

Teaching Judaism to German and Japanese Christians: a comparative study.

Kawagoe, 28.6.2014

Rabbi Professor Jonathan Magonet

The full title of this paper should be something like: ‘The experience of teaching Hebrew Bible and Jewish Bible exegesis to German and Japanese Christians: a comparative study.’ The opportunity arose some five years ago to teach Hebrew Bible in the Theology Faculty at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka as a visiting Research Professor. What was initially intended as a one-off opportunity developed into an annual three-month visit. Having spent the previous forty years teaching the same subject in various academic and adult educational contexts in Germany, primarily to Christian audiences, I was curious about the possible differences in the reception of the approach and materials I was offering in the two societies. This is a preliminary, largely anecdotal accounting of some of my observations and questions.

At the outset it is important to note one distinguishing factor between the two communities that hardly needs to be stated to this audience. German Christians grow up in a country where Christianity has been the dominant religious faith for most of two millennia. The physical landscape of Germany, from villages to large towns, is in large part identifiable as Christian through churches and cathedrals, through graveyards, through schools, institutes for adult education, community centres and university departments for theology; the culture is dominated by Christian teachings or reactions against them; German history is replete with inter- and intra-Christian struggles for power which in part define the character of the nation and the distribution of Catholic and Protestant communities within the country; political parties use the term Christian to help define their identity. Even the post-war decline in membership of the Church cannot diminish its direct and indirect influence on the individual and collective lives of the nation. Moreover, Christianity remains the normative religious culture against which other faiths are expected to define themselves and their place in German society.

In sharp contrast Japanese Christians represent only about one percent of the Japanese population. About half are Catholic, and rest are Protestant in three main divisions, of which the Baptists, the community that I know best, are the smallest group. Japanese Christians have to define their distinctive beliefs against the background of the dominant Japanese culture and religious traditions which, of course, they also fully share. Their recent history is no more than a century old but it does include difficult and dangerous experiences, such as questions about their loyalty to the State during the Second World War. So they experience all the challenges of being a conscious minority, something utterly different from that of their German counterparts. In this respect their situation is in many ways closer to the historical experience of the Jewish people.¹

Seinan Gakuin University, shortly about to celebrate the centenary of its foundation, is a Baptist institution, though it became independent of the American Southern Baptists from which it originated a few years ago. My invitation to teach came from the Department of Theology, thanks to the recommendation of the Professor of Old Testament studies, Professor Kobayashi, to whom I am indebted for

¹ Questions for further study: To what extent do Japanese Christians identify with, celebrate or commemorate past events and places in their local Christian history? Do Japanese Christians differ significantly in their attitude to Japanese history, especially with regards World War Two? Do Japanese Christians have issues about their identity in ways that would not seem relevant to other Japanese?

enormous support and friendship from the outset.² I have made a serious attempt to learn Japanese, however I still teach classes on the Hebrew Bible in English and need the help of a translator. I have given a number of public lectures that Professor Kobayashi kindly translated into Japanese and which, through his good services, were published in book form.³ This year I was honoured by the University with a doctorate *Honoris Causa*, the first time in its history that a rabbi has been so honoured. Over the years as I have come to know a little about the Christian community in Japan. The similarities to and differences from the Christian circles I know in Germany led to this attempt to analyse them.

The most obvious and striking contrast between the two Christian societies from a Jewish perspective is the difference in the relationship with the Jewish people. Germany has a complicated, troubled and ever-changing Jewish history also going back almost two thousand years, climaxing in the horror of the Shoah, the Jewish term for the Holocaust. Jews are therefore a familiar if complex part of the geographical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional landscape of Germany. Today, memorials and events of remembrance, old and newly re-built synagogues, are a constant physical reminder to Germans of an absence, of a missing component of German culture and society because of the Shoah, an absence that even the recent influx of large numbers of Russian Jews following the fall of the Soviet Union has done little to change. In the almost seventy years since the end of the Second World War the attitude to Jews and Judaism in Germany has gone through a variety of stages and expressions. The initial horror, following the public recognition and acknowledgment of what had been done in the name of the German people, had political consequences including a major process of re-education. The willingness of successive governments to address the issue of crimes against the Jewish people led also to strong support for the newly created State of Israel.

A great deal of immediate post-war re-evaluation of Christian faith and tradition began within the German Protestant Church as early as the late 1940's because of awareness of the failure of the Church to combat the effects of National Socialism. This led to a profound re-evaluation of Christian teachings and doctrines regarding the Jewish people and Judaism itself, especially the demonization of Jews as Christ-killers. These teachings were acknowledged as having helped to provide fertile soil for the anti-Jewish feelings that the Nazis could exploit. That same tragic history also affected the Catholic Church. It influenced the 1965 Second Vatican Council publication, *Nostra Aetate*, which made historic changes to Catholic teachings and policy, including revolutionising the approach to other religions and Judaism in particular.

In post-war Germany a few rabbis and Jewish teachers who were willing and able to engage with Christians despite the Holocaust, provided Jewish input into this radically new dialogue process. In a sense it was less a dialogue and more an exchange of information, with the Jewish partner educating about Jewish values and concerns. It was often coloured by a profound sense of guilt about the past on the part of the Christian participants. But in general the importance of an informed awareness

² The University is particularly important in terms of Jewish-Christian dialogue because of the large display of Jewish materials in its Museum. Plants that are part of a well-documented Biblical garden can be found throughout the campus.

³ Jonathan Magonet (Y.Kobayashi Ed) *Rabino Seishokaishak: Yudaiyakuo to Kiristokuo no Taiwa* (Shinkhyo Shupansha, Fukuoka 2012).

of Judaism has now been assimilated into the formal structure of Church activities. For example, at the Kirchentag, the large biennial gathering of the Protestant Church, and the similar Katholikentag, the programme will include some kind of dialogue with Jews or an educational programme about Judaism. In more recent years they have also included similar input about Islam.

At a popular level Jews and Judaism were treated as taboo subjects in Germany for many decades after the war, and any criticism of Jewish activities was rapidly attacked as evidence of anti-Semitism. In some cases there was even a tendency to offer so much uncritical support for anything Jewish, that it amounted to a kind of philosemitism. Inevitably, in time, reactions set in amongst generations born so long after the war that they no longer wished to share their parents' and grandparents' sense of guilt. Today, if one may generalise, the process of normalisation is well developed. Nevertheless Jews and Judaism remain subjects of curiosity in Germany. The occasional attacks on Jewish institutions or use of anti-Semitic slogans by individuals or groups are a reminder that past history is still alive. Such provocative acts are guaranteed considerable news coverage, which is probably one of the considerations of the perpetrators so as to attract attention to their cause. But there is a considerable degree of familiarity with Jews, Jewish history and culture, in part through radio and television programmes and movies, and a taste for East European Jewish popular music, 'Klezmer'⁴. All of this cultural background inevitably affects how German Christians respond to Jewish teachings.

In obvious contrast, Jews have virtually no physical presence in Japan, either historically or today. Insofar as statistics exist there are understood to be about one thousand Jews in the country, with small synagogue congregations in Tokyo and Kobe. In marked contrast with Germany, if there is knowledge of the troubled history of the Church's attitude to the Jews, it is likely to have been made available by Japanese theologians who underwent studies in Germany or elsewhere abroad. So this is a second-hand kind of knowledge, without any of the same emotional weight or sense of immediate relevance that it has in Germany.

Nevertheless the virtual absence of Jews has done nothing to prevent a considerable amount of curiosity about the Jewish people, sometimes expressing itself in curious beliefs, such as the idea that the Japanese people are descendants of the 'ten lost tribes' of Israel. An important and well-known book is Viktor Frankl's 'Man's Search for Meaning' (*Yoru to Kiri*) which was the subject of a public discussion at Seinan Gakuin University.⁵ The *Diary of Anne Frank* remains an important and popular book for young people, though the recent vandalising of copies in libraries is a reminder that Jews seem to attract irrational emotions, even in their absence. More sinister was the publication and wide circulation in the nineteen-eighties of best-selling books based on the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an early twentieth century forgery that purported to be the record of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. In a well-researched study David Goodman notes the theories that have tried to explain this phenomenon: as a form of sublimated anti-

⁴ Klesmer (a yiddish word derived from two Hebrew words, kley zemer, instrument for music) is a term used to describe the music played, especially for weddings, by itinerant Jewish musicians in Eastern Europe up until the outbreak of the Second World War, and subsequently revived.

⁵ Having met Professor Frankl briefly some years ago in Vienna I was asked to speak about him and respond to questions: Jonathan Magonet 'Reflections on the Teaching of Viktor Frankl' (Tr. Ichiro Sudo) *Seinan Theological Review*, Vol 71 Number 1 March 2014, 211-219; Jonathan Magonet 'The Response to the Questions Raised by Michiko Kawahara' (Tr. Yoichi Kobayashi) *Seinan Theological Review*, Vol 71 Number 1 March 2014, 221-226.

Americanism; as related to Japan's World War Two alliance with Nazi Germany; as an extension of Japan's complex history of imagining foreigners. Yet other researchers believe it reflects inverted feelings of kinship with and admiration for the Jewish people expressed as fear and envy. Whatever the reason, the 'Protocols' feed into the imaginations of those with paranoid delusional states and/or a love of conspiracy theories. Its influence can be seen in the actions of Asahara Shoko. Three months before the Sarin Gas attack on the Tokyo subway, Aum published a ninety-five page 'Manual of Fear' (Kyofu no manyuaru) that quoted liberally from the 'Protocols' and officially declared war on the Jewish 'world shadow government' which, it asserted, was plotting to murder untold numbers of people and 'brainwash and control the rest'.⁶

But these occasional extreme situations aside, one is left with an ignorance and curiosity about Jews and Judaism, in part, I have been told, because of parallels that have been drawn between the Biblical 'chosenness' of the Jews, and similar views about the destiny of Japan. On a more mundane level, Jews are thought of with some admiration, but through a number of classic stereotypes: that Jews are wealthy; that Jews control the Hollywood film industry; that Jews are very clever, as evidenced by the number of Jewish Nobel prize-winners. However, this absence of direct experience of Jews and Judaism does lead to openness to learn more when the opportunity arises.

This curiosity expresses itself at a popular level in the positive response to the Passover celebrations I have conducted with my wife over the years at Seinan. This family-based, domestic festival is called the '*seder*', which means 'order', because of the fixed order of service used for the evening, contained in a book called the '*Haggadah*' or 'Narration'. The evening celebrates through the use of a traditional narrative text and accompanying meal, using symbolic foods, the story of the exodus from Egypt. It includes a game of hide-and-seek for the children with a piece of the traditional 'unleavened bread' eaten during the week of the festival, and some counting songs. It concludes with the hope, 'Next year in Jerusalem'. The *seder* is based on the Biblical narrative but as elaborated and expanded, often quite playfully, by the rabbis, beginning already in the second century CE. With the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans and the subsequent dispersion (Diaspora) of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire, the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem and its sacrifices became replaced and transformed into this domestic, family occasion, the most popular festival in the Jewish year. Japanese Christians know about the Passover from the Gospel narrative, but have no sense from this as to what actually happens. Of course the form of service we have today has been augmented by later additions and also by the improvisations that each family gathering brings to it, so that it is not direct witness to the *seder* that Jesus might have attended. But instead of being disappointed those who have experienced it have enjoyed learning something about a living Jewish tradition, a ritual which places children at the centre of the festival, encouraging them to ask questions. In general it demonstrates how to combine a serious and thought-provoking religious event with a considerable degree of fun.⁷

⁶ David G. Goodman | *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Aum and anti-Semitism in Japan. (Posen Papers in Contemporary Anti-Semitism No 2)* (The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005).

⁷ One student was sufficiently inspired by the event that she wrote her Master's Thesis on the subject: Chiharu Miyanashi *Sugi koshisaini okeru 'kodomonotoi' no igi* (The significance of children's questions in Passover) 2013.

There is a further example that helps differentiate German and Japanese perceptions of Judaism and that is in their respective understandings of and attitude to the State of Israel. This comes across perhaps most strongly in the nature of visits by church groups to the 'Promised Land'. Again I am relying in part on anecdotal evidence and it would be interesting to pursue this matter in greater depth. Of course Israel is an easily accessible and popular tourist destination for Europeans, so to visit is not such a massive undertaking. In general German Church groups that go to Israel are very conscious of contemporary political issues. In part this has to do with their awareness of the situation of Christian communities within the Arab world and the need to show solidarity with them. This translates itself in terms of visits to Israel with the wish to meet with Christian leaders in the occupied territories and to address Palestinian concerns as well as learning about Israeli attitudes to the ongoing conflict. In this respect the social and welfare concerns for which Christians feel responsibility come to the fore. Such visits are also facilitated by the many Christian clergy who have spent time in Israel during their studies as part of a programme sponsored by the Germany Protestant Church. In these cases contacts with their friends and former teachers provide a more personal dimension to such visits. In contrast I understand that the visits of Japanese Christians are much more in the form of a pilgrimage, the orientation being a pious desire to see the places where Jesus lived and taught, and to bring the Bible stories to life, so as to enhance the spiritual life of their Church community. Again this difference is a reflection of the more distanced relationship between Japanese Christians and the Jewish people. Of course the exceptions to this generalisation are the Makuya community, whose experience of Israel is long-term and intense and would warrant a separate study.

Let me turn now to the academic level where something else, perhaps more challenging, occurs. Both German and Japanese Christians share two contrasting approaches to Bible study. One of these we might simply characterise as pious or even fundamentalist, committed to the literal truth of the words of Scripture. Perhaps not surprisingly such literalism, preached in Church, is very dependent on the local vernacular translation in regular use and could be seriously challenged if made aware of the Hebrew original. Such a community tends to be dominated by the assumption that whatever they have been taught is the true and only way of understanding the particular text. This is reinforced by the authority of the religious leader who has taught them.

However the context I know best is that of the seminary or university faculty of theology. In Germany, there is the requirement of a minimum proficiency with Hebrew and Greek for theology students. In Japan these two subjects are compulsory in Catholic and Baptist seminaries, but apparently in Protestant ones the students chose one or other of the languages. I mention Hebrew in particular because the Jewish tradition is always to return to the Hebrew text as the starting point of any exegetical activity. Understandably in the Christian seminary context, with so many other subjects to master, the formal requirement of passing a Hebrew exam has to be fulfilled, but the language may not be further studied or used unless the student is inspired by a particular teacher or given the opportunity to spend time studying in Israel. I hope that my own insistence on returning to the Hebrew and demonstrating its significance has been an encouragement at least to some students to continue using it. However, it may be that in this particular matter Japanese students have an advantage over their German counterparts. What has struck me over my time studying Japanese, apart from my inability to memorise Kanji, is the similarity of the way in which Kanji functions in conjugating verbs to that of the Hebrew three letter

verbal root. In both cases the same ‘fixed’ verbal element can be adjusted by amending it through additions to become either active or passive or causative. I have not explored beyond that very simple observation, and I do not think that this proves that Japanese is really Hebrew, as inevitably has also been suggested! But it does offer a way of helping the Japanese student recognize a familiar grammatical pattern in what is otherwise a seemingly remote language.

Languages aside, both in Japan and Germany there is a dominant methodology that determines the approach to Scripture, the historical-critical method pioneered in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this approach the Scriptural passage itself is almost secondary to the quest to establish an authentic version of the text, to differentiate the various elements that might have gone into its composition, the historical context in which they can be presumed to have been generated, and only lastly some kind of values this newly synthesised version might be able to convey to a contemporary Christian community. I suspect I am rather parodying this methodology, but it remains the mainstay of teaching in Germany and Japan, despite the many new hermeneutic approaches (including feminist, liberationist and literary ones to name but a few) that have emerged over the past several decades.

My own approach to the Hebrew Bible is very much more literary and takes advantage of two thousand years of rabbinic readings and re-readings of the Biblical text. Perhaps it would be helpful to introduce you to a basic tool that Jewish scholars have available, the so-called ‘rabbinic Bible’, the ‘*mikraot gedolot*’. I like to introduce it to students because it shows the continuous engagement with the Biblical texts by Jews, rabbis and laypeople alike, over the centuries. It is a recognised and common tool for Jewish scholars today. Unlike Christian lectionaries that are selective in the texts that are selected, the entire text of the Torah, the five books of Moses, is read in a yearly cycle in synagogue on the Shabbat, so that a number of popular collections of commentaries, derived from classical and modern sources, are studied on a regular basis. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no such equivalent Christian set of materials available to the average churchgoer or even the seminary student, because there is no similar tradition of regular study or the same continuity of exegetical traditions.

In a typical page of the rabbinic Bible, a few verses of the Bible are presented. Even this text contains within itself a number of interpretations. The text preserved in the scroll read in synagogue consists only of consonants and indications of paragraph breaks. Therefore the vocalisation of individual words, the notations that break up the sentence into sense units, and the sentence divisions themselves are all additions to the printed text that represent decisions about its meaning. Alongside the Biblical verse may be found the Aramaic *targum* or translation of Onkelos from the 2nd century CE. Nearby may be found a selection of notes from the *masora*, indicating scribal issues, dating from the 7th-10th centuries. Some editions contain a sixteenth century compilation of cross-references to the Biblical passage to be found in the Talmud and Midrash, the rabbinic legal and homiletic collections. Usually beneath the Biblical text the commentary of Rashi, Rabbi Shelomo ben Yitzhaki, the greatest and most popular of the mediaeval Bible commentators, who lived in France and Germany in the 11th century, will be located. On the same or facing page will be the commentary of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, born in Spain in the 12th century but who travelled extensively in Europe. His commentary is very much influenced by the philosophical questions current in the Muslim world, but also the newly emerging interest in Hebrew grammar as a subject for study. Again nearby we might find Ramban, Nachmanides, 13th century Spain, who may open his comment by quoting

Rashi and Ibn Ezra, only to disagree with them about the meaning of the text. Add to this Rashbam, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, the grandson of Rashi who often takes issue with his grandfather, and Rabbi Obadiah Seforno, 16th century Italy, who was engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue in his day. Other such traditional compilations may include other commentators up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The effect of learning about this tradition, illustrated in this form, is similar amongst both German and Japanese students. It is a surprise to discover that such a living tradition of debate across the centuries exists and continues down to today. To some it may come as a shock to realise that many different interpretations of a single text may exist, and that none of them are considered to be the true and only meaning. A third result is the recognition of the relativity of exegesis which becomes obvious when considering the context in which Rashi wrote, perhaps debating meanings with contemporary ideas within the Christian Europe where he lived, compared with the very different scholarly Muslim world of Ibn Ezra's Spain. I will often point out that the same relativity applies to contemporary exegetical approaches that are also determined by our own cultural background and presuppositions. Perhaps as disturbing is the question that then arises as to where does authority lie in deciding which meaning is, if not true, then most plausible or indeed relevant. In legal matters, Jewish tradition is clear that decisions have to be made about how things are to work out in practice, though open to reinterpretation if circumstances change. But in the areas of ideas or belief there is no external authority in Judaism, unless one chooses a particular teacher for guidance. Even then, authority ultimately rests with the individual. I suspect that culturally this latter point is harder to grasp for Japanese students than for Germans because of their very different cultural norms. Nevertheless my impression in both communities is that discovering this plurality of approaches to a text is ultimately experienced as a great liberation, though the consequences will have to be worked out over the period of their studies and careers.

To give another example, I was very struck by the response to a lecture I gave here in Japan on the chapters in the Book of Genesis dealing with Joseph's treatment of his brothers when they came to Egypt seeking food. They did not recognize in the Egyptian man who had the power to distribute food the brother that they had sold into slavery. I called the lecture 'Joseph's Revenge', and analysed in some detail the way in which Joseph manipulated his brothers and psychologically tortured them. In the end I tried to explain how his personal suffering had led to this behaviour and how he changed subsequently. At the end of the lecture, during the discussion, I was surprised by the first question. It seems that the speaker felt compelled to accept the logic of my analysis but then asked: but the Bible tells us to see these figures as models for our behaviour, how can we teach this image of Joseph? My response was to question where the Bible actually tells us to see such figures as models. But more to the point, the Biblical narratives portray heroes and villains alike in their human strengths and weaknesses, sometimes with explicit or implicit judgment on their behaviour. If there is any imperative to be derived from the Hebrew Bible it is to read such stories critically and to try to discover something about our own selves and our own society through the act of studying. Jewish tradition offers some guidance in this direction. For example, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac has never been understood in Jewish tradition as something we are to imitate, and only in tragic instances of martyrology in the Middle Ages, did those who recorded the incident understand it as an example of sacrifice for the sake of God. Rather the rabbinic treatment of Abraham invites us to emulate him instead as a generous host (as he displayed to the visiting angels) and as one who drew people to the worship of the

One God. What surprised me about this reaction was that I could not imagine a similar reaction of discomfort from German students, perhaps again because of different cultural assumptions about conformity or individuality.

There is another area where the two Christian communities tend to have similar reactions. This occurs when one tries to indicate the presence of humour in Biblical texts. This element is well documented, particularly in terms of irony, satire, word-play and even vulgar folk humour. However, there is a kind of seriousness, even solemnity, when approaching the Hebrew Bible as a 'sacred text' that leads to reluctance in recognising what is actually there. I once asked a German New Testament professor about humour in the Gospels. Since Jesus was a popular preacher and worked with parables, as did his rabbinic contemporaries, I assumed that this would be a rich vein of study. After a long pause he answered that he had once read a paper about a joke in one of the Gospels! This may be a reflection of a particular type of German academic.

Such reluctance to discover humour has not been a feature of rabbinic exegesis, both in identifying such elements in the text and in composing commentaries. In part this is a deeply-ingrained feature of Jewish culture, probably related to our experience as an often endangered minority community. Humour, particularly self-mocking irony, is a survival technique, used to anticipate and displace anxiety. It has its origin in the Hebrew Bible itself. I offer the following example of gallows humour with the awareness that it may not be appreciated, again for cultural reasons. The Children of Israel have left Egypt. The Egyptian army is chasing them, the Sea of Reeds is a barrier in front of them. They turn to Moses and say with a typical kind of ironic inversion of the sentence order: 'There weren't enough graves in Egypt that you brought us here to die!' (Exodus 14:11)

A Japanese colleague pointed out that as well as a serious engagement with the critical skills needed to understand the text, the Jewish approach always allowed for the use of imagination and creativity something that he thought was less apparent in Christian circles. Certainly while the rabbinic homiletic *midrash* might move far from the obvious meaning of the text, it was always anchored in some feature or anomaly in the text itself as the starting point. It assumed the reader would recognize this and not need to have it spelled out.

In Germany students are more attuned to certain kinds of Jewish humour and respond more readily in the classroom situation. Japan has its own traditions of humorous storytelling in *rakugo* and *manzai*, and a fondness for *dajare*, but in terms of the classroom context there is again a double cultural divide to be overcome by someone with my background. Firstly the cultural associations that are common in Western society, largely through the influence of American media, are missing, so that humour may not be recognized as such. Secondly, in the classroom situation, it is as if permission has to be given before Japanese students feel comfortable recognizing and responding to humour. In general this is a reflection of a respect for the sensei in the Japanese classroom that is somewhat less evident in the Western situation. That same discomfort is also expressed in the reluctance to answer questions, perhaps for fear of making a mistake, or for saying something that is not suitably clever, or simply for being exposed before the teacher and fellow students. This is clearly a feature of the Japanese classroom rather than any difference between the two Christian communities.

In concluding I would like to correct any impression that I may have conveyed that the Japanese response to what I have been teaching is more naïve or simple than that encountered in Germany. In some ways this may be true as far as undergraduate

students are concerned, but is not the case with graduates. Moreover, many of the teaching staff of the theological faculty at Seinan, having studied abroad, including in Germany, America and Israel, are equal in every way to their German counterparts. Of course what has been missing here is the experience of a local living Jewish community or the presence of Jewish scholars, apart from the occasional touring guest lecturer. My sustained presence over five years has, to a small extent, made up for this absence, and helped turn a theoretical interest in Jewish Biblical exegesis into an experienced engagement. This also functions on another level in terms of interfaith dialogue, previously confined to Christian-Buddhist or Christian-Shinto opportunities. The engagement with Judaism, which speaks directly to shared texts and concerns, has provided a new dimension to their studies for two cadres of students. Moreover it has catalysed an interest in broadening the dialogue amongst the so-called 'Abrahamic faiths', leading to a Jewish-Christian-Muslim symposium this June on the theme 'Is Monotheism Dangerous?'. Such opportunities are manifold in the German context. To some extent the Christian-Jewish dialogue there has recently been seen as eclipsed by the more urgent need of a Christian-Muslim dialogue in Europe given the growing size of the Muslim community and fears of terrorist activity. Here in Japan it is a fresh and stimulating opportunity for broadening the understanding of the Hebrew Bible. I hope I have the opportunity to continue to contribute to these developments and further refine some of the observations made until now.