

# Kingdom of All Nations and Kingdom of All Times

## Explorations into a Main Topic of the Psalter and Its Potential for Interreligious Encounters

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Dieser Beitrag erkundet die Ausprägungen und fragt nach den theologischen Herausforderungen eines zentralen Themas des Psalters (nicht nur) masoretischer Tradition: Der Rede von einem zeitlich und räumlich universalen Königtum Gottes. Die Bewegungen des in den Psalmen und ihrer Rezeption wahrgenommenen Diskurses über menschliche und göttliche Macht geben Anregungen für eine interreligiöse Perspektive auf diese Texte und ihre Geschichte. Im Fokus der Überlegungen steht Ps 145 mit seiner Ausgestaltung des Begriffs der göttlichen מלכות/βασιλεία, ein Spitzentext der Vorstellung von Gott als König im Psalter.

Sitting on the roof of Jerusalem's Austrian Hospice or walking the streets of the Old City around noon, I hear a multivocal call to prayer: the sound of the muezzin, church bells, and recitations from a nearby Yeshiva.

With bits and pieces of the long history of prayer in world religions in mind, it is quite plausible that in many of the prayers I hear, God's kingdom is remembered and hoped for; that God is addressed as king, and even that the praying persons or groups address themselves as active parts of a kingdom of God. Often, this kingdom of God is portrayed as universal – in terms of time and space as well as in terms of relevance for people of all nations, all generations, and all times.

This observation that can be made at different places in our world, but in an especially concentrated way in Jerusalem, brings me to the questions that led to this text:

Why did and do people portray God as king and God's actions, space and time as a kingdom, and what kind of potential could this have for interreligious encounters and interreligious dialogue?

The work on this question that I would like to encourage here will start with a brief journey through the psalms and their images of God as universal king. In a second step, I will discuss the theological challenges we might face by speaking of God as universal king and of God's universal kingdom. I will do so with a special focus on an important psalm in Jewish and Christian tradition, Ps 145. Finally, some questions and suggestions on

the potential of this imagery for our subject matter – discussing the psalms in an interreligious perspective – will be added.

## 1. God as Universal King in the Psalms: A Brief Overview

The psalter in its different traditions is an important chapter in the history of the image of God as king. It contains not only the יהוה-מלך-psalms, but also other texts and a wide range of individual verses that refer to God in royal imagery. This imagery may be regarded as a theological focus of the Psalter<sup>1</sup> that of course comes with a variety of distinctive elements, transformations and contexts.

God as king fights against chaos and sustains the cosmic order; he reigns from his throne in Jerusalem on Mt. Zion and/or his heavenly throne; his kingdom has effects on the nations as well as on praying individuals; and it is connected to human kingdoms and to the king of Israel/Judah in Jerusalem. We could add even more elements, terms and thematic links; for example: God is king *because* he conquered the forces of chaos, or: Zion is and will be the center of the universe *because* it is the very place of God's throne. As the latter example already shows, the imagery of God as king is of course also closely connected to historical circumstances and changes.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I focus on the notion of universality in the discourse on God as king, as it may be especially interesting and challenging when thinking about psalms in an interreligious context. Throughout the psalter, we find universal dimensions in the picture of God as king. These universal dimensions occur in at least three specific ways.

The first of these may be referred to as temporal: God is king always and forever. His kingdom encompasses all time, past, present and future (see, for example, Ps 10:16; 29:10; 74:12; 93; 103; 145). It reaches back to creation and thus precedes all human kingdoms. As not only Ps 145 shows, this temporal universality is filled with life by “all generations” living through the ages.

Complementary to the temporal specification, God's kingdom is also portrayed as spatially universal: God is king in all corners of heaven and

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1 See, for example, Schnocks, *Psalmen* (2014), 125–131 on the Masoretic psalter. The image of God as king is an important motif in other textual traditions as well (of course with varying details), such as in the psalter of the Septuagint or the psalter from Qumran that we find in 11Q5.

2 Just to mention one example of a reflection of such transformations: Leuenberger, Gott (2019).

earth. His kingdom comprises islands, mountains, heights and depths, all nations, all social groups, even the living and the dead (see, for example, Ps 22:30–32; 47; 48; 95; 96; 103).

Thirdly, the qualities and actions that are attributed to God in the image of a king are universal in their relevance. This includes, for example, his wondrous and mighty deeds in creation and history, for the people of Israel in the wilderness, and for the supplicant in a state of despair, as well as God's mercy, his commitment to those who are suffering, his name and his glory (see, for example, Ps 48:11; 74:12; 89:3, 15; 103; 145).

For all of these aspects, the communication of God's universal kingdom is important. God is remembered in the image of a king; his kingly deeds are praised, reported, and told; and they are hoped for and requested for the present and future of the praying community. God's praise, the communication of God's kingdom, is also portrayed as universal (see especially Ps 145, but also Ps 18:2–5; 22:4; 45:7, 18; 47) and seems to be an integral part of the idea of a kingdom of God throughout the ages.<sup>3</sup> This may be seen, for example, in the *Shir haShabbat* from Qumran, in New Testament texts, in Rabbinic literature, as well as in later reception history, such as in Franz Rosenzweig's thoughts on the kingdom of God and liturgy.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, the notion that God's kingdom is universal is quite strong in the psalms, but by no means uniform in the description of what exactly is universal or how these universal dimensions relate to other statements about God.

Furthermore, universality in the image of God as king does not exclude distinctions and statements that may at first sight contradict or at least weaken the notion of universality.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the distinction between Israel and the nations is vivid in a number of psalms (Ps 10:16), as well as the human, Davidic king that even has a share in God's universal might (for example Ps 21; 45; 61; 72; 89). God's universal kingdom does not exclude human kings nor human power in general. However, human kings are put into perspective against the background of a kingdom of God. The universality of God's kingdom is – not only in the psalms – constantly confronted with the limits of human existence, with suffering and death, with moral deficiencies and the restricted horizons of humans, regarding God's universal might.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the authors of the texts do not seem to put it

3 In this paper I have to disregard the diachronic aspects in the discussion on God's kingdom and its universality. For a general overview, see *Janowski, Königtum* (2004).

4 See *Rahn, Reflexionsbegriff* (2019).

5 This is of course true not only for the Psalter. Studying concepts of universality in prophetic literature results in similar observations – the relations between God, other gods, Israel and the nations are under constant consideration.

6 Interesting examples of these connections are also found in the *Hodayot* from

beyond their readers to deal with the universal relevance of God’s kingdom in a positive way.

In the discourse on God’s kingdom, the specific terms for “kingdom” such as מַלְכוּת and מְלוּכָה are especially important for the elaboration of universality, even if they occur in only a handful of places. However, these instances, Ps 103 and 145 in particular, show that the universal kingdom of God – in their words, the מַלְכוּת of God – may serve as a concept that integrates theological and anthropological features and confronts readers with certain challenges.

## 2. Theological Challenges of God’s Universal Kingdom – Ps 145 as a Test Case

Psalm 145 is situated between the last psalter of David and the final Hallel, serving as a hinge between those two sections.<sup>7</sup> This significant position is additionally highlighted by the occasional superscription הַהֵלֵל לַדָּוִד that also points in both directions. The alphabetic acrostic that governs the formal structure of the text is closely connected to the content of Ps 145. It underscores the universal approach and, in the verses beginning with מ, ל, and כ, the central subject of the text: God’s kingdom. The text speaks not only about God but also about human reality, and it closely connects both realms, such as by means of temporal aspects or the images of the body that refer the actors – God and humans – to one another. Psalm 145 relates the individual and the group to each other, both of which fill God’s kingdom with life. The praising “I” is related to the praising community (note the significant shifts in who is addressed), the חַסִּידִים are related with the evil-doers and with all of God’s works. The major topics of Ps 145 include: 1. God’s action in creation and history that are portrayed as actions of a king, 2. the communication between God and humanity and humanity and world, and 3. human reality that is actively engaged in God’s kingdom.

1 Davidic praise

I will exalt you, my God the king,  
and I will bless your name for all times and  
further.

הַהֵלֵל לַדָּוִד  
אֲרוֹמַמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ  
וְאֲבָרְכֶךָ שְׂמֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Qumran. For the text and translation as well as an introduction, see *Schuller/Newson, Hodayot* (2012).

<sup>7</sup> See for a detailed analysis of Ps 145 and a selection of its contexts *Rahn, König-tum* (2020).

- 2 Every day I will bless you,  
and I will praise your name for all times and  
further. בכל־יום אברכך  
ואהללה שמך לעולם ועד:
- 3 Great is YHWH and very praiseworthy,  
and to his greatness there is no limit. גדול יהוה ומהלל מאד  
ולגדלתו אין חקר:
- 4 One generation to the next will glorify your  
works,  
and your mighty deeds they will make known. דור לדור ישבח מעשיך  
ונבורתיך יגידו:
- 5 On the splendor of the glory of your majesty,  
and on the words/events of your wonders I will  
meditate. הדר כבוד הודך  
ודברי נפלאותיך אשיחה:
- 6 And the power of your awesome deeds they  
will tell,  
and your greatness I will recount. ועוזו נוראתיך יאמרו  
ונדולתיך [ו] [גדולתיך] אספרנה:
- 7 The memory of your abundant goodness  
they will pass on,  
and of your righteousness they will sing. זכר רב־טובך יביעו  
וצדקתך ירננו:
- 8 Gracious and compassionate is YHWH,  
slow to anger and great in faithfulness. חנון ורחום יהוה  
ארך אפים וגדל־חסד:
- 9 Good is YHWH to all,  
and his compassions are over all his works. טוב־יהוה לכל  
ורחמיו על־כל־מעשיו:
- 10 They will give thanks to you, YHWH, all  
your works,  
and your faithful ones will bless you. יודוך יהוה כל־מעשיך  
וחסדיך יברכוכה:
- 11 The glory of your kingdom they will tell,  
and of your mighty deeds they will speak;  
12 to make known to the children of humanity  
his mighty deeds,  
and the glory of the splendor of his kingdom. כבוד מלכותך יאמרו  
ונבורתיך ידברו:  
להודיע לבני האדם נבורתיו  
וזכבוד הדר מלכותו:
- 13 Your kingdom is a kingdom of all times,  
and your dominion throughout one generation  
to the other. מלכותך מלכות כל־עלמים  
וממשלתך בכל־דור ודור:
- 14 A supporter is YHWH to all who are falling,  
and one who lifts up all who are bent down. סומך יהוה לכל־הנפלים  
ויוקף לכל־הכפופים:
- 15 The eyes of all, to you they look,  
and you are the one who gives them their food  
in its time, עיני־כל אליך ישברו  
ואתה נתתן־להם את־אכלם בעתו:
- 16 opening your hand  
and satisfying every living being with desire. פותח את־ידך  
ומשביע לכל־חי רצון:
- 17 Righteous is YHWH in all his ways,  
and faithful in all his works. צדיק יהוה בכל־דרכיו  
וחסיד בכל־מעשיו:

18 Near is YHWH to all who cry out to him,  
to all who cry out to him in truth.

קרוב יהוה לכל־קראיו  
לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת:

19 The desire of the ones who fear him he fulfills,  
and their cry for help he hears and saves them.

רצון־ראיו יעשה  
ואת־שועתם ישמע וישעם:

20 A guardian is YHWH over all who love him,  
but all the evildoers he will destroy.

שומר יהוה את־כל־אהביו  
ואת כל־הרשעים ישמיד:

21 The praise of YHWH my mouth will speak,  
and all flesh will bless the name of his holiness  
for all times and further.

תהלה יהוה ידבר־פי  
ויברך כל־בשר שם קדשו לעולם  
ועד:

“Your kingdom is a kingdom of all times” – V. 13, the climax of Ps 145, highlights the universality of God’s kingdom and of human praise that is communicated throughout the psalm. The time-specification כל־עולמים combines the quantifier כל, which occurs 17 times in Ps 145, with the plural of עולם and thus creates a maximum of time, encompassing past, present and future. Universality is also underscored by means of the alphabetic acrostic – Ps 145 speaks of God and humanity from *aleph* to *tav* and thus uses “all potential words”.<sup>8</sup> As Ruven Kimelman already noted: The temporal and spatial universality that the psalm proclaims for God’s kingdom and human praise becomes evident both to the eyes (in the alphabetic acrostic) and to the ears (through “phonemic sonority”<sup>9</sup>).

The notion of universality – temporal, spatial and in terms of divine and human action – may be overwhelming. One could be tempted to ignore the fact that there are also aspects of particularity in Ps 145 and that “God’s kingdom” exactly unfolds in this dynamic ambiguity. Apart from “all works”, “all living beings”, and “all generations”, the psalm begins with a praying “I” in the first verbal form, the aleph-word: אֲרִימֶמֶךָ. I will lift you up, my God, the king. Through V. 1 and 2, 5 and 6 to the final verse 21 we may follow in the footsteps of this “I”, which has been interpreted, for example, as David or as some leader of communal worship and with whom every reader of the psalm may identify. Readers are also encouraged to identify with the different groups of people that Ps 145 mentions. With all of God’s works of course, but also with some rather particular groups: The fallen, those who are bent down, the ones who call on him, the ones who fear him, the ones who love him, the evildoers and, perhaps most strikingly, God’s חֲסִידִים. In fact, Ps 145 manages to strike a balance between God’s universal, cosmic power and his care for the individual human being in need. It seems to implicitly discuss and sound the limits of God’s universal

8 Berlin, Rhetoric (1985), 18.

9 Kimelman, Psalm 145 (1994), 51.

kingdom while taking a realistic look at the diversity of relations between God and human beings.

In addition to the temporal and spatial aspects, universality is emphasized in the way God's kingdom is attested in God's deeds. The link between all of God's deeds and thus also the foundation of God's kingdom, the psalm recalls, is his universal *חסד*, his *רחם*, his mercy and compassion. With the quotation of Exod 34:6–7 it is rooted in God's history with Israel, and in Ps 145:9 it is expanded to all of his works. Thus, Ps 145 remembers God's mighty deeds in creation and history, which is also God's special history with Israel in the exodus and God's history with the whole world, with all of his works. God's universal deeds become present in the universal memory of his works.

Focusing on Ps 145, the theological challenge, inspiring readers and commentators of all times and all nations, lies in the following questions: If God's mercy is over all of his works and all of them are called to praise, what is the special status of the *חסידים*? And why are the evildoers still there? How can the absence of Israel in Ps 145 be understood? Are the *חסידים* the people of Israel? Could perhaps everyone following the footsteps of the praying "I" of Ps 145 become a *חסיד*? How can God's *חסד* that Israel experienced in its turbulent history with God be attributed to everyone, everywhere? Is there a sense to any kind of separation (ethnic, religious) in a world in which God and his worship have become universal? How can the universal concept of texts like Ps 145 be understood? Perhaps as a kind of utopia? And, not finally, but of special importance for the subject matter of this volume: May the continuous tension between particularity and universality, for which Ps 145 is only one example, prove as productive for interreligious encounters with these texts?

These dynamics and challenges of universality became theologically productive in the reception history of Ps 145 and its main theme, God's kingdom. In its history, God's kingdom has noticeably often been communicated through texts that reflect dynamics of universality and particularity. Reflection on the nature of God's *מלכות* between universality and the particular status of Israel, the son of man or the holy ones is also found, for example, in the book of Daniel (Dan 3:33; 4:31, 34; 7:14, 27), which has close parallels to the central verses of Ps 145.<sup>10</sup> In Daniel we encounter similar temporal ambiguities as in the conception of the universality of God's kingdom in Ps 145. God's reign is eternal but still to be hoped for and expected for the near future. In the Songs of the Shabbat Sacrifice from Qumran, which offer important evidence for the study of the term *מלכות*, we find a very strong cultic – and thus present-oriented – understanding of God's

10 See Kratz, Reich (1993).

reign. The heavenly praise of God's kingdom in the different Songs shows that the term מלכות may be a very concrete description of a certain realm of power (in the case of the *Shir haShabbat* the heavenly temple) and at the same time a capacity of God himself, a characterization of his action. This action is not elaborated as in the second half of Ps 145 with God's action for the needy, but concentrated on the description of God's heavenly kingdom that may be realized on earth through the cultic participation of the hopeful community. God's temporally universal kingdom is brought into a particular context, the particular "now", through liturgy.<sup>11</sup>

Various contexts of Ps 145 give different answers to the questions above and add to the discourse on a universal kingdom of God. This holds true for the psalter in the Masoretic tradition, the Septuagint and Qumran<sup>12</sup> as well as in the later history of reading the psalms. The following examples aim to illustrate this insight and foster further investigation.

Connected to the importance of Ps 145 in Judaism is the well-known citation from the Talmud in Berachot 4b. The Talmud tells that everyone reciting the תהלה לרוד three times a day will be a child of the world to come. There is no need for the Rabbis to specify the prayer they refer to – there is only one תהלה לרוד in the whole psalter: Ps 145. Jewish liturgy<sup>13</sup> put this psalm into an interesting frame that named the prayer, as it is known today, Ashrei. As such, it was embedded in different parts of the daily liturgy: at the beginning and towards the end of Shaḥarit and to start the Minhah, the afternoon prayer. The frame, consisting of the verses Ps 84:4 ("Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise"); Ps 144:15 ("Happy is the people to whom such blessings fall; happy is the people whose God is the Lord") and Ps 115:18 ("But we will bless the Lord from this time on and forevermore. Praise the Lord!"), inseparably grew together with the text of Ps 145. These verses enhance the תהלה-*inclusio* of Ps 145 and additionally strengthen the reference to God's name and the temporal (and in rabbinic Hebrew also spatial) horizon of עולם. However, they also contextualize Ps 145 with elements the text itself does not mention: God's temple and, quite emphatically, his people. It thus focuses the text and applies it: the pious groups of Ps 145 should be identified with God's praying people. Additionally, it underlines the aim of the text: "All

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11 See the recent and extensive study of *Jost*, *Engelgemeinschaft* (2019), and the short reflections in *Rahn*, *Königtum* (2020), 250–257.

12 On Ps 145 in the Septuagint and at Qumran, see *Rahn*, *Königtum* (2020), esp. 235–250.

13 For examples of the adaptation of Ps 145 in Jewish and Christian liturgies and its relevance for the notion of God's kingdom as a liturgical motif, see *Rahn*, *Reich* (2020).

flesh”, “all works” of God shall join in the universal praise of God’s kingdom. This universal hope manifests also in Christian liturgies, were Ps 145 found its place – among other uses – in the Eucharist, as is the case in the Syriac tradition. The Eucharist may be understood as the anticipation of a kingdom, a world, and a divine time in which none of God’s works is lacking.

When the Qur’an speaks about God’s mercy being “over all of his works” and thus communicating a core part of the image of God’s kingdom in Jewish and Christian tradition, it gives voices to a similar hope that has the potential to change the present.

In addition to this short piece from liturgy, selected voices from commentaries on the Psalms show how Ps 145 fits within the history of the discourse on God’s universal kingdom. Although they come from approximately the same time, they reveal different reactions to the image of God’s universal kingdom and different ways of assessing the theological challenges of the psalm.

Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) is known as a leading scholar of German-Jewish orthodoxy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His commentary on the psalter was published in 1882.<sup>14</sup> Naturally, Hirsch points to the important function of Ps 145 in Jewish liturgy and connects this to the main theme of the psalm, which he describes as God’s care for the whole universe, for everything and all people. For Hirsch, Ps 145 is a testimony of God as the one who is absolutely great and good and thus the king of the universe.<sup>15</sup> Human existence is defined through the human attitude towards God’s kingdom that determines the position and function of people in God’s creation. This is also where Hirsch points to the universal tone and the coexisting shades of particularity of the psalm. Hirsch attributes a shared sense of the divine to the larger part of humanity. This sense lies mostly in the insight that there is a large gap between the actions of the divine, of some higher force, and the efforts of mankind. However, the confession that it is the universal love, the  $\text{כסוד}$  of the almighty king, that is the foundation of human actions is a confession ascribed to the  $\text{עֲבוֹדָתוֹ}$ , God’s co-workers in his kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Hirsch’s exegesis of Ps 145 can be connected to his important concept of Israel’s purpose to be the anticipation of God’s kingdom on earth, to be the yeast of the people (“Hefe des Volkes”).<sup>17</sup> Hirsch finds a decisive aspect of his theology – the twofold idea of redemption – in texts such as Ps 145. The redemption of the people of Israel from slavery and

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14 *Hirsch*, *Psalmen* (1882).

15 *Ibid.*, 345.

16 *Ibid.*, 349.

17 *Ibid.*, 349.

exile opens the space for the daily redemption consisting of God's care for his whole creation.<sup>18</sup>

Hirsch's Christian contemporary Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), founder of the Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig and an important representative of conservative Lutheranism, is known for his emphasis on *Heilsgeschichte*, connecting the two parts of his Christian Bible. This emphasis on *Heilsgeschichte*, which was decisively influenced by his pietist background, is also perceptible in his commentary on the psalter (from 1883), even more so when it comes to major subjects such as God's kingdom. For Delitzsch, God's universal care for his whole creation is the scope of Ps 145 and the mark of God's kingdom that finds special expression in the use of Exod 34:6–7.<sup>19</sup> Of particular interest for the subject of this paper is Delitzsch's dogmatic extrapolation that the universality of human praise points to a life after death – without life everlasting, universal human praise would not be possible. Another dogmatic emphasis in Delitzsch's commentary is his assessment of the universality of God's kingdom: For Delitzsch, God's mighty deeds make him present to all humanity, to the whole creation, whereas in his mercy, he is only present to those who call on him “in truth” (V. 18). Delitzsch explains this singular phrase with a hint to the New Testament Gospel of John, which emphasizes real, true prayer (John 4:23–24).<sup>20</sup>

These selected and very brief examples only give an idea of the way in which the image of a universal kingdom of God challenged theology<sup>21</sup> and further challenges it today. The latter may be illustrated by a contextual reading of Ps 145 from our time. Ajoy Kumar Lama relates his exegesis of Ps 145 and its message of God's universal kingdom with his own place of origin, 21<sup>st</sup>-century India with its religious diversity:

These findings have important implications for correcting certain perceptions among people of other faiths in India who have regarded Christianity as the religion of the western nations, and the God of the Bible as the God of the Jews and the Europeans. The compositional reading of Psalm 145, which underscores the universal Kingdom of God, counters such false social, cultural, and religious bigotry. The churches in India are comprised of people who have embraced Christianity from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. The writer belongs

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18 Hirsch, *Psalmen* (1882), 442.

19 Delitzsch, *Commentar* (1894), 813.

20 *Ibid.*, 816.

21 Other examples that show how the claim of the universality of God's kingdom in Ps 145 attracted the interest of exegetes can be found in the commentaries of Friedrich Baethgen (*Baethgen*, *Psalmen* [1897], 439–440), Heinrich Graetz (*Graetz*, *Psalmen* [1882/1883]) and Charles and Emilie Briggs (*Briggs/Briggs*, *Commentary* [1907]). The Briggs siblings' discussion of the Psalm's notion of universality also led them to date the text to the Hellenistic period – a rather late dating that was a minority view among scholars of their time.

to a community that has enjoyed a Buddhist heritage for more than two thousand years. The psalm provides a new perspective on the God of the Old Testament for his community. [...] To that effect, the prophet Isaiah prophesied YHWH's claim – before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear (Isa 45:23–24) – and Paul reiterated for the Church – every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11).<sup>22</sup>

Psalm 145 gives an interesting example of a text that not only produced a rich history of discourse on the image of God's kingdom, but that can itself also be described as a product of theological challenges that led to this same image full of memories and hopes. With Ps 145 in mind, the image of God as king may contain the thought experiment of an expansion of God's kingdom to the whole world, to all nations.

### 3. God's Universal Kingdom in Interreligious Encounters – First Explorations and Further Questions

Studying the image of God as king in the psalter and its reception leads to the encounter with very different specifications what such a kingdom of God looks like. This diversity crosses borders of canon, as well as borders of confessions and religions, a fact that Erich Zenger underscored, for example, in his thoughts on Ps 145 and the Final Hallel as an impetus for Jewish-Christian hermeneutics of the psalms.<sup>23</sup> His reflections on the question how Jews and Christians read the psalms may give a strong impetus for the very perspective of this volume: accessing the psalms in an interreligious context. With its strong reference to the continuous tension between particularity and universality, Ps 145 and its history invites us to dive deeper into this chapter of inner- and interreligious debate.

The universal relevance of God's mercy that we discovered as a core theme of the image of God's kingdom plays an important role not only in the scriptures of the Jewish and Christian tradition, but also in those of Islam. Starting with Sura 1:1, God's mercy is a refrain throughout the Qur'an, such as in Sura 40:7–9 as well as in 7:156, with a clearly universal perspective but also with distinctions regarding divine mercy. These are just two instances (many more could be added) that may be seen as complementary to statements from the psalms, again striking a balance between hope and reality that is also fundamental to the history of God as king. Talking about this diversity and thereby also discovering similarities, common memories and hopes, may be fruitful for interreligious encoun-

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22 *Lama*, Psalm 145 (2013), 248.

23 *Zenger*, *Fleisch* (1997).

ters. We should emphasize the term encounters here, because it may not only be about some sort of organized, scientific dialogue but also about experiencing different liturgies, reading Jewish commentaries, Islamic poetry, Christian homilies, etc. This also contributes to the aim of interreligious dialogue today: exchange, understanding, interconnectedness, and joint responsibility for the world and its future.

Furthermore, the psalms, with their discourse on human and divine power, as well as the multifaceted history of God's kingdom, may strengthen our critical understanding of mechanisms of power and powerlessness, of suppression, misuse of power, and of all the complex connections of religious and political origins of today's conflicts. God's universal kingdom may serve as a sort of counter-image to experiences of contingency of human power and corruption, for people experiencing the opposite of cosmic care and support. A universal kingdom of God in the way Ps 145 portrays it could be a utopian counterweight to the many struggles and calamities in our world today, and it is one possible way to think about God's open history with the world.

Sitting on the roof of the Austrian Hospice or walking the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem around noon, I hear a multivocal call to prayer. The sound of the muezzin, church bells, and recitations from a nearby Yeshiva.

With bits and pieces of the long history of prayer in world religions in mind, it is quite plausible that in many of the prayers I hear, God's kingdom is remembered and hoped for; that God is addressed as king, and even that the praying persons or groups address themselves as active parts of the kingdom of God. Often, this kingdom of God is portrayed as universal – in terms of time and space as well as in terms of relevance for people of all nations, all generations, and all times. I also notice the desire for peace and justice that is often linked to this image in a variety of ways. This desire will hopefully spur us on to debate our texts, ourselves, and our images of God.

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