Entangled Utopias

Interreligious Horizons in Psalms and Psalms Studies – An Introduction

Christian Frevel

Der Beitrag fragt nach den Voraussetzungen und Implikaten einer Psalmenlektüre, die unter dem Stichwort „interreligiöse Horizonte" das in den Psalmen thematisierte Heil der Anderen in den Blick nimmt und die bereits eingeübte Perspektive des jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs unter Einschluss des Islam zu einer trialogischen Perspektive der abrahamitischen Religionen erweitert. Dazu werden die identitätskonstitutive Performativität des Psalmengebets und das Konzept einer „shared tradition" vor dem Hintergrund eines modernen Traditionsverständnisses als Grundlagen entfaltet. Daraus ergibt sich der Imperativ einer interreligiösen Achtsamkeit für das Lesen und Beten der Psalmen. Der Beitrag arbeitet heraus, dass die Psalmen dennoch kein Handbuch für den interreligiösen Dialog und der Universalismus einiger Psalmen (bspw. Ps 47) nicht *die* Lösung sind; sie bieten viel eher eine Möglichkeit, die Beziehung zu den Anderen neu zu definieren, sich ihnen zu öffnen ohne sie zu vereinnahmen. Akzeptanz und Wertschätzung der Anderen sind dabei die Grundpfeiler einer Haltung, die den Psalter als „Lehrhaus" begreift.

A small workshop took place July 29–31, 2019 on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It was held in memory of Erich Zenger (July 5, 1939 – April 4, 2010), a pioneer of the Jewish-Christian dialogue and a celebrated exegete of Psalms.[1] The workshop was entitled "'By my God I can leap over a wall.' Interreligious Horizons in Psalms and Psalms Studies", and was mainly characterized by two aspects:

1. Psalms represent an important part of Christian-Jewish spirituality in practice. Examples range from the festive and Sabbath services of the Jewish liturgy to the monastic Liturgy of the Hours. Even the early church did not juxtapose the traditional collection of Psalms with new ones but adopted the psalms of the Hebrew tradition. Through the prophet David the

1 See the collected volume of essays on topics of the Jewish-Christian dialogue "Gottesrede. Gesammelte Aufsätze von Erich Zenger zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog" edited by Rainer Kampling and Ilse Müllner (2018), and most recently the volume "Mit Gott ums Leben kämpfen" edited by Christoph Dohmen and Paul Deselaers (2020). Further the forthcoming volume "Re-Thinking Erich Zenger" edited by Ilse Müllner and Rainer Kampling.

Psalms are also valued in the Qur'ān. From ancient times through the Middle Ages until the present there have been scientific exchanges about the interpretation of psalms. Not all of the fruits of the Psalms have yet been picked in this regard. Thus, the workshop asked for interfaith interconnections and encounter in reflecting, interpreting, and performing psalms and the Psalter through the ages.

2. The Psalms are an outstanding object of study for lived intra- and inter-faith ecumenism. Many investigations have explored Jewish-Christian relations and the impact of Psalms in this regard. But how far the interreligious potential of the hymns and laments in Psalms beyond this "comfort-zone" of religious dialogue actually reaches, has hardly been explored so far. An understanding of the interreligious potential of the Psalms is an almost complete desideratum. Hence, the conference intended to contribute to these questions. It is not meant to provide ready-made solutions but rather to tap into Psalms' universality as a potential source of peace and understanding and to uncover their power to reduce hostility and separation by taking the fate of the other into consideration. Doing this does not ignore the fact that the Psalms can also be used, and have been used, as a resource for conflict and violence. The endeavor is encouraged by the extraordinary potential of Psalms in past and present: "Psalms have served as a catalyst for a new understanding and creative partnerships."[2]

The venue on Mount Zion in Jerusalem was not chosen by chance, since religious encounter always occurs at a particular place at a particular time. There should be no need to justify that Jerusalem is a special place of intra- and interfaith encounter for the so-called Abrahamic religions. In no other location on earth can one find such a variety of confessions, denominations, and religions in such density in such a confined space. Adding the historical dimension, which potentiates the diversity of perspectives, the power of Jerusalem has a unique characteristic regarding the interfaith dialogue compared to all other religious melting pots of modernity. The multi-religious lived space is characterized by cohabitation and snippets of shared religious experience. Thus, both the historical and the actual Jerusalem is a promising place for the academic reflection of mutual contact and religious encounter. At the same time Jerusalem, a city that is holy to all three Abrahamic religions, plays a prominent role *in* Psalms as a place of special divine presence, as the location of the temple, as the destination of pilgrimage, etc. It should also not be concealed that in Jerusalem and with reference to Jerusalem claims collide, which, if they do not contradict the vision of peace in and out of the city, make its realization difficult. However,

2 *Gillingham*, Psalms (2012), 245.

as with the interreligious encounter in a space of mutual respect, acceptance and recognition, there is more hope than reality associated with Jerusalem as a city of peace and a place of mutual encounter. But, "in the Psalms, there sounds an idea […] that the city grants its inhabitants something that is not simply the product of its inhabitants".[3] Jerusalem played a crucial role in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim past, and – who would deny it – also in the present. In addition, the city also plays a role in the future for all three Abrahamic religions.[4]

In particular, the eschatological perspective of the pilgrimage of the nations and the encounter with God in the last days stands out. In the psalms Jerusalem as a whole is repeatedly called upon to praise and glorify (Ps 147:12) and peace for the city is implored (Ps 122:6). Through the special appreciation of Jerusalem and by making a relationship with Jerusalem the leitmotif for everyone, the city becomes a normative idea and beyond that a living utopia. The constitutive structure of this utopia in the Psalter that configures Jerusalem in this way, points beyond the psalms into real history, whereby the leitmotif of redemption continues to be responsible for salvation as well as for disaster. Once again, it is a question of perspective (even if not only of perspective). The workshop was intended to be experimental, to test out ideas, topics, concepts, avenues, objections, and suggestions. The idea underlying the approach concerned three major fields: 1. the level of the biblical text of Psalms, 2. the level of reception in history and research, and 3. the level of practice in synagogues, churches, and mosques. The following will expand some assumptions and prospects of the undertaking as well as some limits and shortcomings. It expands upon the introduction to the conference held in Jerusalem and is meant rather as a theoretical introduction to the present volume; it is not intended to introduce the various papers.

1. Psalms as a School of Learning

The church fathers understood Psalms as a theological *and* spiritual resource. In his famous commentary on Psalm 1 Ambrose (339–397) asks the well-known question: *Quid igitur psalmo gratius?* "What is more pleasing than a psalm?"[5] The answer is in fact "nothing", why he even explicitly

3 *Zenger*, Stadt (1999), 199 (own translation).

4 See *Laato*, Understanding (2019).

5 *Ambrose*, Explanatio Psalmorum XII, Book I, Chapter 9. CSEL 64:9. For a translation see *Ní Riain*, Commentary (2000). See also for the following quotes.

corrects the Apostle Paul's commandment that women should remain silent in the church: they do well to join in a psalm.[6] Interestingly enough, the Bishop of Milan also asks in the same passage: "What experience is not covered by a reading of a psalm?" And he adds: "In a psalm, instruction vies with beauty. We sing for pleasure. We learn for our profit." The question, what is not covered by a reading of a psalm, inspires the question, how far does the horizon of Psalms actually reach? That Psalms *teach* beyond prayer in a density that is unparalleled in the Bible is an insight, which is worthwhile to elaborate upon and which is the starting point of our considerations on inspirations for an interreligious reading from Psalms. Ambrose emphatically points at the universality of the Psalms' message when he contemplates the many benefits of the Psalms: "Yes, a psalm is a blessing on the lips of the people, a hymn in praise of God, the assembly's homage, a general acclamation, a word that speaks for all, the voice of the Church, a confession of faith in song." While on the one hand reading Psalms as the voice of Christ and on the other hand reading Psalms truly as the voice of the Church, Ambrose broadens the horizon to understand Psalms as "a general acclamation" and "a word that speaks for all" *(plausus omnium, sermo universorum)*. Behind this Ambrosian universalism, to put it clearly, is of course a thoroughly inclusive position towards the other, but underneath this time-bound restriction the question arises whether the strong universalism of some of the psalms cannot also be understood as a suggestion to look at the salvation of others without encroaching on them.

Taking this learning process as a starting point, a metaphor suggests itself, which may apply to the Psalter as the "house of voices".[7] It is the metaphor of the Jewish "Lehrhaus", which is meant as an institution of encounter, where learning and the confrontation with others and their points of view is based on the study of scripture and on acceptance and tolerance. The Jewish house of learning is a place of tradition as well as of innovation, a place of self-assurance as well as of opening up crusted positions. It is a place of discussion and controversy, where there is not just one truth, but various truths meet and struggle for their place. Isn't it time for a trace of *glasnost* in religious discourse?

The metaphor of the Psalter as a *Lehrhaus* exactly means to open up in a secure environment of positionality. Yet the origin of the metaphor does not come from the modern interreligious context at all, but goes back to another ancient scholar, Hippolytus of Rome, who in the second century in his Εἰς τοὺς Ψαλμούς (homilies of the Psalms) calls the Psalter "a school of

6 "Psalmum etiam bene clamant; hic omni dulcis aetati, hic utrique aptus est sexui."
7 For this metaphor, which aptly brings together the plurality of perspectives within the Psalter with its performance, see *Ballhorn*, Psalter (2016).

grace".[8] However, to understand the Psalter as a school of interreligious learning also means to perceive it not only as a school of prayer, but also as a space for reflection. The prayerful execution makes the Psalter – as a text – special, because its statements are appropriated by performative implementation. While prayer is a resonant performance that reflects and creates identity, praying psalms is more than just recitation. The striking fact now that makes the Psalms special in this way is the presence of the other within the text, be it as foe, foreign nation, or the world of the other.

Reading is more than acknowledging a text with a fixed meaning. Cognition includes a culturally embedded processing, and the "wherefrom" is never identical to the "whereto". Inbetween these poles is interpretation. Reading processes are always related to identity formation; they create, constitute, consolidate, confirm, negotiate, question, challenge, and even dissolve identities. In short: Reading *changes* identity. Reading involves the reader deeply, it has far reaching consequences in *transforming* the reader.[9] In this way the Psalter can be understood as a *Lehrhaus*.

Hence, reading and praying the passages, in which "the other" is accepted as being different but acknowledged as being equal at the same time, must have consequences in understanding the theological role of "Israel" and the horizon of salvation. Is Israel the now extended base of salvation or the means of salvation? Have the nations to join Israel or does Israel merge with the nations? What exactly is the role of "Israel" in the process of salvation in Jewish-Christian understanding, and in which way has this relatedness to "Israel" (whatever is meant by that) an indispensable meaning in a trialogue? And in which way exactly is Jerusalem, as a *lived* and *perceived* space, interwoven in this process, as a non-negotiable means of universality? If so, this would have theological consequences that are not limited to the Jewish-Christian relationship. As we will see below, a crucial consequence is to take Israel, Jerusalem, and the nations not *univocally*, but rather *equivocally*.

Thus, in *reading* (reciting, reliving, and praying) the other, his fate, and his salvation in the psalms becomes part of the discursive process in which religious identity is constituted and negotiated through one's relationship with God. Reflecting the Psalms under these conditions opens up an interreligious perspective not in the way of an elaborated reflective interfaith dialogue built on topics of dissent and consent, but rather simply taking the other into account. The aim of this idea is initially very modest. It has

8 *Hippolytus*, HomPs 12,7 (τὸ καλὸν τῆς χάριτος διδασκαλείον) (Text: P. Nautin, Le Dossier d'Hippolyte et de Méliton, Paris 1953, 177); cf. *Buchinger*, Psalmenhomilie (1995), 141.

9 See *Erbele-Küster*, Lesen (2001) and her contribution in the present volume.

several presumptions, which cannot be unfolded here in detail. The most important one is the assumption of a monotheistic common ground between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, which is often expressed by the abbreviating adjective "Abrahamic", which is in itself not free of problems (see below). This common ground is a *shared tradition* in narratives, persons, divine attributes, metaphors, etc. Although the notion of a shared tradition will play a role below, it is not putting Psalms naively as a common ground in the first place of a religious dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Nor is it about using psalms simply as a basis for an interfaith prayer within practiced interfaith or even interreligious encounter.[10] In the first place it is simply a reflection upon the fact that the other person is understood to be responsible to the same God and that this other person appears in the text and is present as an object of divine action. Thus, it is rather a matter of not losing sight of the other person while reading and praying the Psalms. It is about an *inter-religious* mindfulness in which the statements in a psalm and one's own understanding of that psalm are not decoupled from a real world in which common understanding and the peaceful encounter between the religions remains a goal.

It is meaningful, to give just some short examples, if in the process of Jewish or Christian praying *all* righteous people shouting for joy and all people being upright in heart are included in rejoicing a God whose character is forgiveness (Ps 33:5, 13, 18). It opens up the scene, so that all the nations not only enliven the stage-set in pursuit of particular "national" interests but are actually involved in the dynamics of praise: If they are seriously invited to clap hands, to raise a joyous shout for God, who is praised as king (Ps 47:2). And finally, it is of importance if God's steadfast love toward "us" is the substantiation for the invitation to all nations to praise God (Ps 117:1–2). To develop a mindfulness here that gives space to the other and lets the concern for his salvation and his fate flow into one's own constitution of identity as relevant, that is what is meant when the Psalter is called a school of interreligious learning.

2. The Jewish-Christian Context as Starting Point

The Psalms as texts of execution are particularly sensitive in this respect. The approach should not be misunderstood as an irenic rhapsody. It is not

10 See the development of presuppositions and implications for inter- and multi-religious prayer, which is not in the focus of the present considerations, *Bechmann*, Beten (2019), 340–357 (Lit!); *Porthuis*, Rituals (2020).

meant as a means of dialogue, but rather as a reflection on repercussions of performance and the appropriation of tradition therein. To say the least, the Psalms do *not* offer guidelines for interreligious integration. They are not programmatic as an approximation to believers of other religions; they are no handbook of interreligious discourse. It would be naïve to engross them only for a way of understanding and simply to assume that they are received from all sides in the same manner. This would ignore that psalms also have potentials of disagreement with the other, intransigent particular positionality, and the exclusion of the other. Also, this dimension is highly relevant in taking psalms as texts of prayer. Psalms are both a moat and a bridge at the same time, as Erich Zenger has aptly put it for the Christian-Jewish context:

> Reciting the Psalms makes us aware that they are both a moat and a bridge between Judaism and the Church. The fact that both speak the same prayers to one and the same God in their own way, even in respect for the peculiarities of the other, makes us aware that there is a 'wall' between them that both divides and connects. Judaism and Christianity are the families that live 'wall to wall' in the great house of the same God. This is not always easy, as we know. It brings problems, demands consideration and sometimes limits. But it can also be enriching, especially when families find the right balance and distance. The Psalms are a practice for that![11]

The conceptual base for this is the very fact of Psalms being a *shared tradition* between Jews and Christians, and partly in a different manner also a shared tradition between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Let me elaborate on the understanding of shared tradition in the following paragraph.

3. The Concept of *Shared Tradition* as a Means of Entanglement

The great stream of tradition meanders through times and contexts. This brings religious traditions into contact and exchange. Traditions are "thick" representations of encounter, appropriation, mutual exchange, mirroring, adoption, adaptation, transformation, demarcation, confrontation, polemics, dialogue, misunderstanding, etc. Traditions never come into being without contact to other traditions; they are thoroughly relational even if the sphere of influence is difficult to track down in each and every detail. As little as traditions have a beginning, they are solitaires or exist in splendid isolation. They keep staying in contact beyond their formation in var-

11 Zenger, *Gott* (1997), 20 (own translation).

ious forms of reception. Traditions are recursive constructs, but they are not static. By contextualization and interpretation they are continually changing; they are supplemented, amended, condensed, abridged, enlarged, superimposed, and adjusted. Those variances are partly adopted and also partly rejected by the communities that keep a tradition alive. Thus, tradition is in a steady flow, it is a dynamic concept. Traditions serve the preservation of meaning. Through interpretation (a term that pools the variance described above) they simultaneously enable the production of meaning and the expansion of existing rationalities: Traditions are sense-productive constructs that intrinsically want to be related to the ever contextualized present.

However, although always being in a state of flux, traditions condense into firm networks, which are declared unalterable in a canon or in quasi-canonized bundles of traditional literature. These processes of canonization exist likewise in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Canonized traditions safeguard the identity of religious communities by regulating their religious practice and doctrine. But as is generally known, even the defined canon does not guarantee identical collective identities. This has various reasons such as the fact that there are different shapes of the same canon in detail (e. g., the Septuagint or Masoretic canon of Psalms), or that certain criteria of selection exist in taking recourse to the same canon.

Finally, traditions contain modes of self-understanding and self-conception. They form reservoirs of identity concepts, which have inclusive and exclusive aspects alike. While providing the resources for their own identity, they include aspects of an understanding of the other at the same time. Traditions have, so to speak, docking sites to reflect upon the other. On the one hand, it seems necessary to give attention to those statements in which the other is focused upon, on the other hand this calls for reflection on the traditions of the other for the same reason. "It is important to identify one's position in a self-reflective process. In this hermeneutic process it can be interesting not only to look at one's own tradition, but at the other's tradition, as well. Like a look in the mirror, this look can shed new light on one's self-understanding."[12] Particularly the portion of shared tradition becomes crucial in those processes of negotiation of identity.

The idea of *shared tradition* makes the entanglement of traditions thus a resource of understanding. This is meant in two directions: First, the perception of *tradition history*, that is defining a shared tradition with reference to common origins or formative encounters. Second, with regard to the *reception history* of traditions, that is the perception of links, entanglements, and relatedness of common recourses on tradition and its interpre-

12 *Grohmann*, Approaches (2009), 8.

tations. "A reception history perspective has the advantage of interacting with a full and often complex interpretative tradition."[13]

This is not intended to declare the traditions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims are identical, but that they are related. Even the understanding of a shared tradition does not level differences (and is not meant in such a way), but it makes space for commonalities and relations. To downplay the intersections and the common origin of traditions of Jews and Christians (and Muslims alike) is misguided rather than appropriate.[14] It is nevertheless true that a comparative view should avoid too simplistic conformity of traditions, be it with regard to their origin in straightforward processes or of theological understanding. Yes, there are many differences, but even these are often an outcome of encounter. It is in any case necessary to disclose them and discursively explore their contextuality.[15] That different interpretations exist within a school of thought is natural. Rabbis like to quote Ps 62:12 "God has spoken one thing, I have heard two things" in this context, so that Erich Zenger called it "the basic axiom of a Christian-Jewish biblical hermeneutics".[16] There is always a plurality of understanding, *ad intra* within a community of believers and *ad extra* or *inter* with other communities of believers.

The fact that religions did not simply come into being at a fixed point in time, but differentiated themselves in complex processes of inner differentiation is an insight that is hardly disputed in religious studies.[17] This basically means that the contact zones, which later form the identifiable out-

13 *Gillingham*, Psalms (2013), 1.

14 One prominent example is *Neusner*, Jews (2001), XII. In contesting a *common tradition* between Jews and Christians, Jacob Neusner clearly failed historically and systematically, although I understand what he intended when negating any intersection between the two and pointing at the differences in the first place. But this view is oversimplifying and downplays the intersections and interactions in history on the one hand and the undeniable shared portions of tradition on the other hand. From the Christian side we could also mention the renewed discussion of the protestant canon initiated by Notger Slenczka, who suggested a clear assignment of the Old Testament to Judaism, which is also hardly appropriate to the process of canonization and the historical development in Antiquity, see out of many *Schmid*, Christentum (2016).

15 See *Fornet-Ponse*, Theologie (2012), 232. („Wegen dieses Überhangs des Glaubenssatzes gegenüber der Praxis sollte den ausdrücklich formulierten Verschiedenheiten von Auto- und Heterointerpretation vielleicht ein höherer Stellenwert zugedacht werden, auch wenn die Abhängigkeit dieser Sachaussagen von ihrem jeweiligen Weltbild nicht bestritten werden soll.")

16 *Zenger*, Bibel (2009), 34 (own translation).

17 See out of many *Tiwald*, Entstehung (2016); *Boyarin*, Judaism (2018); *Neuwirth*, Qur'an (2019), and for a systematic perspective *Krech*, Kommunikation (2012).

side, were only created via the processes of inner differentiation. Especially for the three Abrahamic religions it has proved impossible to mark their births. For Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in particular there was no "interreligious" exchange during the formative phase, since there were no fixed entities named Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. We may rather speak of intra-religious processes of differentiation, which were in detail nevertheless very different. Hence, to speak of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the early phases of emergence has become fuzzy. We will not enter the broad discussion on essentializing religion or of hybridity triggered by post-colonial understandings, here.[18] But it should be clear that the complex processes of differentiation from which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam finally emerged, call for historical differentiation rather than for essentializations. The conceptualization of emergence has to allow (primarily but not restricted to the early phases) a certain overlap, blending, merging, back and forth, encounter, contact, etc. The mentioned processes reveal that the *traditum* (the content of tradition) as well as the *tradere* (the process of transmitting the tradition) are deeply interwoven. Having said that, referring to commonalities does not have to encroach on the other nor – with regard to the identity of communities – have to be over-exaggerated. To be clear, there is no "master perspective" on religious tradition, and observations on a common origin by no means imply or intend a claim of a common outcome as a normative idea. In other words, positional plurality in religions and even in the Abrahamic ecumenism is irreducible and irrevocable.

The reflections on a concept of shared tradition above have led us into a consideration of the inherent interweaving and connectivity of religious traditions in general. This close relationship becomes stronger the earlier in the process of formation those traditions are in contact with each other. In doing so – and this would be a difference to previous approaches – the concept is not limited to common origins but includes the manifold entanglement within the history of encounters, which is beyond a naïve concept of a praise of commonalities. It includes the dark sides of encounter, the many disputes, depositions, and disparagements of the other through history as part of the reception history. But it creates – and this is indeed meant normatively – an awareness of relatedness not only in a single point beyond history, but rather within and throughout history.

18 Various concepts such as Wittgenstein's family resemblances or Jonathan Smith's polythetic relations have been proposed to conceptualize this and to avoid the definition of religion, see for instance *Smith*, Religion (2014); *Satlow*, Judaism (2006); *Stausberg*, Religion (2012). This is not the focus of the present paper.

4. The Interfaith Relevance of Psalms as Shared Tradition

This holds particularly true for the Psalms that form a significant part of the *shared tradition* between Jews and Christians not only with reference to the oral and written tradition and its interpretation, but beyond that in the performative practice of accomplishment in prayer. Psalms form part of the continuous practice in service as well as they form the backbone of countless discourses within the Jewish and Christian intellectual tradition. While this has been studied at length,[19] the lines of communication, reception, and mutual influence between the Muslim tradition and the Jewish-Christian traditions are less intensively focused upon. The Psalms nevertheless also enjoy a special esteem in Islam not only but particularly as *Zabūr* in connection with David (Sura 17:44 *wa-ʾātainā dāwūda zabūran*, cf. Sura 4:163).[20] The esteem for David as a psalmist continues in post-Qurʾānic Islamic literature when David in al-Yaʿqūbī recites a psalm similar to Ps 18. Particularly the universalism of Ps 148–150 is quoted even in Arabic language.[21]

The special role of Psalms particularly in the formation of the Qurʾān is further underlined by historical and systematic connections. A significant number of psalms quotations and countless allusions, which form a high degree of intertextuality, have to be mentioned here. The remarkable structural parallels and the formative power of the liturgical-poetic language in the Qurʾān lead Angelika Neuwirth to perceive the Qurʾān even as "a psalm intertext".[22] She writes: "That is not difficult to explain: Liturgical piety shaped by psalms is to be presupposed for the Syrian Church and especially for monastic circles. It could also have had a formative effect on members of the Qurʾānic community."[23] The intertextual conversation between Psalms and the Qurʾān goes far beyond formal aspects into shared convictions in statements about God, his character, essence, agency, and salvific deeds. Interestingly enough the relationship is not built on reading processes but rather on performances. "The early Qurʾān consists to a large extent of

19 From a vast amount of literature, the only reference here is to *Gillingham*, Approaches (2013); eadem, Journey (2013); *Grohmann/Zakovitch*, Approaches (2009).

20 See the overview of *Saleh*, Psalms (2014); *Schippers*, Psalms (2006), 314–318; *Neuwirth*, Psalmen (2008); eadem, Psalms (2010); eadem, Qu'ran (2019), 241–264.

21 See *Schippers*, Psalms (2006), 316.

22 Cf. *Neuwirth*, Zeit (2009), 322; eadem, Koranforschung (2014), 37. Cf. also her contribution in this volume.

23 *Neuwirth*, Zeit (2009), 322; see further *Schippers*, Psalms (2006), 317 mentioning the Violet Psalm Fragment from Damascus which he dates a bit earlier to the eighth century. For the discussion of the date in the ninth century and earlier dates, see *Al-Jallad*, Damascus (2020), 35–39.

paraphrases of psalms; it forms part of Late Antique psalmic piety which for the first time finds its place in the Arabic language, there being no Arabic translation of the Psalms extant before the ninth century."[24]

To sum up, Psalms form part of the *shared tradition* between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. They have a history of reception that overlaps in many ways and that is determined by both, parallels and differences. The most fundamental difference with regard to Psalms is the affiliation into the canon. With Jews and Christians, the Psalms form an uncontested part of the common tradition of sacred texts. In Islam, the Psalms do not belong to the canonical texts, but they do enjoy a special appreciation as a holy scripture preceding the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān's allusions and quotations of psalms is in a certain way comparable to the use of the Scriptures in the New Testament, where the Psalms are in many ways understood as presupposed space of resonance attesting God's action and truth. Both coincide in the understanding of the Psalms as prophecy and David as Prophet. All three religions have recourse to the Psalms as prayer of praise and lament. However, although David is also praised as a famous musician in Islamic tradition,[25] only Jews and Christians perform this prayer in private and communal service.

The Psalms take a special role in the demand for awareness of the other described above. That is due to the religious practice that does not understand the Psalms just as texts of tradition but understands them as prayer. In prayer identity is expressed performatively; prayer not only creates and actualizes the relationship to God, but firstly includes into prayer everything that claims validity in one's own self-understanding, and secondly always constitutes also a relationship to the outside world. Prayer is therefore relational and correlative; it includes the other at least implicitly. Thus, it has a special meaning not only to read and reflect upon particular statements on the foes or the nations, but to *pray* them. This holds true for the positive ones such as Ps 117:1 "Praise the LORD, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples!" but also for the negative non-harmonic notes in the score such as Ps 10:16 "The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations shall perish from his land."[26]

24 *Neuwirth*, Qur'an (2019), 73.

25 See *Schippers*, Psalms (2006), 315.

26 If not otherwise indicated all translations of biblical texts are taken from the NRSV.

5. The Limits of Universalization and the Perils of Inclusivism

I am aware that the idea of an interreligious horizon in dealing with Psalms is harboring dangers and can be misinterpreted as being monopolistic. Therefore, I would like to give the thought a final twist in reflecting upon universalism and inclusivism.

Speaking of an Abrahamic ecumenism is usually based on the insight of intersections and commonalities between the traditions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In particular these comprise the notion of God, the idea of his personality, his acting in history, the idea of election of certain figures such as Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, Noah, David, Job, Mary and Jesus, etc. Beyond the historical interest the metaphor is usually understood as a starting point to define a special relationship of these three religions, which is rooted in God's universal will of salvation. Through Abraham a common ancestry of Jews, Christians, and Muslims is established to which the idea of Abrahamic ecumenism refers. However, one has to admit that this common ancestry in fact is construed quite differently within the three religious webs of tradition.[27]

The *inwardly directed* formation of identity (intra-religious self-assurance) that is described with the *cipher* "Abraham" must not simply be equated with a position directed *outwardly* (inter-religious localization). Thus, understanding the inclusive potential of Abraham in one's own tradition (e. g., the universal "people of the God of Abraham" in Ps 47:10; "Abraham's bosom" in Luke 16:22, or Abraham as an example [*'imāman*] for all believers [except the evildoers] in Sura 2:142) does not provide a general inclusion of the other. Universalism or universalization is neither a guarantee for inclusion nor for a peaceful dialogue.[28] Universality is always formulated from an *intra-religious* perspective, since there is no meta-perspective of truth. Hence also inclusivism is not a "solution" for integrating the other into the encompassing truth of one's own belief, it is rather an attempt to open up one's own convictions which are held to be true.

As described above the interaction of the identity constructions is of greater importance for a dialogical approach.[29] It should nevertheless not be concealed that the religio-theological construct of an "Abrahamic ecumenism" has contradictions, challenges, and jeopardies. However, it also has benefits, which include an open-ended learning process. It is about entering into a conversation determined by acceptance, perception, and mutual re-

27 Cf. *Frankemölle*, Abraham (2016); *Levenson*, Abraham (2012).

28 See *Bechmann*, Abraham (2019), 415.

29 See ibid., 27, 404.

cognition in order to make commonalities and differences clear and to enable the communication of the other person's otherness. Only by including the differences it will be possible to realize understanding through the commonalities, as has often been emphasized.[30]

When inquiring the possible interreligious potential in reading Psalms, the goal cannot be the levelling of differences and the assimilation of the other in a Psalm-based universalism. In a way the basic idea of an interreligious awareness or respect for the rights of the other within the reception of one's own tradition, which was unfolded above, questions practiced patterns of traditional theological views, which have put universalism and particularism in a diametrical opposition. In 1967, for instance, Peter Altmann published a study on the concept of election in which his final paragraph was entitled "Die Überwindung der Erwählungstheologie durch Universalismus" (Overcoming the Theology of Election by Universalism).[31] Particularism was considered a problem and "Israel" was often blamed with strong anti-Jewish attitude for its insular stubbornness and for being diametrically opposed to the universalism of Christ. The relation of particularism and universalism was conceptualized in models of an either-or-antagonism, of a succession in which universalism follows particularism naturally, or a dialectical overcoming in which particularism is superseded by universalism. All models have particular problems which were discussed intensively for some time.[32] Jon D. Levenson is right when he says: "Nothing is more delicate than the interplay of universalism and particularism in traditional Jewish theology."[33] What is needed is not to dissolve particularisms, but rather to carefully characterize both perspectives in a more nuanced way, their relation and the repercussion they have for a dialogical perspective.[34]

Without an opening through universalistic docking points in the conceptual formulation of its own self-understanding on the one hand, particularism becomes insular. A religion then is in threat to lose its ability for dialogue and the integration of the perspective of the other. Without particularism on the other hand, a religion loses its own specific and identifiable profile, which also limits the possibilities of integrating the perspective of the other. Thus it is clear, that the reflection on universalism neither aims at unification, nor at inclusivism. In this situation, a conception of a comparative mutual inclusivism may avoid claims to exclusivity and non-relational

30 Cf. *Laato/Lindquist*, Encounters (2010); *Bechmann*, Abraham (2019), 101–139; *Frankemölle*, Abraham (2016).

31 *Altmann*, Erwählungstheologie (1964), 29.

32 See, for instance, *Smend*, Universalismus (1962); *Talmon*, Universalismus (1975); *Dietrich*, Universalität (1992); *Petuchowski*, Partikularismus (1994).

33 *Levenson*, Horizon (2002), 169.

34 Cf. *Petuchowski*, Partikularismus (1994).

truth concepts at the same time. Different perspectives of participants in the discourse can then be understood as complementary and – importantly – related to each other. The respective other person understands his religion in such a way that salvation is not denied to the other faith. According to the principle of not exercising compulsion in religion, the opposite party is free to open itself to the offer of universalism. The precondition for this is the mutual awareness and acknowledgment of the other faith and its possible, but not necessary inclusion. Whether this is a possible avenue in religious understanding may be further discussed, but what seems clear to me is that the universalism in Psalms may function this way. To accept that one's own exclusivity is limited is a necessary step. Exclusivism does not provide an attitude in which understanding goes hand in hand with recognition. It becomes obvious, that the thought expressed here presupposes the universal will of salvation and the unity of God, i. e., it is located in the context of the interfaith dialogue.

The ideal construct of an interfaith *understanding* through Abraham is often hampered by persistent inclusivism from one side, which monopolizes the integrity of the other. It is thus clear, when facing the universalism of Psalms within an interfaith context, the objective is not to Judaize or Christianize the other on the one hand. On the other hand, it is even more obvious that the universalism of the Psalter cannot be neglected within the endeavor of understanding the demand for autonomy of the other. But again, universalism is no guarantee for dialogue; inclusivism requires an impossible meta-perspective and can therefore only claim validity under its own conditions.

If the limits are already shown, it must also be emphasized that approaches of universalism do not in any way cancel out particular aspects. The expectation that a particularism would first have to be broken up before a universalism can take hold is wrong. What role can the universalism of psalms then play having an interreligious horizon in mind? Psalms often speak of "the nations", which are invited to join Israel in praising the justice and mercy of the Lord (Ps 96:7; 117:1; 148:11). Thus, the particularism is allegedly broken up into a wide universalism. There are no prerequisites mentioned, neither accepting the Torah nor conversion, etc. At first sight it hardly seems to be a question, how far the inclusive universalism of the Psalms reaches out. To give just some examples: "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you." (Ps 67:4) "All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name." (Ps 86:9) "Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength." (Ps 96:7) The scene is opened up and the people of God now seemingly include the universal world of people. The same holds true with regard to the role of Jerusalem, when Ps 87:6 says:

"The Lord records, as he registers the peoples, 'This one was born there' (Selah)." The source of life at the navel of the world, marked by the presence of God, leads all peoples to the same God. A monotheistic and creation-based universalism makes the city a comprehensive image of salvation. However, even in these strong metaphors the particular perspective is never voided, neither is the special position of Israel according to the plan of salvation neglected nor the covenant with Israel abolished in these Psalms. Israel will not be dissolved in a universal mixture of nations, it remains the opposite of the nations; through its election it even becomes a medium of God's will of salvation, through which the nations reach salvation. This proves the inclusivism an intra-religious perspective and at the same time the dichotomy of exclusivism and inclusivism wrong. But it becomes also clear that a univocal understanding of Israel in those passages is impossible. Let us take Ps 33:12–13 as a final example in which Israel is praised as blessed *and* the universality of God's desire for the salvation of all humankind: "Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage. The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind." The "new" nation described is not univocally "Israel", but the *people of God* ("the nation whose God is the LORD") becomes a cipher-like (eschatological) equivocal notion of God's people.[35] At the same time this universal people cannot and should never be dissolved from Israel. In this nuanced dialectic way the relation between particularism and universalism is neither identical nor antagonistic. Rather the election of Israel remains a particular means of salvation.

6. Fusion of Horizons – A Summary

The hermeneutical-phenomenological metaphor of the *fusion of horizons* introduced by Hans-Georg Gadamer often resounds in reflections on inter-religious dialogue.[36] Docking points of his hermeneutics are obviously his notion of understanding, which is conceptualized not as a unilineal process, but rather as mutually overlapping and influencing horizons. Understanding becomes a matter of negotiation. Further on, it is his emphasis on the role of tradition,[37] recourse, and historical context in the process of understanding that is attractive for a religious context, which is obviously bound

35 See *Hossfeld*, Heil (2012), 175.

36 See, e. g., *Gill*, Conversation (2015), 11–14; *Hedges*, Gadamer (2016), 6–7; idem, Theology (2016).

37 See *Auerochs*, Gadamer (1995), 294–311.

to tradition. The way to develop an acceptable starting position for a dialogical understanding does not require a distancing from one's own tradition, but rather to check and balance the expectation and prejudices of the other. Even the term awareness, which has become a central notion in the argument above, resounds in Gadamer's theory. Although the present paper, which intended to explore the role of psalms in an interreligious or more precisely an interfaith respect, did not intend to build on Gadamer, some aspects of the argument above may well resemble aspects of this theoretical background. The paper aimed at promoting an inter-religious attention when reading and praying the Psalms.

Our starting point was the general understanding of inclusive and exclusive, universal and particular statements in the Psalms. How can they be understood if they are read against a multi-religious context or the horizon of an interfaith dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Our first step was to give the Psalms special importance in this context in a threefold respect: First, they are not only read but also prayed, at least in Jewish and Christian religious services. The ritual performance includes statements of inclusion and universalism and this implicitly or better performatively affects the constitution of the prayer's collective and individual identity. The fact that they are performed as prayer adds a special facet to their contribution within collective religious identity formation. Thus, psalms take on a special importance when they include or exclude the other. Second, Psalms are part of the shared tradition of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The fact that they form a *shared tradition* makes them applicable in the context of an Abrahamic trialogical context. Thus, Psalms can unfold a special importance in the Muslim-Christian-Jewish interfaith trialogue. Under the condition that these Abrahamic religions are devoted to the same monotheistic God, the link through shared traditions has special importance with regard to hope for salvation. The actual convivence in a house of the same God makes them relevant in this respect. And finally, Psalms has played a particular role within dialogue contexts throughout history, starting with the New Testament, the church fathers through medieval times up to modernity. That is without doubt not only because of its importance for religious practice but also because of its contents as the "Little Biblia" ("Kleine Biblia", Martin Luther). There is hardly any other biblical corpus in which the nations play a greater role and in which the definition of *Israel* as a matter of election and salvation is more challenging.

Having underlined that psalms are relevant in interreligious respect and that they develop an implicit meaning, the paper underlined that Psalms can have a guiding function within interfaith contexts of Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. This guidance is oriented towards mutual acceptance and a general awareness for the inclusion of the other. However,

Psalms is not a handbook of interreligious dialogue; the Psalter does not contain recipes of understanding. We discussed the perils of inclusivism from one side and suggested a virtual position of mutual inclusivism not to interfere with the freedom and truth of the other. The striking universalism of some psalms, which gives the Psalter a universal coloration from the end, is neither a problem nor the solution. It is rather a task and an opportunity to constantly redefine the relationship to the position of others and their acceptance and to open up to them without simply absorbing them. The "people of the God of Abraham" (Ps 47:10) are not a given, but rather a challenge to be achieved at least in the sense of mutual inclusion. The legitimate truth claim of the other forms irrevocable positional differences within the history and understanding of tradition, which can only be met with respect. Acceptance and appreciation of the other as a person and their freedom are crucial as the common base in recourse to the psalms. This concept is not intended to negate the dark sides of the psalms, in which the enemy is cursed and asked to be destroyed. But the general idea of including the other is the dominant and normative guiding principle. Thus, the openness to the other and his otherness is presupposed in reading and praying Psalms. In this way, Psalms can be understood as a "Lehrhaus", a religious teaching house in which positionality is developed and negotiated, but in which the key concepts for the recognition of the other are also included. The normative ideal of a dialogic understanding of the other and developing a concept of universal salvation under the condition of the encompassing longing for salvation of the one God of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, is the major challenge, which can be unfolded only on this base and without abandoning one's own tradition. The Psalms do have an interreligious horizon that is not limited to their eschatological vision.

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