The Christological Reception of Psalms in Hebrews

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Martin Luther read and understood the Old Testament from the perspective of the New Testament. For Luther, the two parts of the Bible form one unity. "What drives home Christ" serves as the key for understanding and interpreting both Testaments. The Psalms, especially familiar to Luther because of the monastic liturgy of the Hours, became a central text both for his belief and scholarly Bible studies. Because of the Psalms' form and dialogical character, they have been prayed time and again by Jews and Christians up until the present day. Martin Luther asserts that,

> Hence also it comes to pass that the Psalter is the Book of all the Saints; and every one, whatsoever his case may be, find therein Psalms and words which suit his case so perfectly, that they might seem to have been set down solely for his sake, ...[1]

Since the Psalms transmit experience, one can always find a Psalm to suit one's own case. Believers can see their own lives through the psalmist's eyes and bring their lives to God with their words; Jesus's life, too, can be seen and interpreted with the help of the Psalms. In his Preface to the Psalter (1531), Martin Luther wrote,

> Yea, the Psalter ought to be precious and dear, were it for nothing else but the clear promise it holds forth respecting Christ's death and resurrection, and its prefiguration of His kingdom and of the whole estate and system of Christianity, insomuch that it might well be entitled a Little Bible, wherein everything contained in the entire Bible is beautifully and briefly comprehended, and compacted into an enchiridion or Manual.[2]

[1] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revised Edition of the German Psalter (1931)," at **www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/martinlutherpsalter.htm**.

[2] Martin Luther, "Preface," in *WA* DB 10/1, 98, 20–22, at **www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/martinlutherpsalter.htm**.

However, the question of whether this way of reading the Psalms is legitimate is disputed in publications on the hermeneutics of Hebrews.[3] Two different aspects are discussed with regard to Martin Luther and Hebrews. First comes the question of whether the Christological reception of the Old Testament withdraws their Holy Scripture from the Jews, since they do not understand Jesus as the announced Messiah. Secondly, this Christological interpretation is challenged because it deprives the Psalms of their historical sense. New hermeneutical models can help us to approach these questions. According to reader response criticism, the meaning of a text emerges during the act of reading.[4] Understanding and interpreting a text are always determined by the reader's worldview and interests. The historical sense, often equated with the author's intention, cannot be regarded as the one and only, and therefore normative, meaning of a text. Furthermore, neither the author's intention nor the interpretation of the first readers can be grasped today. Thus, a text does not have only a single meaning, but offers potential meaning for different readers to understand it in different ways in relation to their worldview. In a nutshell, one text can have a multitude of true interpretations.[5]

The author of Hebrews understands the Psalms from the perspective of his Christian belief and he does so in a hermeneutical way.[6] He is famil-

[3] For a brief survey, see Angela Rascher, *Schriftauslegung und Christologie im Hebräerbrief*, BZNW 153 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 35–37.

[4] Cf. Gerhard Haefner, "Rezeptionsästhetik," in Ansgar Nünning (ed.), *Literaturwissenschaftliche Theorien, Modelle und Methoden. Eine Einführung* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2004), 107–118; Ralf Schneider, "Methoden rezeptionstheoretischer und kognitionswissenschaftlicher Ansätze," in Vera Nünning/Ansgar Nünning (eds), *Methoden der literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Textanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche J.B. Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2010), 71–90. Constitutive is the work of Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula. Die Mitarbeit der Interpretation in erzählenden Texten* (München: Carl Hanser, 1987). Concerning a theological evaluation, cf. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Einführung in die theologische Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 82–84; 102–105.

[5] Nevertheless, this implies that misunderstandings of a text can be identified. Reader response theories do not necessarily imply that "anything goes" in matters of interpretation.

[6] Cf. Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 23–25; Michael Theobald, "Vom Text zum 'lebendigen Wort' (Hebr 4,12). Beobachtungen zur Schrifthermeneutik des Hebräerbriefs," in Christof Landmesser, Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Hermann Lichtenberger (eds), *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift*, BZNW 86 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 751–90. In detail, Rascher, op. cit. (note 3); Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics. The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge et al: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

iar with the language and the worldview of the Psalms and uses them to understand the story of Jesus Christ. At the same time, his belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah determines his understanding so that the old words take on new meaning. The hermeneutical approach of Hebrews acknowledges what reader response theories have pointed out: while texts shape our worldview, our worldview shapes the interpretation of texts. Therefore, if one text can have a plurality of meanings, then both the Jewish and the Christological interpretations of the Psalms are possible true interpretations, depending on the interpreter's perspective. The hermeneutical consequence of this insight is that the Christological interpretation of the Psalms does not imply that the Jewish interpretation is obsolete. According to modern reception-oriented hermeneutical theories, the Jewish as well as the Christian readings of the Psalms can be understood as true interpretations of the same text. The author of Hebrews allows the words of God to speak afresh "today" to his Jewish and non-Jewish readers without denying that these words were originally addressed to the Jewish people only.[7]

The Letter to the Hebrews—if the designation as "letter" is appropriate at all[8]—generally hampered a historical interpretation concentrating on the author and his intention. This epistle does not begin with an epistolary preface including a salutation and the naming of author and recipients, although it has an epistolary conclusion (Heb 13:20–25). The author of Hebrews is unknown, as are the circumstances, the precise date and location of its composition.[9] Obviously, the author does not want to focus on himself but on the voice of God. He integrates himself into the group of listeners; he is part of the "we" who listen to God's Word.[10] By presenting the scriptural words as words spoken by God, these words are spoken with ultimate authority. "Today" God's voice itself is to be heard again. For the author of Hebrews, the Psalms function like lenses through which he perceives Jesus Christ. This paper will analyze the interpretative program of Hebrews on the basis of its two opening chapters; they depict the worldview of Hebrews, providing the foundation for the author's further Christological and paraenetical reflections. The interesting question is how the author understands Jesus' life with the help of the Psalms, fully aware that one can see things in different ways.

[7] Hebrews does not argue polemically against Israel. Cf. Martin Karrer, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, vol. I, chapter 1,1–5,10, ÖTBNT 20.1 (Gütersloh/Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), 111–14; Martin Karrer, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, vol. II, chapter 5,11–13,25, ÖTBNT 20.2 (Gütersloh/Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 101–105.
[8] Cf. the genre of Hebrews, Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 13–21.
[9] Note Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 30–33, who depicts the assets of an interpretation of Hebrews focusing on text pragmatics and the reception by the readers.
[10] Ibid., 43.

One can "see" things in the sense of perception and/or of apprehension or interpretation (Heb 3:9f; see also Mk 4:12). The author differentiates between sensory perception and interpretation and, gradually, wants to enable his listeners to see their reality from a Christological perspective formed by the language and the worldview of the Psalms.

The social and historical situation of the recipients of Hebrews can only be deduced from the text itself and therefore remains hypothetical.[11] Nonetheless, there are good reasons for assuming that the audience—probably Jewish and non-Jewish Christians—is in danger of becoming lax in their commitment to Jesus Christ, possibly because of the delay of the *parousia*.[12] Furthermore, the listeners suffer from social stigmatization and persecution, probably including public ridicule and imprisonment (Heb 10:32–34).[13] The fact that the Christian community worshipped a crucified man as God was a *scandalon* both for Jews and Greeks. God's messenger coming in the name of God and representing God cannot die by means of punishment reserved exclusively for criminals. According to Deuteronomy 21:22f, for Jews a crucified person dies as one cursed and forsaken by God. Jesus' death invalidated his claim to speak in the name of God. A mock crucifix, discovered in 1857 in the ruins of the imperial palaces on the Palatine hill in Rome, illustrates what non-Jews thought about Jesus' death.[14] It shows a crucified man with the head of an ass or a horse and a human figure kneeling before the cross. The Greek inscription explains the scene: "Alexamenos worships his God." The early believers in Christ had to explain how Jesus' human life, including his shameful death, was compatible with his announcing the kingdom of God and their hope that Jesus Christ would eternally reign with God. In Hebrews 2:8–9[15] this problem is addressed:

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[11] On the presumptions concerning the addressees, see Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 12f; Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 98–101. Concerning the feasible social setting of writer and audience, cf. Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB 36 (New York: Yale University Press, 2001), 64–79.

[12] Karrer even speaks of a liminal theology in Hebrews; Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 48–53. Contemporary literary criticism points out that the only audience we can actually know are the "implied readers" that the text itself creates. On the concept of "implied reader," see especially Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[13] Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 49.

[14] Cf. Fritz Rienecker and Gerhard Maier (eds), *Lexikon zur Bibel* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, [6]2006), 943–45.

[15] To a large extent, the translations of Hebrews follow Attridge, op. cit. (note 6). The italic script type shows where Hebrews uses citations or allusions to the Old Testament. Concerning the different forms of reference, cf. Rascher, op. cit. (note 3), 24–26.

> *subjecting all things under his feet."* Now in *subjecting all things to him*, God left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, 9 but we do see Jesus, who for a little while *was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor* because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

As believers look back at Jesus' life and death, they "see" his humanity, not his already present exaltation and reign, his sitting at God's right hand,[16] which is not perceptible with human senses (cf. Heb 11:26f). The listeners' life situations correspond to this dual perception of Jesus: They do not see themselves as companions of a heavenly calling, a position with honor and glory, but experience humiliation and social stigmatization (Heb 13:13f; cf. Heb 11:9; 12:1–3). How does the author help his listeners to perceive what they cannot see yet with earthly eyes? Where does he tell them to turn their attention?

THE WORLDVIEW IN HEBREWS—THE SPEAKING GOD (HEB 1:1–4)

The first verses of the text describe the worldview that is based on the Holy Scriptures of Judaism, especially the Psalms, as well as contemporary philosophy,[17] and it is within this framework that Hebrews develops its theology. The basic theme of Hebrews 1:1–4 is the speaking God, a leitmotif especially of the following chapters (Heb 1:1–5:10):

> Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Heb 1:1–4).

[16] The importance of this conception for the New Testament writers and early Christianity in general is clearly represented by Martin Hengel, "Sit at My Right Hand!," in Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 119–225.

[17] Cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 28–31, referring to the traditions which Hebrews shares, especially the parallels between Hebrews and the Hellenistic Judaism represented by Philo. Concerning spatial and temporal categories in Hebrews, compared with Platonic and apocalyptic conceptions, see Koester, op. cit. (note 11), 96–104.

The central subject of the Greek sentence is the "speaking God." God spoke through the prophets to the fathers;[18] now God speaks through the Son. Both God's speech and the living of the Son comprise time and place. Christ's future possession of all things by God's grace is even mentioned before Christ's role in creation (Heb 1:1–2). The Son is described as the radiance[19] of God's glory[20] and the representation of his essence, creating and sustaining the universe, mediating God's Word and effecting redemption. The syntactical and rhetorical climax of the sentence is the affirmation that the Son himself took a seat at God's right hand, expressed by a finite verb in the midst of a series of participle constructions (Heb 1:3–4).[21] "The focus here, as regularly in Hebrews, is not on the inauguration of Christ's position, but on the fact of its superiority. Christ within the supernal world has a position higher than any other member of the world."[22] In Hebrews 1:4, reference to Christ's position of honor and power is made through the first allusion to Psalm 110:1.[23] Regarding the different aspects characterizing the Son, Hebrews emphasizes the sitting of the Son at God's right hand. This presumption is confirmed by Hebrews 8:1: The author proves that "the main point in what has been said, is that we have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right of the throne of the majesty in the heavens."[24] The Son reigns with God eternally and his leadership is powerful. Between heaven and earth, he acts as a mediator, speaking God's Word to human beings and making an approach to God's throne possible.

[18] Karrer points out that Jewish and non-Jewish believers are addressed by Hebrews. There is no clear hint that the parallelism in Hebrews 1:1f. is antithetic. God's speech, first through the prophets and secondly through the Son, offers the same message of salvation. At various points in Hebrews, the author suggests that God's message of God spoken through the prophets has direct and special relevance for contemporary hearers of the word. See Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 111–13.

[19] Cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 42f., concerning the meaning of the Greek ἀπαύγασμα.

[20] Glory (δόξα) is a common designation of the divine reality. Cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 43f.

[21] The author of Hebrews displays his Christology without any explicit reference to the resurrection of Christ. Instead, the author emphasizes on the one hand the atoning death and on the other hand his exaltation to God's right hand; cf. Hengel, op. cit. (note 16), 152f.

[22] Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 47.

[23] Concerning Psalm 110 (Ps 109 LXX), Thiselton speaks of the "key frame of reference" of Hebrews. Antony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdman Co, 2009), 81. It is quoted in Hebrews 1:3; 10:12; 12:2 and alluded to more often. The author of Hebrews probably used a version of the LXX text. For convenience, I cite the Psalms corresponding to the counting of the MT.

[24] The designation of God recalls Hebrews 1:3. The Greek term μεγαλωσύνη is used for God in the New Testament only in Hebrews 1:3; 8:1 und Judas 1:25.

In Hebrews 1:1–4, the author opens up a wide perspective: the readers "see" both the earthly and the heavenly reality; they "see" the past, the present and the future. God is characterized as a speaking God, speaking to us through the medium of human language, through human beings such as the prophets and, finally, through the Son (Heb 1:1–2). Throughout his writing, the author demonstrates how God's voice can still be heard in the presence of the writing and hearing of Hebrews. The Word of God that is written down in the Holy Scriptures is now heard anew in the present situation of the audience. Especially in Hebrews 1–2, the author does not at all interpret, or only scarcely interprets, these words. Obviously, he is convinced that the words of God spoken in the past still have something to say in the present situation. The God who spoke to the fathers through the prophets is the same God who speaks anew through the Son (Heb 1:1–4). This is why the author is not interested in the written word, but in the new meaning that the words of God disclose when they are spoken and heard today. God makes Godself understandable in the present situation and therefore understanding can take place (Heb 1:1f). Like Luther, the author of Hebrews is well aware of the fact that the compliance of the listeners with the Christian worldview cannot be achieved by rational reasoning, but only through the Holy Spirit who brings the Word to the heart of the hearers (Heb 6:3). Through signs and miracles, God shows the effectiveness of God's words even if they are delivered through such human mediums as Christian preachers (Heb 2:3f).

Surprisingly, the author of Hebrews avoids the common introductory formula "it is written" (γέγραπται).[25] While he is not interested in when and by whom something was written (cf. Heb 2:6), this observation does not imply that the author did not know about the origin and the original contexts of his citations (cf. Heb 9:20; 12:21). In fact, it proves how he understands the words of God: God still speaks today by means of the scriptural words. In this new context, these words continue to explicate God's saving will, but they also obtain a new meaning since God now speaks through the Son to listeners in a different situation. Thus, God is faithful to God's promises without being bound to the meaning God's words might have had in the past (cf. Heb 3:7f, 15; 4:7). The Word of God is meaningful because its meaning is not the same once and forever. Because of this insight, the author of Hebrews can quote words from the Scriptures—words written before Jesus' birth, to talk about Jesus and his saving role.

[25] Hebrews uses γράφειν only once in Hebrews 10:7. Concerning the OT citations and the special form of quoting in Hebrews, cf. Theobald, op. cit. (note 6), 755–65; Koester, op. cit. (note 11), 116f.

The Son as the visible reflection of God's glory (Heb 1:5–14)

The medium of God's speaking in the present, "today," is the Son (Heb 1:2.3f), who is more than the angels or such prophets as Moses (Heb 2:2f; 3:5f), who are also God's messengers. Jesus is not only God's agent of revelation; he is the medium of God's glory (Heb 1:3) and the incarnation of the divine reality who has the power to impress others.[26] He atones for our sins and, in the end, leads all believers to glory (cf. Heb 2:10). The Son even reigns with God and thus is far superior to the angels.

Several quotations from the Psalms, presented as God's words to and about his Son (Heb 1:5–14) and reasoning why the Son is superior to the angels, follow the skillfully elaborated introduction. In Hebrews 1:5, God is cited with the words of Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, providing the validation for the title "Son." In their original context, both verses belong to the concept of kingship in Israel, and the metaphor of the son expresses an intimate relationship between God and the king of Israel.[27] By using further scriptural words (Dt 32:43; Ps 97:7; 104:4; 45:7f; 102:26–28),[28] God reveals the role of God's Son: God predicts an angelic homage of the Son (Heb 1:6), his eternal and righteous lordship and his anointment with the oil of gladness (Heb 1:8f.). Furthermore, God confirms the portrayal of Christ as agent of creation, expressed already in the exordium (Heb 1:10; cf. Heb 1:3), and approves his eternal existence. God addresses his Son with the titles "God" and "Lord" (Heb 1:9f)! The passage ends with a rhetorical question quoting the words of Psalm 110:1 (Heb 1:13f; cf. Heb 1:5) about whether God ever said to an angel, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." That the Son has accepted God's mandate was already stated in Hebrews 1:3. God's explicit order authorizes the Son and, at the same time, the citation of Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1:13 discloses to the audience that the Son is acting in accordance with his Father.[29] The difference between the Son and the angels is grounded in Christ's status as Son (Heb 1:5) and in his exaltation to unique communion with God (1:13f).

The angels are messengers of God's words too, but they only convey messages according to God's commission. The Greek term διακονία/diakonia

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[26] Cf. in detail Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 120f.

[27] The proclamation of Christ as Son does not allude to the creation of a new status, but it is the proclamation and revelation of this status to the readers of Hebrews by God. Regarding the discussion of this interpretative problem, see Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 54f.

[28] Note the block diagram of OT citations in Hebrews, designating original speakers and readers as well as speakers and readers in Hebrews, in Theobald, op. cit. (note 6), 754.

[29] Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 153.

is to be understood as "fulfilling a mandate, doing something in commission" and can therefore be used as an antonym to ruling (cf. Mk 10:42–45). A sovereign can give orders, a διάκονος has to fulfill orders, he acts on behalf of someone else. Relating to the audience, a διάκονος may appear with authority. In the given context, the commitment is probably that the angels have to convey God's Word to the people in the name of God (cf. Heb 2:2).[30] As God's commissioned agents, they speak in the name of God to the believers. They speak with authority (cf. Heb 2:2), but their authority is a delegated one.[31] The thrust of the passage is not that the angels are at the service of the audience, but that they are God's messengers.[32] Whereas the angels are agents commissioned by God, the Son partakes in God's reign. He is even a sovereign himself, sitting at God's right hand.[33] That the Son is superior to the angels marks his status as Son of God with whom God speaks at eye level, as Hebrews 1 illustrates. Christ, like the angels, is an agent of revelation, but he is far superior to them.

The purpose of Hebrews 1 is to demonstrate the Son's superiority to the angels as a medium of God's revelation. Establishing the Son's authority, the author portrays the intimate relationship between the Father and Son. The exordium (Heb 1:1–4) portrays the speaking God as well as Christ's exalted position and enumerates his different functions as God's medium. The heavenly dialogue (Heb 1:5–14) illustrates Christ's status as the Son to whom God speaks face to face and with whom God reigns eternally.[34] Christ "thus is given *the most immediate form of communion with God,*

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[30] With the meaning "commissioned to convey the message of God" διακονία is used for example in Rom 11:13; 12:7; 2 Cor 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 1 Ti 1:12; Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 20:24. Cf. Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament*, WUNT II/226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

[31] Note Attridge's interpretation concerning Heb 2:2: "The word delivered through angels was 'valid' (βέβαιος), a legal term implying that the word entailed serious obligations. *The implications of that validity are now made explicit in the notice* that every 'transgression and disobedience' (παράβασις καὶ παρακοή) will be punished"; cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 65.

[32] Therefore Hebrews 1:14 and Hebrews 2:1–4 are not "superficially linked," Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 63, but the author is consequently dealing with the status and authority that his—different—messengers have.

[33] Based on this interpretation of διακονία, the comparison between the Son and the angels in Hebrews 1:13f. is not at all out of place; cf. for example Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 62 concerning the problems with the interpretation of Hebrews 1:13f. The author of Hebrews points out exactly that the Son can act sovereignly—he is the highest king at the right of God—whereas the angels only do what God has told them to do.

[34] Some scholars suppose that Hebrews is trying to correct an angelological Christology, but this thesis remains hypothetical; cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 51f.

which was comprehensible to a Jew based upon the texts of Old Testament."[35] The worldview that the author of Hebrews has presented in the exordium (Heb 1:1–4) is confirmed and proven by the words of God (Heb 1:5–14). The hearers or readers of Hebrews become witnesses of a heavenly conversation by which Christ is presented as the divine Son of God, as the agent of creation and of redemption, as the eternal sovereign, crowned with honor and praise. He mediates between God and people, delivering God's words and having made purification for sins. Without using the titles, the Son is thus characterized as God's apostle, i.e., God's sent messenger to preach the gospel and as high priest (Heb 3:1).[36]

Consequences for the hearings (Heb 2:1–4)

Hebrews 2:1–4 explicates the implications of Hebrews 1 for those who listen to and hear it. It continues the development of the theme of the speaking God, now focusing on the audience. The passage emphasizes the need to pay attention to the word delivered by different agents (cf. Heb 1:1–4), using legal terminology.[37] The message of the angels is "validated" and if the hearers disobey by transgressing God's orders, they will receive a "just recompense" (Heb 2:2). But if the addressees neglect the Son's message, they must fear eschatological judgment. The word delivered by the Son is characterized as a "great salvation" (Heb 2:3). The announcement of the salvific word takes place initially through the Son. After that, there are the first listeners who become witnesses preaching the word. Hebrews is not trying to authorize the message of these first—now called apostolic—figures by appealing to apostolic tradition and their status as eyewitnesses or

[35] Hengel, op. cit. (note 16), 148.

[36] Note that Christ is called mediator of a new and better covenant three times in Hebrews (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Christ is depicted as holding the two most important offices of Judaism and emerging Christianity: the office of high priest, mediating between God and God's people and the office of an apostle preaching the gospel. Plato, too, enumerates two religious offices, i.e., the priest or priestess and the exegete. The latter is responsible for the ever-new interpretation of holy scriptures; cf. Plato, Leges 759b–759e. In Plato, Politikos 290c, priests are described as mediating between Gods and humans. They are offering sacrifices as gifts in the name of the humans to the Gods and they are praying for help in favor of the humans.

[37] Concerning the legal character of the terminology of Hebrews 2:1–4, cf. Koester, (note 11), 206–209. He points to a Jewish tradition that angels acted as intermediaries at Sinai, conveying the Law in God's name, cf. Koester, (note 11), 205. Given this tradition, Hebrews 2:1–4 would note that disregarding the message of Christ is worse than disobeying the Law.

apostles. It is God who corroborates their testimony (Heb 2:4). God works "signs, wonders and powerful deeds" to confirm the message transmitted by human figures. Only the word of the Son is not in need of a godly authentication, because the glory of the Son's status and reign is the visible radiance of God's glory (cf. Heb 1:3). The Son himself is the incarnated word of God, the visible imprint of God's existence (Heb 1:2–4).

Jesus—for a little while partaker of human existence (Heb 2:5–18)

Quoting Psalm 8:4–6 (8:5–7 LXX) the author now focuses on the earthly life of Jesus (Heb 2:5–18). In its original context, Psalm 8 describes the unconfined dignity of human beings and their mandate to reign.[38] Hebrews uses this Psalm in order to look consciously at the incarnated Jesus and to describe—and interpret—his, for a little while,[39] low status[40] (Heb 2:5–9).

> (5) Now it was not to angels that he subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. (6) Someone bore testimony (to this) somewhere saying: *What is a man that you should remember him or a son of man that you watch over him?* (7) *You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; with glory and honor you have crowned him*; (8) *you have subjected everything under his feet.* Now in *subjecting all things*, he left nothing unsubjectable to him. At present we do not yet see all things subjected to him; (9) but we do behold the one who *was made for a little while lower than the angels*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death *crowned with glory and honor* so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone.

Surprisingly this citation—describing Jesus' human existence—also alludes to the glory and power of the Son. The citation ends with the hint that God has placed everything in subjection under God's feet, pointing to Hebrews 1:3.13 and alluding to Psalm 110:1; this Psalm runs like a red thread through the whole text of Hebrews and even through passages describing the human existence of Jesus. That the ruling of the Son is important for

[38] Cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen. 1. Teilband: Psalmen 1–59*, BKAT XV/1, 6. Auflage mit Nachträgen zur Literatur (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 212f. Here Kraus speaks of the miracle of the human existence, of the dignity of all human beings who are crowned with honor and glory by God, their creator.
[39] Concerning the differences between the Hebraic and the Greek version of the Psalm and the interpretation of the Greek βραχύ, cf. Koester, op. cit. (note 11), 214–17.
[40] The author does not speak of humiliation (κενόω κ.τ.λ.), like for example Phil 2:7, but he uses the Greek term ἐλαττόω wich means "to suffer loss"; cf. Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 171f; Koester, op. cit. (note 11), 216.

the author is especially indicated by the way in which he has embedded the citation. In Hebrews 2:5, the author declares that it was not to the angels that God subordinated the world to come. Without explicitly saying that it is subordinated to the Son, the author presumes that this is the case. In Hebrews 1, the glory and ruling power of the Son were illustrated at length in comparison with the role of the angels, so that the hearers are now well informed about the role of the Son. Furthermore, having finished the citation, the author again points to the reign of the Son (Heb 2:8b): he paraphrases the last proposition of the citation and clarifies it by ascertaining that God really placed everything—without exception—under the Son's dominion. But this reign is not visible for the audience or for himself, he admits. They can only see the low status—in comparison to the angels—of the Son, called for the first time by his name, Jesus.

The lower status of Christ in contrast to the angels probably refers not only to Jesus' death, but to his incarnation in general. In the LXX, the Psalm cited was understood anthropologically as referring to human dignity and honor.[41] It seems likely that the author of Hebrews too interprets the Psalm and, through its lenses, the life of Jesus as well, from this angle. For a little while, God had made him lower than the angels—he became a human being of flesh and blood, i.e., he shared human existence as it is. Nevertheless, God also crowned him with honor and glory as God honors human beings in general (cf. Ps 8). Both in Hebrews 2:6f and in Hebrews 2:14.17, the writer points especially to the fact that Jesus shared the human condition and therefore experienced the weakness and frailty of humankind, including suffering and death.[42] Obviously, the author of Hebrews takes the incarnation of Christ seriously. But based on the anthropology of Psalm 8, he probably has a positive idea of the human being. The only difference between Jesus and the other people is that he is the incarnated Son. Jesus became lower than the angels, but he is still an esteemed human person. The human existence of Jesus that is visible to the listeners explains why they have a congenial and helpful mediator—one who understands human suffering and weaknesses (Heb 2:17; 4:15f). This indicates that the incarnation per se has a positive effect on the relation between Jesus as godly mediator and the humans he will lead to God.

But the author of Hebrews does not stop here. He continues his argumentation. Because of suffering death, Jesus was crowned with honor and glory by God. This means that even the suffering and the death that Jesus

[41] Cf. Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 169, who pursues this understanding.

[42] The term "cross" is used only once in Hebrews 12:2. Hebrews speaks of the incarnation and even of the salvific death of the Son without special reference to the cross or even to the shameful way of dying.

had to experience—in contrast to Greco-Roman conceptions of honor and shame—are not dishonorable: God has crowned him with honor and glory.[43] As a further argument, the author adds that his death is salvific because of God's grace: Jesus experienced (or, put more precisely, "tasted") the bitterness of death vicariously for everyone.[44] Without God, Jesus' shameful death would have been the falsification of his status as Son and agent of God, but with God—because of God's grace—even this death is surrounded by honor and glory (cf. Heb 2:7).[45] The goal of Jesus' incarnation is that the "pioneer to salvation" leads a lot of brothers and sisters to glory (Heb 2:10), i.e., God made him competent for this task by perfecting[46] him through suffering. Jesus fully shared the condition of the brothers and sisters whom he wants to save. And thereby, his status as God's Son can even confer glory upon his followers. The author states that Jesus, the agent of sanctification, and the believers who are sanctified are of one and the same origin (Heb 2:11).[47] As Jesus and the believers are regarded as siblings (Heb 2:10–12), the most likely interpretation of the "one origin" is the idea that Jesus and the believers have the same father. According to this statement, the author points out that Christ was therefore "not ashamed" to call them brothers and sisters and to rank them among his family. In the Greco-Roman world, kinship and friendship were factors influencing the status and prestige of a subject. By calling them brothers and sisters, Jesus places himself on the same level with his believers. This is obviously a question of honor and shame. But the effect here in the text is that the believers obtain higher status because they are seen as children of God.

> Reinforcing the concept of kinship with Christ serves the author's program of reassuring his listeners of their honor as Christians for, in first-century Mediterranean societies, "the advance of one member of an agnatic family would advantage all his kindred."[48]

[43] Cf. Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 172.
[44] Cf. the outcome of this participation according to Hebrews 6:4.
[45] Cf. Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 172.
[46] Concerning the language of "perfection," see the excursus in Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 83–87.
[47] In Hebrews 2:17 Jesus is named high priest for the first time. His priestly office that will be illustrated especially in Hebrews 4:14–10:23 is here connected with his human existence. Because he has "tasted" and therefore knows human weaknesses and temptations, he can be an empathetic high priest (Heb 2:17; 4:15).
[48] David Arthur DeSilva, *Despising Shame. Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SBL Dissertations Series 152 (Georgia: Scholars Press Atlanta, 1995), 291.

Jesus, who wants to lead his believers to the eschatological glory in heaven, makes it possible for them already now to partake of his status as children of God.

This idea is explicated in Hebrews 3:1, where the author calls the listeners "holy brothers and sisters, partakers of a heavenly calling." In Hebrews 3:14, he even states: "We have become partakers of Christ." While Jesus was tasting the bitterness of death as partaker of human existence (Heb 2:9.14), his followers tasted the heavenly gift and also became partakers of the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4). The incarnation of Jesus—as the author of Hebrews reasons—allows his followers to come closer to God, to become God's children and to partake of God's glory (Heb 2:9-3:1).

Only if Jesus still holds higher status than his followers is it comprehensible when the author of Hebrews points out that Jesus is "not ashamed" to call them his brothers and sisters (Heb 2:11): The verb

> ἐπαισχύνεται does not express an inner feeling, but a public confession, God's testimony on behalf of the ancestors of faith. This confession by God, which gives the believer his or her honor, answers the believer's confession that he or she is a sojourner and foreigner on the earth.[49]

The verb ἐπαισχύνεται is often used in New Testament texts to challenge believers in Christ not to be ashamed of the person and message of Christ. If they will proclaim their belief in Jesus publicly, God will honor them in heaven (e.g., Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; Rom 1:16; 2 Tim 1:8.12). In Hebrews, this verb is used once more referring to God (Heb 11:16): "God is not ashamed to be called their God." The new status of the hearers who follow Jesus to his and their heavenly home is approved by the Son and by God, who are not ashamed of this kinship. Given that the hearers are God's children, they are Jesus' brothers and sisters and he has no reason to be ashamed to proclaim this kinship. The author of Hebrews lets Jesus speak for himself (Heb 2:12-13), putting scriptural words on his lips (Ps 22:22; Jes 8:17f):

> saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me."

With the words of Psalm 22:22, Jesus describes himself as a medium of God's Word (cf. Heb 1:2) and— trusting in God like the psalmist, a person in distress who finishes his prayer of supplication with words of praise—Je-

[49] Ibid., 293f.

sus publicly praises God in the assembly. Psalm 22[50] has two parts. Psalm 22:1–21a is a prayer of supplication by a believer in deepest distress. He suffers from illness and hardship, from mockery and god-forsakenness. Psalm 22:21b marks a turning point: the psalmist is heard by God: "You have answered me!" (cf. Heb 5:7).[51] The following verse is the citation of Heb 2:12b! The fact that the psalmist was heard by God, that he was saved from hardship and from the threat of death is obviously the reason that he now preaches the name of God in the community and that he sings hymns to God. Thus, the second part of Psalm 22 (Ps 22:22–31) is a hymn of gratitude that praises and preaches the hearing and helping and reigning God to Israel and all nations! It is this Psalm that is extensively quoted in the New Testament passion narratives![52] Jesus is thereby characterized as a believer who trusts in God like the psalmist, even when he is overcome by death (cf. literally Heb 2:9f; 14f). Jesus had to go through suffering and death; he tasted its fear and bitterness, but obviously never ceased to trust in God who saved him (cf. Heb 2:9; 5:7f; Ps 22:19–21.24). God did not save Jesus from death, but preserved him by bringing him through suffering and death. Therefore, Jesus can praise God and he preaches God to his brothers and sisters as the psalmist of Psalm 22 does in the second part of the Psalm and with the same words. As Hebrews 12:3 and especially Hebrews 13:6 presume, Jesus does what the listeners should do. But it is not the believers' endurance and faith that will open the door to heaven for them. Rather, Jesus himself will guide them to heavenly glory (Heb 12:2). The hearers are told to look to him with undivided attention, to see in him "the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

But how does Jesus become the pioneer and perfecter of faith? This is explained in Hebrews 2:14–18 with reference once again to the fact that Jesus and his followers are siblings, similarly partaking of the same flesh and blood. In accordance with Greco-Roman and Jewish conceptions of honor and shame, it is shameful to consider a person who died like a criminal on the cross as a member of your family. But Hebrews does not evoke this—shameful—aspect of Jesus' death.[53] The author has already stated that because of God's will, the death of Jesus was crowned with honor and grace. Jesus even defeated the fear of death and achieved—through his

[50] Cf. Kraus, op. cit. (note 38), 320-34.

[51] NET Translation.

[52] Ps 22:1 in Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34; Ps 22:18 in Jn 19:24; cf. Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34; cf. Koester, op. cit. (note 11), 230.

[53] Paul's interpretation of the salvific death of the crucifixion with special emphasis on the cross is a different way to construe the redemptive function of Jesus' death. Cf. 1 Corinthians 2, where Paul is emphasizing the shameful manner of Jesus' dying.

death—a victory over the lord of death (Heb 2:9; 14). Thereby, Jesus liberated his followers from slavery, i.e., from the lifelong fear of death.[54] Thus, the listeners metaphorically gain a new and higher status through Jesus' victorious death; they are freed from a slaveholder. In Hebrews, Jesus' high status is not compromised by the manner of his death. The author describes him—in spite of the crucifixion—as "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2f).[55] Jesus' death does not challenge either his high status as Son of God or his dominion.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HEARERS (HEB 3:1, 10, 14–16; 12:2)

Through the lenses of Psalm 8:5–7, the author of Hebrews shows his hearers the invisible glory and dominion of the incarnated Jesus on the one hand and, on the other, the visible incarnation due to which Jesus expresses his solidarity with human beings. Both the words of the Psalm and its embedding and interpretation in Hebrews 2:5; 9–18 create a kind of bond between humanity and divinity. Even the most shameful event in Jesus' human life, his death, is characterized as a victory, destroying the power of death and evil and demonstrating the honor and grace that God has given to him.[56] Through the lenses of the Psalms, the first two chapters of Hebrews present a Christology that takes Jesus' human existence, includ-

[54] The redemptive effect of Jesus' death here is not explicated as freedom from sin, but Hebrews offers a rather anthropological interpretation that fits well the thrust of the passage.

[55] Accordingly, the reason given for this death by the author is not the plan of God, but the hostility of the sinners (Heb 12:3).

[56] Attridge, op. cit (note 6), 79–83, enumerates different models for explaining Hebrews 2:10–18. Attridge describes similarities to a Hellenistic hero myth. "The application and reinterpretation of the basic mythical scheme may be found already in classical sources. Plato's famous story of the cave may be an early metaphorical application. Cynic and stoic philosophers made out of Heracles a philosophical hero and came to see in his tragic end the true victory over death, which was only symbolized in the myth of his descent to the underworld. A clear example of this development is found in the tragedies of Seneca, where the hero achieves glorification through his suffering and, by example of his stoic acceptance of death, liberates others from the fear of death," Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 79f. It is not unlikely that the philosophically and rhetorically educated author of Hebrews used these traditions to explain to his Jewish and Greco-Roman hearers the meaning and significance of Jesus' death.

ing his suffering and death, while holding firm to his status as Son and sovereign, seriously. There is no need for the hearers to be ashamed of this agent of God, because even his—from a human point of view shameful—suffering and death is—seen through the lenses of the Psalms—a sign for the glorious mission he fulfills in the name of God.

Based on this demonstration,[57] the author exhorts his listeners to look consciously to Jesus and to perceive in him the apostle and high priest (Heb 3:1). The Greek verb κατανοέω can express an intensive sensory perception as well as discernment. Hearing the words spoken by God and Jesus has qualified the listeners now to see—through the lenses of the Psalms, and of the words spoken by God—not only the human Jesus, but also the apostle and high priest of God mediating God's words and making atonement for sins (Heb 1:3). The community is addressed as "holy brothers and sisters," "partakers of a heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1), they should keep in mind their "boldness" and "boast of the hope" (Heb 3:6). In the house of Christ, the listeners evidently have high status. They can perceive themselves as esteemed people who have the competence to speak publicly. Παρρησία is basically a confident self-assurance expressed in bold speech.[58] In Hebrews 4:14-16, the author summarizes the effects of the mediation of Christ described in Hebrews 1-4, showing that the hearers can confidently approach the throne of God.[59]

> Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:14-16).

Seeing and hearing belong together. By hearing the words of God, the listeners can see the divine reality that surrounds the human Jesus. Through the lenses of the Psalms they see that Jesus is already sitting at God's right hand and they see the glory surrounding even his human existence and his death (Heb 2:8f).

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[57] Cf. the Greek ὅθεν introducing the new passage.

[58] Cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 111f.

[59] Interestingly, Hebrews balances with these verses the announcement of God's final judgment, to whom the readers must finally render their account; cf. Knut Backhaus, "Zwei harte Knoten. Todes- und Gerichtsangst im Hebräerbrief," in Knut Backhaus, *Der sprechende Gott*, WUNT 240 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 131-51. Backhaus focuses on the rhetorical strategies and the pragmatic effect of announcements of judgment.

JESUS—THE PRAYING AND INTERCEDING HIGH PRIEST

In this essay, I have read and understood Hebrews 1–2 from the point of view that the author presented in Hebrews 1:1–4, seen through the lenses of the Psalms quoted in these chapters. The result is a Christology that sees Jesus primarily as the Son of God crowned with glory, sitting at the right hand of God and partaking in the everlasting reign of God. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews takes seriously Jesus' human existence—including his suffering and death. Yet, he does not interpret the incarnation as complete abandonment of glory or as shameful humiliation. Only for a little while, Jesus was made lower than the angels (Heb 2:7), and his incarnation and even his suffering death are not without glory.

But there is a second passage describing Jesus' human existence in Hebrews 5:7–8. This passage seems to contradict the proposed interpretation in the sense of a Christology that focuses on the high status of Jesus as Son of God. Hebrews 4:14–16 summarizes the ideas developed in Hebrews 1–4 and prepares the subject of Jesus as the high priest (Heb 5:1–10:18). Hebrews 5:1–10 compares the earthly office of high priest (Heb 5:1–4) with the office of Jesus as a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:5–10). The motif of Christ as the high priest was already mentioned in Hebrews 2:17. Comparable to the method of argumentation in Hebrews 1–2, the author shows in Hebrews 5:1–10 the priestly role of Christ through the lenses of the Psalms. The author writes (Heb 5:5–10):

> So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Both earthly high priests and the heavenly priest are appointed for their office (Heb 5:4–5). While the earthly high priest obtains honor (τιμή)[60] because of his honorable office, the Son gets glory from his father (δοξάζω): he is glorified through the words of Psalms spoken by God (Ps 2:7; 110:4). The passage clearly alludes to Hebrews 1: whereas Christ was installed by the

[60] This Greek term is commonly used as a designation for an office; cf. Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 145.

"speaking God" as Son and king (Ps 2:7; Ps 110:1), now he is installed as Son and priest. Comparable to Hebrews 1, the listeners hear and "see" through the lenses of the Psalms a heavenly scene illustrating the high status of Christ as Son and high priest. But, abruptly, the perspective changes to focus on the humanity of Christ. He is portrayed as praying with deeply felt emotions; "Jesus offered up[61] prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Heb 5:7-9). The content of his prayers is not indicated and obviously not relevant for the author.[62] What is this scene, showing Jesus sharing the most painful conditions of human life, all about? The lenses of the Psalms can perhaps be helpful here. The language used to describe the praying Jesus points to "a traditional Jewish ideal of a righteous person's prayer," a concept often found in Hellenistic Jewish sources, but based on language used in the Psalms.[63] Roughly speaking, Jesus is portrayed here as a prayer of Psalms.[64]

According to the Psalms, God has the power to save from death (cf. Heb 2:9; Ps 22). Death can be understood in a narrower sense as being threatened by (impending) death or in a wider sense as living in the realm of death—which would be a description of the human condition compatible with Hebrews 2:14f. Two aspects are of special interest concerning Jesus' status as high priest and Son, who in the days of his flesh (cf. Heb 5:7; 2:14f) endures suffering and fear of death. First of all, Hebrews 5:5-10 again illustrates that suffering and death are not incompatible with Jesus' high status. He endures suffering and death that in general belong to human existence, thereby proving his confidence to God. Like the psalmist of Psalm 22, he brings his deepest supplications to God and he is heard. The Son's human life included real suffering and death, but he firmly trusted in God. Suffering and death are not incompatible with his status as high priest, but this is the way that he is led to perfection and made a competent high priest who sympathizes with his followers (Heb 2:17f; 4,15). Secondly,

[61] The used verb προσφέρω is in general used in a cultic sense for offering sacrifices; cf. Heb 5:1.3. Using this verb for the Jesus' prayers alludes to the idea that the prayers are the sacrifices he offers to God, but the parallels should not be overly emphasized. See in detail Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 149.

[62] Different assumptions on what Jesus prayed for and in what way he was heard by God are proposed by scholars. The main problem with a supposed reference to the Gethsemane accounts is that Jesus was not saved from death. Cf. Karrer, op. cit. (note 7), 274f.

[63] Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 148f. Attridge quotes different documents in support, amongst others Philo referring to Moses as ideal intercessor; Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 149-51. Cf. also Backhaus, "Gott als Psalmist," in Backhaus, op. cit. (note 59), 101-29, here 22f.

[64] Cf. Backhaus, op. cit. (note 59), 139.

although "Hebrews does not use hortatory language at this point, a concern for the audience is transparent,"[65] Jesus is here presented as a model of how to come to terms with suffering and with fear of death.

Conclusion

Through the lenses of the Psalms, the audience of Hebrews can see both the invisible glory of the Son and his visible human existence. The author particularly focuses on the Son's high status that is not visible to the human eye: The Son is the eternal king who is sitting at God's right hand and he is the compassionate high priest who enables the hearers to approach the godly throne (Heb 2:17f; 4:16). The Psalms spoken as words of God afresh today help the listeners to see not only Jesus' human existence but also his everlasting glory, his dominion and his intercessory activity as high priest. Even suffering and death cannot affect his status. This also has consequences for the believers' self-perception. Moses was terrified to approach the Zion (Heb 12:20f), but the listeners can be self-confident and full of boldness, being invited to a festival gathering in the city of the living God (Heb 12:22f; cf. Heb 4:12–16). "The believers' honor is grounded in God's declaration of association with them, by which he commits to them a share in the divine honor and commits to preserve their honor as an extension of God's own dignity" (Heb 4:9; 11:16).[66]

Furthermore, Jesus presents a model of how to come to terms with suffering. Even if the believers are socially stigmatized because they worship a crucified man, they now see Jesus with spiritual eyes: they recognize that his humanity and death are meaningful and compatible with his status; this is the way Jesus mediates high status and salvation to his followers. They furthermore know that they are siblings of Jesus and children of God. They notice that Jesus was not preserved from death, but God preserved him by bringing him through suffering and death to glory. Even if they have to suffer, they can firmly trust that God will bring them through suffering to his glory. By hearing God's words and by seeing the glory of the Son who confidently trusted in God even during his days of flesh (Heb 2:5–18; 5:5–10), the hearers finally become psalmists themselves. They now see that God's power to save is at work even in the reality of suffering and death. Confidently, even defiantly, they can pray with the words of Psalm 118:6, "With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?"

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[65] Attridge, op. cit. (note 6), 153.

[66] Cf. DeSilva, op. cit. (note 48), 293.

or Hebrews 13:6, "So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'"

The author of Hebrews is convinced that God speaks to present-day believers by using the same words once spoken to the fathers. He is well aware of the fact that the ancient words of God get a new meaning when spoken and heard in a new situation. Hebrews relates the Psalms to Jesus, interpreting his life and his significance in the light of their words. But the author is not interested in limiting Scripture to the witness of Jesus Christ and he does not argue polemically against Israel. The Christological interpretation of Hebrews does not outdate the traditional Jewish understanding of the Psalms. Thus, the author of Hebrews assumes and is pleased that the words of God can have different meanings depending on the particular situation of the readers and hearers. To appreciate that all texts, including the words of God, can have different meanings in different situations can free interpreters of biblical texts from the fruitless effort to find the one and only appropriate interpretation. Relating this important hermeneutical insight to Martin Luther's understanding of the Psalms enables us to hold on to a Christological interpretation of the Psalms without denying their earlier contexts in Israel's history and their continuing validity for Jewish believers. The hermeneutical insight that one text can have a multitude of true interpretations can relieve us from searching and defending the one and only true interpretation. In fact, the contemporary global Lutheran community may read the Psalms in different contexts and the resulting plurality of interpretations can be appreciated in confidence that God is speaking to present-day believers in different ways, using the same words once written in the Holy Scriptures.