PART TWO

BIBLICAL STUDIES
CHAPTER TWO

DOES AN EXCLUSIVE VENERATION OF GOD NECESSARILY HAVE TO BE VIOLENT?
ISRAEL’S STONY WAY TO MONOTHEISM AND SOME THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Rainer Albertz

1. Introduction

Since September 11, 2001, it has become obvious to everyone in the world that religiously motivated fanaticism and violence constitute a dangerous political threat to all human civilisations. The bomb attacks on the public transportation system in Madrid and London have demonstrated that those in Europe are also directly involved in this new kind of religiously-induced cruelty. Being confronted by these alarming experiences, which cannot be limited to Islamic religion, all theologians are asked to examine the violent potential of their own religious tradition. Often the monotheism of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religion is suspected to be such an aggressive and violent potential. Therefore I would like to ask the self-critical question: does our exclusive monotheistic belief, which we inherited from Ancient Israel, have to be violent?

In the last decade this question is often answered in the affirmative. In the United States, Regina Schwartz wrote her accusatory book, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. In Germany, the Egyptologist Jan Assmann induced a broad debate on the violent impacts of monotheism by his books *Moses der Ägypter* and *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus*. While Christian and Jewish theologians like to evaluate monotheism to be the climax of religious development, Assmann praises ancient polytheism, where the distinction between true and false religion would have been

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