Summary of: Streiten mit Gott und mit Menschen: Konfliktanalyse am Beispiel der Psalmen (Nina Beerli)

(ch. 1., pp. 1–5) In view of the extremely positive assessment of the Psalter as a book of life and faith of the individual, which is still held today, it is sometimes almost forgotten that there is also often conflict in the Psalms. A quick passage through the texts shows that conflicts play a central role throughout the Psalter. Opponents appear even where they do not really fit into the immediate context (cf. e.g. Ps 104, 139). At the same time, however, it is noticeable that in today's use of the Psalms, precisely those passages are often omitted that deal with opponents. Obviously, these passages trigger an uneasiness that leads to giving certain Psalms a wide berth. The criticism of the texts is largely related to the fact that the numerous occurrences of opponents and the way they are dealt with do not really want to fit in a so-called Christian reading of the Psalms. As a result, certain Psalms and Psalm passages are condemned as texts that do not conform to a Christian-based ethos. On the other hand, there are attempts to rehabilitate the texts by pointing to the historical context of an Israel oppressed by foreign peoples or exploited social groups and/or by emphasizing the realistic worldview of the Psalms and/or by pointing out that the prayers delegate the exercise of violence to God.

The topic of the enemies in the Psalter has been addressed repeatedly in biblical research. Many biblical scholars (among others Wilhelm de Wette, Hermann Gunkel, Othmar Keel, and Erich Zenger) have made important contributions to the subject. For current research, the volume Gegner im Gebet: Studien zu Feindschaft und Entfeindung im Buch der Psalmen (edited by Kathrin Liess and Johannes Schnocks in 2018) provides important insights.

The dissertation builds on the findings of previous and current research, but at the same time opens new perspectives: By focusing on the hitherto little-researched question of how praying persons, opponents, and God interact in conflicts, a new and fresh light is shed on the subject. The study provides insights into the conflictual interplay of the praying person(s), opponents, and God and into the dynamics of the conflicts depicted in the Psalms. Three main aims can be formulated: (1) The first aim is to make a general contribution to a better understanding of the phenomenon of conflict as it is depicted in the Psalms, (2) the second aim is to show the diversity of the conflicts addressed in the Psalms, and (3) the third aim is to investigate whether fundamental patterns of acting out conflicts can be found in this diversity. In contrast to previous research, not only specific Psalms (groups of Psalms respectively) will be considered, but all Psalms in which conflicts occur will be included. The corresponding findings are

registered, documented, and classified. In this way, it can be shown which parties are in coalition with each other, which issues are negotiated, how conflicts proceed, which conflict regulation strategies come into view, and which understandings of conflict are represented.

(Ch. 2., pp. 5–12) In doing so, analytical instruments of recent conflict research, more precisely of social science conflict research, are used in an innovative way. Social science conflict research works with the concept of social conflict. In a social conflict two or more parties with irreconcilable positions face each other. The parties to the conflict may be individuals or groups. In the conflict analysis developed by social science conflict research, the aim is to describe the main actors involved in a conflict, the conflict issues, causes, dynamics, and history of conflict as well as possible forms of conflict regulation.

(Ch. 3., pp. 12–14) In order to achieve the above-mentioned research goals, it was necessary to make as comprehensive an inventory as possible of the numerous representations of conflict in the Psalms. On this basis, it was then possible to identify conflict motives that occur several times. This step revealed that certain combinations of motives occur again and again. This finding allows the conclusion that overarching structures exist. In order to substantiate this assumption and to profile any existing conflict patterns, the individual texts were examined in more detail with recourse to analysis criteria of social science conflict research. Accordingly, the conflict motives and patterns described in the dissertation are developed on the basis of the examination of the individual texts. They are a result of the analysis of the individual texts and are not, conversely, applied to the texts in the form of a pre-existing model.

In deciding which texts to examine and include in the dissertation, the decisive factor was not their genre or the occurrence of certain terminology. The decisive criteria were whether a conflict is brought up, whether this conflict can be assigned to a conflict pattern, and whether it can be analyzed on the basis of selected criteria of social science conflict research adapted for the study of biblical texts. Thus, the focus is not on a form-historical but on a motive-historical approach.

Methodologically, the conflict patterns emerge from the comparative analysis of the individual texts. For reasons of better readability, however, the dissertation first presents a summary of the profile of the respective conflict pattern and then illustrates it using exemplary Psalms. In this way, it should be possible to make

visible both: the broad lines and more complex details of the numerous findings.

(Ch. 4., pp. 15–20) After the development of the research questions and a brief research review in Ch. 1., the specification of the concept of conflict in the light of recent conflict research in Ch. 2., and the preliminary methodological considerations in Ch. 3., Ch. 4. offers an introduction to conflict analysis in the Psalms, which develops and substantiates the preceding remarks more broadly.

(Ch. 4.1., pp. 15–16) First, the path of knowledge from the review of the texts to the determination of conflict motives and from there to the development of conflict patterns is described. The developed conflict *motives* are not the only possible ones. They may occur frequently or rarely, overlap each other, be closely related to a conflict pattern, or occur independently of a particular conflict pattern. For many texts, however, it can be stated that certain combinations of motives are encountered again and again in the same or very similar form. This indicates that many of the conflicts depicted in the Psalms are acted out in certain recurring ways. This leads to the following hypothesis: *How* a conflict is acted out is not random but is based on certain reasons, patterns of action, and behavior. These recurring combinations of motives are called conflict *patterns*. They, as well as the motives, have a model character: As a rule, a pattern is not encountered in its ideal form in the texts, but is very often supplemented by further conflict motives that are typical of other patterns or that cannot be assigned to any pattern.

(Ch. 4.2., pp. 16–18) The determination of conflict motives and patterns is not sufficient for the analysis of conflicts, because motives and patterns only provide information that there is a potential for conflict. For the study and description of the conflicts described in the Psalms, three criteria derived from social science conflict research must be met:

- At least two actors appear: If God saves the praying person from "evils" or "afflictions", then it can at best be assumed that there is a concrete conflict situation in the background. However, since no actors are tangible, such a conflict situation cannot be evaluated.

- Points of contention, i. e. the issues under discussion, are identifiable. At the beginning of a conflict, the issues and conflict cause(s) often coincide. Since conflicts often expand in their further course or the conflict topic shifts, the causal conflict issues can be lost from view and new or further issues move into focus.

- A process of the conflict, i. e. a conflict history, is evident. This does not

have to cover the entire course from the beginning to the end of a conflict. Often, only an excerpt from a conflict that has already been going on for some time is described. The conflicts depicted in the Psalms are not neutral reports but are always told from the perspective of a party involved in the conflict (usually the one or ones praying, rarely God). This does not contradict a well-founded conflict analysis, because one of its goals is precisely to ascertain how a dispute is portrayed from the perspective of the parties involved. When we speak of the *history* or the *course* of a conflict, this is associated with the idea of a chronological sequence of events. However, the disputes brought up in the Psalms often do not follow a chronological sequence in their presentation. Rather, they bring up different aspects of conflicts or shed light on a conflictual situation, which cannot necessarily be brought into a chronological sequence.

(Ch. 4.3., p. 18) There are many texts throughout the Psalter which are not free of conflict, but which do not or only partially fulfill the above criteria. These texts usually show a clearly tangible potential for conflict, but their investigation according to the criteria formulated above is not possible.

(Ch. 4.4., pp. 18–19) Furthermore, there are texts that show several dominant conflict patterns. This means that several conflict patterns stand "equally" next to each other. In the dissertation 45 texts are analyzed. They can be assigned to one of the four conflict patterns, but the fact that these 45 texts can be clearly aligned to a conflict pattern does not mean that only motives of the corresponding pattern occur. However, the occurrence of further motives is not sufficient for the determination of an additional conflict pattern. The occurrence of texts with several conflict patterns or with one conflict pattern and further conflict motives shows that the boundaries between the patterns cannot be sharply defined.

(Ch. 4.5., p. 19) Conflicts can be regulated provisionally or definitively in different ways. Generally, when speaking of the end of a conflict, one speaks of different forms of conflict regulation. In the dissertation, three variants of conflict regulation are distinguished terminologically:

- *Settling* a conflict means that the conflictual situation continues to exist – i. e. the conflict is not (yet) definitively ended. However, one (or more) party to the conflict finds a way of dealing with the continuing conflict that is acceptable to them in the medium or long term (*Regelung* eines Konflikts).

- If a conflict is ended by mutual agreement, it is referred to as the *resolution* of a conflict (*Beilegung* eines Konflikts).

- If a conflict is ended by eliminating one party to the conflict, the conflict

situation is said to be *dissolved* (*Auflösung* der Konfliktsituation)

(Ch. 4.6., pp. 19–20) According to the criteria mentioned above, the pattern to which a conflict can be assigned is not primarily dependent on the existence of a specific terminology. Conflicts can also be identified where typical terms for opponents or enemies are missing. An approach oriented towards existing motives and patterns, actors, issues, and dynamics allows for a broader perspective. In this respect, the dissertation clearly differs from previous research, which, when examining opponents in the Psalms, has usually limited itself either to a specific Psalm genre (usually the Lamentations of the Individual) or to a specific Psalm group (often the so-called Imprecatory Psalms) and/or with a view to specific terminology for opponents (e. g. the wicked, enemies of the individual).

(Ch. 5., pp. 20–29) Ch. 5. Offers a more detailed description of the 19 developed conflict motives. They are already sorted according to the conflict pattern for which they are constitutive:

Attack – Defense (Angriff – Abwehr):

M 1 Damage/Make defenseless (Schädigung/wehrlos machen): One party is harmed or rendered defenseless by another.

M 2 Annihilation (Vernichtung): One party is annihilated or threatened to be annihilated by the other.

M 3 Defense/Rescue/Protection (Abwehr/Rettung/Bewahrung): God comes to the aid of the praying person(s) and fends of the other party, rescues, or protects the praying person(s) from attack.

M 4 Subjugation (Unterwerfung): God (and His king) subjugates a counterparty with the goal of controlling and dominating them in the long run.

Turning away – Turning back (again) (Abwendung – [erneute] Zuwendung):

M 5 Avoidance (Meidung): One party withdraws from, rejects, and/or behaves indifferently toward another.

M 6 Violence of God (Gewalttätigkeit Gottes): God's turning away is expressed in His violent behavior towards the abandoned party.

Guilt – Punishment – Forgiveness (Schuld – Strafe – Vergebung):

M 7 Guilt (Schuld): The praying person becomes guilty toward God.

M 8 Punishment (Strafe): The praying person is punished by God because of a conscious or unconscious guilt.

M 9 Forgiveness (Vergebung): God forgives a debt to the praying person or is asked to do so.

Trial – Assessment (Prüfung – Beurteilung):

M 10 (False) accusation ([Falsch-]Anklage): A party is rightly or wrongly accused by another.

M 11 Finding a verdict/Trial (Urteilsfindung/Prozess): The parties face each other in a (fictional) court case; God acts as judge and/or lawyer and/or prosecutor.

M 12 Judgment/Enforcement (Urteil/Vollstreckung): Gott passes (and enforces) judgment.

M 13 Examination of attitude (Gesinnungsprüfung): The person praying affirms his irreproachable conduct of life and/or asks God to examine it.

Independent and special cases (i. e. motives that cannot be assigned to a specific pattern)

M 14 Lie/Cheating/Treachery (Lüge/Betrug/Verrat): The person praying complains about a certain behavior of an opposite party.

M 15 Mocking/Sneering (Spott/Hohn): A party attempts to harm another party through speech that damages its reputation (social disintegration) and/or indicates through mockery and derision that it does not take the other party seriously.

M 16 Shame (Beschämung/Scham/Schande): One party causes the other party to be shamed or puts them in a state of shame.

M 17 Temptation (Verführung): One party tries to tempt the other to act in a way that is not pleasing to God.

M 18 Revenge/Retaliation (Rache/Vergeltung): One party takes revenge on the other or wants to do so.

M 19 Zeal for God (Eifer für Gott): The praying person provokes conflict through his zeal for God.

(Ch. 6. to 9., pp. 30–234) In the four following chapters, which form the main bulk of the dissertation, the four identified conflict patterns are described in detail. The chapters are structured according to the same scheme. An opening section summarizes the main findings of the detailed analysis of the aligned Psalms and gives an overview of the respective conflict pattern. It is accompanied by helpful tables which focus on the main characteristics and allow a fast orientation (cf. Appendix 2, pp. 254–263). Then all Psalms which can clearly be aligned to the respective pattern are analyzed in detail, focusing on a) the main actors (God, praying person[s], opponents), b) conflict issues (Konfliktobjekte), c) the process of the conflict (Konfliktverlauf), and d) how the conflict is settled (Konfliktregelung).

(Ch. 6., pp. 30–126) *Attack – Defense* (Angriff – Abwehr): One party attacks the other or tries to do so. However, the attack is prevented or warded off by God, who comes to the help of his partner.

(Ch. 6.1. pp. 31–35) <u>God's</u> action or non-action is decisive for the Attack – Defense conflicts, yet it is only reported with restraint. Often it can only be inferred indirectly that God intervenes or has intervened in a conflict. Often His intervention is hoped for and expected. God rarely acts of His own accord without being asked for. Sometimes He remains entirely passive (e. g. Ps 17), which is why the ability of the praying person(s) to affirm him- or herself in God's goodness and His willingness to help is crucial: Self-affirmation helps them to endure. God is often described as protector and defender, which can also be expressed in the image of God as a castle, a (high) rock, or a shield. God provides a safe refuge for those praying and thus ensures that the conflicting parties are separated from each other.

<u>The praying person(s)</u> describe themselves as people who seek God, who are God-fearing and/or righteous. No clear statement can be made about the social status of those praying. Sometimes the prayers describe themselves as poor or needy (e. g. Ps 12), whereby poverty and neediness can be understood both materially and spiritually. However, the people praying may also be well-off and sometimes the praying person reveals himself to be the king or the anointed one. In most cases, the prayers see themselves as hopelessly outnumbered by their opponents. Their strongest "weapon" is their firm confidence in God and His intervention in their favor. It helps them to endure conflict (e. g. Ps 3). But to settle a conflict always requires God's help. Even where praying people themselves take action against their opponents (e. g. Ps 2), this is only possible because God enables and empowers them to do so.

The opponents can be part of the close social environment of the praying person(s) (e. g. Ps 31), members of a particular social class (e. g. Ps 12), domestic political opponents, and/or foreign peoples or their leaders (e. g. Ps 2). However, judging opponents as foreign does not depend only on their ethnic origin. Someone can also turn out to be a stranger because he does not worship God or does not worship him properly (e. g. Ps 54). The opponents always act as a group. Words are their sharpest weapons. Through their words they insult, mock, ridicule, deny, deceive, and betray their victims. Often opponents operate in secret. They are often described as people who do not align themselves with God and His instruction, and thus prove to be not only opponents of those who pray, but also opponents of God. It is perceived as particularly bad when family members or friends turn out to be opponents who either abandon the prayers or even actively turn against them (e. g. Ps 31).

(Ch. 6.2., pp. 35–36) Conflict issues: In *Attack – Defense conflicts*, the issue in the vast majority of cases is the life of the praying person(s). Either it is about harming the praying person(s) or (more often) about destroying them.

(Ch. 6.3., pp. 36–38) Process of the conflict: The process of the conflict can only be described in part. No conflict can be traced from its beginning to its end. The causes that lead to a conflict usually remain in the dark. While the opponents are usually concerned with destroying the worshippers, conversely, the annihilation of the opponents is less prominent in the defense of the worshippers. An important strategy in dealing with and overcoming conflicts, is to strengthen one's trust in God: from the memories of past acts of God's grace, the praying person(s) draw strength to deal with an acute conflict situation.

(Ch. 6.4., pp. 38–43) Conflict settlement: There are four variants to settle a conflict:

1. God brings the praying person(s) to a safe place (In-Sicherheit-Stellung).

2. The opponents are contained, and their power is limited (Einhegung).

3. The praying person(s) is kept safe, and the opponents are contained and limited in their power.

4. The opponents are subjected to the dominion of the praying person (who, in these cases, is the king or the anointed one) and/or God (Unterwerfung)

Following one of these measures, the opponents can sometimes also be destroyed. Conflict resolution through reconciliation of the conflicting parties is at most rudimentarily addressed, and there is never any mention of the praying person(s) taking a step toward the opponents. Positioning in safety, containment,

and submission lead to an interruption of the conflict. Only if subsequently the opponents are annihilated, the conflict situation is dissolved (aufgelöst). Conflicts can have a constructive function if, for example, the worshipper is kept on the right path by rebuke.

The opening section to the conflict pattern Attack – Defense is closed by sketches that summarize the main characteristics of the pattern (p. 44). In Ch. 6.7. (pp. 45–126) the detailed analysis of the aligned Psalms follows: Ps 124, 12, 27, 62, 141, 142 (In-Sicherheit-Stellung); Ps 40, 54, 56, 70, 83, 86, 118 (Einhegung); Ps 3, 17, 31, 55, 57, 59, 64, 71, 140, 144 (In-Sicherheit-Stellung und Einhegung); Ps 2, 110 (Unterwerfung).

(Ch. 7., pp. 127–181) The conflicts belonging to the pattern *Turning away – Turning back (again)* (Abwendung – [erneute] Zuwendung) are characterized by the fact that one conflict party has nothing (more) to do with or wants to have nothing (more) to do with the other conflict party and/or that one conflict party acts violently towards the other. Either the shunned and/or violently treated party tries to persuade the other party to turn towards it (again) in a friendly manner, or the party which turned away undergoes a process which leads to turning back to the other party. In the opening section (Ch. 7.1. to 7.6., pp. 127–137) the main characteristics of the pattern are described. Ch. 7.7. (pp. 138–181) discusses the aligned Psalms in detail. Conflicts that follow this pattern can be divided into two subgroups: The turning away of God from an individual or from a group of people (Ch. 7.7.2., pp. 145–168, Ps 44, 13, 22, 60, 74, 80, 88, 10), and the turning away of people from God (Ch. 7.7.3., pp 169–181, Ps 36, 37, and 73). In the second group, the inner conflict of the prayers comes into focus.

(Ch. 7.2.1., pp. 130–131) In conflicts in which God shuns His people, an individual, or the godly or behaves violently toward them, His actions are perceived as unlawful (e. g. Ps 13). If God turns away from a former partner, this usually leads to the deterioration of interpersonal relationships. In many cases the avoidance of God turns into active hostile actions (e. g. Ps 22). By turning away from someone, God leaves them defenseless. God who is turning away from His people is described as a bad shepherd (Ps 44, 80) who does not fulfill His duties. Not only that He does not protect His people, but He deliberately exposes them to the violence of their human enemies. In Ps 80 occurs the image of the vinedresser who does not tend his vineyard but destroys it. In addition, there is the image of God as a warlord who goes to war against foreigners as well as against His own people (Ps 60). Where, on the other hand, the turning away of people from God is thematized (Ps 36, 37, 73), a positive image of God is

depicted.

(Ch. 7.2.2., pp. 131–133) The <u>praying person(s)</u> describe themselves as God-fearing and often identify themselves with the needy. They suffer greatly from God's turning away. Without Him on their side, they become weak, sick, helpless, defenseless, and/or come near death (e. g. Ps 13). Without God and His help they become easy victims for other people and suffer from social exclusion or from the military attacks of their enemies (e. g. Ps 44). God's behavior is incomprehensible to the praying person(s). Yet they never consider turning away from God for their part. Rather, the praying person(s) hold fast to their faithfulness to God and strengthen themselves in their hope for God's renewed kind attention. They try to get God to turn kindly to them again through appeals and arguments. Due to the descriptions of conflicts that deal with people's turning away from God (Ps 36, 37, 73), it becomes clear that even God-fearing people are in danger of acting wickedly.

(Ch. 7.2.3., pp. 133–134) The <u>opponents</u> never appear alone. They are depicted as foreign enemies (e. g. Ps 44) or as opponents within society (e. g. Ps 36). They are described as evildoers, liars, deceivers, schemers, as deluded and wicked. One becomes wicked by turning away from God. Turning away from God leads to or is made visible in destructive, antisocial behavior, thus again triggering conflicts among people and between people and God (e. g. Ps 73). Although the opponents are portrayed as overpowering, they ultimately serve as a "tool." They can attack the praying person(s) only because God withdraws from the godly, leaves them defenseless, and accepts or deliberately brings about the attack of the opponents on His own (e. g. Ps 44). Thus, either the conflicts among people are to be understood as a consequence of God's turning away from the godly, or it is in reality God's violent action that is in the background of the oppression by human opponents.

(Ch. 7.3., p. 134) <u>Conflict issues</u>: The dysfunctional relation between the praying person(s) and God is in focus. The main issue is God's turning away from an individual or a group, which is perceived as unjust by the praying person(s).

(Ch. 7.4., pp. 134–135) <u>Process of the conflict</u>: The process of a conflict is not described from the beginning, but usually starts in the middle of the events. Often there is a retrospective of past or an outlook on future salvific action of God. Only the conflict history of Ps 22 has a happy ending. God's turning away from an individual or a group often coincides or is often followed by the oppression of the godly by other people, and thus promotes the emergence or aggravation of other conflicts.

(Ch. 7.5., p. 136) <u>Conflict settlement</u>: Conflicts in which God turns away from the

godly, are almost never settled conclusively. Moreover, it is completely unclear whether anything can be done to get God to turn back in a friendly manner toward the godly again. The conflicts that deal with the turning away of people from God (Ps 36, 37, 73) do not report acute conflicts, but are reflections on fundamental conflict situations that characterize human existence per se.

(Ch. 8., pp. 182–204) Psalms aligned to the pattern Guilt – Punishment – Forgiveness (Schuld – Strafe – Vergebung) deal with the guilt of one actor towards God (and other people). Because the praying person has become guilty, God punishes him. The praying person laments his distress and asks God to forgive his guilt. As a result of God's forgiveness the conflict is resolved. The pattern cannot in every instance be clearly distinguished from the pattern Turning away – turning back (again) (cf. Ps 95). In the detailed analyses Ps 32, 38, 41, and 51 are studied.

(Ch. 8.1.1., pp. 183–184) <u>God</u> punishes the sinner, but punishment serves pedagogical purposes. The sinner should become aware of his guilt and be led to repentance. The conflicts studied can only be resolved if God forgives the praying person. Positive connotations prevail in the description of God.

(Ch. 8.1.2., p. 184) <u>The praying persons</u> reveal themselves as individuals who are punished by God for a guilt committed. The divine punitive action (and sometimes the realization of one's own culpability; cf. Ps 38, 51) results in the physical and psychological distress of the praying person. In principle, the praying persons recognize the divine punishment as legitimate (in this there is an essential difference to the conflict pattern Turning away – turning back [again]).

(Ch. 8.1.3, p. 185) The attacks of <u>the opponents</u> on the one praying are only possible because, due to their guilt and the punishment, the praying person is weakened and therefore vulnerable. The attacks on the praying person are therefore to be understood as consequences of the conflict between God and the one praying.

(Ch. 8.2., p. 185) <u>Conflict issues</u>: The main issue is the dysfunctional relationship between God and the individual. The focus is on the misconduct of the one praying.

(Ch. 8.3., pp. 185–186) <u>Process of the conflict</u>: The story of each of the analyzed conflict starts with the assessment of the guilt of an individual and his suffering because of God punishing him. Unlike the pattern Turning away – turning back (again) the praying person has certain possibilities of action at hand to obtain God's forgiveness: confession of guilt and request for forgiveness (both often

made publicly).

(Ch. 8.4., p. 186) <u>Conflict settlement</u>: Two out of four conflicts analyzed are resolved by God forgiving the praying person (Ps 32, 41), two remain (yet) unresolved (Ps 51, 38).

(Ch. 9, pp. 205–234) The conflict pattern Trial – Assessment (Prüfung – Beurteilung) is evident in Psalms in which conflicts are acted out in the context of trials or depicted in the image of a trial (Ps 7, 50, 82, 109) or described in terms of an assessment (Ps 26). Whereas in Ps 7 and Ps 109 the conflict is about the false accusation of an individual by other people, in Ps 26 the individual fears that he may be mistakenly thought by God to be wicked. In Ps 50 and Ps 82 a court case is depicted where God appears as prosecutor of his own people or other gods. Whereas in Ps 7 and Ps 109 the main cause of the conflict is the false accusation of an individual by other people, Ps 26, 50, 82 deal with a certain state of affairs and its (negative) consequences. In Psalm 7, 26, 50, the examination of the inner attitude of an actor by God plays an important role.

(Ch. 9.2.1., pp. 207–208) <u>God</u> is the one who sets the rules and watches over their observance. God tests people and passes judgment on them. This task is difficult even for God. He has to put people through their paces to find out whether they are righteous or wicked (cf. Ps 7, 26). God is not only called upon as judge and advocate, but He himself also laments grievances (cf. Ps 50, 82).

(Ch. 9.2.2., pp. 208–209) <u>The praying person(s)</u> are in a close relationship with God. Where they themselves speak out, they affirm their trust in His goodness and justice. The prayers in Ps 7, 26, 109 are convinced of their own innocence and decidedly set themselves apart from the wicked. In Ps 26, the praying person fears that God may mistakenly consider him as wicked. In Ps 7 and Ps 109 the praying person has to defend himself against the false accusation that he himself behaved antisocially.

(Ch. 9.2.3., pp. 209–210) <u>The opponents</u> never appear on their own but always in a group. They prove to be wicked by their unscrupulous and asocial behavior and because they do not take God seriously and do not follow his ways. The opponents falsely accuse the praying person. Their goal is to discredit them before God and bring about their social shunning.

(Ch. 9.3., p. 210) <u>Conflict issues</u>: Several issues occur: guilt or innocence of the praying person (Ps 7, 26), false accusation of the praying person by his opponents (Ps 109), the inner attitude and the behavior of the faithful toward God or of the wicked toward God and other men (Ps 50), and the incapability of the

gods and their actions toward men (Ps 82).

(Ch. 9.4., pp. 210–211) <u>Process of the conflict</u>: The texts analyzed are framed as trials or as an assessment of an individual's mind. In each case, God is supposed to examine a concrete case, pass judgment and act accordingly.

(Ch. 9.5., p. 211) <u>Conflict settlement</u>: Often the conflict narrative breaks off before settlement (Ps 7, 26, 109). In Ps 50, the divine admonition brings the trial to a temporary end. The conflict is dissolved in Ps 82, where death sentence is pronounced on the gods.

(Ch. 10., pp. 235–246) The final chapter summarizes the results of the dissertation and offers an outlook on possible follow-up research. The following viewpoints are addressed:

(Ch. 10.1., pp. 235–236) <u>Conflicts between men – diversity of areas of life and constellations</u>. The conflicts depicted in the Psalms cover a relatively wide range of social spheres of life. This makes them open to reception by different social groups. The ambiguity regarding the question of the identity of the opponents (i. e. their social or political position, their relation to the person[s] praying, their true intentions) and the overlapping of individual and collective perspectives make the texts compatible for reuse in different contexts and at different times. These aspects account for part of the openness and indeterminacy that characterize many Psalms and the Psalter as a whole.

(Ch. 10.2., pp. 236–237) <u>God as an actor</u>. God appears in the Psalms both as a third party in conflicts between men as well as an adversary of men. In each case, He plays an important (if not a decisive) role in the development of conflict. It is remarkable, however, that God often does not (yet) intervene and does not (yet) speak out. The fact that God often is waited for, is in a certain tension with the simultaneously expressed conviction that God is the leading actor and that conflicts can only be settled with His help. This tension corresponds to the fact that the self-affirmation of the person(s) praying in their trust in God's future intervention in their favor is of great importance. The repeated appeals of the prayers to themselves are also to be understood as appeals to the readers and listeners of the Psalms. In this respect, the conflicts described in the Psalms do not offer instructions on how to end conflicts but are rather to be understood as assistance that shows ways to endure persistent conflict situations.

(Ch. 10.3., pp. 237–244) <u>Thematic aspects</u>
(Ch. 10.3.1., pp. 237–239) <u>Poor, miserable, and weak versus rich, healthy, and</u>

powerful. Often there is a juxtaposition of poverty and wealth, weakness and strength, misery, and vitality observable in the texts. This, and the fact that the weakness of an actor all the more animates to attack him, as well as the view that illness and weakness indicate a culpable behavior, suggest that the experienced reality did not correspond to the appreciation of spiritual and material poverty that come up in the texts and that there were (theological) ways of thinking that represented a negative view of weakness, misery and poverty. Through the theology of the poor, however, the majority of the Psalms become texts through which an attempt is made to counteract this by postulating God's special protection for those affected by material poverty, for those in need of help, the weak and the miserable, and by sensitizing members of other social classes to treat them with care.

(Ch. 10.3.2., pp. 239–240) Integration in the social network. An important topic in the conflicts analyzed is one's embeddedness in a social network. Conflicts threaten or disrupt the social integration of the praying person(s). In addition to massive psychological and physical consequences, social exclusion also has drastic material consequences for those affected (cf. e. g. Ps 109), which is why it belongs to the sphere of death. Social exclusion is described in different ways and can affect both individuals and Israel as a people (as a member of the community of the nations). Mockery and ridicule are essential aspects by which an actor is degraded and expelled from the social community, and at the same time the degradation and expulsion of an actor becomes visible to others by being mocked and ridiculed.

(Ch. 10.3.3., p. 240) Words as a weapon – mockery and scorn versus prayer. The mockery and derision of the opponents are countered by the praying people with their own words in the form of prayers, sapiential mediations, and recollections of history. By speaking out, they weaken the opponents' power of speech. The words of the praying persons often express a strong confidence in God. This capacity for self-affirmation is the strongest weapon available to the praying persons not only in disputes with other people, but also in conflicts with God.

(Ch. 10.3.4., pp. 240–242) The righteous/godly versus the wicked/godless. The distinction between the righteous/godly and the wicked/godless can be traced across all conflicts studied. Often there is a close connection between or even an identification of the righteous/godly and the poor/miserable observable. On the other side, the enemies of the praying person(s) reveal themselves through their asocial behavior as opponents of God. The argument that the opponents of the praying person(s) are actually opponents of God also serves to persuade

God to intervene in a conflict. However, the clear separation between the righteous/godly and the wicked/godless is cracked in some Psalms. Occasionally, the possibility is considered that even the godly can (consciously or unconsciously) act wickedly. But this does not lead the praying person(s) to a more understanding attitude towards the wicked. At the very most, the possibility is envisaged that a transgressor can turn away from his transgressive path and turn (back) to God. However, repentance can only take place when one party adopts the attitude and viewpoint of the other party. Compromise is not considered.

(Ch. 10.3.5., pp. 242 –243) <u>The king, the people of God, and God-fearers as actors in military and political conflicts</u>. Relatively often the Psalms speak of political or military conflicts in which the king (or several kings) play a role. Even where there is less specific mention of conflicts between a person and his enemies, it is often not clear whether that person is a king or a "normal" person. These ambiguities indicate that the authors and redactors of the texts where less interested in the concrete historical conflicts, but focused their attention on general, model-like aspects of conflicts, i. e. conflict *patterns*.

(Ch. 10.3.6., pp. 243–244) <u>The Psalms as a contribution to conflict management.</u> This section asks about the relevance of the study of the Psalms to contemporary conflict situations. Despite the brutality of the conflicts depicted in the Psalms and the largely absence of attempts to understand the motives and actions of the other party to the conflict, to seek conversation, to bring about a compromise solution or reconciliation in interpersonal conflicts, the Psalms can serve as examples of how to deal with conflict: They allow for lamenting a conflictual situation, articulating thoughts of annihilation or desires to weaken the opponents. They do not gloss over anything but take seriously the contradictory and brutal nature of the world. Trusting in God's saving intervention or His renewed kind attention can help people to endure conflicts or even help that a conflict does not escalate to a point of no return. With respect to the readers and listeners of the Psalms, the immediacy of the texts creates potential for identification (cf. Ch. 10.1.), but at the same time makes it difficult to gain distance from an event and to perceive the perspective of the other party to the conflict. This as well as the fact that there are hardly any approaches of understanding another conflict party that could lead to a compromise (not to speak of reconciliation), makes the texts problematic from a today's perspective. However, censoring certain Psalms for this reason cannot be the solution. It is more worthwhile to consider the texts as a stimulus for discussion and reflection on how to deal with conflicts.

(Ch. 10.4., pp. 244–246) <u>Result, summary, and outlook</u>. The dissertation was intended to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of conflict with the Psalms as an example. It was intended to show the complexity of the conflicts addressed in the Psalms and to investigate whether the acting out of conflicts follows certain patterns. By not limiting the object of investigation to Psalms of a certain genre and by not focusing on one particular group of actors, i. e. the opponents, a broad spectrum of conflictual constellations could be taken into consideration.

Based on the analysis of the texts, four important insights can be formulated:

1. Not simply the opponents are the dominant theme of the Psalms (cf. Lohfink, Schriftauslegung, 36), but the *conflictual constellations*, in which the opponents as well as the praying person(s) and God participate, are a theme that characterizes the Psalms and the Psalter as a whole. That many of the conflicts depicted in the Psalms can be aligned to a specific conflict pattern shows, that conflicts often proceed according to certain "rules:"

   a. Conflicts can be acted out according to the pattern Attack – defense, in which God proves or is supposed to prove Himself as defender of the praying person(s).

   b. Conflicts can be aligned to the pattern Turning away – turning back (again). In these conflicts, God turns away from a former partner or individuals turn away from God.

   c. Conflicts can be assigned to the pattern Guilt – punishment – forgiveness, in which people become guilty toward God (and other people), are punished by God (whereby the punishment serves an educational purpose) and seek His forgiveness.

   d. Conflicts can be acted out according to the pattern Trial – assessment. These conflicts are characterized by the aspects of testing and judging and either follow the pattern of a trial or take up particular elements of it or address the examination of the attitude of an individual.

2. The analysis of conflicts helps to sharpen the profiles of the different actors, in particular the profiles of God and the praying person(s). God can be just as much a savior as an opponent, and the borderline between righteousness and wickedness on which the praying person(s) move is very narrow. It becomes apparent that the line between God and opponents and between the praying person(s) and opponents cannot be

drawn sharply. Thus the profile of the opponents is also re-accentuated. They are not simply the "others" who have nothing to do with God or the praying person(s). In principle, everyone can become an opponent. This is true not only for humans, but also for God.

3. The analysis of the conflicts in the Psalms has shown that conflicts often do not end but must be endured. The praying person(s) try to do this by putting as much distance as possible between themselves and their opponents and/or by strengthening themselves in their trust in God's interventions. Almost never does the possibility of a compromise or even a reconciliation between the conflicting parties come into view.

4. In the view of the analyzed conflicts, it is God alone who can end a conflict. All conflicts depicted in the Psalms are conflicts before and with God. People hope for and expect God's intervention. But they also vehemently call on God to finally stand up and intervene – even if God Himself opposes them as an adversary.

The findings of the dissertation can give impulses for Psalter theological reflections as well as for theological actualizations in the present time. They also point to the potential for further research. The analysis of conflicts with regard to the emergence of a Psalm (How does a conflict change with regard to the formation of a text?), or the reception-historical evaluation of conflicts described in the Psalms (Do aspects of conflictual constellations come to bear, for example, in the Hodayot, in the New Testament, in the use of the Psalms through the ages and, if so, how does this happen?) can provide further insights, as can the question of the socio-historical classification of the conflicts described in the Psalms. Applying conflict analysis to other texts of the Hebrew Bible, such as the Jacob – Esau story, the Joseph novella, or the Book of Kings, can also contribute to a better understanding of the themes of friendship, antagonism, and conflict.

Appendix 1 (pp. 247–253) contains excerpts (1) on the concept of reward and retribution, (2) about shame and honor, and (3) about the theology of the poor.

Appendix 2 (pp 254–263) contains overviews, sketches, and lists of the conflict patterns as well as lists of conflict-free Psalms, Psalms with potential for conflict, and Psalms with more than one conflict pattern.