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ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

Original Research Article

Anglican Theological Review
1–17
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DOI: 10.1177/00033286231180143
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Grappling with legacies of pain, shame, and blame in independent schools: reclaiming lament and refocusing praise through psalm 22

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Abstract

As many schools grapple with issues of sexual misconduct and legacy abuse, this article revisits the thinking of Walter Brueggeman and Rolf Jacobson and the "costly losses" initiated by a displacement of the psalmic traditions of lament and praise. The article explores the shift from the social gospel to the prosperity gospel. Drawing from the work in theology and trauma studies by Shelly Rambo and Serene Jones, the article considers the power of lament psalms, most specifically psalm 22, in providing a theological, trauma-informed framework that witnesses to those who have suffered sexual abuse. Moving beyond institutional apology, lament opens the opportunity for grappling with legacies of pain, shame, and blame while confronting the ethos in which lament and praise were lost. Ultimately, reclaiming lament and refocusing praise will require a collaborative commitment by survivors and institutions joining voices to move toward healing, forgiveness, justice, and restoration.

Keywords

church schools, independent schools, lament, legacy abuse, prosperity gospel, psalms of lament, theology of trauma, trauma

[1]My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
[2]O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night but find no rest. (Psalm 22, NRSV)

Over the past ten years, many independent schools have entered a time of difficult reckoning, uncovering historic abuse of former students by adults who betrayed the educators' central duty of care and the institutions' foundation of trust.[1] Some of these schools share an Episcopal heritage. Many schools have confronted this history head on, calling

[1] Jenn Abelson, Bella English, Jonathan Saltzman, and Todd Wallack, "Private Schools, Painful Secrets," *The Boston Globe*, May 6, 2016, https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/05/06/private-schools-painful-secrets/OaRI9PFpRnCTJxCzko5hkN/story.html.

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for deep investigations, publicly encouraging alumni/ae to come forward to speak to their experiences, creating resources of support, and strengthening efforts to create healthier cultures for current students and future generations. There are many schools that have shared these stories publicly and have worked through/are addressing these histories of legacy abuse [e.g., Choate Rosemary Hall (CT), Horace Mann (NY), The Hotchkiss School (CT), Phillips Andover Academy (MA), Phillips Exeter Academy (NH), St. George's School (RI), St. Paul's School (NH), and so on]. Some schools have been challenged by courageous alumni/ae who have shared their painful experiences of abuse in the face of institutional silencing and neglect. Their stories of trauma and pain have often ignited moral outrage, which has led to attention and response.[2] A number of schools have responded with due diligence, investigating abuse by former faculty in a series of reports issued by schools that investigated allegations of misconduct by faculty members. Increased attention has occasioned a deeper commitment to building and strengthening a healthier school culture through comprehensive programs of education and training; implementation of reporting systems; and increased methods of accountability for all faculty, staff, and students. This work is ongoing, is never done, and continues each day to fulfill a commitment to alumni/ae, current students, and future generations.

As these instances of abuse strike at the ability to deliver on the core mission of the institution, a sincere, thoughtful, and substantial apology seems to honor the experience of survivors, allowing the institution to move forward in addressing wrongs committed. "Demonstrating contrition. . .demonstrates humanity"[3] within the institution. However, some institutions often rush to apology without making space for lament.

Lament certainly does not take the place of apology, but rather is a necessary complement. While there has been increased attention paid to the importance of apology by organizations, not surprisingly given the largely secular context, there is often no recognition of lament.[4] Providing the opportunity for individual and institutional lament reinforces the recognition of past wrongs committed and the sincere commitment to address them in the present and into the future. This creates the foundation for a sincere and meaningful apology to survivors. Most importantly, while apologies create the opportunity for the institution to accept responsibility, express remorse, offer recompense, and promise forbearance,[5] the individual lament falls squarely with the survivor providing voice for their pain and experience and placing

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2 See specifically the catalogue of harms perpetuated at Roman Catholic Native American boarding schools in *America Magazine*, May 12, 2022, and the reflections of St. Paul's School (NH) alumnae, Chessy Prout (*I Have The Right To*, 2018) and Lacy Crawford (*Notes on a Silencing*, 2020).

3 Christopher Lukach, "The Time for Contrition," *Net Assets,* National Business Officers Association (July/August 2020): 37.

4 See Maurice Schweitzer, Alison Wood Brooks, and Adam D. Galinsky, "The Organizational Apology," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2015, https://hbr.org/2015/09/the-organizational-apology; Lukach, "The Time for Contrition," 34–37; Georgia Nigro, Eleanor Ross, Talia Binns, and Ceria Kurtz, "Apologies in the #MeToo Moment," *Psychology of Popular Media* 9, no. 4 (2020): 403–11.

5 Christopher Lukach, "The Time for Contrition," NBOA (July/August 2020), 34–37.

this lament within the framework of God's justice and mercy. Lament gives voice, when and if they are ready, to those who have experienced the silencing of traumatic experiences.

Trauma takes many forms which extend beyond the individual to include historical, global, and institutional trauma. As theologian Shelly Rambo points out, "all trauma is an encounter with death. . . a way of describing a radical event or events that shatter all that one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it."[6] The survivor lives within the space between death and life, grappling with the aftermath of trauma and "the belated awakening to the [traumatic] event."[7] This paper deals most specifically with the particular trauma caused by abuse in educational institutions. These stories are heartbreaking. Survivors continue to experience shame, guilt, and anger fueled by their institutions' inability to act or, when they did, by the tendency toward shallowness in the response. Often cultures of privilege were unable to fully comprehend or accept the severity and reality of their failure and the devastating harm which this caused. They became complicit in an institutional silencing that avoided confrontation of these deep wounds. Rather than embracing a victim-centered and trauma-informed response to these claims of sexual abuse (i.e., centering the experience of the victim and responding in a way which recognizes the common experience of trauma with sensitivity to its impact on the individual), schools often engaged in practices that often inadvertently retraumatized survivors and led to retaliation, dismissing the pain of the individual in favor of protecting the honor of the institution. How did the sociological and cultural identity of these schools often negatively impact their ability to confront issues of legacy abuse? More specifically, for Anglican/Episcopal schools, in what way did their Judeo-Christian identities enable and perpetuate abuse in these contexts, allowing Christianity to become an idol for power, misogyny, racism, and sexism that led to the evils of historical and institutional trauma rather than serving as a tool for positive transformation? For those loosely influenced by a Judeo-Christian ethic, and others with a more formal religious affiliation, the resources of their traditions are helpful to address the individual and communal experience of suffering and injustice. Why were these resources most often left untapped? Among them, the psalms offer a powerful and poignant framework through which to give voice to those who have suffered abuse. The psalms of lament, particularly psalm 22, speak to the abandonment of survivors, providing a theological, trauma-informed framework to engage traumatic experiences and hold this devastating pain against the backdrop of praise for God's steadfast love (*hesed*). For those schools that claim this tradition as part of their heritage, there is an opportunity to engage more meaningfully and authentically with survivors of abuse, honoring the reality of their trauma rather than silencing the truth of their experience. Refocusing praise and reclaiming lament provide a useful way forward in addressing these histories of pain, shame, and blame.

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6 Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2010), 4.

7 Ibid., 7.

The consequence of costly losses

[3]Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
[4]In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
[5]To you they cried and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

In his 1986 article, "The Costly Loss of Lament," Walter Brueggemann argues that lament psalms are no longer integrated into the experience of personal or communal faith. The consequence, or "costly loss," has implications for personal formation and societal reformation. Using the object-relations theory, Brueggemann argues that the development of personal identity is impeded by the lack of lament:

> Where there is lament, the believer is able to take initiative with God and so develop over against God the ego-strength that is necessary for responsible faith. But where the capacity to initiate lament is absent, one is left only with praise and doxology. God then is omnipotent, aways to be praised. The believer is nothing, and can praise or accept guilt uncritically where life with God does not function properly.[8]

Rather than developing a mature faith manifest in genuine and authentic wrestling with God, individual agency and power are denied. Inauthenticity is the result: "the outcome is a 'False Self,' bad faith that is based in fear and guilt and lived out as resentful or self-deceptive works of righteousness."[9] Stuck in a stage of dependency without a path to self-realization, the individual "is left with a false narcissism that keeps hoping for a centered self but lacks the ego-strength for a true self to emerge."[10] The lack of lament reinforces the omnipotence of God, perpetuates the submissive acquiescence of the individual, and perpetuates a moratorium on identity development that ultimately undercuts personal voice, power, and resilience.

For Brueggemann, the lost capacity for lament has implications for community. Framing this within the question of theodicy, he demonstrates the ways in which lament served to bring complaints against neighbor or God. Whether human justice has failed or God's justice has fallen short, the lament complaint serves to rouse God to intercede with what biblical scholar Leander Keck referred to as "God's rectifying rectitude that makes all things right."[11] The absence of lament removes the power of this appeal and undercuts the question of theodicy: "justice questions cannot be asked and eventually become illegitimate and invisible."[12] In the same way that the loss of lament robs the individual of agency and voice, the loss of lament also brings similar communal consequences:

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8 Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 103.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid, 104.

11 Leander Keck, class lecture, Yale Divinity School, April 1997.

12 Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," 107.

> A community of faith that negates laments soon concludes that the hard issues of justice are improper questions to pose at the throne, because the throne seems to be only a place of praise. . .Justice questions disappear into civility and docility. The order of the day comes to seem absolute, beyond question, and we are left with only grim obedience and eventually despair.[13]

As Brueggemann identifies the "psychological inauthenticity and social immobility"[14] caused by the loss of lament, Rolf Jacobson argued just as passionately for the retaining of praise. Responding to Brueggemann, Jacobson argues that while praise is retained within the worship experience of the faithful, it is "no longer heard in daily life"[15] and has lost a specific social function. Interestingly, Jacobson follows a similar path as Brueggemann, identifying the consequences to the individual and to the community when praise is removed from our daily experience. Rather than focusing on the loss of praise in the cultic setting of worship, where it is certainly retained, Jacobson focuses on the loss of praise in life outside the worshipping community. In doing so, he underscores the impact of secular culture on our understanding of theological anthropology and the vision of God's justice in the world.

Praise is responsive to God's action in the world and in the daily life of an individual who has experienced some saving grace and relief. Jacobson highlights the responsive nature of praise by building on Westermann's understanding of psalms of thanksgiving. Praise does not end with response, but it is also "generative in that praise creates a worldview. . .praise assumes a world where God is an active agent. . .and evokes this world by naming God as the agent responsible for specific actions and blessings."[16] Jacobson points out that the naming of this world evoked in praise also has the function of deconstructing and undoing other worlds where God's righteousness may not reign,[17] inevitably "destabiliz[ing] unjust social and political arrangements."[18]

The loss of praise also has implications for our understanding of the human person. Just as how Brueggemann saw the loss of lament as impacting the ego-strength of the individual and the formation of identity, so too did Jacobson who saw the loss of praise as having the reverse effect by leaving no room to acknowledge God's sovereignty. Arguing that secular society has replaced praise with congratulations, Jacobson asserts that this shifts the focus from God as the object of praise (theocentric) to the individual as the focus of congratulations (anthropocentric). In so doing, the "dominant epistemological myth of our time. . .that of the autonomous individual"[19] is strengthened and perpetuated. The modern society is uncomfortable with praise, with directing the focus on a God who can make all things possible—a conundrum to the rationale modern mind. Therefore, praise is removed in favor of focusing on the triumph of the individual

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, 111.

15 Rolf Jacobson, "The Costly Loss of Praise," *Theology Today* 57, no. 3 (October 2000): 375–85.

16 Ibid., 377.

17 Ibid., 378.

18 Ibid., 383.

19 Ibid., 380.

achieving success in the world of possibility. This undercuts the grace of God to do the impossible, replacing God's sovereignty with the imperfection of a human one in a world of "suffocating human possibility, one impoverished of the abundant impossibilities of God."[20] In this world bereft of praise and God as its object, "the self is left as its own uncontested Lord."[21] The limits of this view become readily apparent. Misdirected praise in the form of congratulations is fine when all is well and creates significant existential angst when all is not. What happens when the bottom falls out for the autonomous self?

> . . .When all credit is given to the self for good things, a corresponding blame is implied for the bad things that occur in life. . ..the ideology of the autonomous self blames the victim for suffering: the poor man is responsible for his poverty, the abused woman for her abuse, and the sick man for his illness.[22]

In this observation, we can hear the echoes of a prosperity gospel: its influence on how the individual reckons with failure, suffering, and the implications for God's favor. The seeds of the epistemological myth of the autonomous individual grew quite well in the prosperity gospel soil of independent schools where the loss of lament and praise created lasting consequences.

The shadow side of prosperity

> [6]Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
> "May they prosper who love you.
> [7]Peace be within your walls
> and security within your towers. (Psalm 122)

In the culture of independent schools, goal-oriented and achievement-driven, there is not much room given for vulnerability and brokenness. The tight-lipped, emotionally distant cultures of these schools were immersed in values that embraced the "muscular Christianity" of cold showers, spare accommodations, and the stiff-upper lip. Expressions of emotional distress and personal lament were certainly not part of the cultural identity. While praise continued to be part of chapel worship, the culture of the autonomous self focused far more on congratulations in daily life. In these cultures, praise is directed to the individual, and lament is absent, symptomatic of "the cultural unwillingness to deal with the painful reality of our human situation."[23]

Complicating matters, as independent schools grew and became well-supported financially by increasingly affluent families, they entered a competitive arms race of building better buildings and expanding facilities. The stoicism and restraint of so called "muscular Christianity" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were soon replaced by well-appointed classrooms, dormitories, athletic facilities, lavish dining halls, and manicured

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20 Ibid., 382.

21 Ibid., 381.

22 Ibid.

23 Denise Dombkowski Hawkins, *Journey Through the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 79.

spaces which reflected the cultural expectations of well-heeled constituencies. The outward signs of competition and achievement reflected the ideology that had taken root in many schools. Perfectionism, orientation toward lofty goals, and a focus on achievement realized through college acceptance at the nation's most prestigious schools created a social milieu among independent schools that left little room to acknowledge vulnerability, imperfection, or brokenness. While many prospered outwardly, the conditions were being set to allow for "psychological inauthenticity" and the inability to address societal injustice: cultural realities that Brueggeman and Jacobson highlight in their essays. In many of these school cultures, particularly those with an explicit religious affiliation, the loss of lament and praise was exacerbated by a particular reading of the gospel and the theological implications that followed from this interpretation.

The great independent schools of the nation often began through the inspiration of founders who were steeped in a social gospel: committed to providing high-quality education to influence the next generations' leaders and to respond to societal challenges and injustice. Yet, many of these same schools flourished against the backdrop of the increasing appeal of a prosperity gospel. Kate Bowers offers insight into this approach, tracing the nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments of "a Christianity of the American marketplace"[24] which focused on four unifying themes of faith, wealth, health, and victory. While her focus is on the expressions of the prosperity gospel in evangelical and Pentecostal communities, Bower also highlights the ways in which this approach created a landscape of belief and practice sustained to the present day. Certainly, the influence of Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) also contributed to the connection between Christianity and prosperity, balancing the hard-working Puritan values of thrift and commitment to Christian values, seeing these realized in a Calvinistic focus on predestination and the achievement of worldly success as indicative of God's blessing. Baptist minister Russell Conwell preached a sermon in which he "promised listeners that wealth lay within any American's grasp, if they would only accept their Christian duty to work hard and see God's hand through the workings of capitalism."[25] Andrew Carnegie's essay, "The Gospel of Wealth," summarized the aims of this prosperity gospel through which "mainline Protestantism [offered] both a reflection on its high view of human nature and potential, as well as an explanation for its middle-class respectability."[26] This perspective offered a palatable apology for the industrial tycoons and affluent members of the society who could see their lavish lifestyle as a blessing and affirmation of their Christian virtue and expansionist ideals:

> This was an American gospel, based on hard work, pragmatism, innovation, self-reliance, and openness to risk. The steadfast virtues of thrift, prudence, and persistence—so celebrated as the foundation of the American character—were appended to the imagined traits of frontiersmen, wildcatters, and fortune-seekers. It was a muscular Christianity, emphasizing manly exploit and a willingness to seek what is hidden. It valued action over abstraction; it moralized money and finances as markers of thoroughgoing virtue.[27]

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24 Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

25 Ibid., 31.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 32.

In this social milieu, independent schools were established, and the values of this muscular Christianity, and its drive toward wealth and success as signs of Christian virtue, were inculcated in the succeeding generations who would move into positions of power and influence. Increasingly, as many of the religiously affiliated schools moved away from a strong affirmation of their religious identities and corresponding ethical value systems, the duty of Christian responsibility was often watered down and replaced with the entitlements of privilege. While the often-quoted verse "to whom much is given, much is required" (Lk. 12:48) may have reminded students of their responsibility to the common good, the moral imperative of Christian duty often receded into the background as schools struggled to rebrand religious foundations in the face of an ever-changing landscape.

The shadow side of the prosperity gospel began to emerge as the theological moorings of these institutions loosened. Independent schools reflected the values of society and exhibited the same loss of lament within daily life and communal worship where this acknowledgment of suffering and absence of God's favor were in opposition to the values of a prosperity gospel. Similarly, the muscular Christianity of the era highlighted the virtues of the autonomous individual and did not allow much room for praise of God outside of the worship context. As Brueggemann and Jacobson have both pointed out, the impacts on the human person and the community are dramatic and potentially detrimental. Within the independent school culture influenced by a prosperity gospel, the inability to address imperfections and human flaws or outwardly lament the failings of an institution created a "perfect storm" in which victims were silenced, retraumatized by a failed process, and perpetrators were quietly let go or passed on to other institutions. Consequently, the proverbial "golden calf" was lifted within these cultures, as Christianity became replaced by the idol of power, misogyny, racism, and sexism and often detached from the founding foundations of the social gospel. Cultures of pain, shame, and blame continued within this environment at the expense of those who were without privilege or entitlement, often marginalized within the community. Sadly, many schools have found themselves worshipping false idols of their own making at the expense of vulnerable members within the community. Thankfully, what was in the dark is being brought into the light. The revealing of allegations of abuse within independent schools suggest that schools have entered a time of reckoning and progress when the shadow side of prosperity is being uncovered, dysfunctional cultures are being examined, and the cries of the suffering are being heard as institutions make deeper commitments to address years of injustice. In this new environment, independent schools can reclaim the heritage of their founding, moving more directly into the space of lament and praise in which a new vision of the human person and God's world might be realized.

Reclaiming lament and refocusing praise

[4]In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
[5]To you they cried and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

Psalm 22 offers a powerful individual lament that provides a trauma-informed, theological framework for those who have suffered legacy abuse within independent schools. The psalm begins with a cry of abandonment and the direct questioning of God's absence (1–2) phrased in a declarative statement that appears in only two psalms (22:2; 88:6–8, 15–16).[28] This cry of dereliction "portrays the terror of a God who does not answer."[29] The individual lament is conveyed with "screaming" words like the roaring of a lion (1). As Beth Tanner points out, "these words are expressed in the raspy scream of one in deep distress"[30] conveying an urgency to the cry and the intimacy within which this appeal is made to God and which makes God's absence even more unbearable. According to Westermann, "the more prolix the lament becomes, and the more it enters into details, the more the addressee recedes into the background leaving alone the one who is laying out his case alone by himself."[31]

Victims of abuse in independent schools have experienced forsakenness caused by this violation of trust and abuse within the very institution that promised to nurture and protect them, institutions onto whom they were "cast from birth" (10). Instances of legacy abuse were experienced by adults who were often seen to be *in loco parentis*, taking on a parental responsibility and duty of care. Schools that did not believe the experience of victims, or did not take a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach to responding to claims of abuse, only exacerbated the feeling of abandonment and forsakenness experienced by many survivors who cried by day and by night with no rest given (2). As Rowan Williams points out in *Writing in the Dust*, "hasty dialogue and theological solutions are the very antithesis of what is required after a trauma occurs. . .Christians should avoid the temptation to gravitate toward the most immediate option of response, as this may not be correct or helpful to those who have experienced trauma first hand."[32] Instead, we should endeavor to listen and understand the cultural constructs that have created misogynistic systems of blame and shame which arise out of purity culture and "theodicies of blame leveled at young women in particular."[33] The institutional response in patriarchal institutions often embraced this purity culture mindset and left survivors ostracized within the community, feeling shamed and blamed on account of their suffering:

> [6]But I am a worm and not human,
> scorned by others and despised by the people.
> [7]All who see me mock me;
> they sneer at me; they shake their heads;

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28 Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 185.

29 Hawkins, *Journey Through the Psalms*, 86.

30 Beth Tanner, "Psalm 22: Desperate Cries and Recounting God's Ways," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. Nancy deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobsend, Beth LaNeel Tanner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 233.

31 Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 187.

32 Rowan Williams, *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on 11th September and its Aftermath* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 7.

33 Katie Cross, "I Have the Power in My Body to Make People Sin: The Trauma of Purity Culture and the Concept of 'Body Theodicy,'" in *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture, and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross (London: SCM Press, 2020), 23.

The description of the suffering in verses 12 to 18 names the enemy: the bulls (12); the lions that devour, roar, and encircle (13, 16); and the dogs that surround (16). While this could certainly describe the perpetrators of abuse, the context might also give voice to the survivor's experience within the institution whose silence perpetuates their suffering. They form a "company of evildoers" (16) more directly translated as a "congregation" which "names the evil ones not as distant, but as ones that share a cultic community."[34] This suggests a pre-existing relationship between the lamenter and the enemies and creates further dissonance for the one who laments, expressed poignantly by Westermann: "the evildoers. . .no longer take God seriously, and yet God does not condemn them. The lamenter takes God seriously, yet the enemy is able to mock with impunity."[35] The congregation of wild beasts is not held accountable and points to an enemy within the cultic context. Referencing Keel's work in *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, Tanner points out that "in the ancient Near East, these images of bulls and lions represent images of power and strength, indicating these are no ordinary enemies but are menacing and powerful enemies that would discourage others from getting involved."[36] The experience of those abused in independent schools is often very similar, pushed toward silence and shame by the powers that seek to protect the honor of the institution. The result is a deep feeling of abandonment and fear, described in the powerful verses 14 and 15 in the psalm:

[14]I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
[15]my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

Shelly Rambo has written extensively and thoughtfully on the intersections between theology, trauma theory, and biblical studies. Broadening the definition of trauma within the fields of psychology and counseling, Rambo affirms the work of other theologians who have enlarged the definition of trauma "to present profound challenges to epistemology, constructions of the self, and theological understandings of time."[37] Trauma is described as "an encounter with death"[38], and the aftermath of trauma creates a reframing of life which "takes on a fundamentally different definition. . .the tentative quality of life in the aftermath means that it is life always mixed with death."[39] This encapsulates the nature of survival after trauma, the experience of the "physicality of fear,"[40] or "psychic numbing"[41] that prevents trauma from being integrated into time or resolved in an

34 Ibid, 235.
35 Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 194.
36 Ibid., 234.
37 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 6.
38 Ibid., 4.
39 Ibid.
40 Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 234.
41 John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 100.

easy linear progression from pain to redemption. As Rambo points out, "trauma is an open wound."[42] This wound embodied in the "physicality of fear" is the experience of personal trauma often described by many survivors: the paralysis that creates an inability to speak, and the depression that leaves them unable to claim their own agency in the face of institutional abandonment and attack, personal shame, and suffering. Yet, there is power in naming the enemy as "the lament-enemy language urges us to work with God now to transform and make new. . .push[ing] us to face the world and its pain now."[43]

As Rambo points out, there is also power in the act of witnessing to the experience of those who have survived trauma. Witnessing "occurs at the tenuous intersection of death and life; it is a middle activity."[44] This placement of witnessing in the middle position creates an indirectness which "allows the witness to acknowledge and attend to that which rarely emerges into speech."[45] This powerful witness allows for the acknowledgment of the wounds, witnessing to the afterlife of woundedness in the post-traumatic state where the survivor exists also in a middle position, bearing the wounds of death in the midst of life. For Rambo, the theological implications of this are explored even more completely in her insightful book, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, where she explores the impact of posttraumatic woundings and the "traumatic afterlife of the cross."[46]

Serene Jones also offers a powerful and compelling theological reflection in *Trauma + Grace*, focusing more on the church's response to the experience of trauma. Rather than taking a distanced observational viewpoint, Jones wades into the body of knowledge on trauma studies by sharing the stories of individuals she knew and worked with in her congregational settings and by grappling with the very real effects of collective trauma as it is realized in direct incidents of pain and suffering and through implicit systemic manifestations of trauma and pain in systemic racism, misogyny, and white supremacy culture. This is the reality of the "world of disorder and rupture" in which the experience of trauma has created a "disordered imagination."[47] To the stories of pain and rupture and division, Jones raises the possibility of the healing imagination of the church, the meeting of trauma and grace to create the moments through which what is ruptured and broken might be brought back into wholeness. The Church, and perhaps also the church school, is called, "as it exists in this space of trauma, to engage in the crucial task of reordering the collective imagination of its people and to be wise and passionate in this task."[48] Similar to Rambo, Jones underscores the importance of witnessing through the engagement of the church as witnesses to the presence of grace in the midst of suffering. The psalms provide a vehicle for the witnessing of the worshipping community.

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42 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 7.

43 Hawkins, *Journey Through the Psalms*, 91.

44 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 41.

45 Ibid., 40.

46 Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 6.

47 Serene Jones, *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 19.

48 Ibid., 31.

Focusing on John Calvin's commentary on the psalms, Jones asserts Calvin's belief that the psalms resonate for communities and individuals who have experienced trauma, abandonment, and isolation. As Calvin believed, the psalms spoke to "an anatomy of all parts of the soul"; the vehicle through which "all lurking places are discovered, and the heart is brought into the light, purged from the most baneful infection, hypocrisy."[49] Jones sees the ability to move into the lurking places as the power of "speaking the unspeakable. . .giving language to a heart whose pain has made it speechless."[50] Psalms of lament provide the survivors of traumatic abuse the words to break their silence, creating "a vivid imaginative space within which [they] can similarly experience, without negative judgment, the outrage and grief that emerge as they remember and name the traumatic harm they have suffered."[51] Highlighting the insights of Judith Herman's work in trauma studies, Jones suggests that the three-fold movement toward healing involving the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life finds expression in three different functions of the psalms: deliverance, lament, and thanksgiving.[52] While the first two stages are more analogous, the claim that reconnection is similar to thanksgiving raises challenging theological questions and would not accurately describe the experience of survivors who, while reconnected with ordinary life, might not consider thanksgiving the appropriate response for the challenges of their experience.

Lament plays a critical role in the survivor's ability to find agency and move beyond the impact of the traumatic experience. The traumatic events "shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. . .they violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order."[53] As Jones points out, trauma theorists often "refer to an 'eternal present,' a place with no past and, even more tragically, no future, no direction toward which life unfolds."[54] Accepted notions of time are upended in the face of the traumatic event that holds the survivor in the middle position between death and life: "the linear narrative of salvation history dismisses the dislocations and displacements of trauma."[55] To this misplaced sense of time, Rambo suggests a unique pneumatology in which the "middle Spirit provides a vision of God's presence in the abyss,"[56] existing in the space between death and life, the space of wounds in the afterlife of trauma. The deep anguish of abandonment in the agony of disordered time is expressed in psalm 22. Yet, this powerful lament allows "a reciprocal play of speaking and hearing" from the abyss to unfold—the work of the middle Spirit:

> the survivor gives voice to previously unspeakable agony, and in witnessing, the receiver of the testimony is able to confirm that the survivor's voice is heard and the plight no longer needs to

49 Ibid, 51.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid, 60.
52 Ibid., 55.
53 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 51.
54 Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 92.
55 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 128.
56 Ibid., 113.

> be hidden in a dark corner of the soul, but can be pulled into the light of day and affirmed as a reality worthy of sustained lamentation and possible redress.[57]

In psalm 22, lament allows for the re-establishment of agency conveyed against a backdrop of trust in God's saving mercy. Even as the individual expressed their feelings of abandonment and recounts their suffering and the attack of their enemies, the trust in God's ability to intercede is woven throughout the psalm (3–5, 9–11). The recurrence of trust three times in the lament underscores the backdrop of faith within the life of the suffering one and signals the dual truths that they experience: the reality of the act of suffering and the reality of their faith and belief. Both are true. Against this truth of suffering and belief, the individual can make an appeal to God with powerful imperative statements: "Do not be far. . .come quickly. . .deliver my soul. . .save me" (19–21a). At this turning point in the psalm, the appeal is immediately followed by the affirmation of deliverance:

> From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
> [22]I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
> in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
> [23]You who fear the LORD, praise him!
> All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
> stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
> [24]For he did not despise or abhor
> the affliction of the afflicted;
> he did not hide his face from me
> but heard when I cried to him.

This is a quick about-face and occurs after a lengthy recounting of the suffering. Praise and lament are held together quite remarkably in this psalm which, as William Brown points out:

> plumbs despair so deeply and at the same time scales the heights of praise so resolutely. . .. [suggesting] that the complaint and its shift to praise are retrospective. The past is remembered so vividly that the speaker relives it in the present.[58]

The prayers for help are answered, and the individual responds with praise: "being surrounded by menacing enemies is exchanged for being surrounded by the worshipping community."[59] This signals restoration of those who have suffered and the support of the community in hearing and acknowledging their pain and suffering. This points not only to the restoration of the individual to wholeness but also to a movement of the world more closely to God's justice:

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57 Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 54.
58 William P. Brown, *Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 51.
59 Ibid., 236.

[26]The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever!
[27]All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
[28]For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.

As Tanner points out, "God's act to the afflicted one has world-wide impact. . .God is the God of the universe *because* God is the God of the one alone and ashamed."[60] For those who have experienced abuse within independent schools, these verses and the remainder of the psalm suggest the unrealized hopes of those who seek restoration to their school communities and affirmation of their experience. By pointing to a hoped-for future, the lament employs the key characteristic of a meaningful organizational apology, namely, "demonstrating a *commitment to change*. . .creat[ing] distance from the 'old self' that committed the violation and the 'new self' that will not engage in similar behavior."[61] Yet, the impact of these verses in particular, and the psalm as a whole, speak to the experience of those who have suffered legacy abuse in cultures of shame and blame where access to lament was stifled, and the reliance on the autonomous self prevented the development of personal authenticity and the appeal to God's ability to address unjust systems.

Of course, psalm 22 also has an accrued authority within the tradition as the psalm spoken by Jesus from the cross. His utterance is understood only against the backdrop of his silence. As John Swinton points out, this silence "acknowledges the full numbing horror of suffering and legitimizes every sufferer's experience."[62] God is not observing from a distance. The association with Christ's suffering elevates the significance of this psalm for the survivor of abuse, allowing them, if it is resonant with their personal faith, to bring their suffering to the cross where pain and death do not have the last word and where redemption and salvation shatter the world of sin and open the road to light and new life, moving beyond the "suffocating human possibility [and into] the abundant impossibilities of God."[63] Even if the survivor of abuse is not grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the power of the lament psalm resonates with the experience of those who suffered abuse at the hands of adults who betrayed institutional trust, or those burdened with the guilt, shame, and blame of schools unable to confront their own institutional failings.

Lament becomes "a mode of resistance" that helps to shatter silence and "takes the brokenness of human experience into the heart of God and demands that God answer."[64] Psalm 22 best exemplifies this theological response to the evils that leave us numb and frozen and without voice to speak. The utterance of this psalm from the lips of

60 Ibid.
61 Schweitzer et al., "The Organizational Apology," 12.
62 Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 100.
63 Jacobson, "The Costly Loss of Praise," 382.
64 Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 104.

the crucified God validates the experience of all who suffer trauma, thus becoming a "language of outrage [that] gives a voice to suffering and releases rage in a context of faith and compassion."[65] Rather than rest in moral outrage and vengeance, the goal of lament is to create the condition for repair and healing and the re-membering of community. Drawing on the work of Erhard Gerstenberger, Swinton emphasizes that the primary purpose of the lament psalms was to promote "restoration and rehabilitation of those experiencing evil and suffering."[66] This hope emerges on the other side of the abyss at the end of psalm 22, pointing the way from cross to empty tomb. Lament leads to hope, and it is that light of hope—refracted through the fractured prism of the cross—which reframes praise and invites restoration, rehabilitation, and communion:

> Lament provides sufferers with a hopeful language in which they can wrestle with God, self, and others. . .lament enables individuals to move from silence to transformative speech, speech that rages against God, but which ultimately has the capacity for and the goal of reconciling the suffering community with God and enabling both individual and community to find healing, hope, and the ability to love God in spite of the presence of evil.[67]

And yet, this progress toward hope takes time; time experienced in a radically different way by those who live in the afterlife of trauma. Shelly Rambo's unique conception of the "middle Spirit" underscores this challenging reality in the work of trauma studies and the intersection with theological frameworks and linear conceptions of salvation history. Instead, she offers a "pneumatology of remaining, suggesting that trauma, in its inability to be located in one space and in one time, moves us onto a pneumatological terrain to address the complexities of the aftermath."[68] If psalm 22 leads us into the abyss of God's abandonment and the cry of human suffering and trauma, it also moves toward a space where God is found in the very depths of that despair. A theology of trauma that speaks to the experience of those who have suffered evil must never shy away from witnessing to the abyss, for that is where the Spirit is moving in ways that we cannot imagine and which defy our sense of here and now, of past, present, and future:

> Divine love cannot be extinguished. Instead, divine love survives. Spirit is figured both as what remains and as the power to witness to remaining. This is not, however, a contradiction but is suggestive of what takes place between death and life. Divine and human meet in the middle, and there is an intermingling of breath in the abyss; it is the point at which the silent human cry meets the silent divine cry. Spirit meets spirit in the depths.[69]

As much as psalm 22 leads us into these depths where Spirit meets spirit, this psalm of lament allows for true witnessing to the experience of those who have experienced trauma and who have been silenced, marginalized, and left without a voice. In this way, laments in general, and psalm 22 in particular, provide a trauma-informed approach (the

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65 Ibid., 107.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 129.
68 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 170.
69 Ibid.

recognition of the common experience of trauma and its impact on the responses and reactions of individuals) that might be used individually or within a community as the vehicle for personal and institutional lament.

Moving forward

[29]To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
[30]Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord
[31]and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Denise Dombkowski Hopkins asserts that "lament language can help the Church speak the truth about human experience and the life of faith."[70] The same might be said for the power of reclaiming lament as a tool to help schools speak to the experience of survivors of abuse and re-establish faith in institutions. To ignore the power of lament is to dismiss the authentic experience of those who have suffered devastating abuse. Laments help give voice to those who have suffered in silence. Reclaiming the place of lament against the backdrop of praise and trust in God will recenter the understanding of the human person and the arc bending toward justice within God's world. In this way, the costly losses highlighted by Brueggemann and Jacobson might begin to be addressed, particularly through their impact on the educational culture of independent schools influenced by a prosperity gospel.

Reclaiming lament and refocusing praise will require an act of courage and commitment to confront the impulse toward rugged individualism and the culture of congratulations. Doing so will necessitate an understanding of the social-emotional world of human interactions present within independent schools and not simply the perpetuation of focus on cultures of knowledge and achievement. Doing so will require speaking harsh words against cultures of consumption and privilege and gospels of prosperity: challenging the golden calves that have been raised in Christian cultures of prosperity as totems to the evils of racism, misogyny, sexism, and the abuse of power, at the expense of marginalized communities silenced by individual, historical, and institutional trauma. Doing so will invite embracing vulnerability and the recognition of our imperfect and broken humanity held against the rectifying rectitude of God who strives to make all things right. Schools will never recover for survivors what was lost through their experiences of abuse within institutions that failed on their essential duty of care. Acknowledging that devastating reality should push these institutions to make space for the lament of individuals to speak their truth authentically and honestly and in their own time as they move toward the possibility of healing. The courage of survivors to speak this truth confronts the silencing cultures of blame and shame while pushing institutions toward their own institutional lament. The lament psalms in general, and psalm 22 in particular, offer the opportunity for lament and praise: "mourning and wonder—neither one answers the

[70] Hawkins, *Journey Through the Psalms*, 81.

question that trauma poses to grace."[71] As Serene Jones so poignantly observes, these "are instead, states of mind, that, if nurtured, open us to the experience of God's coming into torn flesh, and to love's arrival amid violent ruptures."[72]

The damage within institutions grappling with legacy abuse and the trauma of survivors create a ruptured world for the community and individual, and the witness to this torn reality is the precondition for its healing. Jesus instructed his disciples to put their hands into the wounds and witness to torn reality, so that in witnessing, they might begin to heal and transform. The wounds are never removed, but the "middle" Spirit is able, "by the power at work within us. . ., to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20, NRSV). For those who have experienced the trauma of abuse, and for those who witness to their suffering, the Spirit works within the depths. We who witness should never be in a rush toward healing. Rather, our posture should always be one of attending, listening, accompanying, and witnessing to the open wounds of those who have suffered too long in silence, allowing the Spirit to work in its own time.

> Transformation is not about deliverance from the depths, but instead, about a way of being in the depths, a practice of witnessing that senses life arising amid what remains. The middle story is not a story of rising out of the depths, but a transformation of the depths themselves.[73]

Ultimately, what we may find is that lament leads us into the middle Spirit's space to gaze at the depths of the abyss created by institutional faults and failures, to react with moral outrage and renewed conviction, and to witness to the wounds through which, in God's time, we all might be healed.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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71 Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 161.

72 Ibid.

73 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 172.