

Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*



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Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music* (1971–2000) and *Reformed Liturgics* (1963–69), *Call to Worship* seeks to further the church's commitment to theological integrity, corporate worship, and excellence in music, preaching, and other liturgical art forms.

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Contents

Introduction	v
<i>Kimberly Bracken Long</i>	
Feature Articles	
Learning to Lament	2
<i>Phillip Morgan</i>	
What Do We Preach? Trauma, Lament, and Social Action	8
<i>Kimberly Wagner</i>	
The Brutal Brilliance of the Psalms.	16
<i>Gail Ramshaw</i>	
Is There Something You'd Like to Tell Me?	23
<i>Libby Shannon</i>	
The Work of Our Hands: Abundant Joy, Fearless Generosity.	27
<i>Sandra McDonald and David VanderMeer</i>	
What Would Jesus Pack?	31
<i>Katie Day</i>	
And This Shall Be Our Reply to Violence: Singing in Times of Trial	40
<i>Joshua Taylor</i>	
The Arduous Road Back: Basil and the Problem of "Dirty Hands" in Light of Moral Injury and Combat Trauma	46
<i>Brian Powers</i>	
Praying with the Poor in a Violent World	54
<i>Cláudio Carvalhaes</i>	

Columns

On Liturgy: Saturday's Silence.	62
<i>Mary Beth Anton</i>	
On Music: Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachtani	64
<i>Peter Ncanywa</i>	
On Preaching: Overcoming Violence in the Scriptural World and Our Own.	66
<i>David E. Lower</i>	
On the Arts: To Gather.	68
<i>Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk</i>	

Ideas

“O God, Creator, Sovereign”	71
<i>Text: William McConnell</i>	
<i>Tune: LLANGLOFFAN</i>	
“Praise God for Saints Who Sing”	72
<i>Text: David Gambrell and Don C. Richter</i>	
<i>Tune: EVELYN'S TUNE (SMD)</i>	
<i>Harmony: Hal H. Hopson</i>	
“Into Your Hands, Dear Savior”	73
<i>Text: David Gambrell</i>	
<i>Tune: PASSION CHORALE</i>	

Book Reviews

<i>Recovering from Un-Natural Disasters: A Guide for Pastors and Congregations after Violence and Trauma, Laurie Kraus, David Holyan, and Bruce Wismer</i>	75
<i>Reviewed by Cader Howard</i>	
<i>Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table, J. Todd Billings</i>	77
<i>Reviewed by Buz Wilcoxon</i>	
<i>Rehearsing Scripture: Discovering God's Word in Community, Anna Carter Florence.</i>	79
<i>Reviewed by Mary Margaret Flannagan</i>	

Introduction

Kimberly Bracken Long

The statistics are mind-boggling. These days we are witnessing violent events at such a rate that we are alternately fearful, outraged, and numb. And yet, every Sunday, we are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. How do we do it? How can worshipping communities respond to the violence that seems to be pervasive and unrelenting?

These are the questions that this issue of *Call to Worship* seeks to address. Phillip Morgan and Joshua Taylor draw on a depth of experience to show how central singing is to our communal life, particularly in violent times. Kimberly Wagner shares from her significant research on preaching and trauma to help guide those who proclaim the Word every Sunday. In her inimitable way, Gail Ramshaw opens our eyes to the “brutal brilliance” of psalmody and offers a lament on the “horror and lure of violence” that congregations may pray together.

Several authors write from unique perspectives, adding to the conversation. Katie Day’s research on whether and how congregations arm themselves is instructive and eye-opening. In sharing her experiences as a college chaplain, Libby Shannon helps us understand the effects of trauma and how

we might better respond. Brian Powers draws on his research of the effects of “moral injury” on combat veterans and offers a way that congregations might share in their lament, confession, and healing. Cláudio Carvalhaes describes the work of a group of pastors and scholars who immerse themselves in the lives of oppressed communities on four continents and shares some of the liturgy that has emerged from their experiences. In addition, each of our four columnists offers personal and insightful commentary from their perspectives as pastors, musicians, preachers, and artists. Book reviews and a photo essay describing an ambitious art installation round out the issue, which is enhanced by the art of John Stuart.

These articles may not be easy to read, but I pray they will inform your ministry and feed your soul. In these violent and troubling times, the church continues to gather, week after week, to voice our laments, pour out our prayers, and yes, even sing our praise in the face of it all—for we know that the last word is not death, but life.

Kimberly Bracken Long



John Stuart

Feature Articles

Learning to Lament

Phillip Morgan

By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our harps.
For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
How could we sing the LORD’S song
in a foreign land?

—Psalm 137:1–4

Four hundred years ago, the first African American slaves arrived in this land. Enduring years of bondage and acts of violence they learned to sing their songs in a foreign land. How did they sing these songs? As a lament of the loss of their homeland and family and a way to make some sense of the violence and oppression from which they hoped to one day be delivered, like the Hebrew slaves before them. In singing they created a body of sacred song that has become a large part of my life’s work—to preserve and share the legacy of the traditional Negro spiritual, a group of songs I consider a strong part of my heritage and a part of me. That was not always the case, and it has taken me a long time to live fully into what I feel is a responsibility to hand on these songs as they were handed to me.

The biggest question I face now in my work as a church musician, however, is not “*How* can we sing these songs of Zion?” but rather, “*Can* I sing these songs of Zion?” In the congregations I now serve that are mostly Caucasian, there is often a sense that these songs can’t be sung by the children of the captors and tormentors but only by the children

of those who first hung up their harps in 1619. To sing these songs would be an act of cultural appropriation. That view reduces these songs to merely historical fragments and ignores the bold statements of faith that all children of God should proclaim. I believe that these songs, particularly those of lament, that testify to great struggle and hope are for all of us. I have seen their power come alive in my work with congregations, and I have been overwhelmed when I can feel the presence of my ancestors and those who taught me the songs come into the sacred space where I now sing with my Presbyterian family.

After several years of private study, it was decided, mostly by my grandmother and without my input, that at the age of fourteen I had learned enough in the eyes of my small rural congregation to play the hymns and accompany the choir. I loved the work immediately. While I have always loved music, I have never felt that I have the heart of a performer. But as a church musician, I could live in a world of music, which was my passion, yet also be assured that I was worshipping rather than performing when leading music at church. Typical of an African American Baptist congregation, we sang hymns by Fanny Crosby, Isaac Watts, and Charles Albert Tindley, mixed with gospel classics made famous by the Roberta Martin Singers, Rev. James Cleveland, and Andraé Crouch.

As a pianist, I especially loved playing the gospel classics from the 1960s and ’70s. Martin, Cleveland, and Crouch were all amazing pianists, and I spent hours listening to their recordings, attempting to play exactly like them. I must admit that I became competent at it and can give you a decent hymn accompaniment in the style of Roberta Martin whenever needed. I loved this music. It was

Phillip Morgan is director of music at Central Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky,
and a member of the PAM Executive Board.

an obsession of mine. For many of my high school years the music of James Cleveland or Chopin was sure to be playing at full volume in my home, not the Top 40 radio hits of the mid-2000s.

In addition to the body of gospel music and traditional southern hymns that my congregation sang, there was a particular group of songs I didn't like very much. We sang them without accompaniment, which did not appeal to the one thing I really loved about church music. They were often slow. They had melancholy tunes with depressing texts about the horribleness of life or gruesome parts of the Bible like crucifixion. What I hated most was that they made everyone feel sad.

As I listened, I heard, but was unaware that I was receiving a beautiful musical gift and learning the story of my ancestors' struggles. I was being lectured through song about the history of oppression and violence that the generations before me had endured. I was being given my musical inheritance, the Traditional Negro Spiritual. W. E. B. Du Bois shared a similar sentiment in his work *The Souls of Black Folk*:

“They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine.¹

My earliest remembrance of one of these songs was watching Deacon Paul Johnson, the man known in our congregation to occasionally be moved to lead such a song, stand and begin to sing,

“*Was you there when they crucified my Lord?*”

The one line seemed to take an eternity for him to emit, but by the time he had reached the word *crucified* my grandmother would have tears running down her face. Everyone would. It would be years before I would understand why they were crying. I would have to come to know something of the world in which my ancestors had survived before I could hear their great lament. When I learned, I would stand, open my mouth to sing the same words at a speed that made many feel almost

uncomfortable, and when the melody soared at “O! Sometimes, it causes me to tremble,” I would taste the bitter tears from my own eyes.

In 2017, the congregation I serve engaged in a six-week Lenten book study of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone. Our church staff also made the decision to include elements of the book in all our worship services during Lent. From Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, the connection of Christ's crucifixion and lynching, one of the bloodiest and most violent chapters in African American history, was our guide.

The weeks I spent discussing this book in a small group completely changed my life and my understanding of the faith that I was given as a child. It helped me to understand that the songs I did not understand as a child, songs sung by the grandchildren of those who had endured terrible violence through slavery—and those who had lived in the reality of the terror of lynching in the twentieth century—were sung as a spiritual act of lament. As Cone stated, “It takes a powerful imagination, grounded in historical experience, to uncover the great mysteries of black life. ‘We have been in the storm so long,’ ‘tossed and driven,’ singing and praying, weeping and wailing, trying to carve out some meaning in tragic situations. The beauty in black existence is as real as the brutality, and the beauty prevents the brutality from having the final word.”² They sang those songs to overcome their violent realities. They taught me those songs so that I could one day endure mine.

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The Cross and the Lynching Tree features a reference to an old gospel song or Negro spiritual on nearly every page. As I read, I began to underline them all and add my own references in the margins. All of the songs from my childhood that I had learned from Deacon Johnson came flooding back to me, many of them the chapter titles of Cone's work. “Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen,” “O Mary Don't You Weep,” “Down at the Cross,” “I've Been in the Storm So Long.” All of them wholly a part of my being. I was beginning to understand

why he felt moved to occasionally stand and raise his voice in lament. He was rebelling against hatred. It explained why he would occasionally rise to his feet and sing an old meter hymn lining out the words for the congregants:

*I love the Lord, he heard my cry
And he pitied every groan.*

He was angry with the way things had been and sad at the way things still were, but on Sunday morning he put his trust in God and believed in the story of the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt and deliverance from oppression of his own ancestors. As Scripture says, “The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God” (Exod. 2:23).

My grandparents raised me, and my grandmother was actually a great musical influence on me. She was the greatest teacher I had in matters of musical idioms that stemmed from the oral tradition and could only be passed on that way. From where to add time and space in the melody of a spiritual to how the rhythm of a gospel hymn should really be swung even though Western notation could not adequately describe how—she taught me all of these things while singing through her daily tasks. She would only stop what she was doing to come to the piano, offer her gentle criticism of how I had not played something in the correct style, and sing to me how it really should go. Du Bois described the oral tradition this way: “The child sang it to his children and they to their children’s children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.”³

My grandfather was no musician, but one day he taught me one of the greatest lessons I ever learned, a lesson that would ultimately change my life as a musician and a person of color.

When I was a teenager, there was a moment when my world was forever changed. In my high school U.S. history class, as we began to study the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s, my teacher mentioned as a brief side note the brutal killing of Emmett Till. His lecture featured the famous image of the young black boy in an open casket. Even though I was deeply disturbed, I did not know it yet.

I went home that evening to my grandparents who had created a world for me in which I felt safe.

That day’s lesson had threatened that safety. After some discussion about what I had heard and seen in class, my grandmother sat me down and told me the story as best she knew. She told me that Till had gone down south to visit relatives for the summer, just like her cousins had visited her as children. She told me that he was accused of committing the “crime” of whistling at a white woman. She told me that they beat him beyond recognition, killed him, and threw his body into a river.

As my grandmother told me the story with all the gentleness she could muster, my grandfather roamed around the kitchen fixing, then breaking, and again fixing some appliance. When my grandmother finished, my grandfather looked up and issued a warning. “Son, that’s the way they do colored boys, and don’t you ever forget it.”

The story of Emmett Till and his brave, grieving mother still scares me and haunts my thinking. However, it was what my grandfather said afterwards that I will never forget. In that moment, I learned I could be the victim of violence and that those who looked like me had been the victims of such horrible acts.

His warning to me seemed to be in mind increasingly in 2017 after the killings of Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, and many other black people. With these deaths in our recent past, the people of God entered into the penitential season of Lent.

Central Presbyterian has always sung the sacred music of African American traditions. There has been a healthy dose of gospel music, and spirituals are a staple among the congregation and choirs. However, in light of what I was discovering about my own experience with spirituals, especially the ones that lamented, and gospel music that seemed to be centered on crucifixion, I decided to be a bit more radical and change the percentage of those genres in worship with the musical selections during Lent.

In a typical service, there may have been one spiritual or gospel hymn or response. During Lent, however, we sang at least one spiritual as one of the congregational hymns each week, and the chancel choir sang a spiritual as the choral anthem or choral introit. All of the sung responses during the service were from the African American tradition. The lectionary passages for Year A were paired with chapters of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. These were the musical selections from the African American sacred tradition.

First Sunday in Lent

Chapter 1: “Nobody Knows de Trouble I See”

Matthew 4:1–11

Choral Introit: “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” arr. Robert Shaw

Choral Anthem: “Lonesome Valley,” arr. Gilbert Martin

Communion Setting: “Holy, Holy, Holy” (GTG #556)

“Christ Has Died; Christ Is Risen” (GTG #557)
“Amen” (GTG #558)

Hymn during Communion: “Let Us Break Bread Together” (GTG #525)

Second Sunday in Lent

Chapter 2: “The Terrible Beauty of the Cross” and the Tragedy of the Lynching Tree

Ecclesiastes 3:1

John 3:1–17

Choral Anthem: “I Want Jesus,” arr. Jester Hairston

Hymn: “I Love the Lord, Who Heard My Cry” (GTG #799)

Third Sunday in Lent

Chapter 3. Bearing the Cross and Staring Down the Lynching Tree

Exodus 17:1–7

John 4:5–42

Choral Anthem: “Old Time Religion,” arr. Moses Hogan

Hymn: “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (GTG #700)

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Chapter 4. The Recrucified Christ in Black Literary Imagination

John 9:1–41

Choral Anthem: “I’ve Been in the Storm So Long,” arr. Craig Hella Johnson

Hymn: “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” (GTG #775)

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Chapter 5. “Oh Mary, Don’t You Weep”

John 11:1–45

Choral Introit: “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me,” arr. Moses Hogan

Choral Anthem: “O Mary Don’t You Weep,” arr. Moses Hogan

Hymn: “Guide My Feet” (GTG #741)

Hymn during Communion: “Taste and See” (GTG #520)

Palm Passion Sunday

Choral Anthem: “He Will Remember Me” (AAHH #420)

Hymn: “Were You There” (GTG #228)

Communion Setting: “Holy, Holy” (GTG #593)
“Amen” (GTG #600)

Service music that was used each week included:

Call to Prayer (before Prayer of Confession):
“Come Here Jesus If You Please” (verse 2, measures 1–16) (AAHH #439)

Amen (after Prayer of Confession): “Come Here Jesus If You Please” (measures 17–25)

Doxology: “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow” (AAHH #650)

There were of course challenges with some of the music. After the choir sang Moses Hogan’s arrangement of “Old Time Religion,” I received a great deal of negative feedback. My predominately-white congregation was hearing this spiritual in a completely different light than their black music director. After reading Cone’s work, I was beginning to celebrate the parts of the theology of my upbringing. Since I had always thought there was too much emphasis on the crucifixion narrative in my childhood and as an adult, I had wholeheartedly rejected that thinking. So, for me to sing the words “It was good for my grandmother, it’s good enough for me” was an act of remembrance, and I felt that I was honoring the memory of my ancestors and their plight against oppression. I had learned to lament. However, I heard from many that to honor the religion of their grandparents would be ignoring Cone’s arguments in chapter two about white Christians’ complacency in the history of lynching in this country. The old-time religion of their grandmothers was not good enough for them, and they were determined to do better.

So, for me to sing the words
“It was good for my grandmother, it’s
good enough for me” was an act of
remembrance, and I felt that I was
honoring the memory of my ancestors
and their plight against oppression.

Another challenge that was harder for people to articulate was the difference in mood and tone of the African American music we were singing. Although we had sung African American spirituals and gospel music often, we generally sang songs with texts that spoke of the good news of the gospel and had music to match. “O Lord have mercy on po’ me” was hard for some people to sing, but by placing it in the service where we had traditionally sung the Kyrie, I was able to explain to the congregation that we were literally singing a translation of the ancient Greek text.

There were also great moments of connection and heightened understanding. I received emails for weeks about how the words and tune of the spiritual “I Love the Lord, Who Heard My Cry” had found a way into people’s hearts, and although we had sung it before, it had new meaning in the light of our book study.

A great moment of shock—of the good variety—came when I heard from several members that they had no idea “Let Us Break Bread Together” was a spiritual. They had been singing this communion hymn for years, but in congregations that they assumed would never sing music traditionally sung by African American congregations in worship. The choir enjoyed singing different arrangements of “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me,” and it gave life to one of the spirituals we had sung most often in worship during Lent.

A great moment of shock—of the good variety—came when I heard from several members that they had no idea “Let Us Break Bread Together” was a spiritual.

On Palm/Passion Sunday we sang, as many congregations do, “Were You There” as the final hymn. I decided that I would present the song the way it was first presented to me as a child by Paul Johnson. I played the introduction on the piano as if we would sing it accompanied, but as soon as the congregation began to sing, I stopped playing. I then stood and proceeded to sing the tune the way that I remembered hearing it as a child, being careful never to conduct but to lead powerfully the singing. It was mournfully slow to match the painful and mournful text. I immediately felt the slight hesitation from the congregation but I kept

singing, pausing and bending the notes like my grandmother taught me, and by the second verse, I could feel the realization spread that this was not about singing exactly together. We would all place our anxieties and woes at the foot of the cross and bear witness to an act of violence inflicted on our redeemer, Jesus Christ. We sang the words “nailed him to the tree” and we became the spectators at a lynching of an innocent man. As the congregation began to swell to the third line and cried, “O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble,” tears hot and fast rolled down my face, and perhaps for the first time I found the beauty of my musical inheritance. I was living fully into the tradition handed down to me and I was passing it on the way it was handed to me.

As you can imagine, a study about the ties between lynching and crucifixion held great significance for the Good Friday service. Although we immediately recognized the significance of this worship service, given the context we had given our Lenten journey, it was not an easy service to plan or lead. As each member of the staff studied the book in a small group each week, we shared with one another the connection our congregation felt to the recent soar in police shootings of unarmed African American victims—people who were being executed without due process—and the publicity that followed. I kept remembering those haunting words of my grandfather. After several conversations where I shared my increased anger as I read, I turned my mind to the cross. What resulted was a new way of looking at our service for Good Friday.

Our traditional pattern for worship on Good Friday has been to gather with a hymn, call to worship, and prayer. Another hymn leads us into the reading of the passion narrative, which is broken into several brief readings followed by the extinguishing of a candle and a period of silence. We have also added singing after each reading and sometimes used specific hymns like “Shadows Lengthen into Night” to guide us through the narrative. Carrying the weight of anger over current affairs and the history of lynching, we added the voice of the unarmed into our service in 2017. Each reading was accompanied by silence and then the sudden cry of a victim using their last words. It was an incredibly difficult service, but it put us at the place of death for our savior and for innocent people in our country in a way that I did not think was possible.

Good Friday Service

Prelude “Strange Fruit” by Abel Meeropol

Hymn No. 209 (GTG) “My Song Is Love Unknown”

Call to Worship

Prayer

Hymn No. 228 (GTG) “Were You There?”

Matthew 26:36–56

Jesus prays in Gethsemane.
Jesus is betrayed and arrested.

“What are you following me for?”
Trayvon Martin, 17
February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida

Matthew 26:57–58, 69b–75

Jesus appears before the High Priest.
Peter denies Jesus.

“Officers, why do you have your guns out?”
Kenneth Chamberlain, 66
November 19, 2011, in White Plains, New York

Matthew 27:1–2, 11–14

Jesus appears before Pilate.
Pilate questions Jesus.

“I don’t have a gun, stop shooting.”
Michael Brown, 18
August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri

Matthew 27:15–26

Barabbas or Jesus?
Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified.

“I didn’t even do nothing.”
Sam Dubose, 43
July 19, 2015, in Cincinnati, Ohio

Matthew 27:27–31

The soldiers mock Jesus.

“Why did you shoot me?”
Kendrec McDade, 19
March 24, 2012, in Pasadena, California

Matthew 27: 32–44

Jesus is crucified.

“I can’t breathe.”
Eric Garner, 43
July 17, 2014, in Staten Island, New York

Matthew 27:45–56

Jesus dies.

“Please don’t let me die.”
Kimani Gray, 16
March 9, 2013, in Brooklyn, New York

Matthew 27:57–66

Jesus’ body is placed in the tomb.

“I love you too.”
Sean Bell, 23
November 25, 2006, in Queens, New York

*(Each person is encouraged to pray
and meditate as long as he or she desires,
then to depart in silence.)*

The services created a meaningful and at times challenging season of worship for us at Central as we explored prayerfully our roles in systematic oppression that lead to inequity in our current world and to past and present violence against African Americans. As white people lifted their voices in the words and tunes of the oppressed, they lamented their privilege, and the songs of my ancestors became theirs too. For they were not the songs of African Americans but the songs of children of God, who sang of the suffering and the violent treatment of their savior, like the suffering they had known in this country. Remembering the children of Israel, the slaves who first arrived to this land in 1619, those lynched three hundred years later in the 1920s, and Christ who was crucified, we can lament, “Nobody knows the trouble I see.” Through learning one another’s experience, we grow closer to one another and exclaim, “Glory Hallelujah!”

Notes

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg, 1903), 250.
2. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 94–95.
3. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 254.

What Do We Preach? Trauma, Lament, and Social Action

Kimberly Wagner

On February 14, 2018, many Americans celebrated two concurrent holidays: Valentine's Day and the Christian holy day of Ash Wednesday, a day when people observe the beginning of Lent by receiving the mark of ash crosses on their foreheads, remembering their own sinfulness and mortality with the scriptural reminder, "From dust you came and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Yet, on February 14, 2018, Parkland, Florida, was marked in another way with a violent and needless reminder of sinfulness and mortality when a former student, Nicholas Cruz, entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School with an AR-15 rifle and proceeded to wreak havoc on three floors of one of the school buildings. In a matter of minutes, Cruz killed seventeen people and wounded seventeen more. Though he was later caught outside a local McDonald's, Cruz was able to discard his gun and vest on the third floor and exit the school undetected in the midst of all of the mayhem.

I remember looking at my phone that afternoon to see the news alert pop up of yet another mass shooting, and I felt that familiar sinking feeling in my heart. "Not another one," I muttered out loud. After all, the Parkland shooting came just months after the mass shootings in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Sutherland Springs, Texas. These high-profile public mass shootings felt like they were becoming all too routine.

Even the news outlets seem to have etched a certain template for covering these unbelievable, yet all-too-common stories. Television crews showed footage of students fleeing the building and pictures

of parents holding one another in fear and grief. The news teams faithfully reported how many were dead or injured; they detailed the harrowing search for the gunman; and then reporters turned to the question of the gunman's identity, possible motivation, and how he acquired the gun. All that seemed in line with what we have all grown too accustomed to seeing. And what would come next was sadly predictable: a day or two later the news would announce the identities of each of the deceased with short biographies, often provided by friends or family. Finally they would record scenes from vigils or photograph spontaneous memorials made of flowers, candles, and stuffed bears. And then, within weeks, reporters would move on to the next gripping news story.

But Parkland was different. As predicted, the news outlets released the names of the deceased and their brief bios. But, at the candlelit vigil at the Pine Trails Park Amphitheater the next day, there were more than just tears for reporters to cover. In the midst of the grief there was pronounced protest. Student after student interviewed by reporters spoke unhesitatingly about the need for stricter gun laws and more stringent gun control measures. At one point, in the midst of the vigil, a chant rose from the crowd: "No more guns! No more guns!"¹ And then student leaders rose up from the Parkland community. Only days after the tragedy, students stood up and spoke out. A video from a rally on February 17 went viral as Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School senior Emma Gonzalez offered a fiery speech calling President Trump, the Florida legislature, and the United States Congress to account for stronger gun legislation. She

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began her speech declaring, “Every single person up here today, all these people should be home grieving. But instead we are up here standing together because if all our government and President can do is send thoughts and prayers, then it’s time for victims to be the change that we need to see.”² After leading chants of “Shame on you” aimed towards the NRA and “We call B.S.” aimed towards Washington, D.C., Gonzales finally declared, “We are going to be the kids you read about in textbooks. Not because we’re going to be another statistic about mass shooting in America, but because . . . we are going to be the last mass shooting.”³

This time felt different. This time seemed different. This time the country seemed to sit up and pay attention for more than three days. Even the BBC noted that this mass shooting received more and longer sustained news coverage than any recent mass shooting.⁴ The students held the spotlight and kept focused on their determination to seek stronger gun control laws in the United States.

While many Americans wondered if this might be a turning point in the national conversation around guns, preachers were again faced with the question of what to preach in the wake of a mass shooting. What should preachers proclaim in the aftermath of yet another incident of mass violent trauma? What do traumatized congregations need to hear? Yet, given the overwhelmingly public social action response of the Parkland students, the preaching questions grew even more complicated. Parkland posed an additional preaching dilemma—how do preachers navigate the brokenness of trauma *and* the call to social action? Can preachers fully address the condition of the traumatized congregation and the agitation of energized students without ignoring one group in favor of the other?

Understanding Trauma and Preaching in the Wake of Mass Violence

In order to think about preaching in the wake of mass violence, we need to first understand how such trauma impacts individuals and communities. Using the work of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, sociologist Kai Erikson, and theologian Serene Jones, I define

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trauma as an internal blow or wounding of the mind and spirit that occurs when an experience cannot be fully understood in the moment or assimilated into preconceived meaning-making frameworks. Put another way, trauma is defined by the ungraspable and incomprehensible nature of the experience. Trauma leaves a person unable to make meaning or integrate the situation into their life story.

The experience of trauma leads to individual and communal narrative duress in two ways—through a disruption in temporality and a disruption in narrative coherence. First, traumatic experience ruptures people’s experience of time. The traumatic experience becomes ever present and timeless, continually invading and disrupting the present. This “eternal present” of trauma breaks apart the progression and interrelationship of past, present, and future.⁵ No longer does the plot of an individual or community’s story make sense in its movement through time. Or, as L. L. Langer articulates in his analysis of Holocaust survivors, “the [traumatic] past invades [the] present and casts a long, pervasive shadow over its future.”⁶ Second, trauma leads to a loss of narrative coherence.⁷ Personal and communal narratives no longer hang together in a logical and meaningful way. The narrative becomes fractured into bits of one’s story that no longer make sense as a cohesive whole. The loss of narrative temporality combined with the collapse of narrative coherence at both the personal and communal level combines to form the experience I call narrative fracture.

These fractured narratives no longer function to help people make sense of the world in which they live. Both individuals and communities begin to lose trust in the structures and metaphysical realities upon which they depended before the trauma (such as government, communal organizations, church, or even God). Personally, narrative fracture produces anxiety over stability and anxiety over one’s ability to make sense of the future. Communally, collective narrative fracture often leads to a disintegration of the connective tissues that hold together a community and thus a sense of communal identity.⁸ It is to these kinds of fractured communities composed of fractured individuals that preachers must speak.

Preachers and worship leaders need to name that fractured and broken communal reality and to invite individuals to name their brokenness in the space of holy worship. We should lead worship in such a way that welcomes the fragments of people's experience without trying to immediately put those fragments back together into a smooth, meaning-making narrative.

Understanding the nature and impact of trauma, I argue that preachers and worship leaders need to name that fractured and broken communal reality and to invite individuals to name their brokenness in the space of holy worship. We should lead worship in such a way that welcomes the fragments of people's experience without trying to immediately put those fragments back together into a smooth, meaning-making narrative. We might preach in a way—in sermon content *and* sermon form—that honors, models, and opens up opportunities for people's fragments of incomprehensible and presently meaningless experience to be recognized and blessed as not beyond the love and hope of God. Perhaps we might re-imagine healing as a process that requires the acknowledgement and blessing of fracture even as it leaves room for hope.

Framed theologically, preachers need to hold the tension between the reality of brokenness and the anticipation of hope, to sit in the eschatological gap between the painful truth of the present circumstance and the promises of God—no matter how distant or hidden they may seem. The temptation may be to cling to one or the other—to the circumstances or the divine promises. On one side, in the immediate aftermath of violent trauma, a time marked by deep suffering, confusion, and sadness, the temptation may be for preachers to only offer a message of hope. But, because the realities of trauma are so

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palpable and painful, a proclamation only of hope risks sounding to the traumatized hearers as a kind of utopian escapism. A sermon that preaches only God's healing and redemptive work may actually be received as unbelievable, as it stands in strong contradiction to the listeners' experience. At best, such hope-filled preaching appears as a quick fix or theological bandage that simply masks the gaping wound of suffering. At worst, such preaching could provide a damaging narrative that convinces the listener that their experience of forsakenness or brokenness is beyond the healing work or presence of God. On the reverse side, a sermon that clings only to the reality of suffering without at least pointing towards the eschatological promises of God is unfaithful to the Christian story and nature of God. While the narrative fracture and suffering brought on by a traumatic experience needs to be named, honored, and recognized, such brokenness can only be moved towards eventual healing in the light of the resurrection and final consummation of creation. Preaching in the wake of violence and trauma needs to find a way, in content and form, to honor and navigate that necessary eschatological tension between suffering and hope without collapsing one into the other.

An Additional Preaching Dilemma

At the same time that the mass shooting was happening in Parkland, Florida, I happened to be teaching a course titled "Preaching and Trauma" to seminary students in Atlanta, Georgia. Because we didn't hear the news story until after class, it became our first topic of discussion the following week. We had already spent class time exploring the nature of trauma and the ways trauma impacts both individuals and communities. The students in "Preaching and Trauma" seemed to agree with our working definition of "trauma" (as outlined above) and with the need for preachers to acknowledge brokenness while still leaving room for hope.

Yet, the Parkland shooting seemed to add a new preaching challenge to be faced. My students were inspired and thrilled by the work of the Parkland students. They found themselves fired up with enthusiasm, wanting to become involved in the movement generated by the Parkland students. As activists, they knew what to do; they were ready to go. And yet, as preachers and worship leaders, they found themselves torn, unsure what to do or say. The students seemed agitated as we watched news stories of the Parkland shooting in class along with footage of rallies and interviews with students. Finally, one student raised her hand and asked, “So, professor, what do you preach? Do you preach the pain of brokenness *or* do you preach a social action/social justice sermon?” “Exactly!” another student piped up, “What if you have a mix of folks in your congregation? I mean, what if you have parents mourning the loss of a child sitting in the front pew and, at the same time, you have students sitting in the back pew who are now young activists? You want to honor the brokenness of those parents, but I also, as a pastor, want to encourage those who are seeking justice and speaking out in the public arena, maybe for the first time.”

can only comfort *or* challenge, offer assurance *or* agitate. Yet, a sermon should not be *either* a cry of brokenness *or* a call to action. The two can and should be preached together. And preachers and pastors are not left without a model. We have been gifted a language in the faith that engages all of these tensions—lament. Indeed, lament is a generative action that is foundational for faithful response to trauma *and* sustainable social action.

The Act of Lament

The biblical laments—as found in the Psalms, the prophetic books, and Lamentations—serve as helpful models for how speaking, preaching, and worshiping in these tensions—between fracture and hope, grief and social action—might look. Laments are willing to name the broken reality without shame or even tempering one’s desire for revenge or explanation. Kathleen Billman and Daniel Migliore define lament as “that unsettling biblical tradition of prayer that includes expressions of complaint, anger, grief, despair and protest to God.”⁹ Lament is willingness to name brokenness before God. However, lament is not simply a literary genre or an artifact to be studied or observed.

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I opened the floor for class conversation. Some students suggested that perhaps you preach the lament of brokenness and loss, but then make sure you are present at the rallies, showing your support and celebrating the activists’ efforts. Some suggested perhaps you preach the social action sermon since that was where the community energy seemed to be, but make sure to attend to the mourning and broken families privately. Then, to drive the conversation to a deeper level, I asked, “What if those who are mourning and broken still ache to see the activism succeed, even if they aren’t in a place where they can participate? And what if those who are participating in the social action are still hurting and broken, traumatized and, maybe even *through* social action, trying to give those fragments of experience meaning?”

The more I have studied what it means to preach in the wake of trauma, the more I am convinced that we have set up a false dichotomy. We have somehow become convinced that sermons

Lament is active—it is a verb! At our best, we don’t merely read laments, but we construct and perform lament in our communities. In the face of loss, pain, disaster, or violence, we turn to lament as a faithful practice—as a gift that has been given us within our spiritual tradition. It is speech that is gifted to us when events of violence and trauma render us speechless. Lament offers permission to express our distress, pain, and anger—to stand up in grief and protest in the face of traumatic pain and suffering, trusting that God is not “threatened or upset by such honest wrestling in prayer.”¹⁰ The practice of lament is also more than an emotional or cerebral response. It is an act of the whole, embodied self. As Billman and Migliore write, “As these prayers [of lament] remind us, we lament with our whole selves. The experience of loss is felt by the whole person and that means also in our bodies.”¹¹ The lament psalms indicate the fully embodied act of lament, including graphic depictions of bones being “out of joint,” eyes that are “a fountain of tears” and the wearing

of sackcloth. Lament is a fully embodied response to the fully embodied experience of loss. Lament invites us to call out to God, to weep, to protest, to shake our fists, to even question God, and to name our experience of God's apparent absence.

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Yet, the practice of lament as modeled in biblical texts also holds room for hope. Some laments explicitly name hope in the midst of pain and confusion. For example, Psalm 13 begins with the anxious and frustrated questions: “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (v. 1). Yet, within verses, the psalmist names hope in God's power and saving grace: “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” (vv. 5–6).

In such texts, the tension between hope and hurt, promise and pain are explicitly present. However, in other laments, such as a majority of Lamentations or Psalm 88, there is no explicit naming of hope or trust in God. Instead, the psalmist lingers in naming her complaint, shaking her fist at God, seeking justice or even revenge, and mourning all that has been lost. Hope seems far from present. Yet, the very act of crying out, the very act of shaking fists and naming burdens is an act of faith. The act of lament, in its very performance, is an act of faith and hope—trust that someone is listening, hope that someone can do something about the traumatic reality. As André Resner suggests, “The lament is the response of one who cares enough to take the tragic and meaningless before God. That is an act of faith. To take our honest questions to God is not an act of defamation toward the character of God, but an act of affirmation.”¹² The act of lament itself is an act grounded in faith and hope, even if such hope doesn't find its way to speech.

Lament as Generative Action

Lament is a practice that bridges the divide between ritual speech, public speech, and social action. Put another way, the act of lament is a generative act—it empowers and propels people to act beyond the bounds of the lament by giving voice, restoring agency, naming brokenness, and casting a vision for wholeness.

First, the practice of lament is generative as it often gives voice to those who may find themselves speechless in the face of traumatic loss or violence. One of the features of encountering violence or the experience of trauma is the way it can rob us of our language, our ability to articulate not only hope but even our own pain and experience. As theologian Serene Jones writes, “[W]hen we are overwhelmed, what fails us most profoundly is our capacity to use language, to make sounds that communicate meaning from one person to another.”¹³ Those who suffer, along with those who seek to care for the suffering, often find themselves speechless in the face of trauma. And yet, as preachers and pastors we are called to speak to and with the community. We are summoned to name what has occurred and speak truth into the situation. And so, we rely on the gift of lament—a way of speaking and praying that has been passed down to us from our spiritual ancestors. As André Resner suggests, the Psalms—particularly the lament psalms—are “prayer's speech teachers.”¹⁴ The practice of lament gives voice to those who find themselves traumatized into silence.

Second, and connected to the restoration of language, lament is a generative act in the ways that it restores responsible agency to the lamenting community and individuals. Too often we have pictured the lamenting person as one crumpled on the ground before God, experiencing nothing but powerlessness and desperation. And, certainly, those feelings and gestures are reflected in the biblical text. Yet, by giving voice to such feelings of brokenness or traumatic narratives, the act of lament also strengthens a sense of one's own agency and responsibility. First, voicing one's pain in complaint and protest—giving words to one's fractured experience—resists the collapse into apathy that can so easily happen when one feels isolated or powerless. Second, in being encouraged to come before God not just with praise, but also with pain and brokenness, the lamenting party is assured that God honors our experiences, our subjectivity, and our full humanity. Lament is, as Walter Brueggemann

puts it, a “genuine covenant interaction” in which the petitioner can come to God with the fullness of life’s experiences, instead of only being limited to voicing praise or doxology.¹⁵ And in approaching God with that fullness, the lamenting party insists that their full humanity be seen by God and others. Such bold action is “person-forming and person-empowering.”¹⁶ The act of lament is a generative act that begins to restore agency to the community that engages God in prayer and protest.

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Third, lament is a generative act because it calls out, protests, and resists what is wrong, broken, or evil. The act of lament is not simply an act of mourning; it is an act of protest.¹⁷ In lament, the faithful call God and one another to account. Such lament refuses easy answers or simple consolations. This is made clear in the biblical image of Rachel weeping for her children, “she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more” (Jer. 31:15 and Matt. 2:18). Rachel’s refusal of easy consolation is an act of faithful protest, insisting that only God can provide true justice, restoration, and hope. The act of lament calls out the injustices present in the world, asking not just the community but God to pay attention and even to respond. It also calls attention to the evil in front of the whole community. It is a deep, honest, and public naming what is broken in order that both God and the community may be attentive.

At the same time, lament also names not only what is wrong, but also what might be made right. Lament is an innately eschatological view. While the lamenter may name the mire in which she is stuck, the reality of the broken situation, or the evil that lurks all around, there is still a trust that God can and will make it right. There may be no better example than Psalm 85. A few verses after the psalmist asks God, “Will you be angry with us forever?” the psalmist articulates the hope of an eschatological reality: “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven” (vv. 10–11, NIV).

And even when the eschatological vision is not explicitly named, lament itself is an act that relies on the eschatological hope that things can be made right and that God—and others—still care. “Those who cry out of the depths,” Billman and Migliore suggest, “fight against the ideas of divine immutability and divine apathy.”¹⁸ Though prayers of lament may name the hiddenness of God, there is, paradoxically, still an insistence that God cares or at least is listening. In the act of protest, there is still an insistence that the covenant between the lamenter and God and the lamenter and the community still matters. There is a deep-seated belief that the current experience, the current condition of pain and brokenness is not beyond redemption.

Lament as Generative Action for Sustainable Social Action

Because of lament’s ability to give voice to those rendered speechless by trauma, its ability to restore agency, to name and protest over what is broken or wrong, and its trust (even if implicit) that things can be redeemed and made right, lament may actually inspire social action. For it is only when individuals and communities are willing to stand up, protest, and name what is wrong that true social action can take place. It is only when an individual or group names aloud what is broken that people can begin to gather, protest, and cry out for justice. As Billman and Migliore suggest, “The prayer of lament is a cry for justice, truth, and the fullness of life in the midst of injustice, deceit, and death. That cry is heard not only in churches, hospitals, and private homes, but also in the public arena when people enter into costly struggle for justice.”¹⁹

When people emerge from trauma, reclaiming their voice and agency—perhaps through the act of lament—social change can begin to happen. Social action is born out of the recognition of wrong relationship between an individual and society, between communities, between humanity and the earth, or between humanity and God. And it is lament that protests, names what is broken, and calls out those relationships that have been fractured due to violence or trauma. It is the broken heart of the lamenting individual and community that can inspire social action and change. As pastoral counselor Dr. William Blaine-Wallace poetically offers, “From hearts cracked open through shared suffering flows a surplus of love. . . . Love that spills

over the lip of the communion of the brokenhearted is the energy of and for justice making.”²⁰

Yet lament does more than inspire social action—lament *sustains* social action. At the beginning of her book *Waiting for a Glacier to Move: Practicing Social Witness*, Jennifer Ayres describes the weekly pilgrimage of a small group of Presbyterians who, on the second Tuesday of every month, take the train from Baltimore to Washington, D.C., in order to engage in social and political action. The group meets each month with denominational administrators in the Presbyterian Office, which is located right next to the Supreme Court building, to be briefed about current legislative issues and concerns. Then, the group meets with one of their elected representatives to lobby for legislation and articulate their concerns. While they are committed to their monthly visits to the nation’s capital, Ayres notes that “members of the group do not have grandiose expectations.”²¹ As one participant, Nelson Tharp, explained, “[Y]ou always have the feeling that you’re attacking an iceberg with an ice pick. . . . But still, some people *do* listen, and it does *some* good. As they say, even glaciers move every now and then.”²² So, what sustains social action when, as Ayres suggests, we are waiting for a glacier to move? Perhaps lament can help sustain the work. For, as named above, lament does not just name what is wrong; it names all that is wrong grounded in faith and hope and even expectation that what is wrong can, through the grace of God, be made right.

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The eschatological foundation of lament can serve as an eschatological foundation and sustaining motivation for social action. When the glacier doesn’t seem to be moving and your ice pick is dull, the ability to come before God and protest, while still trusting God is listening and is even at work, can sustain the long effort it takes to enact social change. Lament sustains social change by not only continually inviting protest, but by continually leaning into a vision of what could be, offering faith in the redemptive and reconciling work of God.

Conclusion

While the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School was not the only mass shooting that has produced activists, it did provoke the student leaders of that school to stand up in ways that surprised the nation with their determination and passion. A little over a month after the Parkland shooting, those student leaders banded together with other young people across the nation who have suffered under the tyranny of gun violence to lead the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C. On the stage that March day, the students offered tearful reflections and moments of stony silence. The young people told their stories and demanded change. They raised their voices in pain and protest. They named the broken systems in our nation that led to over 61,000 incidents of reported gun violence in 2017.²³ They seamlessly offered lament and a call to action.

So, what do we preach? Lament. The fullness of lament. Preach lament that names the brokenness but still stands grounded in the eschatological promise, even if it seems far away. Preach lament that gives voice and agency to the hurting and broken. Preach lament, for it is the holy language we are gifted for times such as these.

Notes

1. Sebastian Murdock, “At Vigil for Florida School Shooting Victims, Students Chant ‘No More Guns!’” *Huff Post*, February 16, 2018, huffingtonpost.com/entry/marjory-stoneman-douglas-school-shooting_us_5a86445de4b05c2bcac94545.
2. “Florida Student Emma Gonzalez to Lawmakers and Gun Advocates: ‘We Call BS,’” website of CNN, February 17, 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/02/17/us/florida-student-emma-gonzalez-speech/index.html.
3. Ibid.
4. “Why This Mass Shooting Is Different—the Evidence,” BBC News, accessed October 7, 2018, www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-43504307/gun-control-debate-why-parkland-mass-shooting-is-different-the-evidence.
5. For more on the ways the experience of trauma disrupts the human experience of temporality see Robert D. Stolorow, *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections*, vol. 23, Psychoanalytic Inquiry Book Series (New York: The Analytic Press, 2007); Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).
6. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 172.

7. Utilizing the work of medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky, “sense of coherence” is defined as having three distinct but related parts. First, and closely related to the cognitive, is *comprehensibility*. Comprehensibility is the experience of the world and our own movements within it making sense. A narrative is comprehensible when it makes sense in light of previous experiences of others and the world. Second, a sense of coherence has a component of *manageability*. Manageability, linked to beliefs and motivation, is the sense that we are able (and have the resources) to function in this world, even able to navigate some forces of chaos that come as part of the realities of life in this entropic world. Considered narratively, manageability is our ability to accommodate new experiences into our narrative, which allows us to act confidently in the world. Antonovsky’s third component is *meaningfulness*, which he describes as the “emotional counterpart to comprehensibility.” A narrative is meaningful when it matters to us and we perceive it as worthy of our attention, care, and energy. Unfortunately, the experience of trauma threatens to erode all three components of Antonovsky’s sense of coherence. See Aaron Antonovsky, “The Sense of Coherence as a Determinant of Health,” in *Behavioral Health: A Handbook of Health Enhancement and Disease Prevention*, ed. Joseph D. Matarazzo (New York: Wiley, 1984), 114–129.
8. As sociologist Kai Erikson notes, we must “speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons.” Kai Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185.
9. Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel’s Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (United Church Press, 1999), 6.
10. André Resner, *Living In-Between: Lament, Justice, and the Persistence of the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 117, http://discover.emory.edu/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=discover&afterPDS=true&docId=01EMORY_ALMA21312435290002486.
11. Billman and Migliore, *Rachel’s Cry*, 108.
12. Resner, *Living In-Between*, 111.
13. Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 29.
14. Resner, *Living In-Between*, 117.
15. Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 102, http://discover.emory.edu/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=discover&afterPDS=true&docId=01EMORY_ALMA21178421340002486.
16. Billman and Migliore, *Rachel’s Cry*, 117.
17. Sally A Brown and Patrick D. Miller, ed., *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xv.
18. Billman and Migliore, *Rachel’s Cry*, 113.
19. *Ibid.*, 145.
20. William Blaine-Wallace, “Lamentation as Justice Making,” in *Injustice and the Care of Souls: Taking Oppression Seriously in Pastoral Care*, ed. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen B. Montagno (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 185.
21. Jennifer R. Ayres, *Waiting for a Glacier to Move: Practicing Social Witness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), ix.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Gun Violence Archive website, “Past Summary Ledgers,” accessed October 9, 2018, www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls.

The Brutal Brilliance of the Psalms

Gail Ramshaw

A Violent World

Until the year 1000, what was usual in Psalters was a single miniature illustration of, say, David playing his harp, painted inside the initial letter of a psalm's first word. Thus, on the frontispiece of a fine eighth-century Psalter, medieval instrumentalists flank David, with—surprise!—two worshipers clapping their hands.¹ However, in the eleventh century, a new style of illustration appeared in England in several opulent Psalters, in which each psalm was lavishly accompanied with colored line drawings that depicted in a literal manner the various images found in that psalm.

In what we might call “graphic Psalters,” the illustrators’ choice of what to depict is sometimes startling, especially for anybody engaged in the church’s consideration of how we ought to pray about and through violence. For example, I had always imagined Psalm 1 as an appealing use of the classic imagery of the tree of life,² and I noted with pleasure a recent hymnic version of Psalm 1, with over half of its lines developing the metaphor of “firmly planted” trees: “their fruit is plentiful and good; their leaves are always growing green.”³ But now in my mind is the renowned eleventh-century Harley Psalter, which not surprisingly depicts a fruitful tree and a flowing river, beside the righteous scholar who is studying a scroll. However, the page also shows a wicked enthroned man and a company of soldiers with spears who are being whipped by a devil, and the lower quadrant of the illustration shows a group of sinners being hooked into the tortures of hell’s fires.⁴ Thus in the consciousness of those who prayed with this Psalter, the peaceful tree and the pious scholar were surrounded with

violence—tyrants, weapons, armies, devils, and hellfire.⁵ In the church’s original prayer book, as well as in the world, violence lurks.

There being no less violence in the twenty-first century than in the eleventh, the current practice of our praying Psalm 1 without any thoughts of encroaching armies may point to a desire for nice worship, our communal prayer marked by pleasant thoughts and inspired encouragement. Perhaps this change of tone has something to commend itself. Such a tendency would accord with the theory that verbally or graphically expressing violence serves to aggravate it, that articulating violence begets more violence. If so, any such assumptions that weapons are hidden among the trees should be avoided, especially among Christians.

Yet increasingly it is being suggested that the present is burdened, even crippled, by its secrets. When a past full of wretchedness has been judged to be unspeakable, it has overwhelming power to determine the future. Silence stifles truth. If this is so, horrors ought to be spoken aloud. The search over the last two decades in countless churches for prayerful texts of lament suggests just this: that believers live both encircled by and contaminated with violence, and that the church needs to find ways to pray about it. A century ago, the intercessions that were mandated for weekly use among some Lutherans included the following sentence: “Preserve us from war and bloodshed, from plague and pestilence, from all calamity by fire and water, from hail and tempest, from failure of harvest and from famine, from anguish of heart and despair of Thy mercy.”⁶ Christians who prayed in this way seemed fully aware of and willing to

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articulate the world's miseries. They assumed that life was fraught with misery and that calamities were waiting around the corner to pounce on the innocent, and worshipers needed to address God about these incipient and present dangers. When our prayers of intercession with honest clarity attend to the actual horrors of last week's news, there is at least a beginning of presenting the world's violence before God in communal prayer.

But more litanies of distress are called for.⁷ Perhaps the eleventh century, more willing than we to acknowledge our sorrows and terrors, can inspire us to employ the psalms in our public lament. First, we will consider the metaphoric nature of psalm texts, then our current use of the psalms and several theological interpretations of psalm imagery, and finally a litany that uses violent imagery from the psalms in praying for the cessation of violence.

The Metaphoric Nature of Psalm Texts

The psalms are poems. One twentieth-century Christian interpreter of the psalms was the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, himself a published poet. When describing the poetry of the psalms, he wrote, "Since the Psalms are poems, the function of the Psalms is to make us share in the poetic experience of the men who wrote them. . . . I believe that one's poetic sense must be unusually deadened if one has never at any time understood the Psalms without being in some way moved by their deep and universal religious quality."⁸ Consider both the brilliant imagery and the edge of brutality in Psalm 18: in this one psalm, God is described as my stronghold, my crag, my haven, my rock, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my refuge, a volcano, thunder, my deliverer, my support, my lamp, my instructor in arms, the commander of the armies, and my vindicator. In this single poem, God is both my fortress and my means of escape, both lamp and warrior: if one metaphor is not successful in sharing with you the religious experience of the poet, the psalm offers others.

With metaphors, one says what is not factual—say, my city is being overrun by enemy armies—in order to articulate the most profound truths of human experience—for example, my own sense of despair. Some psalms, notably 74, do describe an actual battle and give details about its horrendous effects. However, in the centuries following the composition of such psalms, the war was over, and the imagery had become a metaphor for countless

There are prisons galore, and we all are in one prison or another, some of our own construction.

unnamed miseries of human life. The metaphors are able to say far more, far deeper, for a longer period of time, than can the facts.

The evangelists of the New Testament relied on the psalms' metaphors to describe the execution of Jesus. Although in the past it was common to understand that the psalmists had miraculously predicted the details of Christ's crucifixion, many biblical scholars now accept the view that since the evangelists who describe Golgotha were not present at that event and received no eyewitness reports, they relied on the imagery in the psalms for their passion accounts. Thus, on Good Friday many Christians recite Psalm 22.⁹ From this psalm comes not only Jesus' plea of having been forsaken by God, but also a literalizing of some, although not all, of the poem's images. Thus, the soldiers divided Jesus' garments, cast lots for his cloak (Ps. 22:18), and pierce his hands and feet (Ps. 22:16). But there are no wild bulls or packs of dogs closing in on the cross—except metaphorically.

Much of the imagery in the psalms is clearly metaphoric. In a recent Jewish translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalm 23:5 reads as follows: "You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies."¹⁰ "In full view," says this translation. Believers who have never seen a shepherd are invited to imagine God as one. Yet the comforting metaphor of God as shepherd is intensified by the distressing metaphor of the enemies that threaten nearby. When Psalm 142:7 asks God to bring me out of prison, worshipers do not assume that the psalm is designed for use only by persons who are incarcerated. We recognize the poetic nature of the text: there are prisons galore, and we all are in one prison or another, some of our own construction.

Admittedly, not all biblical metaphors are readily accessible. The historic practice of Christians referring to the church as Israel has, since the formation of the state of Israel, rendered this metaphor confusing, in some cases misunderstood. Some Christians can use many biblical metaphors in their address to God, but they balk at Father. Can some Christians give this metaphor a rest? Some Christians reject the biblical imagery of a marriage between God

and faithful believers, especially when the church is a submissive bride. Some Christians worry that geographic boundaries of the Promised Land that are cited in the Old Testament cause considerable distress in the current geopolitical situation, given the practice of fundamentalist believers, both Christian and Jewish, to literalize these passages. Is “the Holy Land” a biblical metaphor that must be laid aside, at least for the time being? When that infamous Psalm 137 asks God to smash the heads of the children of our enemies, can this language ever be heard as metaphor?

Our Current Use of the Psalms

We know that not only the psalms assume a violent world, but so does the entire Bible, from the fratricide in the primordial family to the bloodthirstiness of the book of Revelation. The prophets are keen to condemn, even to curse, their enemies, and the Gospel according to Matthew cites Jesus himself as denouncing specific groups of sinners. So, what of all this danger and distress do we hear on Sunday morning? Entire church bodies around the globe are now requiring or recommending to their assemblies the use of one of the several forms of the three-year lectionary. This family of lectionaries, which includes the Revised Common Lectionary, suggests that a selection from the Old Testament be proclaimed every Sunday and that a passage from the psalms function as the communal response to the first reading. The psalm was chosen because in some way its text responds to the imagery or the content of the first reading.¹¹ This renewed emphasis on singing or praying the psalms has been especially gratifying in the Reformed churches, who know from their origins the profound values written into the Psalter.

The three-year lectionaries are urging the restoration of the Great Vigil of Easter, coming into our time from the early centuries of the church. We hear at the Vigil the very stories, brilliant and brutal, that were painted on the walls of Rome’s catacombs to mark the burial places of the baptized. That those ancient Christians

depicted their own deaths as joining with the three men in the fiery furnace demonstrates their practice of adopting the biblical stories of violence as their own. One of the Old Testament’s narratives proclaimed at the Easter Vigil because it is judged as expressing truths behind Christ’s resurrection is the great flood. According to this legend, to cleanse the world of evil, God drowns an entire earth filled with countless humans and animals. The accompanying Psalm 46 describes the world metaphorically as threatened by storm, as relying on a river, and as requiring God to be the only refuge in a time of tumult. At Easter, then, it is as if the resurrection of Jesus will save us from the waters that “rage and foam.” In another narrative at the Easter Vigil, perhaps the most popular, God destroys the Egyptian army in order to save the Israelites at the sea.¹² For the psalm, the assembly sings and perhaps dances along with Miriam in her victory song at the sea. With this ancient chant, the church metaphorically likens our salvation through Christ’s resurrection to that of the Israelites safely brought to God’s sanctuary. Our baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ is the sea that destroyed evil and washes us clean: biblical metaphors have evoked death to highlight life.

Thus, the biblical passages that are proclaimed by means of the lectionary shape the spirituality and guide the prayer of the Christian assembly. Given that the primary focus of every Sunday of the three-year lectionaries is a communal gathering around the risen Christ, as if every Sunday is once again John 20, worshipers on the Lord’s Day do not hear most of the Bible’s horrific tales, nor, consequently, do they normally engage in communal prayer with those psalms that deal with violence. When for six Sundays in Eastertide in Year C the second reading comes from Revelation, it is not the gory details

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of destruction that are selected, but rather the songs of the saved around the throne of the Lamb. When the semicontinuous Old Testament selections have been selected during the green Sundays, the point in the lectionary is not to revel in the distressing history of violence in

the Ancient Near East. Rather, these first readings mean to acknowledge the contemporary power of God to speak against injustice and to bring in God's kingdom of righteousness. The psalms that follow do not include passages in which the church begs God to grind our enemies' bones into the dust, for both the readings and the psalms are shaped in light of contemporary views of what is most spiritually beneficial for worshipping Christians. Please note: although everyone can suggest small or substantial alterations to the three-year lectionaries, I urge those churches that have joined with this worldwide system of reading of God's word to resist such changes. Scheduling communal litanies of lament need not jettison this twentieth-century treasure of ecumenical unity in Christ. Every Sunday filled with praise also includes pleas for divine assistance.

Several Theological Interpretations of Psalm Imagery

It is important for us to inquire how the church's sainted theologians have thought about the unsettling violence in many of the psalms.¹³ No matter what line of argument is taken, the first and last classic Christian response is always that taught by Christ, Christians are to love their enemies. We are to pray for our protection and for their change of heart, not for their destruction or death. Vengeance belongs to God. Whether or not violence is referenced during worship, the last line of the prayer must "offer it to God," trusting that in God's good time, justice will reign.

A further theological inquiry asks who the enemies are. One classic answer is that upon serious reflection, we discover that we are the enemies. "And just who is this evil man? Indeed, we do not have to go outside of ourselves to find him, for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."¹⁴ We are the ones who harm one another, we are those who crucified Christ. The primary call of Christians at worship is self-awareness, not the condemnation of others, and so the imagery of violence can be seen as aimed at our own hearts.

Other theologians have stressed that the psalms are the prayer book of Jesus Christ. He is the one praying the psalms, and the enemies of the church are his enemies.¹⁵ We join in these prayers as the church always prays, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord." We recognize that the psalms' assertions

of self-innocence cannot apply to ourselves; they point only to Christ, whom we join in prayer to God. The enemies are not our national foes, nor our individual distresses, but rather the enemies of the cause of Christ. Thus, we pray for the defeat of the devil, only metaphorically described as the slaughter of our enemies, and with Christ on the cross, are brought to forgiveness for all.

But these classic solutions to violence in the psalms have been judged by many Christians to be insufficient in our time. The work of Walter Brueggemann, relying on the linguistic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, suggests an alternate theory more in keeping with the contemporary psychological view of the human that is identified with Sigmund Freud.¹⁶ Freud maintained that humans have immense interior fears and guilt, and that for the health of the psyche, these horrors ought not be locked up inside secrets but spoken aloud. In a secular world, enter the psychiatrist. For some Christians, enter the minister in rituals of private confession. But for Brueggemann and for many of us, enter also the Christian praying assembly, which can discover a wholesome peace when speaking before the cross of their anger and distress.

The belief is that God can take it:
so, give it to God.

Gathered in the baptized community, upheld by the Spirit of God, the Christian praying community engages in what Brueggemann calls an exercise in "orientation." But on occasion, and in contemplation of the violence, we engage in prayers of "disorientation." Only after such purgation of fearsome feelings can we go on to prayers of "reorientation." Such ritual prayer can, Brueggemann writes, unburden the self by giving such fears and hates to God.¹⁷ Utilizing even brutal imagery is not descriptive—literal details of a plan of action. Rather, it is evocative—metaphoric speech about our human emotion. The belief is that God can take it: so, give it to God. When such speech seems too excessive, it is important to situate it within its biblical context: praying such words "in the midst of the anger and rage that come from oppression can serve to have a favorable psychological impact on the person or the community, if they are prayed in the context of the whole message of the Bible."¹⁸ A further suggestion urges Christians to offer such

prayers for those who suffer but cannot pray for themselves: we serve them by offering to God their great distress.¹⁹

A Litany

Recently I published a set of six laments, each of which relies on a biblical example of need—whether the bleeding woman or Job or the Israelite slaves—to assist our communal prayer.²⁰ I offer here a seventh lament, an expanded communal prayer, in which it is the psalms that provide us with language to express our horror of the world's situation, our cry for redemption, and our trust in the power of God.

Lamenting the Horror and Lure of Violence

With the psalmists of old we cry out in anguish:
Everywhere we look, we see violence.
Armies attack their neighbors, rulers smite
their citizens,
strangers murder for gain, families destroy
one another.
The guilty escape justice, the innocent are
slaughtered.
Even our own hearts are filled with rage.
O God, where is your righteous power?
Where is your merciful protection?

With the psalmist we lament the world's violence:
[from Psalm 10]

Why do you stand so far off, O Lord,
and hide yourself in time of trouble?
The wicked boast of their heart's desire;
the covetous curse and revile the Lord.
The wicked are so proud that they care
not for God;
they deny God with every plot.
Their paths continually twist and turn.
Your lofty judgments are beyond them.
They sneer at their enemies.
Their mouth is full of cursing, deceit,
and oppression;
under their tongue are mischief and wrong.
They lurk in ambush in public squares,
and in secret places they murder the innocent;
they spy out the helpless.
They lie in wait, like a lion in cover;
they lie in wait to seize upon the lowly;
they seize the lowly and drag them away
in their net.
The innocent are broken and humbled
before them;

the helpless fall before their power.
They say in their heart, "God has forgotten;
God has turned away and will never
notice."

A time of silence is kept.

With the psalmist we voice our rage: [from Psalm 83]

O God, do not be silent;
do not keep still nor hold your peace,
O God;
for your enemies are in tumult,
and those who hate you have lifted up
their heads.
O my God, make them like whirling dust
and like chaff before the wind.
As fire burns down a forest,
as flames set mountains ablaze,
So drive them with your tempest
and terrify them with your storm.
Let them be disgraced and terrified forever;
let them be put to confusion and perish.

A time of silence is kept.

Hear us, O God:

Hear us, O God.

When we face violence, keep us safe.

Keep us safe.

When we approach evil, give us courage.

Give us courage.

When we encounter the enemy, help us forgive.

Help us forgive.

In all circumstances of horror, give us your life.

Give us your life.

In all circumstances of misery, give us your life.

Give us your life.

In all circumstances of defeat, give us your life.

Give us your life.

A time of silence is kept.

With the psalmist we plead for God's Spirit:

[from Psalm 51]

Let me hear joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken may rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my wickedness.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
 and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
 Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of
 my salvation,
 and my tongue shall sing of your
 righteousness.

A time of silence is kept.

Hear these words, and receive their power:
 The reign of God the Father is promised to all
 the earth.
 The mercy of God the Son embraces all who do
 or who think evil.
 The comfort of God the Spirit sustains the
 brokenhearted.

With the psalmist we give God praise:

[from Psalm 28]

You, Lord, are my strength and my shield;
 my heart trusts in you, and I have been helped;
 so my heart exults, and with my song I
 give thanks to you.
 You, Lord, are the strength of your people,
 a safe refuge for your anointed.

Let us go forth in peace:

Thanks be to God.

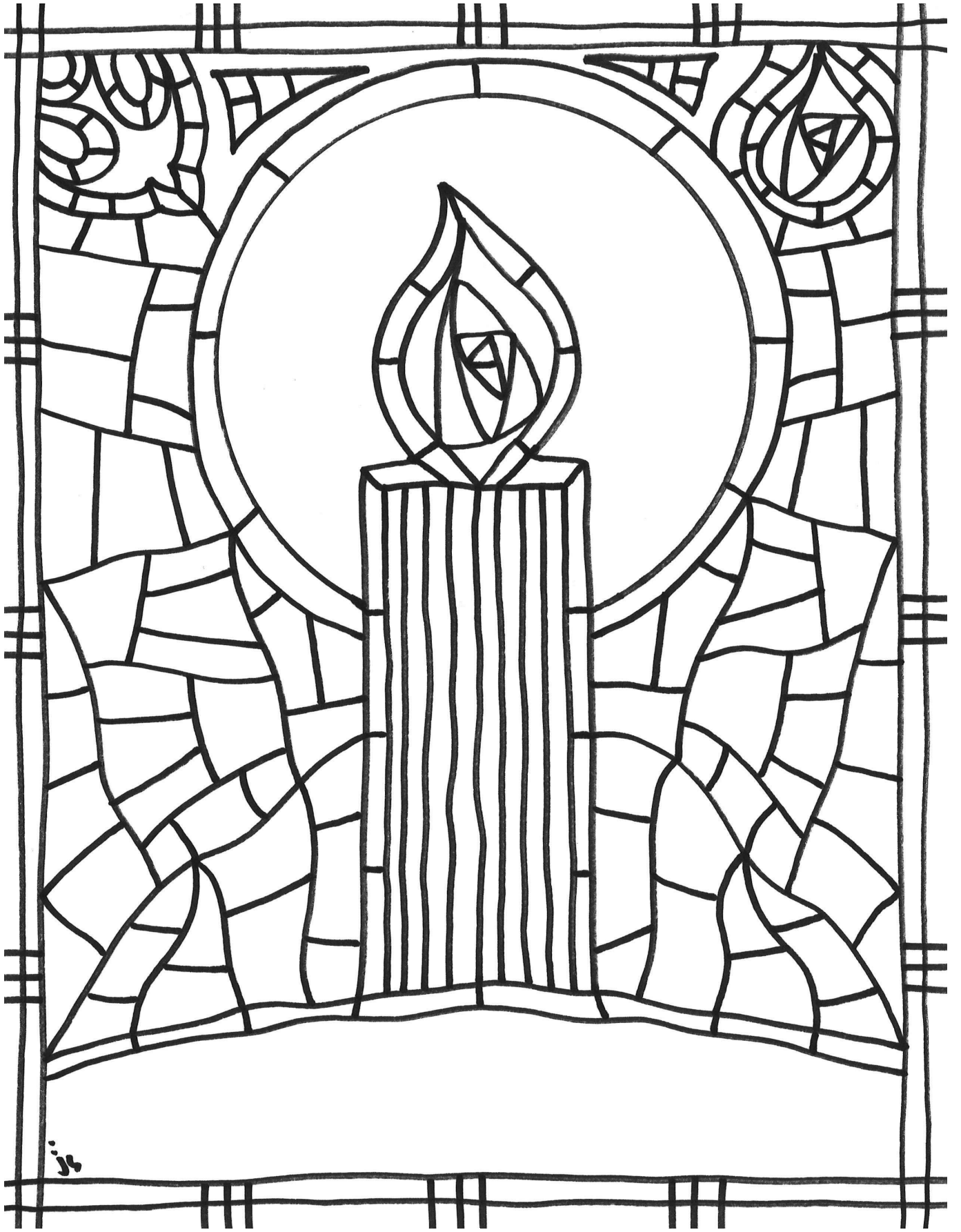
Several Questions

How would you define prayer to a nonbeliever?
 Do you pray or chant the psalms outside of
 worship on the Lord's Day?
 Are any of the classic theological reactions to the
 violence in the psalms spiritually useful to you?
 Would you lead or willingly join with others in a
 litany such as this?
 If so, what would be the situation and setting for
 such a lament?

Notes

1. Scot McKendrick and Kathleen Doyle, "The Vespasian Psalter," *The Art of the Bible: Illuminated Manuscripts from the Medieval World* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 45.
2. See for example the art accompanying Psalm 1 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 339.

3. David Gambrell, "How Happy Are the Saints of God," *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #457.
4. McKendrick and Doyle, "The Harley Psalter," in *The Art of the Bible*, 87.
5. Other examples depicting violence in Psalm 1 are in the Utrecht Psalter, the Eadwine Psalter, and the Paris Psalter; *The Utrecht Psalter in Medieval Art: Picturing the Psalms of David*, ed. Koert van der Horst, William Noel, and Wilhelmina C. M. Wüstefeld (Utrecht: HES Publishers BV, 1996), 56, 237, 241.
6. "The General Prayer," *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1917), 19.
7. I have provided one such prayer, "A Litany of Sorrows and Sins," in *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 16–18.
8. Thomas Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1953), 68–69.
9. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 285.
10. *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 1132.
11. Gail R. O'Day and Charles Hackett, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: A Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007); the book unfortunately misrepresents the intention of the psalm by referring to it consistently as "Lesson 2."
12. The Great Vigil of Easter, *Book of Common Worship*, 295.
13. A short summary of Christian theological positions is described in William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 311–15.
14. See for example Patrick Henry Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2000), 114.
15. An example is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, trans. James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 20–21.
16. Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), especially 153–160.
17. *Ibid.*, 96.
18. Larry Silva, "The Cursing Psalms as a Source of Blessing," *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 22.
19. Margaret M. Daly-Denton, *Psalm-Shaped Prayerfulness: A Guide to the Christian Reception of the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 188.
20. *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks*, 22–27.



Is There Something You'd Like to Tell Me?

Libby Shannon

Our bodies are the texts that carry the memories and therefore remembering is no less than reincarnation.

—Katie Geneva Cannon¹

It almost always starts the same way.

A timid knock on my office door and a small voice, filled with fear and anticipation, says, “Are you Libby? My friend said I could talk to you.”

We settle in, always in the same positions—a student curled up on the couch as small as possible, and me in my rocking chair. Usually there’s tea, occasionally hot chocolate with tiny marshmallows. We keep supplies on hand for such occasions. The box of tissues is conspicuously present, serving as a reminder that others have been here before. The blankets stand at the ready for cuddling or hiding or seeking desperately needed sleep. After a little introduction about who I am, what I do, and what this space can look like, I ask the same question, “Is there something you’d like to tell me?”

And they tell me.

While most of my conversations begin with striking similarity, what follows is always different. I bear witness to stories of grief, stories of anxiety, stories of pervasive sexual harassment and abusive relationships, stories of unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, stories of sexual assault that range from the complicated to the violent, from the far past to only hours earlier, stories of self-harm and suicidal ideation. Sometimes I bear witness to stories that have already been told to roommates, RAs, and parents, to campus safety officers and professors; but more often I bear witness to stories that have never seen the light of day, at least in their entirety. I sit with students who want to know their options,

who are looking for someone to talk with, free from judgment; students who are seeking justice from law enforcement or on campus; students who need hugs; those who don’t know how to find a therapist or a support group; and some who simply need to find the out-loud words. Each story is different, each story is heartbreaking, each story demands to be told, and each story yearns to be heard. While they tell me dramatically different stories, the people who find their way to my office share a desperate need to have someone who will share the burden of their truth.

Sharing the burden of students’ stories, hearing them give voice to their trauma, is perhaps the most important part of my work as a college chaplain and as the victim advocate on my campus. At first glance, these two roles seem incongruous. To the outside world college chaplains exist to have deep, existential conversations with students about faith and vocation. They often bring students together and teach them to talk about religion as educated adults and to engage with them in the work of activism, service, and social engagement. The outside world chooses not to think about the pain and the suffering that happens on campuses; they choose not to see the accidents and the addiction, the illnesses and the suffering—and that’s probably for the best. But so often it’s in these spaces that you’ll find the chaplain, sitting in the ash heap with their people, providing care to those who don’t yet have a language to name their need or aren’t yet sure what they believe, standing in the breach between childhood and their far more complex adult life. This is also the work of a victim advocate. It’s in these spaces—these hard, awful, holy spaces—that we do our work, holding the stories, helping bear the burden, making sense

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It's so easy to dismiss trauma as something that happens to *other* people.

of the pain, and seeking healing and wholeness alongside God's own beloved.

For people who've been knocked off their center by a traumatic experience, one of the first things that happens is they feel as though no one could possibly understand what they're going through. For traditionally aged college students, part of this sense of unique alienation is developmental. But more importantly it's a powerful tactic of trauma, regardless of the age or developmental stage at which one experiences it. Trauma is inherently alienating. It does its best work, which is to say its most damaging work, on our bodies, our minds, and our spirits when we feel utterly alone. It's this alienation that encourages and breeds silence, even in the midst of unbearable pain. Alienation happens when victims are shamed directly or indirectly by their experiences; it happens when our culture dismisses the experiences of victims in very public ways; and it happens when they garner the courage to tell their story and are met with doubt or disbelief or outright hostility. Perhaps most clearly, the isolation comes from the ways in which we are taught implicitly or explicitly that whatever happened to us isn't as bad as it could have been. When our own stories are met with what could have been, we diminish and devalue our truth, pushing it deeper out of sight until the only thing it has left to feed on is our very spirits.

It's so easy to dismiss trauma as something that happens to *other* people, something that exists in remote corners of the globe, forgotten by all but the warlords or the drug lords or the gang leaders. It's easy to think of trauma as something that happens to soldiers or in particularly violent neighborhoods. We relegate trauma to something we can hold at arm's length, something that exists in news updates or distant photographs. Those experiences of trauma are heartbreaking and sad, but for most of us, we can treat them as though they exist somewhere else. The reality is, however, we are a people who experience trauma. All of us. It comes in different forms and with different truths to tell. It comes from horrific, lived experiences and is passed through our DNA. It comes from illness and natural disaster. It comes as we sit with the news stories; it comes from knowing veterans and refugees and violent neighborhoods and the far-flung corners of the

globe, and from living with our own truths. It comes from movements like #MeToo and the ways women and men have only just begun to open the doors to our shared experiences of sexual harassment and abuse. We all experience trauma in a myriad of different ways, but we do not talk about it. Often times not even to ourselves or our God.

But trauma is real, and when we dismiss it as something that happens to other people or normalize it as just part of life or label it as "not that bad," we drastically diminish our ability to respond to our own needs and to care for those around us who are processing their own experiences. We let trauma have the last word rather than moving toward a place that includes a new normal and offers the possibility of hope or healing. Scholar Roxane Gay, in her recent anthology *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*, offers the following observation of her own experience:

Buying into the notion of not that bad made me incredibly hard on myself for not "getting over it" fast enough as the years passed and I was still carrying so much hurt, so many memories. Buying into this notion made me numb to bad experiences that weren't as bad as the worst stories I heard. For years, I fostered wildly unrealistic expectations of the kinds of experiences worthy of suffering until very little was worthy of suffering. The surfaces of my empathy became calloused.²

At the heart of a life in ministry is the call to sit with God's beloved people and hear them—hear them in the midst of their varied experiences and know that God loves them and that we are called to love them. When we look at the fundamental work of the church, it is to be a people who talk, share, listen, believe, engage, and sit with one another. It is our first obligation as a people in community. When we join with God's beloved in the ash heap of life, we do so not as people who have come to do the fixing or problem-solving, but as people taking their place in this ash heap to assure one another that we don't sit alone. Bearing witness to the pain, standing alongside one another in distress, and joining together to forge a new path are nothing new in our collective history.

When we join with God's beloved in the ash heap of life, we do so not as people who have come to do the fixing or problem-solving, but as people taking their place in this ash heap to assure one another that we don't sit alone.

In the Christian tradition, we are a people who tell stories. We have always told stories. From the passing down of the Pentateuch with its stories of enslavement and liberation, through exile, prophetic imagination, and wisdom, to the stories of Jesus and his parables and tales of healings and miracles, and from the early church to our present day, it has been through story that we have told the history and miracle of our faith. In telling stories we know what we believe and who we are; in telling stories we know our sacred foundation. It's in telling the stories of our past that we are best able to confront our future. The stories that have rescued us and those that have caused us harm hold profoundly important places in our communities of faith and in our shared humanity.

Within this tradition of storytelling we are better able to connect to the central role of truth telling for the trauma survivor. For so many who have experienced trauma, the act of claiming their story—whether for themselves alone, for the whole world to hear, or somewhere in the middle—plays a fundamental role in how they begin to conceive of their new normal, their life after. Finding the words and the courage to move from their experience being locked deep inside to crafting language to speak of it can become a life-giving act of agency. But often times, in order to summon the strength to do the hard work of processing trauma, a survivor looks for some sense of what's on the other side before they take that leap of faith.

The longer I spend in trauma work, the more I realize there may only be two things I believe 100 percent of the time. Those two things are the opening line of A Brief Statement of Faith, "In life and in death we belong to God," and the immortal words spoken by the Rev. Dr. William Sloane Coffin at his son Alex's funeral, "God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break." In these two statements, utterly simple in their construction, not terribly complex in their assertions, we find a place for trauma. In God's broken heart and our belonging, in the midst of our lives and our deaths, our hope and our pain, and our hurt and our healing, we find room for the very real trauma that is part of each of our lives.

When we claim that "in life and death we belong to God," we strongly assert that before our first breath was taken and after our last breath has left our bodies, God is present in our lives. Present in a way that speaks to our being created in God's own image. Present in a way that speaks to being declared beloved. Present in a way that reminds us that God has been our pillar of fire and our pillar of smoke leading us out of the wilderness—even and especially when we feel most lost. When in the midst of trauma we cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—*In life and in death we belong to God* whispers back, "I'm here; is there something you'd like to tell me?"

When Dr. Coffin asserts, even and especially in the midst of seemingly unspeakable tragedy, that "God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break," we are clearly reminded that the very God who created us in God's own image and declared us beloved is woven into our lives—not moving the pieces about on some divine chess board, but rather enmeshed in our very being, with love and witness to our great joys and our deep pain. It's in these places, God's broken heart and God's constant presence, that we can be pulled from the deep alienating depth of our own brokenness and begin to see what could possibly lie beyond it.

Perhaps what has become most clear to me as I cling to these two deeply personal statements of faith is the way each of them reminds me, in their own way, that death and destruction, trauma and brokenness do not have the last word. They remind me that heartache will come, yet I will not be alone. They remind me that we have been called in this Christian faith to be people who claim life—life abundant and incarnate, and life filled with challenge and illness and hurt—but in every walk of this life God is present, God is claiming, and God is standing alongside.

We are, indeed, resurrection people.

This mantle of resurrection people reminds us that Friday does not have the final say; Easter will come and Jesus will walk among us. It reminds us that we will meet him on the road and on the beach and hidden away behind a locked door when we're too scared to even venture into the

Being resurrection people doesn't mean we get to go back; it doesn't mean we can forget or ignore or leave out the part of the story that caused harm. Rather it means that with our wounds, in the complicated and messy ways in which they heal, we move forward into a new day.

light. But perhaps the most remarkable thing about resurrection is that when it comes, life still doesn't go back to how it was before. When Jesus appears before his disciples, he doesn't do so whole, but rather lets Thomas place his hands in the wounds. Being resurrection people doesn't mean we get to go back; it doesn't mean we can forget or ignore or leave out the part of the story that caused harm. Rather it means that with our wounds, in the complicated and messy ways in which they heal, we move forward into a new day.

People of resurrection don't get to go back to the life they lead before, and that is profoundly unfair. We will never again know what life was like before our bodies were violated or our spirits were broken; we don't get to go back to a time when we didn't know. Job doesn't get to go back. Jesus doesn't get to go back. Mary doesn't get to go back. My beloved students don't get to go back.

We talk of resurrection as a response to the powers of death and the political forces that sought to destroy Jesus. For some, this claim of resurrection people speaks to what we believe about death and its victory, or lack thereof, in our world. For others, resurrection is something that happens only to Jesus; it happened once, and that claim is sufficient for our faith and life. But what happens if instead of attaching our notions of being resurrection people solely to the death of Jesus, we align our identity as resurrection people with the trauma of his death and the trauma present in our own lives? What happens if we look back across the generations of our faith and see ourselves in the others who lived lives that included brokenness and pain? What happens if we see ourselves in the enslaved Hebrew people or in Job and Mrs. Job, if we see ourselves in Jephthah's daughter or in Esther? What happens if we see glimpses of our own stories among Noah's daughters or the woman with the issue of blood? What happens if we see ourselves among Mary of Magdala, the other Mary, and the other women who told their truth, even when they were disbelieved, derided, and denied?

It's the same thing that happens when women, and occasionally men, find their way into my office and tell me their stories. It's the same thing that happens when survivors find the courage to share their truths with their partners and their families, or to their therapists, or even to tell the world. When we see ourselves and each other as people who have experienced different kinds of trauma—not lesser or greater traumas, not bad or worse pain—but as people who have stories to tell and truths that are hard, we realize just how much we share, how much we hold in common, and how much we're not alone. We also realize just how much those around us are shaped by their stories, shaped into a new normal, a new way of being, a resurrection life.

We worship a God who is both one of trauma and one of healing, one of death and one of resurrection, a God who created and is re-creating. We don't come before a God of platitudes or aphorisms but a God who created us out of love, called us beloved, and loves us still—even in the ash heap, even in the brokenness of crucifixion, even when we feel abandoned and alone. As we work to make sense of our own traumas and those around us, as we struggle to find the words to name our truth, we must remember that we are people who tell stories, even and especially when those stories are hard and uncomfortable. Even beyond the telling of our own stories we must find ourselves prepared to listen to the truths of others, to receive their holy words and see them as God does, beloved and resurrected. It's in the telling and receiving that we are best able to see the incarnation and the resurrection of a God who took human form, suffered, and lived.

Notes

1. Quoted in Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 186.
2. Roxane Gay, *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2018), page x.



The Work of Our Hands

Abundant Joy, Fearless Generosity

Sandra McDonald and David VanderMeer

Sandra McDonald is Worship, Music, and Liturgical Arts Assistant and David VanderMeer is Minister of Music and Fine Arts Ministries at Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

Late last spring, the Stewardship Committee at Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta announced the theme for our fall commitment campaign: “Abundant Joy, Fearless Generosity,” inspired by Mark 6:30–44. They asked a church member, graphic designer Lauren Wright-Pittman, to design the logo, and all agreed that the purple and green graphic of open hands, simultaneously giving and receiving, was just perfect! While discussing the logo in a worship staff meeting, it occurred to Dave that our Liturgical Arts Committee could create an art installation to reflect the theme and logo. Dave immediately contacted one of our liturgical artists, Ellen Phillips, and ran this idea by her. She asked for some time to think and pray about this project, and, not to anyone’s surprise, after two days she had a vision for the artwork. She told us only that the finished piece would be in the same colors as the logo, and that it would resemble wisteria!

A few weeks and a few conversations passed, and Ellen gave us a strange shopping list: green plastic mesh, hundreds of purple balloons, yards of green yarn and fabric, and more coffee filters and cupcake holders—all purple—than we could possibly imagine. We soon discovered that coffee filters don’t come in purple, and, although cupcake liners do, they are rarely available in any one place in the quantity we needed! So Ellen began dying coffee filters purple—a somewhat slow process because they are paper and need to be spread out to dry, and they take up a lot of room in the drying process. Ellen began to suspect that even though the process of assembling this installation was fairly simple, the quantities of each of the materials turned out to be a bit overwhelming.

Each year during the month of July, our Worship, Music, and Arts Committee takes a one-day retreat in the north Georgia mountains. This year that gathering





gave us a chance to begin the project. Early in the day Ellen explained the scope of the work and what each task would be, and while we did our long-range planning for the 2018–2019 program year we cut yarn, strung multiple sizes of dyed-purple coffee filters and purple cupcake papers, and tied uninflated balloons between our paper “wisteria blossoms.” We soon came to realize that the scope of this project was enormous. Originally it appeared that we were going to need about 1,875 strings! While some people were cutting and some were stringing, others began to tie the strands of yarn on the green plastic mesh that formed the frame. It became obvious that if we were going to finish this project in time for stewardship season it would need to be scaled back a bit. Happily the mesh frame was free-form in design and could be easily adjusted. It took some thought to balance the size needed to hang above the chancel with our ability to reasonably complete the work. And we came to realize that we couldn’t finish this art project at our retreat. Revising our plan, we made a substantial beginning and developed a plan to get the rest of the work done back in Atlanta and over Labor Day at our all-church gathering in Montreat, North Carolina. We set six additional dates to assemble the paper materials and balloons onto the strands of yarn. These work sessions, held both during the day





at church and in the evening at members' homes, turned into fun and fellowship gatherings, with refreshments and many interesting discussions. As we neared the end of the project, we realized that we could assemble kits for people to take home to work on. Several congregation members who could not join us for the various work days were able to help by putting assembled strands into plastic bags so they wouldn't tangle. There were tasks for everyone who wanted to help.

Finally, the day came to raise the installation high above the congregation in the front of the sanctuary. A clergy affiliate member of the church, Steve Bacon, and our facilities manager, John White, had designed a hanging system, and several of us

gathered to assist, since each coffee filter on every string had to be fluffed out as the crew in the eaves above the sanctuary lifted the frame and the strings were finally extended to their full length.

The project turned out to be much more labor intensive than we originally expected, but the thing that made it work was the many, many hands that helped—people who did the parts that they were able to do. And therefore many people were able to share the sense of accomplishment when they entered the sanctuary and saw the stunning representation of the stewardship theme. One of our pastors wrote these words: "Out of our abundant joy, God calls us to be fearlessly generous. Out of generosity, God deepens our joy!"



What Would Jesus Pack?

Katie Day

On June 17, 2015, a young self-proclaimed white supremacist shot and killed nine members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, including their pastor, Rev. Clementa Pinckney. The young killer had sat with them for an hour during their regular Wednesday evening Bible study and had opened fire when they bowed their heads in prayer. Although he was a stranger to the church members, they had followed the widespread custom of African American Christians of welcoming persons into their midst. Two days later, the piety of the black Christians affected by this tragedy again caught media attention as several grieving family members of murdered victims attending the shooter's bond hearing tearfully declared they forgave him.

On November 5, 2017, gun violence again ripped through a congregation, this time during Sunday worship. Another young man driven by hate, Devin Patrick Kelley, parked his SUV outside of First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, and, dressed in tactical gear and carrying a semiautomatic rifle, entered the sanctuary during the service and methodically killed twenty-six worshippers and wounded twenty others. He had gone through fifteen magazines, each holding thirty bullets, to end the lives of seven men, ten women (including one who was pregnant), and eight children. One family lost eight members. Kelley's wrath had been directed at his mother-in-law, who was a member of First Baptist, but not in attendance on that Sunday.

There were several points of similarity in these two horrific events. Both of the shooters were angry young white men, driven by hate. They had each purchased their weapons legally, but only because the National Instant Criminal Background Check

System had failed; both had prior offenses that should have prohibited their purchase of guns. Both Roof and Kelley were apprehended through the heroic efforts of regular citizens who tracked them as they attempted to get away. Then, on October 27, 2018, violence struck another congregation as a gunman entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during Shabbat services, killing eleven worshippers and wounding seven others. Like the other two shooters, his guns were legally purchased; and although he was a few years older, he too was consumed with hatred—for Jews and the fact that this congregation helped immigrants. Despite the racial, geographic, and religious differences, all three congregations were forever changed—left struggling with trauma, grief, anger, and the meaning of God's presence and transformation. These three cases raise troubling questions about a culture permeated with violence, about how young men are formed, about how we manage anger, and about our gun laws that are not able to limit the number of gun deaths (over 33,000 last year) by ensuring that guns are easily accessible. These are as much challenges for the church as are the theological questions about the meanings of forgiveness after a shooting, and God's presence and protection before and during one. Although the church must engage all these troubling questions, this article will just focus on the last one: how are congregations making sense of safety and security, theologically and practically, in light of a heightened sense of the threat of gun violence?

We have become accustomed to mass shootings that strike in what are considered "safe" places—schools, movie theaters, gyms, concerts, malls, workplaces. Yet the country and the world were shocked particularly by these three mass shootings because they took place in sacred space. What then

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is the meaning of “sanctuary” if people of faith are no longer safe in “God’s house”? The trauma of these three tragedies has rippled throughout faith communities, creating a sense of vulnerability across religious and regional lines. Sadly, this increasing sense of vulnerability among faith communities is well-founded. It is not just the high profile tragedies in Pennsylvania, Texas, and South Carolina: gun violence in churches is worsening. In the twenty-five years from 1980 to 2005, there were 139 church shootings, most of which were not fatal. More recently, in the decade from 2006 to 2016 there were 147 church shootings, more of which involved fatalities. Although violence on church property is very rare—especially homicides (.44 percent of all congregations reporting this)—the fear of such crime is disproportionately high.¹ Churches are increasingly aware that they are not immune from the gun violence afflicting all of American society, and that realization is beginning to find expression in vestry meetings, parking lot conversations, and the private and corporate prayers of the people.

of variables (gender, age, race, region, etc.), but not by religion. Even less attention is paid to how lived religion comes into play as congregations construct a response to the threat of gun violence—or not. We are at the beginning stages of our study, which is taking us to local churches, individual interviews, and various types of training conferences. There is much that is yet to be analyzed. But there are some things we do know and some things we’re just beginning to identify.

God and Guns: What We Know

We know that there are more guns around. According to a recent Harvard/Northeastern study, handgun ownership grew by 71 percent between 1994 and 2015, even as gun violence was decreasing. This reflects a growing sense of fear and need for protection within society. In fact, Pew data show personal protection is now the primary reason given for handgun acquisition (48 percent); there are an increasing number of female gun owners who feel more at risk. Pew Research Center reports 32

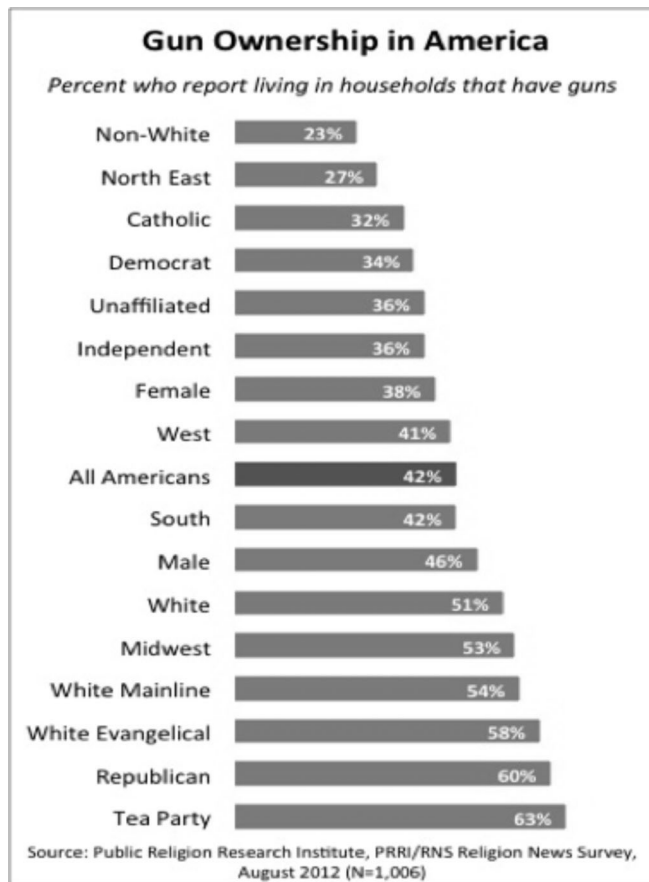
Churches are increasingly aware that they are not immune from the gun violence afflicting all of American society, and that realization is beginning to find expression in vestry meetings, parking lot conversations, and the private and corporate prayers of the people.

Most clergy and church leaders have not been prepared to respond to the threat of gun violence—this is clearly in the category of “things that were never covered in seminary.” As congregations struggle to respond in both fear and faith to growing security concerns, they find few practical and theological resources within their church bodies. Currently I am working on a research project with sociologist David Yamane from Wake Forest University on this very question of how faith communities are processing the issues of safety and security.² Despite the fact that the intersection of religion and guns seems obvious from even an informal observation of American culture, it is a surprisingly understudied social dynamic by sociologists or faith groups themselves. This is largely because of government skittishness of funding research on guns, particularly by the Centers for Disease Control. Large data sets by Pew and others look at patterns of gun ownership and beliefs about gun laws according to a number

percent of men and 12 percent of women own guns (up from 9 percent in 1994).³ While the percentage of individuals owning guns overall is decreasing slightly (down from 25 to now 22 percent), there is a phenomenon of *stockpiling*, with 3 percent of American adults having 50 percent of all guns in circulation—averaging seventeen guns each.⁴ The fear, or at least the reliance on guns, then is not evenly distributed in the public.

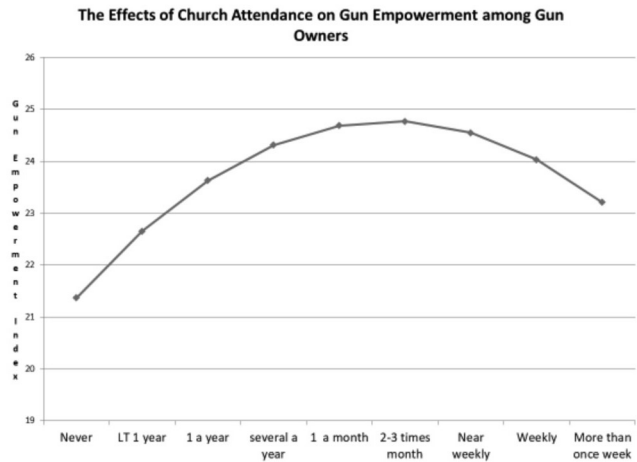
Different patterns of gun ownership emerge by race. Pew data from 2013 show 31 percent of whites as opposed to 15 percent of African Americans personally own guns.⁵ Similarly, the 2015 Harvard/Northeastern data put the percentage of handgun ownership at 25 percent among white individuals, but only 14 percent for African Americans.⁶ Other data identify gun ownership by household, but the trends of lower rates in African American households remain consistent; nonwhites have less than half the proportion of gun-owning households of whites

(23 percent versus 51 percent). Only in the last few years has research begun to consider religion as a variable, so sources are few. Consider these 2012 findings from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) displayed below.⁷ When the data is sorted by religious groups, Protestants show higher rates of gun ownership, and evangelicals have the highest level of any religious group shown here—58 percent compared to 42 percent of all sampled. Other research has backed this up: evangelicals are more likely to own guns, especially handguns.⁸ The PRRI data also found the Catholic rate is well below national rates, at 32 percent. However, Dan Cox of PRRI reported that when separating out ethnic groups, white Catholics look much like the national sample (at 43 percent), but Latino Catholic households are much less likely to own guns (24 percent).⁹ So we can see that religion—as well as race, gender, political party, and region—makes a difference in who owns guns; and within religious groups there can be variation.



Besides religious affiliation, there is some evidence that religious participation has an impact on gun practices. In research coming out of Baylor

University focusing on evangelical men,¹⁰ findings show that as economic anxiety increased, so did attachment to guns. Attendance at worship also had an affect: the more frequently they attended—up to 2 to 3 times a month—the more their “gun empowerment” level increased. However, that attachment was dampened as worship attendance increased to near weekly or weekly.



Through quantitative research we know that religion affects patterns of gun ownership and beliefs, both by the religious identification and by participation. What we don't know is why and how these occur. Why would evangelicals own more guns than Catholics? (One recent study links adherence to “Christian nationalism” and opposition to gun control laws, but this cultural orientation is not exclusive to evangelicals.¹¹) Why would African Americans and Latinos (arguably more vulnerable and in need of protection) be less inclined to own firearms? What is going on in attending church more frequently that would lead evangelical men—even those anxious about their economic security—to feel less attached and reliant on their guns? Finally, how does this all get woven into the dynamics as congregations begin to discern their understandings of safety and security and construct responses? To better understand what is going on, we turn from mining the slim offerings from quantitative studies to exploring how congregations are making sense, making meaning, and taking action by conducting our own ethnographic research. Through participant observation and in-depth interviewing, we hope to develop the proverbial “thick description” of congregations at work, as they are going into new territory to create uncharted responses.

A Spectrum of Responses

It is clear that there is a range of responses that congregations are taking at this point. There are few resources from denominations, publications, or seminaries upon which to draw, and that vacuum can invite the loudest voices. Such open, unscripted space can be uncritical space, so congregational discernment should be, and often is, intentional. This is complicated by the reality that contemplating gun violence in one's house of worship is terrifying and confusing, even if it is rare. Further, sentiments around guns are strong and tend to become more strident when there is a shooting (or even an imagined one), a potential church conflict. Both of these—fear of violence and fear of division—complexify clear-headed discernment by a congregation and are present to different degrees throughout the range of responses.

There have been seven distinct responses that fall along a spectrum, from the most passive to the most aggressive (flight to fight). It should be reiterated that without a lot of quantitative data there is no way to know the actual distribution of congregational responses for some of these responses on the spectrum, nor is it possible to track shifting trends; this analysis is largely based on interviews and observations with clergy and lay leaders reflecting racial and denominational diversity, as well as attendance at training conferences. I will identify each response and consider the implications for the lived theology and worship for their congregations.

Do Nothing

Like many Americans, many congregations—perhaps most—feel that gun violence is far from a possibility they will ever encounter and so they *do nothing*. After all, the unconscious assumption that harm will not come to us enables us as individuals to live our lives, and as congregations to gather for worship. We pray for the families of victims, while assuring ourselves that this tragedy is far away. Worship can enable the insulation through avoidance and reassurance.

Trauma research has shown that when confronted with a live threat, we tend to freeze rather than escape, because our brains are not programmed with a catalogue of threats and a repertoire of the necessary behaviors to deal with them. Hence, victims and witnesses often say, “I thought it was fireworks,” because gunfire is not in their memory banks. We do not challenge the walls of this womb

because the threat is too terrifying to contemplate and perhaps because we feel helpless to know how to respond. Here, the freeze response in an actual situation of violence is echoed in the avoidance instinct in anticipation of one. Nonengagement is understandable but finally reinforces the sense of powerlessness.

Rely on God's Protection

Other congregations are all too aware of the reality of gun violence but affirm their faith in *God's protection and sovereignty*. One pastor of a large suburban African American congregation had had lively conversations in his congregation after events like the shootings of Trayvon Martin and the nine church members in Charleston. There is a liturgical tradition of “armor bearers” to protect the pastor in many black churches, a ceremonial practice proposed but discounted by this pastor as clericalism and incompatible with the priesthood of all believers. When considering the safety of the whole congregation, the idea of having armed security came up in his congregational conversation. One member compellingly argued, “Pastor, you tell us to walk by faith,” and the reliance on God precluded putting faith in firearms. This theological understanding of “walking by faith” here is not a naïve belief of guaranteed physical safety. Rather, it reflects the conviction that in fact *security* means something more fundamental than *safety*. One AME pastor (who actually owned a handgun he did not bring to church) expressed it this way: “They [guns] might protect you but they won't save you. Ultimately, God is in control.”

This theological frame is also reflected in some mainline Protestant churches that have been putting posters at entryways to the building warning that guns are not allowed in the church. For “carry anywhere” states, such signage is legally required as well as being a theological statement. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has produced eye-catching signs stating “No Guns in God's House.” A Baptist pastor from Texas whose church posted such signs recognized that it did create some concern that the church was advertising that it was a “soft target.” There is also an argument that such posters would not stop someone intent on doing harm. Still, the intentional statement recognizes the reality of violence while making a faith claim of trust in God.

Offer Active Shooter Training

A Lutheran synod in a Midwest city reported that congregational safety and security was the “number one call” they were receiving in the bishop’s office in 2017–18. The staff consulted with legal counsel and were advised not to institute any programs or policies that could be interpreted as guaranteeing safety, which could make them legally liable after a tragedy. They would have stayed in this very intentional “do-nothing” position had not the calls persisted. They responded with what they felt was the minimal program they could offer—to offer *active shooter training*. Their training attracted forty-five participants from nine of their congregations. These grim exercises are now commonplace in schools (including seminaries), hospitals, businesses, and government offices as well as churches. The Department of Homeland Security offers these trainings, and there is a growing industry in the private sector of companies now providing this service.

Those faith communities that do have active shooter trainings are “preparing for the worst, and praying for the best.” There is recognition that the church is not immune from the gun violence that has afflicted American society. By training people to run, hide, and barricade, participants are given a sense of nonviolent agency rather than a posture of passivity within a potential victim situation.

Enhanced Security Systems

There was speculation in the weeks following the tragedy in Charleston that African American churches would move toward having armed protection in worship.¹² According to journalistic accounts and my own research, African American churches did make changes toward securing worshipers, but these have largely involved *enhanced security systems* rather than turning to guns. Indeed, the AME denomination issued a statement after the shooting at Mother Emanuel in Charleston, encouraging all of its congregations to review their security systems. Security enhancement might include installing more security cameras, alarm systems, outdoor lighting, locked doors, audio speakers and video cameras at every entrance, and professional security guards. Larger congregations, and those with more resources, have instituted more elaborate security upgrades accounting for an increasing proportion of the budget.

The Scheitle study cited earlier had a large and diverse sample of congregations responding in 2015, before Charleston, Sutherland Springs, and Pittsburgh. Findings indicate that 40 percent of congregations had experienced some type of crime. About the same proportion had invested in four or more types of security systems. Still, “a majority did not have much of any security measures in place.”¹³ But interviews with clergy and congregation members have confirmed that members of congregations with security systems do feel safer when gathered for worship or meetings.

However benign increased surveillance might seem, theological tensions arise. One Unitarian minister decided to follow the advice of the local police chief and lock doors as worship began. But congregation members challenged the move as being incompatible with their commitment to hospitality. Even screening strangers through video cameras and preventing them from entering can challenge the biblical commands to welcome strangers and those who are among “the least and the lost.”

The issue of security is particularly poignant for the Jewish community, with synagogues being the most frequent targets of vandalism and hate crimes. One rabbi from Philadelphia, whose synagogue had recently been a target of anti-Semitic graffiti, talked about how some of the earliest rabbinic debates focused on whether or not weapons should be worn on Shabbat. Balancing the real threat with the teachings of his tradition he said, “We have this big security presence during the week, but on Shabbat all doors are open. No guards. This is because of the rabbinic teaching that all visitors are welcome on Shabbat. So, during the week, we’re a fortress. On the Sabbath, we’re an open book.” As with the African American congregations cited earlier, there is a faith commitment that transcends even personal safety—the need to stay true to the religious tradition. Ironically, Jews and African Americans are more vulnerable in our society, with more legitimate reasons to fear for their safety. Although there are some exceptions, our research is finding that these faith communities are not turning to guns for security, but they do have significantly higher levels of employing security systems.¹⁴

Congregants Wearing Guns

As “conceal carry” becomes legal in more states, parishioners are increasingly *wearing guns* hidden by shirt tails or blazers. Again, without quantitative data it is hard to know how prevalent this is. But some early patterns are emerging through ethnographic interviews.

It is apparent that for those who are packing in worship, this is a personal, voluntary decision. These are, for the most part, men who carry their gun throughout the week. One recurring rationale is that “it would take too long for the police to get here” in the case of an emergency, and they want to be ready. For others, however, having guns in church is a jarring image. But for these armed worshipers, there is not a conflict with one’s faith. “God has given me life and he means for me to protect it,” one Presbyterian elder from an affluent suburban church said. Personal protection extends to family and community, and can be founded in religious values of love and sacrifice. This elder did not know how many others might be carrying in the congregation, but when asked about the possibility he said, “God, I hope so!” Yet he assumed that the pastors would not approve. This presumption that clergy would have a different stance on guns in worship is a recurring theme heard in interviews, revealing a cultural divide between clergy and these laypeople, at least on this issue. Clergy, in fact, are ambivalent about the practice in most Protestant churches. Further, they do not want to know who is carrying weapons in the pews.¹⁵

Only four in ten preachers had addressed the topic—less than had focused on racism, LGBTQ issues, white privilege/supremacy, and Islamophobia, among others.

Clearly, this is something to which most clergy have not been prepared to respond in their theological training. Nor do they seem eager to address it from the pulpit. In a recent survey of active clergy in mainline Protestant denominations, gun violence ranked thirteenth in a list of thirty-eight public issues they had preached about in the previous year.¹⁶ Only four in ten preachers had addressed the topic—less than had focused on racism, LGBTQ

issues, white privilege/supremacy, and Islamophobia, among others. Even though “gun violence” is a less controversial topic than “guns in society,” follow-up comments by respondents indicated that there is unwillingness to engage an issue that could offend hunters in the congregation and others who are part of a gun culture. It has been argued that guns occupy a sacred status in American culture,¹⁷ a third rail for preachers, or at least in mainline Protestant traditions. White evangelicals are more likely to be gun owners than any other faith group or even the country overall (41 percent compared to 30 percent), and most gun owners carry their handguns with them.¹⁸ And not all clergy are uncomfortable with knowing their parishioners might be armed. Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church of Dallas said it makes him feel safer. “I’d say a quarter to a half of our members are concealed carry. They have guns, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that [that they bring them to church].”¹⁹

A question for future research would be how the presence of armed worshipers affects the experience of those in the pews, whether evangelical, mainline Protestant, or members of other faiths. Is this awareness a source of comfort, anxiety, or indifference? Anecdotally, we know it could be any of the three.

Armed Church Security Teams

Farther along the spectrum are those congregations that do not rely on safety training, surveillance systems, or voluntary carrying, but take it to the next level by organizing armed “*church security teams*.” These are volunteer groups within the congregation who (usually) receive training to take action on a variety of threats including sexual assault, weather-related events, and active shooter situations. There are a number of organizations that provide training, such as the Sheepdog Seminars and the National Organization of Church Security and Safety Management. At a recent training conference of the N.O.C.S.S.M. in Frisco, Texas, the eighty attendees were overwhelmingly white, male, and from evangelical churches. However, there were not the usual rituals of evangelical gatherings—opening prayers, singing, and frequent Bible citations. Rather, the program was pragmatically oriented, with two days filled with speakers (all white men) who focused on building the skills and equipment needed to keep congregations safe from violence.

What generated the most attention and energy was preparing for an active shooter. Although this is statistically rare, the story referred to the most (almost as an origin myth for the organization) was an incident in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 2007. A gunman attacked a youth gathering, killing two, then went to a mega church across town, New Life Church, and killed two more people. He was confronted and shot by a member of the church security team and later died (although there is still lingering debate whether his death was finally suicide). New Life has around ten thousand members and a church security team of seventy-five. The recently retired head of their team was a featured speaker at the N.O.C.S.S.M. training conference in Frisco, and he framed his team's work as a ministry of the church. He emphasized the rigorous discipline and ongoing training for the members of the team who could not earn their "A-badge" (i.e., armed) until after one year of service. There was a paramilitary feel to the whole conference exemplified by this speaker. Although he did have references from both Hebrew and Greek Scriptures to support the need for the use of force to protect the people of God, more frequent was the use of militaristic lingo: meetings are "briefings," information is "intelligence," people are "deployed," suspicious people ("Don't Look Right" or DLRs) become "targets," active shooter events are "Black Swan events," and other "tactical" references frame church security as warfare. In references from speakers and conversations with participants, it was clear that the security teams often felt that the congregation and sometimes the clergy did not understand them. These bands of brothers (almost entirely men) provided a space within a congregation for those with military backgrounds. Unlike secular insurrectionist groups, they respected the police and military and saw their role as stabilizing violent situations until the police arrived on site. Given the numbers of groups offering such training, it is predictable that more congregations will be organizing security teams if other strategies do not offer a sense of security for worshipers.

Given the numbers of groups offering such training, it is predictable that more congregations will be organizing security teams if other strategies do not offer a sense of security for worshipers.

Worshipers Openly Carrying Guns

There is a difference in optics and meanings when *guns are openly carried*, that is, when they are visible on the owner. Currently, open carry is allowed in forty-five states, with some variation in licensing and regulation. While concealed carry is more likely, there are some communities of faith where worshipers are allowed, even encouraged, to wear their weapons to services. In fact, there is interesting history of open carry in the American colonies. An openly carried gun connotes readiness against attack and, for these congregations, can be a reassuring presence (even as the idea can be anathema to other faith communities). There have been some churches that have had "2A Sundays," celebrating the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms. Here there is a confluence of authority—divine and political. Recent research on Christian nationalism has found that "Christian nationalists may perceive guns as a sacred God-given right because they see the Constitution, along with other founding documents, as inspired by the Christian God."²⁰ The symbols of cross and gun have equal weight for them. The researchers argue that this dynamic of "God and guns" is located within the culture wars that reproduce differing meanings of morality, threat, and nation.

Remaining Questions

This brief summary of the different ways that faith communities are making sense of the issues of safety and security is limited in its development. As observed, quantitative data would go far in enabling us to know the prevalence of different responses and the shifts that might be occurring. Ethnographic study, which is just beginning, helps

us to understand the internal social processes that create such responses. Obviously, as with any typology, the types are not always so clearly delineated. Congregations can employ multiple approaches at once (active shooter training and surveillance strategies, for example). They could move from one to another.

The larger question is the impact that any of these responses have in the formation of faith identity. Does seeing guns in worship (or knowing they are there) elevate fear? Does it contribute to social bonding or the deterioration of trust? Does it change how we understand and relate to God? Are congregations microcosms of our larger society, both in its threats and responses, or do they have something to contribute in the public discourse about the meanings we bring to both “safety” and “security”? The presence that guns occupy in American culture and experience is clearly unique among the nations and is not abating. How congregations engage this issue, finally, is not just about them. It is located in the larger fabric of the public well-being.

Notes

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14. Ibid., 110.
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John Stuart

And This Shall Be Our Reply to Violence: Singing in Times of Trial

Joshua Taylor

This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.

—Leonard Bernstein, on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy¹

A New Era of Violence

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, following the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, and the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 in rural Pennsylvania, members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate gathered on the steps of the Capitol building to offer comments and a brief moment of silence. As the remarks concluded, someone spontaneously began to sing. This image of bipartisanship, Democratic and Republican politicians, holding hands, hugging, and singing together, has become iconic. Beyond the safe, carefully crafted comments, it was in singing that the raw emotion of those gathered became most evident.

9/11 marked the beginning of a new era of violence in American society. While violence has certainly been a part of the American experience since the earliest days of the nation's history, the twenty-four-hour news cycle, greater globalization, and the live, up-to-the-minute reality of social media highlight the pervasiveness of violence in modern society. As of November 19, 2018, there have been over 314 mass shootings.² CNN maintains a web page tracking the deadliest mass shootings in the United States and another to track terrorist activities on American soil.³ The mere existence of such websites suggests a heightened awareness

and an inescapable reality that bombings, terrorism (both foreign and domestic), mass shootings, school shootings, and other forms of tragedy have become a part of everyday life in the United States.

Beyond the images from 9/11 of the planes crashing, it was in that moment on a Tuesday evening on the steps of the Capitol building that, in response to tragedy, American people found solace and a brief respite from the day's events through song. Regardless of opinions on the appropriate military response, the consequences of subsequent actions taken by the administration, or the unfortunate ways that 9/11 era laws, policies, and policing have at best contributed to, or at worst perpetuated, violence in their own right, that brief moment of song provided the place for lament and grief, for hope and steadfast resolve, and for unity. With millions of American citizens tuned to their televisions, legislative leaders provided what was needed most—not with their words but with a faithful, heartfelt response. A song.

From the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 to the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and Santa Fe High School in 2018, from Virginia Tech (2007) and Ft. Hood (2009) to Sandy Hook (2012), the Boston Marathon bombing (2013), the Pulse Nightclub shooting (2016) and the fallen police officers in Dallas (2016), communities have been forced to respond. They have had to offer ways in which their residents could gather, grieve, pick up the pieces, and hope for a brighter tomorrow together. In most cases, worship and music have provided the setting for these expressions. How does one even begin to prepare for such an arduous undertaking of crafting a response to violence?

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Offering Our Response: Three Accounts

Hilary Donaldson, pastoral musician at the Eastminster United Church in Toronto, Canada, considered her role planning a vigil service following the July 2018 mass shooting in Toronto just a few feet from the church's building. In a video she recorded about the experience, Hilary said, "We never believed this could happen here." Hers is a common refrain among community leaders, pastors, and musicians as they grapple with the realities that it *has* happened "here." Donaldson reflected on planning music following the tragic event, drawing on truths held dear by musicians:

I talk a lot about community singing bringing people together. I'm usually talking about times of joy and celebration, but it is equally important in times like this. It is another way for people to express their pain and move toward healing.⁴

In their book *Engaging in Community Music*, Lee Willingham and Lee Higgins note that

there is an "alchemy" that happens when a balance is present between one's own individual reasons for belonging to the group, and the true sense of community expectations. Belonging to the larger collective is part of defining self . . . and the importance of one's sense of self or self-identity is symbiotic with the community identity and serves as the starting point to action.⁵

In the midst of expressing their grief and seeking to bring together the wider community impacted by the shooting, Donaldson says that vigil planners were mindful of anti-Muslim sentiment. By selecting songs that reflected the diversity of the community, Donaldson hoped that the event would provide a space for the community to express their anger but also to find comfort and, hopefully, peace. In her video, she stated, "By singing together, we shared a piece of our hearts with each other. We reminded ourselves of all that links us together as a community."

Andrew Butler, associate director of music at St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Coral Springs, Florida, shared similar reflections after helping to plan the funeral service for one of the students shot

and killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Butler describes the process of planning and leading the service as "emotionally overwhelming." The shooting in Parkland, Florida, coincided with the observance of Ash Wednesday. Butler commented on the power of the liturgy that day to transform a religious observance into an embodied lament of the gathered community.

In planning for the funeral service of the student, St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church's worship leaders were dependent on the goodwill and support of a wider community. Due to capacity issues, the service was held in the large Catholic church in the community, and, with permission from the Catholic Diocese of Miami, the Episcopal priest was allowed to preside over communion in the church. Additionally, choir members from several different Episcopal parishes and the First United Methodist Church of Coral Gables combined to provide music for worship. When asked about his process for selecting and preparing music for the service, Andrew stated, "In that moment, you have to trust in your training and what you know and then trust that God the Holy Spirit will carry you through."⁶ Butler points to a pivotal moment: as people were going forward to communion, the choir singing Bob Dufford's song "Be Not Afraid," the expressions of worship shifted to community response. Following the worship service, Rector Mark Sims and forty students and chaperones left for a trip to the Florida state capital. The trip began what has become known as the "March for Our Lives" campaign.

On July 7, 2016, a gunman claiming to protest police brutality shot and killed five Dallas police officers and one campus security guard at an otherwise peaceful Black Lives Matter protest. This author's experience comes from leading the music at the public memorial service for the six fallen officers. The memorial service, an ecumenical gathering, featured speeches from former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama as well as Dallas Mayor Michael Rawlings, U.S. Senator John Cornyn, and Dallas Police Chief David Brown. The ceremony represented not only the public grieving for the loss of lives but also the lament of a city that thought its racist history of violence and hatred was a thing of the past. Indeed, the City of Dallas had been a beacon of hope and a model for community policing. As a member of the Police Data Initiative, the Dallas Police Department had

been recognized as a leader in the nation for race relations and the reduction of police brutality.⁷ This event, the largest loss of police lives in the United States since 9/11, exposed our community's uneasy, unspoken contract between racial groups and its scarred past. That past includes such notorious events as the lynching of Allen Brooks⁸ in 1910, when five thousand spectators watched and later took souvenirs, and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

What Was the Faithful Response in This Moment?

Like the events in Toronto and Florida, the ecumenical service in Dallas was twofold. It was a very public service of grieving for six families who had lost loved ones, but it was also the communal prayer of an entire city wrestling with feelings of fear, anger, and despair and desperately in need of hope, compassion, and peace.

It was quickly determined that an interfaith, ethnically diverse choir along with the Dallas Police Choir would provide the musical leadership for the service. There on stage, just behind the President of the United States, would sit seventy-five singers—half of them white, half black, most not knowing one another—who would offer voice to the feelings of an entire city. What should be sung? As people of faith, we trust that God will provide the appropriate words for the moment; but how does one prepare to offer prayer and praise, sung or otherwise, in such raw moments?

The words of communal grief and lament in response to tragedy must be carefully chosen. As Hilary Donaldson shared, “Our songs must be selected to help those gathered find their voice in the face of the unspeakable.”

What Songs Were Sung

The contextual nature of planning services in response to violence makes each individual selection and worship experience unique. The iconic image on the Capitol steps, President Barack Obama singing “Amazing Grace” following the shooting at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the use of “Peace, Salaam, Shalom” at the Danforth shooting all reflect intentional choices by worship planners, inspired and carried forth by the Spirit of God to speak in those specific situations.

For the Dallas service, three individual pieces resonated with particular power in the moment. The first was John Bell's simple setting of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words, “Goodness is Stronger than Evil.” This shorter song was sung repeatedly just before the families of the victims and the dignitaries entered the room. The repeated refrain, selected as preservice music due to its accessibility, quickly grew in energy, and the gathered assembly was invited to join the song. The palpable moment became an assurance of God's presence as the more than two thousand people inside the hall (and countless others watching a stream outside) embarked on a shared journey of this worship experience. Mark Miller's anthem “I Believe,” drawn from the words inscribed on the walls of the Auschwitz concentration camp—“I believe in the sun even when it's not shining, I believe in love even when I don't feel it, I believe in God even when God is silent”—was so poignant in the moment that one local television reporter tweeted that the music for the memorial service was profoundly beautiful and “on point.”

More than any other inclusion in the service, Richard Smallwood's “Total Praise” fully embodied the emotions of everyone in the Meyerson Symphony Center that day. Ubiquitous in the African American church, the piece was largely unknown to most of the white singers. Additionally, in rehearsal, it was discovered that many of the African American singers had learned the piece by rote and were singing different parts than what had been written on the page; this presented a unique challenge. The result, one day later, was the blending of cultures into an impassioned prayer of hope shared across racial lines. The deep sense of community experienced through “Total Praise” in that moment echoes a familiar refrain for many who have shared communal worship in response to tragedy.

Howard Thurman wrote in the first chapter of his book *The Creative Encounter* that because of human suffering,

the normal process of life has been interrupted, and the sufferer is faced with what seems a great irrationality. The pain brings one face to face with the point at which evil touches [them] in particular . . . [but] in the religious experience the individual has the kind of lift and renewal that are good in and of themselves. In the

experience itself evil seems remote and often unreal. . . . Perhaps this is due to the fact that the Christian brings into [their] religious experience as defined a belief and a persuasion that God is the final answer to all that there is, which includes evil itself.⁹

With the President and first lady leaping to their feet and a standing ovation from the crowd, “Total Praise” illustrated Thurman’s point for that gathering. Warren Johnson, a participant in the choir that day, described it this way: “What an honor to be a participant in that service. My take-away moment while singing ‘Total Praise’ was more visual than auditory. Seeing the two first families turn their heads in appreciation of the soloist was most stirring. The gathering of divergent groups expressing a uniform prayer and then the appreciation for our efforts defined the experience for me.”¹⁰

The Arc of Time

The arc of music history is full of examples of music playing a significant response in the wake of tragedy. Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* was written for the dedication of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral after the fourteenth-century structure was destroyed during World War II. Harmonically based around the tritone, the “devil’s interval,” the work interspersed the traditional Latin texts with poetry by World War I poet Wilfred Owen and confronted the horrors of war. In response to 9/11, composer René Clausen wrote *Memorial*, a multimovement work, that interspersed English texts with Hebrew, Arabic, and the Greek *Kyrie Eleison*. Premiered in New York’s Lincoln Center in 2002, the composer, by using multiple languages, hoped to illustrate the far-reaching, cross-cultural impact of terrorism.¹¹ The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired countless artistic efforts from classical music to popular music, including U2’s “MLK” and The Byrds’ “He Was a Friend of Mine.” Leonard Bernstein led the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in Mahler’s Second Symphony (*Resurrection*), two days after JFK’s assassination. This performance began a strong association between the music of Mahler and national tragedy.¹²

After the performance, *Bernstein* spoke to the United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York at their annual fund-raising event. His poignant words carry an enduring sentiment to this day:

It is obvious that the grievous nature of our loss is immensely aggravated by the element of violence involved in it. And where does this violence spring from? From ignorance and hatred—the exact antonyms of Learning and Reason. Learning and Reason: [two words that] every man can pick up where they fell, and make [a] part of himself, the seed of that rational intelligence without which our world can no longer survive. This must be the mission of every man of goodwill: to insist, unflaggingly, at risk of becoming a repetitive bore, but to insist on the achievement of a world in which the mind will have triumphed over violence.

We musicians, like everyone else, are numb with sorrow at this murder, and with rage at the senselessness of the crime. But this sorrow and rage will not inflame us to seek retribution; rather they will inflame our art. Our music will never again be quite the same. This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.¹³

An Internet search quickly reveals dozens of pieces of music written in response to tragic events. Music has been composed to memorialize the movie theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado; choral pieces have been dedicated to those children and teachers murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary. Numerous hymn texts have been crafted in response to various events. Hymn writer Lurline DuPree penned the following in response to the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007 to be sung to the tune Picardy:

Lord, we cry in desperation:
lonely, fearful, sick, care-worn.
Covenants once made are broken:
love is wasted, hearts are torn.
Flood our desert lives, remind us:
in your waters we are born!

Shamed, we stumble, aimless, empty;
dull and joyless, without song.
Listlessly we shun your presence,
numb to you for whom we long.
With your gracious meal restore us;
fill us, make us glad and strong.

When we kneel with cloth and basin,
losing self, we find your way.
Cross and manger, font and table
lead us, make us bold to say:
“Persevering God, eternal hope!
In your presence night is day.”

Glory be to God, creator,
timeless maker of each soul.
Glory be to Christ, Lord Jesus,
God incarnate, human, whole.
Glory be to God, the holy Comforter;
ever with us, guide and goal.¹⁴

Embodying Bernstein’s charge, all have been offered with the hope of creating community, drawing people together in the most desperate situations.

Beyond the large-scale events and newly composed expressions, music offers a response to violence, spoken throughout time and around the globe. Music has an ability to meet people at the point of their deepest despair and transport them to a place of comfort and hope that, at its best, allows for a closer encounter with God. This encounter does not demand anything from the participant. It does not expect uniformity or immediate transformation from those who engage in expressing a response to violence and tragedy. As Michael Hawn notes in his book *Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally*:

“While music in its myriad cultural manifestations has been a metaphor of Christian unity since the beginning of the church, it is not the universal language as some glibly assume. Sung prayer may function, however, to bring unity out of diversity. This is not a unity forged through uniformity of perspective, but a unity that revels in the diversity of God’s creation. Such prayerful song fuses the diverse themes of each community represented in the gathered body into a single melodic community of believers.”¹⁵

So it is in response to violence. Each musical offering is made within the context of the individual worship offering. Individuals bring their own self to the expression be it anger, fear, or sadness and, hopefully, find comfort through the process. As Hilary Donaldson put it, “Where words fail, music speaks.”

Conclusion

“The good news that *life* is available to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death has as its corollary the less enticing news that in order to avail ourselves of this life we shall have to know ourselves numbered among those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.”¹⁶ The response to violence and tragedy is essential as the community seeks to move past horror to a new future. Allowing the authentic voice of those expressions provides the space for healing.

The reality that violence and tragedy have become a part of the everyday American life is most unfortunate. In a new liturgy included in the revised *Book of Common Worship*, the commentary implores:

In the wake of acts of violence, denials of justice, bitter debates, or contested decisions, it is fitting for us to seek the abiding presence and transforming power of the liberating Lord. . . . The prayers [of] these services call for justice as well as peace and are voiced in a way that invites the participation of all who are gathered for worship. When Christians gather and pray with neighbors of other faiths or no faith, we are called to offer a faithful and authentic account of our hope in Christ.¹⁷

Notes

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John Stuart

The Arduous Road Back: Basil and the Problem of “Dirty Hands” in Light of Moral Injury and Combat Trauma

Brian Powers

Introduction

Somewhere around 374, Basil of Caesarea wrote that soldiers returning from war should “abstain from communion for three years” because their “hands are not clean.”¹ Basil is careful here to reiterate what he understands as a long-standing rule of the church fathers that “homicide in war” is not counted as “homicide,” particularly as there may be legitimate ends for which a Christian may endeavor to fight (“chastity” and “true religion” for Basil).² Yet here he reminds the church that even when, as he contends, there may be reasonable argument that conflict is necessary, the violence in which soldiers participate is not a quotidian part of the life of the church community and should not be lightly reckoned as such. To kill another human being, while perhaps done in a time of war, was to participate still in an evil—even if it was deemed a necessary one. This participation required an abstention from communion, and presumably a period of repentance and penance—an indication that one couldn’t simply kill and then return to the fold as though nothing had happened. Read charitably, this practice seeks to provide moral clarity and a path to restoration for those who have encountered and participated in the violence of war.

Using this interpretation, it seems easy to commend the rule, and some, like Peter Dula, have recently suggested that the practice might have merit in a modern society that rarely questions the actions of its military members during conflict.³ Yet certainly, a significant number of questions about its implementation arise, given the significant distance in time and space that separate us from the context of Basil. We might ask whether the rule, if practiced, provides a valuable and needed moral context in which veterans might explore

their participation in the troubling moral aspects of war, or whether asking them to abstain would be understood instead as a pious judgment on a group that already carries a significant amount of guilt by a privileged group whose security is underwritten by the violence in which veterans participate. We might wonder how much agency combatants today have in their circumstances, and how society (and perhaps American Christianity as well) participates, through patronage and voting, in creating virtues that lead those with “dirty hands” to profound moral suffering; are veterans’ hands really “dirtier” than those of the average citizen?

We might wonder how much agency combatants today have in their circumstances, and how society (and perhaps American Christianity as well) participates, through patronage and voting, in creating virtues that lead those with “dirty hands” to profound moral suffering; are veterans’ hands really “dirtier” than those of the average citizen?

In this article, I contend that the best way to explore some of these questions and evaluate the rule Basil proposes is through the phenomenon of combat trauma, and most notably the phenomenon of moral injury in former combatants.⁴ Doing so will shed a great deal of light on issues of suffering, the “goodness” or inherent vice of conflict, and the relationship between civilians and veterans in our midst that might help us discern what beneficial

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aspects of Basil's rule we might carry forward, and what pernicious aspects we may want to prune from it.

Moral Injury and Combat Trauma

A significant number of veterans from the recent conflicts in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have returned with crippling levels of post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and significant psychological injuries. It seems quite likely, however, that combatants have been experiencing post-combat trauma since humanity's first tribal instances of warfare. A large cluster of psychophysiological traumas have been called by various names over the past century: "shell shock" in WWI, "battle fatigue" in WWII, and finally in the 1980s, some version of "combat stress reaction" was understood as PTSD and began to be formally called as such. From this broad understanding of combat trauma, researchers in the past twenty-five years or so have begun to differentiate between two major categories within it—PTSD and moral injury. The symptoms of these two conditions certainly intertwine and are by no means mutually exclusive—many veterans suffer the debilitating effects of both conditions. In order to differentiate them, however, PTSD is generally regarded as having a distinctly physiological component.⁵ When a combatant encounters a life-or-death situation in combat, he experiences a surge of adrenaline and a multitude of other bodily effects. When this happens repeatedly, the endocrine system of the body essentially becomes significantly less guarded about releasing the hormones that cause these reactions. When veterans with this kind of PTSD experience a triggering event, for example, their bodies react—an exploding firework may send their endocrine system into a very reactive mode, and they have to contend with their body chemistry telling them that there is danger nearby; they quite literally feel it, in other words. As psychiatrist Jonathan Shay notes, recovery from this type of trauma (which he calls "simple" PTSD), involves a veteran "unlearning combat adaptations . . . without the loss of the ability to have a good human quality of life."⁶ While the recovery is by no means easy, simple, or without stress and strain, it is, in other words, about adapting and adjusting to the reactions of one's own body.

In contrast, moral injury is a psychological condition that is manifest in varying degrees of guilt, shame, and moral ambiguity that a veteran

may feel about their actions or regret over the very things that they believed were ethical "goods" in the combat zone. Shay often refers to the involvement of moral pain as "complex" PTSD,⁷ noting that while veterans are often able to adapt to physiological changes, the moral aspect of combat trauma is often far more pernicious and can mean that "all chance of a flourishing life is lost."⁸ He catalogues the ways that the "thrill seeking" behavior of morally injured veterans can devastate their familial relationships, cause difficulties in obtaining work, and create an ultimate sense of hopelessness.⁹ While the best way to describe moral injury is still a matter of scholarly contention, Shay articulates one of two prominent definitions of the concept as "the betrayal of what's right by a person in a position of legitimate authority or oneself in a high-stakes situation."¹⁰ A group of prominent psychiatrists and other researchers led by Brett Litz have authored the second, contending that moral injury consists of "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."¹¹

Moral injury consists of "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."

These definitions draw out at least two key aspects of moral injury that are particular to it in regards to other forms of trauma. First, they point to some degree of first-person action, witness, or "perpetration" that is involved in moral injury. In practice, Shay's "high-stakes situation" is so because actions taken in combat so often involve the direct application of violence. As such, life and death hang in the balance of decisions about precisely how that violence is applied. The actions of combatants are directly (the soldier pulling the trigger) or indirectly (the one who gives orders or who supports the attack) responsible for the deaths of others. The Litz definition puts it in explicit terms—moral injury involves primarily the "perpetration" of an action, then radiates the consequences of the action outward to those who fail to prevent it, who witness it, or even who learn about its occurrence. Yet even in the passive experiences listed, a great deal of the power of this understanding rests in the notion that

one is participating in or condoning the traumatic actions that one witnesses or learns about.

The Litz definition thus begins to get at the complicated notion of agency involved with this perpetrator trauma that differentiates moral injury from a more basic form of regret. Combatants are culturally conditioned to accept their country's military ventures as "good" in defense of its values, habituated in training, and inducted into a rigid hierarchy in which obedience is singled out as critically important. They pledge in explicit and implicit ways to follow direct orders, more formal or informal standing orders, standard operating procedures, and operational objectives in defense of the larger "good" of the war aim. The sense of "betrayal" that the Shay definition highlights can be understood as the twisting of a combatant's sense of nobility into a less noble cause or action. It involves a sense that one has committed one's sense of goodness and honor to a particular cause, only to feel betrayed by it, and that one has done moral wrong in service of something one initially believed to be a moral right.

Yet the sense of guilt and shame for the morally injured cannot—and certainly should not, lest we neglect real victims—be treated in ways that are effective for other victims of trauma who experience similar moral feelings. Survivors of other kinds of traumatic events may experience PTSD that involves an intense experience of their own powerlessness and passivity. Many rape or assault victims who are overpowered by an attacker will often experience what Serene Jones calls an "unraveling of agency," in which they lose faith in their ability to control their lives and implicitly question whether they are able to take any effective action in the world. Over time, despite feelings of shame, rape survivors may be able to effectively internalize the truth that they bear no moral culpability for their attack and build an identity that is empowering and which affirms their positive, moral self-image. In a slightly different way, children who were abused at a young age often carry toxic memories and may experience a degree of self-blame, and their treatment often involves the cultivation of a positive, moral self-image. Combatants, however, who have been trained with the mantra that they are "responsible for their actions," implicitly cannot accept that the things they have done are "not their fault." Even with the issues of agency previously named, it certainly seems inauthentic to claim that a soldier is

powerless or passive when she or he wields a potent weapon that is capable of a great deal of death and destruction. From most moral perspectives, this is indeed an entirely different situation in which they are the perpetrator of some particular action, and the responsibility for it rests with them. Attempts by therapists to mitigate the guilt of veterans by justifying or excusing their behavior will often ring as false to the morally injured and serve to increase their sense of isolation.

This leads to the second aspect of moral injury the current definitions highlight—that they hinge on some concrete idea of morally agreed upon "good" or definitive understanding of "what's right." In other words, they depend in some way on shared cultural values. For example, there is a general societal understanding that killing is wrong. While rules of engagement and the strategic and operational objectives of any conflict prevent things from sliding into a state of sadistic anarchy, it is safe to say that in the most intense combat situations, the normal inhibitions that govern moral behavior are inverted. Killing the enemy in the most efficient manner possible is valued and rewarded. Not only is this so, but as many returning veterans will testify, the force of war tends to distort even the rules and restrictions that govern legal and moral action in combat. Michael Yandell, a veteran of the U.S. Army and the conflict in Iraq, describes what occurred there as a "flattening of morality," as commanders and soldiers jettison all rules around the simple imperative to win—to defeat and kill the enemy.¹²

Killing the enemy in the most efficient manner possible is valued and rewarded. Not only is this so, but as many returning veterans will testify, the force of war tends to distort even the rules and restrictions that govern legal and moral action in combat.

There is not only a sense of dissonance between the morality that governs the general civilian populace and soldiers in combat, but also a severe disconnect between the civilian expectation of military members in combat and that combatant's experience itself. Civilian difficulty in accepting the

Veterans are valorized in nearly every public part of American life. They are saluted at sporting events, lionized as “heroes” in political speeches, and essentially embody the archetypal idea of sacrifice and dedication. Yet these actions can actually exacerbate the suffering of the morally injured in a particular way. . . The veteran’s own experience is one of deep moral ambiguity and guilt or shame over her or his actions and participation in the conflict.

moral pain of veterans is illustrated even in the expectations of famed Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. One year into what was dubbed “the Great War” in 1915, Freud wrote,

When the fierce struggle of this war will have reached a decision, every victorious warrior will joyfully and without delay return home to his wife and children, undisturbed by thoughts of the enemy he has killed either at close quarters or with weapons operating at a distance.¹³

Robert Meagher notes that what drove Freud’s view was a belief in a dichotomy between a “savage man” who lived in fear of the vengeance and spirits of those whom he had killed and the “modern man” who had “lost his ethical delicacy of feeling” and “knew better than to allow the past to haunt them.”¹⁴ Not long after, Freud was forced to confront his own error, and to his credit, recognized his folly and in fact laid the groundwork for a great deal of later research into combat trauma, coining the term *war neurosis* to describe it. In a larger sense, however, what Freud’s initial comment illustrates is the pervasiveness of the nationalistic belief that combatants are fighting for an inherently “good” cause, and therefore the struggle that civilian populations have in understanding the moral ambiguities soldiers often face about their actions in warfare.

The moral expectation that Freud pronounced in 1915 still governs much of the American populace today—that because combatants are fighting in what civilians see as a worthy cause, they do not tend to understand why they would suffer from feelings of profound moral ambiguity and guilt. Veterans are valorized in nearly every public part of American life. They are saluted at sporting events, lionized as “heroes” in political speeches, and

essentially embody the archetypal idea of sacrifice and dedication. Yet these actions can actually exacerbate the suffering of the morally injured in a particular way. It communicates the public’s expectation that he or she is worthy of great praise, while the veteran’s own experience is one of deep moral ambiguity and guilt or shame over her or his actions and participation in the conflict. The bitter irony is that there is significant evidence that healing from this kind of trauma involves a witnessing to it—the veteran has to tell his story to a listener intent on hearing it. Yet it is difficult for a veteran to speak these kinds of truths when the populace’s valorization of him signals that they may not be willing to hear a testimony that questions their belief in veteran goodness and heroism—it seems to signal a risk of great judgment. These dichotomous expectations often push the morally injured deeper into a state of isolation and reclusion.

What comes to light as a problem here is one that bears directly on our consideration of Basil’s rule—this troubled relationship between the civilian and veteran. How does a congregation made up of American civilians accept communion while asking veterans to abstain, particularly when, in a democratic society, many in most congregations helped elect officials that directed the military action in the first place? How, in other words, do the veterans’ hands become unclean in the eyes of the civilian congregation as they are the instrument of the larger will of the civilian populace of which that congregation is comprised? There is a tension here that greatly risks undermining any positive effects of Basil’s rule.

Theological Perspectives

Seeing our way through this dilemma requires a careful and nuanced understanding of sin and human willing. Augustine of Hippo famously argued that the power of sin over humanity is that its forces

bind the will and constrict our capacity to make truly “good” moral choices. As a consequence of the fall of Adam, he argues, our human will lost its connection to that which is truly good: God. Our desires are now oriented towards goods that are ultimately illusory and that can be profoundly shaped by external, societal forces. For Augustine, there is no way to “reorient” our desires and willing toward God, absent divine

intervention. We thus find ourselves hopelessly trapped and bound in pursuit of lesser “goods” that we elevate to ultimacy—the fulfillment of love, the protection of ourselves and our neighbors, the pursuit of virtues. All these are decent ends in and of themselves, but they can be easily perverted when we pursue them with reckless and sinful abandon, ignoring the consequences of our pursuit of them to other virtues and other people both near and far from us. What is critical for Augustine is that as sin binds us in these patterns, habits, social constructions, and the myriad of forces that act upon our understanding of what is “good,” we simply do not have the capacity to stand outside these forces and choose what is objectively “good.” Our willing is a part of us as sinful human beings.

Augustine’s understanding provides a conceptual vocabulary that helps to further delineate between moral injury and guilt and shame. It helps us, in other words, to nuance the betrayal of agency and the combatant’s sense of “good.” Rather than a simple betrayal of an accepted “good,” then (as Shay suggests), Augustine’s view allows us to understand how national forces in our culture, societal ideas of identity, and military training itself deeply *shape* the very idea of what is “good” to both society and the combatant. When our culture so elevates and valorizes military members, it implicitly connotes that the American military enterprise in war is perhaps the most virtuous calling for an American citizen. Many join the military today seeking to honor the traditions of their families, towns, or what they generally believe to be the proud military tradition of the nation as

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a whole. When exposed to the killing, violence, and devastation of conflict, many veterans feel that their own sense of honor has been betrayed, violated, and twisted in the pursuit of something that they have a difficult time regarding as a “good” end once they understand what that pursuit truly entails.¹⁵

As Stanley Milgram powerfully demonstrated in his experiments in the 1960s and 1970s, as human

beings, we are predisposed to obey those who we believe to be in a position of legitimate authority, assigning them a great deal of responsibility for the actions that they might direct us to take. With its distinct hierarchy and clear chains of command, the military represents the example *par excellence* of Milgram’s idea. There are a great deal of forces that compel a combatant’s willing in a particular direction—cultural conditioning, training, and a precise and distinct authority structure. Taking elements from the Shay and Litz definitions, in my view, moral injury can be understood powerfully in Augustinian terms as the dedication of oneself in a particular moral orientation, only to recognize at some point that that orientation is false, illusory, or even pathogenic.

Critically, then, from an Augustinian perspective, what the morally injured combatant may experience is certainly an acute instance of human brokenness and the sinful condition of humanity, but it is an experience of the same condition in which everyone participates and shapes as well. The

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cultural conditions that shape the willing of combatants are breathed in and out by nearly every member of American society. The movies we patronize, the politicians for whom we vote, the posts that we forward on social media, the debates in which we engage, the clothes we buy, and certainly the way we speak of right and wrong in churches and classrooms, all contribute to the moral expectations that combatants have for themselves and their sense of what is indeed “right” and “good.” Put another way, combatants can be seen to be the most direct instruments of our cultural and political ideas.

The moment of universal abstention can be one of significant power—the invitation given to the table, followed by silence and a significant time for reflection on why the congregation is abstaining. In this way, the church may attest to the moral clarity of the gospel without singling out the veteran for additional blame.

They are not the only ones that carry or shape them, but they may suffer the most for the distance between them as penultimate “goods” and that which is truly “good.”

Synthesis

As we explore the potential benefits of Basil’s rule in light of moral injury, its element of moral clarity certainly emerges as a much-needed benefit. Psychological researchers often admit that the discipline itself doesn’t have the vocabulary or disposition to adjudicate issues of right and wrong. Some researchers even seem to conflate moral injury and “survivor’s guilt,” ignoring the perpetrator aspect entirely. The general cultural ethos tends to valorize veterans to a suffocating degree, and the church often has lent its rich and complex theology of sin and human behavior to unequivocally calling certain conflicts “just” or “good.” Read through an Augustinian view of sin and the experience of moral injury, Basil’s rule offers an alternative—it recognizes the evil of war as such, resisting the cultural inertia to equate “necessary” with “good,” and takes seriously the guilt of combatants without totalizing it. There are circumstances, Basil contends, that make the killing done in war different than murder; yet he does not seem to lazily assume, as Freud initially did, that this distinction will prevent those involved in it from the moral taint of the act itself.

This refusal to dismiss the moral ambiguity of killing in conflict enables us to see a second major strength of Basil’s commendation: it recognizes the beginnings of a way back from “dirty hands” to reconciliation with the body of Christ. It focuses implicitly on an idea of penance—that there is some path to reconciliation, a way to atone for that wrong in which one has participated. For those in war who have killed others, such a thing is often difficult to imagine, as the victims of the war are often unknown personally to the combatants, and there are numerous factors that would preclude direct reconciliation. Yet once the concept of penance is opened, the path

for the morally injured veteran might be shaped in ways that facilitate healing in multiple ways. Their testimony about what they’ve experienced may be therapeutic for them and would serve as a powerful witness to the reality of modern warfare for the society that valorizes it as it does. The idea of being a truth teller who serves to correct a cultural illusion as a path of reconciliation might also provide a critical sense of purpose and hope—two aspects of life that moral injury tends to block.

In spite of these two strengths, Basil’s rule as stated seems to disconnect the greater church and congregation from the experience of the combatant in a way that is inauthentic in today’s society. It doesn’t contend easily with Augustine’s later idea of the prevalence and radicality of the power of sin to create webs of distortion that infect all of human civilization and in which every person in a society participates. When this connection is ignored, the rule certainly runs the risk of ostracizing the veteran, casting him out of the community rather than embracing him. Certainly, the idea of a pastor or priest turning away a veteran from the table is an image that few today would agree is helpful.

A better practice might be that the congregation at large should abstain from communion every other celebration.

Yet there are undoubtedly ways in which the rule can be modified in order to leverage the powerful aspects of the ritual to achieve an authentic witness to the gospel. For example, perhaps during times in which the United States armed forces are engaged in conflict, rather than asking or requiring that returned veterans abstain from communion for three years, a better practice might be that the congregation at large should abstain from communion every other celebration. If the purpose of the abstention initially was to allow room for the combatant to recognize the impurity in which he’s participated, then this

modification would allow the congregation also to recognize its own complicity in the conflict and stand in solidarity with all those who have returned. The moment of universal abstention can be one of significant power—the invitation given to the table, followed by silence and a significant time for reflection on why the congregation is abstaining. In this way, the church may attest to the moral clarity of the gospel without singling out the veteran for additional blame. The church identifies itself as a place of nuanced moral discernment to the morally injured, a place that will neither offer the empty platitude that “its not your fault” nor a condemnation of the insufficiency of their virtue. It identifies itself, in other words, as a place where sinners come together to figure out how to heal and find meaning in the gospel. Within this space and in the care of this community, the morally injured person perhaps can explore in more detail what healing, penance, and reconciliation means for them.

Accepting the invitation on the alternating weeks would be a way to remind the congregation, both the morally injured and those who aren't, that God's grace meets us all in the midst of our struggle. We take the bread and wine not because we are pure and innocent, but precisely because we are not. It may serve as a powerful symbol that there is hope even amidst penance, and grace along the arduous road home.

Notes

1. Basil of Caesarea, Letter CLXXXVIII in “The Nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron and the Letters,” trans. Blomfield Jackson in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), xiii.
2. Ibid.
3. Peter Dula, “A Theologian in Baghdad,” in *Cynicism and Hope: Reclaiming Discipleship in a*

4. *Postdemocratic Society*, ed. Meg E. Cox (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 101–108.
5. We are increasingly coming to the awareness today that many in different walks of life are experiencing forms of moral injury. My intent is not to exclude those examples, but to highlight the particular way in which veterans suffer in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Basil's rule in particular.
6. See Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 1–7, 64 for a more detailed discussion of the distinction he makes between “simple” and “complex” PTSD.
7. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 64.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. See Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 11–84 for a nuanced discussion of behaviors that seem to stem from moral injury.
11. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner Press, 1994), 182.
12. Brett T. Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29 (2009): 695–706 (695).
13. Michael Yandell, “The War Within,” *Christian Century* 132:1 (2015): 12–13 (12).
14. Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, trans. A. A. Brill and Alfred B. Kuttner (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Co., 1918), 20–21.
15. Robert Meagher, *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 13.
16. Certainly, just as no two experiences of warfare are the same for its combatants, no two cases of moral injury are identical; care must be taken in making generalizations that risk undercutting the uniqueness of the narratives themselves.



Praying with the Poor in a Violent World

Cláudio Carvalhaes

With support from the Council of World Mission, I am leading a project called *Re-Imagining Worship as Acts of Defiance and Alternatives in the Context of Empire*. Twenty-five to thirty scholars, pastors, and students from four continents gather to visit one country in each area, living with poor communities for a few days and then creating liturgical resources from those places. This endeavor has been a life-changing experience, and we can never see liturgy being done the same way again. For a week, we immersed ourselves in the lives of the poor and had to think and pray and write and worship from places many of us have never seen or lived in. At the time of this writing, the group has visited Manila, Philippines, and Johannesburg, South Africa. A trip to Kingston, Jamaica, is forthcoming.

This project is composed to focus on the places in which liturgy is created. Bringing together people from each continent adds to the diversity of thinking, doing, and living the Christian faith. We aim to move away from the idea of liturgy as something done on behalf of the people to actually having people create their own liturgical resources. “People” here means local people along with pastors, students, liturgists, theologians, Bible scholars, historians, artists, pastoral caregivers, and other scholars. The project is to create a book of worship from the ground, a book that will connect with other poor people around the world and create what I am calling *liturgical solidarity*. These liturgies reflect the realities of people’s lives in their own local settings with local issues at stake. Place matters.¹ Place gives us priorities, moves the heart, organizes thinking, shifts the eyes; it makes us hear what matters, taste local foods, touch other holy things, and challenges us to respond to different wonders and tragedies.

This project assumes the backdrop of the notion of empire. The project proposal explains the following understanding of empire:

God’s mission has always taken place in the midst of Empire. God becomes incarnate through Jesus in an imperial world. While the story of his birth and his eventual execution tell a story of adversity in the midst of Empire, the story of Jesus also tells a story of defiance in the face of death, and more importantly through his resurrection it tells a story of hope. Our stories today parallel the story of Jesus in the midst of Empire. We speak of Empire, because we discern a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world today that constitutes a reality and a spirit of domination, enslaving God’s creation; an all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged communities, while imperiously excluding even sacrificing humanity and exploiting creation; a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed—the worship of money, goods and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed; the colonization of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking in compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life. The challenge before the church today is to become a discipleship community, following the example of Jesus in our public witness in the context of Empire.²

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How can we think about liturgy and do liturgy when the context that guides the thinking and doing is a pulsing reality filled with poverty, disaster, fear, hunger, horror, and violence? What do scholars in the United States do when we live and support one of the most horrific forces of empire with its economic and military control of the world? When our liturgies are disconnected from the forces of death, when we pray under the empire without vividly naming the powers of death, we are offering a *soft* support to the powers of destruction and domination.

Thus, when we associate the doing and thinking of liturgy within situations of terror, our prayers necessitate a different grammar—a grammar of awareness, of rebuke, of resistance, of transformation, of life pulsing in the midst of death. In many ways, denominational worship books are rendered meaningless, for they are never fully located in the bodies of the poor who endure the full and real pain of our times. We need liturgies that can rage against destruction and prophesy against local injustices, dismantling forms of power that kill: patriarchy, racism, sexism, economic injustice, and exploitation.

I am not advocating for the avoidance or deletion of denominational books of worship but rather for finding ways to engage with other languages, other feelings, other theologies, other cultures, other situations, other classes, other ways of being. As we move into these processes we need to listen, to read, to learn, and to be open, not only to new words but also to other liturgical settings, movements, gestures, and ways of worshiping as we move towards living together under a new reality, a reality that is common to all, a reality that tries to connect when we are pitched against each other under feelings of fear, suspicion, and anger. By stepping forward and being with, we work on these differences knowing that some will need to lose in order for others to gain. This is what shifting power dynamics means.

Throughout this project, I have been disturbed by the amount of violence in the lives of people and cannot find solace in worship books. The context of the empire is brutal, drenched in many forms of unspeakable violence. When I was a pastor of undocumented communities in the United States, I could feel the breath of violence in their lives every single minute of the day—it did not matter whether Democrats or Republicans were in office. During my time in Manila and Johannesburg, I was exposed to forms of violence that impacted me deeply, even though it was not much different from what

indigenous and black people and immigrants have gone through in the United States.

Liturgy and Violence in Manila

After so many years of colonialism, the Philippines is a fertile ground for fascism. The country is controlled by a few rich people, and neoliberalism has the upper hand of the state. A fascist government led by Rodrigo Duterte is in place, using martial law and extrajudicial killings as necropolitics, expelling indigenous people from their own lands, selling the country's natural resources to agribusiness. The government is in the hands of China's economy and U.S. militarization and does not know how to address the poverty in the country. The fifteen richest Filipinos are worth 57 billion dollars, more money than is held by the remaining 79.6 million people. Eight hundred three thousand jobs in the agricultural sector were lost in the last quarter due to agribusiness. There are no workers' rights and most jobs offer low wages.

We visited four communities: (1) Indigenous people's communities in the province of Rizal, where people are victims of militarization, forced evacuations, demolitions, and extrajudicial killings. They are continuously harassed by land grabbers, mining companies, and the government military forces. (2) Workers' organizations in the province of Bulacan and Southern Tagalog areas. The workers are victims of unfair labor practices. Two workers' organizations in different communities are on hunger strikes. (3) Urban poor communities, victims of demolition because of development aggressions. (4) Peasant communities in the Batangas or Kalinga areas. They are victims of land conversions, militarization, and demolitions, and some of their members are victims of extrajudicial killings.

On the first day, after we were introduced to these communities, someone from the National Council of Churches came to talk to us about safety. We had to be alert about how we would talk; no social media was allowed. If we were jailed, they would have lawyers to deal with it. They were very organized and aware of everything, and they could not promise us that nothing bad would happen to us.

When we all came back from our days with the people, we were emotionally exhausted and deeply disturbed. We had seen so much pain and death—mothers losing their sons to police brutality and the war on drugs. Mothers wailed from pain in the worship services we had with them. We wept with indigenous children whose schools

were bombed by the government and paramilitary movements, for they were accused of being places for revolutionaries. These kids had no place to go. We cried with workers who earn so little they don't have money to go back home and so they sleep on the streets. We wept with people who were without resources and abandoned to their poverty.

It was during the two days writing the liturgical resources that we felt life coming back to us; it was a life-giving time when we found ways to address people's pains and found ways to connect God and real situations, life and liturgy, the life of our faith and the faith of our life. One of the tasks we had was to write prayers engaging our rage and anger. One of the prayers done by a group was filled with cursing and bad words. In any other place this prayer would be blasphemous and outrageous. However, for this group, even though we were theologically very diverse, there was something deeper at stake: the life of the disenfranchised under the brutality of the empire. The pain of our brothers and sisters were such that cursing was another "theological" way of addressing that which we don't have words to say properly. One immense joy was to learn from the local Christians. The people of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines are amazing, and the people of the Union Theological Seminary in Manila do work that any seminary in the United States is able to do. The church is alive in the Philippines.

At the heart of any liturgical work is the body, the body of the people that hurts, the bodies of abandoned communities, the bodies of forgotten societies. The violence inflicted on the bodies of the poor is the work of empire breaking their back, contaminating their food, taking away any possibility for medical care, confusing their thoughts, weighing on their hearts, and depressing their spirits. Any liturgy that does not wrestle with these major issues and give us language to tackle it cannot be seen as the relation between God's full glory and our full humanity. As one participant commented:

Both liturgy and violence are something done to the body. Knowingly or unknowingly, liturgy is at times done to the body in a violent way. The way we deny basic life needs/provisions. The way we form and restrict bodies and gender. The way we teach and preach reason but not holistic good news to people. The words and liturgy are engraved/inscribed in our bodies.

Through the worship service we participate in our life together. Whether these liturgical formations help us fight and resist the impartial violence of this world remains with the reflective work by the church people. Are we only obsessed with the beauty of liturgy? Dare we turn our eyes to see the ugly and painful, even bloody realities of suffering and violence, so that our liturgy is well informed of the ugliness it can take and transform into its own way of beauty and life?³

Our hope is that after these workshops we might dare to turn towards the poor. Another participant gave an indictment of our own liturgical work:

Liturgy without addressing the evils and violence of the world is pointless and meaningless. Liturgy itself becomes a tool of violence, to those who appreciate the beauty of religiosity, yet becoming blind to the ugliness of the world. It is a form of empty religion. What good is it to worship God and have faith in him when one does not reflect his love, compassion, and justice to the world who needs it? Liturgy then becomes a bubble for the religious Pharisees, who only want to feel good in their assurance of God's love and salvation while the world is in chaos.⁴

Liturgical Work from Manila and Johannesburg

With the above comments in mind, I offer a small sample of the liturgical work done in response to the group's visit to Manila and one baptism prayer from Johannesburg.

From the Valley of Dry Bones into a Playground

God of Life, we are living in a valley of dry bones
We have lost our identity . . . we have lost our
humanity

We are unable to feel, we are so numb
We are unable to reach out to the poor,
to those we have segregated as religious and social
outcast

We have forgotten our being *adamab*: the tiller . . .
the steward.

The whole of creation groans in travail
God of Life, we are living in a valley of dry bones
We have lost our identity . . . we have lost our
humanity

Wars, killings, acts of terror and insurgencies
 surround us
 Deaths happen in every corner
 People are dying before their time every tick of
 the clock
 Children and women are being trafficked everyday
 in the millions
 Our communities are disintegrating and
 descending into chaos and lifelessness.
 God of Life, we are living in a valley of dry bones
 We have lost our identity . . . we have lost our
 humanity
 Descend upon us once again
 May your Spirit restore to wholeness our humanity
 May we image you once again
 Enable us to touch our neighbors and build
 solidarities
 Enable us to build peace and institute justice in
 our relationships
 Enable us to break the barriers that are destroying
 our communities
 Enable us to bridge the gaps that separate us from
 each other
 Transform this valley of dry bones
 Into a playground of the children of God. Amen.
 —Julian, Ferdinand, Carleen

A Prayer

For the roads that we have blocked
 For the bridges that we didn't build
 For the empty table that we didn't fill
 Forgive us.

I Shall Not

I shall not mourn for deaths framed as self-defense
 Nor shall I mourn for children starved to death
 I won't mourn for lands consumed by the selfish
 Or even lives denied by slave-shops
 Never!
 I will not give the rich the satisfaction of my
 vulnerability
 Instead, I mourn for the loss of their humanity
 And I mourn for the Nazarene
 Who worked so hard to redeem it
 So if ever my tears drop
 They send atomic ripples beneath ivory towers

Worship in between Spaces in the Philippines

In the space between pulpit and pews
 There's a sermon
 There's a baby crying of hunger

And plenty rushing to calm her
 Before the need to be fed
 Becomes the only message heard

In the space between breath and air
 Is the smog of traffic
 There's steam from clothes
 hanging in the sun
 Up high like fuel costs
 As the fumes of false hope
 Draw people to capital cities

In the space between factory and public road
 Is a tarp stretched over a bamboo shelter
 Three kids call it home
 And their kitchen
 Is a charcoaled pot
 Sitting lonely on two bricks

In the space between mother and umbrella
 Is a child
 clutching to a fading tomorrow
 As greedy companies collapse unions
 And parents disguise their fears
 Smiling at their young
 playing basketball

In the space between bible and policies
 Is a missing paper trail
 Smearred with the blood of the outspoken
 Systemically hidden
 While unsafe workplaces
 Pull the trigger on another
 And death continues
 To fall on gold-filled ears

In the space between church and shopping mall
 Clouds are painted with electric cables
 Peaceful protesters charged
 Police plug corpses with evidence
 But the real shock
 are the foreign ties
 Worn with white collars

In the space between life and living wage,
 There's a community-run school
 desperate for funding
 There are families
 sharing scraps with animals
 But the real beast
 Is the smell of displacement

In the space between CEO and a pregnant teacher
There's a birthquake of resistance
Conceived through churches and workers
Laboring the pains of solidarity
While men with big briefcases
tempt abortion

In the space between pulpit and pews
Poor people are praying
Tears flowing down to the feet of Christ
Like the river Jordan
Where the Word was preached
And liberation made flesh
Where real worship begins
And the message of HOPE lingers

Prayer

O Lord,
We pray for rest,
for the thousands of lives unjustly murdered in the
name of war on drugs;
We pray for cure,
for the mothers and wives whose hearts are being
torn apart by the loss of their beloved;
We pray for peace,
for the communities traumatized by random
killings, not knowing if they will be the next
tomorrow;
We pray for repentance,
for those who are powerfully armed, yet point
their guns at the poor and powerless.
Lord, hear our prayer as we take refuge in you.

Eucharist

Creator God, in whose Word darkness was
shattered, in whose breath dust became being,
and in whose love bondage became liberty.
We approach your table unworthy even of the
crumbs that fall beneath it. Broken as we are,
we draw nearer in faith, knowing that you are
and always will be our first Love.
In history, you have loved us into being, you have
loved us into freedom, and you have loved us
even when we were unlovable.
We praise you without ceasing, and give thanks
now and forever. Amen.

[Communion Hymn]

One: I was hungry
church was opened
I entered there

"The table is ready" Christ said
I have received a piece of bread
For me, it was not bread
but life itself
I was on a journey to retain my life
A black, crushed, blood-stained hand fed me.

All: Amen, Lord, give us our daily bread.

One: God, feed the hungry.

All: Lord, put us in poverty, so that we share life with the poor.

One: Go and be the bread for the hungry.

All: Lord, we only have five loaves of bread in our hands.

One: Bring it to the Lord's Table.

[Five women bring the bread forth.]

All: Lord, accept our offering.

One: Yet there are still many who thirst.

All: Lord, we have coconut water with us.

One: Bring it to the Lord's Table.

[Two children bring the water.]

All: Lord, accept our offering.

Offering Prayer

[Leader holds up loaves of bread.]

One: Our workers shed their sweat, blood, and everything for this fellowship. These are the products of their struggle. This bread comes from the people who slept without food.

All: God of life, bless this bread and the hands that prepared it.

[Leader holds up coconut water.]

One: Our farmers bring forth the coconuts, fruits of their labor. They live in poverty and are themselves thirsty for emancipation. Through this water, we share in their tears.

All: God our everlasting fountain, bless this juice and the hands that harvest.

One: May this bread and coconut water be the body and blood of our Lord.

All: Amen. Let it renew us all.

One: On the night before he was betrayed, the Lord took bread in his hand, he took wine and said . . . this is my body . . . this is my blood.

All: Lord, by receiving your body and blood we surrender ourselves to your mission of salvation. Let us too be a light to others. Amen.

Prayer of Dismissal

Eternal God, we have partaken in the communal meal as you have demonstrated to us but we are far from community. As sinners, we seek the guidance of your Spirit, to bring us nearer to Christ and fashion us in the ways of your divine community today, tomorrow, and beyond. In Jesus we pray, Amen.

Prayer of Repentance / Penitence

God of the homeless with no place to sleep or
even store their worldly goods,
God of the beggar to whom we have not given
money,
God of the hungry who sell and eat lumps of soil
as their food,
God of those who sell their bodies,
God of the men and the women who pee in the
streets . . .

[*Sing: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."*]

Jesus, who looked at the thief and the beggar with
love, who invited the thief into your kingdom,
who asked the sick and the poor what they
needed,
We repent as the church, your disciples who say,
Do not come to us; the Lord is too busy . . .
Our church is too clean, our communion is too
holy.

Lord Jesus, who looked at the rich young ruler and
felt pity,
Forgive us for denying you three times, many
times.
Forgive us for the way we have come
Listening to people's stories, buying them a piece
of soap maybe,
Coming as shining lights—glimmers of hope.

We say a generalized prayer for the poor, the
hungry, the homeless, the motherless
With our eyes closed in holy prayer,
And as we open our eyes, we see the seven we
started to pray for have become seventy-seven,
Gathering around, asking us to pray.

And then, looking at the time, we look away and
move on
To our next appointment.
As we leave, we hear their desperate questions—
when are you coming back to visit us?

[*Sing: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."*]

Our God, we come before you with broken hearts,
contrite hearts.
Your heart is breaking for them, and for us—you
are their glimmer of hope, our glimmer of
hope.

We pray not for the homeless and the poor, the
sick and the vulnerable;
We pray for ourselves, who should be their answer
to prayer.
Challenge us to not walk away sadly like the rich
young ruler or the Sadducee.

Transform our hearts and our lives, transform our
church, turn us inside out
That we may respond without fear,
But with open hearts, open pockets, open homes,
and open churches.

[*Sing: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."*]

Baptism Prayer from Johannesburg

God, we know that you have created a covenantal
community, one where all are invited to enjoy life in
abundance. As we come to celebrate this baptism,
this water symbolizes for us death and life: death
to an old life and resurrection into a new one.
Similarly, we know it calls for us to be life in a dying
world. Bless now this water that you created that it
will cleanse, heal, and transform. We cry out for a
blessing of the rivers of Africa, that they would flow
in abundance, cleansing and replenishing our land.

We bring before you your child [*insert name*].
[*He/she*] lives in a continent whose resources have
been abused and plundered by the powerful forces
of empire. Education is a scarce service, drug
abuse fills the streets, human trafficking plagues
communities, and poverty gnaws at empty stomachs
while the rich sit fat and comfortable. Provide for
and protect this child through us, [*his/her*] family.
Hold us to account that we would be your hands

and feet, your provision, your protection. Receive them now in Jesus' name, Amen.

Liturgies and Power Dynamics

What the people in these workshops desire is to end violence by shifting the power dynamics of our society. In its small gestures, liturgies can be seeds that can enact larger actions, expansive forms of organization, and works of solidarity. As Siobhán Garrigan says:

I suggest that our liturgies themselves sometimes contribute to and sometimes challenge our violent world, at times within one service. How effective they are in either regard depends largely on the way they conduct the social and cultural power that flows through them, because violence is usually the product of misplaced or abused power.⁵

The restoration of justice within liturgical small actions can cause a ripple effect into larger forms of relations. Worship services must entail a voice and action of restitution and restoration. Our worship demands moral standards that must be lived within the liturgical spaces but also outside in the world. The desires that we learn to foster and feed in our worship services continue to shape our daily lives. The restoration of lives, be it economically, racially, sexually, and so on must be lived in our worship. In this way, our worship services will demand daily lives restored and, in turn, will demand a worship that is a work of ongoing restoration.

Every church can create its own common/community worship book. This task entails praying with others who are on the other side of the social/economic/racial/sexual divide. That means moving into those parts of town that we don't know how to connect or engage. That means being with other people. That means a *step forward* into fearful and unknown places in order to create bridges and relations.⁶

Garrigan suggests that actions are not enough without interactions: "no action can occur independently of its immersion in interaction."⁷ What we need to do is to find those small interactions in our communities that can expand themselves with other people, championing causes of those who are oppressed and engaging other religions and other social organizations such as poor people's campaigns, and go beyond the narrowness of

our own understandings. Fundamentally, these interactions must engage the animals, the sea, the whole earth and its biodiversities as equals in God's creation. By shifting power dynamics in each community, we can expand the possibilities of changes from the ground up.

Conclusion

At the end of this workshop, in the testimonies of literally all participants we could read one major line: "I never knew I could do liturgy and do it this way. I now feel we can relate our lives to God in ways that connect our liturgies and the lives of our people. This way of doing liturgy empowers our ability to worship God faithfully and to serve the poor and the earth also more faithfully."

With this article, I am suggesting that no liturgy can be done if not with the poor and without naming the violence that surrounds them. As liberation theologians asked us about forty years ago, we need to convert from our social class to the lives of the poor. I believe this challenge still stands. If we pray with the poor, we can help form ways to resist and to offer liturgical solidarity. Either through cathartic prayers or silence, we can deal with our own unspoken desires for violence, our own forgetfulness of the poor, our own fears, and turn our hearts to God, whose heart is with those who are poor.

Notes

1. I have already worked on the notion of place and territory in the article "In Spirit and in Truth: The Liturgical Space as Territory," in *Common Worship in Theological Education*, ed. Todd E. Johnson and Siobhán Garrigan (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009).
2. To read the whole proposal of the project *Re-Imagining Worship As Acts of Defiance and Alternatives in the Context of Empire*, see www.claudio-carvalhaes.com/blog/re-imagining-worship-as-acts-of-defiance-and-alternatives-in-the-context-of-empire.
3. Text written by participants without name.
4. Text written by participants without name.
5. Siobhán Garrigan, "Worship in a Violent World: Deconstructing 'Ordinary' Liturgies," *Reflections, A Magazine of Theological and Ethical Inquiry from Yale Divinity School* (Winter 2004), <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/violence-and-theology/worship-violent-world-deconstructing-ordinary-liturgies>.
6. See Cláudio Carvalhaes, *Eucharist and Globalization: Redrawing the Borders of Eucharistic Hospitality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).
7. Siobhán Garrigan, "Worship in a Violent World."

On Liturgy: Saturday's Silence

Mary Beth Anton

On the morning of July 20, 2012, I stood in my kitchen baking scones. It was Friday, my day off, which explains why I was at home and not at church. My husband had already left for his office. Our two teenagers were asleep, the doors to their rooms closed. As is my habit I listened to Classic FM UK via Internet radio while I baked. At the top of the hour the newscaster in London began his report, "At a midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* a gunman opened fire in a movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado. We have reports of 12 dead and 70 injured, 58 from gunfire." My breath caught, and my heart began to pound as I listened. Irrationally I ran down the hall to the rooms of my children to see that they were safely in their beds. The night before both attended a midnight screening of *The Dark Knight* with a group of their friends. Finding them sound asleep, I returned to my kitchen. Over and over I said to myself, "*It could have been them.*" Mothers in Colorado just like me, lives ripped apart by unspeakable violence.

The list of incidents of mass violence in the United States seems endless: Oklahoma City. Columbine. 9/11. Virginia Tech. Sandy Hook. Boston. Charleston. Las Vegas. Orlando. Parkland. Add to it the countless individual acts of violence experienced by children and adults, and I become overwhelmed. I cannot imagine if something happened in my family or community. Questions linger: *Has God abandoned us? Is God dead? Where do we turn?*

The psalmist declares, "I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121). But how?

The morning of September 11, 2001, began like any other. At 8:05 the lower school children gathered for the morning service just as they did every day at the Episcopal day school where I served as chaplain. After worship I stopped in the main office next to All Saints Chapel. Everyone stood around a television near the headmistress's desk. Together we watched in stunned silence. As reality sank in my first thought was to pick up my children from their classrooms and run for home. But I knew that my place was with our school community.

Middle and upper school chapels were scheduled later in the morning. To the usual order of Morning Prayer we added Scripture readings from the Psalms, hymns, and prayer petitions. As I remember that Tuesday I am so grateful that worship was already a central part of our communal life. Though our school was diverse both culturally and religiously, every day in chapel we found common ground. There we turned to the One who made heaven and earth, the Lord from whom our help comes.

It is a natural response, I think, to gather together in the aftermath of violence to keep vigil, to worship, lament, and pray. To create space for anger, fear, grief, and tears. Our liturgical heritage gives direction and shape for how we might plan for worship in tragic circumstances. Every year during Holy Week Christians observe The Three Days. A service following an act of violence might find its place in the silence of Holy Saturday.

The violence of Good Friday over, Jesus' body laid in a borrowed tomb, the community of Jesus' followers was left with death and silence. Their world torn apart, the first disciples awaited their own fates in fear, numb with pain and grief. On

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that Saturday the alleluias of Palm Sunday must have seemed inexpressibly distant. In the silence of that Sabbath Saturday did they wail and weep, inconsolable? All they could do was wait for an unknowable future, desperately hoping to see a glimmer of the redemptive activity of God.

That ancient Saturday has something to offer those who suffer and who gather together: *space where God will meet us*. None other than the incarnate God who is always with us and for us. The One who fully knows and understands violence and the resulting horror, anger, and fear. The Scriptures promise that in Jesus “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15–16). In the aftermath of violence, might we gather our communities for worship in the silence of Holy Saturday, trusting that God will be with us?

In the silence of Holy Saturday, we may claim a space for prayer even when words fail and hope is gone. When our prayers are empty, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will pray on our behalf: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words”

(Rom. 8:26). The Holy Spirit moves among the gathered community in ways we cannot fathom. And in the silent space of Saturday the first sparks of Easter fire glimmer with resurrection hope.

In chapel on the first anniversary of 9/11, the upper school choir sang “O Day of Peace” (*Glory to God*, 373), voicing our deepest desires:

May swords of hate fall from our hands,
our hearts from envy find release,
till by God’s grace our warring world shall
see Christ’s promised reign of peace.

Should tragedy strike, may we and our communities of faith find hope and the courage to seek peace in Saturday’s silence.

Postscript: Some years ago, my friend Lana Russell, a pastor in Austin, Texas, told me of a book she had read, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* by Alan E. Lewis. Lana and I discussed the themes of Dr. Lewis’s book as she described them to me at length. I bought it, but never read it. Obviously, the theme of Holy Saturday stayed with me. I am not sure of the extent of my debt to Dr. Lewis’s work. It’s time to take his book off the shelf and read it.



John Stuart

On Music: Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachtani

Peter Ncanywa

The year is 1999. It is a cool autumn evening. The air is abuzz with excitement as everyone in the country has taken part in the recent second democratic election—the election that secured the African National Congress’s second term as the governing party. It was another victorious year that reminded people of the end of governmental oppression, the promise of equality, and anticipation of a new and better life for future generations. The energy still lingered in the air. However, on this cool autumnal day, I mourned a deep loss that shattered my ten-year-old world. The death of my 120-pound Rottweiler, Rex. As I stood in my parents’ bedroom looking out into the garden where he and I used to play, I sobbed for what felt like hours. On the television in the background, “Life” by Des’ree was airing on the Simunye Channel: We Are One.

Fast forward to June of 2005. I received a call from my mom telling me to get ready. Someone would be picking us up shortly to take us to Grandma’s house. As irritable as my sixteen-year-old self was that my weekend was being ruined, I got ready along with my sister. We were picked up by a family friend and were given no information as to why we were heading to Gran’s house on a Sunday evening. This was one of three Sundays of school holidays and it was slipping away from me. In no mood to make small talk, I sat in sullen silence for most of the thirty-minute drive. We arrived at the house and my mom, aunt, and older sisters were nowhere to be found. Cousins and great aunts and uncles greeted us with looks of pity and sadness as we made our way to find my immediate family. A lump formed in my throat. In my heart, I knew what a gathering like this meant. I knew what it meant for the furniture to be moved outside or pushed aside. I knew what it meant to have people walking in

with their heads covered, Bibles in hand, speaking in hushed voices, and hymns being sung in the lounge. *Umthandazo*—an evening home prayer service to help a grieving family.

I remember keeping my composure when my great aunt told us that my grandmother had passed away a couple of hours earlier. I could not quiet my mind from thoughts racing through my head and the guilt I felt for selfishly thinking about the movie on pause at home. My little sister, on the other hand, voiced what I felt in the most primal song of heartache: a heart-wrenching wail. My mother sat puffy eyed next to her. People came and shared their condolences. We all went into the dining room where chairs were set up facing one end—a *makeshift church*, I thought. An elderly man from my grandmother’s Wesleyan Methodist church was speaking on some verse from the Book. My cousin looked up at him from his chair in front facing us, the congregation. *He’s so eager to share what he has learned at seminary*, I thought. And then someone broke into song just as my older sister began crying. “*Eloi, eloi lema sabachtani. Thixo wam undisbiya ngani. Bawo wam undisbiya ngani.*” As the wails grew, so did the chorus: the chorus of people who sang remembering the deaths of their loved ones; the chorus surrounding us and reminding us to have faith; the chorus of people saying that, even though the *intsika* (center pole) of our home had fallen, we would find our feet again.

Death is difficult enough to deal with when one dies of natural causes. And I cannot imagine how much more so violent deaths can be. Amid dealing with shock, anger, hopelessness, a search for answers, and preparations for funeral arrangements, remembering what we are called to do becomes the last thing we want to do. What is that we are

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called to do? For me, the answer lies in the two greatest commandments in Mark 12:30–31. Jesus teaches us that to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” is the greatest commandment, the second being to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

I used to wonder why “Eloi, Lema Sabachtani” was sung *kwi-mithbandazo* and at funerals. A song that, from its call by *umblabeli* (the caller), sounds like an anguished cry. The very words that Jesus spoke on the cross in his moment of despair on the cross: My God, why have you forsaken me? Why would we sing those words?! The answer came to me when I realized that even in his darkest hour, the Son of God felt the pain of a brutal, unjust, and inhumane death. While knowing that the prophecy needed to be fulfilled, he too cried out and felt

abandoned. The human frailty, with which we are so well acquainted, was most evident. And yet, he also asked God to forgive those who were doing him wrong. Jesus did it for us. For the salvation of humankind, which was proven in his resurrection. The defeat of oppressive death and the promise of life everlasting.

This song, to me, meets mourners where they are in their state of grief, yet offers comfort and hope by reminding us that we are not alone in our pain. Our neighbors who came every evening for two weeks before my grandmother’s funeral showed us love through their presence, through the preparation of meals, through leading home evening services, by responding to the callers when they broke into song, and by helping us sing words of faith we were unable to speak.



John Stuart

On Preaching: Overcoming Violence in the Scriptural World and Our Own

David E. Lower

I will never ever again accept a God, or support a church, that is in any way party to what happened to me,” she said. The classroom kept still to hear her stories. She recounted experiences of being abused by Christian men in her family. “Sometimes they would cite violent and patriarchal Scriptures and liturgy to justify what they were doing,” she remembered. “And not one time did our ministers ever ask about my wounds.” “How brave that you’re here,” our theology professor replied. “And how brave of you to share your story. I wonder if we in the church and synagogue and mosque could ever meet your courage with the kind of self-reflection that inspired change requires.” It has been over twenty years since I first heard personal testimony from a victim of the Christian church. As one who has since become a Christian worship practitioner and preacher, I carry her story with me as a reminder of what is at stake in the interpretation and proclamation of the gospel. This brave woman’s witness continues to remind me that how a community relates to Scripture, and to one another, can make the difference between a gospel that gives life and a threat to the gospel that takes life away.

Furthermore, as a religious leader steeped in social privilege, it is important for me and the congregations I serve to attend to our potential blind spots, of which there can be many when it comes to violence and Christian faith. The privilege of not being immediately threatened by violence can make it seem less urgent to see and address, both in the community and in our sacred texts. The Scriptures, of course, contain stories of violence and gender/racial/cultural supremacy, and even at times attribute such things to the will and work of God.¹ Sometimes in the same breath, our sacred texts also call for peace and nonviolence, and attribute

such things to the will and work of God.² When it comes to violence, Scripture can be an ambiguous resource of discordant voices, leaving readers subject to confirmation bias. Whatever our views about violence, the Bible offers supporting verses.

Yet the definitive word given to us on violence we receive in Jesus Christ, the embodiment of the divine, who did not perpetrate violence, but experienced and ultimately overcame it. If we see God through the lens of Christ, then we see that the way of violence is not the way or the will of God. Violence is instead a form of human sin often used by those in power to maintain it and resist God’s will for justice and righteousness.³ Christ suffered and was killed by human violence, but rose ultimately triumphant over it.

While the Christian ethic stands against violence as a tool of oppression, we do so leaning on the Bible’s complicated authority on the subject. Wil Gafney identifies the imperative that we not neglect the roots of violence in our sacred texts, and the ways they contribute to our theologies. While the Bible struggles to envision a world in which violence and rape are not normative, we can.⁴ And we can do so standing on sound Christian theology with a careful relationship to the Scriptures of our faith.

We have now entered an era of exposure in which certain forms of violence that the powerful used to keep hidden and controlled have become visible. This is a time capable of producing great change or doing great harm. So, we the church must lead, speaking clearly against violence and taking responsibility for potential misuses of our sacred texts to justify violence and subjugation. This imperative is outlined by our worship tradition, which directs us to make clear that the Christ’s gospel and church stand against violence and injustice, and for peace.⁵

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In our worship lives, we must maintain a clear, coherent, and consistent Christian theology and ethic of antiviolenence and nonviolent resistance to oppression. This theology and ethic should consistently accompany our Scriptures so that their multiple voices on the subject can be made ultimately clear. Thank goodness for the strength of new resources now adopted by our denomination for this important ecclesial work, including the Belhar Confession (1986, adopted in 2016), the *Glory to God* hymnal (2013), and the revised *Book of Common Worship* (2018).⁶ These resources offer possibilities for confession of sin, affirmation of faith, and prayers of intercession that make the Christian theology and ethic of nonviolence clear.⁷

I am also seeking to maintain this clear, coherent, and consistent Christian theology and ethic of antiviolenence in preaching. Now there are all sorts of problems the subject of violence poses in worship, including speaking about mature themes in an intergenerational audience. But even so, it seems important to address in appropriate ways and not avoid Scriptures or verses that normalize or divinize violence.⁸

In addition to addressing instead of avoiding Scripture's problematic treatments of violence, we must also relate the peace-yearning God revealed in Christ to the world in which we live. It feels important to call out current examples of domineering violence—like domestic abuse, police brutality, and hate crimes—as contrary to the way and will of God. It also feels important, especially for privileged preachers like me, to lift up voices of those marginalized and victimized by the culture of violence, by sharing our pulpits, speaking their truths and telling their stories, or by preaching collaboratively. And finally, it feels important, perhaps now more than ever, to do our best to embody in our preaching the virtues of Christ himself—boundary-crossing, compassion, inclusion, humility, and resistance to oppression and hypocrisy.

Violence is normative in the world out of which our Scriptures come, and in the world to which they now speak. But in Christ, we encounter God, whose nature is not violent, but compassionate; whose will is not control, but freedom; whose means is not domination, but justice; whose vision is not the way things are, but the way things can and will become. If we unpackage the scriptural witness for this essence—clearly, coherently, and consistently—in our worship and preaching, we can be shaped by God's vision and become partners in a new world

where nonviolence, reconciliation, and peace are normative. We can help usher forth God's kingdom by not letting the violent norms of our ancestors, or our own, be handed down any further through the church and its Bible.

Notes

1. Among numerous examples, see Numbers 31:15–18, Joshua 24:5–8, Luke 12:45–47, and Revelation 19:17–21.
2. Among numerous examples, see Psalm 85, Luke 6:28, and Romans 12:17–21.
3. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Ethic of Jesus," in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper Row: 1935), 22–38.
4. Wil Gafney, "God, the Bible, and Rape," *The Huffington Post*, January 15, 2013.
5. PC(USA) Directory for Worship, (W-5.0304): "[In the Service for the Lord's Day], we confess our participation in unjust systems, pray for an end to violence and injustice, offer our gifts to support Christ's liberating work, and commit ourselves to pursue peace and justice in Jesus' name."
6. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2018). The revised BCW has a strengthened "Justice and Reconciliation" section of prayers and services for responding to violence and injustice, pp. 591–632.
7. Confession language: "Unable to live as you intend, we inflict harm and hurt on others and on ourselves as well" (BCW, p. 617). Petition language: "Bring an end to the horror of war; make all violence cease" (BCW, p. 622). Affirmation language: "We believe . . . that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world" (Belhar Confession, PC(USA) *Book of Confessions*, 2016, 10.5).
8. A possible example: "Exodus 14 characterizes God as both resistant to oppression and violent. The first of those is comfortable and believable, while the second is not. One way we Christians can resolve problems raised by our sacred texts is by viewing them through the lens of Jesus Christ. And in Christ we come to understand definitively that God does not perpetrate violence, but suffers and overcomes it. Remembering who and how God is in Christ can help us receive this epic of the Exodus as testimony to God's deliverance, told dramatically using the violent norms of the day."

On the Arts: To Gather

Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk

When unjust actions occur, it may be enough simply to gather—perhaps to sit in silence, to light candles, and to sing.

—*Book of Common Worship*, Introduction to the Justice and Reconciliation section

It may be enough simply to gather.

In the last congregation I served, we held a contemplative prayer service once a month. For many, the evening we gathered in candlelight and song was the highlight of the month. As is the case with many special services, we welcomed visitors and members of other congregations to our contemplative services and to the simple meal we shared afterwards. Centered on readings, silence, the lighting of candles, song, and a communion meal, the service taught me the importance of *simply gathering*. The atmosphere was a contrast to the hustle and bustle of Sunday morning. On contemplative prayer nights, it felt as if everyone came to be in the same room together—to sit in silence, light candles, and sing.

Though these services were not planned in response to specific violent events, they were scheduled times for the community to practice lament; name fears, doubts, and questions; and be held in the presence of God. Some months, of course, we did gather in the wake of national tragedies and mass shootings. We prayed in the midst of community crises, and individuals came to light candles in the face of experiences of personal trauma. The silence taught us we did not have to fill the air with words. As we watched candlelight grow, we marveled at the significance of such a small action. As we received nourishment from clay communion vessels, we remembered God's grace and our shared humanity. With twilight streaming

through the windows, we gathered in the midst of all that might keep us away to participate in God's good intentions for the world. We sat in silence until we began to sing.

Perhaps, I have often wondered, services in response to violent or traumatic events do not need embellishments. Questions are alive in our hearts and need room to breathe. Our pain and fear cannot be covered. Our feelings must be welcomed in the holy space made by gathering. These are times when the most important action is simply to gather. The simple riches we already have are enough—a gathering space, a candle, bread, and a song.

My thoughts about the importance of simple actions in worship come, in part, from my experience as an artist. My experiences of gathering also extend to art contexts and to spaces where viewers encounter art that invites them to bring their own experiences, identities, pains, or joys in real time and space. This kind of welcoming space brings viewers into relationship with one another, recognizing that some truths can best be named and honored when we are gathered. The contemplative service, too, leaves space for each person to come with honest questions or deep laments and to be named and known. When we gather we cannot pretend that we are not deeply related. Though this is always a crucial element of our liturgical theological imagination, it strikes me that it is especially important for communities in the wake of a violent event.

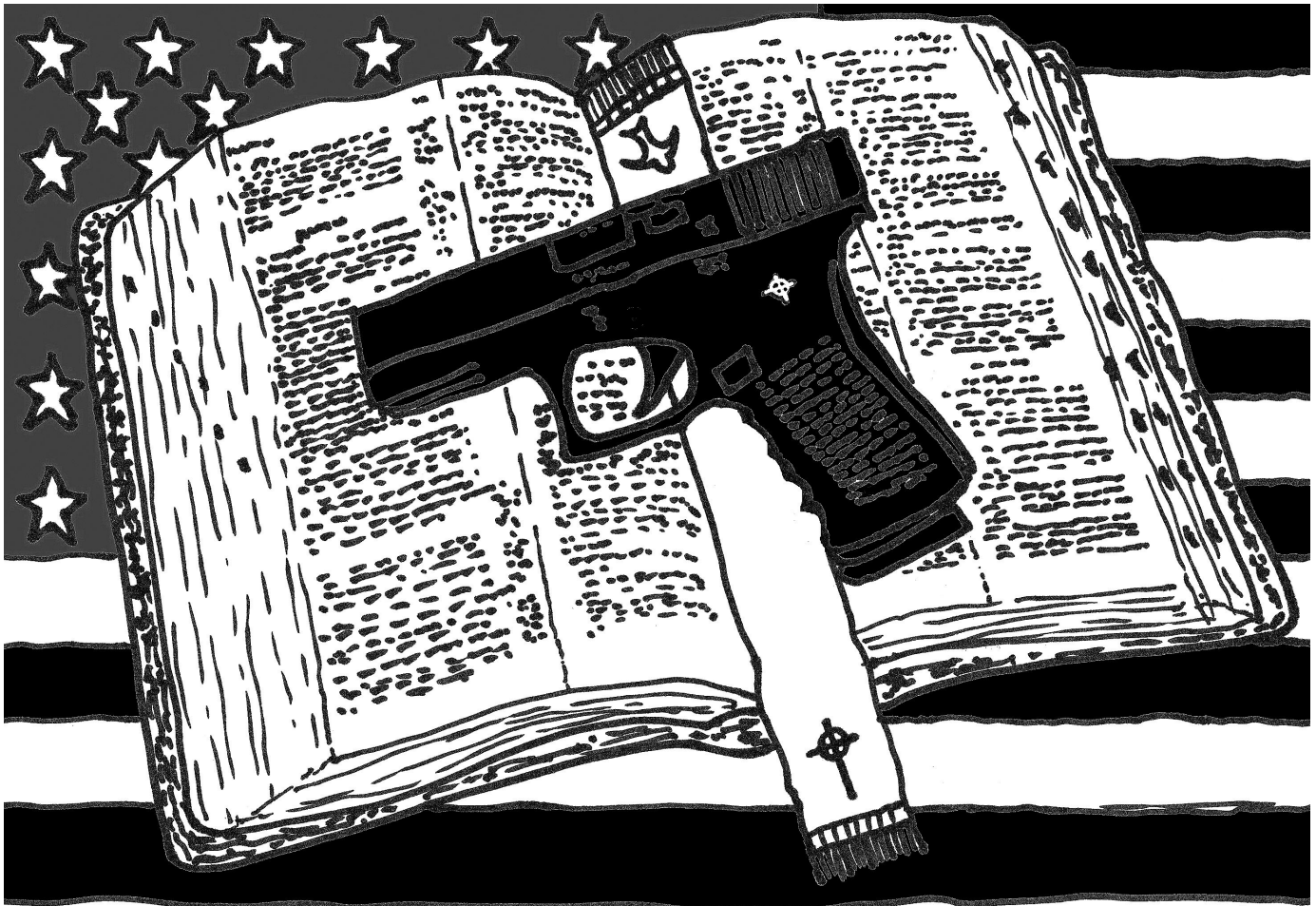
Perhaps our contemplative services created such crucial space not because of anything that was added to the service, but because of what was taken away. There were few extra words. Most every month, in fact, we learned that we needed extra silence. The silent, visual elements of the service helped us to

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hear familiar words of Scripture in profound new ways and called for bold, faithful honesty in the few words spoken from the table, through prayer and in song. The service invited us into a healing mystery discovered in the simple, ancient action of gathering in the presence of God.

“A Service after a Violent Event” included in the *Book of Common Worship* offers a prayer with these words, “The news of this day has ripped our hearts and torn our souls . . . in the depths of pain and anger we gather.”

In the depths of pain and anger, it may be enough simply to gather.



John Stuart

Ideas

“O God, Creator, Sovereign”

Text: William McConnell

Tune: LLANGLOFFAN

7.6.7.6.D

1. O God, Cre - a - tor, Sov - 'reign, Your peo - ple beg for bread. Our hun - gry bod - ies
2. O God, Re - deem - er, Sav - ior, Your peo - ple beg for life. Though col - or still di -
3. O God, Sus - tain - er, Teach - er, Your peo - ple beg for truth. Not shouts of cold in -
4. With Tray - von, Em - mett, Mar - tin, The lynched, the un - named more. The hanged, the shot, the

strug - gle, Our minds and hearts un - fed. You gave your peo - ple Is - rael sweet man - na from a -
vides us You see be - yond the strife. We strug - gle from our bi - as, Su - prem - a - cy of
jus - tice. Nor rhet - or - ic un - couth. Our in - sti - tu - tions fal - ter, The cords that bind us
bat - tered Whose deaths we oft ig - nore. We plead for in - ter - ven - tion, True jus - tice, not mere

bove. Sus - tain with fruit from hea - ven All peo - ple whom you love.
place. For - give us, free us, teach us to be one hu - man race.
fray. God mend us, heal us, save us to be your Church to - day.
words. Good God, we are your peo - ple. Come heal your sick, torn world.

This hymn names Trayvon Martin (1995–2012), Emmett Till (1941–1955), and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968)—three well-known casualties of racist violence in the United States. Sadly, there are countless others we might mention. Those who use this hymn may wish to include other names in the first line of the fourth stanza, or to include a musical interlude between the third and fourth stanzas in which others are named.

Text © 2018 William McConnell

Music: Welsh folk melody; Llwybrau Moliant, 1872; harm. The English Hymnal, 1906

“Praise God for Saints Who Sing”

Text: David Gambrell and Don C. Richter

Tune: EVELYN'S TUNE (SMD)

Harmony: Hal H. Hopson

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are as follows:

Praise God for saints who sing and teach the church to pray;
With Mir - i - am we sing thanks - giv - ing by the sea,
With Je - sus we sing psalms in joy and through de - spair;
Praise God for saints who sing, now rest - ing in Christ's peace:

with hymns of faith and faith - ful - ness they seek the Spir - it's way.
re - joic - ing in the Ho - ly One who gives us vic - to - ry.
thus shep - herd songs from long a - go be - come the chur - ch's prayer.
the an - cient and e - ter - nal choir whose praise will nev - er cease.

Then sing - ing let us pray and pray - ing let us sing,
With Han - nah we pro - claim the God who makes us strong;
With Paul and Sil - as too we raise our glad re - frains
Then sing - ing let us pray and pray - ing let us sing,

un - til with ho - ly har - mo - ny the earth and heav - ens ring!
with Ma - ry we take up the theme and mag - ni - fy the song.
to God who shat - ters sin and death and frees us from our chains.
un - til with ho - ly har - mo - ny the earth and heav - ens ring!

Words: David Gambrell and Don C. Richter, 2015
Music: TERRA BEATA (SMD); Franklin L. Shepherd, 1915

Hal Hopson and Don Richter dedicate this hymn to their uncle R. L. Hopson, joyful singer to the glory of God.

Author Bio

“Into Your Hands, Dear Savior”

Text: David Gambrell

Tune: PASSION CHORALE

In - to your hands, dear Sav - ior, we give you now to hold

The first system of the hymn consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

a child of your re - deem - ing, a lamb of your own fold.

The second system of the hymn consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Em - brace her with your mer - cy, re - ceive her in your peace

The third system of the hymn consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

to join the saint - ly chor - us whose hymns will nev - er cease.

The fourth system of the hymn consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Text: David Gambrell, 2015; based on the Commendation in the Service of Witness to the Resurrection (*Book of Common Worship*, 936).
Tune: PASSION CHORALE 7.6.7.6 D; Hans Leo Hassler, 1601; harm. Johann Sebastian Bach, 1729

Book Reviews

Recovering from Un-Natural Disasters: A Guide for Pastors and Congregations after Violence and Trauma

Laurie Kraus, David Holyan, and Bruce Wismer
(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017)

Reviewed by Cader Howard

How do we prepare ourselves and our congregations for the unimaginable? I will never forget the gut-wrenching anguish I felt when I answered an early morning phone call from a local police officer, informing me of the violent death of a young church member and asking me to be the first person to respond. Looking back to that morning and to the months that followed, as our congregation ministered to the family and tended to circles of friends within the church and in the community, I wish that I had owned a book then like *Recovering from Un-Natural Disasters: A Guide for Pastors and Congregations after Violence and Trauma*.

Laurie Kraus, David Holyan, and Bruce Wismer share practical considerations, pastoral insight, and theological depth as they draw from the deep wells of their own experience responding to congregations in pain. This comprehensive guide is written for pastors suddenly finding themselves leading a congregation in the throes of trauma from a range of unimaginable events occurring in their communities or even on church property, including domestic violence, terror attacks, mass shootings, murder-suicide, and arson. It's a book that no pastor wants to need, and yet every pastor should read and then keep on hand.

The guide is helpfully organized around "the four phases of human-caused disaster response," which are identified as (1) devastation and heroism, (2) disillusionment, (3) reforming, and (4) wisdom. The authors describe each phase in detail while offering suggestions for the appropriate pastoral response, practical steps to be taken, reflections on how to articulate theology and shape the liturgy, and special words of caution about common pitfalls. Special attention is given to clergy self-care,

responding to children, and caring for church staff. Over twenty pages of sensitively crafted worship resources in the appendixes are an unexpected gift.

In addition to this four-phase process, the authors offer three rich, guiding metaphors for understanding the shape of pastoral work after trauma. The first is Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann's familiar description of the movement of the psalms, first articulated in his book *The Message of the Psalms*. It's a movement from a settled orientation, to disorientation and lament, and finally to a new (re)orientation. This movement reminds us that when everything we know seems to fall apart, we must take the time to lament and express painful emotions to God and to each other, and eventually we will find our way into a new settled place with more wisdom, perhaps less naiveté, and a deeper appreciation of what is important in life.

The second metaphor is the Twenty-Third Psalm, which reminds us to walk—and not run—through the valley of the shadow of death. We must resist our desire to rush the process, instead taking our time to pace ourselves through this important work. Psalm 23 reminds us, too, that "the presence of the Lord reassures us along this journey, but God does not 'save' us from making this trek."

Finally, the authors remind us of the Jewish exiles in Babylon who question (in Ps. 137) how they can sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. After the destruction of Jerusalem and their enslavement, they hang up their harps, for they cannot bring themselves to make music. And yet, in the words recounted from an Iraqi woman who had seen her own share of trauma in her faith community, "They didn't destroy their harps. . . . Though now was not the time for singing, someday, there would be singing again." There is hope for the congregation to make

Cader Howard is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater, Minnesota.

it through and come out the other side, certainly changed, but still vital. And ready to sing again.

Of all the helpful wisdom the authors shared, I appreciated the most their reflection on the importance of worship and liturgical expression for the community of faith: “In the endless hours and bewildering days following trauma, worship holds the broken heart of the people.” They suggest rubrics for crafting worship on the Sunday after the event and even for the one-year marker (anniversary), carefully explaining how the character and focus of worship should change according to the congregation’s stage in the process of healing.

This book is engaging and beautifully written, full of real stories, rich biblical imagery, and also haunting descriptions of the aftermath of trauma like “the rip in the fabric of life, the taste of tears shed in disbelief and anger.” While deeply enriching, it is painful to read as you begin to imagine events happening in your own congregation that you never wished to imagine. Depending on your own experience, the book may also stir up memories of your own pastoral responses to trauma and violence. Multiple times, I found myself weeping

on the pages. And yet, reading this in the midst of all my everyday worries about budgets, building projects, and bulletins, I was reminded of what is truly important in this calling. What a sacred privilege it is to accompany a congregation through the joys and sorrows of life, to help them tell their own stories and see how they fit into God’s story, even as we walk together through the valley of the shadow of death.

Despite the heavy subject matter, the authors leave us in a place of hope. Walking together intentionally in the process of healing can lead a congregation and its pastor to a better appreciation of what is important, and perhaps even to a clearer mission focus on addressing the brokenness of our world. The authors reassure us: “The church that walks through the valley of the shadow together can become a potent witness to the power of the light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness cannot overcome. The congregation that learns this becomes a deeper, more real place for people to come who desperately need a true and honest faith, capable of sustaining in the dark valley.”

Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table

J. Todd Billings

(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018)

Reviewed by Buz Wilcoxon

In this anxious season in the life of the church—when so many congregations and denominations feel themselves helplessly sinking into narratives of decline and fears of failure—books promoting paths to renewal in the church are a dime a dozen. J. Todd Billings's work *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope* is not one of those books. Though his entire enterprise is focused primarily on the hope for congregational renewal, he does not make empty promises or string together alliterative jargon—no quick fixes, five keys, or how-to guides. Instead, Billings's hope for renewal begins at the table—the Lord's Table—and moves into an invitation to taste and see the very presence of the triune God encountered in the eucharistic feast. Rather than promising success stories, Billings makes a wager: "that a renewed theology and practice of the Lord's Supper can be an instrument for congregations to develop a deeper, more multifaceted sense of the gospel itself" (p. 1).

As he explores this thesis, Billings utilizes the metaphor of an icon to describe the Lord's Supper; it is both a sign and symbol of God's grace and at the same time a physical, tangible instrument used to present Christ to the worshiping community. This encounter with Christ that is enabled by the sacrament, Billings argues, can become the wellspring of renewal for congregations of all stripes. While the concept of an icon may seem out of place for a theologian so rooted in the Reformed tradition, Billings models a wide hospitality of thought with this metaphor and maintains that same stance throughout the work. He displays a mastery of and great appreciation for the history of Reformed theology (steeped in Scripture) but does so in an

invitational, nonsectarian manner that enables the Reformed tradition to offer important perspectives on questions that are being asked by the broader ecumenical community today. Throughout the book he addresses a number of topics that more than a few pastors and church professionals honestly may not have spent much time and mental energy engaging since seminary. Yet in nearly every case, these threads are tied to very practical matters within the lives of congregations, such as how to address non-Christians within the sacrament or when to welcome children to the Table.

The book is structured around three major areas of examination: (1) the various functional theologies of the Lord's Supper at work within congregations, (2) theological analysis and understanding of what occurs at the Supper, and (3) a constructive description of how Reformed teachings might reshape our modern engagement with the practice of communion. While each of these movements is deep, the payoff comes in the final section, when strands begin to come together and weave a beautiful image of the Lord's Supper as simultaneously a meal of remembrance (of the past), communion (in the present), and hope (for the future). This threefold description is rich in biblical and theological information, and it leans heavily into possibilities for liturgical practice to heighten our awareness of how we meet the triune God at the Table. Billings notes that many congregations tend to emphasize only the role of memory (often of just the cross, not the resurrection), and in doing so, sever bonds that tie that past to our lives as Christians in today's world. When our remembrance at the Table is connected to an awareness of communing with the

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risen Christ—and with the broad, universal family of the church throughout the ages that comes to the feast with him—our identity within the holy drama of God’s work takes much stronger root. Finally, these movements of memory and communion are bound to our hope in the death-conquering power of Christ, who promises to welcome us into the very presence of God. The manner in which Billings speaks of Christian hope beyond death is made all the more powerful when one remembers that his work on this book occurred amidst the severity of cancer treatments (p. xvi).

Readers of this book who locate themselves within the Reformed tradition will appreciate the agile and inviting way that Billings handles discussions of Calvin, Zwingli, the confessions, and more recent Reformed theologians. He also presents engaging accounts of the “holy fairs” from within the history of Reformed worship, which provide a helpful counterbalance to the overly cerebral caricature that is so often (and unfairly) associated with this branch of the Christian family tree.

In the conclusion, Billings revisits his opening wager and names the primary question that his

book leaves open: what are we supposed to do with this? One of the great strengths of this work is that it is rarely prescriptive and instead is importantly formative. However, that does mean that readers who take his thesis seriously now have some heavy lifting to do in translating great theory into patterns and practices within their worshiping communities. As we face this work, Billings reminds us “that true congregational renewal occurs through the action of the triune God. . . . We are not masters of our own destiny, our own church growth, or our own accomplishments” (p. 203).

Billings’s work serves as a helpful bridge between the dense richness of the Reformed theological tradition and the work of the people (“liturgy”) within congregations on a given Sunday. This book probably would not lend itself to a study for a group or a class in many congregations. However, it would be invaluable formative reading for any pastor, elder, seminary student, or congregation leader hoping to seriously engage in congregational transformation that is deeply rooted in the Lord’s Supper, where our deepest hungers are welcomed into the feast of remembrance, communion, and hope.

Rehearsing Scripture: Discovering God's Word in Community

Anna Carter Florence
(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018)

Reviewed by Mary Margaret Flannagan

Amidst the dry, intellectual theological education, seminary students rush to preaching professor Anna Carter Florence's classes for a breath of fresh air. Her lilting voice interrupts newborn homiletical wanderings to ask meaning-filled questions. "Stand in the text and say what *you* see," she urges students who struggle to unburden themselves from historians' and theologians' writings. At her insistence, students color Scripture (with crayons) and go off the page memorizing passages, reading in community, journaling words and phrases, and doodling the heart of the passage into the preacher's heart. In the same way that her classes pull students off Scripture's page, Florence's new book, *Rehearsing Scripture*, asks readers to take the Bible into life's "wild rumpus" of conversation and relationship and theater and beyond. The Bible was not intended to be read quietly behind closed doors, she insists, but in community. When we do so—preacher and student and believer alike—we find our assumptions and limitations turned asunder. As she states in her introduction, "The biblical text is a wild thing, and it takes us to where the wild things are" (p. 7).

"Rehearsing Scripture" is not preparation for some costumed performance, but instead an invitation to play with Scripture, twisting and turning and examining it from different angles. "Some texts need to be practiced. We need to be set loose with them. We need to go and rehearse them, together, and to come back and show one another when we've found something true. And then, we'll see" (p. viii). Within this invitation lies the promise of *something*, though there are no guarantees. We'll see where the chaos takes us. We'll see where the whirlwind turns. We'll see what God has to say to us.

Florence gives readers specific ways to rehearse Scripture. Reading the verbs, standing in the scene, and asking new questions may take a group to new understandings and insights. As the text hits the road, things tend to get bumpy, so etiquette rules are given as guidelines and protectors of the process. These alone are thought provoking and helpful in considering how to talk about a Scripture passage in community; whether preacher to congregation or teacher to class, leaders must care for their audience as they handle treasured texts. Florence then demonstrates how she rehearses Scripture with four biblical passages: Mark 5 (Jesus at work), 2 Samuel 13 (the rape of Tamar—a terror-filled text), Exodus 3 (Moses and the burning bush), and Esther. These four chapters alone are wonderful additions to a preacher's bookshelf.

This process sounds like a lot of work. Find a group, turn the text upside down, ask questions, move around—who has time for this? Why go to such lengths when we could use our old lesson plans and sermon notes and such? "Because these are the very scripts that will redeem all sinners and saints, and the earth we share. They are ours to read and play. And the Word is shimmering on every page" (p. 163). When we take on ACF's method, we will see God wildly dancing through the stories, coloring each verb, and marching down our own streets. We will see something true. Then we will be given the best gift: faith in the living, breathing Word.

Rehearsing Scripture is a book that flows from Anna Carter Florence's heart and hands. Former students hear a trusted and familiar voice speaking through these pages. Preachers, leaders, and teachers are given tools to explore familiar stories with fresh eyes and ears.

Mary Margaret Flannagan is pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Sweet Hollow in Melville, New York, and a member of the PAM Executive Board.

A warning to casual readers: this book will change the way you prepare for sermons and Bible studies. It will rearrange your priorities so that you make time to read Scripture in the strangest of places, asking questions of an unsuspecting congregation.

This book pushes for a befriending of the text in approachable and accessible (and, unfortunately, uncommon) ways. *Rehearsing Scripture* calls you to live with the biblical text in a way that will truly change your life.



John Stuart

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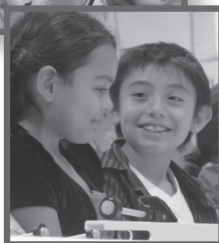
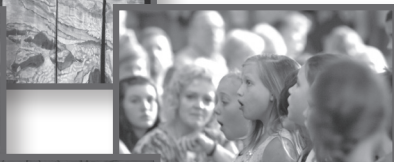


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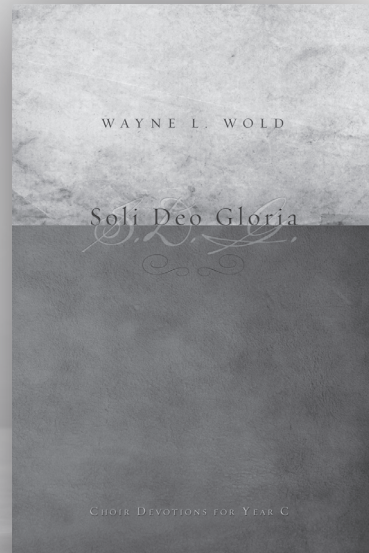
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