An Introduction to Reception History with particular reference to Psalm 1

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AN INTRODUCTION TO RECEPTION HISTORY
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO PSALM 1*

All biblical scholars, perhaps without knowing it, use ‘Reception History’ in their studies. Whenever they take up a commentary, and assess the text of the Bible through the words of a commentator, they are, in effect, using reception history, because they are allowing the text to be received through the prism of a third party: they are thus engaged with the ‘reception’ of that text.

Reception History is closely related to both the historical critical and the literary critical methods. As far as the former is concerned, it indicates an interest in the historical process, taking seriously the fact that the text under discussion is an ancient one from a context very different from our own, even though we might be sceptical about the more dogmatic conclusions of that process. Reception History of the Hebrew Bible in essence starts where Historical Criticism ends – with the so-called ‘final form’ of the (Hebrew) text. It looks at the earliest stages of reception in Greek translation, and (in the case of Qumran) the Jewish *pesher* type of commentary which applies the text to a particular sectarian community, and (in the case of the New Testament) ‘prophetic’ readings which interpret the text as if it were in the process of fulfilment within the Christian community.

Reception History is also closely related to Literary Criticism, also starting where Literary Criticism ends: it is closely related to ‘Reader-Response Criticism’, which is about the ‘effects’ of the text on the reader. It could be argued that the term *Wirkungsgeschichte*, used frequently by those working on the reception history of biblical

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texts in the 1980s and 1990s, best applies to this approach. Using Gadamer’s philosophy, literary critics wrote about the ‘fusion of horizons’ – the horizon of the ancient text and the horizon of the interpreter – arguing that the ‘effect’ of the text could not be seen at just one point in history but only through the sum total of ‘interpretive acts’. In brief: Reception History has an interest is in the diachronic development of the text, and Reception History is concerned with the text as a literary artefact, affecting those who read synchronically.

Although I will use the more popular term ‘Reception History’ throughout this paper, the term ‘Reception Criticism’ is equally appropriate, for two reasons. The first is that this is a way of disassociating ‘Reception History’ from an exclusively confessional, church-based context of interpretation. This does not mean that the confessional approaches are denied a voice, but that they are one voice among many: other important voices include Jewish, Islamic and also secular approaches. A second reason is that it corrects the idea that all this is simply about the ‘collection of data’ – that is, merely amassing together the different ways in which the biblical text has been used through the ages, in art, music, liturgy and practice, as well as in commentaries and sermons – without reflecting critically on the vast amount of information and without analysing themes and trends within the process of reception. The use of ‘Reception Criticism’ thus takes the attention away from its being a descriptive discipline and reinforces instead that its findings are what we might call ‘anthology with a purpose’. ‘Reception Criticism’ is, in brief, ‘Reception History’ in a more critical, deliberately selective mode, recognising that not to be selective will in the end confuse rather than enlighten. So what follows on the reception criticism of Psalm 1 is, I hope, reflective and analytical; it is intentionally selective in the material it uses, because it has a particular theme to emphasise.

My own research on Psalm 1 is a specific application of what I wrote about more generally in a volume entitled *Psalms through the*

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1. This phrase was first coined by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) whose *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960) was translated into English by G. Barden and J. Cumming in 1975 as *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward). *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as it has been applied in literature from the more philosophical use by Gadamer, is about the history of the impact of the text, from its earliest stages and through many interpretative processes.

This orientates around five different types of reception of the psalms. The first, most obvious, is *reception through exposition*: this includes both Jewish and Christian commentaries and introductions which expound the texts and ancient contexts of the psalms and their relationship to other parts of Scripture. Usually, in each tradition, the purpose of such exposition is in part *apologetic*: that is, it is to defend and so give a privileged position to the values of one faith tradition (Jewish or Christian) over and against another. Psalm 1 is used frequently in this way because its central theme is the keeping of the Torah with a theology which is more naturally at home in Jewish than in Christian tradition. The second mode is *reception through instruction*, and includes sermons, tractates and devotional works, thus making the moral and spiritual meaning of psalmody most important. Rather than looking outwards it mainly addresses the particular faith community to which the author belongs. Psalm 1 is also a rich resource in this respect. The third type is *reception through liturgy*; this is about the adaptation of the psalms both within public worship and in private prayer. Despite the fact it is a prologue to the Psalter, Psalm 1 has less to offer in its liturgical reception, both in Jewish and in Christian tradition, particularly when compared with the prolific liturgical use of Psalm 2. The fourth mode is *reception through translation* – for example, from Hebrew into Greek, Latin, Aramaic and Syriac in the earliest periods, and then – looking only at the English medium – into Middle English, Elizabethan English and contemporary English. Psalm 1 is particularly interesting in this respect – the Greek, Latin and Aramaic translations all offer new ways of understanding the psalm, and the various English translations reveal the different theological and political issues which are raised at various stages in its history. The fifth type is *reception through aesthetic representation*, and includes not only literary and poetic imitations, but also music, architecture and art. Artistic representations start with illuminated manuscripts in the early Middle Ages; musical compositions are not really evident until the early Reforma-
tion period. Every aesthetic representation illustrates the importance of reception beyond the vehicle of the ‘word’, conveying the message of a psalm in more imaginative or intuitive ways. Psalm 1, because it heads up the Psalter, is a rich resource; it illustrates the important contribution of Reception History to the more traditional methods of biblical study and it shows how biblical texts like the Psalms can be understood beyond the merely propositional and rational.

In looking at the Jewish and Christian reception of psalmody, we are taking in some three thousand years of tradition. This paper focuses mainly on the history of the Western Church, so any account of the Reception History of Psalm 1 (and any other psalm) has to divide cultural history into manageable categories. I propose six such periods of time.

The first period is from the time of the Davidic monarchy in about 1000 BCE up to the fifth century of the Christian era. Although this obviously begins in an exclusively Jewish context and ends with the domination of the Christian church, one key theme throughout this period is the prophetic bias in the reception of psalmody, with Jewish writers using the psalms as prophecies extending into the future, and Christians reading the psalms as prophecies which have been fulfilled, so that the ‘psalms of David’ are now seen as ‘psalms of (and to) Christ’. Psalm 1 is certainly understood in this way, particularly through commentary and instruction.

The second period covers the fifth to eleventh centuries CE. Here one sees how the psalms were valued for their liturgical, theological and artistic worth. Although the liturgical use of Psalm 1 is not in much evidence, liturgical renewal (both Jewish and Christian, both in public and private) also brings about a proliferation of commentaries and devotional works, with each faith tradition claiming the psalms as their own, and this undoubtedly includes new accounts of Psalm 1. This period ends with a striking innovation in Christian interpretation, namely the illuminations of psalm manuscripts – itself part of the interest in liturgical renewal as the Psalters were used in abbeys and monasteries in western Christendom. Again the place of Psalm 1 in introducing the Psalter means it is rich resource for illumination.

The third period encompasses the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. By now both Jews and Christians are reading the psalms in increasingly refined and systematic ways, in order to demonstrate that these were texts which established the supremacy of one faith over the other. Artistic representation is particularly dominant, even appearing in Jewish prayer books. This period ends with another development in Christian tradition, namely the appearance of the psalms in literary
works as well as in some experimental translations in Middle English. Psalm 1 is sometimes used to this effect. **The fourth period** covers the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The significance of the Reformation for psalmody is immense: by making the psalms more universally accessible through translation, this resulted, in the Protestant tradition at least, not only in a vast number of new versions in the vernacular, but also in new liturgical, musical and literary experimentations. Psalm 1 offers rich resources here, particularly in musical and literary ways.

**The fifth period** – the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – reveals two often conflicting emphases evident in both Jewish and Christian traditions. On the one hand, we perceive a more rational and detached reading of the psalms as ancient cultic poetry (partly a result of the growth of Biblical Criticism), and on the other, a more committed confessional approach which uses the Psalms as contemporary prayers and hymns for personal devotion. Again Psalm 1 is used in both these ways. **The sixth period** covers the twentieth century up to the present day. Especially since post 1945, the psalms have served as a catalyst in helping different faith communities to work with greater collaboration in the face of an increasingly secular culture. Jews and Christians have begun to acknowledge together the richness of their shared heritage of psalmody, and there is evidence of their working to share creatively that legacy, beyond the confines of their own faiths. There are many examples of the ways in which Psalm 1 has been used to promote understanding between the two traditions, focusing more on the piety of the psalmist than on the teaching on the Law, and the many more recent translations are a reflection on this new eirenical way of understanding the psalm.

Having set out this more general methodological and chronological framework of interpretation, a final issue concerns my particular aims in offering a Reception History study of Psalm 1. My main aim is to focus on examples which illustrate the gradual shift from tensions and conflicts between the two faith traditions in the use of this psalm to an increased understanding and even convergence, especially since the middle of the twentieth century. I intend to show that it is extraordinary that a psalm as short as Psalm 1 could, in the earlier periods of reception, produce so much controversy, given that its

5. Towards this end in September 2010 I convened in Oxford an international conference on the Psalms entitled ‘Conflict and Convergence: Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms’ (see www.oxford-psalms-conference.co.uk). The papers are due to be published with Oxford University Press in late 2012.
fundamental message is about the importance of religious integrity. It speaks of how the ‘righteous man’ (in the ancient setting, undoubtedly male) is to live out a faith which is dependent upon God alone rather than being compromised by the alternative lifestyles of those whom the psalmist calls ‘the wicked’. But the earlier commentaries, citations, translations, and later artistic and musical representations, combine to illustrate how this simple message has been used to privilege those within a particular community of faith. The psalm is used in this ideological way even by Jews against other Jews: this will become evident in the writings at Qumran and in the Psalms of Solomon. It is also used to favour Jews over Gentiles: this is especially the case with the Aramaic Targum of the psalm, as well as its interpretation in Midrash Tehillim and in the commentary by Kimchi. It is also used to privilege Christians over Jews: Psalm 1 does not appear in the New Testament, but it is used frequently by the Church Fathers and in illuminated manuscripts to this end. The Psalm is also used in later commentaries, particularly during the Reformation, to give preference to one part of the Christian church over another: Erasmus and Luther each use Psalm 1 in this way. So before the last century there are very few examples of an eirenical and inclusivist reading of this psalm. Instead, it is used to attack those outside the faith community of the interpreter: to my way of thinking, this undermines the very message of honest humility and simple trust that lies at the heart Psalm 1 and it is gratifying to see how more recent Reception History shows more balance in this respect.

Let us now gain some understanding of the text itself. I offer below my own translation of the psalm; I have also tried to present the poetic structure in a visual way. I have divided it into three parts, mainly on account of the different themes and moods, and in each part I have indicated how the parallelism divides the psalm into even smaller parts.  

6. I would argue that, although there are some correspondences with Psalm 2, Psalm 1 is a distinctive self-contained unit. The first letter in the Hebrew alphabet begins the first word of the psalm and the last Hebrew letter begins the last word of the psalm. ’aleph, the first letter, is actually stressed three times in the first three words, ’ašrê ha’îš ‘šær. It means, literally, ‘great happiness to the man who...’. The final letter, taw, is found in the last word in verse 6 – to’bed, (the Qal imperfect 3rd person feminine singular of ’ābad ‘to perish’, reading ‘the way of the wicked will perish’). This use of the first and last Hebrew letters beginning and ending psalms seems to be a literary ploy, often used by wisdom writers, and seen in several acrostic psalms (9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145), to create an alphabetical ‘inclusio’.
Happy are those who do not walk after the advice of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Not so, the wicked! they are like chaff that the wind drives clean away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Despite its clear self-contained structure, the actual sub-division of the six verses has been the subject of much debate. The three subdivisions illustrate the familiar parallelisms and repetitions which comprise Hebrew poetry. I take verses 1 and 2 together, for these both speak of the two conditions which bring about a ‘blessed’ life (the first is concerned with practical living, the second with prayer). In verse 1, we note the threefold ‘sitting’ and ‘walking’ and ‘standing’ and the ‘advice of the wicked’, the ‘way of sinners’ and the ‘seat of scoffers’; and in verse 2, we note two different references to the Torah. I then take verses 3 and 4 together, because they each present two contrasting metaphors – of the tree, and the chaff – which compare the fates of the typical ‘blessed man’ and, in more general terms, the fate of the wicked. Verse 3 has four descriptions of the tree – planted by waters, yielding fruit, rich in foliage, always thriving; but verse 4, introduced by the abrupt lo’ ken ‘not so!’ has just one stark metaphor for the wicked: they are like chaff blown by the wind. Finally, I take verses 5 and 6 together, for these contrast again, twice over, the fate of all those who are ‘wicked’ (the reša‘îm) with the fate of all those who are righteous (the saddîqîm). Verse 5 offers a good example of synonymous parallelism, in the double statement that the wicked will

7. See J. Collins (2005), pp. 37-38, on the presentation of the different views of commentators.
not survive judgment, and the sinners will not endure the assembly of the righteous. Verse 6 uses, by contrast, antithetical parallelism; it compares the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked – the former being known (i.e. cherished) by God, the latter, destined to perish. We shall see how different Jewish and Christian commentators focus especially on these last two verses.

Given that our tracing of the Reception History of this psalm will focus ultimately on its message of integrity of faith, we ought to try answer the question: who is this ‘blessed man’ referred to in verse 1? In Jewish tradition it seems to have been any pious law-abiding male Jew – the model Israelite, who by singing the psalms and by obeying the laws keeps himself ‘pure in heart’. Occasionally in Jewish tradition the ‘blessed man’ is more corporate – i.e., the whole pious law-abiding Jewish community. The Christian reception is more complex. Sometimes the ‘blessed man’ is the baptised Christian; sometimes, he is the Incarnate Christ, whose perfect example of living according to the law is drawn from the Gospels and Paul. So in each tradition the model of ‘blessedness’ is one who offers an example of integrity of faith: the paradox is that throughout its history of reception such a simple psalm has served such contentious purposes.

We turn now to the first two mediums of reception noted earlier, namely exposition and instruction; we shall focus especially on the first three periods, i.e. from the first century BCE up to the fifteenth century.

One of the very earliest uses of Psalm 1 is at Qumran. This is in a scroll known as 4Q Florilegium, one of the some twenty-six fragments from Cave 4, usually dated from the first century BCE on account of its Herodian script. It is the only instance of Psalm 1 at Qumran. It is an anthology in three parts, the first two beginning with a quotation from 2 Samuel 7, the third part beginning by citing Ps.1.1. The third starts by citing Ps.1.1: mdrš mšry ‘a Midrash from [or, out of] the psalm ‘Blessed [is the man]…’). The rest of the psalm is assumed, and it is clear that the ‘wicked’ in this psalm refer to specific Jewish parties outside Qumran; these unorthodox Jewish

8. The first part speaks of three Temples – a future Temple idealized in Exod. 15, the past Temple of 2 Sam 7, and the present ‘Temple community’ at Qumran, who are, paradoxically, living without a Temple, but who are marked out as the true Temple community because of their ‘works of Torah’. The second part uses Psalm 2 because it is concerned more specifically with the Davidic covenant, declaring that the promised Davidic figure will arise in the last days, but – returning to the content of Psalm 1 – this will be alongside another figure who will be the ‘Interpreter of the Law’.
adherents are contrasted with the undefiled keepers of the Torah at Qumran. So Psalm 1 is used to affirm Torah piety, giving the Qumran community a superior sense of identity as God’s elect, even without their Temple, as the legitimate guardians of the law. The ‘blessed man’, in this case, then, is quite simply—and apparently exclusively—the community at Qumran.

There are four allusions to Psalm 1 in the intertestamental literature outside the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are all in texts which have some Solomonic (and hence wisdom) associations. *Psalms of Solomon* is the clearest example, and like Qumran it cites the psalm in a way which affirms a particular Jewish identity and negates others. Given the number of references to moral and ceremonial laws in Psalms of Solomon, the author is commonly supposed to be a Pharisee, descended from the Hasidim, probably writing shortly after Pompey’s invasion of Jerusalem (2.30, 31). Chapter 14, with its concern about the fate of the wicked Jews and the righteous Jews, has several allusions to Psalm 1, each in the consecutive order of the psalm—the delight in the law (14.2/Ps.1.2), the righteous being promised a well-watered place, being like trees of life (14.3/Ps.1.3), the defiant stance against the wicked (14.6 /Ps.1.4, again using [in the Greek] the stark expression *ουκ houtós,* ‘not so!’), and the fate of the wicked on the day of reckoning (14.6-7/Ps.1.6). The use in Psalms of Solomon is very different from the way the psalm was used at Qumran. Like 4 Q Florilegium, it gives the author and his community a privileged status as the guardians of Torah; but, unlike the Qumranic interpretation, this time the ‘wicked’ are parties outside the Jerusalem Palestinian community, whereas in Qumran the ‘wicked’ were parties *emanating from* the Jerusalem Palestinian community. We can thus see already how the simple message of faith and trust is used by different communities to ‘privilege’ their Jewish community over and against others outside it.

Another example of this is in *Targum Psalms,* an Aramaic paraphrase most scholars suggest was known and popularized between the fourth and sixth centuries CE. Here the psalm, with its emphasis on meditating on the Law, is used as a means of encouraging the wider Jewish community to protect themselves from the corrosive influence of the *Gentiles.* The Aramaic has some interesting examples in this respect. Two must suffice. First, in verse 1, *š̄ḥarr* has been used for *yāšab,* the former being a verb which implies more ‘motion’ than

9. There exist only two published translations into English of TgPss, one of which is only available online: See D.M. Stec (2004) and E.M. Cook (2001) at http://targum.info/pss/ps1.htm.
simply ‘sitting’. ‘Sit around to dine’ or ‘recline and eat at a table’ is more what is implied, and the translation by Stec represents this as ‘nor sit at the table in the company of sinners’10. This implies the shunning of ‘table fellowship’ with those who ‘scoff’ at the Torah; the ‘sinners’ here are, by implication – and this after some centuries of persecution – the Gentiles.

The second example here is two additions to verse 5. First, the translation of lo’ yāqumû (literally, from the Hebrew, ‘they will not be established’) is expanded to read ‘they will not be judged as innocent (i.e. they will not be acquitted) nor will they be established’. This expansion, using juridical imagery, suggests the decisions of Jewish courts of law, which the term ‘Assembly of the Righteous’ also evokes. This contrasts sharply with a more extra eschatological phrase in the second half of the verse: lo’ yzkwn yqwmwn ršy’y bywm’ dyn’ rb’ – ‘the wicked will not be acquitted in the great day of judgement’11 which gives a very different slant to the original Hebrew. The wicked (here again we presume the Gentiles) are, as it were, first pronounced guilty in a synagogical court of justice, and then condemned in the Divine Court of Judgement in the last days. So again we may note the way Psalm 1 is used to protect the Jewish community, but this time from some external Gentile threat. This is quite different the use of the psalm as a defence of a particular party within Judaism itself, as we saw at Qumran and in the Psalms of Solomon. In answer to the question ‘who is the blessed man?’ the Targum would thus widen the circle to include all believing Jews who separated themselves from the Gentiles.

The Midrash Tehillim, an accumulated body of rabbinical commentary on the Psalms, which by the thirteenth century served a similar purpose to the growing body of Christian commentary through the various Glosses, offers a different answer. Most of the commentary on Psalm 1 actually seeks to answer the question – ‘Who is the blessed man?’.

One answer is that the entire psalm speaks of Adam: ‘Adam said: “If I had not walked in the counsel of the serpent, how blessed I would have been!…If I had not stood in the way of the serpent, how blessed

10. Cook reads this as ‘nor taken a seat in the band of mockers’. What is apparent here is the increasing sense of familiarity (in that one first ‘walks’ then ‘stands’ and then ‘sits down to dine’ with those who have no regard for the law) which corresponds with the increasing sense of hardness of heart (the wicked… the sinners… the scoffers) of those whose company should be shunned.

11. This reading is supported by the use of the definite article in the Hebrew bammišpāt (‘in the judgement’), which thus speaks not only of an earthly court but of a heavenly one as well.
I would have been... If I had not sat in the seat of the serpent, how blessed I would have been!" 12. Another answer is that the blessed man is Noah, who, safe in the Ark, was like a tree planted securely in the rivers of water. Noah’s fruit, leaf and prosperity were of course Shem, Ham and Japeth. The way of the wicked perished in the Flood; but God knew the way of righteous Noah. Another answer was that the blessed man is Abraham, who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked generation after Babel (Gen. 11.4) nor did he stand in the way of the sinners at Sodom (Gen. 13.13), nor did he sit in the seat of the scornful like Abimelech (Gen. 20.15). He too meditated on the law of the Lord (Gen. 18.19 and 25.5) 13. These examples indicate again the Jewish interpretation of this psalm, although here we actually see less invective against other Jewish parties or against the Gentiles; its purpose is more for the instruction of the Jewish community.

Of the Jewish commentators between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, David Kimchi (1160-1235) stands out from predecessors such as Rashi (1040-1105) and Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) because of the way he reads the psalm as a homily, from David himself, about how all Jews must keep the law ‘in deed and in word and in thought’ 14. Although more specific anti-Christian polemic is reserved for Psalm 2, some evidence of this is implicit in Psalm 1. For example, like Targum Psalms, Kimchi interprets ‘the wicked’ in verses 2, 5 and 6 as those who do not keep the law: these are by implication all Gentiles, who ‘will not rise in the Day of Judgement’. The identification of the righteous in verses 5 and 6 is clearly and exclusively David’s people, the Jews. The ‘law of God’ in verse 2 can only be the Torah; commenting on this verse, Kimchi asks how a Jew with business occupations can study the law ‘by night and by day’, and the answer is ‘every time he shall be free from the occupation of his livelihood’ 15. So who is now the ‘blessed man’? It is exclusively any


13. Interestingly Moses is not identified as this man. In fact, Midrash Tehillim demonstrates that David supplants Moses in this respect: ‘Moses blessed Israel with the words Blessed art thou, O Israel (Deut. 33. 29), so David blessed Israel with the words Blessed is the man. David thus begins with new blessings: ‘As Moses gave five Books of Laws to Israel, so David gave five Books of Psalms to Israel, the Book of Psalms entitled Blessed is the man (Ps. 1:1). So David is the blessed man par excellence. See Braude (1959), p. 5.

14. The adherence to Davidic authorship of this psalm is clear: ‘And the Psalms which have no superscription “of David” David composed; and also those for which no author is mentioned David composed’: see G.H. Box (1919), p. 3. The reading of the psalm as a Davidic homily is seen on pp. 5-7, and the interpretation of the Day of Judgement, on pp. 10-11.

15. See G.H. Box (1919, p. 8
law-abiding Jewish believer in any synagogue community throughout Europe and the Middle East who looks back to David’s example and follows the Law of Moses.

So what we have discovered in Jewish tradition, thus far, is that the ‘blessed man’ is consistently applied only to Jewish believers. In the earliest period this is usually to reinforce the importance of one Jewish community over and against other Jewish communities, as we saw at Qumran and in the Psalms of Solomon. Later it is applied to an increasingly wider body of Jewish believers, so that it reinforces the status of Jews over and against Gentiles. This is made explicit in Targum Psalms and Kimchi, and it is implied in Midrash Tehillim.

By contrast, examples of Christian commentaries and devotional works on Psalm 1 throughout the same three periods are focused far more on hidden meanings which defend the theological superiority of the Christian interpretation of Psalm 1 over the Jewish one.

The New Testament has nothing to say about Psalm 1. One of two very early citations is in the Epistle to Barnabas (about 130CE). Ps.1.3-6 is used in Barnabas II. The context is a discussion on how the cross and baptism have been prefigured in the Old Testament. Ps. 1.3-6 is quoted at length, and the comparison of the ‘blessed man’ with the tree and waters provokes the conclusion: “Mark how He has described at once both the water and the cross. For these words imply, Blessed are they who, placing their trust in the cross, have gone down into the water; for, says He, they shall receive their reward in due time: then He declares, I will recompense them.” So here this applies to the baptized believer who has gone through the waters and been saved by the tree, or the cross. A second similar citation is found in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho 86 (about 150 CE). Again the tree is identified with the cross: first refuting the Jews’ own understanding of their Scripture, Justin demonstrates the so-called true, hidden, Christian meaning of Ps. 1.3 by reading it alongside Pss. 92.12 and 23.4. The ‘tree of life’ again is the cross, which is the means of making man blessed; the ‘waters’ are waters of baptism which are the means of making man righteous.

By the third century the search for the ‘hidden meanings’ in the Psalms by Alexandrian commentators meant that the ‘blessed man’

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have become increasingly understood as Jesus Christ, ‘who was man in the Saviour’. One such is Origen (c.184–254) in *Tomi in Psalms*. For Origen, Psalm 1 is ‘a locked door which the key of David can open, but only the Lamb who was slain can break’. It is hardly surprising that Origen read the first three verses of the psalm as Christ identifying with our humanity through his life and death, and the last three verses as Christ the Lord, judging the world and vindicating his Church.\(^\text{18}\)

Within the western churches, preoccupied up to the first part of the fifth century by the Arian heresy, Psalm 1 was increasingly mined for hidden Christological meanings which supported an orthodox faith. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–67), for example, understood that the Psalter as a whole offered ‘a detailed map for growth in Christian holiness’\(^\text{19}\). But Hilary could not read the ‘blessed man’ in the first verse of Psalm 1 as Christ: ‘The contents of the first Psalm forbid us to understand it either of the Person of the Father or of the Son. If Christ is Lord of the Law, how could his happiness be achieved by becoming like the object he had created?’\(^\text{20}\) So, for verses 1-2, Hilary argues that the suppliant is speaking about God rather than of God. But verses 3-6 are of God; here Christ is ‘hidden’ in the reference to ‘the tree of life’. Identifying the tree not as the cross, but as the tree of life which gives us wisdom, Hilary argues that Christ, who is wisdom, is also like a tree; the fruits and leaves of the tree compare with the gifts of immortality which Christ offers to all of us. Through further reflections which move deeper into the Gospels and further from the psalm, Hilary finds the mysteries of the Incarnation, Baptism and Passion all hidden in this verse, where the wisdom of Christ who is the tree of life ‘undoes’ the work of Adam who took from the tree of life. Of course this cuts across any Jewish reading of the psalm.

Jerome (c. 342–420), like Hilary, is critical of assuming the ‘blessed man’ is Christ in his manhood\(^\text{21}\). Jerome, like Origen, sees

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\(^{18}\) See B. Daley (2003), p. 193, also note 11, referring to Philoc., frag. 2.4.19-24; also p. 194, referring to Philoc., frag 2.1.1-10.

\(^{19}\) The phrase is from Daley (2003), p. 199.

\(^{20}\) Quoted in Waddeall (1994), p. 504, and taken from *Tractatus in Psalmum 1* (CCSL 22:19; similar passages occur in CSEL 22:20 and 21:1-22. See also: ‘I have discovered, either from personal conversation or from their letters and writings, that the opinion of many men about this Psalm is, that we ought to understand it to be a description of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is His happiness which is extolled in the verses following. But this interpretation is wrong both in method and reasoning…’ (translation from http://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/nppf209/ii.vi.ii.1)

Psalm 1 as a great door to the whole building of psalmody. He focuses on verse 3, first comparing the law with the tree, then the tree as an image of wisdom, and then, because Christ is the wisdom of God, seeing Christ as hidden throughout the Psalm. For Jerome, however, this is the human Christ, the incarnate wisdom of God, whose presence here encourages us to become like Him. How do we do this? We become like Christ through meditating in thought and word on Scripture, which is also the tree of life, whose leaves are the words, and whose fruit is the meaning.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is without doubt the most important Christian commentator on the psalms in the early church. His Enarrationes in Psalmos is the only entire collection of the Psalter from the fathers of the western church to survive; it is the most detailed Christian reading of the psalms, becoming a major contribution to the Glosses in Medieval Psalters. There were at least three reasons why Augustine found so many hidden Christian meanings in the whole of Psalm 1. First, to identify Christ as the ‘Blessed Man’ accorded with his theology of the Incarnation (in part a response to the Donatist crisis in the north African churches). Secondly, an engagement with a theology of works in the light of the grace of God meant this was an ideal psalm to use. (In part this was due to his refutation of Pelagianism, which also accounts for his detailed expositions of Psalm 119, and it is this reason above all that Luther used so much of Augustine in his own commentary.) Augustine, developing Origen and Jerome, argued that in Psalm 1 we hear the voice of the human Christ (‘Christ the Body’, speaking the psalm for us and with us) and then to hear the voice of the risen and ascended Christ. (Blaising and Hardin [2008], p. 3, quoting from FC 48.7). Despite what it is said about the blessed man in verse 1, we may note here in verse 3 that it is the human Christ who is hidden in the psalm. References to the tree as the cross indicating the divine activity of Christ are absent in this work.

22. ‘When Solomon says, “She is a tree of life to those who grasp her [Prov. 3.18]”, he is speaking of Wisdom. Now, if wisdom is the tree of life, Wisdom itself, indeed, is Christ. You understand now that the one who is blessed and holy is compared with this tree, that is, with wisdom. He is in other words, like Christ.’ (Blaising and Hardin [2008], p. 3, quoting from FC 48.7). Despite what it is said about the blessed man in verse 1, we may note here in verse 3 that it is the human Christ who is hidden in the psalm. References to the tree as the cross indicating the divine activity of Christ are absent in this work.

Head) working out salvation for his church. Speaking of the relationship between Christ and the Law, Augustine comments: ‘...It is one thing to be in the law, another to be under the law... the one... is free, the other a slave. Again, the law, which is written and imposed upon the servant, is one thing; the law, which is mentally discerned by him who needeth not its “letter” is another thing’ 24 So Christ is the Law, and as the Law is compared to the Tree, and the Tree to Wisdom, so Christ is also the Wisdom of God through the image of the Tree.

Cassiodorus organised the psalms into twelve categories, and Psalm One belongs to those psalms where ‘the bodily life of the Lord is described’ 25. So Psalm 1 concerns Christ’s sacred incarnation. ‘Though other psalms also say much about Him, none of them speaks in this way about his behaviour on earth’ 26. Christ’s Blessedness is proclaimed so that the human race might be given an example of how the heavenly Man (sic) came and bestowed salvation on us, just as the earthly man (i.e. Adam) proclaimed death 27. The number of the psalm is equally important: ‘The placing of the Lord Jesus Christ at the beginning of the collection is no idle arrangement. He is the unique Oneness, simple and perfect, having need of nothing...from this Fount comes the multitude of numbers which however multiplied return always to it, and without it such calculation cannot begin or emerge’ 28. So for Cassiodorus the first Psalm offers theological teaching against heresy on the Oneness of the Two Natures of Christ.

Peter Lombard (1100-1160) might be compared with Kimchi; he was born in the year that Kimchi died. His commentary on the Psalms is probably the most significant in the entire Medieval period because of the way it brings to the study of each psalm 29 a number of different Glosses, including ‘Pseudo Bede’ from the twelfth century, Anselm’s Glossa Interlineas, and Gilbert of Poitier’s commentary. Like Aquinas, Lombard’s In Psalmos Davidicos Commentarii (Glossae Psalterii) – his first work (c. 1138) – uses Aristotelian rhetoric (in asking questions about the psalm’s title, subject-matter, intention, and mode of arrangement) as his method of exegesis. His Preface to and

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24. This rather more forceful translation is taken from http://ccel.org/ccel/scaff/npnf108.ii.1_1.html
25. However, within the commentary Cassiodorus moves between this and the second category, where ‘the nature of the Godhead Himself is subtly indicated’ (see P.G. Walsh [1990], p. 43; also J.J. O’Donnell [1995]).
26. See Walsh (1990), p. 45
27. Walsh (1990), p. 46
29. See Colish (1992), pp. 532-538, on the way these different resources produce a rich and varied anthology for Lombard.
Commentary on Psalm 1 illustrate this approach very clearly. Agreeing with earlier tradition, that this psalm encapsulates the themes in the rest of the Psalter, he divides it into two parts: verses 1-3 show the importance of living a life of virtue, and verses 4-6, the consequences of a life of vice. The Preface goes on to discuss the Blessed Man (who is Christ) and the fate of the wicked man (who is like Adam), which shows some interesting engagement with Jewish interpretation as this time. Just as Adam was wretched and cursed in all he did, the second man is blessed and gives blessing in all he does. Both Preface and Commentary resemble a minute systematic theology in just one psalm: small wonder, as Colish observes, this was the psalms commentary most cited, copied and used in the twelfth century.

The various ‘Glosses’ on Psalm 1, whether Peter Lombard’s Glossae Psalterii or, later, the Glossa Ordinaria and the Magna Glosatura, were used to inspire Christian believers in monasteries and churches throughout Europe and the Byzantine world to look back to Christ and live out his Gospel, just as the Midrash Tehillim was used to inspire Jewish believers in synagogue communities throughout Europe and the Middle East to look back to David’s example and to follow the Laws of Moses. We are moving into a period when, gradually, the psalm was seen as either ‘Law’ or ‘Gospel’: as we shall see shortly, it is ironic that by the sixteenth century this reading divided Christians against other Christians as much as it did Christians against Jews.

We now turn an entirely different mode of reception, namely aesthetic representation. We shall focus on the visual reception of this psalm, and the historical periods which concern us are the beginning of the ninth century to the end of the fifteenth century. It is clear that Psalm 1 has always been lavishly illustrated by Christians because it introduces the entire Psalter and shows how the Psalter as a whole is to be read. A few examples, from the ninth to fifteenth centuries, from both western and eastern Christendom, show

31. See Minns and Scott (2003), pp. 111-112. All this is by way of Preface: Peter then discusses the psalm in detail, verse by verse, clarifying the various historical, moral and mystical levels of meaning. For example, in verse 1, Beatus vir is seen through the lens of Adam, the Christian, and Christ himself, and to illustrate each point Peter draws from other Glosses as well as other passages from Scripture. The commentary provides a way of expanding the teaching of the church through the text of the psalm.
how the search for hidden meanings was not just literal but imaginative, too: and from this, a good deal of anti-Jewish reading is also implied in their view of the ‘blessed man’ as the Christian set over the Jew.

Firstly the *Utrecht Psalter* (c.820-35) from the Benedictine monastery of Hautvilliers, near Eperny, using artists from the school of Rheims, has as a representation of Psalm 1 a drawing which is the only one to take up a full page. Here the Christian overlay is fairly visible. The blessed man, seated at the top left just outside a circular tempietto, is clearly not Christ, but the figure is reading about him (‘by day and by night’) and this is certainly not David, who apparently ‘wrote’ the psalm: this is a typical Christian, and the angel standing behind inspires him and marks him out as blessed. Opposite him is the ungodly man, seated on a ‘chair of pestilence’, surrounded by soldiers and demons.

Another example is another ninth-century *Khludov Psalter*, from Constantinople, which scholars agree has clearly been influenced by the Utrecht Psalter in its composition and symbolism of Psalm 1, although the illustrations are marginal vignettes, accompanying the Gloss. Here however we have a more specific anti-Semitic polemic: against the iconoclastic stance of the Jews in Constantinople, those surrounding the ‘ungodly man’ are no longer armed soldiers and demons – but three Jews, blown about by the wind over the face of the earth.\(^{35}\)

Psalters with Christological illuminations of Psalm 1 were very clear negations of Jewish readings. The *Stuttgart Psalter*, again contemporaneous with the Utrecht Psalter and from St Germain-des-Pres near Paris, illustrated the tree as the cross of Christ, with the ungodly man turning from this scene: an anti-Jewish interpretation is implicit here.\(^{36}\)

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36. Taken from [www.library.nd.edu/medieval_library/facsimiles/litfac/s/stuttgart.html](http://www.library.nd.edu/medieval_library/facsimiles/litfac/s/stuttgart.html)
Christian iconography is also frequently found in the margins of later illuminated Psalters: in the fourteenth century *Luttrell Psalter*, David and his psaltery might dominate the initial ‘B’, but the iconography of the Virgin and Christ Child at the bottom of the page makes a similar supercessionist impact, giving the impression that David’s playing the harp is to celebrate the Virgin Birth.\(^\text{37}\).

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\(^{37}\) See http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/confir\text{mation.html} ?book=luttrell Q permission
MS 10 from Corpus Christi College Oxford: By permission of the President and Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford CCC Ms No. 10
A few Christians scholars in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mainly from the schools of northern France and monastic communities in England, did engage more specifically with Jewish commentators and the *Midrash Tehillim*\(^{38}\). They exhibit, to different degrees, a good knowledge of Hebrew combined with that typical familiarity with the Glosses\(^{39}\). Some evidence of their work is in those thirteenth-century manuscripts which copy out the Hebrew and Latin texts in corresponding columns: one example from the Psalms is *MS 10 from Corpus Christi College, Oxford* – which in fact has three columns, using both Jerome’s Gallicanum and the Hebraica versions alongside the actual Hebrew. But this is exceptional.

We now return to reception through the commentary tradition, and the focus here is on the fourth period we noted earlier – i.e. between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

We return to what was said earlier about that tension between reading Psalm 1 as ‘Law’ or ‘Gospel’. Commentators such as *Desiderius Erasmus Roterdamus* (1469-1536) continued to write about Psalm 1 in more strident anti-Semitic way. Erasmus’ commentary on Psalm 1 is part essay, part sermon, for his friend ‘Beatus Rhenanus’. Its subtitle ‘*Iuxta tropologiam potissimum*’ reveals that, to use his own words, ‘the reform of morality is my principal aim.’

Commenting on verses 1 and 2, Erasmus compares the Jewish (false) delight in the ‘law of the Lord’ and the Christian (true) delight in it: “The Jews were under the law; they were confined, fenced in, as it were, by the dictates of the law, and they obeyed it, out of fear not choice, as if it were a slavemaster. Christians live their lives ‘in the law’, and choose to live according to the law because they are invited to do so by charity, not compelled by threats of punishment”\(^{40}\). However, this failure to meditate properly on the law is equally evident in the church: “those who, day after day, mumble their way through psalms they don’t understand… those who approach the mystic writing seeking ammunition for their frivolous debates…”\(^{41}\). In verse 3, Erasmus gives much attention to the metaphor of the *leaves* of the tree: these are compared not only with the false teachings of the

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38. In this way they went somewhat further than Peter Lombard, whose primary concern was an engagement with the Christian tradition.
39. In part the learning of Hebrew was a desire to reform the Latin texts of Jerome’s Psalter, which in its many manuscript versions was recognised as being in a corrupt state: it was hoped by returning to the Hebrew original, a refined version of Jerome could be produced.
40. See Heath (1997), p. 28. This is followed by a sharp attack on the Jewish sacrificial system and the dependence upon the letter not the spirit of the law.
41. See Id. (1997, p. 30.)
Jews but also with the leaders of the church who are equally guilty. Similarly in verses 5-6, Erasmus prefers to read the references to the councils and judgments in a moral rather than eschatological way: these are the councils of princes and bishops (“and God forbid, the popes as well”) which are executed without concern for justice, by those who are worldly and lack ‘virtue’ which is the result of ‘blessedness’. Small wonder, Erasmus continues, God will not recognize them – and indeed all sorts of Christians living out a faith without virtue – when the day of judgement comes. *Enarratio in Primum Psalmum* was Erasmus’s only psalms commentary to be written before Luther’s reformation; but it undoubtedly signalled the signs of the times. So what we see in this reading of Psalm 1 is another ‘privileging’, this time of not only of Christians over Jews but of one Christian community over another. The simple message of the integrity of an obedient faith before God has somehow been overlooked.

**Martin Luther** (1483-1546) gave his first lectures at Wittenberg on the Psalms. The lectures were published in 1519 – four years after Erasmus, and two years after the conflict at Wittenberg over the 95 Theses against the Roman church – and were, predictably, replete with political as well as doctrinal comment.

Luther’s first commentary on Psalm 1 reveals a tension between his love for psalmody because of its witness to true Christian doctrine, and his more cautious, often anti-Semitic, approach to the Old Testament in general as a vehicle for faith. Put quite simply, this first psalm proved a challenge for the outworking of Luther’s antithetical theology of ‘Law’ and ‘Gospel’. The key problem was how a Christian could ‘delight in the law’: for this law brought about the self-righteousness of the Jews which led to their rejection of Christ, and similarly encouraged the works-righteousness of the Roman church which resulted in the suppression of the laity and the true voice of Scripture itself.

Commenting on verse 1, Luther identifies the wicked and the sinners as the Jews. Stressing, as did Erasmus, the ‘seat of pestilence’ as an example of wrong teaching, Luther places the full blame on the Jews: ‘This is what the Jews do, who have abandoned Christ. Under their lips is the deadly venom of vipers (Ps. 140:3), and their wine is the poison of serpents (Deut. 32:33). Therefore they must teach contrary to Christ, for they do not teach Christ’. Their errors have

43. See Id. (1997), pp. 61-62.
been passed on to the church today: ‘And, to come now to our own times, those occupy the “seat of the scornful” who fill the church of Christ with the opinions of the philosophers, the traditions of men, and the counsel of their own minds, and oppress poor souls. They neglect the Word of God, through which alone the soul is fed, lives and is sustained.’ So the ‘law’ which both Jews and church leaders follow is not the will of God at all: being blown hither and thither by false doctrines, their teaching is like the chaff that the wind takes clean away (verse 4); and on the Judgement Day they will meet the fearful storms of God’s wrath (verses 5-6). Thus the law – here Luther echoes Erasmus and the Augustinian tradition before him – has become for them an enslavement: it has been ‘lived under’ rather than ‘lived in’. The true Christian response – the path to virtue and true blessedness – is to meditate on Scripture as a free response to the voice of Christ. “See that you always separate most widely and distantly the Law of the Lord from the laws of any men, and watch with all diligence that the two, confused in one chaos (as is done by the doctors of destruction), do not miserably destroy you. They either turn the Law of God into human tradition or human tradition into the Law of God.” In this way the Christian, imitating Christ and being given grace from Christ, is like the tree in the midst of the garden (verse 3) and that Christian will be exempt from God’s wrath on Judgement Day (verses 5-6). True blessedness, therefore, is in the Christian love of the word of God, following the example of Christ who in his human life is the ‘Blessed Man’ above all men.

Many of the Reformation commentators use the psalm, like their Christian predecessors, as a means of ratifying their theology over and against different persuasions, often with an anti-Jewish bias. It is noteworthy that this tradition continued into the Lutheran commentary tradition of the eighteenth century onwards.

44. See H.C. Oswald (ed.), p. 293.
45. See Id. (ed.), p. 294.
47. U.F.W. Bauer (1997), E Tr http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article8.htm p. 24 makes the interesting observation that anti-Jewish comments rarely are found in Roman Catholic commentaries, and that this is partly explained by the different attitude to justification by faith compared with Lutheranism. Wilhelm de Wette provides an interesting example, in that his Lutheranism gave him the credentials to represent the newer form of Liberal Protestantism. On this account his anti-Jewish stance in commenting on Psalm 1 is more moderate, but it is still apparent.
If Luther’s exegetical works on the Psalms mark his concern to reform the church from a very early period, John Calvin (1509-1564) produced his best-known commentaries near the end of his life. His Psalms Commentary emerged from a weekly discussion group, Congrégations, between 1555-1559. Unlike Luther’s commentary, Calvin’s reading of the psalms is less polemical about the Jews and is more parochial and pastoral in its devotion to the congregation at Geneva⁴⁸.

Psalm 1 is in many ways the fruit of Calvin’s many sermons on Psalm 119 in 1554 – a period when Calvin, like Luther, had reflected upon the relationship between the Old Testament Law and the New Testament Gospel. Noting that Psalm 1 is a Preface to the entire Psalter, Calvin immediately applies the attainment of ‘Blessedness’ not to David, nor to Christ, nor to the one individual, but to the entire congregation: ‘The sum and substance of the whole [psalm] is, that they are blessed who apply their hearts to the pursuit of heavenly wisdom’⁴⁹. What follows could not be more different from Erasmus Speaking of the early Hebrew belief in a morality of rewards and punishments which is apparent in the psalm, de Wette contrasts the ‘externalism’ in the practice of morality and piety in Judaism with the more ‘inward and spiritual’ concept ‘among us’; because ‘this conviction [of a more black-and-white morality] is refuted by experience so [that] we do not seek reward for virtue in external happiness’: see U.F.W. BAUER, ibid., pp. 7-9, which refers to de Wette’s third edition of his Commentar über die Psalmen in 1829 (first edition 1811). According to de Wette, early Hebrews and later Jews thus represent a more inferior piety than that upheld by Christians. What de Wette does not demonstrate, however, is that this more ‘spiritual piety’ is evident within the Hebrew Bible, in the Shema’ in Deuteronomy 6, and in Jeremiah 17 – both texts which have some affinity with this psalm.

Even Hermann Gunkel, whose views of the psalms as post-exilic spiritual songs have been seminal in psalms scholarship, hardly commended Psalm 1. Viewing it as a non-cultic didactic psalm, he too, following Wellhausen and Duhm, read it as an example of the transformation of more spiritual prophetic piety into a more legalistic religion. Noting the relationship between Jeremiah 17 and Psalm 1, Gunkel points out that whereas the earlier prophetic text advocates ‘trust in God’ as the hallmark of true blessedness, “…here, in place of trust in God, erudition in the Law has entered in” (Bauer, ibid., p. 19, citing Gunkel’s Ausgewählte Psalmen (1904), p. 3, and more explicitly, Die Psalmen, fourth edition, p. 2) when the “written law determined piety… after… the decline of prophecy.

⁴⁸. Although she never refers at all to Psalm 1, a recent work by G. SUIJN PAK, called The Judaizing Calvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) argues that Calvin’s positive use of Hebrew to clarify the meaning of the psalms and his general lack of criticism of the rabbinical modes of interpretation, something which made his views different from Martin Bucer’s as expressed in his Psalms Commentary written in Strasbourg, and earned Calvin the (then critical) title of ‘Judaizer’.

⁴⁹. Calvin’s systematic approach to reading the psalms would usually be to look first at the meaning of the psalms in the life of David, then in the life of Christ, then in the life of the church. The commentary has been taken from http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom08.vii.html
and Luther. There is nothing explicit on the doctrinal debates about the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. There is no indictment of misguided Jewish interpretation, nor any specific references to the abuse of ‘the law’ (i.e. Scripture) by church leaders. The antithesis implied by ‘the righteous’ and ‘the wicked’ is not between Jews and Christians, nor between corrupt and genuine leaders of the church in teaching and in practice; the antithesis here is that between the church and world – between the godly, who know true happiness by pursuing heavenly wisdom, and the ungodly, who think they possess happiness but who are to discover that what they possess is a mere shadow of the real thing.

The emphasis and focus is entirely on the meaning of the verses for the congregation in Geneva. By joyful learning and constant meditation on the Law (i.e. Scripture), they will receive the blessing from God and it is this which will make them flourish like a tree. Even the discussion of the judgement of the unrighteous (or in Calvin’s terms, the ‘ungodly’) in verses 5-6 has no eschatological application, but is rather focussed on this present life: ‘According to all outward appearance, the servants of God may derive no advantage from their uprightness; but as it is the peculiar office of God to defend them and take care of their safety, they must be happy under his protection’.

Let us now turn to aesthetic representations of this Psalm throughout the Reformation period, this time focusing not on the visual but the musical compositions of this psalm. Compared with illuminated manuscripts, musical adaptations of Psalm 1 are surprisingly more eirenical. The actual text, whether in Latin, translation or paraphrase, allows for that more ‘plain-sense’ pastoral effect which we saw in Calvin. Through the musical medium, the hearer/participant can interpret the words in whatever way seems appropriate.

Let us take, first, metrical psalmody: this was designed to enable the laity to memorise the psalms for themselves. Metrical psalms were sung and prayed not only in worship but also at home and work (very different from the ways in which Latin Plainchant, sung by cantors and skilled experts, prevented the laity from knowing and using the psalms outside the church). However, metrical psalms are always paraphrases rather than translations of the text. This meant that Christological interpretation (the ‘hidden meaning’) could easily be added into the paraphrase; but as far as Psalm 1 was concerned, the literal reading of the text seems to have prevailed.

A good example of metrical psalmody is from the church in Geneva. Well-known ‘secular’ melodies were used, although no other musical instrument was allowed other than the human voice, and even here, polyphony was forbidden. Psalm 1, with its more peripheral role
in liturgy, was late in appearing. But the version by **Claude le Jeune** taken from the French edition of the *Geneva Psalter* illustrates the plain sense, personal appropriation of the psalm\(^{50}\).

Not only metrical psalmody, but every single musical composition using the English version of Psalm 1 seems to have the same ‘plain-sense’ appeal. An obvious example is **Coverdale’s** vernacular version, which is a bridge between the prose rhythm of Latin plainchant and the poetic rhyming of metrical psalmody\(^{51}\). Psalm 1 is clearly understood in a plain sense and pastoral way, without any emphasis on any hidden meaning\(^{52}\). The version by **Beale** is a good illustration of this.

One other example, also in English, reinforces this point. This is the version from Archbishop Matthew Parker’s Psalter, called *The Whole Psalter translated into English Metre*, which appeared in 1567. The court musician **Thomas Tallis** selected eight psalms, and produced a version of them, each in four parts, based upon the eight modes developed by musical theorists in the Middle Ages. Each mode represented eight different musical types – meek, sad, angry, fawning, delighting, lamenting, robust, gentle – for which the scale and pace of music provided appropriate accompaniment. Psalm 1 was one of these. The mode is ‘meek’. The words, from the psalm’s first two verses, again show the ‘plain-sense’, personal reading of this particular psalm\(^{53}\).

What should be clear in all these musical versions is the lack of explicit Christian ‘hidden meanings’ which were so paramount in the Christian commentary tradition and in Christian artistic representations of Psalm 1. This gives testimony to the ecumenical power of music contrasted with the polemical impact of illustration – although

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50. The music played during the paper was Claude de Jeune’s version ‘Qui au conseil des malins n’a esté’ sung by Chant 1450 in the CD ‘Du fond de ma pensée’: Vocal Music of the French Reformation (CHR 77297).

51. Coverdale used Jerome’s *Gallicanum* and Luther’s 1524 translation, and produced his first version, probably in Zurich, in 1535. Despite various vicissitudes, Coverdale’s amended and revised Psalter became an established part of Cranmer’s Book of Common Prayer in 1549, resulting in its still being well known in traditional Anglican church liturgy today. Typically, every verse was set in two half-lines to reflect – intuitively, albeit not always with linguistic accuracy – the characteristic parallelism of the Hebrew poetry.

52. The music played during the paper was W. Beale’s version of Psalm 1, ‘Blessed is the man’ sung by Wells Cathedral Choir, #10 on the CD “O Praise the Lord of Heaven”. The Psalms of David, Volume 2 (Priory: PRCD 337).

53. The music used in the paper was from Thomas Tallis’s *Tunes for Archbishop Parker’s Psalter*, ‘Man blest no doubt’ sung by the Chapelle du Roi #25 on the CD ‘Thomas Tallis. The Complete Works. Volume 6. Music for a Reformed Church’ (Signum SIGCD022).
of course each served particular faith communities where the participant could read into the text the meaning they saw fit. The only English version of Psalm 1 which is more explicitly Christian is Isaac Watt’s version, *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (1719): but the entire collection was, after all, designed ‘to make David speak the common sense and language of a Christian’.

I would argue that this plain-sense reading of Psalm 1, especially evident in Calvin and the Reformed church and also in liturgical music, is an important model for our contemporary use of it. From a twenty-first century perspective, we now need to work towards a more ecumenical understanding of psalmody – one which brings Jews and Christians closer together through the singing and praying of the Psalms. Given the threat of ‘secular humanism’ – which has consequences for each faith tradition – it seems a travesty that Jews and Christians should continue to fight over their shared faith rather than find ways of communicating it, in complementary ways, from a position of faith, together. Most psalms are more like ‘open windows’ and can be sung and prayed for their plain sense: Psalm 1 is ideal in this respect.

So the Reception History of Psalm 1 has been able to highlight, in a way no other type of biblical criticism can do, the use and abuse of a single psalm, from the time of its composition up to the present day. Reception History in practice can teach us a salutary lesson about how

54. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) is the only metrical version of Psalm 1 I know which is not only moral and pastoral but also Christological, as seen in the last two verses.

Sinners in judgment shall not stand
Amongst the sons of grace,
When Christ, the Judge, at his right hand
Appoints his saints a place.
His eye beholds the path they tread,
His heart approves it well
But crooked ways of sinners lead
Down to the gates of hell.

55. The actual paper ended with a presentation of the Jewish and Christian aesthetic reception of Psalm 1 from the last century up to the present day. Lazar Weiner’s version of Psalm 1 sung by the Boston Chorale was used to accompany Moshe Tsvi HaLevi Berger’s painting of the tree as a menorah (Museum of Psalms, 1995), Marc Chagall’s ‘Beati Pauperes’ from *Psaumes de David* (1978), and ‘Psalm 1’ from Debra Band’s *I Will Wake the Dawn* (2007). Howard Goodall’s version, ‘Lyke a Freshly Planted Tree’ (*Pelican in the Wilderness*, CFMD13, 2010) was used similarly with Arthur Wragg’s ‘Psalm 1 in the Great Depression’ (*The Psalms for Modern Life*, 1933), Michael Jessing’s ‘Psalm 1’ (*Book of Psalms*, 2002) and ‘Psalm 1’ from St John’s Bible (Bush Centre, Minneapolis, 2007). In each case these were contemporary receptions of Psalm 1 from a personal, faith-centred, non privileging point of view.
we read constructively and imaginatively the prayers and hymns of the Psalter. Two contemporary versions of Psalm 1 are offered below, one Jewish, one Christian: each uses the references to the ‘righteous’ and the ‘wicked’ in the psalm in a more universal than specific faith context, and together they make this point extremely well.

**Psalm 1 as a Jewish Prayer**

Happy the one
stepping lightly over
paper hearts of men

and out of the way
of mind-locked reality
the masks of sincerity

he steps from his place at the glib café
to find himself in the word
of the infinite

embracing it
in his mind
with his heart

parting his lips for it
lightly
day into night

transported like a tree
to a riverbank
sweet with fruit in time

his heart unselfish
whatever he does
ripens

while bitter men turn dry
blowing in the wind
like yesterday’s paper

unable to stand
in the gathering
light
they fall
faded masks
in love’s spotlight

burning hearts of paper
unhappily
locked in their own glare

but My Lord opens
his loving one
to breathe embracing air.


*Psalm 1 as a Christian Prayer*

Oh how well off he will be
    whose nose has not been led by know-alls,
    whose feet have not swept along with the crowd,
    who has not joined in the laughter of those
    who belittle whatever is decent.
His pleasure is more on the mind of God;
    it is fixed on him in all seasons.
He is sound as a tree that grows beside running water,
    whose autumn will be full of fruit;
His leaves will never lack green;
    his labours will all pay off.
The ones that abandon God will not be so lucky;
    the wind will carry them off like chaff;
In a just society they will have no place;
    on Judgement Day they will not have a leg to stand on.
The ones that seek the Lord, the Lord is already with them;
    but those that get their own way will live to regret it.


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