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Editorial

The Academy's 2005 conference, planned under the theme, "Singing Our Sorrows", took place less than one month after the tsunamis that devastated countries around the rim of the Indian Ocean; and as this issue of *AJL* was being prepared, we heard news of a series of terrorist attacks in London.

Sadly, then, the papers presented here have a timeliness not envisaged when the conference was first conceived. Natural and humanly-devised events have given cause for individual and communal lament which demands our sensitivity and skill in the craft of liturgy, to give expression — within safe ritual structures — to the powerful reactions such experiences evoke.

I trust that the conference papers presented here, and those to come in the next issue, will provide helpful resources for those charged with facilitating such rituals.

As always, I look forward to receiving your contributions for future issues of *AJL*; and I wish you continuing courage and hope.

Inari Thiel
Logan City

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Many Voices of Lament: an exploration of the book of Lamentations

Elizabeth Boase

Introduction

In the year 586 BCE, the city of Jerusalem was overrun and destroyed by the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar. The destruction of the city followed a protracted two year siege, with the armies surrounding the city and restricting the flow of food and water into Jerusalem. Famine spread, and death was rife. When Jerusalem was finally conquered, the Babylonians destroyed the entire fabric of Judean society. People were killed, buildings were destroyed, the king, the leaders and all but the poorest members of society were exiled. The Temple, the sacred centre heart of the nation, was levelled and its treasures carried off by the victorious army. The social, political and religious life of the nation was totally destroyed.

We can gain some insight into the pain and grief of the Jerusalem community through the book of Lamentations, which is thought to have developed in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem. As its name implies, Lamentations is a collection of lament poems in which the worshipping community gives voice to its pain.

Lament, and lament language, has a unique place in the theological expression of Israel. When we consider the lament, two primary

functions come to mind. First and foremost laments are an expression of suffering. Through lament we give voice to suffering, and in lamenting before God, we both acknowledge and dignify the suffering.¹

Of itself, lament is also a turning towards God, is prayer directed at God. Laments express pain and suffering, and voice, however hesitantly, the possibility that things may be made better in the future. Whether through the fact of being heard, or through divine response, intrinsic to the lament is at least an element of hope.²

When we turn to the book of Lamentations, we find a rich diversity of language expressing the suffering of the community. Much of the discussion on Lamentations in the past fifty years has focused on an attempt to find the theological message or centre of the book. Various theories have been put forward, but despite attempts at defining the theological thrust of the book, Lamentations has defied being tied down to a single outlook or perspective.³ Rather, a close reading of the book shows that it gives expression to multiple perspectives, viewpoints and theological outlooks.⁴ In expressing its grief the

¹Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 272.

²Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. 266-67.

³See, by way of example, Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Alan Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe," *Prooftexts 2* (1982): 1-17; Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London: SCM, 1954); Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1992); Michael S. Moore, "Human Suffering in Lamentations," *RB 90* (1983): 535-55; Robert B. Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations*, OTG (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994).

⁴So also F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 2002); Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (New York: Orbis, 2002); Charles W. Miller,

Jerusalem community did not present only one aspect of that grief. It did not silence dissenting voices, or try to produce a neatly packaged theological perspective on the destruction of the city. It didn't try to solve the problems, or resolve the grief. Rather, through these poems, Lamentations provides a window to a confusion of emotion and explanation which portrays a community in turmoil, a turmoil which is not silenced, but given the validity and dignity of language. Pain, grief, hope, anger, confession and denial are all represented in the richness of Israel's expression. Nothing is resolved, but much is aired. And, what's more, aired before God.

Lamentations as dialogic text

In order to understand the nature of the rhetorical confusion presented within Lamentations, it is useful to first provide an overview of the book itself.

The book of Lamentations is firstly a book of poetry. It is made up of five chapters, each of which is a self contained poem. As poetry, there is a tightness of expression and richness of language. Metaphor, simile and poetic images dominate. The first four chapters are alphabetic acrostics. In chapters 1 and 2, each series of three lines begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In chapter 4, each series of two lines has this structure. In chapter 3 the acrostic is intensified. The lines can be grouped into threes, with the beginning

"Reading.Voices: Personification, Dialogism and the Reader of Lamentations 1," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 393-408; Adele Berlin, *Lamentations*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

of each of the three lines starting with the same letter of the alphabet. We thus have three aleph lines, three bet lines and so on. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, but it still has twenty-two verses, which conforms to the length of the Hebrew alphabet.

So, why poetry and what's more why such a tight acrostic form?

The poetic language of the book allows for a richness of expression that would not have been possible had prose language been used. The very nature of poetry allows a variety of images and metaphors to be utilised. In addition, the poetic form allows the introduction of different voices into the expression, thus opening the possibility of bringing different viewpoints into play.

The tightly structured acrostic form is more difficult to explain. While it would seem to be too formal and structured for the expression of such raw emotion and grief, in using the acrostic the poems can be seen to express a sense of totality; the *aleph* to *taw* of grief. Closely related to this is that the acrostic also has the effect of containing the expression of grief. In her discussion of the acrostic form, O'Connor captures this sense:

Lamentations' alphabetic devices are deeply symbolic. They expose the depth and breadth of suffering in conflicting ways. The alphabet gives both order and shape to suffering that is otherwise inherently chaotic, formless, and out of control. ... It tries to force unspeakable pain into a container that is familiar and recognisable even as suffering eludes containment. It

implies that suffering is infinite, for it spans the basic components of written language from beginning to end.⁵

So the poetry and the acrostic form both serve the expression of the suffering.

Lamentations can be described as a polyphonic text. It offers a variety of viewpoints and expressions of grief concerning the destruction of Jerusalem — viewpoints which are not collapsed or resolved into one. How is it, then, that the text achieves this dialogical tension?

First, the poets of Lamentations introduce a variety of different voices into the text. At least four key voices are heard. There is the voice of the narrator, who opens the book with his description of the fallen city. This voice recurs throughout chapters 1-4. There is the voice of the personified city, who describes her plight and suffering in first person speech, occurring predominantly in chapters 1 and 2. Another dominant voice is that of the community, who speak in first person plural voice, and appear briefly in chapters 3 and 4 and all of chapter 5. Finally, chapter 3 introduces a fourth voice, an individual male sufferer who describes his plight in intentionally gendered first person speech. These voices interweave within the poetry, at times agreeing with each other, at others disagreeing, but together presenting a jumble of different viewpoints.

⁵O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 13.

The introduction of these various voices is a powerful device. Lamentations "reflects a community's desperate grasping for meaning as the world around it - and the political, social, and religious framework which gave this world meaning and purpose - has collapsed."⁶ Heim argues that the utterances of Lamentations are "directed at different audiences within the textual world of the book. They convey different, and often competing messages, and they struggle for the readers' attention."⁷ Lamentations is "designed to reflect the historical situation of a community going through turmoil and crisis."⁸ It "is a consciously 'open' text which gives multiple answers to complex questions related to Jerusalem's destruction."⁹

In using different voices to express its lament, the poems of Lamentations do not try to give only one viewpoint, silence dissenting voices or to capture only one theological perspective. Rather, the many voices within the poems reflect a whole range of emotions and explanations concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, making these poems a powerful expressive tool for the whole community, and not for just a minority few within the larger group.

Another way in which Lamentations introduces various viewpoints into the poetry is through the different themes treated within the book.

⁶Knut M. Heim, "The Personification of Jerusalem and the Drama of Her Bereavement in Lamentations," in *Zion, City of Our God*, ed. Richard R. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 146.

⁷Heim, "Personification of Jerusalem," 146.

⁸Heim, "Personification of Jerusalem," 146.

⁹Heim, "Personification of Jerusalem," 169.

Various themes develop and recur throughout, sometimes spoken by one voice, sometimes by another. Sometimes one voice picks up and responds to the concerns of an interacting voice. The various themes within the book help to express the different viewpoints present within the community.

These themes include descriptions of misery, references to divine responsibility for the destruction, expressions of confidence in Yahweh, call to confession, hope for the future restoration of Jerusalem and references to the sin of the people

The interweaving of these themes helps to present the emotional tapestry of the book.

In addition, the poems, at various points, draw on the richness of Israel's theological traditions as a means of attempting to explain what has happened. We find expressions which draw on the Deuteronomic school of thought, linking sin and consequences. Through its references to the city as a female figure, the linking of the destruction of Jerusalem with the day of Yahweh's judgment and through references to sin, the text makes explicit links with the prophetic literature. Chapter 3 draws on concepts familiar to Israel's wisdom traditions, and we also find reference to Zion theology concerning the inviolability of Jerusalem. In drawing on each of these traditions, we see emerging attempts to come to terms with the

destruction, even though those attempts are not yet presented into a unified or resolved explanation.

As a means of illustrating the way in which the poems of Lamentations create their meaning, chapters 1-3 of the book will be outlined.

Lamentations 1

Lamentations 1 contains the speech of two personae: the narrator (vv. 1-9b, 10-11b, 17) and personified Zion (vv. 9c, 11-6, 18-22). Both voices speak of the destruction of the city, describing its present plight and its causes. The two voices, however, stress different aspects of the destruction, interacting with each other as the poem progresses.

The opening voice of Lamentations is that of the narrator, who describes the present state of the personified city (vv. 1-6) and explores the causes of her plight (vv. 7-11). Much of this speech presents a theology linked to the prophetic literature which sees the destruction as being the result of the sin of the city. This link is one of the explanations for the destruction present within the book. The narrator's voice does not fully accept this theology however, and as the poem progresses, tension begins to emerge as to the adequacy of this explanation.

Verse 1 opens with the cry *ekah*, a howl of pain and misery often associated with a funeral dirge. Throughout the opening verses (vv. 1-

6) the narrator contrasts Zion's past glory with her present state, describing her misery throughout. Zion/Jerusalem is personified as a female figure, achieving two things. It allows the pathos and grief of the city to be described in very personal language. For the community of the day it would also have reminded them of the prophetic judgment speeches in which Jerusalem was described as a female — often as an unfaithful wife or a whore.¹⁰

The narrator's primary concern is the city as the political and religious centre of the nation. Even when referring to the city as female, many of the images suggest her political role. She was great among the nations (v. 1), was a princess who is now a vassal (v. 1), she has lovers and friends who have abandoned her and become her enemies (v. 2), and her foes have become her masters (v. 5). The narrator also describes Zion mourning over her lost cultic function (v. 4).

The narrator links the city's destruction with her sin. This could be the basis of the reference to lovers (v. 2), and is clearly stated in v. 5. But this view is also undermined. Although the narrator is an observer of the city and her plight, the text suggests that he has some empathy for her, especially in his description of her as a lonely, tearful widow who lacks comforters. Even where reference is made to sin (v. 5), the surrounding lines present startling images which lead the reader to consider Zion as victim. Yahweh is said to have caused Zion to suffer,

¹⁰ Isa 1:21-26; 3: 25-4:1; 22:1-14; Micah 4:6-14; Jer 4:11-18, 19-21, 29-31; 6:1-8, 22-26; 10:17-21; 13:20-27; 14:17-18; 15:5-9; 30:12-17; Zeph 3.

and the plight of the children of the city is described. Through the use of imagery and descriptions which evoke empathy on behalf of the audience, the poetry questions the link between sin and punishment. The focus is on the suffering not the sin.

The narrator's speech continues in vv. 7-11), although the focus centres more on the causes of Zion's plight, both in terms of the actions of the enemy against the city (vv. 7, 10), and in terms of Zion's own actions (vv. 8-9). Descriptions of Zion's misery continue, and further reference is made to the sin of the city (vv. 8-9).

Verses 8-9 again refer to Zion's sin, however these two verses are full of ambiguity. Zion is portrayed as a despised and shamed woman, named as a sinner and described in an array of sexually loaded images. Prophetic texts are evoked in the reference to Zion's sin, and the images can be read in terms of Zion as harlot (Isa 1:21-26; Jer 13:20-27). However, the images also portray Zion as victim, and can be read as reference to sexual assault.¹¹ The ambiguity of meaning remains unresolved in these verses, however, the narrator's reference to the lack of comforter for the city (v. 9) supports a more sympathetic reading of the text.

In v. 9 we hear the voice of Zion for the first time, introducing a new perspective into the poem. Zion interrupts the narrator, addressing

¹¹Hosea 2 also portrays the punishment of a female figure in terms of sexual assault. There, however, the woman portrayed is representative of the land and nation.

Yahweh, appealing to Yahweh to notice her affliction. The narrator's speech has paved the way for the voice of Zion, and now the focus is on the city as subject, the one who calls out to Yahweh in her distress. Zion's position as victim and sufferer comes to the fore.

The narrator resumes his speech in v. 10, continuing the language of assault continues. The narrator describing the invasion of the temple by the nations (v. 10b) - a description which can also be read as a reference to the sexual assault of the city, thus reinforcing the sexual imagery of vv. 8-9.¹² The narrator's speech closes with a description of the people within the city affected by famine (v. 11a-b). The focus of the narrator's speech has shifted from a primary concern with the city as a political and cultic entity, to a focus on the everyday suffering of ordinary people in the wake of the destruction. Tension filled images of Zion the sinner and Zion the victim are thus juxtaposed.

Zion takes over as speaker in v. 11, again appealing to Yahweh, this time to notice her despised state. This appeal is followed by Zion's lengthy speech (vv. 12-16, 18-22) which describes Zion's the city's plight in intimate, first person speech. Aspects of Zion's body are emphasised (vv. 13, 14, 16, 17, 20) introducing a sense of intense personal attack in Yahweh's actions. The city as subject has shifted from an identity bound by her political and cultic function to an

¹²F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp and Tod Linafelt, "The Rape of Zion in Thr 1,10," ZAW 113 (2001): 77-81.

individual who has been overwhelmed and assaulted by a powerful enemy - Yahweh. The sense of personal assault potentially present through the narrator's use of ambiguous sexual images (vv. 8-9, 10) is fleshed out and made real in the speech of Zion.

Zion's concerns are more personal and reflect her suffering as an individual, with her pain centring on the fact that it is Yahweh who has caused her to suffer. Zion places emphasis on her physical and emotional suffering, describing herself as a wounded victim who is pleading for both notice and comfort.

Zion refers to her own sin three times, but it is still her suffering which dominates. Each time she names her sin Zion's speech returns immediately to a description of the suffering Yahweh's action caused her, with the references surrounded by images of Jerusalem's portrayal of herself as an uncomforted victim.

Zion's speech stands in contrast to that of the narrator. While the narrator's speech was filled with references to the political downfall of the nation, the city's cultic function, and her loss of purity, Zion's emphasis is more on the personal impact of the destruction and the fate of groups within the city. Zion does echo some the narrator's concerns, but does so for her own purposes. She places more emphasis on the incomparability of her suffering (v. 18b) and her anguish and turmoil (v. 20).

A dialogic interaction occurs in the differing concerns of the narrator and Zion. These differences are, arguably, facets which represent aspects of the community's distress following Jerusalem's destruction. The people suffered personal pain and anguish, and the political and cultic life of the city was destroyed.

The chapter closes with Zion again appealing for her suffering to be noticed, turning back to Yahweh (v. 20a). Having called out to Yahweh vv. 9c and 11c, and having had no response, Zion turns to passers-by in v. 12, and in v. 18 also calls out for the peoples to hear her cry and notice her suffering. Again, no response is forthcoming, and Zion re-turns to Yahweh. Zion's initial speech ends where it opened, with Zion enduring unnoticed, comfortless suffering.

Lamentations I contains unmerged viewpoints which stand in tension. The narrator and Zion have different concerns. Although there is a sense of empathy in his speech, the narrator, is primarily concerned with Zion's political and cultic function, the purity of the city, and sin as the cause of the city's plight. When Zion speaks, she is much more concerned with the personal reality of her own suffering and the suffering of the community. Zion also names sin as the cause of Yahweh's action against her. But even when she voices this orthodox view, the reference is eclipsed by her immediate concern with her own suffering. Zion and the narrator discuss the same event, but do so from different perspectives, thus expressing different viewpoints.

Lamentations 2

Lamentations 2 continues the dialogic interplay begun in chapter 1, with the voices of both the narrator and Zion again being heard. The chapter shares common themes with chapter 1, both referring to divine responsibility and giving descriptions of misery, however the development of the themes varies. It is the narrator who now names the divine responsibility, moving then to voice a description of misery (vv. 11-19) in which he addresses Zion for the first time and expresses his own grief over the fate of the city. Zion continues to call to Yahweh to notice her suffering, but her description of misery becomes more strident as she attempts to goad Yahweh into action (vv. 20-22).

The narrator's speech opens the chapter (vv. 1-8), again with the *ekah* cry (2:1), evoking the funeral dirge. Following the lead of Zion in chapter 1, the narrator now voices the divine responsibility theme but, in doing so, expresses his own concern. In contrast to Zion's description of Yahweh's personal attack against her, the narrator continues to be concerned with the political and cultic role of the city. Reference is made to the abandonment and/or destruction of the cult by Yahweh (vv. 1, 6-7) and multiple references are made to the physical destruction of Jerusalem, the nation and its leaders (vv. 2-5, 8).

The initial focus (vv. 1-8) is on Yahweh as warrior acting against the city and nation, drawing on holy war imagery. The language is suggestive of the prophetic literature, although that theology is subverted. Although the Babylonians are mentioned briefly, a barrage of verbs is used to emphasise Yahweh as the cause of the destruction. The anger and wrath of Yahweh are stressed, with the opening verses (vv. 1-6) dominated by reference to the heat and intensity of Yahweh's anger.

Several facets of the description of divine action subvert the prophetic theology. Usually when the prophetic literature describes Yahweh acting against the city, the reason for the destruction is described, always tied with the sin of the city. Reference to sin is absent from this passage. The intense focus on Yahweh's actions initially suggests a sense of dispassion on behalf of the narrator. However, this sense of emotional distance is broken open in the sheer intensity of the description and the unrelenting focus on Yahweh's destructive action in the absence of any causal explanation. As Zion is overwhelmed by Yahweh's forceful destruction, so too is the audience. The audience is left with a strong sense of Zion as Yahweh's overpowered victim.

The sense that the narrator's speech expresses outrage at the treatment of Zion is confirmed in the continuation of the narrator's speech in verses 10-19.

These verses shift from a focus on divine responsibility to description of misery. The narrator is transformed from an observer of the city's plight to a participant in her suffering. Here (v. 11) the narrator assumes the same attitude to the destruction as does Zion, describing his own weeping and turmoil over the devastation. The narrator also describes the cries of the children due to the famine and their subsequent starvation (vv. 11-12), which stands in line with Zion's reference in chapter 1 (v. 16).

Within this chapter the narrator addresses Zion for the first time (vv. 13-19), acknowledging her concerns and perspective. Verse 13 is pivotal, with the narrator acknowledging the incomparability of Zion's suffering, seeking, but failing, to offer her comfort. The following verses (vv. 14-17) reinforce the impossibility of comfort for Zion. The prophets are excluded from the role of comforter, the mockery of the passersby is described (v. 15), as is the gloating of the enemy (v. 16). On top of this, it is announced that it was Yahweh who caused Zion's downfall (v. 17). Despite effectively disqualifying Yahweh as a comforter, the narrator calls on Zion to cry again to Yahweh (vv. 18-19). Despite Yahweh's responsibility and ongoing silence, it is only in a response from Yahweh that comfort is possible. The paradox of Zion's situation is thus captured.

Chapter 2 closes with a brief speech by Zion who again appeals to Yahweh to notice her plight (vv. 20-22). Throughout Lam 1 and 2,

Zion alternates between turning to Yahweh (1:9c, 11c, 20; 2:20) and away from Yahweh (1:12-19) in her attempt to have her suffering noticed. Zion reminds Yahweh of their past relationship (v. 22) in an effort to goad Yahweh into responding. Zion describes the extreme suffering within the city, making special mention of the cannibalism of the mothers (v. 20), echoing and intensifying the previous reference to the children (1:5, 16; 2:11-12). Zion then draws together the concerns of the entire chapter, accusing Yahweh of not only forgetting but also mistreating various groups within the city. Despite the appeal Yahweh remains silent.

This is a startling and shocking chapter. The accumulation of verbs describing the extremity of Yahweh's actions barrage and overwhelm the reader, creating a sense of the victimisation of the city, especially so in light of the virtual absence of reference to sin. Unlike the prophetic texts where Zion is cast in the role of the deserving recipient of Yahweh's anger, Jerusalem is transformed into a battered and overwhelmed victim of divine wrath. This expression of anger and outrage, even outrage expressed towards the divine, is an important voice heard within Lamentations, a stand given validity in the canonisation of this text.

Lamentations 3

Chapter 3 of Lamentations is a diverse and complex chapter. It introduces new voices, themes and traditions into the book and in

doing so introduces disparate viewpoints into the interaction. This is the only chapter in which explicit hope is expressed within Lamentations, thus setting it apart.

The chapter opens with an extended speech (vv. 1-18) in the first person voice of a male figure. Like the narrator and Zion, this man names Yahweh as the source of his troubles, however his emphasis is different. Zion and the narrator were concerned with Yahweh's actions against the city. The man's speech concerns Yahweh's action against an individual figure with there being no indication that the voice in any way represents the city.

That this voice is male is emphasised in the opening verse "*I am the man,*" setting the voice apart from the previous speakers. He is male, and is recalling his suffering as an intentionally gendered figure. His maleness contrasts with Zion, who is intentionally gendered as female. As a male figure, the images used to describe Yahweh's affliction are associated with more masculine imagery than those of Zion, "invoking the physical violence against the male body associated with war and exile."¹³ Yahweh imprisons the man (vv. 4-9), he is hunted (vv. 10-13), is shot with arrows (vv. 12-13), walled in (vv. 7, 9). The man describes the relentlessness of Yahweh's pursuit (vv. 2-3) and the affliction of both body (vv. 4-6) and spirit (vv. 5, 11, 14-18). Like Zion, this is a very embodied figure (vv. 4, 13, 16) who

¹³Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84-85.

has suffered great individual affliction against all aspects of his person. The end result is the loss of all hope and happiness (vv. 17-18).

In contrast to Zion's speech in chapter 1 (vv. 12-20), the man makes no reference to sin as the cause of Yahweh's actions. Unlike Zion he does not overtly call on Yahweh or others to notice his suffering.

In introducing this new persona, the text is able to present a different and distinctly masculine viewpoint on the suffering. In the verses which follow, however, the man moves beyond the recollection of suffering in an attempt to explain or resolve the suffering.

The man's speech (vv. 19-30) evokes Israel's wisdom traditions, reflecting on the nature of Yahweh (vv. 22-24, 34-39) and the correct stance to be taken before Yahweh in the face of suffering (vv. 25-30). Psalm traditions are also evoked in expressions of confidence (vv. 19-24, 31-33). These verses contain an element of hope otherwise absent in Lamentations, and are, in many ways, a counter view to the remainder of the book. This opposing theology of hope has frequently been privileged in discussions of the intent and theology of Lamentations, however it must be recognised that this hope is but one viewpoint among the many expressed within the book

The man's speech moves from voicing divine responsibility to an expression of confidence in Yahweh (vv. 19-24), raising the

possibility of hope. The source of the man's hope lies in the recollection of Yahweh's attributes of steadfast love, mercy and faithfulness. The verses which follow (vv. 25-39) introduce a new viewpoint into the dialogue, developing a theodicy in which the man uses wisdom-like language and concepts to both account for (his) suffering and to expound the proper attitude towards suffering. It is these verses which stand in greatest contrast to the remainder of both chapter and book.

The man defines the attributes of Yahweh, who is good to those who wait for him and to the soul that seeks him (vv. 25-30). These verses all counsel patient waiting on Yahweh and the adoption of an attitude of humility. This stance is in contrast to the man's initial vehement and lengthy complaint against Yahweh. The man has moved from a contemplation and recollection of his own suffering, to a reasoned reflection on suffering, constructing a theodicy as a means of moving beyond the suffering, and distilling a sense of hope.

Following this expression of theodicy, the man again expresses confidence in Yahweh (vv. 31-33). The ongoing nature of the suffering is acknowledged, with reference made to Yahweh not rejecting forever, alongside reference to Yahweh causing grief. This is counterbalanced by confidence in Yahweh's compassion and steadfast love, and the belief that Yahweh does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

Finally, the man again uses wisdom-like language in the description of Yahweh's omniscience and omnipotence (vv. 34-38). The unit culminates with a declaration as to the futility of complaint in the face of the punishment of sins (v. 39).

While there is distinct hope within the man's speech, raising the possibility of leaving behind grief and suffering, the dialogue of Lamentations does not conclude at this point. The hope is fleeting, with the following verses returning to lament focusing once more on the suffering endured (vv. 42-66). In the larger scheme of the book, the hope-filled theodicy developed by the man is only one viewpoint in the larger dialogue.

Despite the movement of the poem back into lament, the position attained by the man is given privileged position in much of the scholarship on Lamentations. However, in recognising the multiple expressions within Lamentations, and in allowing those expressions to remain unmerged, the hope of the man does not eclipse other, less hopeful voices. Instead, it is understood as but one viewpoint concerning the destruction of the city and the suffering of the community, and while it does suggest a path by which the hopelessness of suffering can be alleviated, it is neither the centre, nor the purpose of the whole book. Hope is but one voice struggling to be heard in the rhetorical confusion of Lamentations.

Space prevents considering the remainder of the text in any detail. Chapters 3-5 continue to expression grief and lament, sometimes in the singular voice of the narrator, sometimes in the voice of the community. Despite the hope raised by the man in chapter 3, the book itself ends on a note of despair. Chapter 5 closes with a pitiful question which looks to Yahweh, yet doubts whether or not there is hope of renewed relationship. The final verses are less than hopeful. "Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old - unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure."

Throughout the book the one voice which has not been heard has been Yahweh's. This silence becomes the central focus of the book's conclusion reinforcing a sense of divine abandonment. The poetry moves towards Yahweh but does so in doubt of a response, unsure as to whether the destruction, pain and suffering represent a permanent severance of the relationship. The dialogue is open and unfinalized. Both the community and the text's audience are left with the heart rending reality of the ongoing silence of Yahweh, yet the appeal leaves open the possibility of a future word from Yahweh.

Conclusions

As a book, and despite its complexities, Lamentations stands as a model of lament for today's community. This poetic book provides a myriad of viewpoints in a situation of great pain and anguish. It

expresses many different aspects of suffering, ranging from utter despair to faith filled hope. It allows the various viewpoints to sit side by side, not attempting to dissolve differences into a unified theology, or to provide neatly packaged answers. It simply allows tensions and ambiguity to rest together.

Lamentations provides a call for us in our expression of lament in the midst of personal and global grief and pain. Our laments are primarily expressions of emotion, expressions of the pain and suffering felt by those who participate in them. Our laments do not have to provide the answers, or resolve the issues. Rather, they are vehicles for their audience to give expression to their emotion, they give validity to those emotions, and they bring those emotions before God. In doing so they become prayers, and are, in essence, expressions of faith in a God who will act.

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A Liturgist's Response

Elizabeth Harrington

Dr Boase's paper opened up for me many new insights into the Book of Lamentations. Coming as the conference did just a few weeks after the Asian tsunami tragedy, the voices of turmoil and of ultimate hope in these Hebrew writings seemed particularly poignant.

An investigation of the three volumes of the Roman Catholic Lectionary for Mass reveals that the Book of Lamentations is seldom used in liturgical celebrations.

Excerpts from Lamentations are never used as the first reading on any Sundays of the year or on the weekdays of Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter. Only once in the two-year cycle of readings for weekdays in Ordinary Time does a passage from Lamentations appear.

Interestingly, pericopes from Lamentations appear four times in Lectionary Volume 3, once as a suggested reading during a Mass in time of earthquake, and three times in Masses for the Dead, two of those being for the burial of children. In each of these instances, the passage is taken from the third chapter of the book, the chapter in which a note of hope is introduced which gives assurance of God's continuing mercy and love despite the suffering of the present.

At such times of destruction and death it is obviously appropriate to use passages from scriptures that express despair at current circumstances counterbalanced with confidence in God's compassion. One wonders, however, why these stories are not proclaimed at other times of the year and in other liturgical celebrations.

The book "Liturgies of Lament" by J. Frank Henderson is an excellent resource that is invaluable to liturgists called on to prepare services in times of tragedy. It is surprising to discover that, in the several pages of suggestions of scripture passages to use on such occasions, the Book of Lamentations is mentioned only twice.

It is possible that excerpts from the Book of Lamentations are not used more often in liturgical celebrations because the nature of this piece of writing means that it needs to be read in its entirety in order to be fully understood. The various voices that are heard, the different viewpoints that are expressed, the multiple answers to complex questions that are offered: these cannot be discerned in reading only a selected section of the work.

Perhaps the passages from chapter three which are currently used occasionally in liturgy are the only real options for lectionary pericopes. The person who preaches on these texts would find a valuable source of material to help open up their meaning in Dr Boase's thorough analysis of the complete book.

Without Lament There Is No Life

Gerard Moore

The title of this paper is deliberately vague. Lament itself is not necessarily unclear, but speaking of it, placing it in context and calling it forth in faith is not something we are overly accustomed to do. As well, it is a title that allowed the designated area – lament in Christian worship – to be able to reach outside of the narrowness of the field without losing touch with liturgy. So I have attempted to draw upon the web of interconnections between lament in liturgy and lament in life. As such the essay is as much an excursion as an exposition. It does not aim for completeness nor for an entirely systematic clarity. Rather it seeks engagement.

What is lamented

What is it that we lament? Without prejudice for the pain that events cause regardless of their classification, I would like to proceed by setting out three categories of lament. There may be more, however the hope is that these three will prove useful.

One is the dismay and distress that result from events, decisions, institutions and people that significantly hinder and impede the reign of God. In particular these revolve around ideology and ideologues, rather than truth and the practitioners of wisdom. Within Western Christianity the violence, division and isolationism of the

Reformation period and its subsequent effects could be counted here. In human society we could place under this heading the use of war, torture or terror for political purposes. We can ask how can God appear so indifferent to those who take so blasphemously the divine name and the divine image in human beings.

A second is the sadness and unbridled loss that is part of the cycle of life and events as humans on this planet. Human beings are destined to make poor decisions, injure others, allow potential to languish, go numb. Created material beings are inescapably subject to the laws of matter. The morning I began writing this section the secretary told us of the death on day one of its life of her great nephew. There was no evident cause and certainly no neglect, and the baby did not even leave hospital. How cruel to see dashed with such finality the hopes of nine months, a birth and a first holding, feeding and photographing.

The third category refers us to the inconceivable and unbearable violence and destruction itself. This can take the forms of trauma, tragedy and chaos. Under trauma we can speak of violence, abuse and torture done to our brothers and sisters by our brothers and sisters. In tragedy we see and feel the meaningless loss of human life. There is human agency involved at some level. For Australians the Kempsey bus crash (accident), the Port Arthur shootings (individual madness) and Gallipoli and the Somme (societal madness) leave us wondering about meaningless death and the randomness of life. For

Western culture there is the Holocaust and for Cambodia, the killing fields. Of course both belong to the world too, and many groups involved remain unnamed. Chaos is what happens when disaster strikes and the 'world' itself breaks apart. The violence and havoc of the Boxing Day tsunami in the Indian Ocean speaks for itself. How can God remain idle? Does God consent to these? What is the source of meaning?

In the face of what we find ourselves lamenting we find ourselves seeking to know what protection does the covenant bring. We are required to ask, in existential terms rather than theological terms, what it means for Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, to be at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named (Eph 1:20-21).

Lament and forgetfulness

Prescinding from the directly theological, what happens to a community and society when situations of lament are ignored. At the same time, lamentation needs to be 'contained' otherwise the misery, sadness and pessimism can be overwhelming. Lament and rituals of lament play a significant role in creating a healthy society. Why, then, is lament so difficult to find in our worship? Should it not have a permanent place in our institutional prayer, or at least be an ever-present option to be called upon when needed? Why are we prone to 'forget'?

Pastoral, liturgical and theological amnesia

An opening answer is quite simple. Lament necessarily involves giving outlet to a mix of anger, release, pain, cries of injustice, grief and betrayal, and consequently is not a comfortable experience. As people who are involved in the creation, organisation and celebration of rituals we have to be careful not to subvert the process. It calls out of us empathy with those in lament, trust in the process of lamenting, and a professionalism that creates a space in which the participants feel 'safe' rather than 'judged'. With this is needed an acute awareness of the 'other' and a removal of our own feelings and instinct to control. We are not always up to the challenge.

However our amnesia also has roots in liturgical theology. The more recent recovery of liturgy as essentially praise and thanksgiving, as well as the perennial relationship between liturgy and beauty, can serve to call our attention away from lament. The reading of the word 'celebration' in a lower, populist register is an example of this effect.

We need to look beyond liturgy to our theology, or rather theological ideology. The biblical concern with sin as the source of evil can leave us disinclined to respond to the demands of tragedy, physics and coincidence¹. Aligned on this same tangent are theological and devotional approaches in which the concentration on gaining heaven compromises the call to establish the reign of God on earth and

¹ Some commentators on the Boxing Day tsunami have related the devastation with the coming judgement of God on a sinful world. See "God's will comments horrible, says dean", by Lisa Pryor, Sydney Morning Herald, Jan 3, 2005.

reduces our empathy for human suffering and loss. From another angle we can find ourselves camped in a theological locus from which we can forget the wider truths. Every Catholic sacramental theologian should lament the Reformation and have a sense of 'despair' as he or she walks through St Peter's Basilica in Rome: beautiful building, bad karma.

An openness to lament is an integral component of authentic pastoral practice, liturgical celebration and theological development.

Our make-up as human beings: trauma and lament

There may also be features of our human make up that make it difficult for us to lament but also show how necessary it is. One is our human physical response to trauma². Traumatic experiences can be stored in the brain as raw emotional data and remain unintegrated into the other parts of our memory. Here we have an example of the danger when life-threatening events remain hidden and isolated. Normally, the things we remember are processed as narratives into an interconnected network of language and meaning that make up our conscious memories. Much of this activity occurs in the left side of the brain.

² See Margaret Wilkinson, "Undoing trauma: contemporary neuroscience: A Jungian clinical perspective," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 48 (2003): 235-253 and John Briere, "Treating adult survivors of severe childhood abuse and neglect: Further development of an integrative model", a chapter in J.E.B. Myers et alia, *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment, 2nd Edition* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

While a traumatic event remains 'isolated' from conscious memory, it is not forgotten by the body. The person can experience flashbacks, in which the body and mind re-register and re-experience the trauma and respond reflexively in 'fright' or 'flight' — as if it were "all happening again". Unless the connections are made from the 'isolated' memory of raw data to the integrative network of a narrative memory then anything that reminds the brain of the painful event can trigger a response of terror in the here-and-now, of 'fright' or 'flight'. This is catastrophic for mental health. It leaves the person exhibiting behaviours which often isolate him or her from the community.

The more the raw memory of a particular trauma is integrated into the person's memory of their history and who they are as a whole, the more the person is able to call up responses other than 'fright' and 'flight'. They can begin to modify their behaviours and so more fully and freely engage with the community.

At the same time, when the raw data of the trauma is related to other memories of who we are, where we've been and what we know, it is transformed into a narrative. It can now be communicated and shared — it can become a 'public' act. The raw traumatic data are no longer 'isolated' and neither is the victim, who until then remains isolated and alone in their incommunicable experience of the trauma.

Rituals, ritual patterns and ritual language have a part to play in opening up pathways from the raw traumatic data of experiences to the narrative memory. They help to provide a safe space in which the person can trust and feel safe to revisit the pain-filled raw memory of the trauma. He or she can begin there to integrate the raw, painful experiences of the trauma into his or her own memory and restore a sense of wholeness to himself or herself. In being a space shared in a community, ritual also becomes a space where trauma memory can be shared, breaking down the isolation of the pain of trauma, thereby allowing the person to re-enter the community. This example of trauma shows both how difficult it can be to lament, but yet how important and necessary it may be for our own and the community's healing.

It is worth considering the application of this to communities rather than individuals. For how many hundred years was dialogue between Lutherans or Calvinists and the Roman Church rendered impossible. No group was able to break out of the isolation brought about by their raw memories. Often the 'flight' or 'fight' response was triggered (the equivalent of flashbacks), as seen in any Catholic debate about the vernacular liturgy or even vernacular bible. Only when pathways were established could an integrating narrative be found – here from the Catholic side can we name such pathfinders as Yves Congar and Hans Kung³.

³ In reference to finding 'pathways' it is difficult to overestimate the theological importance of Hans Kung's seminal work on justification, published with the 'imprimatur' of Karl Barth himself. The work

Current Australian society

Life in contemporary society can be difficult enough without having the added burden or charge to lament. The way we live can induce a response of 'fatigue'. We know of 'compassion fatigue' when it comes to seeking help for the needy, whether the poor, the destitute, refugees or other worthy causes. A further example is how we get tired of hearing about the damaging consequences our way of living is having on the environment. Elaborate and blunt societal mechanisms of avoidance can bring about a lack of energy and will. Lament requires will and energy. Added to this is our current preoccupation with the future, and the effect this has on how we view the cycle of life. The allure of the future, of new inventions, technologies and unforeseen wonders can diminish our sense of the present. We want and expect better planes, cars, computers, telecommunications, internet access. Further it can provide an impulse towards the undiminished modernist pretence that things are always going to be better, that the future is always one of promise. There is much in contemporary society that leads us down avenues that are closed to lament. In this way of seeing, the past contains what has been superseded, such as those technologies that we now look upon with amazement, marvelling in nostalgia at their primitive state (e.g the first mobile phones, those early computer games).

forged a common approach to one of the most divisive areas and opened up previously unforeseen possibilities of shared thought and reconciliation. See Hans Kung, *Justification: the doctrine of Karl Barth and a Roman Catholic Reflection* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966).

Philosophical and theological choices and preferences

The terror of unimaginable and uncontrollable change raises the philosophical challenge of what is 'reality'. Let me outline two radical responses to this question, painted in broad brush strokes. More recent existentialist and post-modern thought builds upon an apprehension of impending chaos. Our language, structures and beliefs are inventions to hold together lives threatened by overwhelming forces, meaninglessness and loss of self. At the core is an intuition of the destructive instinct inherent in materiality and all things material. Nothing is stable, nothing trustworthy. Biblically there are resonances here with the chaos in the primeval waters of Gen 1:2 which are able to reverse creation Gen 7:11 *on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened* (see also Gen 8:2-3). There is an openness here to lament, and a seemingly inevitable mood of pathos. Yet for everyday life this remains a difficult stance to hold.

A second response dwells more on the continuity of material creation across history. Language, institutions and culture witness to an implicit trust in the ongoing goodness and meaning in human life. Biblically again we can turn to the first creation story with its constant antiphon: *God saw that it was good* (Gen 1-2:4). Any attention that should be paid to lament is quickly diverted to providing for ongoing necessity. Survivors of tragedy still require a next meal and shelter, both signs that there is a possible future. The focus on children

surviving destruction, or an infant born in the midst of an upheaval, reorientates the present to a hope in a new beginning and a restoration of innocence. This philosophical impulse for continuity over discontinuity is very much at the heart of ritual and symbolic behaviour, of sacramental theology, liturgy and culture. Theologically it can envisage an eschatology that has no room for the apocalyptic. Ultimately there can result a theology that has no room for experience.⁴ If this is the case then there is little room for lament. It is necessary here to be mindful that our discussion is on lament. Theologies that dwell on continuity can play a major part in consoling individuals and cultures afflicted by disaster because they offer hope and provide foundations for a future. Lament is not alien to them, but easily forgotten in them.

Language

Our understanding of language plays a role in the 'forgetfulness' that is part of human existence, including the forgetfulness to lament. Post-modern philosophers constantly remind us of the limited nature of words⁵. We rely, in the main, on words to reveal things and concepts to us, and we quickly come to see them as giving us the thing itself. Our tendency is to interpret this as the word gives us the

⁴ Metz tells the fairytale of the hare and the hedgehog. The cheeky hare is challenged by the hedgehog to a race along the furrows of a ploughed field. However the bandy legged one goes home first, has breakfast, gets his identical-looking wife to stand at the far end of the furrow, takes his place on the starting edge and begins the race. The hare runs and runs, but each time he gets to the end of the furrow he finds the hedgehog 'always already there'. In the end he dies of exhaustion. For Metz, reading the tale deliberately 'against the grain', the hare is involved in history. See J. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, A Crossroad Book (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 161.

⁵ Despite the postmodern insistence, it is worth noting that the problem is not new. See the sixth century text of Dionysius the Pseudo Aeropagite, *On the Divine Names*.

essential nature of the thing. We forget the fragility of words. In many ways they are invitations to us to enter into the ongoing reality they 'describe' rather than to know the 'essence' of a thing. We can become overconfident about the meaning that a word is evoking. If words are invitations then great words, such as 'God', 'love', 'death', entail risk. They are an invitation into a relationship that shifts and changes. This involves loss and grief. The great words of living are also words that require an attitude of lament. When we forget the limits of language we forget the need for lament.

Our pastoral practice, liturgy, theology, human nature, contemporary society, philosophical presuppositions and language can hinder lament even while at the same time they require it.

Outlines of Christian lament

Within all this can we find traces in Christian faith that draw us to lament, and consequently to life?

The opening beatitude:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Beneath both the verse in Matthew and in Luke is a teaching from Jesus about how God looks upon our world, assesses it and consequently offers blessing to the 'poor'⁶. There is a sense in which

⁶ For the author's reading of the beatitudes see his *The Beatitudes and Justice*, Catholic Social Justice Series No. 52 (North Sydney: Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2004). The approach followed comes from Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6: 20-49)*, Hermeneia Series, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

material poverty is part of the dynamic. In the ancient world riches were seen as a blessing from God, and poverty a sign that the person or family had been forsaken by the divinity. There are Christians today who preach a similar 'gospel of wealth'. Jesus himself reflected a more sceptical position, seen in his praise of the widow who offered to God from her small store of copper coins (Lk 21:1-4) and his saying that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the one who is humble as a child (Mt 18:1-5). Yet impoverishment is no blessing either. Nor can the rich afford to be indifferent to the plight of the poor since eternal punishment is the lot of those who ignore the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick and the imprisoned (Mt 25:31-46).

One of the most interesting and fruitful interpretations of *blessed are the poor in spirit* is one that explores the possibilities inherent in 'spirit'. Spirit implies our awareness, our thinking, our consciousness. To be poor in spirit has a sense of consciously and intentionally thinking through the actual condition of human beings as we are in this world. It is to stand before the poverty, misery, violence, pettiness and corruption that over and over again afflict the living and loving of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. It is to know that while I eat others are hungry, that while I sleep others have no shelter. It is to recognize that we humans spend more on guns than education or hospitals or mental health. If we are poor in

spirit we have no choice but to be aware of injustice, pollution, exploitation.

Nor do we have a choice in facing up to the 'ordinary' behaviour that is a part of our lives. We attend meetings where ordinary people make very 'ordinary' decisions, decisions that cut across rights, deny responsibility, cover up mismanagement, protect poor leadership. We live and work in very human systems. There are constant pressures, subtle and sledgehammer-like, which drain our resolve to act fairly, to protect the weak, to take up our part in leadership, to give away authority to bullies and the inept. It is demoralising to see these dynamics played out, and distressing to comprehend the effects they have on unsuspecting and often anonymous people whose recourse to justice or fairness we have seen cut off. It is humbling to know that we are a part of this and in collusion with it.

Clearly to look at the world as it is, unvarnished and raw, means that we have to be able to look at ourselves in the same manner. Poverty of spirit requires the humility to know we are finite and sinful, and to recognize that our world is in peril. In the face of this we do not flee. Rather we acknowledge that all these are real. If this is what it means to be *poor in spirit* it is at the same time a great and a difficult grace.

How is it a part of the reign of God? How is this humility a blessing? There is a relationship between what we know and what we love. The

more we understand something, in this case the real and hidden workings of our world and society, the more our love is stretched. As we try to love more in the face of ugliness, violence and very ordinary behaviour, we find our love stretched to encompass these things without condoning them. We find our actions enlarged to face the threats but in such a way that we do not become consumed by the violence and injustice we both dwell in and oppose. Yet is this not God's love? Doesn't God's love stretch to embrace the world without backing away from injustice, evil, fear and indifference? We see this in the way Jesus grieves over the hardheartedness of the religious leaders symbolised by the city of Jerusalem: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing* (Mt 23:37). Despite this insight, Jesus turned towards Jerusalem, not away from it (Mt 16:21). He was resolute in his desire to bring the all-embracing love of God. Lament 'stretches' love.

'Dangerous' memories within the Scriptures

We can give attention to a pair of subversive reminders within the scriptures. One is of the violence in the scriptures themselves. There is much death, destruction, vengeance and war, some from the enemy, much from God, the friends of God or on behalf of God or God's people. Try as we may, we cannot cut these passages out. We find various hermeneutical approaches that can shed light on them,

ameliorate their more vicious edge, and even shed them in a more moral light. We use them in contexts that offer different explanations, such as when Catholics at the Easter Vigil read of the sacrifice of Isaac and later sing with Miriam about how the flower of Pharaoh's army sunk like a stone. Nevertheless these songs and narratives remain violent, uncomfortable and compromising of the message of a loving God. Since we can neither control nor excise these passages perhaps they can be uncomfortably seen as an invitation to lament the difficulties of faith and the poverty of its answers.

A second reminder is the death of Jesus. Though the Gospels reveal it in light of the resurrection there are strong elements of lamentation that can be retrieved. In Matthew's account Jesus' final words are an agonising cry: *My God, my God why have you abandoned me* (Mt 27:46). They are from a lament psalm and point to Jesus own pain at abandonment by God shown through a prayer to God (Ps 22:1). We should allow the despair its proper place and resist the temptation to tone down the anguish⁷. What is missing from the death accounts is the desperation of the followers of Jesus. We learn little of it, except that Jesus was in the tomb for three days. All were fearful, some fled, the women entered into the rituals of mourning. What was going on in the hearts of Jesus' friends and followers? How foolish did they

⁷ For a discussion of the variety of interpretations of this verse, especially those downplaying its raw angst, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah, Vol Two* Anchor Bible Reference Library (Doubleday), 1043-1051. Brown himself is against any softening of the cry, and while recognizing that the one line can imply the psalm as a whole points out that the evangelists often used particular verses of a psalm to pinpoint a particular predicament that Jesus faced without necessarily applying the whole of that psalm to the event (see page 1050 fn 52).

feel, how lost, how angry, how empty? We do not know. The three days in the grave should not be so quickly passed over. Perhaps it is appropriate to re-introduce the symbol of Jonah in the belly of the whale, the reluctant prophet immersed in monstrous darkness.

The Eucharist and lament

The Eucharist⁸ is an action of *anamnesis* not amnesia. In current Catholic theology the Eucharist is looked upon as a defining action of Christian existence, one that brings the memory of the paschal mystery to bear on the life of the community. It is described in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal as the act which makes manifest the church as the Body of Christ (GIRM 91). In particular, in the Eucharistic Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification (GIRM 71), the community keeps the memorial of Christ recalling especially his passion, resurrection and ascension (GIRM 79e). This memorial is the ever-present gift of salvation. We can ask, then, is our memorial sufficiently inclusive of what we are prone to forget. There are reminders of lament in the Eucharistic prayer tradition? There is some. Jesus death is one. The petitions for the Church are another tacit admission of failure. The names of the martyrs are a third. Yet these openings can be seen too easily in light of the 'hedgehog' and not of the 'hare'. In keeping the memorial of Christ how attentive do we allow the meaning of Christ to immerse itself in

⁸ I will follow an official Roman Catholic line of thought here, and reference it to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), third edition (2002). See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Liturgy Documentary Series 2 (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Washington DC, 2002), hereafter as GIRM.

the tragedy of each age⁹. When we do this we begin to engage with the memorial of Christ as a 'dangerous memory', a memory that does not let us rest, that reminds us that the poor are still poor, the hungry still hungry, the traumatised still isolated¹⁰. Again a Roman story comes to mind, this time of a recent visit to St Mary Major during a Sunday Mass. The disgraced Cardinal Law sat at the bishop's chair, bishops and priests concelebrated the liturgy, the altar was decked in splendour. The liturgy displayed all the characteristics of the 'hedgehog' when it was realised that the gold from just one of the altar candlesticks would have been enough to run for a year the Peruvian parish of the impoverished missionary I was accompanying.

Conclusion

Across this paper we have tried to integrate Christian liturgy and faith on one hand and human living in society on the other to help us have a picture of what requires lament, explore why our age can find lament difficult, and outline some broad lines of Christian thought on top of which we can trace a contemporary Christian lament. It may be well to end with an example of what a contemporary lament in Eucharistic praying could look like. Here is the 'preface' equivalent

⁹ See David N. Power, "Hope is the Joy of Saying Yes", chapter in his *worship: culture and theology* (Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1990), 183. See also another essay in the same volume "When to Worship Is to Lament", 155-174.

¹⁰ The term 'dangerous memory' comes from the political theology of Metz, and refers in the first place to the dangerous and subversive memory of the freedom of Jesus, from which can challenge all totalitarian systems and one-dimensional ideologies to emancipation. See his *Faith and History in Society*. For a quick overview with some critique see the 1981 book review by Charles Curran at <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1981/v37-4-bookreview4.htm>.

from a Eucharistic Prayer specifically composed as a lament. The author is David Power¹¹:

Blessed are you, Lord God, because when we fear to speak words of foolishness or falsehood, you gather us here to confess your name.

When justice seems to have fled from the earth, you gather us in the promise of a rule where justice and peace shall kiss.

How long, O God, shall you allow death and evil to prevail over your people? [room here to indicate specific trials, injustices, sorrows]. Our voices are stilled by the pain that we behold on the faces of those so doomed.

Be comforted, you say, but where is comfort?

Peace, you proclaim, but where is peace?

Open then our ears, O God, to hear the stories in which you still dare to speak, so that we may acclaim your holy name.

R. The peace of God shall be revealed, for the mouth of God has spoken.

We thank you, O God, whatever our trembling, because when we are laid low, we find you in our midst, in the one on whom the Spirit had descended, on whom your strong right hand has rested.

We praise you for Jesus Christ, for he is the one in whose suffering your judgement speaks and in whose fire we are baptized.

In him we have been promised another rule, a compassionate presence, even amid strife and suffering and in hours of darkness.

Joining then with the abandoned of the earth, with the poor who are the blessed of your reign, and with the peacemakers who are your children of predilection, we raise up our voices in a hymn of yearning and awe that has never ceased to give you praise:

Congregation: Holy, holy, holy ...

¹¹ David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992): 336-7.

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