only appendages or final elements of stories that would stand as complete and coherent in themselves, even without these 'etiologies.' Thus at the most we can speak of genre-related *motifs*. Sometimes they are also inserted in the middle of a narrative in order to lend an etiological point to something that is merely a subordinate element in the narrative itself. Or, at other times, the etiological element is a coordinated intention of the narrative, but is not solely responsible for the shaping of the narrative units in question.

In his commentary on Genesis, Hermann Gunkel employed the various types of etiological viewpoints only for the purpose of distinguishing some subgroups within ‘myth’ and the nonhistorical or ethnographical ‘sagas of the patriarchs’ (as he calls them in his system). He does not appear to include ‘etiolooy’ as a special genre.

But even if there are instances of a proper genre of etiologies in the Old Testament, we must again question whether that genre is present in Genesis 2-3. It is true that Genesis 2-3 uses pre-literary genres as elements in its construction, such as the three verdicts of YHWH-Elohim on the serpent, the woman and [all] humanity [Adam]. But the whole composition is not at that level. We ought not to be deceived by its ‘simplicity.’ It is not ‘archaic, but rather in sovereign control of its artistry.’ The question of genre can then, at most, be posed in a different sense corresponding to this level, and in that case we should, in any case, proceed at a minimum from a survey of the whole ‘Yahwist writing.’

However, this question can remain open; my only purpose here is to advise caution. It is by no means established that what Rahner describes, and what he has in mind, belongs in the field of ‘genres.’ We must at this point demand of the dogmatic theologians, too, a greater degree of precision in the application of concepts drawn from literary theory, or at least a justification of their conceptual language (since, of course, the literary theoreticians are not always in full agreement with one another).

It has become customary among Catholics to speak of the *genus litterarium*. This concept is sometimes expanded to mean something like ‘literary phenomenon,’ unfortunately even among exegetes. In fact, the ‘genre’ is, of course, only one - and by no means the most important - aspect of literary reality. The genre is not even the one thing in a literary work that needs to be examined to determine the author's intention, which would certainly be important in a hermeneutics involving a theology of inspiration. This is clear even from the papal documents, which in connection with the question of determining what is intended to be expressed use not only the phrase *genus litterarium* (558, 580, 581) but a whole series of other expressions, such as *dicendi formae* (558, similarly 559, 560, 581), *logendi modi et rationes* (559, similarly 558, 560), *exponendi narrandique artes* (559, similarly 560). These refer in part to individual literary characteristics, and in part to the whole body of such characteristics. This is clear especially in the more technical formulations in Cardinal Suhard's letter: ‘les procédés . . . de la pensée et de l’expression’ (580), ‘les formes littéraires,’ ‘tous les problèmes littéraires,’ ‘les procédés littéraires,’ ‘tout le matériel . . . de la science littéraire,’ ‘langage’ (all in 581).

(Th eencyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* was apparently not in a position to express itself precisely in the technical language of modern literary criticism, since it was written in Latin.) It is evident that the papal documents are not the reason why *genus litterarium* has become a catch phrase used far more often than is appropriate. Perhaps this was caused by the fact that, at the beginning of this century, that concept for a time was the focus of hermeneutical discussion among Catholics, and that in recent years it was again brought into the foreground by the struggle over form criticism of the gospels. In any case, dogmatic theologians should only use it when it is appropriate to the subject, since otherwise, here again, the long-term result will be another split between dogmatics and exegesis that can only lead to misunderstandings.

These, then, are my misgivings about Karl Rahner's terminology. Let me emphasize once again that it is not a question of the subject matter, but of the words; one could even overlook the unconventional use of language were it not necessary to take a stance in opposition to the steadily growing alienation among the various fields of theology.

It remains, finally, to ask how that which Rahner is suggesting can be better organized and named. I think it is important to note at this point that Rahner begins with the question: *Where* does the author of Genesis 2-3 know the things that are being described? Rahner’s attention is thus directed not at all to the finished biblical text and its ultimate literary shape, but to the process of recognition, of acquisition of knowledge, that

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20. These and the following numbers refer to the enumeration in *Enchiridion Biblicum*, *Documenta eclesiastica Sacram Scripturam spectantia* (Naples, 3rd ed. 1956).
precedes the text. And that is the real subject of his remarks. Rahner is thus really speaking of acquiring knowledge of history, and, in fact, of a very special case of that acquisition of knowledge: acquiring knowledge of history by deduction.

Alonso-Schökel, in his section II, 4, has developed the triangular scheme that serves as the directing principle in this process of acquisition of knowledge. A whole series of facts at a particular historical moment constitutes the basis from which the retroactive question is posed concerning a single cause at the beginning. All lines of causality converge on this one single cause, just as the various lines one could draw from the different points at the base of a triangle can converge at the apex. But modern historical consciousness is guided by a different principle, which is more like the image of a web. Behind the plurality of facts at a given historical moment there stands, at an earlier moment, a plurality of causes that is just as complex and confusing, and behind that another similar plurality, and so forth. It would be a praiseworthy task for a dogmatician interested in the theory of knowledge to provide a solid and convincing proof that the triangular scheme, at least in this one special case of the account of the beginnings of human history, is objectively justified, in contrast to the scheme of multiple interweavings of various parallel causes.

Since we must be careful, in the case of such an intensely literary text as Genesis 2-3, not to draw too great a separation between the process of knowledge and that of composition, and since, in addition, we can only deduce the process of knowledge from the resulting composition, Rahner’s statement about the process of historical knowledge behind Genesis 2-3 simultaneously contains some essential implications about the creative process through which Genesis 2-3 came to be. Alonso-Schökel, in his section ‘Hipótesis sobre el proceso creativo’ deliberately drew this conclusion. At the same time it is true that this particular kind of process of knowledge and composition has shaped the concrete appearance of the text, even though it may remain an open question whether one should necessarily assign the resulting stylistic characteristics and structures of the text to the level of ‘genre.’ In any case, these are literary phenomena that aid us in determining the expressive intention of the text.

The expressive intention must be determined at the literary level before there is any point in considering the fact of inspiration as part of a theological evaluation of the biblical text. We must, in fact, draw attention to the fact that even with the determination that the author is evidently thinking in terms of the triangular scheme that inquires about a single ultimate cause, the intention of Genesis 2-3, as regards what it means to say about history, is not fully clarified.

In particular, the multiple modes of thinking according to the triangular model collected by Alonso-Schökel raise the question whether this model was always applied solely for the purpose of making genuine historical statements. The model, as model, implies our world of space and time, and therefore always locates the apex of the triangle at a point in space and time. But is it really certain that the whole model, including the space-time scheme, could not also be used simply in order to make statements about the present world of the one making the assertion? If, on the basis of the multiple instances of the use of this model in the Old Testament, we admit the validity of this question, we must pose an additional question to each: namely, whether the author in each case, who, with the aid of the triangular model, presents an event in the past as the cause of present circumstances, genuinely intends to make a historical statement. In the case of Genesis 2-3 this question can scarcely be answered solely by means of a stylistic analysis of these two chapters; what is required is an examination of the larger context of Genesis 2-3, that is, the whole Pentateuch or - if one wants a more restricted field and considers the corresponding theory to be correct - the Yahwistic work. Of course, it is not sufficient to prove that the work as a whole contains a general intention to make historical assertions (a proof that would probably not present too many difficulties), but beyond this, it is necessary to show that the prehistorical prologue is also located within the field wherein the intention is to make genuine historical statements. Only that fundamental affirmation can guarantee the triangular model in Genesis 2-3 its full effectiveness. Only then can one, on that basis, describe the intention of Genesis 2-3 as genuinely historical.

Once the intention of the statements about the sin that stands at the beginning of human history has been literarily clarified in this way, one can introduce the fact of inspiration and thus arrive at a genuinely

21. ‘Motivos sapienciales’ (see n. 4 above), 309-12.
22. Ibid. (see n. 4 above), 313-14. I am leaving aside the fact that at this point in his article he has already introduced the fact of inspiration.

23. This is stated with emphasis here, since in Rahner’s work the line between these two areas, which should be methodically separated, tends to disappear.
24. This is not entirely clear in Alonso-Schökel’s work, either. Still, there is at least an indication on p. 300 that a mythical self-understanding on the part of Genesis 2-3 is excluded by the larger context in which those chapters stand.
theological evaluation. In this process, the conclusions we have reached earlier about the methods of attaining knowledge and of composition that led to the biblical text will be of the utmost importance for the purpose of determining and describing the particular statement made by the text in its individual details.