

## WHAT ABOUT LITURGICAL LAMENT?

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Recent studies of the canonical Psalms have generated a number of memorable metaphors for grasping the power of Psalmic prayer. Walter Brueggemann, after Paul Ricoeur, speaks of the spiritual struggle to maintain equilibrium, a struggle worked out through the sequence of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation.<sup>1</sup> John Goldingay, in response, describes the life of prayer as an ever-repeating cycle, or spiral, of praise and prayer, prayer and praise.<sup>2</sup> These approaches to the *function* of psalms in the life of faith echo deeper *structures* in the texts of the canonical Psalms themselves. Hence, N. H. Ridderbos, a generation ago, perceived a "golden cycle" of praise and prayer in the Psalms,<sup>3</sup> while Claus Westermann identified the "two poles of praise and lament"<sup>4</sup> around which the Psalms are constructed. What these metaphors and analytical grids have in common, I would argue, are four essential insights.

First, there is a startling *diversity* of affect and experience in the life of prayer. Religious experience in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is as multiform as life itself.

Second, the life of faith involves *movement* from lament to praise and back again that evidences the magnetic pull of tenacious faith on the one hand and a candid grappling with the problems of this world on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Third, these varied religious affections *counterbalance* each other this side of the eschaton. Lament and praise are incomplete without the other, lest praise, particularly general or descriptive praise, be misunderstood as smug satisfaction or lament be understood as a denial or refusal of grace.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, at some deep level, these diverse expressions *cohere*. Praise and lament do not tear each other apart. However anguished the tension between Psalm 88 and 150, they co-exist in the Hebrew Psalter and in the life of prayer. They both can be mapped on the metaphoric fields these scholars have described.

As both Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, among others, have argued, these metaphors and structures are instructive for the life of prayer today. In Miller's words, the movement from lament to praise and praise to lament depicts "the very structure of faith in relation to God."<sup>7</sup> This essay arises out of the conviction that these insights have specific implications for the life of the Church as it is expressed in public worship. My thesis is two-fold: first, our public worship must constantly seek to broaden its affective range, to express what Nicholas Wolterstorff has described for a number of years now as the trumpets of joy, the ashes of repentance, and the tears of lament.<sup>8</sup> Second, we must be far more intentional about how we achieve this, learning from the Psalms themselves how to sound our laments and praises with poise and passion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). See also his *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>John Goldingay, "The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer in the Psalms," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 20 (1981): 85-90. Brueggemann specifically avoids the image of a cycle. See "Psalms and the Life of Faith," 8, n16.

<sup>3</sup>Nic. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen: Opnieuw uit de Grondtekst Vertaald en Verklaard*, vol. 2, Psalm 42-60, in *Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift*, (Kampen: Kok, 1973), 159. This reference was pointed out to me by Carl J. Bosma.

<sup>4</sup>Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, trans. J. R. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 10.

<sup>5</sup>This movement is helpfully described by James Luther Mays, as follows: "The prayers for help, the songs of praise for help, and the songs of trust reflect a movement from helplessness through salvation to gratitude and to the life of trust based on the experience of salvation. . . . The movement is the basic pattern of the Christian's relation to God through Christ." *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 42.

<sup>6</sup>See Gordon Lathop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 57, 164.

<sup>7</sup>Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 55.

<sup>8</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Trumpets, Ashes, Tears," *Reformed Journal* 36 (February, 1986), 17-22. Brueggemann identifies the extensive spectrum of covenantal prayer in the Old Testament that "runs the gamut from serenity to anger," and then suggests that "faithful prayer requires keeping the entire range operational" ("Prayer as An Act of Daring Dance: Four Biblical Examples," in *Psalms in the Life of Faith*, 147).

<sup>9</sup>My thesis is informed in part by Brueggemann's *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress

Indeed, the fruit of careful scholarly study of biblical praise and lament lies in part in its liturgical applications.<sup>10</sup> I will address these by commenting on three structures which shape Christian worship--the *ad hoc* structuring of prayer in times of crisis, the regularized structure of the Christian year, and the typical structure of Lord's Day worship--with particular attention to the possibilities for liturgical lament.

### I. LAMENT IN TIME OF CRISIS

What happens on Sunday morning in public worship after a young child in your congregation is taken deathly ill? Or when an adolescent's extended battle with an eating disorder threatens to rip apart a young family? Or when an otherwise upstanding member of the community is shown to be an unrepentant perpetrator of domestic abuse? Or when nearly 200 people die in an Oklahoma City bomb blast? Or when a barrage of suicide bombs threaten to undo peace in the Middle East? That is, what happens in public worship when conventional songs of praise would be nothing more than a bright facade?

These moments are pastorally crucial.<sup>11</sup> And they occur in the life of many congregations with astonishing regularity. These moments are more critical for pastoral spiritual formation than a full-docket of church education programs. And how we handle them may say more about the gospel we proclaim than a year's worth of sermons.

As far as public worship is concerned, I suppose all would agree that it is best not to remain untouched by such situations. There are always stories, like the one James White is fond of recalling, of a certain Anglican rector, who, after the onslaught of a decimating flood, prayed the prayerbook as always without alteration. The collect of the day read: "Water your earth, O Lord, in due season." No, these situations require our sensitive and honest attention. Injustices must be identified. Enemies must be named. Solidarity with the suffering and, above all, deep and soul-searching faith must be expressed.

But what exactly are we to do in such situations?<sup>12</sup> How can we express our anger, fear, and bewilderment? At the risk of sounding naive, let me suggest that we take the Psalms themselves as our model. When faced with an utter loss of words and an oversupply of volatile emotions, we best rely not on our own stuttering speech, but on the reliable and profoundly relevant laments of the Hebrew scriptures. This strategy capitalizes on the most salient features of the Psalter. As Sigmund Mowinckel argued, the Psalms of lament were likely composed *ad hoc*, for occasional festivals or times of crisis.<sup>13</sup> As Brueggemann has observed, the Psalms arise out of "situations of regression," out of the "extremities of life and faith,"<sup>14</sup> the same context as contemporary communities in distress. And as Miller has pointed out, the language of the Psalms is open and metaphorical, well-suited for application to other times and places.<sup>15</sup> Although their language is

Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>10</sup>Liturgical lament has been received a fair amount of attention lately, including Michael Downey, "Worship Between the Holocausts," *Theology Today* 43 (1986): 75-87; J. Frank Henderson, *Liturgies of Lament* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994); Marcia Sachs Littell, ed., *Liturgies on the Holocaust: An Interfaith Anthology* (Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1986); Don E. Saliers, "Lamenting and Confessing: Truthful Prayer," in *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Divine Glory*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Lester Meyer, "A Lack of Laments in the Church's Use of the Psalter," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993): 67-78; David N. Power, "When Worship is to Lament," in *Worship: Culture and Theology* (Washington, D. C.: The Pastoral Press, 1990), and "Worship After the Holocaust," *Worship* 59 (1985): 447-455; Gail Ramshaw, "The Place of Lament Within Praise: Theses for Discussion," *Worship* 61 (1987): 317-322; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Liturgy, Justice, and Tears," *Worship* 62 (1988): 386-403.

<sup>11</sup>And they are crucial for liturgical leaders, although not always recognized as such. As Brueggemann comments, "the one-sided liturgical renewal of today has, in effect, driven the hurtful side of experience either into obscure corners of faith practice or completely out of Christian worship into various forms of psychotherapy and growth groups." ("From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 68).

<sup>12</sup>See also the particular liturgies for the long-term seriously ill, for persons suffering from addiction and substance abuse, for victims of crime, survivors of abuse, and other occasions for lament in Frank Henderson, *Liturgies of Lament* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).

<sup>13</sup>Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. A-Thomas, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 193.

<sup>14</sup>Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 7.

<sup>15</sup>Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 8 and 21-26.

occasional, the Psalms are not so specific that they cannot be used as liturgy (not just as scripture) today. For all of these reasons, the Psalms themselves can well become our mentors for liturgical praise and lament. The diversity, movement, balance, and coherence of full-orbed liturgical prayer is nurtured best by the canonical Psalms.

Importantly, by suggesting the use of biblical laments in crisis situations, I do not mean to suggest we should merely pick out memorable phrases or metaphors from particular texts. For too long we have been content to single out a favorite or convenient versicle or, perhaps worse, to assemble what Hughes Oliphant Old has described as "collages of dismembered psalm verses" for liturgical use, while totally ignoring the structures and contexts by which these verses gain meaning.<sup>16</sup> Voluminous scholarly study of biblical prayer in the past two generations has focused on how the content and meaning of individual psalms arise from basic structures or patterns of prayer and, more specifically, how individual psalms improvise within a given structure. I am suggesting that in public worship we work within the basic forms we have learned to discern, and then, like a jazz soloist who embellishes a common musical theme, that we improvise in context of our particular tragedy.

Thus, most basically, we learn how to *structure* our lament from the structure of the biblical laments themselves. Our lament begins with *invocation*, a startling confession that even in crisis, we approach a personal and accessible God.<sup>17</sup> In lament, we do not recoil from the tension that this presents, a tension which Patrick Miller has described concerning Psalm 22, as "an almost unbearable sense of contradiction between the roaring cry of dereliction and the address that repeatedly insists that the silent, forsaking, distant God is 'my God.'"<sup>18</sup> Then, our lament freely addresses this personal God through the picturesque gallery of images used in direct address in the Psalms. We pray to Yahweh, the rock, the fortress, the hiding place, the bird with encompassing wings. These metaphors are not just theological constructs, but means of directly addressing the deity. And as we pray them, these metaphors shape and reshape how we conceive of this God. They hone our image of God with the very tools that God gave us.

Our prayer continues with bold *lament*. We bring theodicy right into the sanctuary. We learn from the Psalms the value of direct discourse. Our pale subjunctives and indirect speech ("We would want to ask you why this might be happening") is transformed to bold and honest address ("How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?"). Such honesty in its own way comforts the bereaved and expresses solidarity with the wronged. Their questions and protestations are not illegitimate in the life of prayer. For prayer may well feature question marks alongside of exclamation points. Honest worship expresses genuine doubt as well as assurance.<sup>19</sup> The Psalms teach us that doubt can be expressed as an act of faith, that prayer may include not just pleas for God's help, but even complaints to God concerning injustice and ever-present evil.<sup>20</sup> We also learn from the Psalms that biblical lament comes in many forms. Some lament is directed toward the enemy; some toward God; some is individual and isolated; some is communal and comprehensive. Lament is a response to the full range of problems in the human condition. The Psalms specifically name isolation, shame, despair, danger, physical impairment, and death as cause for lament.<sup>21</sup> Each has its own logic and metaphorical correlates, which in turn provide us with a rich storehouse of language to enrich our prayers.

Then our prayer continues with specific *petition*: heal us, free us, save us. We express, with Westermann, that "lamentation has no meaning in and of itself,"<sup>22</sup> but leads necessarily to petition. Noticing, with Miller, that petitions in the

<sup>16</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 55-76.

<sup>17</sup>Samuel Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 265.

<sup>18</sup>Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 59.

<sup>19</sup>See Robert Davidson, *Wisdom and Worship* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 118-131; and this comment by Paul Ferris, Jr.: "The Hebrews, like their Semitic cousins and their Sumerian predecessors, demonstrate what to the Western mind is a remarkable proclivity to complain to their deity and consider it in some sense a part of worship." (*The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 166).

<sup>20</sup>Craig C. Broyles has argued that "upon closer examination of the lament category we have discerned two distinct forms of appeal: the psalms of 'plea', which affirm the praise of God, and the psalms of 'complaint,' which charge God with failing certain traditions normally expressed as praise. In the former subcategory, praise appears as a motif in its own right; in the latter, praise is presented as that which the lament denies." *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form Critical and Theological Study*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 52 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 221.

<sup>21</sup>See Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 116-20.

<sup>22</sup>Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 266.

psalms correspond with the laments they follow, we learn to search for specific petitions that are fitting to our lament.<sup>23</sup> In fact, our lament, our petition, and our eventual praise of God fit together like hand and glove. The very attributes for which we praise God are those we invoke in times of need.

Finally, our prayer ends with *expressions of hope*, confidence, and trust, however muted by the present situation. Lament is eschatological prayer. It always looks to future. It may not be possible to sing praise in times of crisis. Yet praise is anticipated, even as the community yearns for the resolution of the crisis. Praise is the fully expected outcome of even crisis and despair.

Thus, form criticism of lament identifies and instructs us in a model for liturgical prayer in times of crisis. If nothing else, liturgical leaders would do well to reflect on the stunning and artful ways in which psalmic prayers adapt this structure, with a mind to providing the same sort of imagination and resourcefulness in public prayer today. Both carefully written and extemporaneous prayers can rely on this very structure as a prototype or guide. All of us--whether experienced worship leaders or novices--would benefit from rehearsing in our private studies the practice of formulating prayer according to biblical models. In sum, most basically, the Psalms provide us with a structure to guide us as we lead God's people in liturgical prayer.

An even more direct strategy is to pray the psalms themselves. Take a specific Psalm of disorientation, with its extreme and specific language, with its passionate plea and lament against God, and allow it to shape communal prayer.<sup>24</sup> Choose a psalm because it is "a genuine and sensitive match between expression and experience."<sup>25</sup> Choose Psalm 69 for a crisis of shame; Psalm 51 for a crisis of guilt, Psalm 38 or Psalm 41 for medical crises, Psalm 88 for times of utter despair; Psalm 71 for the afflictions of old age; and Psalm 143 for occasions of oppression or victimization. Then bring it to life with imagination and passion.

We might choose to simply pray the Psalm as it is, without embellishment, with a deliberate pace that allows the worshipping community to enter into the pathos of the text. Or, we might improvise on the Psalm text, speaking the words of the Psalm, followed by our own very specific application. Consider the following example of a congregation lamenting a case of domestic abuse. The text alternates between Psalm 13, and individual lament, and a pointed prayer written for the specific occasion.<sup>26</sup>

*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
 How long will you hide your face from me?  
 How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
 and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
 How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*

Lord, our Lord,  
 we feel forgotten.  
 This abuse rips apart our faith.  
 The victim, our sister \_\_\_\_\_, is alone in despair.

<sup>23</sup>Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 99-101.

<sup>24</sup>I propose this in respectful disagreement with Westermann who suggests that "on account of their fundamentally different background, such psalms can no longer be the prayer of a Christian congregation." (*The Living Psalms*, 23).

<sup>25</sup>Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 27. Among the Psalms that are appropriate for such situations are Psalms 13, 59, 64, 102, 142, and 143. These Psalms feature direct and urgent speech that is appropriate to a situation of crisis, without extensive historical references that might complicate their use as prayers today.

<sup>26</sup>In the context of the liturgy, the words of the Psalm and words of the prayer that improvises on the Psalm should be distinguished, perhaps by having each lead by a different leader, perhaps by printing one and not the other, or by some other means.

How long must this persist?

*Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!*

*Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

The perpetrator of this abuse is winning!

Please, Lord, stop him!

We cannot bear to see this fool--  
the enemy of our sister, and of us--  
believe he is successful.

*But I trusted in your steadfast love;*

*my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.*

*I will sing to the LORD*

*because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

We long to sing praise,

to have our sister begin to sense your goodness again.

For deep down, we trust in your goodness. Amen.

After such a prayer, the community is not likely to read Psalm 13 the same way ever again. Suddenly the biblical prayer has become the prayer of the community. And perhaps by God's grace, the victim will be able to sense that biblical faith, and the God to whom it is directed, is not hostile to her isolation, but rather embraces her pain.

In many critical settings, this rendering of lament will be too hasty. Indeed, one problem in liturgical lament is that we arrive too quickly at the vow of praise, the happy ending, glossing over the pithy cries of lament that conceal deep and brooding affections. Though it is not a final solution, consider expanding this improvisation on a lament psalm so that it encompasses an entire service. Take a full hour to pray through a given Psalm of lament, like Psalm 13.

In so doing, we have begun the process of prayer on the occasion of crisis. But this is only the beginning. Here our scholarly sources, with their heuristic metaphorical grids, are particularly helpful, pointing out a lacuna in most liturgical prayer. Their call for balance, movement, and coherence in prayer challenges us to measure our liturgical prayer against psalmic prayer. The prayers of the Psalms enter fully into lament, but then move, as faith demands, toward declarative praise. What about our liturgical prayer? For even if we are sensitive enough as worship leaders to acknowledge crisis, how often do we seek to lead worshipers over time through disorientation to reorientation? Often, we must acknowledge, we leave worshipers "behind" in lament, hastening during subsequent days and weeks to return quickly to normalcy, to descriptive (general) praise and songs of well-being. Or, conversely, we are content to linger in lament with them, praying week after week concerning a given crisis with a sense of despair that fails to sense the magnetic pull of eschatological hope. Liturgical prayer in times of crisis is not complete with the expression of lament. But the lament is but one step on a long journey back toward declarative (Psalm 30) and descriptive praise (Psalm 103). Thoughtful worship leaders will be eager to

lead a congregation slowly but surely from lament to praise over time, all with a specific moment of crisis in mind. For specific lament can and should only be practiced in a congregation with room for specific praise and thanksgiving at occasions of "reorientation." If we are to lament with startling specificity, we also need to give praise with startling specificity, with declarative hymns of praise that name specific gifts of God to the worshipping community.<sup>27</sup> Psalms 13, 30, and 146, taken together, express the full range of the cycle of Psalmic prayer. Psalm 13's concluding vow of praise (v. 6cd) pivots right into Psalm 30's opening proclamation of praise (v. 1). And Psalm 30's thanksgiving for specific divine intervention leads right into Psalm 146's language of all-encompassing praise. This pairing suggests creative ways to structure liturgical prayer. Consider three possibilities: First, if we have used Psalm 13 with reference to a specific crisis, then we might look for the pastorally appropriate time (perhaps it will be only days or weeks, but perhaps months or years later) to pray Psalm 30 as the flipside of Psalm 13 and then finally Psalm 146 in the same way, improvising on its structure and phraseology. Second, when praying Psalm 30 and then Psalm 146, explicitly recall Psalm 13 as the prayer of the original occasion of crisis. This is the key to offering praise with full integrity. Third, mirror this structure for liturgical prayer in liturgical preaching. Consider a sermon series, perhaps titled--after Calvin-- "Anatomy of the Soul," that begins with Psalm 13 and moves to Psalms 30 and then to 146, encompassing disorientation and reorientation, lament and praise.<sup>28</sup> In so doing, consider the goal of such preaching not to solve the problem of evil, but rather to lead worshipers more deeply into these biblical prayers.<sup>29</sup>

All of this is not to say that every biblical lament is equally suitable to take as a model, nor that this is the only way to lament. Yet this strategy of structuring our liturgical prayer after particular biblical texts, and combinations of texts, has several advantages. First, it provides ample warrant for saying such strident things to God. This reduces the need to provide a long and windy justification for doing so in the context of the liturgy. It gives us permission to do what our religious culture might not permit us to do otherwise. Similar liturgical advice was perhaps best expressed by Richard Baxter more than three centuries ago: "The safest way of composing a Stinted Liturgie, is to take it all, or as much as may be, for words as well as matter, out of Holy Scripture." Why? Because "all are satisfied of the infallible truth of Scripture, and the fitness of its expressions, that are not like to be satisfied by man's."<sup>30</sup>

Second, this practice provides a plumb line to test our pastoral instincts. Brueggemann, following Peter Berger and others, has observed that structured language serves to both enhance and limit our experience of despair.<sup>31</sup> In the case of a grieving family, for example, the church can help them by providing language to acknowledge, and even to enhance, their feeling of helplessness. At the same time, such language provides a limit for that experience. To those who suffer, biblically-shaped liturgical laments convey three important and interwoven themes: their suffering is real, it is not the last word, and it is spiritually significant--all without a theological treatise on the subject.

Third, it provides a strong structure out of which can arise genuinely spontaneous prayer. We free church Protestants should cherish our tradition of free, extemporaneous prayer.<sup>32</sup> Yet what we consider to be entirely spontaneous prayers are often nothing more than long sequences of eucharistical cliché. Without structure, we forfeit the possibility of genuine spontaneity--something every jazz soloist knows. The Psalms teach us the value of spontaneous prayer. Many

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<sup>27</sup>This is one reason why the Christian community needs qualified composers. For writing occasional music for times of lament or praise is perhaps the most fitting correlate to psalms of declarative praise.

<sup>28</sup>Another interesting approach to a series of sermons on the Psalms might begin with Brueggemann's study, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon," in *The Psalms in the Life of Faith*, 189-213, and feature sermons on Psalms 1, 25, 73, 103, and 150, per his canonical exegesis.

<sup>29</sup>Of course, this cycle of Psalms can run in two directions. For a congregation's prayer of well-being, its prayer of Psalm 146, is not complete, this side of the eschaton. Thoughtful worship leaders will also then be eager to help a worshipping community sense when it must complement its descriptive praise with lament, if not for itself, then in solidarity with others. For a congregation that assumes that all is right with the world, the cycle of prayer--or a sermon series on the psalms--might need to begin with a different point in the cycle, from Psalm 146, to the shock of Psalm 13, and then only Psalm 30. Such a congregation could be reminded that the horrors presented daily on the national news ought to be an insistent call to public prayer, a vital part of an in-the-world spirituality.

<sup>30</sup>Richard Baxter, *Five Disputations of Church Government and Worship* (London, 1659), 378.

<sup>31</sup>Brueggemann, "The Formfulness of Grief," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 86.

<sup>32</sup>Here I agree with Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Ministers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 5.

Psalms clearly arise out of immediate experience and reflect unrestrained expression of guilt, fear, or anger.<sup>33</sup> Yet they also teach us the value of form. Many of the most immediate and personal of the psalms clearly rely on tried and true phrases and structures of speech.<sup>34</sup> Improvising on fitting Psalms is one of the simplest ways of judiciously balancing freedom and form.

Fourth, this strategy of structuring liturgical prayer in times of crisis according to the movement from lament to declarative praise to descriptive praise lends integrity to our praise. Brueggemann has spoken about the ambivalence of descriptive praise, calling for a hermeneutic of suspicion to question whether these songs of well-being are really smooth cover-ups for wishing to maintain the status quo, for ignoring the cries of the poor. But if they are sung subsequent to and in full awareness of God's help in time of crisis, they take on a new and powerful integrity.<sup>35</sup> In so doing, our praise powerfully unites themes of redemption and creation. The experience of restoration becomes not an end in itself, but a means by which we are able to perceive more clearly the cosmic creative work of God in creation and re-creation.

Fifth, this strategy provides a way for individuals caught up in isolated and lonely struggles with tragedy or injustice to find a voice in a community of worshipers. Lament is often so deeply personal.<sup>36</sup> How can an entire community ever hope to empathize with the isolation and individuality of the victim? Perhaps finally it cannot. Yet praying the Psalms in this way may allow, again by God's grace, a particular victim or sufferer to sense an unacknowledged solidarity with women and men of faith who have prayed these canonical prayers through centuries of pain and violence. This is one distinct advantage of the purposeful use of ancient prayers. Relatedly, the "I"-Psalms reflect the notion of corporate personality that is key to Israel's identity. Their first persons singular subjects acknowledge the individual worshiper before God. Yet their expression of broad national sentiments suggest that they are not merely isolated soliloquies.<sup>37</sup> Praying the Psalms may give even modern worshipers in individualistic societies a sense of participating in the corporate personality of the body of Christ.

Sixth, this strategy allows these biblical texts to shape us in an immediate and direct way. In such prayer, these texts burrow into our bones, as it were, and become part of our spiritual identity. Significantly, it not just the prayers of the Psalms in general nor a general theology of lament in general that forms us. Instead, particular texts, with particular twists on otherwise stereotypical ways of praying, form us in faith.<sup>38</sup> This strategy gives worshipers, especially suffering worshipers, biblical landmarks to anchor personal prayer and worship. It gives us a place to put a bookmark in our Bibles. It gives us texts to recall at family reunions and anniversary commemorations. This is a tangible gift that thoughtful liturgy can provide for victim and congregation alike in times of crisis.

## II. LAMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

But not every Sunday is an occasion of crisis. Many worship services are planned and led in the routine of the life.<sup>39</sup> How do praise and lament function in liturgical routine?

The answer is found, I believe, in the two large structures which shape public worship in countless congregations. For well-balanced liturgy, like praise and lament in the Psalms, has its own poles, or cycles, or sense of equilibrium. Noticing the points of correspondence or analogy the Psalm cycles and these cycles has much to teach us.

Consider first of all the large pattern of the Christian year. Every year, time and time again, we journey from the eschatological lament of Advent to the profound adoration of the incarnate Christ at Christmas and Epiphany, from the baptismal soul-searching of Lent to the unbridled praise of Easter morning. This yearly journey provides ready-made

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<sup>33</sup>Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 15--see also 14.

<sup>34</sup>Brueggemann: "In the use of form, the community does a specific task, that is rehabilitation of a member from a chaotic experience to a structure experience in this particular life-world." ("The Formfulness of Grief," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 96).

<sup>35</sup>See Goldingay, "The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer in the Psalms," 86.

<sup>36</sup>See J. Christiaan Beker, *Suffering and Hope: The Biblical Vision and the Human Predicament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3, 122.

<sup>37</sup>Martin Ravdal Hauge, *Between Sheol and Temple: Motif Structure and Function in the I-Psalms*. JSOT Supplement Series 178 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>38</sup>The concern for discerning the particularities of individual texts has been central to the work of Westermann, among others. See *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 166. My intent is to suggest that this be realized in the context of public worship.

<sup>39</sup>Though, in some congregations, almost every worship service will be marked by vigorous sense of disorientation or reorientation.

moments to give voice to the cries and acclamations of people at every point in the journey of faith.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, one of the richest benefits of a well-celebrated Christian year is that it provides not only a balanced diet of biblical readings and theological themes, but also balanced diet of the Christian affections in the life of prayer.

### Good Friday

Out of the entire cycle of the Christian year, I would like to consider two particular celebrations with redolent possibilities for lament.<sup>41</sup> First, consider Good Friday. Liturgy for Good Friday is one of the most challenging pastoral and theological exercises imaginable. In fact, the ability to plan and lead Good Friday liturgy with theological insight and pastoral sensitivity would make a fine exit requirement for seminary M.Div. students. Do we celebrate the Lord's Supper, or not? Do we rejoice or do we weep? How do we, on this day, proclaim Christ crucified *and* risen? For many, it's such an odd day. We feel like we need to be sad, but we're not sure why.

Generally, our liturgical strategies for the day run in two directions. One strategy is that of historical reconstruction: we dramatize the passion, rehearse the seven last words, and plan three hour services in darkness. One congregation even rigged a way to rip the curtain that hung in its chancel at the ninth hour. This strategy follows a pattern described by the Spanish nun Egeria who visited Jerusalem in the late fourth century and described in detail a pattern of worship that retraced the Jesus' passion step by step, hour by hour. This strategy, which liturgists call "historicization," has much to commend it.<sup>42</sup> At its best, this strategy roots our worship in the historical events of Jesus' life, and becomes *anamnesis*, remembrance, in its deepest Hebraic sense. Yet it is also incomplete. By itself, this remembrance does not celebrate the staggering metaphysical significance of the cross, nor its profound meaning for the life of prayer. For that we need something more.

A second liturgical strategy for Good Friday might be called, somewhat crassly, performing a funeral for Jesus. This type of service mimics a funeral in every way possible: we sing dirges, speak eulogies, and offer prayers that bemoan the sad fate of the prophet from Nazareth. In short, although we might sense the ambiguity of the moment, we do what it takes to leave church feeling sad. This strategy may well lead to what J. Christiaan Beker has described as "passion mysticism, a meditation on the wounds of Christ, or. . . a spiritual absorption into the sufferings of Christ," which he finds alien to Pauline theology.<sup>43</sup> It is reflected in Roman Catholic piety by the cult of the sacred heart and in Protestant piety by gospel hymns that center exclusively on the blood of Jesus. By themselves, these expressions too are incomplete. For Good Friday is more than merely a day of death. It is day that transforms death. On Good Friday, we learn that our journey to death was shared by the very Son of God.

So, consider another strategy, perhaps an addition to the first and a transformation of the second. This strategy considers Good Friday the *locus classicus* for lament, a day for prayer in solidarity with the cries of world--indeed, in solidarity with the suffering and dying Lord himself. Here we can learn a lesson from some early liturgists. For centuries prior to the Reformation, Good Friday was the occasion for the longest and most intense intercessory prayer of the entire year.<sup>44</sup> When the medieval Roman church pared down the Mass by trimming the general intercessory prayer, early liturgists

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<sup>40</sup>Congregations who do not follow the Christian year should nevertheless provide occasions for both thanksgiving and lament. Here the Puritan practice of days of thanksgiving and days of humiliation (or fast days) provide an instructive historical study. See Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), and Leigh E. Schmidt, "Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year in Eighteenth-Century Evangelicalism," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 90-109.

<sup>41</sup>Every season in the Christian year presents its own redolent possibilities for expressing different aspects of lament and praise. Space only permits an examination of these two events.

<sup>42</sup>A classic study of this is that of Robert Taft, "Historicism Revisited," in *Liturgical Time*, Wiebe Vos and Geoffrey Wainwright, eds., *Studia Liturgica* 14 (1982) 97-109, reprinted in *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1984), 15-30.

<sup>43</sup>J. Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God*, trans. Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 88.

<sup>44</sup>See G. G. Willis, "The Solemn Prayers of Good Friday," in *Essays in Early Roman Liturgy* (London, 1964), 1-48; and also see Jungmann, vol. 2, 482; Duchesne, *Christian Worship*, 172-173. See also, see Louis van Tongeren, "A Sign of Resurrection on Good Friday. The Role of the People in the Good Friday Liturgy Until c. 1000 A.D. and the Meaning of the Cross" in *Omnes Circumstantes: Contributions Towards a History of the Role of the People in the Liturgy*, ed. Charles Caspers and Marc Schneiders (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1990), 101-119.

(probably quite conservative ones) stepped in to preserve that lengthy prayer for use on this one day of the year.<sup>45</sup> Their instincts have much to teach us.

Part of what we celebrate on Good Friday (and the word "celebrate" is crucial) is that Christ has completely identified with us in suffering, even to death (Isa. 53:12, Heb. 4:14-16). On Good Friday we hear again Christ pray the lament of Psalm 22, and suddenly remember how wondrous it is that we have an intercessor who is able to sympathize with our weakness (Heb. 4:14-16; 5:7-9). On Good Friday, we hear Jesus pray for his enemies, redefining how lament functions in the life of the faith.<sup>46</sup> On Good Friday, we recall the words of Paul that confer mysterious significance on the suffering of those who are united with Christ in death (Col. 1:24, 2 Cor. 1:5, 4:10, Phil. 3:10; also I Peter 4:12-16). On Good Friday especially, we sense the complete identification of Christ with us, the basis for an all-important vicarious humanity of Christ by which our prayer and worship is made possible.<sup>47</sup> What better time than this to practice a spiritual discipline of lament in solidarity with those who suffer, including Jesus himself?

In part, Good Friday lament can be practiced through the use of the full traditional intercessory prayer for Good Friday, described above. Or perhaps this is the day when Psalm 88, the darkest of all Psalms can be used liturgically. Better yet, consider using Psalm 22 to structure Good Friday liturgical prayer, the very Psalm which the gospel writers place on the lips of Jesus on the cross. Begin Good Friday intercessions with Psalm 22:1-21, followed by extemporaneous prayers of intercession and lament. Then conclude the prayers with vs. 22-31, a decisive song of hope that anticipates Easter praise.<sup>48</sup> Concerning the Psalms of lament, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once observed that "No individual can repeat the lamentation Psalms out of his own experience; it is the distress of the entire Christian community at all times, as only Jesus Christ has experienced it entirely alone, which is here unfolded."<sup>49</sup> This liturgical suggestion for Good Friday takes Bonhoeffer's words seriously. It challenges us to move toward lament in full awareness of the Christological anchor to the life of prayer. If lament is new to your congregation's liturgical life, then begin with lament on Good Friday.

## Advent

Second, consider Advent, the season of anticipation and hope. Despite both the overwhelming influence of the shopping mall on Advent spirituality and the persistent temptation to conflate Advent with Christmas, the intent and genius of Advent is first of all to cultivate eschatological hope.

Eschatology, of course, is one of the main themes of twentieth century theology. Holocausts and world wars invite apocalyptic and eschatological thinking. One fruit of this interest is new appreciation for the ways in which prayer and worship are eschatological acts. Hans Joachim Kraus<sup>50</sup> and Brueggemann, among others, have emphasized this aspect of Old Testament prayer. J. Christiaan Beker has echoed this emphasis in New Testament theology. Both J. J. von Allmen, the late Swiss Reformed liturgical theologian, and Don Saliers have applied an eschatological framework directly to the church's liturgy.<sup>51</sup> As Saliers summarizes: "all petitions and intercessions are part of an eschatological dimension of all praise and thanksgiving . . . the very act of prayer as petition or intercession for the whole world is an implicit prayer that the kingdom or final rule of God may come to the whole world."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>For a modern equivalent to this solemn prayer of intercession, see *The Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 283-287; *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 277-280. For the use of lamentations in tenebrae for Holy Week, see *The Book of Occasional Services*, 2nd edition (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1988), 72ff; Hoyt L. Hickman, et al, *Handbook of the Christian Year* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 177-189.

<sup>46</sup>Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 309.

<sup>47</sup>James B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981), 127-147.

<sup>48</sup>See Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 298.

<sup>49</sup>*Psalms: Prayerbook of the Bible*, 47.

<sup>50</sup>Hans Joachim Kraus, *Theology of Psalms*, 102. For fascinating study of the messianic and eschatological understanding of the Greek Psalter, see Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Seibeck], 1995).

<sup>51</sup>J. J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>52</sup>Don E. Saliers, "Liturgy Teaching Us to Pray: Christian Liturgy and Grateful Lives of Prayer," *Liturgy and Spirituality in Context*:

Now we know the importance of eschatology *theologically*. The question is whether we can realize this eschatological vision *liturgically*. Can eschatology, particularly eschatological lament, shape spirituality in the midst of the Christian community? And can it do so even when the use of six-syllable words is not permitted?

Here our leadership of liturgical prayer is crucial. By praying eschatologically, and by pointing out to worshipers how and why we are doing it, we cultivate, however slowly, an eschatological spirituality. Consider two strategies for Advent. First, use the Psalms that express eschatological lament and longing. Psalm 80 is a traditional Psalm for Advent. Its refrain is the paradigmatic Advent prayer: "Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." And its prominent use of the vine/vineyard metaphor figures prominently in later Christological and eschatological prayer texts.<sup>53</sup> The meaning of Advent is best realized when we sense the analogy between Israel's hope and our own: we, like Israel, yearn for the coming of Messiah, the full arrival of the kingdom. By the liturgical use of this Psalm, and others like it, we identify ourselves with Israel in a tangible, liturgical way.

Second, we must pray with an eye to the future, so as to express and arouse intense hope and yearning. This happens in two ways. It happens through expressions of hope that arise out of situations of despair, praying, "O Come, O come, Immanuel," in full awareness that "captive Israel mourns in lowly exile here."<sup>54</sup> This is the prayer of *eschatological petition*. It also happens when prayer names acts of justice, integrity, and shalom as signs of the coming kingdom, and presents them as signs of the kingdom of God in this world. This might be called *eschatological praise*.

While explicitly eschatological petition and praise need not be limited to Advent, Advent is a time for calling attention to the future-orientation of both petition and praise. Imagine the following concise introduction to an Advent intercessory prayer: "Today in prayer, we give thanks for the birth of a new child to the Smiths, we ask for healing for Jill, for Larry, for Michelle. Especially today, in Advent, our prayer is oriented to the future. Because we believe in the Advent gospel, our prayers today feature two key words (and children, I challenge you to listen for them)--the words are 'hope and promise.'" To complement this liturgical practice, consider asking junior high church school students to write out Advent prayers entirely in the future tense, publish in church newsletters explicitly eschatological laments for use in personal and family worship, or agree to begin every church-sponsored Advent and Christmas celebration by the quiet singing of "O Come, O Come Immanuel." No doubt these suggestions will be variously applied in different communities. But the point remains the same: Advent must teach us to pray, even to lament, with our faces turned toward the future.

These moments in the Christian year, just like individual Psalms, take on new significance when seen against the backdrop of the whole cycle of biblical prayer. Here again our scholarly sources are helpful. For the prayers of the Christian year, like the prayers of the Psalter, can be understood better in terms of the whole gamut of lament and praise. Just as passionate lament in the Psalter has the affect of unleashing declarative praise after times of crisis, so too serious and sturdy lament and intercessions on Good Friday and in Advent have the effect of immeasurably deepening our Christmas and Easter praise. Just as descriptive psalmic praise dislodged from lament invites a hermeneutic of suspicion, so too Christmas and Easter praise can become suspiciously saccharine without the journey through Lent and Advent. It is well-accepted spiritual advice that the best way to prepare oneself for ecstatic and unbounded praise on Easter is to enter fully into the pathos of Good Friday. The same is true for Christmas and Advent--and for lament and praise. Praying only part of the cycle, whether in the Christian year or in the Psalms, is a mark of tepid spirituality.

### III. LAMENT IN ORDINARY SUNDAY WORSHIP

The Christian year is one large structure that nurtures the full range of affections in liturgical prayer. But it is not the only structure which shapes our worship. Consider also the classical pattern of Lord's Day worship. Taken as a whole, Sunday morning liturgy, just like the Psalter, has a range of affect and movement. In the course of well-celebrated Sunday worship, we praise, lament, give thanks, and intercede. Telescoped to its bare essentials: we gather with thanks, come before God in humble submission, offer unbridled praise, hear the Word with thanksgiving, respond with confession, offer intercession, share the meal of our participation in the works of God in Christ, and leave with dedication and promise. Within this pattern are expressions of plea and praise, disorientation and reorientation, that must be noticed and enlarged.

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*Perspectives on Prayer and Culture*, Eleanor Berstein, c.s.j., ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, the prayer of thanksgiving in the *Didache*. [I suggest you provide a more precise reference!]

<sup>54</sup>This language is borrowed from the classic Advent prayers, the "O-Antiphons," which underlie the hymn "O Come, O Come, Immanuel." For a modern version of the prayers, see *The Book of Common Worship*, 166-167.

## The Opening of Worship

Again, we will examine two key moments in this structure for worship. We begin right at the beginning. Like any event, the opening moments of worship accomplish a great deal: they establish who leads and who follows, and they establish the general ethos, mood, and purpose of the event. To use Ricouer's and Brueggemann's language, they establish whether the event arises out of "orientation" or "disorientation." Does worship begin with a statement of well-being or with acknowledgment of suffering? With praise or plea?

No doubt the *Sitz im Leben* of the worshiping community answers these questions quite naturally. Communities that gather in posh North American suburbs and those which gather in a war-torn Bosnian enclave inevitably begin worship in very different ways. The whole purpose and significance of the gathering is determined by the immediate social context of the community. But should the context be all-determinative? Should posh suburban churches merely repeat their songs of orientation?

Here we can learn a lesson from the shape of classic Christian liturgies, Eastern and Western. For both Eastern and Western liturgy, in most of their classic forms, begin with two paradigmatic liturgical prayers: *kyrie eleison* and *gloria in excelsis Deo*, lament and praise, disorientation and reorientation.

The *kyrie* is truly a lament (though it has been remade as a confession of sin in some liturgical structures). It is a plea for mercy. Later in the medieval period, *kyrie* was improvised, with extended tropes that elaborated and even localized this most simple cry for help. The *gloria*, we might say a bit anachronistically, is a blending of declarative and descriptive praise. As descriptive praise, it brings together the familiar verbs by which we praise God. As declarative praise it links them with concrete events in history.

This juxtaposition at the opening of worship is significant for both pastoral and theological reasons. Theologically, it maintains the eschatological tension of the "already" and "not yet" as worship begins, and helps avoid the twin temptations of triumphalism and despair. Similarly, it avoids simply repeating general descriptive praise of God, unleashed from a sense of God's particular creative and redemptive acts in human history. Pastorally, the presence of these two prayers at the outset provides a point of entry for worshipers at very different points in the life of faith. Every Sunday morning gathering includes people of praise and people of lament: people whose silence and pain craves release, and people whose joy seeks resonance in community.<sup>55</sup> Whether mournful or joyous, whether exhausted or invigorated, all worshipers find a point of contact somewhere in the spectrum between *Kyrie* and *Gloria*.

How do we do this today? What are some liturgical resources for those for whom *Kyrie* and *Gloria* is a foreign liturgical tongue? Consider three specific suggestions. The first is structural: maintain both lament and praise in the typical pattern for the opening of Sunday worship. Whether, like the classic Eastern and Western liturgies, we use *kyrie eleison* and *gloria in excelsis*; whether, like Calvin's *Form of Prayers*, we begin with prayers of humble penitence and continue with psalms of praise; or whether we begin with quiet informal gathering songs of humility and then join in solemn processional hymns of praise, this juxtaposition at once anchors worship in both the real world and in the coming kingdom.

The second suggestion is rhetorical. In leading worship, in giving transitions and introductions to acts of worship, make every attempt to identify with both "disoriented" and "oriented" worshipers. Perhaps the greatest enemy of this today is the ritual of the weekly witticism with which worship often begins. In leading worship, we often borrow patterns of speech from self-help seminars and late-night T.V. comedians. We feel compelled to begin with references to the weather or with a dandy quip to incite a cheap laugh. The penchant for informality, what Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. has called a "rhetorical downshift" in our liturgical leadership, often thwarts the possibility that the opening of worship will identify with a worshiper's deepest hopes and fears.<sup>56</sup>

The third suggestion concerns the texts we place on the congregation's lips at the outset of worship. The required balance of lament and praise commends the use of selected Psalms themselves,<sup>57</sup> as is prescribed, for example, in the 1955

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<sup>55</sup>The vital link between worship and pastoral care is explained William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

<sup>56</sup>Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Fashions in Folly: Sin and Character in the 90s* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1993), 8.

<sup>57</sup>Churches in the free church tradition have complete flexibility to choose these and other psalms for the opening of worship. Yet churches with fixed liturgical texts often have similar freedom in the choice of opening or processional canticles or hymns, for which a

liturgy of the French Reformed church.<sup>58</sup> Especially useful are declarative hymns of praise that bring together an immediate sense of total dependence on God, the distinct memory of occasions of grief and lament, and an awareness of God's recent intervention. Choose a specific declarative psalm, introduce it with a specific reference to some event in the life of the community, and then sing it passionately.

### Prayers of Intercession

In addition to the opening of worship, a crucial liturgical moment for lament is the prayer of intercession that, in classical Christian liturgy, follows and responds to the proclamation of the Word.<sup>59</sup> At first thought, this prayer may seem like anything but lament. Prayers of intercession typically ask for a great deal: for healing, for wisdom, for material blessings, for spiritual growth, and the like. But they don't seem to express lament. This, I contend, is a distortion of the prayers of intercession. Both in the New Testament, and in the subsequent history of Christian worship, prayers of intercession are fundamentally prayers for others, prayers in solidarity with those who suffer. They enact the basic *for-another* posture of prayer that follows from a theology of the cross, according to the twin claims of Miller ("the prayer for the suffering of others is the paradigm of faithful prayer")<sup>60</sup> and Christiaan Beker ("Solidarity is no longer a debatable option but rather an inescapable reality.")<sup>61</sup> In the midst of the worshiping community, which gathers with the assurance of Christ's presence, the paradigmatic prayer is not only, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget *me* forever?", but also, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget *them* forever?".

This insight suggests several ways in which our practice of intercessory prayers can be sharpened. First, it challenges us to affirm Karl Barth's assertion that the intercessory prayer of the church should be "as wide in scope as possible."<sup>62</sup> We might take as our mentor one bishop Fructuosus of Tarragone (d. 259), who entered his death saying, "I am bound to remember the whole Catholic Church from sunrise to sunset."<sup>63</sup> Again, history has much to teach us about how this can be achieved. Classical Eastern and Western liturgical texts featured a regular pattern for intercessions that required liturgical leaders to pray each week for a wide range of concerns: the local church, the worldwide church, political leaders, the oppressed, the sick, etc.<sup>64</sup> Every week, public intercessions covered the whole list, no matter how long the service had gone on. Such patterns, widely available today, need not be straightjackets that limit our prayers, but rather be models to challenge us to grow in praying for others. This aspect of weekly worship is no place to cut corners.

Second, this insight challenges us to fully integrate our liturgical prayer and our life in this world. Westermann claimed that "we can only describe and understand the psalms as originating from worship when worship is seen as the unifying center of the nation's common life . . . prayer in public worship would lose its force without these experiences outside the sanctuary: such prayer is only given life by the movement inwards from outside and back again into daily life."<sup>65</sup> Each time we read a newspaper or watch the evening news, we are preparing for liturgical prayer. Likewise, each time we join in liturgical prayer, we are preparing to read the newspaper and watch the evening news. My suggestion is that we nurture an "intercessory spirituality" that seeks to turn every dimension of our lives in the world into a topic for liturgical prayer. Consider introducing intercessory prayer by a simple, unadorned reading of headlines from weekly newspapers to focus attention on the priestly role of the church for the world, as in the following example of an intercessory prayer for two worship leaders:

[Introduction]: Our prayers will be divided into three sections,

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metrical setting of these psalms might be appropriate.

<sup>58</sup>*Liturgie de l'Eglise Réformée de France*. See *Recueil de textes liturgiques* (Tournon: Eglise Réformée de France, 1985).

<sup>59</sup>See James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), who observes that "the chief problem with the pastoral prayer is that it often tries to do everything and often ends by doing nothing" (162).

<sup>60</sup>Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 324.

<sup>61</sup>Beker, *Suffering and Hope*, 20.

<sup>62</sup>Karl Barth, *Selected Prayers*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965), 6-7.

<sup>63</sup>Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite*, vol. 2, 154.

<sup>64</sup>For a modern reflection of these historical patterns, see *The Book of Common Worship*, 99-124.

<sup>65</sup>Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 7.

prayers for national and international concerns

prayers for local, community needs

prayers for personal, individual brokenness.

To make our prayers concrete, each prayer will be preceded a list of newspaper headlines from the past week.

1 We pray now for the brokenness of our nation and world.

Dateline, March 2011

--Egyptian Unrest continues

--South Africa Death Toll Rises to 25 in Attacks

--Agents Discover Fake Visa Ring

--Two More Arrested in Tourist's Death

2 God of power, God of mercy

We lament before you the brokenness of our world,

a world of war

of disease

of mistrust

of violence.

We claim your promise to be with us.

In your power, heal our world we pray. . . .[silent prayers]

1 We pray now for the brokenness of our local community

Dateline, March 2011

--Vandals Break in at Local School

--Charges dropped in Prostitution Case

--One Hospitalized, Another Arrested in Stabbing

2 Our gracious God,

Our community, too, is broken

The institutions that hold us together often seem to be breaking,

The comfort of our lives is often disturbed by fear.

We claim your promise to be with us.

In your power, heal our community, we pray. . . .[silent prayers]

1 We pray now for individual, personal needs and brokenness

Dateline, March 2011

--Loneliness America's Greatest Killer

--Two More Press Claims of Sex Discrimination

--Numbers of Abused Children up this Year

--Worker Dissatisfaction High at Local Plant

2 Loving God,

so many lives are broken and filled with pain,

haunted with memories of failure, guilt, abuse

stuck in ruts of boredom and loneliness,

searching for meaning and happiness.

We pray for your comforting presence,

for your power to heal and forgive.

Work powerfully in our world, we pray. . . .[silent prayers]

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

1 [Assurance] Jesus said: Come to me--all you who labor and are heavily burdened--

and *I* will give you *rest*.

Take *my* yoke upon you and learn from *me*,

for I am gentle and lowly in heart

and *you* will find *rest* for your *souls*,

2 Friends in Christ,

Jesus died for us and rose again in victory.

His words are sure. In him, we find life and *rest* for our souls.

In addition to this suggestion, consider the following.

\*Include within intercessory prayers hymns and songs that specifically lament reasons for which creation groans: environmental abuse, natural disaster, warfare, domestic abuse, and others.<sup>66</sup>

\*Give particular attention to concerns and problems identified earlier in the reading and preaching of the Word.

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<sup>66</sup>See, for example, the memorable texts of "A Congregational Lament" and "The City is Alive, O God," in *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987).

\*Include in the prayers of the people each week one prayer from Christians who live in a different country.<sup>67</sup>

\*Include in intercessory prayer specific references to the vocations of two or three members of the congregation and the particular dilemmas they face, moving systematically to include each member of the local church community over time.

In short, invest energy in making the prayers of the people one of the "highlights" of weekly Sunday worship.

One of the great benefits of enriching intercessory prayer following the service of the Word is the effect this has on the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Again our metaphor of a cycle or a spiral is helpful. At the Lord's Supper, we pray the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving that is like an epic poem that recites God's deeds in history. Just as in our Psalm cycle, where descriptive praise has integrity when it follows lament and descriptive praise, so too Eucharistic thanksgiving takes on deeper meaning when it follows intense prayers of intercession and lament. Experienced presiders may even take liberty to extend the recital of God's deeds in the Eucharistic Prayer to name specific gifts of God to the local community that correspond to the prayers of intercession just offered. And while this may sound like only an abstract liturgical point for only liturgical connoisseurs, I am convinced that it is pastorally true: deeply meaningful intercessory prayers change everything about how worship is perceived.

#### IV.

In sum, well-celebrated Christian worship shares the very same characteristics as the Psalter. It expresses a *range* of affections. It leads the community in a *movement* into deeper praise and lament, pulled along by both the daily joys and sufferings of worshipers and the startlingly good news of the gospel. It refuses to deny the tension between praise and lament by simply giving up on one or the other. It also refuses to be pulled apart by this tension. In part, such worship is possible with careful attention to the structures which shape Christian worship, structures that resemble or are analogous to the structures Brueggemann, Goldingay and others have described in the Psalms. The occasional structures of lament and praise in times of crisis, and the cyclic structures which shape our yearly and weekly worship are the primary means by which the prayers of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation are expressed. At their best, these structures at once enrich, correct, and balance the corporate prayer life of the church.

In conclusion, we must affirm that the liturgical application of these important lessons from biblical prayer can not be overemphasized. Liturgy, as Brueggemann has pointed out, is world-making speech. It is a crucial aspect of spiritual formation. It trains us in the deep grammar of faith, hope, and prayer. This lesson is especially important today. The primary influence on liturgy today is the clarion call for relevance to post-modern, media-soaked people. Our liturgical strategizing nowadays begins with market analysis. Leaving the task of assessing the merits of this approach for another day, we can acknowledge that market surveys tell us what we long have guessed. We are ministering in a broken world. Even in North American suburbia, all is not well. And whether you are baby boomer or buster, there is nothing as relevant as showing up at church on Sunday morning and joining a congregation that is willing to name precisely and intercede passionately for the very problems that drove you there in the first place. Tellingly, advocates of both so-called traditional and contemporary forms for worship have recently prescribed that churches take more seriously their role as priests in shaping both prayers of lament and praise.<sup>68</sup> The simultaneous call for intentionality in our liturgical prayer by both liturgical reformers and biblical scholars signals an important opportunity for the church today. May God's Spirit bless conversations among them so that the church may be formed in an ever more deeply biblical faith.

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<sup>67</sup>See, for example, the prayers printed in *With All God's People: The New Ecumenical Prayer Cycle* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989).

<sup>68</sup>See, for example, Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 112-113; and Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Divine Glory* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 118-125.