



Seminar

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### *Esther, Ethics, and Martin Luther: Biblical Interpretation in the Shadow of Judeophobia*

Thursday, 16 April, 4:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT ISAAC KALIMI

Isaac Kalimi received his Ph.D. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is now Gutenberg Research Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies and the History of Ancient Israel at Johannes Gutenberg- Universität Mainz, a Fellow of the Gutenberg Forschungskolleg at the same university, and Senior Research Associate at the University of Chicago. He has taught and conducted research at several universities, including Northwestern University; Universität Salzburg; Universität Oldenburg; and Universität Luzern.

Kalimi has published many articles in a variety of leading professional journals. He has edited/co-edited a number of volumes, such as *Sennacherib at the Gate of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography* (CHANE, 71, 2014); *Scriptural Authority in Early Judaism and Ancient Christianity* (DCLS, 16, 2013); *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah: History and Historiography, Text, Literature, and Interpretation* (2012); *Jewish Bible Theology: Perspectives and Case Studies* (2012); *Biblical Interpretation in Judaism and Christianity* (LHB/OTS, 439, 2006). He has also authored numerous books, including *Das Chronikbuch und seine Chronik: Zur Entstehung und Rezeption eines biblischen Buches* (FS, 17, 2013); *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey* (2009); *An Ancient Israelite Historian* (SSN, 46, 2005); *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy* (JCH, 2, 2002); and *Zur Geschichtsschreibung des Chronisten* (BZAW, 226, 1995).

Kalimi's monograph *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (2005, reprinted 2012) was the recipient of the 2006 R. B. Y. Scott Award of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies. He has received many awards, including National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow (2007–08), Fulbright Distinguished Chair (2011), the 2012 Franz-Delitzsch Prize, and Fellow-in-Residence, Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (2013). Kalimi serves as senior editor of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics*, and is associate editor of *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* and *Old Testament Abstracts*. He is also on the editorial board of the *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* (E. J. Brill). During his time at SCAS, Kalimi will work on his monograph 'The Man and the Myth: The Many Faces of King Solomon in the Ancient Israelite Historiography'.

## ABSTRACT

Martin Luther refers to the book of Esther and its Jewish figures in all kinds of his writings. In the early stage of his career as reformer, Luther showed a respectful attitude towards the book and its Jewish figures. However, later on he turned his position up-side-down, and severely criticized the very existence of the book. These contradictory views of Luther are examined here against the background of his general attitude towards Jews and Judaism in the last four decades of his life and career; that is, tolerant and friendly in the early stage, but xenophobic and antrophobic later on. Most likely, these two themes run together, side by side, in Luther's life as protestant reformer: Luther's early sympathy and later hostility to the book of Esther (and 2 Maccabees) is part of and parallel to his early friendly and later anti-Judaic polemics. In the following periods, Luther's negative approach towards the book of Esther had enormous influence on theologians, commentators and other scholars, almost in all over the Christian world, and even beyond it, in fact until today.

Apparently, Luther's Judeophobia stems from a combination of deep subjective disappointment from Jews' refusal to be converted, intense traditional Christian anti-Jewish theology, and perhaps also from some irrational fears of Jewish mythical power. Luther's racist and anti-Semitic manifestos, labels, and accusations were influential during generations. They became a fundamental cultural basis for the ideology and propaganda of the Nazism, and escalated and fully implemented before and during the Second World War.