

**ANTI-JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS OF PSALM 1**  
**IN LUTHER AND IN MODERN GERMAN PROTESTANTISM<sup>1</sup>**

*by*

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1. The text of Psalm 1 reads as follows in a translation based on the Buber/Rosenzweig version:<sup>2</sup>

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| 1 | a | Happy is the person  |
|   | b | who walks not in the counsel of evildoers,                     |
|   | c | nor treads the path of sinners,                                |
|   | d | nor sits together with scoffers,                               |
| 2 | a | but instead delights in YHWH's instruction,                    |
|   | b | and ponders that instruction day and night.                    |
| 3 | a | Such a person is like a tree, planted beside streams of water, |
|   | b | which yields its fruit in season,                              |
|   | c | and its leaves do not wither;                                  |

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1. The text (which was first published in German, "Antijüdische Deutungen des ersten Psalms bei Luther und im neueren deutschen Protestantismus," *Communio Viatorum*, 39 [1997], 101-119) is a slightly revised version of a paper I presented to the Evangelical Theology Faculty of the University of Prague. The lecture style has been essentially preserved.
2. *Die Schrift*, I-IV, translated into German by M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig; vol. IV, *Die Schriftwerke*, 4th, improved edition of the revised edition of 1962 (Heidelberg, 1976).

- d all that such a person does prospers.
- 4 a Not so the evildoers;  
b rather they are like chaff that the wind blows away.
- 5 a Therefore evildoers will not stand in the judgment,  
b nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
- 6 a For YHWH knows the way of the righteous,  
b but the way of evildoers will perish.

“Delight” in the instruction of Yhwh? Whoever is somewhat familiar with the history of German Protestantism will be taken aback at this point. For “delight” in Yhwh’s תורה (instruction), or delight in Yhwh’s νόμος, that is, in the “Law” (the LXX’s constricting translation of תורה) could have been regarded as an inappropriate formulation by many Protestants, not only in the past but to some extent also in the present. “Delight” in the instruction of Yhwh? One can well imagine that this formulation will evoke at least the typical accusation of Jewish self-righteousness and works-righteousness. The commentaries, however, present a significantly fuller, more complex picture of anti-Jewish interpretations.

Almost four decades ago H.-J. Kraus, speaking from within the Reformed tradition in his article “Freude an Gottes Gesetz: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Psalmen 1; 19B und 119,”<sup>3</sup> pointed to anti-Judaism—meaning theologically based animosity toward Jews—in Old Testament exegesis of Ps. 1. In the following I will attempt to provide a detailed analysis of various forms of anti-Jewish interpretations of Psalm 1.

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3. *EvTh*, 10 (1950/51), pp. 337-351.

As some narrowing of scope is necessary, I will focus on Luther's *Operationes in Psalmos*<sup>4</sup> (1519-21) as well as on the most important scholarly commentaries on the Psalms in German Protestantism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries beginning with de Wette and Hengstenberg, two quite different interpreters both of whom nonetheless refer to Luther.

2. I begin with Luther's *Operationes in Psalmos*, in which his anti-Jewish interpretation is comprehensible only against the background of the exclusivistic Christological background of his entire theology and thus of the exegetical principle that results for interpreting the Old Testament texts, namely, that the *sensus literalis* is at the same time the *sensus propheticus*, that is, refers to Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> The resulting attacks on Jews are, therefore, hardly to be assessed as isolated lapses. "*Salus extra Christum non est*" is a central component of Luther's theology as well as in his *operationes* commenting on Psalm 1. The following quotation, referring to v. 1, will serve to illustrate: "Our Psalm

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4. *WA*, 5. The interpretation of Ps 1 is found on pp. 26-47. The (German) translation of his interpretation of Ps. 1 is given in Luther's, "Aus den Arbeiten zu den Psalmen: Der erste Psalm, 1519," in Luther's, *Das schöne Confitemini: Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen, Auslegungen des 118. und 1. Psalms*, in the translation by G. Marstaller et al., Calwer Luther Edition, vol. 7, 2nd edition (Gütersloh, 1979), pp. 161-196. See Luther's Works, vol. 14, "Selected Psalms III," (St. Louis, 1958), pp. 280-311

5. See D. H. Schmidt, *Luther und das Buch der Psalmen* (Tübingen, 1933), p. 12.

doesn't mean the godless and sinful, per se. For every person who is not in Christ is godless and sinful" (p. 169).

Luther's interpretation of another version of the first verse shows this even more pointedly. Verse 1d, "nor sits together with scoffers," reads as follows in Luther, relying on the Vulgate<sup>6</sup> "nor sits on the dais of the pestilence." It is indisputable whom he means by "on the dais of the pestilence." It is "those Jews who are apostate from Christ, who have deadly venom on their lips and whose wine is gall. For whoever does not teach Christ must inevitably teach against Christ."<sup>7</sup>

Because Jews "are not in Christ" or "do not teach Christ," it follows inexorably in Luther's argumentation that they are to be grouped with the evildoers, the sinners, and the scornful and thus excluded from the congregation of the righteous. "*Salus extra Christum non est.*"

Luther's view of the term instruction (תורה) is also determined by his Christological exclusivity. In the following quotation, instead of using "delight" (דפי) and "instruction," Luther follows the Vulgate and uses "free will" (*voluntas*) and "law" (*lex*): "The free will to obey the law comes from faith in God through Jesus Christ.

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6. The Vulgate text used by Luther is similar to the *Psalterium Gallicanum*.

7. Page 171; the first portion of the quotation is a combination of Ps. 140:4 (Rom. 3:13) and Deut. 32:33. The remarks are not made more pleasant for the Jews by the fact that Luther alternates in identifying first the Roman Curia and then the Jews as sitting on the dais of the pestilence.

Otherwise, it is the case that the will which can be coerced by fear of punishment is a subservient and refractory will; but a will that can be lured by the desire for reward is a bribed and hypocritical will” (p. 175). For Luther, without faith in God through Jesus Christ only an anxious attempt to live according to the Law is conceivable. Because of his Christocentrism, Luther cannot conceive of delight in the divine instruction, based on love of God, such as is found in Jewish thought.<sup>8</sup>

In Luther’s interpretation of v. 4 it becomes clear that Christological exclusivity is mortally dangerous for Jews. Commenting on v. 4b, “rather they are like chaff that the wind blows away,” Luther writes: “The Psalmist doesn’t simply say ‘chaff,’ but rather ‘chaff that the wind blows away.’ Not such chaff as peacefully lies there; on the contrary, he means that which is scattered, swirled around, driven hither and yon. One should think, in the first instance, of the Jews. They are driven hither and yon in three ways. First, physically by storms, that is, by the efforts and indignation of the people among whom they live, as we can see before our very eyes: they don’t have secure habitations because at any moment they are at the mercy of a storm that seeks to drive them away. Secondly, they are spiritually driven hither and yon by the wind of diverse teachings of pernicious teachers; because they are not rooted in faith in Christ but are confused in their thinking by untrustworthy teachers, their conscience can never be certain and peaceful. Thirdly, on Judgement Day, they will be frightened away and

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8 . To cite only one Jewish source on the subject, see Pirke Avot I, 2: “He [Antigonos of Socho] used to say, ‘Don’t be like the servants who work only under the condition of receiving payment from their master; on the contrary, be like the servants who serve their master not expecting to receive payment.’”

scattered by the eternal storms of God's irresistible wrath so that they will never find peace even for a moment" (pp. 189f.).

The first point of Luther's exposition legitimizes as scriptural the expulsion and persecution of the Jews that was actually taking place. Enmity toward the Jews, which escalates into pogroms, appears as virtually a divinely willed necessity.

The second point of Luther's exposition repeats in the first place the disparagement of Jewish teachings and teachers discussed above. In addition, Luther deduces from his exclusivistic Christological thinking that a permanent crisis of conscience in which all Jews find themselves derives from their lack of faith in Christ.

In the last point of his exposition, Luther tries to assure the permanent existence of the enmity toward Jews which he had already legitimized for his time. Contrary to Rom 11:15, where Paul brings together the resurrection of the dead and Jews' apocalyptic acceptance (πρόσληψις) of Christ, Luther pronounces the verdict of their eternal condemnation (ἀποβολή).<sup>9</sup>

Particularly Luther's assertion of the threefold drivenness of the Jews shows clearly that he was unable to rid himself of the Christian *Adversus-Judaeos* tradition of antiquity

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9. Cf. the glosses on Luther's lectures on the Letter to the Romans, *WA*, 56, 111, which in reference to Rom. 11:15 mention only the certainty of the condemnation of the Jews but not their ultimate salvation.

and the Middle Ages which had found expression in the Ahasuersus legend of the restless Jew eternally wandering the face of the Earth.

- 3.1. The first 19<sup>th</sup>-century text relevant to our discussion is Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette's *Commentar über die Psalmen*, in the third, revised, and updated edition<sup>10</sup> published in Heidelberg in 1829 (1st ed., 1811; 2nd ed., 1823).<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the fact that de Wette, who stands in the Liberal tradition of theology, wrote the first historical-critical commentary on the Psalms, his use of Luther legitimates beginning with him as representative of the newer Protestantism.<sup>12</sup>

Following in Herder's footsteps, de Wette interprets the Psalms as a direct "expression of feeling" and in his introduction quotes from a pertinent passage in Luther's *Vorrede zum Psalter* (to which Gunkel will also refer a century later) in which Luther points out

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10. Where I have found variations in the various editions of the commentaries, I focus on those most relevant for the discussion.

11. The last two editions are nearly identical and differ from the first edition because, beginning with the second edition, de Wette corrected philological weaknesses by using W. Gesenius' lexicon. These differences are of no relevance for my discussion.

12. The concept of historical-critical research was first programmatically introduced by G. L. Bauer, *Entwurf einer historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (1794), and by J. C. W. Augusti, *Grundriß einer historisch-kritischen Einleitung in's alte Testament* (1806); cf. H-J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3rd edition (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1982), p. 176.

that the Psalms offer a look into the heart of the believer. This view of the Psalms as “religious lyric,” that is, as an individual literary creation, remains dominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In comparison with Luther’s anti-Judaism, de Wette’s exposition of Psalm 1 comes across as quite moderate. De Wette is essentially a strict historical philologist, convinced of the progressive development of religion.

In the introduction to his commentary on the Psalm, de Wette speaks of a supposed widespread conviction among the Hebrews that virtue would be awarded with happiness while evil would be punished with misfortune. The neglect of the Law would, therefore, be connected with misfortune. Therefore, writes de Wette, “The Hebrews had to hold on to this faith even more firmly because their morality and piety were theocratic, that is, consisted primarily in keeping of the Law and in ritual observance and thus was something external. . . . Among us, who have a more spiritual, more inward conception of virtue and piety, this conviction is refuted by experience so that we do not seek reward for virtue in external happiness” (p. 82).

Although de Wette does not say so explicitly, the entire thrust of his argument suggests that one is to assume that the “external” morality and piety of the Hebrews—or of their equivalent, the Jews<sup>13</sup>—are to be seen as a lower developmental stage compared with the Christian’s more spiritual and more inward conception of virtue and piety.

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13. De Wette’s equating of Hebrews and Jews in his early work is clearly illustrated in the two following quotations: “Our Psalm belongs to a later time because of its recommendation of

De Wette presumes that the authors of the Psalms, by praising delight in Yhwh's instruction and the resulting mode of learning and living, are concerned *only* with externals.

This presumption doesn't accord with the exegetical findings, because the negatively formulated threefold parallelism in v. 1 ("who walks not in the counsel of evildoers, nor treads the path of sinners, nor sits together with scoffers") is understood to be in relation to the positively formulated v. 7 of the "Shema Israel" in Deut. 6: "and you shall impress them [the words of the Torah] upon your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you are traveling, when you lie down and when you rise." If one includes as well the two directly preceding verses, Deut. 6:5-6 ("And you shall love YHWH, your God, with your whole heart and your whole soul and with all your strength. And these words which I command to you today shall be in your hearts") a more inward or more holistic description of piety—the love of God and God's instruction—is hardly conceivable.

Thanks to the Psalm's conscious relating of the negatively formulated v. 1 to the "Shema Israel," the second, positively formulated verse, which speaks of delight in Yhwh's instruction, is also to be understood against the background of the "Shema" and the holistic love of God and God's instruction expressed therein. That the delight in Yhwh's instruction is something merely "external" is out of the question.

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love of the Law and study of the Law, which was more a thing of later Jews" (p. 81); "for in later times devout, patriotic Hebrews. . ." (p. 82) (On the designation "Hebrews" and "Jews" in de Wette's later works, see note 19.)

De Wette's presumption that Ps. 1 is concerned only with external legalism is thus exposed as anti-Jewish prejudice.

**3.1.** I turn now to Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg's *Commentar über die Psalmen*, I, in the second edition published in Berlin in 1849 (1st ed., 1842).<sup>14</sup>

Representating a new orthodoxy, the so-called *Repristination Theology*,<sup>15</sup> which sharply rejected both historical-critical and historical-grammatical research as well as Schleiermacher's subjectivism, Hengstenberg's commentary on Ps. 1 refers explicitly and repeatedly to Luther.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly to Luther, his exposition of "delight in YHWH's instruction" is exclusivistically Christological. First we read: "There is a greatness in having one's delight in the Law of the Lord. The natural man, even if awareness of the holiness of the Law has been awakened in him and he anxiously tries to satisfy it, does not move beyond fear" (p. 15). By contrast, for Christians (God's born-again persons), delight in the Law predominates; yet they too must struggle constantly with their delight in sin. Christ alone can lay claim to perfect fulfillment of the Law.

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14. The two editions are nearly identical.

15. Cf. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung*, p. 222.

16. Pages 2, 10, 14-16, 18, 23.

Hengstenberg's observation that only Christ fulfilled the Law implies that Jews—these “natural,” not born-again people—contrary to their own self-understanding of the Law are unable to develop more than an attitude of fear.

Based upon his Christological approach, Hengstenberg at another place in his commentary lets fall—rather casually—a denigrating judgment on the Jews: “Because the Jewish people did not meet the great demands of v. 1 and 2, it can no longer be a tree bearing fruit in due season; to such a tree will apply the harsh saying of Matt 21:19: ‘may you never bear fruit again’” (p. 17).

Using this exegetical or pseudo-exegetical trick, which falsely identifies Israel with the fig tree in the Gospel according to Matthew—a further anti-Judaism—and then in addition by not allowing the Psalm to speak for itself, Hengstenberg twists what it says into its opposite, for Hengstenberg's verdict of eternal futility now strikes, not the evildoers who reject Yhwh's instruction and according to the Psalm then lose their way, but rather the righteous Jews who with a holistic love of God seek to fulfill God's instruction.

- 3.1.** The next commentary I examine is Hermann Hupfeld's *Die Psalmen*, I, published in 1855 in Gotha (2nd ed., 1867 [Riehm]; 3rd ed., 1888 [Nowack]).<sup>17</sup>

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17. The first and last editions do not differ essentially from one another.

Hupfeld is Hengstenberg's antagonist in Psalm interpretation. Unlike Hengstenberg, Hupfeld is a consistently historical-philological exegete who is concerned to keep the Old Testament free of any dogmatic constraints and to allow it to speak for itself.

Hupfeld believes Ps. 1 must be dated rather late, from which it follows that "not a mere theoretical study of the letter of the law after the manner of later Jews is the result; rather, the very personal expression 'his delight' as well as the context direct attention to the moral content and spirit of the Law" (p. 9).

Underlying Hupfeld's exposition is a widespread nineteenth-century history-of-religions model with anti-Jewish implications which, first evident in a systematic manner in de Wette (though not in his commentary on Ps. 1<sup>18</sup>), differentiates between preexilic Hebraism or preexilic Israel and postexilic *Judaismus* or postexilic *Judentum*.<sup>19</sup> In this model, a natural religiousness and spirituality, as well as a living,

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18. See W. M. L. de Wette, *Biblische Dogmatik Alten und Neuen Testaments, oder kritische Darstellung der Religionslehre des Hebraismus, des Judenthums und Urchristentums* (1813), which in the Old Testament part of his dogmatic distinguishes between Hebraism (Part 1) and Judaism (Part 2). Cf. also R. Smend, *Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wettes Arbeit am Alten und am Neuen Testament* (Basel, 1958), p. 103, and R. Rendtorff, "Das Bild des nach-exilischen Israel in der deutschen alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft von Wellhausen bis von Rad," in his, *Kanon und Theologie: Vorarbeiten zu einer Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1991), pp. 72f.

19. The terms Hebraism (or Hebrews) and Judaism (or Jews) function in two way in de Wette: In his early writings, Hebraism or Judaism is synonymous with the Old Covenant or Old

prophetic piety of the Word, are granted to Hebraism but to Judaism only an arid legalism and a lifeless piety of the letter of the law.

It is clear that Hupfeld views Ps. 1 as a model for Jer. 17:7ff., and his observation about the “moral content and spirit of the Law” situates the Psalm as still in the stage of Hebraism. Thus follows the verdict that since the postexilic period Jews are no longer capable of comprehending “the moral content and spirit of the law.”

- 3.1.** I continue with Bernhard Duhm’s commentary, *Die Psalmen*, KHC, published in 1899 in Freiburg, Leipzig, and Tübingen (2nd, expanded and revised ed., Tübingen, 1922).

Wellhausen’s most significant comrade-in-arms in the scholarly battles of the day, Duhm too concerns himself with the development of Israelite religion whose climax he sees as occurring in Israelite prophecy. In contrast to the positions discussed thus far which, with the exception of de Wette, all interpret Ps. 1 positively, Duhm interprets it negatively as a product of a degenerate Judaism in the last century before Christ: inter alia, he applies to the Psalm the history-of-religions model of Hebraism and Judaism found already in Hupfeld.

Duhm sees in the contrast between the righteous and the evildoers that characterizes the Psalm the contrast between Jews faithful to the Law and Jews who have abandoned the Law. However, he is apparently capable only of incomprehension or ridicule of the

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Testament religion and designates a lower religio-historical level compared with the New Covenant or New Testament religion. In his later works, preexilic Hebraism is set over against postexilic Judaism, the latter representing a bungled attempt to restore Hebraism.

Torah scholars' faithfulness to the law and the study of Torah pursued in their synagogues: in commenting on the phrase "sits together with scoffers" in v. 1d, which Duhm refers to Torah-despising, Greek-sympathizing Jews, he says these "without doubt stood in sharp contrast to the synagogues where the Torah scholars wracked their brains over whether or not one could eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath" (p. 2).

From a stylistic perspective Duhm is bothered by the double usage of the Hebrew word תורה in v. 2. The expression יהוה תורה in v. 2a, "YHWH's instruction," should therefore be replaced by יראת יהוה, "fear of YHWH." The import of Duhm's emendation becomes clear in the statement that follows: "In later literature, the 'fear of Yhwh' denotes respect for God's revelation and obedience to God's Law, the *religio* of nomism"(p. 3).

By emending the text to accord with his meaning he creates a peg on which to hang his negative characterization of Judaism as a nomistic religion.

That Duhm regards this nomism as religio-historical decline is evident from the following quotation which, in an exact reversal of Hupfeld, views the Psalm as dependent on Jer. 17:7ff.: "In Jeremiah there is a general concern with proper trust in God and erroneous trust in man; here [in the Psalm] the concern is the incessant study of the Law and ridicule of it. One can see how nomism has narrowed the purview" (p. 3).

Commenting on v. 3d, “all that such a person does prospers,” Duhm says, finally: “Even if the devout person studies the Torah ‘day and night,’ that does not exclude other activities; in everything he does—commerce, handwork, marriage—he is happy. The author believes (without any qualms) in the recompense doctrine, as expressed in Psalm 73 or in the Book of Job. Whoever becomes so wrapped up in the Torah misses out on the lessons of reality” (p. 3).

Thus Duhm, like Hengstenberg, converted the message of the Psalm into its opposite. For, rather than teaching “the lessons of reality,” Ps. 1, the overture to Psalter, has the diverse reality of the suffering of the righteous in view, which is a common theme in the Book of Psalms. Ps. 1 counters this reality of suffering with a perspective of hope which praises a life lived according to the Torah as the more promising way, despite all appearances to the contrary. By no means does the Psalm represent a loss of reality in favor of a concern for pure doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

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20. In addition, the character of Jewish Torah scholarship is described in derogatory terms. The purpose of the study of the Torah is practical, as is evident in a discussion in the Sifre to Deut. 11:13. In the discussion, the following question is posed: “Which is greater [literally: great], the teaching or the deed? R. Tarfon said: The deed is greater. R. Akiva said: The teaching is greater. All together responded and said: The teaching is greater, for the teaching leads to the deed.”

**3.1.** The first commentary of the twentieth century to contain anti-Jewish interpretations is Rudolf Kittel's *Die Psalmen*, KAT, XIII, which appeared in the fifth/sixth edition in 1929 (1st/2nd ed., 1914) in Leipzig.<sup>21</sup>

Although Kittel does not belong to the Wellhausen school—inter alia, he rejects its late dating of the Psalms—his interpretation of Ps. 1 follows the path laid down by Duhm, especially with regard to his negative view of the Psalm.

Kittel takes verse one's separation of the righteous from evildoers, sinners, and scoffers to refer to pagans or to Jews inclined to paganism: "Since the days of Ezra, Judaism has made this separation from pagans a most strict obligation; the principle itself, however, is older . . . Ever since pagan or pagan-friendly stirrings had crept into the community, the principle was applied also to Jews favorably inclined to paganism, especially to those who favoured things Greek. Down through the centuries, Judaism believed itself best able to preserve its national and religious characteristics through what Tacitus called its *odium generis humani*—animosity toward others and separation from those who differ from themselves."<sup>22</sup>

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21. The first and second as well as the fifth and sixth editions are nearly identical in regard to Ps 1. See the following note for the one significant difference.

22. Between the first/second and the fifth/sixth editions there is only one difference; however, it is significant: the anti-Jewish remarks are more pointed in the fifth/sixth editions. In the latter, prior to "the separation from those who differ from themselves" (4) Kittel inserts the "animosity toward others."

Quite apart from the fact that v. 1 refers primarily to separation from evildoers, sinners, and scoffers within the Psalmist's own community, Kittel misjudges the nature of Israel's separation from other peoples as seen, for example, in the Book of Ezra. This separation, or rather this never consistently realized demand for separation,<sup>23</sup> served to protect Israel's confession that "YHWH is our God, YHWH alone" (Deut. 6:4) and, after the Exile, to prevent Israel from turning once again to worship of the idols of the peoples living in the land, as had been the case before the Exile.

This demand for preservation of Jewish identity or the partially realized practice of separation from others after the Exile Kittel maliciously turns into Jews' "animosity" toward others throughout history. This idea, carried to its logical conclusion, means that it was this Jewish animosity that provoked the hatred and the persecutions to which Jews have been subjected for centuries and from which they still suffer.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Cf. I. J. Petermann, "'Schick die Fremde in die Wüste!' Oder: Sind die Sara-Hagar-Erzählungen aus Genesis 16 und 21 ein Beispiel (anti-)rassistischer Irritation aus dem alten Israel?," in S. Wagner (editor), *(Anti-)Rassistische Irritationen: Biblische Texte und interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit* (Berlin, 1994), pp. 149f.: "Ezra's rigorous demand for divorces (10:11), however, never found the enthusiastic support that is always absurdly assumed in the scholarly literature! . . . The desideratum of separation from the 'idolatrous heathen peoples' remained a theologumenon, which couldn't be carried out in practice. Divorces of couples in 'mixed marriages' were assuredly scarcely carried out; whether the forfeiting of property or expulsion from the community with which recalcitrants were threatened (10:8) actually took place is difficult to prove."

24. In light of his negative attitude toward the Jews, it is not surprising that Kittel uses the New

Finally, for Kittel the classical contrast between righteousness by faith and works-righteousness cannot fail to be included; Kittel links it with the contrast between prophetic Hebraism and legalistic Judaism: “It is the difference between prophetic and legalistic piety, the contrast between works-righteousness and righteousness by faith, which is reflected here and which clearly shows that Ps. 1 is later than Jer 17. The Psalm contains a reinterpretation of the prophetic word in a legalistic Judaistic sense. There can be no doubt which of these two views of God-pleasing conduct Jesus and Paul attached themselves to. But one should not be misled by the insight that the prophetic stage of piety and knowledge of God is superior to the legalistic stage into the error of thinking that the latter is worthless. To disdain it would be to misjudge its lofty purpose; during the time when prophecy was dying out, it served as a substitute for the living prophetic word and preserved and saved the great achievements of Israel’s past for a greater future” (p. 5).

Jewish life according to the Torah in the Second Temple period thus has no worth in itself. Jews were fulfilling only a substitute and fill-in function between the dying out of the age of prophecy and the beginning of the church, preserving for the church the great accomplishments of Israel’s past, that is, Hebraism’s prophetic piety. Implied in Kittel’s conceding to Jews this one function in the Second Temple period is that, following the saving events connected with Jesus, Jewish life has been bereft of any significance whatever.

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Testament term “yoke” referring to the Law only in the sense of “burden” (p. 6) instead of the equally possible meaning of guidance for one’s way.

3.1. I come now to Hermann Gunkel's commentary, *Die Psalmen*, HK, in the fourth edition published in Göttingen in 1926 (5th unaltered printing, 1968).

In contrast to the traditional view that the Psalms are "religious songs" to be understood in the context of their time and their place in the history of Israelite religion,<sup>25</sup> Gunkel's genre approach, particularly his search for the psalms' cultic "*Sitz im Leben*," does indeed constitute a paradigm shift; however, this is of no significance for his interpretation of Ps. 1 since Gunkel, along with all subsequent commentators, is convinced that Ps. 1 is a didactic wisdom poem with no cultic "*Sitz im Leben*."

Like Duhm and Kittel, Gunkel too interprets the Psalm negatively. Compared with the previously sketched anti-Jewish interpretations, he offers nothing new. Rather, situating the psalm in a general history-of-religions context, he essentially repeats the thesis of the degeneration of the true, prophetic piety into a legalistic version thereof. "In the history of religion one not infrequently observes that religion, after experiencing a powerful upsurge through eminent prophets, then fashions a canon out of the Scriptures of the great past which it thenceforth reveres as the essence of divine revelation. In such periods, a substantial portion of piety exists in an intimate familiarity with the letter of the Holy Scriptures. . . . Thus, the righteous person, according to this Psalm, spends his entire time joyfully studying the Law in order to learn more and more about God's will--a typical picture of Jewish piety. . . . Noteworthy is that Jer. 17:5ff., the prophetic passage which the psalmist imitates, . . . says that the pious person 'trusts Yhwh'; here, in place of trust in God, erudition in the Law has entered in."<sup>26</sup>

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25. Thus Duhm, *Die Psalmen*, x.

26. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 2. The degeneration idea is found already *in nuce* in Gunkel's

**3.2.** Hans Schmidt's argument in his commentary, *Die Psalmen*, HAT, published in Tübingen in 1934, is similar to Gunkel's.

Referring to postexilic Judaism, he writes: "During this period one no longer lives one's piety out of a direct experience of God. The voice of his living messengers, the Prophets, has fallen silent. In their place, one has the Holy Book, which governs religion. The time is late, a time of epigones" (p. 2).

As far back as 1923 Alfred Bertholet had spoken of "Late Judaism [*Spätjudentum*]" in connection with Ps. 1 (p. 120) in his brief commentary, *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments*, II (Tübingen). In other words, Judaism is an expiring model which comes to an end as soon as it brings forth Jesus Christ.

**3.3.** I proceed with Artur Weiser's commentary, *Die Psalmen*, ATD, which appeared in the seventh edition in 1966 in Göttingen. The first edition appeared already in 1935; the tenth edition was published in 1987, and is still available.<sup>27</sup>

Weiser, who represents a cult-historical approach and in his introduction refers to Luther<sup>28</sup> in a manner reminiscent of de Wette and Gunkel, once again understands the Psalm positively, as had Luther, Hengstenberg, and Hupfeld.

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*Ausgewählte Psalmen* (Göttingen, 1904), p. 3.

27. The various editions differ only insignificantly from one another.

28. *Die Psalmen*, pp. 11f. Weiser quotes from the second prologue to the German Psalter of 1528.

The contrast between Hebraism and Judaism that we observed frequently in the preceding discussion emerges in a new version shifted to a later point in time: Weiser sets the teachers of wisdom, in whose ranks he presumes the authors of the Psalms belong, over against the Pharisees. This juxtaposition corresponds for him with the contrast between inward and outward Law-piety. “The poet of the Psalm does not get bogged down in the external aspect of Law-piety. . . . Therefore, his counsel to meditate upon the Law day and night is to be understood less in the sense of an external, acquired Law erudition, such as the strict Jew still pursues today, and more as an admonition to submit oneself unremittingly to God’s will. . . . Already in the Old Testament, the nature of the biblical will of God is that it is manifest not only in individual commandments the fulfillment of which casts off, as it were, the burden of responsibility, but rather as a persisting demand from God which lays claim to the whole person” (pp. 70f.).

In other words, in contrast with the Psalmist whom Weiser has associated with the teachers of wisdom and who knows God’s demands and God’s will for the whole person, every strict Jew who tries to take every single commandment seriously and to live each of them out does not measure up to God’s demands and God’s will. A decision to live in accord with God’s will can become outright dangerous “if it is bent into a calculating recompense-belief and leads to thinking that one can make demands on God. . . . The Jewish faith, as the Old Testament shows many times over, frequently succumbed to such dangers in a variety of ways” (p. 71).

Protestant theological cliché thus obliterates completely the reality of Jewish life. As in Luther, Jewish life in accord with the Torah—be it the most devout and perfect on earth—still remains imprisoned in the sphere of works-righteousness. Apart from Jesus Christ, the attempt to live a life according to the Law is condemned to failure and is conceivable only as coerced obedience or as avaricious desire for a reward from God.

- 3.1.** Finally, Hans-Joachim Kraus's commentary, *Psalmen*, BK.AT, XV/1, in the fifth, thoroughly revised and updated edition published in Neukirchen-Vluyn in 1978 (1st ed., 1960; 2nd ed., 1961 [skimmed]; 3rd ed., 1966; 4th ed., 1972).<sup>29</sup>

Like Weiser, Kraus, approaching the Psalm as a form-critic, understands it in a positive sense as a didactic wisdom poem, specifically a Torah-Psalm. Analogously to the concern expressed in his 1950/51 article cited at the beginning, Kraus here says of the term תורה, "Every narrowing of the term 'Law' and every judging of 'Jewish nomism' is to be rejected" (p. 142).

More cautiously phrased than Weiser but in substance similar to him, he says at the end of his commentary on the Psalm that the way it pictures the צדיק, "the righteous person," shows characteristics of the superindividualistic paradigm which "the 'Pharisee,' with his external, rigorous Law observance is unable to fulfill" (p. 142). The תורה has been fulfilled only by Jesus Christ, through whom and by whom Christians have been translated into the fortunate state of being the *nova creatura* of the צדיק. "*Salus extra Christum non est.*"

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29. The first through the fourth editions are virtually identical.

**4.0** In summary, the commentaries reviewed fall into three categories of interpretation models:

**4.1** The first model, seen in Luther, Hengstenberg, Weiser, and Kraus, is marked by positive interpretation of the Psalm and consequently by Christian appropriation of it. On the other hand, Jews are deemed incapable of attaining the theological level of the Psalm both in theory and practice because (reducing what these interpreters say to its essence) Jews in their strict adherence to nomism cut themselves off from the Christian truth.

The representatives of this model can be differentiated further: whereas Luther reads the Psalm completely unhistorically, Hengstenberg, and especially Weiser and Kraus, seek to place it in historical perspective. However, this has no effect on their Christian appropriation of the Psalm.

With certain restrictions Hupfeld's commentary can also be included with this model of interpretation. He too understands the Psalm positively and views Jewish use of it negatively, but he rejects any Christian appropriation of it.

**4.2** The second model, found in Duhm, Kittel, Bertholet, Gunkel, and Schmidt, is that of religio-historical degeneration. The distinguishing feature of this model is that the Psalm is seen as the product of a "decayed post-prophetic Judaism." A logical

consequence, as Duhm explains (p. 5), is that “an unconditional appropriation of the content of Ps. 1” is prohibited.

- 4.3** The third model of interpretation, represented by de Wette, is that of religio-historical progression. In contrast with the Hebrew-Jewish level of religious development, which is characterized as external and superficial, Christian religiousness is seen as more spiritual, more inward, and thus stands qualitatively higher on the religious scale.
- 4.4** If one were to look for a common basis of the anti-Jewish statements of these exegetes, a decisive factor, in my opinion, is Christology, more specifically, the Reformation’s justification-Christology with its exclusivistic, anti-Jewish configuration. This can be demonstrated explicitly only for Model 1 commentators. Yet, since the notion of Jewish nomism runs through all the commentaries, the anti-Jewish statements of Model 2 and Model 3 commentators can also be traced ultimately to the Reformation’s justification-Christology.
- 4.5** I find indirect confirmation of the above in the fact that in nine of the Roman Catholic commentaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the nine are actually all there are) no—or at least no explicit—anti-Jewish interpretations of Psalm 1 are evident.<sup>30</sup> As I see it, this is because the doctrine of justification by grace through faith plays a much smaller role in the Roman Catholic tradition than it does in Protestantism.

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30. In part the Catholic commentaries are, however, implicitly anti-Judaic in that they regard the Old Testament (and thus Ps. 1) as a Christian book (or as a Christian text) and take no account of the fact that this book and the Psalm are in the first place by and for Jews.

Consequently, the Roman Catholic tradition does not manifest a fear, bordering on the pathological, of Law observance.

The commentaries:

- Peter Schegg, *Die Psalmen*, I, Munich, 1845
- Valentin Thalhoffer, *Erklärung der Psalmen*, Regensburg, 9th ed., 1923
- Hermann Wiesmann and Johannes K. Zenner, *Die Psalmen nach dem Urtext*, I, Münster, 1906
- Karl A. Leimbach, *Die Psalmen (Erster Teil: 1-75)*, Biblische Volksbücher, Ausgewählte Teile des alten Testaments, Fulda, 1st ed., 1909 (4th ed., 1922)
- Edmund Kalt, *Die Psalmen*, HBK, Freiburg, 1935
- Heinrich Herkenne, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments, Bonn, 1936
- Friedrich Nötscher, *Die Psalmen*, EB, Würzburg, 1st ed., 1947 (6th ed., 1962)
- Bernhard Bonkamp, *Die Psalmen nach dem hebräischen Grundtext*, Freiburg, 1949
- Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1-50*, NEB, Würzburg, 1993

**4.7** Protestants are capable of interpreting Ps. 1 without expressing anti-Jewishness too, as is evident from eight further commentaries on the Psalms, by Calvin, Franz Delitzsch, Ferdinand Hitzig, et al.:

- Calvin, 1557; Ausgabe: *Johannes Calvins Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift in deutscher Übersetzung*, 4. Bd., Die Psalmen, 1. Hälfte (Neukirchen, o. J.)

- Heinrich Ewald, *Die Dichter des Alten Bundes, 1. Teil, 1. Hälfte: Allgemeines über die Hebräische Dichtkunst und über das Psalmenbuch*, Göttingen, 1st ed., 1840 (2nd ed., 1866)
- Justus Olshausen, *Die Psalmen*, KEH, Leipzig, 1st ed., 1853
- Franz Delitzsch, *Commentar über die Psalmen*, I, BC, Leipzig, 1st ed., 1859 (4th, rev. ed., 1883; 5th ed., 1894, hg. v. Friedr. Delitzsch)
- Ferdinand Hitzig, *Die Psalmen*, I, Leipzig, Heidelberg, 1963
- Friedrich Baethgen, *Die Psalmen*, HK, Göttingen, 1st ed., 1892, (2nd, rev. ed., 1897; 3rd, further rev. ed., 1904)
- Hans Keßler, *Die Psalmen*, KK, 2nd, re. ed. of the KK, Munich, 1899
- Helmut Lamparter, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, I, BAT, Stuttgart, 1st ed., 1958 (3rd ed., 1977)

4.7 I would like to conclude with a brief exegesis of Ps. 1:2 by an unknown Torah scholar taken from the *Midrash Tehillim* I.12, which could serve to encourage modesty in Christian interpreters. The text reads: “On the contrary, he has his delight in the Torah of the Eternal One; this refers to the seven commandments enjoined on Noah’s children.”<sup>31</sup> The scholar could have made it much easier for himself if he had applied the verse to his own Torah studies and to that of his colleagues. It could have been a nice self-affirmation. But no, he applies the verse to us who belong to the “nations” and praises us as happy (Ps. 1:1a) if we cheerfully seek to live according to the Noachide

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31. Wünsche, *Midrasch Tehillim oder haggadische Erklärung der Psalmen*, I/II, following the text in the edition and translation by S. Buber, with notes and source references (Hildesheim, 1967), p. 9.

commandments. Up to the present time, one seeks in vain for a comparable Christian interpretation, which praises Jews for their joyous delight in the Torah.<sup>32</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

This article presents a detailed analysis of the different forms of anti-Jewish interpretations of Psalm 1 by M. Luther and in Modern German Protestantism (as exemplified by W.M.L de Wette, E.W. Hengstenberg, H. Hupfeld, B. Duhm, R. Kittel, H. Gunkel, A. Weiser, and H. -J. Kraus). These commentaries reviewed fall into three models of interpretation. The first model is marked by positive interpretation and Christian appropriation. In this model the Jews are deemed incapable of attaining the theological level of the Psalm, because—and reducing what these interpreters say to its essence—the Jews in their strict adherence to nomism cut themselves off from the Christian truth. The second model is that of religio-historical degeneration. The distinguishing feature of this model is that the Psalm is seen as the product of a “decayed post-prophetic Judaism.” The third model is that of religio-historical progression. In contrast with the Hebrew-Jewish level of religious development, which is characterized as external and superficial, Christian religiousness is seen as more spiritual, more inward, and thus it is considered higher on the religious scale. If one were to look for a common basis of the anti-Jewish statements of these exegetes, a decisive factor, in my opinion, is Christology, more specifically, the Reformation’s justification-Christology with its exclusivist, anti-Jewish configuration.

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32. I want to thank Christina Stein for providing an initial translation of the article from

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