

# Reception Aesthetics of the Psalms

## A Third Space for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

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Die „Psalmen als Atem der Welt“ (Erich Zenger) zu verstehen eröffnet einen Horizont für den interkulturellen und interreligiösen Dialog. So lautet die Grundannahme des Beitrags ausgehend von einer rezeptionsästhetischen Lektüre des Psalters. Die zweite Annahme stützt sich auf die Rezeptionsgeschichte: Der Psalter und seine Sprache bilden eine geteilte Tradition in den sogenannten Abraham-Sara-Hagar-Religionen. Die Autorin versucht mit Hilfe der Rezeptionsästhetik und der interkulturellen Hermeneutik beides aufeinander zu beziehen und dabei sowohl Chancen als auch Schwierigkeiten des Dialogs zu bestimmen. Sie zeigt die dialogische Struktur und Poetizität der Psalmen, insbesondere die Rolle der Doxologie darin, auf und wie diese einen dritten Raum konstituiert, der offen ist nicht zuletzt für eine gemeinsame Rede zu Gott jenseits der geteilten und umstrittenen Orte.

### 1. Prelude

“Psalms as breath of the world” (“Psalmen als Atem der Welt”)<sup>1</sup> – this phrasing by Erich Zenger epitomizes the theology, anthropology and cosmology of the Psalms.<sup>2</sup> It reflects especially the tune on which the Psalter ends: “Every breath shall praise Jah! Hallelujah” (Ps 150:6). In Ps 148 nature, the heavens and different weather phenomena like hail are invited to join. The Psalter concludes on an invitation to a performative cosmic reception. According to this interpretation by Erich Zenger, which is captured in the phrase that Psalms are the breath of the world, one could say that reading Psalms is breathing as we all breathe and are in need of praying, humming, singing and breathing beyond dogmatics and in midst of conflicts and despite contested texts and places. In the final Psalter Hallel (Ps 145–150) the

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1 Zenger, *Atem* (2008), 579.

2 The quote “Psalmen als Atem der Welt!” stands in an exemplary way for Erich Zenger’s legacy in Psalm Studies. It is the imaginary power and creativeness of individuals in science and grassroots’ movements, politics and religious groups that brings people together! This among other things has stimulated Christian Frelve to set up and organize this conference. I would like to express my gratitude for the possibility of being part of it.

mentioned addressees encompass divergent living beings beyond specific gender, ethnic or religious belongings. Praise, according to Ps 148, does hence not neglect social relations despite the fact that it transcends them as the act of praise unites them and as they are joined by nature. The concluding exclamation of the Psalter, to praise, gives a clue for our topic how a prayer raising from one religious background may transgress borders and aim at an act of praying across cultures and religions.

This notion of Psalms as breath of the world serves a one of three stimuli to conceptualizing intercultural and interreligious dialogue anew.<sup>3</sup> Next to it, I apply Erich Zenger's plea for a common talk to God in inner-ecumenical dialogue to interreligious and intercultural encounters. And last but not least his endeavor that Christians acknowledge in their reception of the Psalms the Psalter as a prayer book of Jews alike, is crucial and reflects the set of problems. The Psalter originated within Second Temple Judaism and became through its reception likewise part of the Christian tradition. In general, the Psalter has been received in different contexts as prayer book, as book of devotion, as teaching and as source of imagination in the arts. The reading of the Psalter has shaped these different communities, and vice versa.

The setup of the article is twofold: The contribution of the dialogical and poetic nature of the Psalms and in particular the act of praise to the interreligious dialogue shall be highlighted because this constitutes the fundament, the third space. It is against this background that I discuss in a second step contested issues regarding interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the light of the Psalter.

## 2. Reception Aesthetics and (Interreligious) Psalm Prayer

The outline of the conference taking up the legacy of Erich Zenger fosters to build bridges between reception aesthetics of the Psalms and interreligious dialogue. It is challenging as the two, Psalm Studies and interreligious studies, are separated fields in the academic tradition I stem from. Both fields have developed their own methodology and the field of Psalm studies is not preoccupied with questions of interreligious hermeneutics. For a long time, Psalm Exegesis has been interested in the individual Psalm, its historical background and the determination of its form (*Gattung*). However, other approaches like intertextuality, poetical, narrative and rhetorical stu-

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3 Cf. *Schreiter*, *Possibilities* (2005) for conceptualizing interreligious dialogue as an act of intercultural communication.

dies and the interest on the Psalter as a book have changed the field. In the last decades quite some volumes appeared on the Jewish and Christian interpretation history of the Psalter,<sup>4</sup> while mainly treating them as two separate fields and without special interest on interreligious dialogue in particular. Nevertheless, these studies seen as a whole give testimony of communalities and divergences of the approaches and show glimpses of the interreligious dynamics in these processes.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, the Psalms including their interpretation history, and our context alike, call for developing an interreligious hermeneutics of the Psalms. In order to achieve this, I depict in what follows the text and its reception aesthetics (2.1) and the context (2.1.1). This twofold description forms the background for the aim of this investigation. Along with reception aesthetics of the Psalms as the methodological approach comes a specific conception of dialogue (2.1.2) and prayer as a corollary (2.2).

## 2.1 The Text and Its Reception Aesthetics

The aesthetics of the Psalms affects its readers. This implies my methodological presupposition to approach the text in a first step as a literary text that invites us to enter through its poetical strategies; like the opening alliteration of the Psalter: *'ašrē hā 'iš 'ašer* (“happy is the human being that”, Ps 1:1a). It functions as a eulogy of the reader and listener who is stimulated to follow the path of the righteous. The poetical and literary form serves as so called “implied reader”. While reading we get involved in the Psalm and the Psalter as a book. This I label “reception aesthetics of the Psalms”.<sup>6</sup> Reception aesthetics as a hermeneutical approach presupposes phenomenological involvement. It takes the text in its poetical and affective structure and its very materiality as a given which comes to live however solely in its

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4 For instance: *Gillingham, Psalms* (2008); *idem, Jewish* (2015); *Grohmann/Zakovitch, Jewish* (2009); *Zacharias et al., Jewish* (2009).

5 The article by *Sawyer, Psalms* (2015) stresses the importance of Reception History and the need to take it into account in our exegetical work; however, he just juxtaposes different examples of the reception from both traditions. *Gillingham, Jewish* (2015) compares along Ps 137 the interpretations in the Jewish tradition with those in the Christian. At the end of her article she states that Ps 137 with its stress on human vulnerability “therefore encourages dialogue between the two faith traditions” (80). *Berlin, Answers* (2015) and the response by *Körting, Exegeses* (2015) unfold the polemical dynamics between Jews and Christians in Medieval Times as reflected in Jewish Psalm Commentaries, namely the one of Rashī; even some anti-islamic commentaries are crept in, as Berlin states (38).

6 Cf. *Erbele-Küster, Lesen* (2001).

reception. This has far reaching implications for the conception of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, as I shall show below.

The Psalms contain gaps that enable readers from varying social, cultural, and historical contexts to identify with. Reception aesthetics highlights the aesthetical dimension of the text, as it is unfolded in the reading processes. In a similar vein in recent years, scholars focus on the emotional and transformative processes while reading Psalms.<sup>7</sup> A second characteristic, which favors the openness of the reception across cultures, is the dialogical nature of the Psalms.<sup>8</sup> This holds true already in its very structure as it encompasses different speech acts. Different groups and persons are addressed in direct speech in the Psalms: God, the inner self, the in-group and even those who are called enemies.<sup>9</sup> Hence prayer as sketched in the Psalms intends and stimulates a transformative practice regarding the relation to God, to oneself, to the other, and the world. The plurality of voices engages the reader. Sometimes it is difficult to decide who is speaking to whom. At some instances we have hidden speakers or performative speech acts who disclose the speaker like in the “happy be” formula; mostly expressing ideas from wisdom circles. Reception aesthetics in a historical perspective provides likewise a hermeneutical key for understanding the interreligious aspects in the reception history.

### 2.1.1 My Context<sup>10</sup>

The place we are writing from is decisive as the place we meet and dialogue. This has been the lived experience last but not least at the conference held at the Dormitio Abbey in Jerusalem. Our context has repercussions on the understanding of ourselves. As we reflect on the places we are writing from they become transformed into space:

Not in the trivial sense that everything occurs in space, but because where events unfold, how space takes shape, the relationship between identity and space, and the role of human beings in the production of space are more and more important. Space is no longer thought of as a passive participant, but an active one and those who relegate geography and space to the status of inconsequential do so at their own risk.<sup>11</sup>

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7 Cf. *Eder*, *Identifikationspotentiale* (2018).

8 Cf. *Weber*, *Poetologie* (2006) and *Bruggemann*, *Human* (2014), 527.

9 Cf. *Erbele-Küster*, *Lesen* (2001), 133 ff.

10 The following paragraph is inspired by *Heschel*, *Island* (1966) 117, 118. For the necessity of reflecting on the context see the two volumes by *Segovia/Tolbert*, *Reading* (1995).

11 *Schreiner*, *Space* (2016), 345.

The reciprocal relation of place, space and the encounters who establish actually the space, lies at the heart of my approach. I expound the poetical peculiarities of the Psalms as a European Protestant Old Testament scholar who has been teaching Old Testament in ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural contexts. Europe as a geopolitical and cultural space is currently shaped by discourses and practices fighting the rise of new racism including Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Fundamentalism alike. I have been engaged in different interreligious dialogues mostly with two partners at the table either Jews or Muslims. I have been involved in a Christian Translation project of the Bible within a German-speaking context in gender sensitive language.<sup>12</sup> The project was committed to the Jewish origin of the scriptures. I speak as a German despite that darkness and death facing Auschwitz swallow my words – 75 years after the liberation of the camp. I speak and write as one who was invited to be a “*mensch*” in Upper Manhattan at the Jewish Theological Seminary for one semester. Space as it becomes obvious from this sketch of my context is not a stable category but history, culture and power relations are inscribed in it. Last but not least, I speak as a person who is convinced that we should recognize mutually our shared and contested heritage and likewise our traumatic experiences as both are intertwined.<sup>13</sup> Jews, Christians and Muslims address in their prayers the God of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar.

### 2.1.2 Aesthetical Hermeneutics of the Psalms and Interreligious Dialogue

Reception aesthetics takes into account both: the poetical and literary nature of the individual Psalm and the intercultural and interreligious reception history of the Psalter as a book. Reception aesthetics allows to reflect on these processes hermeneutically. It is first of all the Psalter itself which opens up perspectives beyond one culture and religion. As stated above, its reception history from the very beginning has interreligious dimensions. The Psalter which has been shaped within Second Temple Judaism is a shared tradition among Jews, Christians and to a certain point Muslims; and likewise it is a contested one.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Cf. *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*.

13 With the combination of shared and contested I take into account that the act of “sharing” may be very different and includes often dispute: *Limor, Space* (2007) especially 220, 227.

14 This has been made most visible during our discussions on the conference and the guided tours by Angelika Neuwirth und Florian Lippke in Jerusalem. For the reception history of Psalms in Judaism: *Cooper, Interpretation* (2014). He stresses that we lack evidence for a vast reception practice of Psalms in worship in rabbinic times. For the Reception in Islam cf. *Irving, Music* (2016).

In the endeavor to develop an interreligious hermeneutics of the Psalms I build on previous studies who favor an aesthetical approach to interreligious dialogue by relying on the arts. Volker Küster presented a model of interreligious dialogue through the arts taking up the notion of third space.<sup>15</sup> “*Dialogue through the arts*’ [...] opens up several perspectives in accordance with the classic hermeneutic patterns: behind the image, in the image and in front of the image”.<sup>16</sup> Space in this concept is understood as a network of relations not as a fixed entity or container. Third space describes a contact zone for different positions without a presupposed or implemented hierarchy. Hence the third space is defined and created by the encounters itself. I explore how the dialogue as depicted in the Psalms may serve as means for the dialogue with each other in the third space the Psalter creates.<sup>17</sup> The aesthetical oriented hermeneutics of dialogue tries to explore the above stated notion that the Psalter in its poetical and rhetorical form is realized in its reception. On the textual level of the Psalms God is taken as a given. The assumption is that the manifold dialogical structures in the Psalms may challenge our intercultural and interreligious dialogue in general and in particular within the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar tradition.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2 Prayer, Psalms and Dialogue

I move from prayer in general (2.2.1) to Psalm prayer in particular (2.2.2). On that basis I highlight one specific form of prayer, praise, which forms according to the Psalms an all-embracing practice. The act of praise serves hence as a means of comprehensive encounter between humans and the divine, among human beings regardless their contexts, between the anthropocentric world, nature and the cosmos. Therefore, praise according to the Psalms as a nonfunctional many-voiced act opens up a third space (3.3).

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15 Küster, *Dialogue* (2018). The article reflects methodologically on the art exhibition curated by the author on the occasion of the conference on Christian-Muslim Relations in Yogya/Indonesia in 2012. *Illman*, *Art* (2012) takes Martin Buber’s concept of the between as created through the encounter with the other as hermeneutical key. For the concept of space as critical tool in interreligious dialogue cf. *Winkler/Rodriguez/Leirvik*, *Spaces* (2017). In their preface they claim a spatial turn in intercultural theology and interreligious studies.

16 Küster, *Dialogue* (2018), 380.

17 Küster, *Einführung* (2011), 151–152 takes up the concept of Third space by Homi Bhabha understanding dialogue itself as an alternative third space; cf. *idem*, *Who* (2004).

18 For the strive of an intercultural and intercultural engaged reading of these traditions: cf. *Trible/Russel*, *Hagar* (2006) and *Erbele-Küster*, *Ethics* (2014).

### 2.2.1 Prayer as Dialogue of the Heart: An Individual and Communal (Inter-)Religious Practice

Prayer can be defined as dialogue of the heart on an individual and communal level. Prayer is an act of communicating with God. Prayer is a verbal, bodily,<sup>19</sup> and ritual act of addressing a deity, either individually or as a community. In a cultural anthropological perspective, the most basic human utterance is the sigh.<sup>20</sup> In the act of praying, the addressee – the deity – might be implicit, missing or searched for or even contested.

Turning to interreligious prayer in particular one can differentiate between individual and communal practices. In the first case, an individual participates in the communal prayer practice of another religious group. This is a form of sharing one's own tradition, longings and practices and trusting that their might be a communal act of intention and practices beyond a shared religious belonging or beyond a shared religious creed. This differs from communal official interreligious prayer where adherents from different religions come together. They may pray together or pray next to each other, most often as reaction to public traumatic events. In the dialogue with God the dialogue partners share a common direction and addressee, sometimes more explicitly a common longing. Actually, this is the common starting point of communal interreligious and intercultural prayer that adherents from different religions address the deity as they all see the world in face of God. The focus implies to be less concerned with the specific way of talking about God. Erich Zenger stressed in a public speech on inner Christian ecumenical encounter the need for a common dialogue to God not just a common God-talk.<sup>21</sup> I would like to expand it to interreligious dialogue in the act of praying to God. The common dialogue to God is not preoccupied with doctrinal and metaphysical questions about the identity of God and opens ways beyond the modern "same God" discussion.<sup>22</sup>

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19 The Jewish Amida prayer has its name from the habitus: the act of standing – before God. In the *Liturgia horarum* (Liturgy of Hours) we stand up at certain instances and bow.

20 Cf. *Prade-Weiss, Violence* (2017).

21 To quote from a public speech of Erich Zenger in 2005: "Wir brauchen die gemeinsame Rede zu Gott!": "wir brauchen nicht nur eine gemeinsame Rede über Gott. Wir brauchen vor allem eine gemeinsame Rede zu Gott! Im gemeinsamen Gebet zum biblischen Gott. Ich persönlich wünsche mir, solange sich eine eucharistische Gemeinschaft verbietet und ausschließt davon, eine Intensivierung des gemeinsamen Betens und Singens. Etwa der biblischen Psalmen als Realisierung von Kirchenökumene." Cf. <https://www.domradio.de/audio/vortrag-von-erich-zenger-von-gott-reden> (accessed on January 29, 2020).

22 It is important to note that the claim that Christians pray to the same God as Jews is much more obvious to state from within a Christian standpoint than from a Jewish.

Instead it focuses on the common longing as humans and likewise on the act of praying. In this vein Abraham Heschel identifies a shared vision among Jews and Christians, that there is a divine reality concerned with the destiny of humankind: “The misery and fear of alienation from God make Jews and Christian cry together”.<sup>23</sup> According to Alon Goshen-Gottstein, shifting the ground of the discussion among Jews and Christians from theological doctrine to worship might be helpful, despite differences and it hints to the identity of God.<sup>24</sup> Altogether, the proposed avenue through the Psalm prayers in the case of the Abrahamic tradition assumes a common direction.

This dialogue with the Other (God) encompasses the dialogue with the others, adherents from other religions and traditions. In interreligious studies these kinds of communal prayer are called “dialogue of the heart” next to the “dialogue of faith” and the “dialogue of the hands”.<sup>25</sup> The expression dialogue of the heart generates other connotations. Within biblical anthropology the heart stands for the inner self as center of reflection and emotion likewise.<sup>26</sup> According to the rabbinical Tradition Sifre on Deut 11:13 the love of God is conceived as prayer. Prayer is worship with the heart (b Taanit 2a). Prayer as the dialogue with the heart within one’s own tradition becomes a first step towards interreligious dialogue of the heart. Dialogue of the heart seems possible even if the different religious groups argue on other instances on the nature of God.

### 2.2.2 Psalm (Prayer) and Their Dialogical Traits

Psalm prayer attests a dialogical nature concerning the relation to God, to oneself and the other including the inanimate world. In a metaphysical way the alterity of God constitutes a space which may serve for dialogue in general. I start by highlighting the inner dialogue as sketched in the Psalter. The I speaker often address the inner self with questions. In a repetitive

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23 Heschel, *Island*, 118. He goes on “while dogmas and forms of worship are divergent, God is the same” (*ibid.*, 122).

24 Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *God Between Christians and Jews – Is it the Same God?* Paper presented at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture consultation “The Same God?” sponsored by the McDonald Agape Foundation cf. [http://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/goshen\\_final\\_paper\\_0.pdf](http://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/goshen_final_paper_0.pdf) (accessed on March 16, 2020).

25 For this tripartite typology of interreligious dialogue: Küster, *Einführung* (2011), 137–139. Schreier, *Possibilities* (2005) 27, who holds a chair for Vatican Two Theology, refers to the fourfold map of interaction on interreligious dialogue from the Vatican from 1984: (1) dialogue of life; (2) dialogue of action; (3) dialogue of theological exchange; (4) dialogue of mystical experience. He adds a fifth form “wherein people of different traditions gather together to pray (although they may or may not pray together)” (28).

26 Cf. Janowski, Herz (2015).

style, the speaker questions him/herself in Ps 42:6, 12; 43:5: “What are you cast down my inner self and so troubled over against myself?” The Hebrew word which is used here for the inner self (נפש *nefeš*) stands for the bodily seat of emotions and desire. In this same Psalm the speaker addresses God with urgent questions as the I sees himself in distress and surrounded by enemies: “Why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 42:10; cf. 43:2). The Psalm quotes their questions that echoes the doubts of the speaker him/herself: “Where is your God?” (Ps 42:2).<sup>27</sup> The identity construction is a dialogical one as the person who prays defines him/herself through the act of praying itself. This idea is verbalized in Ps 109:4: “In return for my love they are my adversaries. However, I am prayer”. Regardless of affliction by pain, poverty or hate speech (Ps 109:3, 4a) the lyrical I keeps on praying and conceives his/her identity constituted by the dialogue to God. The dialogical relations as sketched by the Psalms are multilayered and encompass self-reflectivity.<sup>28</sup> Questions from third parts reflect or initiate inner dialogue. They serve didactic ends and are characteristic for wisdom literature. Psalm 107 is framed by an opening imperative to give thanks and it concludes on a double didactic note. A disclosed speaker addresses bystanders and in a sense the readers. The final question stimulates study and reflection: “Who is wise? He may give heed to this! They shall understand the deeds of the lovingkindness of JHWH” (Ps 107:43).<sup>29</sup> The question does not identify the wise but invites all to be wise. Questions in general mirror doubt, critique and longing as part of the possibility for a change. They express the ambivalence and vulnerability of human existence.

The most challenging for interreligious prayers may be the way the Psalms speak about the enemies. I can touch it only briefly. The Psalms address the conflicts and their parties directly.<sup>30</sup> In some Psalms the speech of the adversaries is cited and they are addressed publicly.<sup>31</sup> Psalms like Ps 9/10; 109; 137 confront the hostile other and their oppressive actions. Pre-catory expressions and lament reflect the struggles the I-speaker is facing. The speaker calls upon God to retribute righteousness. These Psalms do not call for speakers’ vengeance, as Erich Zenger and others have argued.<sup>32</sup> In first instance the Psalms of enmity, as he calls them, uncover violence and express sensitivity to the oppression of others. Indeed, the speech acts in

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27 Cf. *Rahn, Frage* (2018).

28 *Frevel, Selbstbeobachtung* (2017).

29 For this Psalm in general cf. *Móricz, Ethics* (2020).

30 This stands in contrast to our common interreligious prayer practice where we avoid to speak about conflicts or even conflicting parties.

31 Cf. on the issue *Erbele-Küster, Lesen* (2001).

32 Cf. *Zenger, Vengeance* (1996) addressing the issue how to use Psalms in the Christian prayer praxis.

the Psalms are expressive and passionate, in some instances even outrageous as the situation is unbearable for the speaker. The German born Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai phrases the need for emotive prayers like this: "But if we plead quietly, God will think that we don't need peace and quiet" (from *Gods Change, Prayers Remain forever*, Stanza 13). According to the final Psalter Hallel besides protest and plea, praise as aesthetic and cosmic praxis is boisterous alike.

### 2.2.3 God, the Psalter and Praise as Third Space

Praise is according to the Psalms the essential form of communal and individual dialogical communication with God. It constitutes the relation to God: The lyrical I of Ps 109:1 characterizes God as "God of my praise". This personal God-talk is rooted in the struggle for survival: "God of my praise be not deaf to the accusations of the evildoers!" (Ps 109:1). Praise stems out of protest. Hence praise is not just one expression of prayer among others, it is an act which embraces and presupposes the other expressions and dialogical relations. Finally, due to its nonfunctional and cosmic nature praise opens up a new avenue for the dialogue with each other.

The very act of praise is conceived as God's residing place as expressed in a poignant poetic phrase in Ps 22:4: "But you the holy one, you are enthroned on the praise of Israel" (cf. Ps 102:13). This verse envisages God's residing place as poetry and prayer. In a sense it reflects on the function of the Psalter as a whole making use of the feminine plural of the noun *tehillah* (תְּהִלָּה) for prayer/psalm song. In this conception of God spatial and poetical conceptions converge: God's habitat is defined by humans' poetry. This idea has repercussions on the people whose prayer is as stable that it serves as throne for God. The verse reminds me as a non-Jew that the Psalter of the Israelites function as vicarious recitation of the Psalms for the creation, to allude once again to Erich Zenger's interpretation: It sketches a vision that the *Tehillim* (Hebrew for Psalms/Psalter) and the recitation of the Psalms serves as a means in participating in God's Holiness.<sup>33</sup>

The aesthetical dimension of praise implies that praise serves no specific function. The opening exclamation in Ps 147 expresses this idea "Halleluja! As it is good to hymn to our God. As it is sweet: lovely praise"

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33 Cf. Zenger, *Psalter* (1998), 48: "Den Texten wohnt die rettende, schützende, tröstende und vergebende Gegenwart Gottes inne" (with a reference to Ps 22:4). "Im und mit dem Rezitieren des Psalms ruft der Beter die Gotteswirklichkeit herbei, die "eigentlich" im und vom Tempel erwartet wird." (Ibid., 35–36.) This idea is reflected in the daily Psalm prayers in the church of the Dormitio Abbey on Mount Zion which provides stabilization in time and space.

(V. 1).<sup>34</sup> The imperative to praise God has the utmost range of addressee: persons and groups imagined as present like the nations, humans and animals alike, even encompassing the inanimate world. This becomes most obvious in the final Hallel Psalter composition. As mentioned at the outset of the article the perspective moves there from protest and dialog with oneself and others towards a communal, even cosmic, act of praise (Ps 148; 150).<sup>35</sup> This all-encompassing praise is considered as a most basic human form of existence: breathing. In the act of praise lament and the plea for righteousness as expressed in the Psalter, as a whole is present. Praise expresses that humans, the world in general, is related to God who is conceived as liberator, creator and sustainer of life. The practice of praise recalls humans that they are not self-made.<sup>36</sup> In these descriptions of God those seeking for justice may join, as the preceding Ps 146 underlines or even the whole cosmos next to the cattle and the birds, kings of the earth and all people are listed (Ps 148:10–11). Hence, praise units beyond dialogue with the other. The act of praise as non-functional communal (God) talk and the Psalter (*tehillim*) itself opens a third space as a meeting place.

### 3. Contested Places and Figures and the Shared Space Provided by the Psalter

This intriguing concept of Ps 22:4 that praise constitutes space for God's presence shall be contrasted with the challenges of interreligious dialogue. I shall explore along exemplary shared and contested issues how the Psalter may offer ways to negotiate with these.

#### 3.1 Shared and Dispossessed Traditions, Shared and Conflicting Longings

Abrahamic religions share common traditions such as the Psalter. Erich Zenger and others argued for a conscious reception of the Psalms as Jewish Texts within the Christian Tradition. When Psalms are read in Christian communities one has to make audible that Christians do this along with Jewish people and that the texts were handed down to us. This may avoid

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34 Eder, *Identifikationspotentiale* (2018), 185: "Das Loben Gottes ist nicht nur angemessen, nützlich und notwendig, sondern auch ein ästhetisches Geschehen."

35 Cf. Neumann, *Israel* (2018), 301–338.

36 Cf. Brueggeman, *Praise* (1988).

the appropriation as a form of dispossession. Indeed, we share common prayers however, we do not pray in common and our intention and interpretation may be different even conflicting. Still adherents of both religions are connected as Abraham Heschel in his visionary essay in 1966 “No religion is an island” proclaims:

The crisis engulfs all of us. The misery and fear of alienation from God make Jew and Christian cry together.<sup>37</sup> Horizons are wider, dangers are greater [...] No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Spiritual betrayal on the part of one of us affects the faith of all of us. Views adopted in one community have an impact on other communities. Today religious isolationism is a myth.

To underline his position, he cited Ps 119:63: “I am a companion of all who fear Thee, of those who keep Thy precepts.” This explains further the above mentioned argument that the common interreligious and intercultural ground is the common direction of our human longings beyond differences in God-talk.

### 3.2 David as Implied Reader and as a Shared Figure in the Abrahamic Tradition

A lot of Psalms connect in their superscription the prayer to David; while some have a narrative superscription who describe a situation of affliction. “The malleable Davidic persona” stands for the king in past and future and for the “everyman in the present” for whole Israel and the individual, as Alan Cooper puts it.<sup>38</sup> For him this is likewise a characteristic trait of traditional Jewish reception history. Through David, story and Psalm are intertwined, and this serves to teach a lesson. In Medieval times in the Islamic tradition, David has been regarded as exemplary pious and as prophet to whom the Psalms (*Zabūr*) has been revealed.<sup>39</sup>

Already in its early reception and translation history, this link to David became reinforced. The Septuagint ascribes thirteen more Psalms to Da-

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37 Heschel, *Island*, 117, 118. This resonates even more in the process of finishing this article as it coincides with the global crises induced by the spread of COVID-19.

38 Cf. Cooper, *Interpretation* (2014), 258.255; see idem, *Aspects* (2018) and *Erbele-Küster, Lesen* (2001).

39 Cf. Irving, *Music* (2016), 55: “As Muslims and Christians began to learn more about each other’s religions in the early modern period, certain points of commonality were recognized [...] the use of music to worship the God of Abraham occupied a middle ground that could be shared, and the figure of David and his Psalms in this respect became an object of agreement, debate, or speculation.”

vid.<sup>40</sup> Last but not least this strong link with David has fostered the Christian reception history of the Psalms in their messianic reading.<sup>41</sup> The figure of David plays hence an ambiguous role and has led to contested claims on space as the conference participants could experience next to the conference venue at David's tomb on Mount Zion. The tomb is venerated by Jews, Christians and Muslims as it is a site of prayer up today.<sup>42</sup> This leads us to the next issue: space.

### 3.3 Prayer, Place and Space

Prayers are oriented in a spiritual, mental, physical and even political way, like our prayer houses. The orientation of praying (Psalms) takes place in time and space. Place designates the way we conceptualize and inhabit our environment. The conception of place requires us hence to think about the territorial claims often included when we pray the Psalms making reference to concrete place in our act of praying. I would like to demonstrate this along a few examples, mostly from the reception history of the Psalms.

The Psalter itself reflects on the importance of place in several instances. One example is the voice in Ps 137 who asks: "How shall we sing the song of JHWH in a foreign land?" (Ps 137:4). This yearning from Ps 137 echoes at Auschwitz, in Negro spirituals, and in Postcolonial Theology likewise.<sup>43</sup> The prayer is uttered out of the diasporic existence and the barbaric oppression. The Psalter as a whole reflects the life beyond the holy place in the diaspora and the destruction of the First Temple. It includes a transformative interpretation of the temple as concrete geographical place into a metaphor for the presence of God.<sup>44</sup> In reciting Psalms God becomes present. Nevertheless, even when the temple becomes a metaphor for God's presence the reference to a concrete inhabited and lived place does not get lost. It is transparent to both the historical context and the context of the reader.

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40 Cf. *Erbele-Küster, Lesen* (2001), 86–94.

41 This is reflected in quite some articles in the present volume.

42 Cf. for the history of veneration *Limor, Space*, 224–228. According to her the act of locating and veneration the place of David's tomb starts within early Christianity. She sees a rise of Christian veneration of the place linked to ceremonies held for David at Mount Zion (attested in the second half of the fourth century) and later in the Church. Muslim texts from 10<sup>th</sup> century cite this Christian tradition; and finally Jewish people venerated from the middle ages onward the place.

43 For an overview of Jewish and Christian Reception history of Ps 137: *Gillingham, Psalm 137* (2015).

44 Cf. *Zenger, Psalter*, 42, with reference to Ps 27:4.

Interestingly, the only direct quotation of a Psalm in the Quran alludes to land. Quran Sure 21:105 cites Ps 37:29. It reads “And we have decreed in the Book of Psalms (*Zabūr*) – after admonition (Angelika Neuwirth ‘after praise’) – that the righteousness shall inherit the earth.”<sup>45</sup> It would be of interest to consider this verse further and ask if we follow the translation by Angelika Neuwirth what role praise, and respectively the Psalms, may play in our mutual encounter.<sup>46</sup>

The initial statement of the paragraph that the “orientation of praying (Psalms) takes place in time and space” undergoes a transformation if the concepts by the Psalter itself are taken into account. The Psalter itself utters Ps 122:6 “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!”<sup>47</sup> The prayer unites the different religions, despite it may also linked with contesting views of the other and on the city. Taking up this idea the Jewish Theological Seminary/Milstein Center hosted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2018 an Interfaith Evening of Music and Prayer under the motto “Songs for the Holy City: Muslim Turks, Christian Armenians, Israeli Jews, New York Jews, Muslims, and Christians, were present.”<sup>48</sup> Songs were sung in many languages, all in praise of the oneness of the holy city, Jerusalem.

Indeed, the orientation of praying takes place in time and space thereby oriented towards Gods eternity and holy place. This links the contested and lived place to Gods place; hence it links place with the concept of third space. This concept of the holy place and the Psalms as a given text may

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45 Saleh, *Psalms* (2014), 282.

46 Angelika Neuwirth stressed in her lecture on the conference the doxological dimension of the Quran.

47 This has been the motto of the concluding evening prayer at the Dormitio Abbey on 31 of July 2019 to whom all participants of the conference had been invited to. Rabbi Burton Visotzky, Appleman Professor of Midrash and Interreligious Studies at Jewish Theological Seminary/New York and director of the Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue has composed the following prayer in this line in 2013: “Adonai open our mouths to sing Your praises. / On this weekend when His Holiness Pope Francis prays for peace with Presidents Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas, / When the Jewish community has just celebrated receiving Your Torah; the Catholic community celebrates the Feast of Pentecost; and the Muslim community counts down the days to Ramadan; / We ‘pray for the peace of Jerusalem’./ We join our voices in prayer with other People of the Book to pray together as one: / for peace between Israel and Palestine; / for peace among all humanity; / and for fulfillment of the words of your prophet: / ‘Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore’./ Lift high the Menorah and shine Your light upon all who pray for peace. Amen.” Cf. <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/node/18596>.

48 Cf. <http://www.jtsa.edu/songs-for-the-holy-city> with a video of the evening. Cf. the Interreligious project Tehillim in Frankfurt/Germany (<https://ircf-frankfurt.de/> accessed on January 01, 2020).

provide a third space while being aware of our contested and lived spaces. Nelly Sachs, a German born Jewish poet (1891–1970), captures this tension concurrently while transcending it in her poem “Chor der unsichtbaren Dinge”. The poem opens with addressing the wailing wall: “Klagemauer Nacht/Eingegraben in dir sind die Psalmen des Schweigens.” (Wailing wall Night/Carved in you are the Psalms of silence).<sup>49</sup> The Psalms of protest have become silent. However, the unspeakable<sup>50</sup> is situated to a concrete place. Concurrently, she opens in her poem a space to reside in. Her petition to the wailing wall/western wall in Jerusalem makes transparent the Jewish concept of Makom. Makom as referring to a geographical place can likewise stand for God.<sup>51</sup> Genesis Rabbah 68:8 explains this: “Why is the Holy one, blessed be he, called Makom? Because he is the place of the world. “Perhaps the rabbis, who felt themselves to be in some sort of exile, and therefore invested space with transcendence and God with materiality”, as Barbara Mann expounds.<sup>52</sup> Hence, so called spiritual readings of the Psalter, which has been often favored in Christian circles, cannot solve the problem of contested and shared places, neither on a political-religious level nor on a theological level as the concept of God is involved. However, poetics might help to recall in interreligious and intercultural settings that the lived and longed for place is linked to God which transcends human limited conceptions. Last but not least, the Psalter as a literary poetical text may serve as a third space. The text in its alterity offers its readers a sanctuary.

#### 4. Postlude: Psalm 116, Love Lyrics and Jerusalem<sup>53</sup>

Psalm 116 opens in a uniquely way as love lyrics and ends on praise of Jerusalem in a public note.<sup>54</sup> An exclamation and confession “I love!” (אֶהְבֶּה) inaugurates the Psalm. According to the Masoretic reading, the verb has no object. Interpreters tried to insert one: the name of God. The state-

49 Cf. *Sachs*, *Fahrt* (1988), 62; for a translation of the poem as a whole into English: <https://nellysachsenglish.wordpress.com/2013/06/15/chorus-of-the-invisible-things/>.

50 For the category of the unspeakable: *Herman*, *Trauma* (1992), 1.

51 Cf. the history of Amsterdam: the city has received as a nickname *mokum*, the local Yiddish word for place, designating as a new *Heimat* for Jews in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

52 *Mann*, *Space* (2015), 183.

53 Cf. *Erbele-Küster*, *Atempause* (2012). On the occasion of the memorial conference in Münster/Germany Jerusalem eclipsed my eye.

54 Cf. *Vincent*, *Théologie* (2000).

ment can be understood as characteristic for what is prayer according to the Psalms as the verse goes on: "I love as indeed God has heard my voice, my supplication for favor." Because God, who is present in his name, as the Psalm underlines, is the one who listens to supplications and desperate strivings, one may have a relationship to the world described by love.

It is an imperative to praise God in the public and in a concrete place: "In the courts of JHWHs house in your midst, o Jerusalem: Hallelujah!" (Ps 116:19). The city and all its inhabitants shall join the praise as participating in the breath of the world. The vision is that all are united in this act of Hallelujah. This may become possible if adherents from different religions start the dialogue with uttering the first words of the Psalm: "I love".

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