G. Sujin Pak’s *The Judaizing Calvin* began as a doctoral dissertation at Duke University under the direction of David Steinmetz, the editor of the series in which this book now appears. Pak seeks to uncover Calvin’s place in the exegetical history of eight messianic psalms (2, 8, 16, 22, 45, 72, 110, and 118) by contrasting his approach to five earlier commentators and the *Glossa Ordinaria*. In addition, Pak reviews and moderates a debate between the Lutheran polemicist Aegidius Hunnius and the Reformed theologian David Pareus regarding Calvin’s allegedly “judaizing” exegetical hermeneutics. Pak also suggests ways in which theologians might build upon the hermeneutical foundation laid by Calvin in order to establish more positive relations between Christians and Jews. Finally, she aims to demonstrate the role of the history of exegesis in confessional identity formation.

The strength of Pak’s book lies in her convincing contrast of Calvin’s typological and historicized reading of these psalms with the christological hermeneutic of the *Glossa Ordinaria*, Nicholas of Lyra, Denis the Carthusian, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, and Martin Luther. She establishes that Hunnius indeed had the gravity of historical interpretation behind him when he accused Calvin of judaizing (13), since Denis the Carthusian and Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples did not concern themselves with David’s historical circumstances as factors that should influence Christian interpretation. For these commentators, the only history that mattered when interpreting these psalms was the history of Christ (17). She qualifies this summary by mentioning that Nicholas of Lyra usually explained David’s historical situation at the beginning of his commentaries, but nevertheless understood the primary meaning to be about the Savior (149). The medieval commentators believed that the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures were plainly
taught in the messianic psalms. Pak argues that Martin Luther joined the earlier interpreters by explaining that these psalms contain (first and foremost) literal prophecies of Christ (24-25, 34). Luther understood Christ and the Jews as the “main players” in the messianic psalms (36), and denounced the appropriation of rabbinic exegesis by Christian theologians (49). Luther left no room for typological readings of the messianic psalms by insisting that they were literally about Christ, his Church, and his enemies. In contrast, Martin Bucer employed a typological reading of these psalms, while simultaneously utilizing and criticizing Jewish exegesis. Nevertheless, his interpretations were parallel with the earlier commentators.

Breaking with the established tradition, John Calvin rejected the assertion that these psalms teach the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. He did this in order to preserve the “simple and natural” (i.e. historicized) sense of these psalms (92). Calvin saw David and Israel as types of the Christ and Church that were to come, and thus the primary meaning of the “messianic” psalms can be found without a christological emphasis. Pak argues (but does not prove) that Calvin had knowledge of Jewish exegesis apart from what he read in Bucer’s commentary (98). She contends that he employed this alleged knowledge “more covertly” than Bucer (101). Pak is far more successful, however, in demonstrating that Calvin’s rejection of the antecedent christological reading of these psalms left the door open for Hunnius to accuse him of judaizing.

Pak suggests that her research has important implications for confessional identity formation, as well as for historical and contemporary relations between Jews and Christians. She also proposes that her approach to the history of exegesis might help to fill the void of “religion” in the scholarship of confessionalization. These aspects of her argument are unpersuasive, as her research on the exegetical nuances of three Reformation theologians on such a limited body of Scripture does not necessarily reflect the “religion” of the majority of Lutheran or Reformed Christians. While Pak’s approach to historical theology is very useful for understanding the hermeneutics of a sample of theologians
over three hundred years, it is not particularly helpful for shedding light on the actual process of confessional identity formation during the Reformation era. For this, she would have to explore the extent to which her theologians’ contested readings of these psalms were (and were not) received and embraced by the laity. For instance, it is clear that Calvin’s exhortations to his followers to refrain from using the imprecatory psalms against their enemies fell on deaf ears. Pak fails to demonstrate that the majority of early modern Protestants internalized the hermeneutical distinctions of either Luther or Calvin on the messianic psalms any more than they embraced Calvin’s exhortations to refrain from imprecating their foes before battles during the Wars of Religion.

The copy editors at Oxford University Press failed to correct numerous spelling and grammatical errors, and Pak’s argument is weakened by repeated language, unclear sentences, and imprecise terminology. She has apparently used and closely followed James Anderson’s 1845 translation of Calvin’s *In Librum Psalmorum Commentarius*, as many of her quotations are identical (or nearly so) to his, but she neglects to provide a citation. Despite these weaknesses, Pak’s study provides valuable insight into Calvin’s innovative use of typology to historicize eight messianic psalms that had traditionally been interpreted through a more direct christological hermeneutic.

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