A Pastoral Psychology of Lament

Pastoral Method | Priestly Act | Prophetic Witness

William Blaine-Wallace

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Pastoral Method-Priestly Act-Prophetic Witness

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ABOUT THE COVER

The cover art is a visual presentation of a quote by Tennessee Williams, which is elaborated upon in the Preface: “The violets in the mountains are breaking the rocks.” The quote captures the collective capacity of the fragile ones, the sorrowful and suffering, to make a way through the impermeable and emerge radiant. My spouse, Victoria Blaine-Wallace, brought the quote to my attention about six years ago. Victoria, a graphic artist, designed the cover.

ABSTRACT

My eight years of ministry among the dying and bereaved in two settings rife with sorrow and suffering—The Grady Hospice Program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia and The Hospice at Mission Hill, an acute inpatient hospice in Boston, Massachusetts for persons dying of AIDS—left me with an indelible awareness of and curiosity about the ironic joy and creative energy for justice-making that emanated from these communities. This dissertation is an attempt to further substantiate, better understand, and test the validity of my awareness and the legitimacy of my curiosity.

After developing the dissertation topic around my awareness, curiosity and passion, I arranged interviews with people and communities who seemed to exude the joy and energy I had experienced at Grady and Mission Hill. I interviewed people engaged in ministries and not-for-profit agencies in various cities in the United States: Boston, Massachusetts; Columbia, South Carolina; Lewiston, Maine; Portland, Maine; San Francisco, California; and Washington, D.C. I interviewed the survivors of abuse and genocide.

In Part One, I explore the theological grounding, the psychological traits, and the spirited courageousness of the fragile, which empowers them to make a way through the impermeable and emerge radiant. The investigation leads to the construction of a pastoral psychology of lament that is less a way of caring for the sorrowful and suffering and more a manner of being in relation in and for a broken world. In Part Two, I detail the design of lamentational relation and formulate a nascent lamentational ecclesiology as that which may contribute to the renewal of the presently sluggish spirit of mainline religion in America.

SAMENVATTING

Mijn acht jaar priesterschap voor stervenden en mensen die treuren om verlies in twee plaatsen die overlopen van smart en lijden – Het Grady Tehuis Progamma aan het Grady Memorial Hospitaal in Atlanta, Georgia en Het Tehuis in Mission Hill, een tehuis voor dringend opgenomen patienten in Boston – heeft op mij een onuitwisbaar besef achtergelaten van en ook nieuwsgierigheid naar de ironie van de vreugde en de creatieve energie in het recht-doen dat naar voor kwam in deze gemeenschappen. Deze dissertatie is een poging om de werkelijkheidswaarde van mijn bewustzijn en de legitimiteit van mijn nieuwgierigheid verder te onderbouwen, beter te begrijpen, en te testen.

Na eerst het onderwerp van deze dissertatie te hebben ontwikkeld in termen van mijn besef, nieuwsgierigheid en passie, heb ik vervolgens een reeks interviews opgezet met mensen en gemeenschappen die blijk leken te geven van de vreugde en energie die ik heb meegemaakt in Grady en in Mission Hill. Ik interviewde mensen die werkzaam waren in priesterschappen en in diensten zonder winstoogmerk in verschillende steden in de Verenigde Staten: Boston, Masschussets; Columbia, South Carolina; Lewiston, Maine; Portland, Maine; San Francisco, California; en Washington, D.C. Ik interviewde overlevenden van mishandeling en rassenmoord.

In Deel Een onderzoek ik de theologisch onderbouwing, de psychologische trekken, en de begeesterde moed van het breekbare, hetgeen hen in staat stelt om een weg te banen door het ondoordringbare en stralend tevoorschijn te komen. Dit onderzoek leidt tot de opbouw van een pastorale psychologie van het treuren die minder een manier is om zorg te dragen voor smart en lijden en meer een manier van in relatie treden met en voor een gebroken wereld. In Deel Twee geef ik een meer gedetailleerd ontwerp van de

treurende relatie en formuleer de opkomst van een treurnis gebonden kerkkunde als iets wat zou kunnen bijdragen aan de vernieuwing van de huidige verluierde gesteltenis in de overheersende religie in Amerika.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Several years ago, the parish I served in Boston began a building restoration project, which included extensive exterior work. The chairperson of the building committee asked my spouse, Victoria, a graphic designer, to create a construction sign. The parish's physical plant is on Newbury Street, the fanciest pavement in town. The idea was that Victoria could design a sign that would be more "boutique" than routine, something that would catch the eye of the thousands of people who walked by the property each day.

Victoria designed a construction sign centered on a quote by Tennessee Williams: *The violets in the mountains are breaking the rocks* (Robbins, 1993, p. 175).

The quote became something of a mantra for the parish and a gift to those who passed by, an arresting gift for a few. One passerby, a person from the neighborhood, a friend, who remained on the fringes of the congregation out of distaste for religion, scratched a note to me about the sign. Here is what my friend shared:

> *Last summer, I saw for the first time the quote on the church lawn. At first my mind was confused by the words and I didn't consciously understand the sentence. And, then, seconds later, I was overcome by such intense sadness at the realization of what the words meant—almost incomprehensible to my conscious mind, yet at a cellular level my being understood—and my tears fell uncontrollably. I began to play a game with myself of reading the words over and over to see when I would finally be able to read them without crying—it never happened. To me the words meant that this delicate, innocent beauty—the violets—were such pure goodness, that even though they were fragile, tiny, almost meaningless to some, these beautiful, innocent little violets kept growing and*

> *multiplying and their light and beauty broke open the hard, cold, impenetrable darkness of the rock. The realization that light, goodness, beauty, is so powerful that it is capable of breaking the hard, cold darkness is overwhelmingly emotionally jarring. Bill, is this something akin to God?*

My friend's question—*Bill, is this something akin to God?*—vivifies this writing project and shapes the arc of our quest to explore, not answer, her impassioned question. You, the readers, and I will walk around together inside the question. We will witness the fragile flowers that are the community of the grieving and aggrieved, the broken and bent, the delicate and vulnerable ones. We will witness lives that testify to an ironic power issuing from weakness shared, a force that burrows up and through the seemingly impenetrable granite of life-the-way-it-really-is. We will watch for the ways their tears-in-relation hydrate an arid world, restore and renew severed relation, and instill hope for a better day. We will learn to locate ourselves at a distance near yet far enough away from them to ensure that we safely, respectfully, attentively behold their tears. We will wait patiently, tentatively for their tears to speak to us that we may be embraced by a particular and, I feel, especially sacred wisdom. My desire for us, as witnesses, is to complete our exploration having found more courage, better ways and new opportunities to have our own tears freed and heard to voice in and by the communities in which we live out our relational commitments and bonds.

Several persons and communities will lead us on our walk. I give thanks for and honor the indefatigable person and spirit of Andrea. She has offered the conversations we shared in pastoral counseling as a touchstone for my elucidation of the trajectory of convivial tears from wailing to lament towards justice making. I thank Debbie Nathan

and Edmond O'Malley, recent residents in family therapy at The Salem Center for Training, Therapy and Research, who sat with Andrea and me in a witnessing position, a formation which I will present in Chapter 7. I thank other colleagues at The Salem Center for their commitment to collaborative counseling relations and for shaping many of the ideas that form the foundation of this writing project: Evan Login, Stephen Gaddis, Kara Kaufman and Marjorie Roberts. I thank my friend Elizabeth Cochran for a conversation about a workshop she attended on the spiritual art of body mapping, an experience that testifies to the power of public mourning. I thank the enormously inspired, inspiring and untiring workers for justice, whose work, referenced throughout the dissertation, bends history towards liberation: legends of the Civil Rights Movement, Ruby Sales and Cleveland Sellers; nine members of the diversity cohort at Bates College, a group of students and staff, who shared the richly diverse and surprisingly similar stories of their journeys to Bates College; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, whose witness against the prison industry, and for the victims of it, is making a sizeable dent in the side of "the prison fix;" the participants in the conference on the Rwandan genocide at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine, especially the students in the Rwandan genocide course, the survivors of the genocide with whom they corresponded, and the professor, Alexandre Dauge-Roth; Esperance Uwambyeyi, Tutsi survivor of the Rwandan genocide; Glenda Hope, whose leadership of San Francisco Network Ministries has been the life line and blood for the invisible and marginalized ones of the Tenderloin district for over thirty years; members of the Bates Office Professionals Network, who risked "testimonial relation" as a means for wrestling with the matter of classism in the academy; my peer supervision group of pastoral counselors, Anchorage, a continuous and consistently inviting and safer

place to hear one another along; members of St. Paul's Church, Brunswick, Maine, who risk testimonial relation; Debbie Little Wyman and Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries, a ministry to the homeless in Boston, Massachusetts. I thank Nicci Leamon for the respectful, heartful and skillful manner of transcribing the inquiry interviews. I thank my colleague, Marty Deschaines, for her keen eye in the copy editing process. I thank the readers on my PhD committee, Professors James Day, John McDargh, Sharon Thornton and Elka Todorova. I thank Professor John Rijsman, my PhD co-supervisor, who shepherded me through the Tilburg University doctoral process with such a hospitable spirit. I thank my PhD co-supervisor, Professor Harlene Anderson, whose book, *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities* (1997), was the impetus for my enrollment in the Tilburg University PhD program and the inspiration for my dissertation. Dr. Anderson offered a most generative, near- experience editing of the text, for which both the dissertation and I prospered. Finally, I thank my spouse, Victoria, who keeps bringing my musings about relation, especially relation among those who have lost much and many, back to the immediate and particular.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a public response to my friend's personal note about Tennessee Williams' quote—"The violets in the mountains are breaking the rocks."—and her concluding question, "Bill, is this something akin to God?" In Part One, I explore my friend's theological question about the psychological capacity of the fragile to make a way through the impermeable and emerge radiant. The investigation leads to the construction of a pastoral psychology of lament that is less a way of caring for the sorrowful and suffering and more a manner of being in relation in and for a broken world. In Part Two, I explore the possibilities for mainline religious life in America that derive from a pastoral psychology of lament, with the hope in mind that through such possibilities people like my friend might find the desire and wherewithal to give religion another chance.

Six Premises of the Pastoral Psychology of Lament

The pastoral psychology of lament is constructed on the foundation of six premises: lament is a relational act of articulation; lament is testimonial; lament is a relation in which testifier and witness stand to be changed; lament is revolutionary; lament is the seedbed of and catalyst for social justice movements throughout history; lament is a hermeneutical lens through which to explore and understand the broad Judeo-Christian tradition.

First, *lament is a relational act of articulation*. I understand articulation as more than an effort to convey an experience of a person or community's sorrow and suffering in order to unburden the heart. Lament is more than a therapeutic sharing of one's feelings. Articulation is different from an exorcism of anguish. Articulation is the crucial

endeavor of the grieving and aggrieved to connect, the enterprise of making community among the sorrowful and suffering. Hence, lament is fundamentally relational. Throughout the dissertation, I differentiate lamentational relation from wailing; wailing being the isolated, failed, and, therefore, inarticulate attempt of the grieving and aggrieved to connect. Wailing is personified in the following excerpt from a letter written by Mukangwije Lea, a survivor of the Rwandan Genocide:

> My primary concern, however, is still my mother. She is very old and has been through so much. If you look closely, all the people who inhabit this Village are traumatized. She is in this category. She lives in a very deep silence. I try to entertain her, but you realize that she is overwhelmed with sorrow. The survivors live in a vast loneliness. This is the case with my mother, Mama Emma. Even now, she cannot fully understand what happened (Williams, 2008, p. 354).

Second, *lament is testimonial*. Because lament is the grieving and aggrieved person and community's utmost effort to relate with another or others on matters of ultimate concern, lament is in the declarative voice. Lament is solemn testimony. An ardent investment of one person's or a community's broken and violated spirit demands more than a compassionate listener. An engaged witness is required. Note the Black preacher's call from the pulpit, "Do I have a witness?" The listener is required to step up. The testifier-witness dyad is one of call and response, a formula that is basic to the Black church experience, a liturgical act I will talk more about in Chapter 10.

Third, *lament is a relational act in which both testifier and witness stand to be influenced in the relationship and exchanges*. The testifier, in being heard to voice anew and afresh, learns from the utterances that emerge between the witness and herself. The

testifier is positioned to hear herself as if for the first time. The witness, because of the relational demand implicit in the testifier's desire to connect and engage, is different from the more distant and altruistic listener in service of a burdened heart. Bearing witness is risky business in that the witness is exposed, vulnerable to being addressed and engaged, and through such encounter, changed.

Fourth, *lament is revolutionary*. Lament, as the first three premises establish, is a public act of seeking connection between those who stand to be changed through the relation. Testifier and witness are subject to becoming, and participating in, a community that demands reparation of and liberation from both the perpetrators of their suffering and the political forces and configurations that caused their suffering.

Fifth, *lament is the seedbed of and catalyst for social justice movements, and has been throughout history*. In the dissertation, I give greatest attention to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's in the United States, and propose that this movement was seeded and catalyzed by religious lament, the lamentational relation that was, and is to a lesser degree now, central to the Black church experience.

Sixth, *lament is a hermeneutical lens through which to explore and understand the broad Judeo-Christian tradition*. I maintain that the Judeo-Christian tradition is a grief narrative. Moreover, I maintain that the grief narrative is evangelical, *Euangelion*, Good News, in that it lifts out, underscores and privileges a sacred history of redemption and reconciliation for the oppressed and estranged. I argue that the grief narrative also is evangelical in that it invites and equips materially privileged people and communities to articulate the tyranny of wealth that has isolated them from, and disguised their kinship with, a hurting world. Consequently, I propose that lamentational relation, as a central

motif of the Judeo-Christian tradition, is a pattern the present day, mainline church in America might more richly develop towards its own renewal.

Five Definitions Relevant to this Dissertation

Throughout the dissertation, I will use specific terms and phrases that warrant description and definition at the outset. Five stand out: God; self; church; the *meantime*; my positionality.

First definition: my construction of *God is relational*. By relational I mean a pre-Cartesian Trinitarian theology and post-Cartesian contemporary, process, Trinitarian, feminist and postmodern theologies. My hope is that together these theologies will make for something of a "Radical Orthodoxy." (Cooper-White, 2007, p. 79)

In the pre-Cartesian former, "God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of freedom, love, and knowledge." (LaCugna, 1991, p. 243) Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three modalities of the One God, an expressively Cartesian notion embedded in Reformation and Neo-Orthodox theologies. Rather, Father, Son and Holy Spirit comprise an *event* of communion, a mystery of relation (LaCugna, p. 262).

In regard to the post-Cartesian latter, feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes that the

> symbol of the Trinity evokes a livingness in God, a dynamic coming and going with the world that points to an inner divine circling around in unimaginable relation. God's relatedness to the world in creating, redeeming, and renewing activity suggests to the Christian mind that God's own being is somehow similarly differentiated. Not an isolated, ruling monarch but a relational, dynamic, tri-personal mystery of love (1992, p. 192).

Pastoral theologian Pamela Cooper-White enfolds the former and the latter theologies into a profound, succinct, and generative sense of God as relational:

> This Trinity is, then, a spacious room—even a matrix/womb, in which multiple metaphors can flourish, honoring simultaneously the relationality and the multiplicity of God. In its constant shape-shifting play of images, I would want to argue that the Trinity itself can become a third space between theological certainty (as a classically posited finiteness of precisely one [essence] and three [immutable characteristics of God]), and a vacuumed-out negative theology—Anselm of Canterbury's three inscrutable and completely unknowable "*nescio quids*" or "I know not what's." In this Trinitarian third space for theological imagination, the three "persons" of the Trinity are deconcretized, no longer to be understood as a literal "Father," "Son," and "Holy Ghost." The threeness of the classical Trinitarian metaphor is, rather, opened out into multiple images and symbols for the generativity, the incarnational presence, and the continuing aliveness and activity of the divine. Nor is this a collapsing back into the heresy of "modalism," in which the three "persons" of the Trinity are collapsed merely into divine functions or modes of being—as simply creating, redeeming, and sanctifying activities of the One God (p. 81).

A metaphor of the relational God that opens a generative "room" in which I spend a lot of time contemplating and praying is that of the divine dance:

> Choreography suggests the partnership of movement, symmetrical but not redundant, as each dancer expresses and at the same time fulfills him/herself towards the other. In interaction and inter-course, the dancers (and the observers)

> experience one fluid motion of encircling, encompassing, permeating, enveloping, outstretching. There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again. To shift metaphors for a moment, God is eternally begetting and being begotten, spirating and being spirated. The divine dance is fully personal and interpersonal, expressing the essence and unity of God. The unity of the dance forbids us to think of God as solitary (LaCugna, p. 272).

For me, over the course of the last fifteen years, the most bountiful and inspiring "theological text" of the relational God has been my experience of, and almost worshipful devotion to, the performances of the Mark Morris Dance Group, especially the production of *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato.*

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will name the Trinitarian dance, God, as *The Event of Right Relation*. The term, right relation, is the creation of feminist theologian Carter Heyward. Right relation, according to Carter Heyward, is "relation in which all parties are empowered to be more fully who they are as persons (or creatures) in relation." (1989, p. 193)

Carter was my colleague for several years at The Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I witnessed Carter live out such *Godding* (1996), another term she coined, in her personal and professional commitments. Occasionally, we would meet with students who had hit the wall of supernatural theism, students who did not know what to do with the God of their upbringing, the God who was something akin to the "mayor of celestial city"—very old, wiser than wise, inapproachable and revered, holed up in a mahogany paneled office with the Ten Commandments behind him on the

wall, with Jesus as executive secretary.[1] Carter would bring deep regard and appreciation, respectful curiosity to these conversations, resisting the student's desire for answers, staying situated in dialogue.

Second definition: my construction of *the self is relational*. Genesis 1: 26a (Revised Standard Version) reads: "And God said, 'Let *us* make [persons] in *our* image." The Trinitarian God is a metaphor for the self-in-relation. LaCugna writes that the "substance of God exists always concretely, existentially, in persons." (pp. 245-246) Each person of the Trinity is interdependent, mutual and reciprocal, not solitary or bounded. Likewise, persons are interdependent, mutual and reciprocal, not solitary or bounded. God is the event—the dance—of three persons, not three entities who act independently, three conscious individuals (LaCugna, p. 250). Likewise, persons do not act independently but together comprise the event of personhood.

Catholic feminist theologian Catherine LaCugna, in writing about the relational self, depended heavily on the writings of John MacMurray, a Quaker and moral philosopher, citing his 1953-1954 Gifford lectures at the University of Glasgow, later published as two volumes: *The Self as Agent* (1957) and *Persons in Relation* (1961*)*:

> MacMurray challenged the fundamental theoretical assumption of the "turn toward the subject," namely, that the Self is a *subject* for whom the world is *object*. The Cartesian starting point created an antimony between reflection and action. As the title of MacMurray's first volume suggests, he sees the Self as an agent, a doer, not an event of self-reflection and self-absorption. Second, in the

[1] I owe this image of God as "mayor" to Wes Seeliger, now deceased, Episcopal priest in Houston, Texas, and writer and illustrator of *Western Theology* (1973), an artful rendering of contrasting images of God as settler, mayor of the town, God as trail boss of the wagon train, heading west with Jesus as scout and the pioneers as the people of God.

> "egocentrism" of the Enlightenment, the Self is an isolated individual. To acquire knowledge, the Self, in the moment of reflection, withdraws from action, withdraws into itself, isolates itself from the world and from other selves. MacMurray proposed a view of the Self as person: Personal existence is constituted by relation to other persons. Personhood, or subjecthood, is not identical with or reducible to "individual center of consciousness," as if one could be a person independently of one's relationships with others. In fact, for MacMurray, the Self withdrawn into itself, into self-reflection, is neither a true Self nor a true person. If Descartes' was a "turn to the subject," MacMurray's is the "turn to the Other." (LaCugna, pp. 255-256)

Third definition: when and where the Trinitarian dance—selves turning to one another in mutual, interdependent, reciprocal relation—is performed on the stage of history, there is *ecclesia*, church. Church, for me, is a universal category for the divine dance. I have known church in the movement of parishioners back and forth through the chancel of Emmanuel Church in Boston to and from the communion rail, with John Harbison's *Communion Words* sung by the Emmanuel choir accompanying them. *Goose bumps*. Of late, I have seen "church" outside the window of my study at Bates College, where students, faculty, staff and Lewiston residents co-create a vegetable garden, the fruits of which will feed hungrier people. *Goose bumps*.

The institutional church, in my case, the Anglican Church, hosts the Trinitarian dance on a sacramental stage. The sacrament of Baptism anoints ecclesial people:

> The ecclesial [person] is created at baptism. Baptism brings about a "new reality." The sacrament of baptism brings about an ontological change. The

> change is indeed ontological, not in the sense that one kind of being becomes another kind of being (watermelon becomes harp), but the new being produced by baptism is a new *person*, a new being-in-relation, a new capacity for transcendence, a new capacity for erotic expression, a new capacity for communion, a genuine instance of freedom.
>
> Those who identify with Jesus in baptism are given a new way of being in the world, now as fully personal. Putting on [Jesus] in baptism becomes the authentic basis for a true communion among persons. Baptism thus transforms solitariness and separateness into communion (LaCugna, p. 263).

In many sacramental-oriented congregations, the baptism font is placed at the entrance of the sanctuary. Congregants are invited to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads with water upon entering and leaving worship. For me, this is a refreshing reminder of, a renewed grounding in, my relational being-ness, my participation in the Trinitarian dance, my "sacramental personhood." (LaCugna, p. 264)

Moreover, between my personal anointing with baptismal waters at the beginning and end of worship, at the center of worship, is Eucharist, the sacrament of Holy Communion. Eucharist is the audacious enactment of the Trinitarian dance in the midst of an American culture that makes sacrosanct the bounded self. The Eucharistic celebration "establishes a network of relations that is supposed to allow persons to subsist, to be in relationship, in freedom," (LaCugna, p. 264) a network of relation in which "a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female." (Galatians 3: 28, International Standard Version) The Eucharist, as the reader will experience throughout the manuscript, is elemental to my person and this writing project.

Of course, an institutional church embedded in our present culture struggles, once outside the doors of sanctuary, to enact or participate in the Trinitarian dance. Note, for instance, American religion's present fervor against homosexuals as participants in the dance. An aim of this dissertation is to establish means for making our struggle to advance and expand the Trinitarian dance a heartier one.

Fourth definition: I seek to bridge the gap, cited above, between the institutional church's persistent aspiration for and ongoing failure to enact and participate in the Trinitarian dance. The tool for my quest to help bridge the gap is a theology of the *meantime*.

Martin Luther understood the church as *viator*, a journeying communion, making its way from slavery to freedom, existing between slavery and freedom, comprised of *viators*, pilgrims who are *simul justus et peccatore*, at one and the same time saints and sinners, enslaved and free. I do not mean saint and sinner as the moral and immoral characters of individual persons. Rather, saint and sinner are emblematic of relational conditions, of being connected and disconnected, inherited and dis-inherited, in communion and estranged from communion.

The binary of relation and isolation is the *meantime*, the times in which we live our lives, from which we do not escape and, yet, here and there transcend. For Luther, episodes of transcendence of the *meantime* within the institutional church are outbreaks of the "true" church within but not apart from the "historical" church. The "true" church acts as underwater springs that refresh the murky and stagnant waters of the historical church.

The particular transcendence of the *meantime* that I emphasize in this dissertation is the Trinitarian dance of the suffering and sorrowful. Moreover, I privilege this particular transcendence as universal because an originally good existence—a fallen creation—groans in travail and yearns for restoration (Wink, 1992, p. 10). Not to acknowledge and embrace the brokenness of our lives and the lives of others is to be "half alive in the *meantime*." (phrase attributed to Carlyle Marney) Pamela Cooper-Wright writes, "All theology, but especially pastoral theology, begins with human beings, and in particular, the pain and brokenness of the human condition." (p. 35) Moreover, as participants in the Trinitarian dance are sorrowful and suffering, so too is the God-event, or, God. God is witnessed in this dissertation as sorrowful and suffering. When and where God and humankind transcend the *meantime*, there is resurrection.

Fifth definition: I write the dissertation, from *my particular positionality*, as a straight, white, middle class, educated man who, through such privilege, composes at a greater distance from that which I write about—the sorrowful and suffering. At times, I will not see as clearly as others will, those who are closer to the "open wound of life in this world." (Moultmann, 1993, p. 49) Other times I will unknowingly trip over my privilege, demonstrating an unintended insensitivity that will be hurtful to some. For my skewed vision and insensitivities along the way, I apologize. I hope that, in the balance, my writing expresses more respectful curiosity than asserted knowledge.

In addition, I write as a priest, deacon and pastoral counselor. As a priest, I write with words from my priestly vows on one shoulder: "to care alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor (BCP, 1979, p. 531)." I compose the dissertation with the broad expanse of humankind in mind, with the hope that the ideas and practices

expressed in the dissertation will open space in which persons and communities may be more fully cared for and loved.

Words from my deaconate vows watch me write from the other shoulder: “You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.” (BCP, 1979, p. 543) I desire the dissertation to lay a plank or two during the ongoing construction of the relational bridge between church and world, enabling a lesser distinction between the two.

I write as a pastoral counselor, who has sought, for almost three decades, to find the materials to build a corridor between the personal and the public, pastoral care and justice making, the pastoral counselor’s study and the public square. I seek to write about “the care of souls” in a manner that oppression and injustice matter and are addressed.

Two Perspectives: Psychotheological and Postmodern Ideas and Practices

Borrowing a phrase from pastoral theologian, John McDargh, I write from a “psychotheological perspective.” (1993, p. 172-193) I seek to find places of resonance between theology and psychology and places where one becomes curious about and seeks to know from the other. I seek and claim a mutuality and reciprocity between theology and psychology that is new for me and, I believe, the discipline of pastoral psychology.

For the last several decades, in terms of pastoral care and counseling, theology has genuflected before psychology. Pastoral counseling training programs during the 1970’s and 1980’s, when I trained, mostly were centered in object relations, self and ego psychologies. Theology was mixed into an already sufficient batter, added mostly for seasoning, that is, justification for the specialized vocational path we were taking. I do

believe, and there is evidence that, the subservient place of theology in the fields of pastoral psychology and pastoral theology is waning.

My own path towards establishing interdependence between theology and psychology has been and continues to be cleared by my second perspective, postmodern ideas and practices. Written into the "DNA" of postmodernism is the quest to find and privilege resonance, mutuality and curiosity between different parties—in this case, disciplines in relation, or what I name later on in the dissertation as "border walking." Hence, my pastoral psychology of lament is postmodern. Pamela Cooper-White (2007) lists several aspects of the broad territory of postmodernism that resonate with pastoral psychology and reverberate through this dissertation.

First, rationalism, the ability to think about the existence of oneself and the world, is too narrow to understand and sustain either self or world (Cooper-White, 2007, p. 13). Protestant theologian Karl Barth, in his monumental work, *The Epistle to the Romans*, first published in Germany in 1918, deconstructed 19th century rationalistic religion and philosophy from the perspective and amidst the ruins of World War I. The assessment of Barth about the limits of a Cartesian worldview to sustain the world has stood the test of, and has grown in significance over, time. Rationality is one paradigm, greatly flawed by my estimation, "answering only those questions that can be conceived within its own cultural, linguistic, sociological, political, and historical horizons." (Cooper-White, p. 13)

Second, objectivity is called into question by the unavoidable predisposition of any human perspective. "The subject, or 'I,' can never be removed from its own observation. Furthermore, to study something or someone is to interact with it, to

influence or cause change," (Cooper-White, p. 13) as well as to be changed by the process.

Third, all truths, facts, and discoveries are local. They are not "applicable to all people, creatures, things and places." (Cooper-White, p. 14) Postmodern ideas and practices rescue truth "from the timeless to the timely." (Lartey, July 15, 2001) Reality is socially and culturally constructed (Gergen, 1995, pp. 266-275). Reality, then, cannot be fully discovered. There is no "place" to find it.

Fourth, a claim to truth is valid to those who make the claim. Furthermore, the claims to truth by any one person or body of persons are stained by the values, biases and assumptions of those who make the claims. Furthermore, the claims are made for their benefit, either knowingly or unknowingly. The act of deconstruction is the art of unmasking through inquiring into these values, biases, assumptions and interests of the claims and their makers.

Often the enemy is *us*. We inherit and internalize the dominant claims of our culture and prosper them. These claims are in the "water" of the culture, and we often unknowingly and naively drink without realizing or acknowledging the hurt caused by assuaging our thirsts. An important postmodern question, especially in respect to the dominant claims and claimers of religion, science, and nation, is: "Who stands to benefit the most according to this statement or version of 'truth'?" (Cooper-White, p. 15)

Fifth, persons and the communities in which they reside live by some version of truth that works for them as a way to hold on and live responsibly amidst the vicissitudes of daily life. The postmodern "trick" is to hold these truths lightly, keep them fluid and malleable. The task is to stay open to the truths of others, to remain curious and in

conversation about the truths of a growing number and diversity of neighbors in this increasingly pluralistic world. The challenge is to evaluate continually each of our particular community's truths in light of post-Holocaust, post-Genocide, post-Apartheid ethics (Cooper-White, p. 15): "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children." (Greenberg, 1997, p. 23) I raise and wrestle with this challenge throughout the dissertation as I seek to rediscover and bear witness to the public and political dimensions of lament.

Sixth, postmodern ideas and practices, having grown out of the failure of modernism to curb the violence that stems from the conflicts between the claimers and their claims of "timeless" truths, evaluate truths by the criterion of liberation. Truths are accepted as "true" to the degree that their power is

> liberative of the marginalized and the oppressed, rather than reinforcing existing structures and institutions of power that continue to harm people, creatures, and the planet through self-serving paradigms of domination and control (Cooper-White, p. 16).

The Structure of the Dissertation

Part One

Part One, through which the psychology of lament is constructed, is comprised of five chapters. In Chapter 1, I situate the project in a theology of the cross. I elucidate the theology through the narrative of my particular life story, especially memories from my childhood. I testify to the impact these memories have had on both my relational and vocational paths.

In Chapter 2, I explicate the cultural climate that challenges the church to return to her lamentational roots, and the nine characteristics of lamentational relation that help the church to meet the challenge. The primary "text" of the explication is a family therapy session.

In Chapter 3, I explore a theology of God that emerges from a hermeneutic of lamentational relation. The principal texts for the exploration are the relation between two residents at The Hospice at Mission Hill, and a therapy meeting with Andrea, the client, Debbie Nathan, a resident in a therapy training program, and myself.

In Chapter 4, I deconstruct wailing. Wailing, as stated in my first premise, is the antithesis of lament. Where lament is a relational act, wailing is the anguished condition of those who are not partnered in their sorrow and suffering. I present wailing as epidemic in American society.

In Chapter 5, I present four principal characteristics of lament: 1) lament requires community; 2) lament weakens time's hold on us; 3) lament is for more than the *meantime*; and 4) lament is political. I close Chapter 5, and Part One of the dissertation, by positioning lamentational relation as the design for and renewal of mainline faith communities in America.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the key "teacher" is Andrea. Andrea's presence is also evident in Chapters 2 and 3. The relation Debbie, the resident in training, and I established with Andrea over the course of roughly a year of therapy meetings served as an icon through which I prayed this pastoral psychology of lament. I am deeply grateful for our collaboration and honor her courage and integrity. I reconstruct our meetings

through my memories of the meetings, videotapes of a couple of sessions, and a transcribed interview between Andrea, Debbie and me about our collaboration.

Throughout Part One, I also rely on transcribed inquiry interviews with leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, Ruby Sales and Cleveland Sellers, and Civil Rights Movement historian, Nashani Frazier.

Part Two

In Part Two, I detail the design of lamentational relation and formulate a nascent lamentational ecclesiology as that which may contribute to the renewal of the presently sluggish spirit of mainline religion in America.

In Chapter 6, I elucidate my almost three decade's journey from a more modernist pastoral psychology of "care of the soul" to a postmodern pastoral psychology, with its focus on the "soul of relation." I pay close attention to the pastoral care and counseling movement's privileging of individual wholeness, how such a focus reflects the spirit of the present-day American soul, what church historian Sydney Ahlstrom calls "rampant anarchic economic individualism."

In Chapter 7, I delineate a pastoral method centered in what is known in postmodern therapeutic theory and practice as the witnessing process. I begin by distinguishing my pastoral method from modernist-influenced pastoral care and counseling. I then present the history of the witnessing process and clarify my particular adaptation of the witnessing process for a pastoral ministry of lamentational relation.

I present the inquiries that substantiate my pastoral method of lamentational relation. I present material from three transcribed inquiry interviews: 1) members of the Bates College Office Professionals' Network; 2) participants in the Memoirs Project, a

diverse cohort of students and staff at Bates College; 3) and, a conversation with Esperance Uwambyeyi, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, and Alexandre Dauge-Roth, a professor at Bates College, whose area of expertise is narratives of trauma.

In Chapter 8, I extrapolate, from a poem by Laura Gilpin, *The Two-Headed Calf*, the priestly function in an ecclesiology of lament. I develop the "why" of the priestly act, using material from a transcribed inquiry interview with members of St. Paul's parish in Brunswick, Maine, and a study of Ecclesia Ministries/Common Cathedral in Boston, Massachusetts. I develop the "way" of the priestly act through a transcribed inquiry interview with Elizabeth Cochran's body mapping experience, and a study of a two-week series at Bates College titled *Art and Alterity: Beyond the Other as Enemy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

In Chapter 9, I illustrate the prophetic witness that issues from lamentational relation. I present, from a transcribed inquiry interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, her prophetic witness against the prison industry in California, and her witness of the prophetic work of Mothers ROC, a coalition that works for prison reform in California. I feature the prophetic witness of the Rwandan genocide class at Bates College in the winter semester of 2007, through student evaluations of the course and a review of the final course project, *Voices from Rwanda*.

In Chapter 10, I outline the beginnings of an ecclesiology of lament. I focus on the Black church experience to construct an epistemology for mainline religion in America.

I close with “concluding thoughts.” I summarize the principal elements of a pastoral psychology of lament through a story about how the lamentational testimony of rape survivors in the Congo is creating a major change for the good.

Means of Inquiry

My eight years of ministry among the dying and bereaved in two settings rife with sorrow and suffering—The Grady Hospice Program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia and The Hospice at Mission Hill, an acute inpatient hospice in Boston, Massachusetts for persons dying of AIDS—left me with an acute and indelible awareness of and curiosity about the ironic joy and creative energy for justice-making that emanated from these communities. This dissertation, in one sense, is an attempt to further substantiate, better understand, and test the validity of my awareness and the legitimacy of my curiosity.

After developing the dissertation topic around my awareness, curiosity and passion, I arranged interviews with people and communities who seemed to exude the joy and energy I had experienced at Grady and Mission Hill. I interviewed people engaged in ministries and not-for-profit agencies in various cities in the United States: Boston, Massachusetts; Columbia, South Carolina; Lewiston, Maine; Portland, Maine; San Francisco, California; and Washington, D.C.

I designed each interview in a manner that allowed for the construction of new knowledge for each particular interviewee or interviewees with whom I was in conversation, and for myself, with the expectation that the co-created new knowledge was in the service of our good and the greater good. Often my interviews included witnesses, reflectors, a method I write about in Chapter 7. The format always was open-

ended conversation, with a commitment to the fundamental indeterminacy of postmodern inquiry interviews. I held myself accountable to not furthering the relational violence of more modernist research, which, with a high degree of determinacy, opens up a greater chance of objectifying and using the interviewee or interviewees for predetermined objectives. Terry Tempest Williams (p. 284) writes to this point in a reference to Dr. Paul Farmer, anthropologist and physician:

> I recall listening to Dr. Paul Farmer speak at the University of Utah a few months before coming to Rwanda. He spoke of structural violence, how most people in power say "data is the cure for antidote." Farmer says no. That the importance of listening to life stories is crucial to our understanding of how a community exercises their right to be healed.

Every postmodern therapeutic conversation is an inquiry interview in that new knowledge is created by and shared among all the conversational collaborators. Therefore, actually, every lamentational event is an inquiry interview conducted by all of the conversational partners. The meaning and "truth" of the previous two sentences will unfold as the dissertation proceeds.

In conclusion, this pastoral psychology of lament and the embryonic ecclesiology that issues from it, hopefully will engage the question of my friend—Bill, is this something akin to God?—in a manner that adds to the wider discussion of what constitutes good pastoral presence and performance in a culture where the walls between church and world are both being chipped away from the outside and dismantled from the inside.

Part One

FOUNDATIONS OF A PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF LAMENT

Above the hotel gate, I saw a sign:
"International Conference on Inflammation of the Eye"
for those who have cried too much or not cried enough.
All of them with name tags on their lapels
like temporary nameplates in a cemetery or markers
in a botanical garden.
They approach one another as if sniffing, as if checking,
Who are you where are you from and when
was the last time you cried.
The subject of the morning session is "Sobbing:
The end of Crying or the Way It Begins." Sobbing
as soul-stuttering and griefstones. Sobbing
as a valve or a loop that links cry to cry,
a loop that unravels easily, like a hair ribbon,
and the crying—hair that fans out in profusion, glorious.
Or a loop that pulls into an impossible knot—
sobbing like an oath, a testimony, a cure.
Back in their cubicles, the women translators are busy
translating fate to fate, cry to cry. At night they come home,
scrub the words from their lips, and with sobs of happiness
they start loving, their eyes aflame with joy.

Yehuda Amichai (2000, p. 147)

Chapter 1

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF A PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF LAMENT

"No! First we grieve and then we march."

Glenda Hope (Thornton, 2002, p. 188)

Fireweed, a plant species of the Northern Hemisphere, is the first vegetation to appear after a forest fire or other ground disturbance. Fireweed was the first new growth to appear on Mount St. Helens after the volcano. A few days after a forest floor is made barren by fire or other foe, the green foliage of fireweed breaks through the charred or disturbed earth. Soon pinkish blossoms adorn the austere and inhospitable landscape. Fireweed grows and flowers as long as there is open space and direct light. As other, larger vegetation re-appears, the plants die out. The seeds remain in the soil for many years. When the land is ravaged again, the seeds germinate anew.

Fireweed is a metaphor for *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross. The theology of the cross is the foundation upon which this pastoral psychology of lament will be constructed. The theology of the cross is a particular, long held and less widely shared construction of the Judeo-Christian heritage in First World cultures. Moreover, the theology of the cross is more predominant in the Lutheran tradition in which I was raised and trained.

The theology of the cross constructs God as hidden in, among and for the marginalized, looked over, trampled down and forsaken. At the heart of a theology of the cross is the crucified Jesus, a construction of the cross that bears witness to Jesus as

executed for standing as a victim, with and for the victims of the commercial expansion of the Roman Empire into Galilee during the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Crossan, 1998). The construction of the expendable life of Jesus for the expendable ones, and the expendable Jesus' subsequent innocent death, germinated a movement of expendable ones expending their lives as, with and for the innocent victims of empire then and now. Martin Luther King, Jr. called such expenditure redemptive suffering, suffering that redeems history.

Former Civil Rights leader Andrew Young, while reflecting upon the power of redemptive suffering, remembered another Civil Rights leader, Fannie Lou Hamer. Andrew Young said that when he saw Fannie Lou Hamer emerge from a week in jail with a glow around her, he discovered the redemptive power of imprisoned lamenters (Young, 1997). Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of *Sweet Honey and the Rock*, bears witness to the same power, experienced through her own imprisonment, for leading a protest march down Broad Avenue in Albany, Georgia. Reflecting on her experience in a make-shift jail in Leesburg, Georgia (big rooms with barred windows filled way beyond capacity, 11 miles outside Albany), Bernice says: "In jail my voice changed, my voice deepened." Jail was Bernice's *Julliard*, her conservatory (Reagon, 1997).

The Jesus movement was and is a witness to new life emerging from ravaged landscape by means of innocent victims finding one another, through which hope is fashioned. Radically differentiated from the more popular and institutionalized construction of the cross—that Jesus died for our sins, therefore we have another chance at life—the construction I privilege testifies to the strength that emanates from and for

those who bring their weakness into community to be voiced and shared (Blaine-Wallace, 2003).

I cite as an example a community of survivors and orphans of the genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutu Rwandans in April of 1994 (Ndahayo, 2008). Two hundred Tutsis from several families fled to a convent, some two hundred meters from the United Nations peace envoy compound, to escape the Hutus. The Hutus found them, rounded them up, hacked them to death, beheaded them and then tossed them in a large pit.

Several years later, the children, spouses, siblings and friends of the executed Tutsis worked with the nuns behind the convent to exhume their loved ones. They carefully identified, as best as they could, their loved ones, mostly from fabric remnants. They washed and placed the bones in separate piles; skulls with skulls, thigh bone with thigh bone. They reconfigured bodies from the remains, as best they could. They placed each in a coffin draped in white and marked with a purple cross. While they worked, they sang, prayed, laughed and cried. In the evenings, they shared memories and participated in conversations about embracing the future, learning reconciliation, practicing forgiveness. They understood these conversations to be as much of the burial rite as the final burial service. Since the burial, they keep the conversations alive so that the ghosts of their dead may rest and remain in peace. From the scorched earth of a common history of desolation sprouts a green and pink field of conviviality, an articulation (literally, a binding together of that which has been torn apart) which looks and sounds like joy.

My privileging of shared suffering and sorrow as the cornerstone of religious community is a witness against a *theologia gloria*, a theology of glory, by which the majority of mainline American religious communities construct God and God's followers

as triumphal. I seek to deconstruct a sufficient God and this God's sufficient followers, thereby re-establishing a model of collaborative vulnerability by which seeds of hope, having laid dormant in the darkness of presumed sufficiency, germinate, like fireweed, again as if for the first time.

A Theology Grounded in Personal Narrative

The theology of the cross and my desire to build a dissertation from it springs from a lifetime of curiosity, contemplation and deconstruction of foundational childhood memories of suffering and sorrow. Mine was a violent home in a violent community. These memories shape my ministry. My commitment to how and what I remember of these experiences of childhood has formed and fueled almost three decades of ministry. How and what I remember has shaped my identity and practice as a pastor, priest and prophetic witness for social justice in a variety of roles—parish priest, health care administrator, pastoral counselor, social activist, spiritual director, and therapist. How and what I remember has vivified my understanding of, orientation to, and presence within the various settings of my pastoral, priestly and prophetic ministry—parishes; inpatient and outpatient hospices, including the nation's first acute inpatient hospice; ministries of spiritual direction at an Episcopal divinity school, monastery and center for prayer and contemplation; a practice of individual, couples and family therapy at a center in which I also served as training faculty; and, most recently, as the multifaith chaplain of what *US News and World Report* designates as a "small, most selective, private liberal arts college." How and what I remember has wiggled its way into my activities of daily living. My memories determine the relational commitments I am drawn to and make, the music I listen to and books I read, the places I worship, and the causes I serve and give

money to. The memories shape how I listen, converse and learn as a spouse, parent, grandparent, son, sibling and friend. The memories are the thread of continuity over many years as a consumer of therapy. In short, how and what I remember is the cornerstone of my character, that is, how I desire to live in relation.

Memory as a cornerstone of character merits further description. I do not, or, more accurately, no longer, remember in a more Freudian construction, the Neo Freudian, Self Psychology, Object Relations narratives, which permeated my initial training in psychotherapy during the first half of the 1980's. How and what I remember of my childhood is not a space "within" the "self" and constitutive of how I have individuated as a "person." Over the last several years, beginning with my commitment to relearn and retrain as a psychotherapist within a mostly collaborative language, lesser narrative therapy-oriented position, how and what I remember of my childhood is more postmodern-oriented. Memory is a co-creational act of dialogue between my inner and outer utterances, the inner and outer utterances of my conversational partners, and our collaborative reflections on these utterances. The reflexive conversation, not the bounded conversationalist, is constitutive of who I am. The self, as elaborated in the introduction, is relational.

How and what I remember of my childhood, at times, many times, especially as a person of prayer and contemplation, is comprised of a conversational partnership of one. Such does not make for an oxymoron. Drawing on the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin on internal voices (Farmer, 2001, pp. 59-60), I attend to myself as an expansive and varied "city" of voices, a populous of agonal and convivial voices, some vying for hegemonic supremacy at one moment, others "chewing the fat" together at the

same moment. I am not the mayor of this politic. I do not manage, as ego, the voices. Rather, I am an equal voice in a conjured conversation, exiled from authorship (Coates, 1998, pp. 103-125), incarnated as collaborator. Through this collaboration, I am languaged into life and relation.

Two principal narratives express the conditions of sorrow and suffering that dominated my childhood. In contemplating these stories and my decision to share them as formative of my vocational path and theory and practice of ministry, as foundation for this dissertation, and, most importantly, as *manna from heaven* for my own journey from Egypt, through the wilderness, towards the promised land, words of Pablo Neruda come to mind: "If each day falls inside each night there exists a well where clarity is imprisoned. We need to sit on the rim of the well of darkness and fish for fallen light with patience." (1989, p. 95) I persistently sit on the lip of brokenness, with fellow strugglers, and together cast, with this bait, for new knowledge.

Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue

Between the ages of seven and thirteen, I lived in a nicer home on Rawson Circle, in a wealthier neighborhood of Albany, Georgia, Bernice Johnson Reagon's hometown. The house reflected an upward trend in our family's social location. Our greater sufficiency was due to my father's emerging success in the clothing business. My father had moved from a store manager in a lower end, credit-based clothing chain to part owner of *Best Credit Clothing Company*. This business, too, targeted those of lower social location, principally military families, who were abundant in Albany, the home of several military bases. *Best Credit Clothing Company* was located on Broad Avenue, Albany's main street, the place of Bernice Johnson Reagon's arrest. Albany represents a

major chapter in and location of the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's. *The Albany Movement* is considered one of the most brutal scenes of the civil rights movement. Most of the action, in the form of demonstrations and marches, happened along Broad Avenue. I often witnessed the brutality.

What I witnessed on Broad Avenue was both horrifying and familiar. At home on Rawson Circle and in front of my father's store, I experienced a similar violence—physical abuse, loud and injurious shouting, acts of shame and shaming, fits of rage, out of control emotions and actions, perpetrators and victims. Two images: 1) my wailing mother being slapped across the living room by my hysterical father, veins standing out and throbbing along his reddened face and neck, I trying to intervene, my brother hiding behind the sofa, and my sister shut up in her room; 2) Martin and Coretta Scott King, Jr., Andrew Young, Julian Bond, John Lewis, hundreds and hundreds of small children, howling mothers, courageous youth and adults being hosed to the ground by ecstatic policemen, bitten by dogs, clubbed by the sticks of visibly scared National Guardsmen, unrelentingly jeered by crowds of white bystanders.

Over time, the two images, in conversation with me, became more like than unlike one another. The distinctiveness of each image dissolved. The images blurred. The blurring led to my late teen years and twenties being constructed by the conflated images. Early marriage chose me as a sheltering contradiction to and healing of the violence of my home. I drifted toward ministry as a vocation that invited me to move off the curb of Broad Avenue into the fray of conflict as enmeshed mediator, much the way I situated myself in the violence of my childhood home. As time went by, in and through various vocational and relational contexts that mirrored my past, along with many years of hard

work in therapy, I deconstructed the blur of domestic and social violence, personal and public terror and constructed a more liberative narrative for hearth and world. I call the progression, initiated by German theologian Dorothee Soelle (1975), a movement from wailing—inarticulate (disconnected) suffering and sorrow that constructs us—to lamentation—articulate (convivial) sharing of suffering and sorrow in community. This progression from a brooding self, what Saint Augustine called *homo incurvatus in se*, self turned in on oneself (a relational notion of sinfulness), to a relational self, with more and newer voices with which to dialogue, created new knowledge for greater possibilities.

The journey from wailing to lament is not over. The journey is less that which I have moved through and more a dialogue I continue to have. The particular icon of lament written at the relational nexus of Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue remains at once ancient and new, fermented and fresh. Recent reflection and reflections upon the reflection in the company of friends and peers creates newer, more nuanced, kinder knowledge of my roots. The newer knowledge born of the dialogue follows.

I was born from a womb agitated by the juxtaposition of domestic and social violence. My mother comes from a wealthier background, her family more educated and refined than most. By the time of her adolescence, alcohol had violently ravaged her immediate family, leaving her to take care of an addicted mother in a materially and relationally impoverished household. My father comes from an eastern North Carolina cotton mill village, abject material poverty, which spawned relational violence. My father is a product of a social location often referred to as “poor white trash.” For many years, most of my years, I have felt and known myself to be tossed about in the conflagration of domestic and social terror that was the union of my parents and the cradle of my birth. Of

late, with the icon of lament written from the conflagrated intersection of Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue nearby, I have made good progress. I am more actively redeeming my past and renewing my relation with parents and siblings in the spirit of empathy for and solidarity with who we were then, now and in between. I am making peace closer to home, the same peace I have made with much greater relational dexterity farther from home, the peace I have more adroitly managed to create and sustain as a pastor, priest and prophet. Indeed, and, at times, regretfully, I have better accomplished vocationally that which I have aspired to better embody domestically. A review of my three most invigorating vocational assignments/contexts and the shape of my domestic life at the time of each are illustrative of a mounting desire for and success at transposing the whole of my relational life into a narrative of lament.

The period of time and vocational context most reflective of my heritage were the years I served as director of hospice at Grady Hospital, in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia. Grady Hospital is the county hospital. Its mission is to the indigent poor in Atlanta. When I began my ministry there, the indigent poor meant the vast majority of the Black population in Atlanta. The hospital was huge in size and throbbed with the energy and intensity of inner city Atlanta. The atmosphere of the emergency room was compared to the field hospitals of Vietnam. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Action was a rock's throw from Grady. I commuted to Grady each day, an hour each way, from a very nice house in a sufficient subdivision, Mountain View Acres, which bordered Atlanta proper. The subdivision is one of hundreds that surround Atlanta. The circle of subdivisions is referred to as the white donut. The mission of Mountain View

acres was, and, I imagine still is, to buffer its residents from the noise, chaos and danger of Atlanta proper.

Mountain View Acres and Grady Hospital mirrored, in kind and degree, Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue. There was violence in my home—domestic and subterranean, that is, the quieter storm of a failing marriage—and violence at the office—social and abject, the firestorm of unchecked racial inequality. I was living at the reincarnated junction of my birth and youth, which made for both the most painful and exhilarating time of my life. At Mountain View Acres, a family wailed. At Grady Hospital, a hospice team co-created space for lament. Moving back and forth between Mountain View Acres and Grady Hospital proved both disconcerting and illuminating.

A few months into my first year at Grady Hospital, a first year medical resident summoned me to the bedside of a young man in the last hour or so of his life. The other physicians and nurses kept great distance. We stayed with him until he died. The young man's diagnosis was Gay Related Immunodeficiency Disease. The young man was Grady's first case of what was to be thousands and thousands of cases of the disease shortly thereafter named AIDS. Almost overnight, Grady's definition of the indigent poor was expanded to include a cohort of young, white, gay, newly poor and terminally ill men. Our hospice program quickly became a final home for this rapidly growing and ravaged population. The canvas of lament that was Grady Hospice grew in beauty and stature. We, I felt, were emulating "The Beloved Community," a phrase authored by Josiah Royce, a Boston philosopher and near contemporary of William James, and placed

into the contemporary religious imagination by the well known civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.[2]

Caring for persons dying from AIDS differed greatly, more in degree than kind, than care of persons dying from cancer, the diagnosis that dominated roughly 99% of other hospices in the country. Because we were part of the 1% of other hospices, all of the hospices in this very small cohort collaborated daily by phone and regularly through conferences and workshops to deliver the best possible care. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported our efforts by funding a program that enabled the AIDS service agencies in the ten cities most affected by AIDS to work together closely and often. After a year of working together, a small team from the cohort took our newly acquired knowledge to second tier cities through workshops and conferences. As a part of this team, I became aware of and applied for the position of executive director of the health care organization that was soon to open the nation's first acute inpatient AIDS hospice. I moved, with my failing family, from Atlanta, Georgia in the Southeast to Boston, Massachusetts in the Northeast.

The Hospice at Mission Hill became, for me, a fuller representation of "The Beloved Community." AIDS, by this time, had mutated to AIDS and HIV, and the profile of the AIDS/HIV patient had expanded beyond that of gay, mostly white men. AIDS/HIV was creeping into the historically poor, Black communities, spread mostly by intravenous drug use. The profile of our inpatient hospice dramatically changed both in terms of race and class.

I remember Jonathan. Jonathan was dying at Mission Hill. His lover, Ken, had been at his side throughout the previous weeks, having taken time away from his job as a

[2] I thank John McDargh for this historical note.

buyer of designer clothing for a chain of high-end department stores. Jonathan's parents, farmers from rural Maine, far removed by values, life style and standard of living from the experience of middle class urban life, homosexuality, gay relationships and dying centers, came to see their son before he died. A nervous dad in bib overalls and a now terrified Ken faced each other across Jonathan's bed. After a period of uneasy silence, they simultaneously reached across the bed, embraced, and cried in each other's arms. Jonathan placed a hand on each of their backs.

The icon of lament that was The Hospice of Mission Hill, written in the image of these three men's embrace, which transposed the agonal to the convivial, was the resolution I desired for the binary that was my personal and public life. I longed for hands to emerge from my relational brokenness, and be placed on the backs of my family and vocational dissidence.

In what now looks more like an attempt to reach such resolve, I accepted an appointment to a more conventional, less rarified position. I served as vicar then rector of Emmanuel Church, a very progressive Episcopal parish in Boston. Emmanuel celebrated its first same sex union in 1981. In 2004, while I was there, when Massachusetts legalized same sex marriage, the parish supported my decision to defy the bishop's directive that priests of the diocese were not to solemnize same sex marriages. Moreover, Emmanuel is situated in the fanciest block of Boston's most prestigious street, Newbury Street. The juxtaposition of progressive Emmanuel and prestigious Newbury Street, while notable, was much less remarkable than the juxtaposition of Mountain View Acres and Grady Hospital, Lexington and Mission Hill. Emmanuel Church represented a more manageable context for the integration I desired.

The resolution would not happen in the way I imagined. The marriage, and the family order situated around it, after many years of struggle and work, was finished. I consider the failure, mostly mine, of not being able to transpose the marriage and family from wailing to lament, to integrate Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue, in a manner that was redemptive of both addresses, to be a loss that I am still learning to grieve. For many years, I have wailed more than lamented. Over the last couple of years, I have learned to lament more and wail less.

That agonal juxtaposition of prestigious Newbury Street and progressive Emmanuel did move towards a relational dynamic that is now, arguably, a narrative of lament. About eight years ago, in cooperation with the City of Boston and a not-for-profit mental health center, Emmanuel turned a goodly number of its square feet into *Safe Haven*, a twenty-four hour center for roughly thirty dual diagnosed women, most of whom have lived on the streets of the Boston's Back Bay neighborhood for the last three decades. *Safe Haven* was created because these women, afraid to go inside of buildings because of what had happened to them in buildings, did not feel safe in the city's homeless shelters.

The establishment of *Safe Haven* took much time and great care. Two social workers, working out of Emmanuel, established relations with the women over the course of two years. In the meantime, other leaders of the parish and I worked long and hard to encourage the likes of The Ritz Carlton, Ermenelgildo Zegna, and the very wealthy residents in the first block of Commonwealth Avenue, who shared an alley with Emmanuel, to welcome these new neighbors. After two years, enough trust was built between all parties to break ground. This collaboration of city government, a private

healthcare organization and a religious community was the first alliance of this kind for Boston.

Upstairs, a congregation of well-educated, liberal, artful people gathers. Downstairs, a community of marginalized, addicted, emotionally haunted women makes and risks life together. Often, more often over time, upstairs and downstairs have been leveled into a region of shared suffering. Outside, the highest end salons send over body care products for the women, Brooks Brothers sends over clothes now and then.

The Story of Linda

The story of Linda is illustrative of the transposition of downstairs and upstairs into that which is closer to "The Beloved Community." Linda has lived at *Safe Haven* since its inception. Little is known of Linda's past. We do know that she has lived on the streets for at least a couple of decades, and before that she was a scientist.

Linda spent the first several months mostly downstairs, occasionally walking upstairs, mostly during worship on Sunday morning. Linda would walk around and about the worshipping community, never sitting down. She was not deterred by events in worship like my sermon. Over time, I became comfortable with Linda walking back and forth in front of the pulpit. Occasionally, Linda would recite, very loudly, the Lord's Prayer, one line behind the rest of the congregation. Soon, the congregation learned to take the dissonance in stride.

One Thursday night, after Linda had been at *Safe Haven* for about a year, she showed up at the Thursday night Eucharist, which was held in the chapel, a much smaller venue. The chapel is an architectural gem, acclaimed as one of the most beautiful worship spaces in Boston. The chapel is dedicated to the women martyrs of the church, and

statues of all the women martyrs comprise the reredos, the large, decorative installment behind the altar. I believe the feminine atmosphere of the chapel made the chapel a safer place for Linda.

Linda sat in the rear of the chapel, several rows from other parishioners. During the sharing of the peace, a well-intended parishioner walked over to her, extended his hand and said, “The Peace of the Lord be with you.” Linda screamed loudly, “Don’t touch me!” and bolted from the space. The following week, Linda returned for Eucharist. She sat alone in the back and parishioners let her be. The following week, Linda returned. When the congregation went to the altar to receive the elements, Linda joined the line. When she approached the priests for bread and wine, she did not pause. She passed up the bread and wine, walked past us and returned to her seat. The following week she came forward again, paused in front of us, refused to receive the elements and returned to her seat. The next week, she paused in front of us, extended her right hand, covered by a large red mitt. She received the bread. The next week, she extended a bare, open hand and received the bread; no wine, she is Roman Catholic.

I heard, just recently, that during an adult forum dialogue following worship, a couple of months ago, Linda broke into the conversation, saying, “I want you to know that Linda is not my real name. Sharon is my name.”

I understand worship, more particularly Eucharist, to have been the safer place for Sharon to find a way to make Emmanuel, upstairs and downstairs, home. The Eucharist is a drama that moves from wailing (agony) to lament (shared sorrow) towards joy (solidarity) for peace (compassion and justice). The Eucharist is a particularly alluring drama for those, like Sharon, who wail more and lament less, who know joy vaguely

because of circumstances beyond their making and control. The allure of the Eucharist for those whose suffering is more conscious and abject is its promise, acclaimed most directly by the partakers: “Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.” I believe the ongoing rhythm of Eucharist at Emmanuel brokered the connection between the less conspicuous and conscious suffering of those upstairs and the more obvious suffering of the residents downstairs. Through Eucharist, we found common ground.

The alluring promise of Eucharist seduced me early on, as a very young child in a violent home. In Eucharist, the conflation of Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue is placed in the crucible of a sacred history, and thereby is untangled and offered back to me as gift. When I stay away from Eucharist too long, the unitive whole of Rawson Circle and Broad Avenue is lost, the two conflate and I digress. The promise of tomorrow and the possibilities for today emerge again and anew through my regular participation in the Eucharistic drama.

A logical question arises: How legitimate, relevant and inviting is a pastoral psychology honed from the material of shared suffering, even shared suffering that evokes solidarity, joy, promise and peace? June Jordan (1985, p. 47) names my and others’ skeptical voice: “It occurs to me that much organizational grief could be avoided if people understood that partnership in misery does not necessarily provide the partnership for change: When we get the monsters off our backs all of us may want to run in very different directions.” A closer look at lament, through the lens of my second memory, addresses the question.

Tattered Church Building on a Red Clay Road

During our years on Rawson Circle, we had a domestic worker, a Black woman, Sarah, who kept house five days a week. Sarah was our "maid," the term used in the South for domestic workers. I remember Sarah as part of the family, a memory for which I credit my mother. My mother befriended Sarah, and Sarah her, in a manner that helped bridge the race and class divide.

Often, I would ride along when mom would take Sarah home at the end of the day. White folks referred to Sarah's neighborhood as "colored town." On many a night, as we drove down either a dusty or muddy road past a dilapidated, white clapboard church, I would hear undulating, unnerving, exhilarating, destabilizing, jubilant song so energized as to almost break down the walls and raise the roof. This was Sarah's church.

I sensed then and believe now that there was an unbreakable bond between what happened between those walls, under that roof, and on Broad Avenue. Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young, Julian Bond, Jesse Jackson and John Lewis led the marches past my father's store. Those behind them embodied the uncontainable passion that wore down and bent the back of the more abject, visible racism of the South. The uncontainable passion was born in Sarah's church and in hundreds of similar churches across the South.

The memory of Sarah's church remains the icon I meditate upon to stay grounded in and committed to an ecclesiology of lament.[3] When I lose confidence in an

[3] An ecclesiology of lament has been "on the ground" since and following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, during which a significant number of victims were massacred in their churches. These churches have become places of lamentational passion: "We look through broken windowpanes into a dark room of the brick annex to the church. Women are singing, their hands undulating like butterflies. A choir of older women. They sing with their eyes closed. It is the same chorus being sung over and over again, like a musical rosary being moved not through their fingers but through the vibrations of their voices." (Williams, p. 304)

ecclesiology of lament, that is, when I wonder if I am privileging a "crepe hanger" ecclesiology, I imagine Sarah and her church, and I recall the words of one of my favorite writers, a fellow Southerner, who was close to Sarah's church experience, Flannery O'Connor: "[Americans] have domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily." (O'Conner, 1970, p. 159) The voices of Sarah and Flannery invigorate me to stand against a theology of glory and for a radical theology of the cross.

Deconstructing White Privilege

While Sarah and Flannery's voices invigorate me to stand against a theology of glory and for a theology of the cross, I am strengthened and grounded in my stance by an awareness of my own deprivation and anemia as a participant in a mainline church that is diseased by white privilege. My friend, Ruby Sales, a legend of the Civil Rights Movement and now the director of Spirit House in Washington, D.C., meets me at the place of my white oppressiveness. Below is an excerpt from the inquiry interview with Ruby Sales, January 2007:

> Bill: Do you think mainline church, white church is capable of jubilation, capable of shouting?
>
> Ruby: No, because the one thing that they based their (*unintelligible*) on, and their sense of essence in a socially constructed world, whiteness, that says that your self is predicated on power and things, that the only thing that you would end up celebrating and shouting for would be things . . . and power. You have to reconstruct yourself. You have to remember – I think the bridge to each other is this – I'm probably going to misquote it, but it's to remember when we were all strangers and aliens and our father stood outside the gate. That is, that is the

source of that thing which we celebrate, of how far God has brought us. You know, but if you don't have that understanding, the only thing that you can celebrate is power.

Bill: So how do we deconstruct the church, and recraft the church – mainline church? How do we deconstruct and reconstruct the church that most of the [Episcopal Divinity School] graduates go to into a church of joy?

Ruby: By deconstructing God and Jesus. By moving away from the Christ to the historical Jesus. By taking the cross out . . . by having religion not undergird white supremacy and power, but have it undergird human freedom.

Bill: And that would be (*unintelligible*) church, it would be a -

Ruby: But it will be a witnessing church, a testifying church. It will be a church where – you know, I think I told you at EDS – although I wasn't a churchgoing person when I went to EDS, I was really agnostic – at the heart of what I was – what struck me always is that there was no thanksgiving. People just started immediately in prayers, demanding God give 'em this, give 'em that. God, I want you to – I could never understand how people could be issuing *orders* to God.

Bill: Well, that's my . . . joy has to grow out of redemption. I mean, out of being met and found in the wilderness, right?

Ruby: Well, yes but it also has to do with how you understand and see the world, and your inner and outer, your values. If you think that it is a gift to wake up in the morning, then that's a – you remember when the Kenyan guy came to EDS, I'll never forget, and we were in (*unintelligible*) community worship and he was leading the service that day? Oh, God, you were not there. And he came out in

this long African robe, and he had his, and he said, I want to . . . let's *celebrate*, I want to thank God for this *morning*, I want to – people looked at him like he was barbaric.

Bill: Why did they look at him that way?

Ruby: Because he was experiencing God in a different way. Because he was starting with thanksgiving. Because he was wanting to praise God . . . for the journey. As difficult as it were, he thought that there had been milestones along the journey that was worth celebrating. And they didn't get that – they thought he was for, they were horrified that he was not from the prayer book, that he was, you know, breaking the tradition. And they froze. And he stopped in the middle of it and said, well I must be doing something wrong.

Bill: I'm just not sure how white American church can get to that place. I mean -

Ruby: Bill, you got to look at your *history*. History becomes the cornerstone for how we understand, and act out a meaning of God. So if you come from a history of enslavement, industrialism, I mean and all of the other isms -

Bill: So we have to shout out of our encapsulation and materialism, and we have been -

Ruby: I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see.

Bill: And we are lost in our own affluence?

Ruby: Numbed in your own affluence. Because in effect, you can't pray . . . you can't shout when you're *numb*. And see, part of being white -

Bill: See, that's why I think we're . . . we're walking around, that the white church is walking around inarticulately wailing. I mean, in depression, in

> numbness, in road rage, in boredom . . . and how do we find, how do we come together in our enslavement? How do we come together and shout through our enslavement?
>
> Ruby: Because you have, this is how, when I give this conversation it's amazing . . . that it ultimately makes white people cry. When I say, you know, Black people are not the only people who suffer from tremendous loss. That to be white is to lose your connections with your ancestors, to lose your historical experiences, and to buy on to this thing, this socially constructed reality called white. It is in effect the will . . . to be willing to commit suicide and to kill oneself . . . and one's connection with the past. And I talk about whiteness – not as a privilege, but as a death. And I talk about a spiritual death, that what the makers in the corners of that require people to do is to kill their connection to the fact that their grandmother was an Irish peasant. And to buy into this thing that because they're white, they're all powerful, and they've always had things, and not to remember in England when their great-great grandmother stood on the corner begging for food. And I'm saying, so that is . . . it is to take the *spirit* out of people. How can you expect people to have spirit when it's beaten out of them? And part of what whiteness says – that's why Audre Lorde's essay was so profound, is the erotic, and Carter was kind of on to it but she didn't know what to do with it . . . she took it to a sexual level.

Ruby's description of and prescription to heal the spiritual death of white privilege legitimizes the right of the white to "hoot and holler" like the Black man who gave thanks for the morning in the chapel at Episcopal Divinity School. The problem is

that we do not know how to shout.

As white people ensconced in the American edition of a Eurocentric/masculine grand narrative, we have a blurred knowledge of our particular and concrete histories of material oppression and social disinheritance. As noted previously, I am the first generation, on my father's side, to be born off the mill village. The mill villages of eastern North Carolina usually are located "across the tracks," places of poverty at the periphery of prosperity, relocated from the industrial Northeast to the rural South in the early part of the 20th century for the purpose of cheaper labor.

As curious as I am about my mill village roots, I know little about them. The narratives in my family about the mill village are mostly about having "risen above it," "gotten off it," "left it behind." My father and uncles talk about having "made it." "It" is material sufficiency. They boast of having made a name for themselves, "name" meaning that they have achieved the American "dream" of self-actualization. I know little or nothing about most of my ancestors, how they ended up in and did not find a way to leave the mill village, how they did and did not persevere in the daily struggle to survive.

The majority of the ninety-three percent of Americans, who believe in some representation of God, are vaguely aware of our elders who did not "evolve" from Ellis Island and the likes towards sufficiency and actualization. These elders are the missing link that would connect us to the historical chain of sorrow and suffering, where resides the energy and impetus to work towards the redemption of the history from which we distance ourselves. Moreover, as the seminarians at Episcopal Divinity School (arguably the most progressive seminary in the nation) demonstrated, we feel uneasy in the presence of those who are linked to the chain, those who have learned and are quick to

express the ironic joy born of shared sorrow and suffering.

Mainline religion in America has inoculated itself from, and has been inoculated by, the grand narrative of whiteness-as-material-sufficiency-and-self-actualization. Ironically, the inoculation has made us anemic. What Carlyle Marney once said about religion in Charlotte can be said of religion in America: "The Churches of Charlotte, one of the most religious cities in America, don't have enough gas to get from here to Wadesboro." (Carey, 1981, p. 45) That would be fifty miles. Mainline religion's engagement in a broken world is mostly about *helping others*. Mainline religion's grief narrative is grounded in the personal and is addressed as something to get through and over. When grief is collective, anything larger than a "bereavement group," such as a nation grieving September 11, we are at something of a loss in terms of how to go on, much less together. President Bush best voiced our anemia a few days after September 11 in his now infamous prescription for our grief: Go shop.

In other words, the most religious nation in the world does not quite know how to sing *Marching to Zion*, much less join the march. From Flannery O'Connor's short story, *Revelation*:

> She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the

> God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away (O'Connor, 1982, pp. 653-654).

An ecclesiology of lament for mainline religion in America begins with establishing better ways for us to listen respectfully, attentively and curiously to our wailings, made inarticulate by having drifted from our lamentational moorings and washed up on the more barren shore of whiteness. Through such a presence with and for one another and others, we will re-member the ligament that attaches us to a world community groaning in distress and grappling for a way forward together towards a more liberative future. The closer we get to our moorings, the more distance we will have closed, the more difference we will have erased, between Darfur and Boston.

The way forward that I envision and imagine is an epistemology reflected in the congregational dynamic inside the worn out, white clapboard church on the dusty or muddy road in "colored town," on the edge of Albany, Georgia, the church to which our "maid," Sarah, belonged. The kind of church in which Ruby was raised (inquiry interview, January 2007):

> Bill: Now, Ruby, building on what you said last night – it meant so much to me – that Dr. King was the beneficiary of a long fermenting movement. In other words, he sort of stood in the . . . he walked in front of people like your mom and your dad -
>
> Ruby: Yes, he walked behind.

Bill: He walked behind.

Ruby: He walked behind people like my mother, my father, my grandmother, his mother, his father, the people in the church that he talks about, the old women in the church that he grew up, who claimed him very early as their own precious little Martin, and so that he walked be-, we walked behind that generation . . . who really held the community open for us.

Bill: Ruby, it . . . if I say that the movement was carved out of . . . from the heart of the old women in church, how does that strike you?

Ruby: I would say it was carved out of the hearts and hands . . . hearts *and* hands, and work, hard work of the women, of black women in the community who ultimately were in the church. They were the carriers of the dream, they were the ones who gave you two dollars in a handkerchief when you went away to college, they were the ones who had the oratorical contest, they were the ones who . . . they were the ones who had interpretive dance contests, they were the ones who kept, who fertilized your intellect and your creativity, and who made you believe that you could be somebody in a world that said that you didn't exist. *That* was not a word in their vocabulary, that you didn't exist. That was not a word. I mean, we were, we grew up in a high school where the model was excellence, achieving excellence. So there they were pumping us up for excellence . . . in a world that said that we were inferior. There was nothing in my vocabulary that said inferior, *nothing*. Because these *extra*-ordinary women made me feel that I was a special child – as Alice Walker talks about, in terms of 'womanist' – I mean this whole business of, if you're one of these special black girls who talk back to

> the world, who's sassy, who's much, who's precocious instead of being beaten down – you're egged on. And so I was one of those little black girls who was egged on.
>
> Bill: And where did this, where did, where does this fire . . . I don't know if start's the right word, but what keeps these coals going? Where did these women find and nurture their passion?
>
> Ruby: They found and nurtured their passion in their relationship with God . . . and their sights as visionaries. Because they had the capacity, as I said, to work not only for what was there today, but what could be possible for tomorrow. So they were the ones who could see down the road. They were the ones who understood – with a very deep, deep understanding – that injustice didn't last forever. And that you had to prepare people to be able to work for that day when it didn't exist, and to work to bring it about, I mean justice about.

The Black church experience, to which Sarah and Ruby belonged, is broader than Black. It is the experience reflected in the Second Testament narratives of the *ecclesia*. The rudiments of the Black church experience are reflected in the practical ecclesiologies of persecuted and oppressed people of faith throughout the history of the church. The dynamics of the Black church experience are mirrored in the community life of the persecuted and oppressed people of many and most religious traditions.

The Black church experience is a relevant, applicable and restorative ecclesiology for a mainline American church, paradoxically made anemic by its prosperity, navigating its way back to the lamentational mooring from which it has broken loose. The Black church experience during and before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and

1960's, less so from the 1970's, when the federal programs designed to help community hurt it (inquiry interview with Cleveland Sellers, January 2007), and apart from its current prosperity-preaching offshoots, is the closest, in time and proximity, to mainline congregations on their way back to the ancient and still lively harbor of the insufficient and dependent. Therefore, the Black church experience offers a good blueprint for the construction of an epistemology that privileges more of a quest for relational knowledge than a search for objective, universal truths. In Chapter 10, I will develop the beginnings of such an epistemology.

Roots of a Relational Ecclesiology of Lament

The theoretical backbone of an ecclesiology of lament is situated in the early work of Dorothee Soelle, who did theology from a Post Holocaust perspective and during the second half of the twentieth century. Dorothee Soelle was the creator of the wailing-lamentation-solidarity-joy-change trajectory referenced earlier in this chapter in a more cursory form. This trajectory is the foundation of the pastoral psychology of lament I am developing through the dissertation.

For Soelle, lamentation was radically relational. Out of the community of incomprehensible wailing—a community in which the identity of mourner and witness becomes indistinguishable through a mutuality of brokenness—comes a resonant song. Soelle recognized lamentation as incomprehensible wailing that, when witnessed, is transposed into an articulate voice of comfort and hope. For example, Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, wrote of women "shriekers," who, when brought to church and accompanied to the altar during Mass by other women, found peace (2002, p. 46). Lament is incomprehensible wailing that has found a song to sing, and someone with

whom to sing it. Such singing, Soelle believed, is “psalmic language,” not because it reflects a particular literary genre, but, rather, contains the elements of “lament, petition and the expression of hope” (1975, p. 72):

> I call upon thee, O Lord, make haste to me. Give ear to my voice, when I call to thee! Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting of my hands as an evening sacrifice. (Psalm 141, verses 1 and 2, Revised Standard Version)”

A choir of lament makes a mysteriously joyful noise unto the Lord through a convivial envisioning of a future born out of solidarity, what the Apostle Saint Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13 heralded as “seeing through the glass dimly.” Listen to *The Blind Boys of Alabama* before they hit the big time. Shared suffering is doxological (Thornton, 2002, pp. 159-163).

I recall the Grady Hospice chapter of my life. I spent days among those dying ghastly deaths, in the poorest part of a city, and nights with the supposedly living, in a corridor of an upwardly mobile middle class suburb. My friends wondered how I possibly could do such work day in and day out. I wondered how I could do such living night in and night out. Among the dying, I learned to distinguish deeper joy from shallower happiness.

Doxology, cries of joy birthed from the tears of shared suffering, is Eucharistic. Body broken in community time after time, for us again and again, is news, good news, before and after it is sound doctrine. Eucharist keeps open a wound that offends the senses and manners of a church and society in which sufficiency is sacrosanct, a wound from which the hopes of and for the insufficient spring.

Eucharist, as convivial drama in four acts—wailing, lamenting, rejoicing, acting— is dangerous to the powers and principalities who count on a dissonant, numbed constituency of the complacent singing sanguine praise songs to a cock-sure God. I am reminded of American author Annie Dillard's notion:

> On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return (1982, p. 40).

Doxology is the point at which grief becomes political.

Two February's ago, in 2006, at the beginning of Black awareness month, I received an email about a campaign to get *Eyes On The Prize*, the most celebrated history of the civil rights movement, back on air after over a decade in the archives. The documentary had been imprisoned by copyright restrictions, which, on the surface seem bureaucratic, but, when scratched, smell of what First Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann calls *Royal Consciousness*, economics of affluence, politics of oppression and religion of immanence (2001, p. 30). In the email, Civil Rights leader Lawrence Guyot said that the restrictions are analogous to banning the books of Martin Luther

King, Jr. and Malcolm X. He continued, “If people had stuck to the law, Black people wouldn’t have the right to use restaurants and hotels.”

If not by fine print and legalese, the regnant dominion drowns out *Eyes On The Prize* by reciting bedtime stories of its official doctrine, optimism (Hall, 1996, p. 463), to the sleepy middle majority, lulled into dreams of gated communities by the prose of a prosperous present. The regnant dominion keeps trying to hum the citizenry to sleep, fearing that the strangely joyous lament of the grieving and aggrieved community of the marginalized will be heard. The outsiders’ strident hope for the future threatens the insiders’ obsessive concern for the immediate, for which they have margined the future. Evidence the Bush administration’s willingness to hand down to our children an almost unimaginable debt and an increasingly pillaged environment in the service of the moment.

In spite of what church has mostly become in America, pathos co-opted by patriotism, the Judeo-Christian witness is rooted in grief. The ministry of Jesus, and of those who came before him, Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, and Micah, thickened the stories of incomprehensible wailing of the abandoned into songs of lament among the dispossessed, creating joyous solidarity dangerous to the prosperity of temple and town.

I believe the principal task of the church in present-day America is to reclaim and restore our Judeo-Christian pathos, a tradition of grieving that both encourages and equips us to embrace our present experiences of suffering and death towards liberative engagement in and for a world groaning in travail. We have a rich tradition to draw from, what German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz calls a “dangerous memory” that loosens the grip of dominant claims about life (Thornton, 2002, p. 133):

> Memory has a fundamental theological importance as what may be termed anamnetic solidarity or solidarity in memory with the dead and the conquered which breaks the grip of history as a history of triumph and conquest interpreted dialectically or as evolution (Metz, 1980, p. 184).

I am reminded of Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. The congregation begins services with "Psalms of Lament," what they call "the public processing of pain." They take their processed pain to the streets, holding prayer vigils at the site of each violent death in Durham (Brueggeman, 2001, p. 122). The gospel is *grief work gone public*.

Public Grief and Reconciliation

Public grief offers more than the road to freedom for the oppressed. Public grief creates the strongest possibility for more genuine reconciliation between perpetrators of violence, tyranny, power abuses and their victims. The God illumined through the eighth century prophets and Jesus yearns for a cosmos throughout which all that is estranged is reconciled. Reconciliation worth its salt begins with the victims' public expression of grief and, if at all possible, in the presence of their perpetrators.

A good percentage of processes of reconciliation fail because the victims are de-centered. Extraneous recipes for reconciliation are imposed on victims by those who either pretend or presume to act on their behalf. The voices of the victims are patronized and, at worst, silenced. When the voices of victims are at the center of the reconciliation process, and effectively heard, their first and strongest voice is the story of their pain and loss told in as much detail as possible to those who have hurt them.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, after the first public hearings of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, received a letter from a radio listener who heard the broadcast testimonies of several victims:

> The world is wept. Blood and pain seep into our listening; into our wounded souls. The sound of your sobbing is my own weeping; your wet handkerchief my pillow for a past so exhausted it cannot rest—not yet. Speak, weep, look, listen for us all. Oh, people of the silent hidden past, let your stories scatter seeds into our lonely frightened winds. Sow more, until the stillness of this land can soften, can dare to hope and smile and sing; until the ghosts can dance unshackled, until our lives can know your sorrows and be healed (Tutu, 1999, p. 119).

The most startling finding of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was how much of the work was accomplished in the simple yet excruciating recollection by the victims of their experiences, the grief brought to light and life through the sharing of memory, and the possibility for forgiveness that emerged from the sharing of sorrows. This finding also is supported in the gacaca trails in Rwanda. Gacaca, translated as “grass courts,” (Williams, p. 271) is a village system of government, historically gathered for smaller crimes, and recently enacted to enable survivors and orphans to address and question accused perpetrators of the genocide. Public grief, historically discouraged in Rwanda as a dishonoring of the deceased, and from which children had been sheltered, has spilled into the gacaca hearings. The testimonies of the perpetrators, and the invitation for the witnesses to address and question the perpetrators, have brought to utterance the broken hearts and despairing spirits of survivors and orphans, creating new possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation. The gacaca hearings are changing the culture of grief in

Rwanda. While forgiveness and reconciliation do not always follow from public and publicized grief, very rarely do they occur when communal and communicated mourning is overlooked or bypassed.

Public grief also creates the strongest possibility for more genuine reconciliation between nations in conflict. Conflict resolution expert Olga Botcharova (2001, pp. 292, 293) has worked tirelessly and effectively in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. She writes that violated nations move to knee jerk positions of invincibility that exacerbate further violence because they do not take the necessary time to grieve losses and attend to suffering. Botcharova has found that an intentional, timely and persistent sharing of the pain caused by violation opens space for options other than retaliation; solutions are found that are broader than the thin détente that most often exists.

What if, as writer David Grossman suggested in the February 8, 2005 issue of *The Los Angeles Times*, the peace talks between Israel and Palestine began with the acknowledgment and sharing of the suffering each had caused the other? Possibly a passage towards peace would begin with confession: “We’re sorry.” Such a beginning would augur for a resolution stronger than that built on hostility and suspicion, the kind of solution that extends one hand in peace and withholds another hand to keep a firm grip on the guns.

What if America had mourned September 11 for more than the ten days of flamboyant mourning prescribed and abruptly terminated by President Bush, who called for “an end to grief?” (Butler, 2004, p. 149) Possibly, we would be less complacent about and compliant with the Bush administration’s Armageddon-like response of big and bigger bombs first in Afghanistan and second in Iraq. Attention to suffering for more than

the gilded ten days of sorrow may have yielded a heightened experience of "humility, vulnerability, impressionability and dependence," (Butler, p. 150) which might have become resources to the degree that we refused to resolve them too quickly. These experiences might have moved us beyond and "against the vocation of the paranoid victim who regenerates infinitely the justifications for war." (Butler, p. 150)

Philosopher Judith Butler names our post-September 11 analysis a dis-ease born of the neglect of claiming and grieving our vulnerability:

> A narrative form emerges to compensate for the enormous narcissistic wound opened up by the public display of our physical vulnerability. Our [post-September 11] response, accordingly, is not to enter into international coalitions where we understand ourselves to be working with institutionally established routes to consensus building. We relegate the United Nations to a second-order deliberative body, and insist instead on American unilateralism. And subsequently we ask, Who is with us? Who is against us? As a result, we respond to the exposure to vulnerability with an assertion of US "leadership," showing once again the contempt we have for international coalitions that are not built and led by us. Such coalitions do not conflict with US supremacy, but confirm it, stroke it, insist upon it, with long-term implications for the future shape and possibility of global cooperation (2004, p. 7).

I'll say it again, this time more emphatically, given the church's penchant to present herself, for sufficiency's sake, as a loudspeaker for current American cultural idealism and imperial political agendas and initiatives: Public and publicized grief is the ecclesiology most faithful to our Judeo-Christian heritage, central to distinguishing our

faith communities from the power and principalities that hold this eon captive by insidious stun guns of prosperity that numb the populace into complacency, essential for waging a nonviolent revolt against regal consciousness, thus elemental for prospering the reign of God. The construction and heralding of narratives of grief in the pastor's study, at adult forums, during Eucharist and other liturgies of loss, beside the water cooler, from the vestry meetings, among those eating lunch at the soup kitchen, through choir rehearsal, break open the deadness of spirit that imprisons our compassionate hearts. "The beginning of noticed pain," says Walter Brueggemann, "signals a social revolution." (2001, p. 91)

At the beginning of this chapter, I privileged a theology of the cross as the formative "voice" in a pastoral psychology of lament that prospers the type of ministry alluded to in the previous paragraph. I mentioned that God, in a theology of the cross, is constructed as hidden in, among and for the marginalized, looked over, trampled down and forsaken. I presented Jesus, the one executed on the cross, as a manifestation of the hidden God. A foundational question remains: How is the hidden God constructed underneath my writing and who is the God I have constructed. In other words, who is the God Jesus manifests?

I will construct God, throughout the pages of the dissertation, not as a being, the God of supernatural theism. I will construct God, as I did in the introduction, as the *event* of right relation. The event of right relation looms large and looks over my shoulder as I write. The event of right relation is the primary audience for and to whom I write. Such audience suggests something of a first essence, a primal center, a transcendent reality. Is the event of right relation, my image of God, then, theistic?

To answer this question, I draw on an aspect of the work of Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the idea of the "superaddressee." Bakhtin introduces the concept by observing that "within every utterance there is a presumed third listener, one beyond the addressee, or second listener, to whom the utterance is immediately addressed" (Farmer, 2001, p. 22):

> But in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, always presupposes a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee). In various ages and with various understandings of the world, the superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, and so forth) (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 126).

For Bakhtin, utterances—words and other dialogic expressions— have no meaning in and of themselves. They have meaning for another. The first concern of our utterances is that they "always want to be heard." (Farmer, p. 22) If our utterances are not heard in the immediate contexts of our relations,

> our utterances press on "further and further (indefinitely)" until they locate a point of understanding. The fundamental significance of our utterances pressing forward is understood when Bakhtin writes that the lack of being heard, the absolute absence of a third party, the superaddressee, is the meaning of hell. One reason Bakhtin passingly refers to the superaddressee as the "loophole addressee" is that the speaker (or author) can ill afford to "turn his whole self and his speech

> work to the complete and final will of addressees who are on hand or nearby (Bakhtin, 126-127)." The risk here for the speaker (or author) is not only that what he or she says will be misunderstood, but rather that what is said will be misunderstood utterly and forever. The superaddressee thus offers a loophole for a perfect understanding elsewhere and a hedge against the dangers of consummated misunderstanding here (Farmer, p. 22).

In particular, I write this dissertation to the immediate addressees that are my committee, and to the superaddressee, the event of right relation, or the moral ground of dialogue, the "conversational background," (Anderson, 1997, p. 119) which is for me, as a person of faith, but does not necessarily have to be, a metaphysical verity. There is that to which I am finally answerable (Farmer, p. 23). In general, all my utterances of relation are made in respect to and in communion with the event of right relation, which is less the author of relation and more the One who disappears into our relations and emerges as "another voice (Shotter, 1995b, p. 50)" from the dialogue between the self and other, what the Judeo-Christian tradition might reference as the Holy Spirit. In Chapter 3, I expand the idea of God as the event of right relation.

The Suffering God

I do imagine my superaddressee, the character of relation, to have many voices emanating from the narrative history of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The voice that most captures my curiosity, attention and loyalty of late is a particular event of scripture, a text that is an altar for me to return to again and anew, each time as if for the first time. It is the altar at the center of a pastoral psychology of lament. I name this voice the altar of the howling God: "Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the

temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." (Mark 15: 37-38) And "the earth shook and the rocks split." (Matthew 27:51)

In the story of the crucifixion, at the moment of Jesus' death, God exposed God's self, not revealed, exposed. The burning bush and backside of Yahweh are trumped by utter transparency. In *Preaching Mark in Two Voices*, by Brian K. Blount and Gary W. Charles, Charles writes that "the passive voice of the verb, *schizo*, indicates that this rendering is the divine response to the death of Jesus; the tense and meaning of this verb suggest a violent, completed, and decisive action. As God rends the veil (*katapetasma*) of the sanctuary (*naos*), that which divided the holy from the profane is removed." (2002, p. 240) God's unattached wailing violently, aggressively, uncontrollably crosses the boundaries of the acceptable and sane, the predictable and containable. God is out there; out there as parents are when the incomprehensible abyss that is the death of a child severs one's self in two, shakes one loose from the sturdiest bearings, splits one's world wide open, leaving one wholly exposed.

God as Suffering Other

When I am called across thresholds of relative order into the chaos of broken persons and communities, and, when I try to grab hold amidst the tremors and terrors of my own lived experience, I find myself steadied by the image of the God of Abraham wrenched loose and left open by gaping diminishment. The image makes for good company. God becomes Word for the strange, ironic comfort born of a bond of mutuality between profoundly agitated Other and disconcerted self. In an incarnational, sacramental construction of the sacred, which my particular acre of the Judeo-Christian heritage is, there is invitation and precedent to transfer the bond of mutuality between

profoundly agitated Other and disconcerted self to the human realm, what Martin Buber constructed as the I-Thou relation. Emmanuel Levinas said, “Is not the face of one’s fellow [sister or brother] the original locus in which transcendence calls an authority with a silent voice in which God comes to mind?” (Levinas, 1999, p.5)

When others become Other, pastoral ministry as action and goal borders on the blasphemous. Who would say to God, “Say more about that?” Moreover, who dares to speak? Rather, on holy ground, we remove our shoes and leave our tongues stuck to the roof of our mouths. We are in a dialogic space, readily ascribed as sacred, born in silence. In this space, self and Other, self and Others, are allowed, invited to complete sentences of deep diminishment, regret and longing, which incubate in silence, are loosely formed as an utterance, and enfleshed in the presence of a respectful and curious beholder, listener. In this day and age, a space for the completion of such sentences is revolutionary. Religion and psychotherapy, for instance, are tempted to give answers or expect visitors and consumers to trim and squeeze their sentences into the discursive frames of their particular doctrines, theories and techniques. The space for the completion of respectfully, curiously waited for, tentatively, carefully shaped utterances is the breeding ground for new knowledge and possibility, which is generative for dialogic partners and partnerships.

Church as Lamentational Community

My sense and vision for faith communities, in our increasingly post-Christian culture, is that they will become, more and more, places to complete utterances of the heart. Through such becoming, they will manifest more of an *ecclesia* of lament. Faith communities that embark on an ecclesiology of public suffering and sorrow most likely

will struggle, particularly in a time when the dominant religious discourse is about triumph. Triumphalism not only infuses the conservative churches that, say, march into worship to *The Star Spangled Banner*. Triumphalism permeates progressive religious communities as well. More progressive denominations and congregations assume that they are compelled to focus on growth in numbers of persons and dollars to account for loss in membership and expensive buildings handed down from a previous era of prosperity and power.

Faith communities that drink from the "dangerous memory" that is a Judeo-Christian heritage purified of its historical equivocation to temple and town, that feast off the redeemed memories and restored future of the broken, are likely to fail the imposed and/or presumed indicators of survival and success, which, it seems, are finally about accommodation. Those left unaccomodated by the transposition of wailing, lament and solidarity, often those with deeper pockets and more connections, probably will leave. Budgets will hemorrhage. Buildings will leak and crack. Endowments will shrink. Pews will offer more than the 18 inches between people that the church growth experts suggest.

What is left of daring churches that more richly develop the wailing-lamentation-solidarity-joy-change dynamic may be a post-Christian community that resembles the pre-Christian community who witnessed Jesus' execution—his mother, the beloved disciple, an aunt and a cherished friend. I believe that the faithful who remain steadfast in these "failing" churches most likely will hear the faint promise of a new, unorthodox, organic, dependent, fragile community: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, Behold your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took

her into his own home." (John 19: 26-28) From house church such as this, heaven is made.

Post-Christian house church, as Luther's ecclesiology suggests, does not necessarily need to exist in opposition to, and define itself against, mainline church. The house church of the grieving and the aggrieved, if heard to voice as a principal voice amidst the other voices in and of denominational and parish life, can infuse and, over time, revive a dying institution. Post-Christian house church may play a small part in revivifying an institution that presently seems to get about eleven miles to the gallon on the open road, eight miles in the city.

Age old choruses of hope-filled hallelujahs ring through the Judeo-Christian tradition, beginning with Genesis 1: 1-2, when the Spirit moved over chaos and emptiness, and stretching through time to a once widowed parishioner embracing a just widowed parishioner, after Eucharist, in the narthex, last Sunday, with other parishioners gathering around to shelter. Each day, "Amen's!" such as these re-point the crumbling mortar between a few more bricks on the tired façade of Christendom. When and as we privilege these "Amen's!" in the daily life of our faith communities, the restoration of our tradition progresses more swiftly.

As previously mentioned, in Chapter 10 of the dissertation, I will offer some "starter dough" for mainline congregations to knead as a way to embody more of the character of Post-Christian house church.

Chapter 2

THE RELATIONAL FOUNDATION OF A PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF LAMENT

In this chapter, I will seek to accomplish two things. First, I will elucidate the present cultural climate in America as that which poses a challenge to the church to return to her lamentational roots. Second, I will suggest how we might meet the challenge by presenting nine characteristics of what I call godly loving. The principal "text" I reference to accomplish both tasks is a family therapy session.

A couple of years ago I attended a conference, which hosted a few of the foundational voices in family therapy. A particular presenter captured my attention. I will call her Ann. She presented a brief video clip of her work.

Six persons, three men, two women and an adolescent boy, representing three generations of one family, sit in a semicircle with their therapist, who had arranged for Ann to consult with them for a session. The therapist tells Ann before the session that his work with the family is stuck, that there has been no movement over the last couple of sessions.

Ann enters the counseling room to the sounds of loud chatter. She sits among the family. The racket increases, particularly the giggles of the youngest, the thirteen-year-old grandson of the quietest person in the room, the grandfather, who sits to Ann's right.

Ann sits still and silent among the clamor for what seems like a long time. Eventually, Ann says, almost in a whisper, "There is much noise." The decibels increase, especially the sniggers of the adolescent. Ann waits for a while longer and then softly says, "I wonder, if noise could speak, what would noise have to say to us?" In a few

moments, the grandfather speaks: “Noise would say that we need to speak.” A nervous laughter escapes the grandson. The grandfather continues: “There is much to talk about that is hard to talk about but needs to be talked about.” Air is let out of noise like a pinpricked balloon. An uncomfortable silence remains.

Ann, looking around at the family members, says, “Is this too hard to bring to words now? What do you think? Shall we talk or not?”

The grandfather responds, “We must talk about my cancer. We can’t avoid it any longer. Yes, it is very hard for me. I’ve been independent for as long as I can remember, able to be strong for others. Now, I am going to be dependent. I don’t know how. We must talk.” The air of relation gushes into the room like a breeze through a just opened window on an early spring morning.

The *Meantime* as Our Sacred Location

This scene of an intergenerational family bound by the noise of an inchoate bondage, and slogging, with the help of each other and others, towards a strongly desired and faintly imagined redemption, has a ring of familiarity. This family’s story, eventually, now and then, is our story. It is my story now, as my family of origin, six of us, makes our way, in fits and starts, one step forward, two steps backwards, out of the situation of my father’s serious stroke several days ago. The story of life a good bit of the time is composed in the desert between Egypt and Canaan. We live in the *meantime*, between affliction and deliverance. The *meantime*, I believe, is the locus of a good part of sacred history.

Both the major texts and principal religious figures of the Judeo-Christian heritage make a good case for the *meantime* as especially holy ground. Luther, haunted

by a hunger for a peace that eluded him, zealously mined the First Testament, especially the Psalms, and the Second Testament, particularly Romans and Galatians, in order to extract sacred meaning from and for the *meantime*. He struck gold. Luther's best nugget is a kingdom of God lassoed from heaven and re-located to earth as the communion of saints—God's own rather than God's best—making its way from despair to hope.

There is abundant and fertile historical precedent for imagining, implementing and inculcating church (and, for that matter, synagogue and mosque) less as morality encampments and more as *meantime* sojourners, as "one cat in one ditch and one nobody of a son of a bitch trying to pull her out." (Campbell, 1977, p. 187) When our religious communities are more about our shared existential dislocatedness, the ethic that oozes from them is more expressive of compassion and justice, less demonstrative of cleanliness and purity. Moreover, while the constituency of the clean and pure is few, and often positioned over and against the many, the condition of existential dislocatedness is global. The territory of the ditch is expansive. Hence, the boundary between "church" and "world" dissolves. The diverse inhabitants of the ditch discover a contagious solidarity. Their solidarity is sacrosanct because it offers one of the best possibilities to redeem the epoch of the *meantime*, the *meantime* being the reign of social institutions fallen from goodness and on the backs of humankind, particularly the backs of the vulnerable and disenfranchised ones (Wink, 1992).

The family of six gathered for counsel is a microcosm of the historical church in particular and of history in general. Our epoch is one that is bound to the *meantime*, and we yearn for transcendence in the midst of it. Our yearning often is indiscernible.

Muffled and Muted Sounds from the *Meantime*

Ann says, “There is much noise.” Our society is similarly noisy. The losses of everyday life have a way of rendering us mute. Being mute is more than deadly silence. Sometimes it is noise. Whatever the manifestation, it is an inarticulate wailing. Occasionally there is a wailing wall. We find ourselves at its feet in times of big and blatant loss, like the death of a child, or the devastation of an earthquake, the terrorist attacks of September 11. More often, there is no wall. We are caught in the embrace of the more obtuse diminishments that leave incomprehensible wailing unattached, as the clamor of six kin folk not yet connected to the cancer of their father and grandfather.

Our unattached wailing whips around like the haywired robotics of a drivenness to despair manifested in day in and day out busyness and boredom. Unattached wailing thrashes around like a broken fan belt under the hood of an SUV cruising at 85 miles an hour down the interstate carrying a car pool toward another day of gerbil-like activity in the office towers. Unattached wailing flogs around in the absurd and out-of-context ranting of the homeless ones, their hosannas long separated from reality. They wave cups in front of the nicely attired zombies heading from garage to elevator.

When the whipping, lashing and flogging of unattached wailing go unheard, we, like the six members of the yet-to-be heard family, become stuck. When I excavate the whipping, lashing and flogging of my unheard stuckness, what I usually discover is a noisy numbness not unlike the spirit of the subway on an ordinary Wednesday afternoon during rush hour. You would never know by the agility with which I am doing the day. At day’s end, on those days when I am bold enough to pray honestly and ardently, I

experience my diffuse buzzing to be a forgotten sadness stored in the top bin of my spirit's icebox. My depression is a frozen grief. I am not alone.

Our stolid sorrow is epidemic. A nation "zones out" in front of *American Idol* while Washington makes illegitimate war and maneuvers coffins invisibly through Delaware. Middle America kneels at the rail of conformity and swallows our new communion wafer, antidepressants (Greenberg, 2007, p. 38), as Pentagon radically under reports Iraqi and Afghani deaths, military and civilian, as a presidential contender composes, during one of the bloodiest months in Iraq, new words for the Beach Boys' hit, *Barbara Ann*: "Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran." Pennsylvania Avenue has a hand in the cookie jar of our future, eying SSI checks that my grandmother both counted on and was proud of after decades of standing in front of a cotton loom in Saffie Mill. Moreover, we are mostly curious about The Super Bowl; if not the game, the commercials. Hundreds of thousands of people are dying in the Darfur genocide, roughly 800,000 people were slaughtered in the Rwandan genocide, and we pass the years impeaching a president for a dalliance, carping and whining about Exxon's profits. Our capitulation to violence is manufactured and maneuvered, in part, by forces beyond ourselves. Our numbness and deference to the horrors surrounding us are underwritten by a media, mostly *Fox* and *CNN*, who glorify and sanitize our nation's violence in the name of halting violence, though, more sophisticated media outlets are co-opted as well. In time, the *New York Times* came out against the war, but not before producing front-page photographs of "romantic images of military ordnances against the setting sun in Iraq or 'bombs bursting in air' above the streets and homes of Baghdad (which are occluded from view)." (Butler, p. 148)

Depression requires the thin oxygen of isolation that is helped along by our cell phones, televisions, Ipods and computers. Sorrow seeks the fresh air of communion. That America has forgotten how to grieve, to its great demise, is a sad testimony to a culture that has made the individual sacrosanct, self-sufficiency an eschatological aim. Such a testimony is what I believe faith communities are called to address. Our challenge is to transpose the noise of wailing into the music of lament. Again, the gospel is grief work gone public. Such work requires a particular grace.

Grace as Relation

Who has the presence of heart to establish community for broken and bound up hearts? Who hears our wailing to voice, both attached and unattached wailing? For instance, who is there to say to us, at the death of a friend, the loss of a job, the abandonment by a partner, "If your tears could speak what would they say?" Is it your priest? Is it a kindly acquaintance at work or the companion with whom we walk around the reservoir three days a week, a friend at coffee hour? Harder questions prejudice my diagnosis that society has calcified sadness, leaving us as the living dead: Who is there to say to us, "If your slumping shoulders wrote you a letter, what would be in it?" "What would be the last will and testimony of your 60 hour work week?" On the other hand, "If your rage could write a song, what would the lyrics be?" "If your numbness thawed out, what would it say about life in the freezer?" Would it be your therapist, your journal, your prayer shawl? To whom do we dare speak? Who is our Ann?

These questions bear witness to the evolution of my experience of praying God, a progression among and through the community of the brokenhearted, over the course of almost three decades. The journey has been from He to She to Relation. Evolution

transposed into revolution. A fresher understanding and experience of grace is at the heart of a radical theology of relation. Grace, among sufferers who witness one another along, is not so much manifestation, epiphany, the transcendent made immanent, the surprising, unexpected, not-to-be-harnessed God-event. Grace is both more and less than the serendipitous in breaking of heaven. Grace is the grounded character of love that is contingent upon and continuous in the communion of the brokenhearted, bent over and broken down. This grace stays put and prospers a slowly progressing reconciliation of us who are estranged, a gradual and deliberate restoration of the fallen institutions that dominate us. Broken people who witness one another along are people broken open to hope by the love they make (Palmer, 2005, p. 2). From spirits cracked open through shared suffering flows a surplus of love. The community of the broken and bent has a habit, which history gives witness to, of richly distributing the excesses of the love they conjure. Love that spills over the lip of the communion of the broken and bent is the energy of and for justice-making. God, rather than mediated through grace, is Grace: "the resilient, fragile, healing power of finitude itself." (Welch, 2000, p. 178)

Godly Loving

The richest soil for encountering the suffering God, whom I earlier symbolized in the scriptural image of Yahweh exposing Yahweh's howling Self at the death of Yahweh's Son, is the ground of our own absence and emptiness, the places at which we are mute, the experiences about which we are at a loss for words. At times of devastation, beyond all security of language and identity, where calculation withers, love, in the particularity of the neighbor, rushes in and permeates the void (Lane, 1998, p. 73). Love, contingent upon alterity, the presence of the other resolutely remaining other (Levinas,

pp. ix-xiii), attends to our stammering, determined not to quiet or console, but to witness.

What love witnesses is at times obvious—the howling of the little boy who has just lost a sister to the tsunami, the animal-like murmurs of the middle-aged man who has recovered memories of child sexual abuse. More often love is required to witness sighs, groans and embodied gestures of violation of unconscious or undisclosed origin—the increasingly vacant eyes of the underemployed Haitian healthcare workers at the nursing home, the emergent irritability of the otherwise swimmingly sufficient church treasurer whose records are being audited, the strange tic (Soelle, p. 69) of a mill worker who has been groped from behind by her foreman for thirty years. Love witnesses our incomprehensible wailing, attached and unattached, in all its manifestations.

Godly lovers, then, are those who have an uncanny capacity to watch impotently and wait helplessly. They stand beside and among with stuck tongues and empty but open hands, not presuming to understand, know, cure or heal. Godly loving is not so much learned as passed on. Those who witness the broken tend to be those whose brokenness has been witnessed. They are the mute among the mute.

Nine characteristics of godly loving follow, through which the *meantime*, the time between despair and hope, is named and moved toward redemption. I construct these characteristics from postmodern ideas, which shape this pastoral psychology of lament, and discuss them in the next section. These nine characteristics include: testimonial relation, conversational partnership, silence, listening, alterity, polyphony, marking absence, reiteration, and hospitality.

Nine Characteristics of Godly Loving

Testimonial Relation

"All sorrows can be borne if you can put them into a story or tell a story about them."

(Arendt, 1958, p. 175)

Isak Dinesen

"Testimonial relation" is a term used by my colleague at Bates College, Alexandre Dauge-Roth, professor of French, to frame his work with survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Dauge-Roth (email correspondence, April 10, 2007) explains what he means by testimonial relation:

> Testimonial relation is a concept that stresses the fact that testimony is not a personal endeavor but a social practice that calls for an intersubjective space of encounter and mutual transformation. To see testimony as a social space of negotiation implies that both witness and listeners are giving up any position of authority in the definition of what is worth remembering and true, which does not mean that they are giving up the uniqueness of the position from which they are testifying and listening. Within the testimonial relation, witness and listeners are embarking in a mutual discussion that leads to a mutual transformation of one's prior beliefs and conceptions, since the experience of the other always exceeds mine even though both need each other's intersubjective acknowledgement. The relational dimension of testimony indicates therefore that this encounter always, potentially, conveys a risk or a chance of being transformed by the other's voice and experience with which I cannot totally identify nor identify as my own. What is at stake here is a mutual acknowledgment that the experience of the other, often

> a disturbing or traumatic one that triggers the impetus of bearing witness, is always already mine and thus there is an ethical responsibility to respond to the call of the witness and his or her aspiration to share our common humanity through the acknowledgment of our differences.

When victims and their witnesses stand with and for one another in testimonial relation, victims are restored to and for life in community. Witnesses awake again and anew to and for a creation groaning in travail. Witnesses catch hard to hear cries muffled both by overt and insidious societal mechanisms, which work to institutionalize forgetting and drown out remembering. The ethic of testimonial relation has the spiritual power, scriptural authority and sacred history to help shape, albeit, against great odds, an ecclesiology reflective of what Martin Luther King, Jr., in reference to Josiah Royce, heralded as "The Beloved Community."

Religious communities are uniquely suited to order and prosper "The Beloved Community" because they are one of the few institutions gathered and sanctioned for testimonial relation for testimonial relation's sake. There is greater, more acceptable space for testimonies of life-the-way-it-really-is in the Thursday morning bible study group at Emmanuel Church in Boston than there are at the work place or site, or around the hearths, of the parish's congregants. A cohort of very busy people have found a way, for almost a decade now, to regularly find (as in once I was lost but now I am found) one another. Religious organizations that create such space are growing spiritually, some numerically. Their members are quick and glad to share stories of handing each other along and, in the words of Wittgenstein, "going on together" (as cited in McNamee, 2004) towards a more peaceful world.

Andrea and Testimonial Relation

I illustrate testimonial relation through a series of weekly meetings with Andrea, a counselee, and me, the counselor. Some of the sessions were video recorded. For the sessions that were not recorded, I took notes immediately following each session. We usually invited others to join us in the collaboration, a fellow counselor once or twice and quite often two counseling residents in our training program. Andrea and I invited the additional collaborators not to expand the number and knowledge base of the experts in the service of Andrea's growth. Rather, we invited them to join me, the interviewer, as co-witnesses of Andrea's ongoing and emerging testimony. The witnesses of Andrea's testimony shared, and held one another accountable, to at least two commitments.

First, relocate expertise about Andrea's testimony to the proper authority, Andrea, the testifier, by resisting the unspoken and taken for granted deference given to the "professional" by the "client." We did not need to work hard to honor this commitment. Andrea has a great nose for *merde*. She quickly flattens therapeutic hierarchies. Second, privilege mutuality and reciprocity in the conversational partnership, thereby allowing ourselves to desire, learn from and be changed by the special knowledge and wisdom issuing from Andrea and her generative story, a story that both reveals and inspires qualities of courage, tenacity, vulnerability, respect and values of honesty, justice and compassion.

How might I best introduce you to Andrea, or, more particularly, her testimony? I ask the question because of the oftentimes relationally violent manner in which we, as those invested in and sometimes certified to carefully and caringly listen, unwittingly

(literally, not in a witnessing position) colonize the stories of those who come to us for accompaniment, or, more accurately, seek us out in order to be heard to voice.

Violate and colonize are strong words. Do I err a bit on the side of hyperbole? I do not think so. In Massachusetts, for instance, there is afoot a movement for third party payers to compensate licensed counselors based on the improvements counselees make over a specified course of time in regard to the diagnoses counselors must make at the conclusion of the first session. Hence, the grand narratives of the healing profession capture, encapsulate and, with good intention, often strangle the particular and local narratives of those who make themselves vulnerable to and in the space of the anointed helpers. I am a pastor and counselor who offers an open invitation for hurting ones to make themselves vulnerable to and in a healing space. Yet, I am regularly and sorely tempted, by my good intentions, to cough up my own grand narratives that will make their days. More and more I am aware, again, as if for the first time, that there is a correlation between the spiritedness, efficacy of a generative conversation and my capacity to sit on the hands of "my special knowledge and greater wisdom" in the midst of it.

Andrea's Testimony as Performance

I will present Andrea's testimony, briefly now, with much more detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, through her art, visual and written. The power of Andrea's testimony, both to her and those who witness it, is less related to mimesis—memories of what happened—and more to that which captivates, grabs our attention and awakens us.

One way to describe Andrea's narrative is "testimonial performance," (Chambers, 2004, pp. 35-45) a means of testifying that uses art forms—visual art, poems, prose,

metaphor, music—as mediums for making the unapproachable approachable. Andrea's testimonial performance is not rehearsed or stylized. Rather, Andrea engages in bricolage. She creates her own timely strategies for testimony using materials at hand—visual art, poetry and prose—in a creative, resourceful, and original way. Andrea does not bring art to our conversations. She makes art in conversation; sometimes, literally. I can relate. When I struggle, in the conversational moment, to find a manner in which to express my suffering, either to my therapist or spouse, in a group or on a walk around the pond with a friend, I pilfer through the work shed of language (I can't draw!) for metaphors and ancillary stories that both hold the heart, and transport the essence, of my present story.

Testimony as performance, as opposed to telling-recounting-unfolding, breaks apart the narrow constraint of *chronos* (linear) time, that is, how does the past relate to the present and inform the future? Testimony as performance breaks open the greater prospects of meaning in *kairos* time, the fullness of time, as in "the time is ripe." In the *kairotic* moment, testifier and witnesses experience fresher tributaries, flowing from testimonial relation, that lead to newer, co-created knowledge and possibility. Andrea, then, in the performance of her testimony, is transposed from subject to agent. Those who bear witness to her testimony are transposed from listener-interpreter-wisdom bearer to learners, collaborators and mutually invested explorers.

Performative testimony creates agency by refracting the stark, sometimes blinding rays of the facts of suffering into beams that are bent into shades soft, and, therefore, safe enough to captivate attention and evoke response. For instance, the historical facts of Andrea's suffering might quickly be totalized by a wider and less particular community

of interlocutors, for instance, her classmates, as obscene. We culturally exclude, with the moniker of obscenity (literally, obscure and cover up), that which wakes us from a somnolence of innocence and ignorance about the horrors of a particular history or the horror of history in general (Chambers, p. 23). On the other hand, when Andrea mediates facts from her horrific past through the canvas of an enormous, blue/white tear encapsulating serrated, orange/red fragments, those who witness it on the wall of her counselor's study may be captivated and respond curiously. Andrea, hearing of another's interest in her art, may be open to take another's offered hand and figuratively walk across the territory of her tear. In Chapter 7, I will present a presentational testimony similar, in shape, to Andrea's, which mediates the facts of the present Israeli-Palestinian conflict through various art forms. The project enabled students, faculty and staff at Bates College to engage in dialogue about the conflict in more dialogic, less adversarial ways.

To illustrate further testimonial performance, I offer five examples that I have experienced. First, I remember a particularly stirring (life changing by some estimations) retreat led by the rector of a smaller, dynamic parish, attended by about a dozen people from the parish and diocese. The retreat was held in a very painterly environment of forest, water, paths, a large log cabin, big fireplaces and great food. Each participant, in the company of other participants, created, between times of personal and public prayer and worship, with an array of materials that served a variety of artistic mediums, body maps: presentational testimonies representing the history, most often the painful, sometimes brutal history of their bodies-in-relation. I will present this experience in more detail in Chapter 8.

Second, I remember Grace Paley's brief, remarkable narrative, *Three Days and a Question* (1991), and her attention to testimony more as utterance than statement, more as gesture than content, more to event than structure (Chambers, p. 39). Paley arbitrates suffering that fails words and offends the ear through the thrusting of an arm. Ross Chambers offers a beautiful and illustrative witness to Grace Paley's narrative in his book, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and The Rhetoric of Haunting*:

> On three separate days, a similar event occurs. The narrator encounters, always on the street or while out and about, first an elderly Holocaust survivor, on the second occasion a young man with AIDS, and finally a Haitian taxi-driver, witnesses respectfully to genocide, an inhumane epidemic, and North American racism. Each of these three has difficulties of (self) expression, due to inadequate English in the case of the Holocaust survivor and the Haitian, and in the case of the PWA (person with AIDS) to the caution with which AIDS must be mentioned ("Carefully he says, AIDS"). Each is led therefore to supplemental speech with the same gesture, thrusting out an arm—marked by a tattooed number, Kaposi's lesions, by pigmentation—in the direction of his interlocutor. The interlocutor of the Holocaust survivor, who is not the narrator of the story, reacts with fear and anger. In the other two cases (in which the interlocutor is the narrator), she reacts to the PWA with embarrassment and unease (she and her friend "shift in our pockets"—an odd phrasing—looking for change); and then, to the Haitian, with a question. The question is addressed, however, not to the witness, but to us, her readers (2004, pp. 39-40).

Third, I remember a conversation with a new friend about the recent loss of his long standing, long loved and loving friend, who died after a two-decade struggle with AIDS. My new friend, searching for a manner to mourn that is both less and more than the recollection and recitation of a completed relation ("I don't like to talk about death and dying."), was composing a letter to his friend's special niece about her precious uncle. The spirit of my new friend's remarkable relation with his now dead friend is prismed through a literary gift that graces another life, and, by extension, the world.

Fourth, I remember the play, *Rwanda 94* (Dauge-Roth, 2005). In the performance, survivors of the 1994 genocide testify to, and expose the "symbolic violence" of, the present government. By "symbolic violence," a phrase minted by Pierre Bourdieu and elucidated by my colleague, Alexandre Dauge-Roth (p. 86), I mean the manner in which the "aftermath" regime constructs the public account of the genocide's survivors, authorizes the time and space for their testimonies, and prescribes the rituals of their now institutionalized mourning, toward the end of moving on. Hence, the particular and local testimonies, the "obscene experiences" of the survivors, are "smothered" (Kofman, 1998) in the service of, among other things, a policy of progress. The grand and official narrative of state—accelerated and scripted time heals all wounds—brings to mind the counterpunctual insight of psychologist Harry Goolishian: "For change to move quickly, things must go slowly." (Andersen, 202) The performance includes a Western journalists' unwitting participation in the national strategy of forgetting, which mirrors the media's culpability in the government's post September 11 war of, among other things, distraction. The performance includes the voices of the dead victims, whose testimonies "haunt" a world that sleeps through the abject, lingering, unfolding suffering

of the dead who live and living who are dead; therefore, the genocide continues. By haunting, I also mean the manner in which all the dead victims of violence throughout history reside in the liminal space of the world's consciousness, where they cannot be fully identified or completely ignored, but can and are experienced as ghostly apparition, as nightmare (Chambers, p. 39). I know from experience, as one who, here and there, springs up in bed and screams, having been startled out of a restless sleep. The performance brings to light, again and anew, our haunted world's haunting silence during and after the slaughter of roughly 800,000 persons over the course of three months in the spring of 1994. The performance brings to mind our nation's haunting silence during our now four-plus-year decimation of Iraq, which, as the executive branch plan suggests, is the first stop in the destruction of "the axis of evil."

Fifth, I recently received a gift of a wooden cross. The cross is made from the wood of homes in New Orleans destroyed by Katrina. Those who view the cross are invited back across the threshold of the Katrina tragedy through another door, one that makes room for a more curious and imaginative review of the situation.

Testimonial relation is the shape, the contour for conversations of lament, whether performative or not, though I privilege the performative. The eight remaining characteristics of godly loving represent the values of and methods applied in constructing testimonial relations of lament between two people, among many, at the parish, from the public square, in the reconciliation process, towards a better future. I offer the words of artist and scholar Kali Tal as sustenance and inspiration for our continuing exploration:

> Bearing witness is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to the seductive pill of revision and repression….If survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure (1996, p. 7).

Conversational Partnership

"Language is hospitality."

Emmanuel Levinas (Dufourmantelle and Derrida, 2000, p. 135)

The simple phrase, conversational partnership (Anderson, 1997, pp. 64 and 67), represents a major, and, for me, monumental shift in the way helping relations are imagined and practiced. One of the best descriptions of what is generally known as the collaborative therapy corner of postmodern therapies is offered by a student in a collaborative-based training program: "If I was observing and did not know who the therapist was, I wonder if I could identify them?" (Anderson, 1997, p. 64) Two of the seminal "voices" in the movement towards collaborative and away from dualistic, hierarchical commitments, Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian, founders of an internationally known and respected family therapy and training center, The Houston-Galveston Institute, initially described the nature of their new manner of thinking about and doing therapy as "just talking with people." (Anderson, 1997, p. 67) I find in this phrase a means for and mandate to break down the walls of the therapy room, in a sense, to de-mystify the therapy situation. Such de-mystification is especially valuable to the one who comes for therapy. She discovers that "therapy" is something she knows

something about and may engage in with a variety of collaborators. I continue to learn and risk practicing and trusting conversational partnership as a meaning-making, meaning-restoring collaboration that changes little across many contexts. More and more, when the purpose of my conversations is "to go on together," the context of the conversations matters less and less. I find myself showing up in much the same way, whether I am in therapy sessions, as the counselor or the counselee, engaged in spiritual direction, making pastoral care visits, hiking with a friend, hearing a confession or chatting with a student who drops by.

Granted, to write about conversational partnerships as "just talking with people" does raise suspicions about "watering down" something as culturally sacrosanct as the therapeutic process. Therefore, over the next several pages, I will deconstruct this provocative phrase, in terms of its liberative and spiritually taxing characteristics, especially as they pertain to the testimonial relation of lament.

Pastoral Inferiority

Most of the clergypersons presently serving mainline congregations were trained as generalists. Seminary education has been mostly about learning to do many things relatively well. We trained towards the goal of knowing enough about scriptural exegesis, pastoral care, ethics, administration, preaching and teaching to move effectively across the territory of congregational life. We learned a little about a lot. Upon completion of our training, after being ordained as clergy and installed as pastors, we came to serve people who knew a lot about a little. We have plied our trade in the era of the expert. We, as generalists, have faced a crisis of confidence, shame, disappointment and regret. When those we serve come to see us with an issue, problem, depression, broken relation,

sorrow, desire, illness or transgression, we listen for a little while in order to know where to go on the Rolodex for a referral. We have been tentative about or dismissive of what has seemed like the little we have had to bring to the table of care—love, respect, attention, curiosity, expendability and commitment to those in our charge.

Loss of Pastoral Authority through the Industrialization and Psychologizing of Grief

The biggest acre of pastoral authority to be cornered and captured has been the experience of loss. The hospice industry covers loss from diagnosis of terminal illness to bereavement services for survivors up to at least twelve months following the death of the loved one. Hospice is required to have credentialed chaplains and bereavement counselors. More and more, the congregational minister's role, at the time of dying and death, though she may do more, and the congregation's role, though they may do more, mostly is the funeral or memorial service. Other losses, such as job, marriage, status and so forth, once the purview of the pastor, are considered too complicated or dangerous, in terms of litigation, for us to address. The present mainline church has little chance of being an agent of social change, because the "lamentation choir," such as that I heard from the dilapidated church when my mother and I took Sarah back to "colored town," has long dispersed. The contagious passion and energy for social justice has dissipated. There is little chance of us "going on together."

John McNight, sociologist at Northwestern University, vividly portrays the present grand narrative of grief (and, by association, expertise), illustrating why clergy and congregations are both tentative about and often struggle at conversational partnerships. McNight writes about the once and present inhabitants of a county in

Wisconsin, initially the Sauk Indians, long removed from their land to the reservation, and now the descendants of European immigrants:

> The new technology is called "bereavement counseling." It is a tool forged at the great state university, an innovative technique to meet the needs of those experiencing the death of a loved one, a tool that can "process" the grief of the people who now live on the Prairie of the Sauk.
>
> As one can imagine the final days of the village of the Sauk Indians before the arrival of the settlers with John Deere's plow, one can also imagine these final days before the arrival of the first bereavement counselor at Prairie du Sac. In these final days, the farmers and the townspeople mourn the death of a mother, brother, son, or friend. The bereaved are joined by neighbors and kin. They meet grief together in lament, prayer and song. They call upon the words of the clergy and surround themselves with community.
>
> It is in these ways that they grieve and then go on with life. Through their mourning, they are assured of the bonds between them and renewed in the knowledge that death is a part of the past and future of the people on the Prairie of the Sauk. Their grief is a common property, an anguish from which the community draws strength and which gives it the courage to move ahead.
>
> Into this prairie community the bereavement counselor arrives with the new grief technology. The counselor calls the invention a service and assures the prairie folk of its effectiveness and superiority by invoking the name of the great university while displaying a diploma and license.

At first, we can imagine that the local people will be puzzled by the bereavement counselor's claims. However, the counselor will tell a few of them that the new technique is merely to *assist* (author's emphasis) the bereaved's community at the time of death. To some other prairie folk who are isolated or forgotten, the counselor will offer help in grief processing. These lonely souls will accept the invitation, mistaking the counselor for a friend.

For those who are penniless, the counselor will approach the County Board and advocate the "right to treatment" for these unfortunate souls. This right will be guaranteed by the Board's decision to reimburse those too poor to pay for counseling services.

There will be others, schooled to believe in the innovative new tools certified by universities and medical centers, who will seek out the bereavement counselor by force of habit. And one of these people will tell a bereaved neighbor who is unschooled that unless his grief is processed by a counselor, he will probably have major psychological problems later in life.

Several people will begin to contact the bereavement counselor because, since the County Board now taxes them to *ensure* (author's emphasis) access to the technology, they will feel that to fail to be counseled is to waste their money and to be denied a benefit, or even a right.

Finally, one day the aged father of a local woman will die. And the next door neighbor will not drop by because he doesn't want to interrupt the bereavement counselor. The woman's kin will stay home because they will have learned that only the bereavement counselor knows how to process grief in the

> proper way. The local clergy will seek technical assistance from the bereavement counselor to learn the correct form of service to deal with guilt and grief. And the grieving daughter will know that it is the bereavement counselor who *really* (author's emphasis) cares for her, because only the bereavement counselor appears when death visits this family on the Prairie of the Salk.
>
> It will be only one generation between the time the bereavement counselor arrives and the disappearance of the community of mourners. The counselor's new tool will cut through the social fabric, throwing aside kinship, care, neighborly obligations, and community ways of coming together and going on. Like John Deere's plow, the tools of bereavement counseling will create a desert where a community once flourished.
>
> And finally, even the bereavement counselor will see the impossibility of restoring hope in clients once they are genuinely alone, with nothing but a service for consolation. In the inevitable failure of the service, the bereavement counselor will find the desert even in herself (McNight, 1995, pp. 5-7).

John McNight's poignant analysis transports me back to the relational authority of Ann in the presence of the six family members. Ann sits with the family of six, and loosens their utterances, sending them on their way together, convenes a conversational partnership that once happened regularly and well in local community. Ann was a deft practitioner, who brought to the conversational partnership what clergypersons and church people have but more tentatively trust and therefore less confidently offer—love, respect, attention, curiosity, expendability and commitment— feeling as clergy and church do, that such is insufficient in comparison to *professional*, *licensed* caring.

The Hard Work of "Just Talking with People"

The qualities of caring that clergypersons and church people readily and disparagingly critique as "just talking with people," and that Ann privileges in her practice, make for spiritually grueling work. Conversational partnering requires that the caregiver "listen, hear and speak." (Anderson, 2007, p. 35) from a position of personal investment and vulnerability, thereby opening herself to learn and change, exposing herself to outcomes neither predicted or imagined.

The heart work that clergy and church write off as second class is the kind of collaborative presence that postmodern approaches to care aim for. It is a noble aspiration, and, with benefit and cost. The pastor and/or therapist remain "lighter on their feet." The pastor's fifth conversation of the day and the therapist's fourth straight session promise engagement, wonderment, new knowledge and meaning to a degree that more modernist positions of pastor care and secular therapies cannot, especially since many modernist positions practice the power imbalance (and I would say injustice) of pastor and therapist as more distant and withholding. Pastor and therapist are expected to deliver something. On the other hand, "just talking with people" is engaging enough to make a "client load" of thirty sessions a week, generally considered the number of sessions needed for a financially viable practice, impossible to sustain without the high risk of fatigue and burnout. I am proud of the guideline of the credentialing body I belong to, *The American Association of Pastoral Counselors*, which suggests that a client load of more than twenty-six is unsustainable for doing the kind of work expected of us.

The challenge facing the church and clergy in the ministry of lament is to gain appreciation for and confidence in what they have to offer, and to more richly develop

their gifts for "listening, hearing, and speaking" as conversational partners and conveners of conversational partnerships. I offer the next seven characteristics of godly loving to help increase such appreciation and confidence, and to develop greater skills for conversational partnership with the grieved and aggrieved.

Silence

Silence is receiving growing attention in our increasingly noisy world. One reason my spouse and I relocated to Maine was to hear creation again. German writer Max Picard's classic text on silence, *The World of Silence* (1952), grows in relevance. Popular Christian writer Barbara Brown Taylor's 1997 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching, at Yale, *When God is Silent*, invites us to be quiet enough to hear the silent God, and, to preach from that silence, ours and God's. Feminist theorists are mining silence for its political nature and importance. Professor of English and Women's Studies, Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (2004), writes about the silencing of women throughout history and the use of silence by women, of late, for power advantage.

While silence as stillness and strategy have some meaning for a pastoral psychology of lament, especially as a method for an agenda of social justice, the characteristic most relevant to my project is the relational. Bakhtin writes that in stillness there is no noise, while in silence there is a voice that does not speak (Patterson, 1991). I am interested in silence as the "voice that does not speak," the utterance torn from its meaning by tragedy, violence and loss, therefore exiled. Silence is a relational act of redeeming the exiled utterance.

Ann entered the noisy room of the six family members and therapist who were mired in an incomprehensible wailing that had yet to be heard to voice. She could have

cleared her throat, and said, as I might have said, “Okay, good morning, let’s get started, who wants to begin?” Instead, she sat silently for a while.

Ann’s silence was, I believe, more respectful than strategic. Respect for those who suffer imposes a silence (Thornton, 204). Pastoral theologian Sharon Thornton writes that the pastoral caregiver’s place of silence at the feet of those who are grieving and aggrieved, when shed of professional trappings and contrivances, and grounded in an open heart, is best described as a sacramental-like act of beholding. Beholding is the beginning place of relation, prior to description and resistant to explanation, by which ordinary time is transposed into sacred moment. It is like the time, during Eucharist, when I as celebrant break the bread of God’s broken body, hold the severed remains in two hands, and lift the pieces for the congregation to behold. The rubric in *The [Episcopal] Book of Common Prayer*, reads, “A period of silence is kept.” I rather think an experience of silence is created.

Howard Thurman, in writing about the woman brought before Jesus for adultery (Thurman, 1981, pp. 105-106), said, “Jesus raised his eyes and beheld the woman.” Jesus’ initial silence was not a “Rogerian notion of unconditional positive regard.” (Thornton, 201) Rather, Jesus’ silence was an act of absolute respect that involves a commitment to the deep humanness of others (Thornton, 201). Jesus did not “accept” the woman “in spite” of her adultery, a “liberal” position that is implicitly judgmental; he honored the gift of her being. The woman’s sex life was irrelevant.

Fundamental to the stewarding of a silence that beholds is an acknowledgment and respect for an inner voice, which participates in the conversational partnership. The inner voice is the repository of what Hans Gadamer (as cited in Anderson, 1997, p. 118)

called “the infinity of the unsaid.” The inner voice does not wait to speak its mind, to move from the inner space to the outer world untouched and unscathed. Rather, in conversation, inner thoughts and conversations take shape and meaning in the act of being languaged, with a purpose to connect. The yet-to-be-said does not emerge, it appears, serendipitously, from between, and, therefore, in the service of greater connection and newer knowledge. The inner voice is personal but not private, in that the superaddressee, whom I call God, beholds the beholder. The inner voice is a territory of integrity.

I refer to a current issue in the peer supervision group I belong to as an inner voice crisis. My inner voice is silenced by the inattention of my colleagues to the un-languaged or yet-to-be languaged “voices” in the room. I and another colleague often complain to other members that the conversation moves excessively fast for us. The issue is less that I am too slow to jump in. Rather, I find that I do not have enough time to pay attention to my inner voice, believing, as I do, that from my inner voice comes the words from which thought emerges, *in the slower speaking of the words*, as if I am observing a birth of sorts, unwrapping a gift in and for purposeful conversation, conversation that connects and opens fresh space for new knowledge.

In order to make more space for the inner voice in conversations I steward, I begin and end each conversation with a couple of minutes of silence. During the silence, the conversational partner or partners and I are “logging on” to our inner voices. Moreover, in the midst of conversations, often during moments that are full or “on to something,” I sometimes ask for a time of silence.

I find that the inner voice is more disturbing and disquieting for us when we are listening to people who suffer. We feel pressured to deliver words via express mail in order to help our neighbors. Our words-towards-caring do not have time to ferment and unfold thoughts on the way to, as well as received from, the dialogical space between our neighbors and us. In addition, our inner voices may become horrified by what we are witnessing. Our tongues become more stuck than silent. The challenge is to leave our tongues stuck, resisting the temptation to pry them loose with words. Stuck tongues, as uncomfortable as they are, do respectfully behold. Usually, the respectfully beheld conversational partner, sensing our presence, offers utterances, in time, that loosen our tongues.

Furthermore, the grieving and aggrieved testifier, whose horrific experience leaves the witness speechless, struggles for words. Her struggle is relative to the degree of her horror. Her struggle is for utterances capable of conveying the nature and meaning of her horror. The search for utterances of meaning is harder in that the nature of the horror is difficult to make meaning of. The witness's silence, both offered and occasioned by the conversation, creates a space for the potential, the possibility of the testifier to convey more fully the horror of the experiences. Sometimes the witness's silence enables the testifier to restore exiled meaning or discover new meaning. Silence, then, is a co-creative action. If the testifier's experience fails to be conveyed or made meaning of, the witness's silence remains co-creative in that the testifier's space, that may birth the not-yet-said, remains clear and open because the witness has not closed the space with words.

A few days ago, a colleague and I interviewed, using the witnessing process model described in Chapter 7, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide. Esperance, the survivor, said that she did not know where to begin because words could not convey the horror of her experience. Nonetheless, she began and told a story of immense terror. Her one-year-old daughter was drowned in her presence. Her husband, parents and siblings were killed as well. After a two-hour testimony, Esperance shared her frustration at not being able to convey her experience or reflect on it in a meaningful way. My colleague and I could have easily disagreed with her assessment. Rather, the three of us talked about the value of words when words fall short of conveyance and meaning. We talked about how "failed" words serve to connect us in the midst of the indescribable and meaningless. My colleague said (inquiry interview with Esperance Uwambyeyi and Alexandre Dauge-Roth, June 2008):

> . . . you asked her, are you still looking for words? And I think words are not necessarily, don't equal an explanation. They are just words, so they are neither an explanation nor the experience that they refer to. It's a way of building more, a community or a relationship among us, because what she went through is something that will always remain foreign to me, whatever, can not even, I cannot explain it to myself.

Moreover, the inner voices of the three of us stay with each of us after we depart one another's company. Each of our inner voices will continue to attend to us and hold out the possibility for us to find utterances that better convey and give a dimension of meaning to the testimonial relation we shared. Our inner voices will keep the

conversation going, enriching the next conversation we have together as well as new conversational partnerships we establish. Our yet-to-be said regions are enriched.

That the inner voices in conversational partnership continue the dialogue between meetings is a reality that is receiving more attention and engagement in the field of postmodern therapies. For instance, narrative therapists encourage letter-writing between meetings. The therapist practices near-experience writing, lifting up particular words from the last meeting that have stirred the inner voice of the therapist and inspired the inner voice of the therapist to reach out.

As the previous few paragraphs suggest, suffering creates a double bind. The testifier strongly desires to convey and make meaning of her suffering while at the same time her suffering makes it harder to find words to convey and make meaning of it. The witness feels the strong need for words with which to address the sufferer at the same time that words seem inadequate and unavailable. Such being the case, the act of lamenting requires greater space for silence, more attention to the inner voice, from which utterances *will* or *may* take shape. I emphasize will and may to underscore the role of time in the act of unbinding. The movement from wailing to lament through more silence than usual takes time. An email I received in May of 2008 from an undergraduate at Bates College, from Zimbabwe, who participated with me in a memoirs project with under-represented students, serves as an example:

> Hello Bill. Short term is going by well. I am really enjoying the good weather! I just wish things were better back home, but I can only pray. I am taking a writing and tutoring class and it’s quite engaging. I have been engaged in deep thoughts lately. Most of the stuff that would be difficult to talk about. Maybe it's

> because of the ongoing problems back home, or just that I have more time to think about stuff, sometimes it just brings me anger. I miss the memoirs group as we could have potentially shared our inner thoughts and fears. However, I was wondering if you would be available during the summer as I would like to take my steps to write out issues that burn within me. I appreciate that the memoirs group was open for us to share our deep thoughts but I could have said much more. I hope you can help me let the thoughts out (thinking of your probing yet temperate questions during the interviews of the memoirs). God Bless You. Clyde

Listening

Silence as respectful attention to our inner voices is not the beginning of a linear process of pastoral talk, the hush before the rush of dialogue. Rather, silence is the spring from which those who are beheld find the fresh water of words to communicate their experience. Hence, silence is a listening that watches and waits and receives what the others are able and willing to share.

Ann watched and waited in silence as she sat among the six family members and therapist. Ann's silence enabled her eventually to name respectfully no more or less than that which those around her offered, incomprehensible wailing: "There is much noise." Ann's simple and sublime naming is rich with insights critical to the dynamic that moves incomprehensible wailing to convivial lament, towards joyful solidarity that liberates.

Harry Goolishian once said, "Listen to what they really say, and not to what they really mean." (Andersen, 2002, p. 18) Goolishian's psychology was spiced with Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. One is unable to notice something

because it is always before our eyes." (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 129) Expressions are not gleanings from internal constructs; they are social contributions, gifts for participating in bonds with others. "Expressions bewitch understanding, not vice versa," (Andersen, p. 8) through listening that creates enough room for the expressions to be voiced to completion.

As pastoral caregivers, we usually feel compelled to get at and understand what someone means, as if our task is the deliverance of meaning. How often I have said things to the sorrowful and traumatized because I believed I needed to say anything that counted for something. The pastoral vocation is, first and last, about relation, not deliverance. Relation is good enough.

Grief work requires no experts. The words the grieving and aggrieved share with us are not to be adroitly mined but valued, cherished, treasured, qualities born of an innate, "naïve" curiosity (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, Epson, 1997, p. 302). To assume that the words have hidden meaning requiring our excavation is to cross beyond the boundary of that which is offered, which is a violation of the others' spirit. Words are gifts, not clues. Harlene Anderson thickens the distinction between gift and clue in talking about two particular qualities of listening, hearing, and speaking:

> Listen, hear, and speak as a learner. Be genuinely curious about the other. You must sincerely believe that you can learn something from them. Listen and respond with expressed interest in what the other person is talking about—their experiences, their words, their feelings, and so forth.
>
> Listen, hear, and speak to understand. Do not understand too quickly. Keep in mind that understanding is never-ending. Be tentative about what you

> think you might know. Knowing interferes with dialogue: it can preclude learning about the other, being inspired by them, and the spontaneity intrinsic to genuine dialogue. Knowing also risks increasing power differences (2007, p. 40).

Gifts are to be opened. Ann says, “I wonder, if noise could speak, what would noise have to say to us?” The grandfather answers, “Noise would say that we need to speak.” The grandfather continues, “There is much to talk about that needs to be talked about but is hard to talk about.” Ann respectfully checks with the family to see if it is okay to continue to open the gift, “Is this too hard to bring to words now? What do you think? Should we talk or not?” The grandfather concludes, “We must talk about my cancer.”

The grandfather, I believe, did not come to the session or wait for a time in the session to say, “We must talk about my cancer.” The grandfather did not know what he was going to say before he said it (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, Epson, p. 6), as if the “unsaid” already exists, waiting for its time, waiting to be noticed, discovered, or “unearthed” by the craft of the therapist (Freedman, J., Combs, G., 1996, pp. 44-45). The initially silent Ann, paying respectful attention to the noise of incomprehensible wailing, allowed those in the room to name the not yet known, and through such naming, be heard to a voice of lament. The voice of lament was a new, previously unstoried narrative, co-constructed by therapists and family (p. 46) in solidarity, awakening a previously unimagined future ripe with fresh possibility.

The Reverend Glenda Hope talks about a “life stance of thankfulness” that waits for God’s guidance in silence (Thornton, p. 201), what Sharon Thornton suggested “we might call contemplative listening, a disciplined kind of listening in which we attempt to

disregard any of our preconceived notions, theories, and hunches about someone and their experiences (Thornton, p. 201)."

Contemplative listening cautions us to take a careful position in respect to the heretofore crown jewel of pastoral caring—empathy (Thornton, p. 201). Empathy presumes the possibility of knowing the other, and privileges the act of knowing the other. The assumption that we share an understanding with another as the result of a resonant connection may violate the space or particularity of the other. Contemplative listening "brackets empathy with a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' " and invites us to participate with the grieving and aggrieved in co-creating the not-yet-known, an imaginative enterprise of restoring "dignity, freedom and hope." (Thornton, p. 201) We are tempted to announce and celebrate empathy in dialogues that are making a connection and difference. A hermeneutic of suspicion suggests that we approach the empathy that emerges in conversational partnership gingerly, curiously, and silently. My experience is that empathy is an inner voice utterance that does not need our help to be conveyed.

Alterity

Alterity is a postmodern term, which means differentness, otherness. Alterity, as a position, serves as a "handle" to hold onto in conversational partnership to keep us from slipping away from relational positions of learning and curiosity and slipping into power over positions of expertise, knowing and understanding. Alterity checks the pastoral caregiver's penchant for empathy and her approach to empathy as one of the more essential characteristics of pastoral presence. Alterity is an important handle because pastoral caregivers—usually those who have experienced suffering and continue to make meaning of their own suffering—often assume that they are in a better position to relate

to and care for those who suffer. While the sense of being a "fellow struggler" motivates us for engaged pastoral accompaniment, it is not necessarily a helpful sense in a pastoral psychology of lament. As similar as our histories may be to the histories of those we are in conversational partnership with, the respectful and attentive position remembers that the grieving and aggrieved other is and will always be the other; different from us, hence, one before whom we remain expectant and open to being inspired, touched, amazed, awed, blessed and changed.

The suffering other, in our beholding of her, addresses us as the Other, the embodiment of God, about whom we can know little and predict less. The Other addresses us from "elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected and unplanned." (Butler, p. 130) The Other "ruins our plans, and if [our] plans are ruined, that may well be a sign that something is morally binding upon [us]." (Butler, p.130)

Emmanuel Levinas introduced the notion of the "face" to explain how others make moral claims upon us (Butler, pp. 131-132):

> The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility. The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*), but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other. The celebrated "right to existence" that Spinoza called the *conatus essendi* and defined as the basic principle of all intelligibility is challenged by the relation to the face. Accordingly, my duty to respond to the other suspends my natural right to self-survival, *le droit vitale*. My ethical relation

> of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the world. To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.

Levinas makes clear that the face "is not exclusively the face of a man." (Levinas, p. 140) Citing Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* (Part Three, Chapter 23), Levinas mentions

> a visit to the Lubianka in Moscow by the families or wives or relatives of political prisoners, to get news of them. A line is formed in front of the windows, in which they can only see each other's backs. A woman waits for her turn. 'Never had she thought the human back could be so expressive and transmit states of mind so penetratingly. The people who approached the window had a special way of stretching the neck and back; the raised shoulders had shoulder-blades tensed as if by springs, and they seemed to shout, to cry, to sob.' Face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakening to the precariousness of the other (p. 140).

The power of the face of the Other to make a moral claim upon us emanates from the proximity of the suffering other to us. The nearness of the suffering other prohibits, or, at least makes harder, our inclination to keep suffering at a distance by making abstractions like "the suffering," or constructing totalizing categories such as "the homeless." When the suffering other is abstracted and totalized, that is, removed from her

place of standing before and over us in all her particularity and precariousness, we are more likely to be complacent about her suffering and complicit in aiding and abetting it. Our complacency and complicity are aided and abetted by a culture that works overtime to keep the suffering other out of our range of sight. Peace, as Levinas suggests, begins with re-situating the suffering other before and over us. For example, the tide turned against the Vietnam War when the nation saw a little girl fleeing down a road naked and aflame.

Polyphony

While alterity in a pastoral psychology of lament works to keep the suffering other before and over us, polyphony works to open up the myriad voices of the suffering other and others and to make flatter the dominant voice of those on high.

Polyphony, like alterity, is a postmodern term with roots in the writings of Bakhtin. Bakhtin wrote about Dostoyevsky's literary forms, in which many authors narrate the story, each with a particular account (Anderson, 1997, p. 225). In addition, each author is a plurality of independent voices in dialogue with one another (Anderson, 1997, p. 225). Each voice in the polyphony of voices that comprise the novel, rather than carrying a piece of the novel's meaning or "truth," co-creates, with the other voices, a dialogue. The dialogue, rather than moving towards the meaning of the text, is the "truth" of the text. As the reader of the text, our voice is added to the dialogue. Our participation in the text is the text's truth *for us at this time*. Bakhtin went on to ascribe the character of the polyphonic novel to the composition of the self (Anderson, 1997, p. 225). The self is at heart dialogical, a conversational self, polyphony of inner voices, and, with her outer voice, a participator in polyphonic discourse.

Polyphony, in the service of a pastoral psychology of lament, is epitomized in *The AIDS Memorial Quilt*, sponsored and funded by *The Names Project Foundation*. *The AIDS Memorial Quilt* began in 1987. The Quilt measures approximately twelve feet square, and a typical block consists of eight individual three foot by six-foot panels sewn together. Each of the 40,000 panels that make up the Quilt memorialize the life of a person lost to AIDS (*The Names Project website*). The friends and family of the deceased create the panel of their loved one.

I was involved in many panel creations. In a sense, we understood ourselves to be about the artful work of recovering the polyphony of voices of the deceased self that had been silenced and stolen throughout the course of the illness by the grand narratives of medicine and religion. For instance, Larry came to define himself less as a lover of art deco and more as one with a low or high T cell count. On his panel, we painted one of his favorite neon signs. Tedd, having headed home from Atlanta to rural Georgia in order to have a place to die, traded in his drag queen name, Tonya, and took on the new moniker of "sinner." On his panel, we glued a patch from his favorite dress.

Twice, in the 1990's, all the panels from around the United States made their way to Washington, D.C. Each time, roughly 250,000 people gathered to piece together and witness the Quilt on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Both events ended with a candlelight march. A polyphony of tens of thousands of imaginative, quilted "voices" made for a public mourning shed of the more or less monophonic sounds of solemnity and commemoration. During the candlelight march at the conclusion of the second Washington gathering, towards the end of the first President Bush's term in office, the

enormous crowd marched around the White House, repeatedly, shouting, “Three more weeks! Three more weeks!” Public mourning was politicized. Public morning is political.

Bakhtin devoted much study to the work of Rabelais, the French Renaissance writer. In Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais, he located in the medieval carnival the polyphonic voices of the low, the peasant, the outcast. The polyphonic voices of the low question, ridicule and drown out, for a time, the monophonic voice of the high—the church and the state (Shay, 2000). Bakhtin wrote of the festive laughter of the medieval carnival, a laughter that he described as "gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 11-12)." Anyone who has attended Gay Pride parades in major US cities can attest to the present relevance of Rabelais’ work and Bakhtin’s assessment of it.

Marking Absence

“Even if the killer tells you that your father’s bones are in a toilet, you go to those pits and pull them out.”[4] (Williams, p. 291)

Survivor of Rwandan Genocide

The morning after the execution of Jesus, women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. Jesus was absent. Mary Magdalene’s anxious cry is a collect over their desperation: “They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him.” (John 20:13)

[4] At a commemoration event at Bates College in April of 2009, marking the 15th anniversary of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, Carine Gakuba, a survivor, said that she returned to Rwanda to confront the man who murdered her father. She shared with us that her principal desire in the confrontation was to find out where her father was killed, so that she could visit the place. Her desire to mark the absence was much stronger than her need for a word, whatever word, from her father’s killer, her need to speak words to him.

Public grief work begins with companions walking toward an empty tomb, a labyrinth circling to a center of absence, where together we stand and cry for our loved ones and ourselves. As a woman in Chile said: “Every time I see a madman or a hobo in the street I think it may be my husband, or that he might be somewhere in a similar situation.” (Schreiter, 1998, p. 33) The one request of a woman who lost a son to apartheid was that South Africa provide a tombstone for a body never found. A survivor of child sexual abuse prays for memories of her body’s violation to return, as painful as they may be, so that she will have a place from which to orient her horror.

As I talked about in Chapter 1, I spent ten years among people dying from AIDS during the first wave of the pandemic. Those who died were young and, for the most part, healthy prior to onset of the disease. One of the most haunting dimensions of their dying was the horrific wasting and disfigurement of their bodies. I remember the passion with which we created their panels for the AIDS quilt. We sought to recapture and reconfigure the profiles of their once sufficient and embodied lives.

Our relation to those who have died and or disappeared does not end, it changes. Yet, change demands a touchstone from which to depart:

> The children entered the room where Steve’s body lay. They touched his feet; they touched his arms and felt them as cold. They moved closer and lovingly rubbed his forehead. Respectful. Curious. And then, one by one they began to cry, freely and unself-conscious. One of the said, “Steve was my best friend.” Another said, “I miss him.” Within minutes, the children were sitting on the bed alongside his body telling stories about their uncle. Fear was transformed into comfort,

> curiosity melted into love, and the silence was no longer uncomfortable. (Williams, p. 207)

Marking death and disappearance in concrete and material ways is the beginning of the journey. Ritual and liturgy are our instruments of peace. We have the aforementioned Judeo-Christian tradition of "dangerous memories." We have the voices of present victims, who, when heard to voice, can collaborate with the stewards of ritual and liturgy to mark the tombstones of their sorrow and anguish. As we gather around the victims and their co-created tombstones, their memories become the community's memory. The community's memory is dangerous to the stasis that preserves the dominance of temple and town.

Reiteration

On the road to Emmaus, two disciples are fleeing the pain of Jesus' execution and the city in which it happened. A stranger approaches and accompanies them along the way. A dialogue ensues over the afternoon and evening that transposes an oppressive story into a redemptive one.

The grieving and aggrieved need a predictable and consistent audience for telling and retelling their stories, over and over again (Schreiter, pp. 43, 46). The purpose of repetition is not to talk ourselves away from the past, or to forget the past, but to remember the past in a new way. At the time of loss and trauma, the words shared do not necessarily convey the meaning desired. The narrative that will abate the pain, stave off the abyss of nothingness, transform the memory, enable us to move ahead is a cacophony of words slowly but surely co-constructed into a liberative language in and from which a preferred future is co-created. A liberative story is built by sharing old and new word

arrangements over and over again. There is no telling how often stories of sorrow and tragedy need repeating in order for a new perspective, a glimpse of meaning, an unforeseen path, a previously unimaginable forgiveness, a once closed future to open. Harlene Anderson conveys that "change emerges in and through the redescriptions that result from telling and retelling of familiar stories. In the telling and retelling not only do new stories emerge, but a person changes in relationship to them: the narrating self changes." (1997, p. 109) Change begets change. Public grief work as narrative construction is an anticipatory and active waiting that does not reach completion and resolution. It is a discourse that keeps opening space for new possibility through unending repetition in the *meantime* for transcendence of the *meantime* now and again, here and there. Resolution thwarts revolution.

Hospitality

"An act of hospitality can only be poetic."

Jacques Derrida (Dufournmantelle and Derrida, p. 2)

The atmosphere in which pastoral caregivers wait with the grieving and aggrieved in repetitive conversation needs to be carefully considered. When Jesus cooked breakfast on the seashore for his bereaved disciples, fishermen, he prepared fish, not his fish, their fish (Schreiter, p. 89).

When building The Hospice at Mission Hill, we collaborated with the finest interior designers in the Northeastern United States to create spaces that were extravagantly welcoming—prints of Robert Mapplethorpe photographs, one ceiling painted as clouds, another as a trellis entwined with grape vines. Our guests mostly were

unimpressed. We had prepared deathbeds at The Ritz. They desired deathbeds that reflected the spirit and tastes of the homes they had to leave.

I remember a similar experience in a Rwandan refugee camp. Counselors gave children crayons so that they could draw their experiences of loss, their feelings of trauma. The children ate the crayons. They were hungry and had never seen crayons before (Schreiter, p. 107).

With hands carrying carefully prepared recipes of compassion, we are apt to trip over the rug of our cultural biases and power advantage, spilling our goodwill in the laps of our guests. Godly hospitality is a moveable feast, one that moves from our hearths to the hearths of our neighbors. Hospitality that empowers those dislocated by loss and trauma de-centers the host and centers the guest. As de-centered hosts, we will feel awkward, disempowered, the ones interpreted rather than the ones interpreting, those beheld in uncomfortable ways by the beneficiaries of our regard. Our disorientation possibly is the strongest connection we may have to the disoriented ones to which we attend. We become more like than unlike them. The distance between caregiver and cared for closes, the distinction between server and served is lost. Mutuality is established.

French philosopher Jacques Derrida offers a postmodern frame for the de-centered host. He deconstructs what he calls a possible hospitality towards the possibility of an impossible hospitality, a hospitality that moves across the host's hearth to the hearth of the hosted. Derrida suggests that hospitality requires

> one to be the "master" of the house, country or nation, hence controlling. In other words, to be hospitable one must have the power to host. Secondly, in order to be hospitable, the host must also have some kind of control over the people who are

being hosted. If the guests take over a house through force, then the host is no longer being hospitable towards them precisely because they are no longer in control of the situation. For Derrida, any attempt to behave hospitably is also always partly betrothed to the keeping of guests under control, to the closing of boundaries, to nationalism, and even to the exclusion of particular groups or ethnicities. This is Derrida's possible conception of hospitality, in which our most well intentioned conceptions of hospitality render the "other others" as strangers and refugees. Whether one invokes the current international preoccupation with border control, or simply the ubiquitous suburban fence and alarm system, it seems that hospitality always posits some kind of limit upon where the other can trespass, and hence has a tendency to be rather inhospitable.

On the other hand, as well as demanding some kind of mastery of house, country or nation, there is a sense in which the notion of hospitality demands a welcoming of whomever, or whatever, may be in need of that hospitality. It follows from this that unconditional hospitality, or we might say 'impossible' hospitality, hence involves a relinquishing of judgment and control in regard to who will receive that hospitality. In other words, hospitality also requires non-mastery, and the abandoning of all claims to property, or ownership. If that is the case, however, the ongoing possibility of hospitality thereby becomes circumvented, as there is no longer the possibility of hosting anyone, as again, there is no ownership or control (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Jacques Derrida, hospitality).

The impossibility of an impossible hospitality, through our imagining of it, does inspire us to reposition ourselves in respect to the stranger, the Other:

> Deconstruction says "come to the step of the other," to the step of Elijah at our door, to the step of the absolute surprise, so that the other will not be my doing, the mirror image of my "psyche." If anything, it is I who will be invented by the other (Caputo, 1997, p. 73).

I am reminded of Jesus sending out the newly chosen twelve disciples, as recorded in Matthew 9: 35 -10: 10. He instructed them to carry empty purses, one coat, to wear no sandals, to present themselves at their doors empty handed, barefooted, vulnerable and dependent. The "lost ones" to whom the disciples were sent were the ones who would invent the exposed, vulnerable and dependent disciples. We who take up discipleship, the expendable life, are invented by the lost ones to whom we are sent.

The Spirit of Curiosity

Curiosity, as a witnessing position, is a cornerstone in the postmodern foundation of this pastoral psychology of lament. Curiosity infused Ann's presence with, and attention to the utterances of, the family of six. Curiosity wove through the nine qualities of godly loving. I imagine curiosity leaping between and around God, the *Event* of right relation. I know curiosity to issue from sacramental personhood. I perceive that curiosity is one of the most embodied relational positions, noticed in the eyes, experienced in the shoulders and hands as one leans into another's words and gestures. I ponder how much curiosity is a grace, a *charism* given, how much it is a learned discipline and position of relation. I experience curiosity as a hard to define yet easier to point to "parent" of

postmodern sensibilities and relation. One knows and does not soon forget when another is respectfully curious of her.

I close this chapter in remembrance of and deep gratitude for Tom Andersen, a Norwegian family practitioner turned psychiatrist, recently deceased, who, for me, was one of the most respectfully curious “voices” in the broader postmodern community. I will say more about Tom in Part Two of the dissertation. I offer words of Marjorie Roberts, a friend and colleague, who knew Tom as a friend and worked with him over the course of many years. The paragraph is from a speech she delivered at a conference in honor of Tom. The speech was titled, “What I Learned from Tom Andersen.” The conference, held March 29, 2008, was titled, “Reflecting Processes in Therapy: Finding Ways Forward:”

> I was privileged to witness a consultation in Massachusetts between Tom and Diane, a social worker, who directed an agency. She and her staff were struggling in their work with a family, and had stopped working with the father after he tried to run over his children with his car. At the end of the consultation, Diane described feeling energized to return to her work. I heard several years later that Diane and her colleagues immediately resumed their work with this man, and several years later, he won the father of the year award in his community. With Diane's agreement, Tom returned 10 years later for a follow-up meeting with Diane to discuss what was significant about their earlier meeting. As I listened to Diane and Tom discuss what was significant in "helping Diane and her colleagues go on” in their work with this man, I learned that it was a new perspective based

on Tom's curiosity about her work and the very words that she used in describing her concerns, which led to identifying new possibilities.

Chapter 3

GOD

"After Auschwitz, no theology:

the numbers on the forearms

of the inmates of extermination

are the telephone numbers of God,

numbers that do not answer

and now are disconnected, one by one."

Yehuda Amichai (Amichai, 2000, p. 48)

The construction of God in this chapter is shaped by the narratives of four people, who have taught me much about God as the *event* of right relation: Andrea, whom you have previously met, and whose presence is formable for the rest of Part One; Rose, a senior at Bates College; and, Ronnie and Johnny, residents of The Hospice at Mission Hill. I begin and end the chapter with conversations with Andrea.

Andrea

I first met Andrea in a meeting with Andrea and my colleague, Steve, who was her therapist at the time. Steve was about to take a yearlong sabbatical and he asked me if I would consider seeing Andrea during his sabbatical. The purpose of the meeting was for Andrea and me to meet one another and for the three of us to talk about the possible transition.

As is the practice of the center in which we worked, Steve shared nothing other than Andrea's name prior to the meeting. Such practice protected Andrea from being colonized by the grand narrative of clinical assessment, and from what, in most any other

contexts, simply would be bad manners, that is, talking about someone outside her or his presence. The commitment of our “secular” counseling center to talk about “clients” only when they were present was, for me, one of the “sacraments” of our center, the bread and wine of respectful attention, mutuality, collaboration and co-creativeness.

Steve introduced Andrea to me while Andrea listened. Steve invited Andrea to interrupt and edit as needed or desired, to augment Steve’s introduction of her. Rather than engage in mimesis, historical facts and remembrances, Steve gave witness to the beautiful, strong and courageous actions of Andrea as she navigated the rocky waters of a violent heritage. Steve shared one of Andrea’s testimonial performances, an essay, entitled *The Pink Revolution*. In the document, Andrea advocates for victims of abuse and violence. She exposes what she describes as the totalizing, diminishing, abusive and violent atmosphere of treatment centers, what she calls, *The Warehouse*. She offers striking remedies for humanizing both victims of abuse and violence and the institutions and professionals who treat them.

So, rather than reading process notes in Andrea’s record before our meeting, I was witness, in our meeting, to poignant, passionate writing:

> My intention is to change the dynamic of society as we know it, to include people who face challenges related to their past. People who have been abused face many struggles, emotionally and spiritually. However, they are not solely "a person who has been abused." They are humans who have the capacity to love, to feel, to work, to study, and to be an individual. They should not be catastrophically lumped together as an out-group.

Andrea listened intently and appreciatively. She did not add or subtract.

Next, Steve introduced me to Andrea. I did add material, gingerly. Steve chose not to mention that I am an Episcopal priest. I felt the information was important, especially in light of Andrea's history. I, almost apologetically (my issue), shared with Andrea that I was a clergyperson. Andrea smiled and said, "Oh, no problem. I don't do religion but I am very spiritual. If you are comfortable with it, I am." Our first exchange bore old knowledge about me in a new light. Andrea has much to teach. When we talked about the omission (my word) later, Steve said that he did not feel my priestly vocation was "near the top" of what he wanted to communicate about me to Andrea.

The statement, "I am spiritual but not religious," seems to follow me around. Such was the mantra of most of the people who found their way to the urban parish I served for 13 years. They were full of stories about what religion had not been for them, thirsty for meaningful conversation and relation. They desired vertical space, worship, a time out of time, as shelter for their busy, linear lives. They were hungry for ways to care for others near and far, and the earth. Moreover, they tiptoed around the "G" word.

Such was the confession of many counselees I sat with in the counseling centers where I practiced. They found their way to the counseling centers because of spiritual violence. The majority of the colleagues with whom I practiced also voiced the mantra. They had seen enough of religion's dark side.

Often faculty and students (not so much staff) at the small liberal arts college I serve as multifaith chaplain confess their reticence about religion. Recent data shows that over 75% of students and faculty at Bates College affirm the sacredness of life; roughly the same number find the buckets from their religious pasts too small to catch the manna they remain hungry for.

"I am spiritual but not religious." I am curious about the sentence. Usually, when I walk into the room of this sentence, I mostly see a space cluttered with abuse scandals, congregations embroiled in internal conflict, the politics of the religious right, witch hunts against the gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgendered and queer communities (henceforth GLBTQ) , the victims—many of them good friends—of commissions on ministry, the violent hatred among and between Abraham's children.

When I clean up the clutter, straighten up the room, there remains a palpable feel, an edgy atmosphere that I struggle to identify and name. There is something going on that has to do with language, the complex relation of words to experience. The tectonic plate of our lived experience pushes against, under and alongside the tectonic plate of our inherited, particular, present lexicon (or lack thereof) of God talk, creating a fault line under the room of "I'm spiritual but not religious." We are at a loss for words.

Rose

Rose spent last summer in a small farming village in Transylvania, a province of Romania. She kept time by the church bells, a schedule by the sun, company with the villagers while shadowing the minister of the village church. An email from Rose opens new space for our consideration of performative religious language:

> I am caught in between this talk of radical Christianity, the Transylvanian Unitarianism, US UUism, and what I am reading in preparation for India, which is Zen Buddhism. Someone asked Kinga to translate for them what it is, exactly, that I believe. I COULD NOT give an answer. It just seemed like such a silly question. It seems obvious, right now, that words don't suffice and that you should look at the way someone behaves to see what it is they believe in. How am

> I supposed to answer that? "I believe in something, but it is not a thing, and I COULD call it God, but you have this idea that God is a thing, and things fit into places and are there or not there, and I don't think so, but maybe I do, oh actually I just decided I don't, and really I am just nothing and everything all combined into simply a flapping door that moves every time I breath...??? I had to answer, though. I think I just smiled awkwardly and said that I was a Unitarian. They then wanted to know if I believed in God or not, and, after 19 years of thinking that word unfit for religious radicals, and two years of wanting to get "Boy, do I believe in God" tattooed all over my face...I was stuck! Needless to say, I think I'm at a crux and don't know how to articulate what is going on. He he! then this paragraph is silly!

"I don't know how to articulate what is going on." Rose seems less concerned with articulating her idea about God. Rose seems mostly invested and engaged in articulating (literally, to connect) the next move in the coordinative event that is dialogue. Rose, in response to the neighbors' inquiry, struggles to conjure up words for the interpreter about a matter sacred to her, in order to contribute to a conversation, while resisting the temptation to language a grand narrative (hers or another's) about belief, commitments, values, understanding, conviction, hope, wisdom and so forth.

I imagine that the villagers do not struggle with belief, nor is their narrative grand. More likely than not, their belief is mostly uniform among villagers and shared across the village, having been plied over the course of generations. Theirs is a situation in which a religious word, whatever the word, represents a reality commonly held by all. The experience behind their religious words behaves, stands still and steady behind the

religious word that represents it. Their religious words more easily work as spiritual connection for relation.

In a pluralistic environment, words signify the relations and commitments of a particular community. Words do not, by nature (words as representations of universal truths), coordinate experiences beyond the particular community that has coordinated, co-created and languaged them toward their shared relation and commitments. For instance, Rose's email to me was ripe with the language coordinated, co-created in and for our particular relation. On the other hand, Rose and her new village friends were not only busy learning one another's native languages, they were playing word games that would work for them as they crafted a conversational partnership. In an increasingly diverse and pluralistic world, there are no short cuts around the art of coordinating and co-creating a shared language of relation.

Such is the challenge of my present work. I have experienced a religious language barrier and challenge similar to Rose's as I have made my way through my first two years as multifaith chaplain at Bates College. My job description states that I relate to and serve all the religious communities on campus, including those sharing atheist and secular humanist commitments. I have quickly, sometimes painfully, learned that the language I have used adroitly, and without much forethought, within my Christian-Anglican-Episcopal-liberal-community to coordinate right relation—care, respect, attention, compassion, justice, passion, solidarity—when shared within the multifaith community, sometimes do not work. To think or expect relation prior to or without the hard work of coordinating, co-creating a shared language of relation, is a colonizing act, especially since I speak as one with a particular power and authority in the religious life of the

college. That I am routinely vetted, “checked out,” to see if I am toting a bucket big and broad enough to hold and share their experiences is a good thing. Together, slowly, we are coordinating a language of relation that is trans-religious.

The community of the broken and bent is as local as oneself to another, as broad as the colonized indigenous ones across the world, as global as a humankind haunted by the violated ones of history, dead and living. In addition, the community of the broken and bent does not need to work as hard to construct a relational language that bridges cultural differences. Suffering is the universal language, trumping the language of love, I believe. A big portion of the love that unites, heals and changes history issues from shared sorrow. The community of the grieving and aggrieved is as established and tight-knit as the Transylvanian village Rose visited last summer, in spite of its diverse composition. The problem of pluralism dissolves as the dialogue about shared sorrow ensues.

Theology of the Hospice at Mission Hill

I remember the agonal and invigorating shift in the mostly gay and white culture at the Hospice at Mission Hill (Blaine-Wallace, 2003, pp. 13-15) when Johnny came to live with us. Johnny was poor, Black, addicted, streetwise and straight. Johnny was a preview of what would become the predominate patient profile of our hospice. Johnny’s adjustment was not gentle, nor was the welcome we extended him particularly warm.

Johnny did not know much about art. “Fags” freaked him out, as did their tastes. He did not get our pride of place. He did not like the music we listened to, food we ate, movies we watched or magazines we read. He did not relate to the families we had or the

visitors we received. Johnny stayed to himself and in his room for the first couple of weeks.

We barely tried to coax Johnny out of his funk or space. None of us worked very hard to break the loud silence that hovered over the table during the few times he took his meals in the dining room. The music that blasted from his stereo was very different from the lyricism of Patsy Cline or Liza Minelli, and it violated our ears. When we did peak into his room, the posters we glimpsed gave us pause. Johnny's friends, when they came to see him, seemed to demand a wide path on the way to his room, and we gave it to them.

Ronnie, once a popular drag queen around town, was the first to cross the threshold that separated Johnny from the rest of us. Ronnie's courage to move off familiar ground, onto the foreign soil that was Johnny's life, radiated from his awareness of one thing he presently shared with Johnny—a virulent bout with Pneumocystis Carinni, pneumonia AIDS style. Ronnie and Johnny shared the bond of breathlessness. Upon this foundational connection, Ronnie and Johnny built an abiding relation. Their shared suffering of a disease and its particular symptoms, as well as the marginal place they shared in society (that one was flamboyantly gay and the other poor and Black meant that both were located on or about the same distance from power and privilege), were catalysts for a friendship that bridged the chasm of class that separated them. Their differences came to be more incidental than essential.

The friendship of Ronnie and Johnny was contagious. Their hilarity, affection, teasing, and delight spun a web of relation between all the residents and staff. That web

proved strong enough to support the increasing weight of economic, social, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity within the walls of the hospice over the next several years.

Over those next several years in the life of the hospice, the matter of God was large because God mattered so much. The religious words brought into the midst of the hospice community by residents from diverse religious backgrounds no longer were in storage or on standby. Suffering has us dust off and vivify the matter of God. The religion-spirituality binary within many of the one-time more sufficient selves who came to die at the hospice dissolved into the relational spirit among now insufficient ones sharing each other's suffering. Residents discovered that the religious buckets brought across the threshold of the hospice were excessively small for the spirit of relation encountered there. Because God mattered at the place of their dying, bigger buckets were quickly fashioned. These buckets did not so much hold the new spirituality of the various hospice residents. Instead, the big-enough buckets caught the spirituality of relation that fell among the residents like "manna from heaven."

In Yehuda Amichai's poignant poem above, the God the residents had phoned here and there over the course of their lives, and much more often, sometimes incessantly, over the course of their dying, did not answer and the lines often were disconnected. Still, the nature of relation among those living and dying at the hospice was witnessed and celebrated, here and there, quite often in fact, as God-infused, as sacred.

God, again referencing Emmanuel Levinas, "dropped" into meaning at the hospice in the face of the other (Baird, 1999, pp. 340-351). Ronnie did not so much come to know Johnny as Ronnie came to know himself differently in respect to Johnny. The isolated and holed up testifier, Johnny, interprets the witness, the comfortable and well-

related Ronnie, with the help of a shared struggle to breathe, as responsible. In the face of Johnny, Ronnie came to embody relationally the Sixth Commandment: *You shall not kill*. Johnny reinterprets Ronnie as an ethical agent. Ronnie does the same for Johnny.

Craig, another resident at Mission Hill, did the same for me. Craig's deeply appreciative eyes, as I bathed his lesion-infested body, re-interpreted the way I understood myself as the hospice's executive director, the manner in which I negotiated the priorities of the day, the vision for the future, the pay increase for the licensed practical nurses, the selection of new board members.

Theology, at the hospice, as that concerned with the nature of God, dissolved in the fixed eyes, hollow face and skeletal remains of Wayne, Jesse, Sarah, Don, Laura, Ted and hundreds and hundreds more beautiful people. In these eyes, faces and skeletons, we could not find a way to let a theistic God off the hook. We could not save God even by ascribing to God the more pathetic role as innocent bystander. Nor, though I tried, could we reason that God, horrified at history after the Garden of Eden, turned God's back on history, disowned us. In all cases, God lost God's license to be God. Theology at the hospice petered out as a systematic and emerged as an ethic.

The stewardship of the ethic was simple: respectful regard for the sacredness of the other. The other most always remained the other. Ronnie did not come to listen to Ice T, nor Johnny Barbara Streisand. They expect such from one another. The other remained the other, the impenetrable, unknowable, not to be merged with or consumed by neighbor. Alterity trumped empathy (Coates, p. 163-164). Alterity, as expressed by Mikhail Bakhtin, was the foundation of their love:

> Only love can see and represent the inner freedom of an object…The absolute unconsumability of the object is revealed only to love; love leaves it whole and situated outside of itself and side by side with itself. Love fondles and caresses borders; borders take on a new significance. Love does not speak about an object in its absence, but speaks with the object itself (Coates, p. 175).

What, you might ask, of the God who suffers with us, who accompanies us through our suffering? Certainly, I have held onto and felt the presence of the vulnerable, expendable God of my faith tradition, mirrored in the maligned and executed Jesus. Still the question remains, asked, and, I believe, answered poignantly by South African theologian Denise Ackerman:

> Was God in the gas ovens when Jewish children were thrown into them alive, or with Tutsis slaughtered by machetes or with babies dying slowly of AIDS in hospital wards? Perhaps. I don't know. What is clear to me is that one's affirmation that God is present in suffering must, in Ken Surin's words, be "interrupted by the stories of the victims." They must speak just as loudly as any affirmations of faith about God's presence in suffering (2003, pp. 106-107).

The God of the Hospice at Mission Hill

Theology at the hospice, as voiced by the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, writing amidst the violence of Stalin's Russia, also became known in discourse (Mihailovic, 1997). The God of the hospice is less the steward of dialogue. This God is more the one who disappears into dialogue like a great author exiled to the Patmos of her own creative genius, silenced by her own adroitly effacing hand; Dostoyevsky, for instance. The God of the hospice stands in opposition to the lesser author whose presence hovers over his

text by asserting himself in, under, around and through his characters (Wood, date unknown, p. 6). The God of the hospice, then, rather than non-existent is all pervasive. At the hospice, God, most often, had no isolated essence and consciousness apart from the polyphonic music that was Jesse, in his sequined, gold gown, with thick, turquoise eye liner, holding the hand of the by-now blind Sally, describing, in rich detail, how beautiful he was at the moment, how great he was at being her eyes, while the rest of the residents in the room exclaimed, "Don't you believe that gaudy-assed girly man, Sally, don't you believe it!" God, in the language of the Christian faith, is incarnated, dies and is resurrected in this particular dialogic relation of a few fellow sufferers hanging out for a few moments. These few fellow sufferers act as the silent and pervasive God of the hospice acts, "orchestrating an open-ended conversation among [one another], as their lives and voices interact within the great polyphony of human existence, refusing to impose any truth than that which emerges from their own developing consciousness amidst the hazards of interpersonal life." (Wood, p. 6)

The residents of the hospice, in the spirit of Jacques Derrida (Caputo, 2007), mostly deconstructed, rather than trashed, the institution of religion. Their reticence is laudable. At the time, and still, religion is poisoned by the preoccupying, irrelevant, violent obsession with gay sex. Wayne still reverenced the crucifix on the wall facing his bed. Richard read his bible. Sarah insisted on grace at the table. The residents of the hospice distilled religion back to its golden nugget, the ceaseless yearning for more of what they experienced with and for one another around the living room and across the dining room table. Together, they kept peering through St. Paul's smoked glass, the smoked glass that never is more or less than neighbor. The residents kept peering through

the dim glass of sister and brother to experience more fully the yet-to-be named or fully-known God, faintly glimpsed during a game of *Trivial Pursuit* or at breakfast. They had experienced and imagined enough radical, boundless conviviality to be able to shout, as Derrida exclaimed, repeatedly, during his distillation of religion, "Yes, Yes, Come, Come!" In this sense, the residents *did church*. As the Black church preacher cries out during moments of eschatological thirst, "Let the people say Amen!"

The God of the hospice and, by extension, of the sorrowful, is caught for us in the bucket of Henry James, Sr., his words about Ralph Waldo Emerson:

> This was Emerson's incontestable virtue to every one who appreciated him, that he recognized no God outside himself and his interlocutor, and recognized him there only as the liaison between the two, taking care that all their intercourse should be holy with a holiness undreamed of before by man or angel (Mihailovic, p. 1).

Witnessing God: Andrea, Debbie and Me

I remember God "dropping" into the midst of a meeting with Andrea. Andrea and I, along with Debbie Nathan, an artist and colleague at the counseling center, were at a pivotal moment in our conversation. Earlier in the hour, Andrea had drawn a picture reflective of what she was experiencing, tears. We were celebrating this testimonial performance. Over the course of the last several weeks, Andrea had voiced her desire to cry. She had been prohibited from crying by The Dictator, a dominant voice among the other voices that comprised the community of Andrea's self. The Dictator feared tears as a dangerous "weapon" of Andrea-in-right-relation. Andrea-in-right-relation loosened his (Andrea talked about The Dictator as male) hold on her. The session before, Andrea,

Debbie and I had concocted a revolution parallel to the *Pink Revolution*, the *Revolution of Tears*. Andrea had appointed Debbie and me as lieutenants in this revolution. We were celebrating our victory.

In the midst of our celebration, Debbie asked if Andrea would like to draw what we were experiencing. Andrea nodded in the affirmative. Debbie opened her satchel and pulled out the props for the testimonial performance. Andrea drew, in the bottom left-hand corner of the paper, a small angel. The angel had big wings the color of blue, the same color of the tear Andrea had drawn in the previous session. Between the disproportionate wings-of-tears (my witness of the tear) was an equally disproportionate heart, colored red, close to the color of the agitated, jagged lines Andrea had drawn, during the previous session, in the body of the tear (my witness of the heart). The angel's head was small and colored a faint yellow, barely discernable, with no features. Enveloping the angel, extending just beyond the angel's outline, was an even fainter cloud-like surface, something of an aura surrounding the angel. When asked about the drawing, Andrea talked about the peacefulness she was feeling, what she described as an angel watching over her. A long period of silence followed in which Debbie and I joined our tears to hers.

During the silence, my inner voice kept whispering, *anoint, anoint*. I tried several times to quiet the voice. Touching in a session is forbidden by most schools of therapy, certainly the school of my earlier training. I would be imposing my priestly power on Andrea, an act, because of Andrea's past, which might be experienced as violent and abusive. Debbie was Jewish. Andrea was very spiritual but did not do religion.

I broke the silence by saying, “Now Andrea, you know that I am a priest. I carry the oil of healing in my backpack. Please excuse me if I am suggesting that which is off putting or feels dangerous to you. And, I am so sorry if this offends. Would you like to receive the oil of healing? Her tears increased, she smiled and replied, “I would love that.” I asked Debbie, her Jewish faith being very important to her, if she felt comfortable participating in the sacrament. She voiced her desire to join in the ritual. The only orthodox parts of the event that followed were the oil and the sign of the cross I made on Andrea’s forehead. Prior to the anointing, I shared with Andrea that I did not understand the ritual to be “magical,” that we were not conjuring God down upon us. I shared that I experienced what we were up to as an anointing of the very powerful episode of the *Revolution of Tears* we had just shared together. During the anointing, Andrea, Debbie and I each shared our experience and meaning of the moment.

The faith of the hospice residents, Andrea’s testimonial performance in the drawing of the angel, and our communal testimonial performance in the sharing of the sacrament of anointing afterwards, bear witness to the God of the sorrowful. God, then, is as close as our capacity and willingness to offer ourselves as vulnerable to the brokenness of the near at hand and far away neighbors, a vulnerability that strives to stay awake amidst the haunting voices of a history bloated with suffering.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss our resistance to the vulnerability that situates us in testimonial relation. We will look at our somnolence in the face of suffering, the restless sleep that comes with the haunting presence of the accumulated weight of history’s long trail of sorrows. We will look at how our shield against creation’s agony leaves us to bear

ours more alone than not, and the wailing that issues from our isolation from our suffering sisters and brothers.

Chapter 4

WAILING

"Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence."

Mikhail Bakhtin (Coates, p. 67)

Wailing is to lament as moaning is to weeping, as despair is to sadness. In this and the next chapter, I will draw out the differences between wailing and lament, particularly how wailing is a disease to engage and lament a relation to develop richly and prosper widely. The primary "text" for the venture is a series of meetings between Andrea and me, and Debbie Nathan, the family therapist intern mentioned earlier. The meetings occurred over a year's time. Some of the interviews were video recorded, others were audio recorded. Process notes were recorded after each session. I focus on a generative "voice" in the room during many of our meetings, Andrea's art, which, as previously addressed, mediates suffering in a manner that makes it more approachable.

Andrea brought to our meeting a piece of art she drew during what was for us—Andrea and me—a week long, losing battle in our collaborative *Revolution of Tears* against The Dictator. In the upper left-hand corner were the words, drawn in dark brown, "My heart wants to cry but it is forced into the silence." Below, in the left middle of the canvas, in larger, more brittle letters, "Sometimes I cannot breathe." Below, in the bottom left corner of the canvas, were two vivid, yellowish brown quotation marks with nothing between them, empty space. Streaming down the length of the middle of the canvas was a bright orange and red tear, with a cone of vertical colors—green, yellow, turquoise, blue and purple. The tear looked like the tears of wailing feel—hot, stinging, leaving the face raw and red. The tear resembled a tornado tearing through the heart of the canvas. At the

same time, the tear's trail of stark colors was being blown away from the tear's bead by a stronger, horizontal force. Just before the tear's stream was blown off the right side of the canvas, there were words moving vertically up the right border: "Things that I can't but must say."

Along with the drawing, Andrea brought a piece of prose that she penned during a particularly brutal night of the revolution. Andrea wrote:

> Maybe I should just go to a state hospital. I don't know, maybe I am really crazy. Maybe I am the antagonist like the doctor told me. Maybe I am hostile. I have lost my ability to do art, Bill, so what is left? I have nothing except a half full stomach that needs to be emptied again, nothing except some skin that needs to be cut. I need to bleed, internally and externally.

During the meeting, Andrea and I crafted a decision for her to be hospitalized, not at the state hospital, but at the hospital she regularly visited as an outpatient.

I witnessed Andrea courageously move through the next few weeks of hospital treatment. During a visit, towards the end of her stay, Andrea presented me with a ceramic angel she had made in the art workshop, an icon that accompanied her through her hospitalization, especially the ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) treatments, which Andrea greatly feared. The angel closely resembled the one she drew in the earlier meeting with Debbie and me, referenced in the previous chapter.

The strength of Andrea's courage, depth of her wisdom and beauty of her character are manifested in her determination to bring visual and written art into our testimonial relation precisely at a time when she felt she had lost her ability to do art. Andrea held onto our mutually established criterion of testimonial performance over

mimesis. Andrea trusted that she could give more palpable testimony and I could offer a more present witness through the gift of a prismed pain.

There is more knowledge evoked by Andrea's art. Andrea knows that art is located less within oneself and more between oneself and others. Art is a relational act. Bakhtin, again: "An aesthetic event may only be established in the presence of two participants; it presupposes two unmerging consciousnesses." (Bakhtin, 1929, p. 22) Art was Andrea's gossamer thread of connection, which she sewed between herself and another and others at a profoundly isolated moment in the *Revolution of Tears*.

There are many places on the canvas and in the prose of Andrea's art from which to start our exploration of wailing. We start with a definition around and through which we will travel together. Wailing is the breath-taking, tear-searing, inarticulate (literally, not connected), and godforsaken scream (blaring and soundless) of those whose suffering has not been languaged in relation. I say godforsaken not to signify a person and place God has left. Rather, by godforsaken I mean the condition of being one without the other, half the clay necessary for godly existence, Adam with rib intact, the monologic, not-conversationally-partnered sufferer, one going alone, handing oneself along in the unity of a single consciousness. The godforsaken may wear a suit into Goldman Sachs, an alb around the altar, a jogging outfit down the road, a tattered coat atop a grate in the city. What the godforsaken share is the self-as-bounded. What they have lost or are struggling to find is the self-as-discourser (Coates, p. 164), a concept I develop in Chapter 6**.** Because the bounded self is hallowed in a frontier nation that heralds rugged individualism, wailing is pandemic.

An aspect of Andrea's art most illustrative of the epidemic of wailing is the sentence at the left center of the canvas: "Sometimes I cannot breathe." If two voices is the minimum for life, and I agree with Bakhtin that such is the case, Andrea's seemingly hopeless experience of isolation was squeezing the life out of her.

Breathing requires relation. Breathing, also, is a metaphor for relation, both right relation, mutually generative, and relation that is off beam, colonizing and totalizing of one by another. Tom Andersen, referenced in Chapter 2, and discussed extensively in Chapter 7, richly develops the metaphor of breathing as relation. He writes about the natural pause in the process of breathing—the pause after exhalation and before inhalation (a word, in Norwegian, which means in-spiration as well). He writes that awareness of and curiosity about the pause, by both testifier and witness, is basic to relational breathing:

> We are to be aware of three kinds of pauses: (a) the one that comes after exhaling before the next inspiration starts (if we as therapists go slow and not rush the client to find answers, we might contribute to the next inspiration that starts spontaneously, not by will or force), (b) the one that comes after the person has spoken and thinks to herself of what she just said, (c) the [one] that comes when a reflecting talk occurs, when what was said becomes talked of once more and thereby thought of once more, maybe even in a new way (2007, p. 92).

Tom Andersen was an amazingly gifted host of hurting ones, honoring their pauses with a respect and attention that opened fresh, serendipitous space for new awakenings for both testifier and witness.

Tom Andersen's gift is our challenge. As witnesses, we find it difficult to wait for and be hospitable to the fertile pause that comes at the completion of each portion of testimonial presentation. In one sense, such waiting privileges an ethic of risk over an ethic of control. As those who present testimony, we are apt to resist the fertile pause that awaits the completion of our exhalation of sorrow, or, the fertile pause is stolen from us by an inhospitable witness. Whether resisted or stolen, the testifier carries a presumption, well founded, of not being heard to voice. Whether testifier or witness, we are predisposed to interrupt the rhythmic breathing of testimonial relation. The song of voiced and shared suffering, lament, is preempted by rifled, rat-tat-tat gasping, breathless, anguished wailing, some loud, some muted.

I am reminded of a passionate testimonial presentation of wailing (noise) offered in roughly the first three and a half minutes of jazz musician Ornette Coleman's composition, "A Circle with a Hole in the Middle." In the ensemble, each instrument and its agent go off on their own, without pause, making for a cacophony of sound that seems starved for and stranded from the other instruments and their agents. Eventually, none too soon, with about a minute left, saxophone, bass, drum and trumpet players start to hear and bear witness to the pauses between the notes of one another's music making. The music makers gave one another time and space to breath.

Other bountiful aspects of Andrea's art awaken us to the dynamics of epidemic wailing. "My heart wants to cry but it's forced into silence." "I don't know, maybe I am really crazy." "Maybe I am the antagonist like the doctor told me." Andrea wails as one whose voice of suffering has been silenced by a mental health system and family that have authored her as, among other things, crazy. Moreover, because she squirms and

snarls under the authoritative gaze of the colonizers' anointed leader, the physician, the expert, Andrea is totalized as antagonistic. Andrea usually is judicious and clever enough to know that her "symptoms," not herself, have been consulted regarding her character—according to DSM IV, disordered. Sometimes, as her drawing and prose relate, the constant and tiring grip she and others have on her belovedness slips and she falls.

Stewards of Andrea's well-being make little room for dialogue in the mansion of Andrea's violated life. She struggles to breathe, sometimes almost suffocates, in an atmosphere Bakhtin named monologic discourse, or, monologism. Because Bakhtin's analysis is so sharp and applicable to both Andrea and our own present cultural situation, he deserves to be heard at some length:

> The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power that it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is *a prior* discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain. It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no

> play with its borders, no gradual flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and it stands or falls together with that authority (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 342-344).

In our culture there exists and persists an authoritative word about our suffering, whether little or small, personal or public. The authoritative word about Andrea and us, when and as we suffer, determines what we suffer, how we suffer, and if we suffer. Andrea's agency, and ours, in response to the authoritative word about our sorrow, is severely limited, for the most part, to a yes or no or some derivation thereof. Because the authoritative word is lofty and loud and loaded with institutional legitimacy and power, to say "no" is, at best, disconcerting and often abandoned: "I don't know, maybe I am crazy." Because the lexicon of our resistance has been narrowed to a reactionary "no," our reaction is a thin, emaciated representation of us. The wisdom of what is our far more nuanced and storied response to and contribution about our suffering has been squeezed into a categorical "no." Our hope is silenced by the "no." Once and still we are lost (as in once we were lost and now we are found).

What we can say about Andrea and ourselves about the present state of health care, we can say about the Bush administration's war in Iraq. The administration proclaimed, at the time of my writing, the authorized word about several things. What are we suffering? The threat of terrorism and the cost of fighting it. Why we are suffering? September 11, 2001. Who has and is suffering the most? The American people. What is the future benefit of our present suffering (in other words, our hope)? A democratized

Middle East. To answer any of these questions differently is anathema, blatantly unpatriotic. Therefore, either we join the prescribed lamentation choir or we wail to ourselves or among a few other (though, now growing!) out-of-step, recalcitrant selves.

To make matters worse, the authorized word holders do not sanction or facilitate debate regarding the words they use, for instance, either the nature of democracy or the meaning of patriotism. This ethic of control makes it very difficult to peel the layer back to an even more insidious layer, namely, the presumption behind the authorized words and of those who hold them that the Middle East is, in fact, a place. Ask an Iranian shopkeeper, in an attempt to make polite conversation, about living in "the Middle East," and she more than likely will answer, "What's the Middle East?" Might the phrase, "The Middle East," be the construction of the authorized word holders about and for a land which holds great interest to them because of what is under it?

I write about the Iraq war as an analogy of monologism the morning after I witnessed the Fourth of July parade through downtown Farmington, Maine. The parade gave resolute witness to the necessity and legitimacy of the present and past wars, each of which has the handprints of monologism on it, some more than others. Those in the parade who gave witness are the best of neighbors, certainly not purveyors of evil. Of the paradox, I can say that monologism is demonic, in the Second Testament sense of *diabolos*, deceptively, not apparently evil.

The demonic nature of monologism also is evident in something as seemingly progressive as Lyndon Johnson's ideas and initiatives for *the great society* and their implementation in the administrations that followed his. During the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration and educational forum at Bates College in 2007, I interviewed Dr.

Cleveland Sellers (transcribed interview, January 16, 2007), the keynote speaker for the event. Dr. Sellers, recent chair of the department of African American Studies at the University of South Carolina, and now president of Voorhees College, was a leader in both The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and The Black Panthers. In the interview, Dr. Sellers talked about how the promise of the civil rights movement was dismantled by the same government programs created to inculcate and advance the gains for which they fought so hard. Promising, popular and well-publicized initiatives like urban renewal, welfare and education reform almost uniformly, systematically broke the back of community, the heart of the civil rights movement. Without community, the programs were destined to fail. In the development and implementation of the programs, the community was never invited to join a conversation that never happened. Their enormously powerful and knowledgeable voice was squeezed into either a "yes" or "no." The silenced and marginalized community prophesized the same outcomes that the political and religious right now criticizes: unemployed Black males, single parent homes, welfare mothers. Into the community vacuum came drugs. Questions remain: Were the programs designed to fail? Who brought the drugs into the community? As Cleveland Sellers said, "We certainly didn't drive Mercedes."

When our sorrow, over time, continues to be defined and determined in and by a monologic environment (which subtly and dangerously ensnares us), we come to wailing's destination: Despair. Andrea's words, "Maybe I should go to a state hospital," give voice to the acute, uncut despair that accompanies the buy-out of our sorrows. Her despair is weighted in resignation.

The Wailing of the Well-Intentioned Middle-Class

The enormity of monologism's hand of oppression and domination, along with its broad reach through the generations, leaves us, many of us the idealists of the 1960's, like Andrea, resigned. Our idealism reaped little benefit, it seems. Our strident demand for racial equality in the 50's and 60's turned, in the 70's forward, into stolid legislation and impotent and ineffective policy. It is like we were mostly throwing the green peas of our passion at the pudding of power, getting nothing in return. Andrea's, "Maybe I should go to the state hospital," is our "What difference does it make?"

Our once refreshing rage has grown stale, and is covered with the mold of frustrated hearts—cynicism. Yet, our shoulders are not slumping that much. Ours, most of the readers of this dissertation, the educated middle class, is mostly a comfortable cynicism, couched as it is on the sofa of privilege. That which once incited us now mostly annoys us. Our cultural, epidemic wailing has a particular whine to it. I moaned, maybe growled a tad, as President Bush commuted Libby's jail sentence. However, I was more enraged at the woodchuck nipping at my collards.

Feminist theologian Sharon D. Welch's words have a bite that pertains:

> The cultured despair of the middle class is ideological: it masks the bad faith of abandoning social justice work for others when one is already the beneficiary of partial social change. It masks the ideological definition of moral action that leads to despair when easy solutions cannot be found. Becoming so easily discouraged is the privilege of those accustomed to too much power, accustomed to having needs met without negotiation and work, accustomed to having a political and economic system that responds to their needs (p. 41).

Our location in privilege also quietly, faintly spins a particularly life-taking narrative about engagement in social action. We come to story our investment in social change as necessitating a loss of our social power (Welch, p.135). We are concerned about what we will lose or be asked to give up. Those who support a single payer health care system are also those who most likely will wail (not too loud or too publicly) about the prospects of waiting in line for a hip replacement. Such wailing is illustrative of our deeply engrained sense of the self as bounded and independent (rather than discursive and related). To offer our sufficient selves is an act of giving up a part of us, *sacrificed* for the good. To act, then, is also to mourn the loss of a part of who we are and what we have. The idea of another construction of self, self-in-relation, *communicamus ergo sum* (We relate therefore I am.), a phrase coined by Kenneth Gergen, more and more is lost on us.

"I have nothing except a half full stomach that needs to be emptied again, nothing except some skin that needs to be cut. I need to bleed, internally and externally."

Andrea, as one whose suffering is silenced, as one who is isolated, stranded in the orbit of The Dictator's hold on her, hounded by the rat tat tat of her wailing, after awhile, once again, is numbed by the weight of it all. Anything to re-enter the atmosphere at an altitude at which she can at least gasp for air, whatever it takes not to float off into the endless space of nothingness, even if it is destructive.

I have been there. Andrea's purging and cutting are my gnawing obsessions, which keep me at least at a bearable, though thin, atmosphere, which keep me from being lost in the cosmos. The difference between our wailing is more a difference in degree, less a difference in kind. What Andrea and I share in kind is the need to turn inward on

ourselves, Augustine's *homo incurvatus in se*, for the only relation that seems available at the moment.

Andrea and I have something else in common. We both are aware of, but resist relaxing, a persistent paradox: The way back to good air, solid ground and some hope is the offering of our numbed selves, along with the destructive means of enfleshing our deadened selves, to the same community we retreat from at the times of our greatest misery. I imagine our reticence to resolve the paradox has something to do with the anticipated exhaustion of engagement (after all, the road to numbness has been long) and the ironic comfort that comes with staying in the familiar, though bad, neighborhood of our despair. While we know that such engagement would be vivifying and escape from the neighborhood redemptive, we, nonetheless, resist.

I believe Andrea and I are in large company. Ours is a culture that is numbed by the noise of suffering in and around us. Our histories of violation, coupled with the daily headlines and lead stories of violence near and far, send us to the tryst, back to the refrigerator and food cabinet, or, if healthier, to the gym or choir practice, in order to pinch ourselves back to life. What we are less clear about, culturally, is the chronically ignored antidote of engaging ours and others' sorrows in community. We do not readily understand shared suffering as the way through and out of our tired-to-the-bone, numbed at-the-center, destructively wailing condition.

Our unawareness of the community of shared sorrow as remedy for our mostly masked (for appearance and shame's sake) and destructively mismanaged suffering, again, has something to do with our social location. Our middle class protocols of happiness and sufficiency, as well as matters of race and class, shelter us from

engagement with victims of more abject and absolute suffering. We have the *privilege* of knowing victims only as victims. We are able to locate them as markedly distant and different from us (Welch, p. 168). The difference we establish and distance we keep, besides maintaining our blindness to the elixir that is the community of shared suffering, prospers an immense and dangerous insensitivity. More specifically, from the perch of my insularity, I have the luxury of being simultaneously outraged by the violence and grossed out by the obscenity (to obscure and cover up) of one hundred "Iraqis" being blown apart by a suicide bomber yesterday. The morning after this terrifying tragedy, I sit on a bench, by my garden, at the spiritual intersection of my infuriation and revulsion, and wail at the foot of the same spiritual wall behind which I am encamped. The spirits of the dead victims scream at me much louder than the blue jays I just chased away from the feeder in hope that the indigo bunting will return.

"Things that I can't but must say…"Andrea is caught in a vice. Andrea knows that if she does not give testimony to her violation, she will remain hostage to it. Andrea knows that if she gives testimony, she risks repulsing the witnesses she needs and desires for her emancipation. Andrea also knows that, in the same action, she will antagonize The Dictator, who, all things considered, still provides her with a cell, cot and three meals a day in his regime. Furthermore, if Andrea risks *obscenity* and defies The Dictator, the burden is on her to perform her testimony of violation in a manner that will keep an audience present, accounted for and awake.

The weight of Andrea's risk and her responsibility for the audience, at the time of the drawing, led Andrea to choose wailing over lament. In addition, at the same time, it

was her artful depiction of her wailing that provided me with a refracted (that is, best) way towards a life-giving audience with Andrea.

Andrea's double bind is illustrative of the trap that ensnares all the victims of suffering. The question that haunts us, especially as Americans, as first among first world witnesses more than once removed, by social location and lived experience, from the horrors of our very broken world, is this: How do we shift more of the onus of liberation from the testifier to the witness? More explicitly, how do we close the difference and distance between the victims and us, and make smaller their task of refracting their suffering in the service of our staying put as witnesses? Another way of putting it: How do we seriously and substantially narrow what we understand to be obscene in our witness of, with and for the violated ones?

In Chapter 10, I propose the beginning of an epistemology that will answer this question and shape an ecclesiology that may help close the gap of difference and distance between the "worlds" of suffering. A prologue to an epistemological shift that shapes a renewed ecclesiology, I think, is a less tentative and apologetic relation to our own seemingly less remarkable suffering. We must bring our own wailing, as unremarkable as it might seem in comparison to, say, the victims of Rwandan genocide, into relation with the wider world of affliction—wailing neighbors near and far, near and far in terms of social location and lived experience. In contiguous relation, there is greater possibility for inchoate wailing to be transposed into clarifying lament. We can begin to construct a learned hope (Welch, p. 168). We can practice receiving and giving the fecund pauses between the inhalations and exhalations of our sorrows, pauses that birth freedom. It is to such a choir of lament that we now turn in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

LAMENT

"In the godforsaken, obscene quicksand of life,

there is a deafening alleluia rising from the souls of those who weep,

and of those who weep with those who weep."

Ann Weems (Ackerman, p. 121)

Over time, Andrea's tormented spirit, reflected in the wailing canvas of a scalding, wind-swept tear and the equally anguished prose, faded into the foreground. So did The Dictator. He became more a voice among other voices rather than the stronger voice among lesser voices. At times, his voice still stood out; demons do not respond well to being silenced. When his voice did prevail, Andrea more quickly called in the lieutenants enlisted in *The Revolution of Tears*. Together we either shouted him down, stood around Andrea to buffer the noise, occasionally we simply ignored him.

Four testimonial presentations of Andrea illuminate these more hopeful days of the liberative journey we shared from wailing to lament. Andrea's art, during these meetings, creates a collage of lament, a way for us to weave the many threads of lament we have witnessed together so far into a fabric, a working definition of lament.

Lament Requires Community

In the midst of a meeting with Debbie and me, Andrea asked to draw. She drew three images on a field of cobalt-like blue. In the middle was the larger figure, stick-like but with a contradictory fullness and fluidity, outlined in black, white and grey. The figure seems to be both walking and floating at the same time. Eyes and mouth are open. Arms are outstretched. There is a yellow streak over the figure's head. On the figure's

chest is a red heart outlined in black, worn like a badge. To the figure's left is a smaller figure, drawn almost exactly as the larger one, no heart but the same yellow streak over the head. The larger figure seems to be reaching with the right hand for the smaller figure's left hand. The hands almost touch. To the right of the larger figure is a bigger heart, also red and outlined in black. The heart has white, airy wings that are open. The heart has a yellow streak above as well. I remember the gracefulness of Andrea's hand as she drew. I remember Debbie smiling as Andrea drew. I remember that I felt excited and relieved.

Andrea, when I asked about the yellow streaks, said that they were halos, expressions of peace. She described the heart with wings as an angel. She spoke of the larger figure as herself, the smaller figure, the much-wounded child within. Andrea was leading the child away from The Dictator. Andrea said that her mission was to keep the little child safe, to heal the little child from all her hurts.

Our meeting, at this moment, felt, to me, like a Bach chorale, most especially the final chorale of the St. John Passion, "Ah Lord, let thy dear angel carry my soul." All the arias, recitatives and choruses of Andrea's testimony, and our witness, over many months, replete with the full range of experiences and emotions, were woven into a culminating polyphony of possibility. I was aware of at least six "parts," voices, in our choir—Andrea, Andrea's wounded child within, the angel, the faint and fading echo of *The Dictator*, Debbie and me.

There is an important distinction, clear but worthy of greater clarification, between wailing and lament. Wailing is monovocal. We wail alone. Or, we sometimes wail side by side. Parallel wailing would be a room full of crying, as in a church school

nursery full of infants, a few of the infants having passed feeding time, their crying begetting other crying. Even wailing at its best—hardy, prescribed, courageous wailing—is apple compared to orange of lament. A colleague of mine, in reflecting upon an extended episode of depression, said that he came to setting his alarm clock for "wailing time," 4 a.m. That is hardy wailing, not lament. Lament was the event of my colleague sharing this story of his depression and its "habits" among his colleagues at Anchorage, the name of our group of pastoral counselors, which meets weekly for conversation, prayer, and peer supervision. Anchorage is a space where we have the invitation to bring our woes and transpose them, through our presence with one another, from the cacophonous to the melodic. Anchorage is our post-Christian house church.

Lament is community, a company of mourners testifying and witnessing to a shared experience. As it takes at least two voices for life, it takes the minimum of two voices to lament.

I return to Cleveland Sellers' visit to Bates College, mentioned in Chapter 4, in this instance to his keynote address at the Martin Luther King, Jr. convocation. About halfway through the speech, Dr. Sellers began to recall friends and colleagues he had worked with in the movement, some of whom had died in the movement. Dr. Sellers started to mention the martyrdom of Jonathan Daniels—a white seminary student shot dead August 14, 1965, by a general store owner (also deputy sheriff) in Hayneville, Alabama. Ruby Sales, another legend of the civil rights movement, who delivered the sermon at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Service the night before, was in the audience, on the first row. The shotgun blast that killed Jonathan Daniels was meant for Ruby Sales, then only sixteen years old. Jonathan Daniels and Ruby Sales were standing

in line at the counter of the general store. The owner of the store pulled out a shotgun and said something like, “No nigger is going to stand in front of a white man.” Jonathan Daniels pushed Ruby Sales aside just as the store owner fired.

Dr. Sellers caught Ruby Sales’ eyes as he told the story. After a few moments of eye contact, Dr. Sellers fell silent. After a few more moments, Dr. Sellers started weeping. Ruby Sales stood up and nodded her head in support—she could not walk up to the podium because of a knee injury. Dr. Sellers wept for several minutes. Ruby Sales kept nodding and saying softly, “Amen, amen, amen.” Someone from the audience went to Dr. Sellers’ side, put his arm around him as he wept. This *time out* in the middle of convocation comprises the basic composition of lament—testifier and witness in harmonic connection that is transformative for them and those who witness them.

The Psalms, an integral part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, are not so much *about* lament. The Psalms are testimonial performance *of* lament. Reading Psalm 139 to myself, as comforting as that may be, and participating in Psalm 139 at the noon day office in Christ in the Desert Monastery are different. The difference is in kind as much as degree. The Psalms are something akin to a musical score. They are picked up, offered by and for community.

Because Lament is communal, and takes at least two in testimonial relation to exist, it is more than emotional release, getting it all out or spilling in order to feel better. On the other hand, wailing can be a therapeutic release. I honor my colleague’s commitment to pour his despair into the 4 a.m. crucible of solitude. I know that recently, when our deeply loved and loving dog, Bo, was killed, I would walk behind the barn and wail. I felt better.

Lamenting Bo's death, though, is different. Victoria, my spouse, Julian, our son, Rachel, Julian's girlfriend, buried Bo under his favorite tree. Victoria and I are planting a garden around Bo's grave. We laugh at how Dundee, our younger cat, is acting more like a dog now that Bo is gone. Together we lament.

Lamentation Choir of the Civil Rights Movement

Lament does not feature soloists. Lamentation choirs may have section leaders, but no dominating voices. Such makes for good balance, which makes great harmony. I remember the lamentation choir that was the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's. We rarely heard much about the lamentation choir. The media portrayed heroes, mostly great men like Dr. King. Such one dimensioned, top-down coverage and portrayal did not serve the movement well. As long as the movement was dependent on leaders who were bigger than life, the implicit message was that the chance was small that "smaller" people could make a difference.

Civil rights historian, Nashani Frazier, says (videotaped inquiry interview with Nashani Frazier, May 23, 2007):

> You won't speak truth to power if you don't think you're as smart as Dr. King. You won't speak truth to power if you think you are not as articulate as Dr. King, if you don't have a way of, same way of speaking, you know, like Dr. King. If you think that you are unable to speak – speak – just literally speak – then that suppresses your ability to challenge, your ability to say, you know what, something is wrong here, it just ain't right.

We know much more about Dr. King's Morehouse education, Boston University PhD, and uncanny rhetorical gift than we know of the lamentation choir, the multitude of

people, generations old, whose arms lifted him up, whose hands anointed him for leadership. Much less is known of the more unremarkable, by media standards, local "voices," who, likewise, were lifted up and anointed by the local lamentation choir, but never stood in front of or apart from the choir. Nashani Frazier continues:

> I always think of Fannie Lou Hamer when I think about that. I mean, Fannie Lou Hamer was forty-five years old, working as a sharecropper out of Mississippi. The woman had – I don't even think she had gotten past maybe sixth grade, maybe eighth grade tops – so certainly was not the most literate person. And the woman could move people. I mean, I think her story is a story that you tell above anyone else's. Because it literally speaks to the sense of, quote, the nobody, being able to move everybody. And the impact is just powerful. I mean, you know, it's almost like – why couldn't Dr. King move somebody? He graduated from Morehouse College, he had a doctorate—I mean, my God, if [he] didn't, [he'd] just be lazy. And here's Fannie Lou Hamer, and she is *dy-na-mi*c. And the woman is close to being illiterate. So when you tell that story, I think that changes things.

Lament is loud enough, due to its polyvocal nature and the passion of the various voices, to drown out fear. Friends of Fannie Lou Hamer talk about her "pushing out fear." When her fellow protesters were scared, say, at a demonstration, she would not "talk them down." She would start humming or singing a spiritual. Soon the crowd would join in. The lamentation choir's testimonial performance contained their alarm and apprehension.

Lament Weakens Time's Hold on Us

During one of our last meetings, Andrea brought a notebook of drawings, poetry and prose as her gift to me as I completed my work at the counseling center. Together, we looked through the notebook. A page stood out.

Andrea had glued a painting to the top half of the page. The painting is of a scene through a window. Thick, vertical lines of different shades of brown form a window frame. Through the window are deep shades of blue interrupted by blue-green and white strokes, all of which form a sky. The sky is background for green and golden strokes rendering tree limbs and vegetation. On the bottom half of the page, below the painting, are the following words:

> …this picture is from when I was on _____, the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder unit of _____ hospital—it is the view out of the window at morning. I remember being struck by the blueness of the sky, and the ochres/browns/greens on the tree branches.
>
> …I was reading a lot of Emily Dickinson at the time..."Can I expound the skies?"

Andrea and I talked about the painting. We shared our wonder at how beauty broke through and captivated her at an unexpected time, how splendor reached into the barrenness of her hospital stay and carried her through a day. We shared how the painting and prose on this particular page of her gift to me were breaking into our conversation about the completion of our counseling relation. I remember us acknowledging the painting as providing a window through which to imagine next steps, missteps and more steps as we go on together through the bond we had shared and would continue to share in a different manifestation.

Andrea's presentation of the gift of the painting was a testimonial performance that enabled us to more easily and fully embrace our parting. Testimonial performance, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, mediates the "obscene" facts of violation in a way that the witness can better hear the testimony of the violated ones. Testimonial performance also plays a trick on our times; in a way, subverts the onerous march of time. Through act and action that suspends time for a moment, or longer, suffering sojourners, bone-tired and weary, are vivified for the next leg of going on together. Andrea's gift to me of the painting, at the moment of its presentation, invited us to rest on the branches of the ochre/brown/green tree limbs and gaze upon the blue hewed horizon, gracing us with a means for seeing through the glass dimly. The gift served as our "Starry Night."

Lament has the capacity, and holds out the promise, to liberate the grip of time from its too firm hold on us. Lament cracks open, for a time, our violent and violating histories. Sometimes heaven spills into the crevices. Our sorrows are placed in a wider context. Our sense of an ending, completion, beginning, vision, way are expanded.

Lament sometimes needs a bit of help from her friends in order to spin our times into sacred time; help similar to Andrea's gift to me and for us at the time of our departing, her testimonial performance. In a sense, then, lament is like liturgy (*liturgia*, the work of the people). Communities create spaces for and events of lament.

I remember, during the first wave of the AIDS epidemic, at the AIDS hospice, one of the highest holidays of the year was the Halloween party. The party was wild, flamboyant, wonderful, an event at which the joy of shared suffering was hallowed, celebrated. Partygoers knew, but did not need to name, the lament we were stewarding together.

There were other spaces and events during the course of the year that were similar "sacraments of lament." By sacramental, I mean events that bring fellow strugglers into relation convivial enough to lift them out of their suffering, for a time, transposing their sorrows into a joy that sustains and encourages. The profane mediates the sacred. I remember the contingent from the hospice participating in the AIDS Walk, especially Donald, shy and tentative, reserved in his rural Maine sort of way, being pushed along in his wheelchair by another hospice resident who could walk, laughing out loud, waving his arms in the air to the rhythm of leather-decked dancers from *The Ramrod*. Gay Pride parades across the world are similarly sacramental, initially for those coming out, then as a breath of big fresh air when so many were dying from AIDS, now in defiance of the global violation of the LGBTQ community.

I recall, some fifty years ago, hiding in the bushes with my brother, Cam, at the edge of the evangelical Tent Meeting on Saffie mill village in East Rockingham, North Carolina. Religious revivals often came to the mill village. People flocked under huge tents and were spellbound by the traveling evangelists, many of whom lived up to the best preachers in Flannery O'Connor's fiction. When singing, a rhapsodic organ and sometimes snake handling were added, circus happened. Cam and I witnessed "poor white trash," (how those on the "right" side of the tracks often referred to us) enraptured, undulating, shouting in "skewed" tongue between their work shifts or double shifts, which took place up the iron stairs, into the windowless rooms, at the looms which roared 24/7, fifty-one weeks a year.

Carnivalization of Normal Life

These public laments are drenched in the spirit of carnival. The carnival spirit of public lament is more reflective of the experience of carnival in Renaissance Europe than, say, the Renaissance Festivals that are neatly tucked into the exurbs of our cities, usually in the fall, or the Fat Tuesday revelry in the French Quarter. The Halloween Party and Tent Meeting, and the walk, parade and feast in between, represent what Bakhtin, in writing about carnival, referred to as “carnivalesque," the carnivalizing of normal life.

Carnivalesque is the "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men [and women]… and of the prohibitions of usual life.” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 15) With its masks and monsters and feasts and games and dramas and processions, carnival was many things at once. It was festive pleasure, the world turned topsy-turvy, destruction and creation. It was extravagant juxtapositions**,** the grotesque mixing and confrontations of high and low, upper-class and lower-class, spiritual and material, young and old, male and female, daily identity and festive mask, serious conventions and their parodies, gloomy medieval time and joyous utopian visions (www.english.uga.edu/~mitchel/4830_carnival.htm).

Carnival represents a theory of resistance, a theory of freedom from all domination. "Carnival is the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square.” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123) There is a motivation during carnival time to create a form of human social configuration that “lies beyond existing social forms.” (Bakhtin, p. 280) Moreover, because carnival is sanctioned and celebrated, even in regime, carnival subverts from

within and, according to Michael Foucault, extends our participation in the present system (www.english.uga.edu/~mitchel/4830_carnival.htm).

I remember Easter Sunday at the parish I served in downtown Boston. There were large puppets parading around the sanctuary. Mobiles suspended overhead. About every third year, a court jester appeared, observant, pensive, foolish, walking around during a hymn, reading, sermon, musical offering, holding up provocative, sometimes jolting message boards. Some parishioners complained that the jester "disturbed" the festive occasion.

Like carnival, public lament, in its many guises and sizes, shakes the foundation of monologism, what scripture names the powers and principalities. Carnival, as an inside job, loosens, if only for a time, the hegemony of ideologies that seek to have the definitive word about the world and life in it. When the dust of such lament settles, new light, meaning, courage, and potential are aroused for an alternative, discursive, liberative movement in and for history.

I am reminded of the carnivalesque qualities of slave rituals and celebrations, which the Southern plantation master put up with, cast off as frolic, forms that fueled the spirit of resistance and kindled hope. In addition, we know that slaves co-opted Jesus into their own spiritualities, both in order to legitimize their undomesticated orchestrations of desire and sorrow, and for what they saw in Jesus that Master did not:

> Jesus is the (debased) god who, finding himself in the corrupted world, is obliged, like the fool and the novelist after him, to don a mask in order to confound the status quo whilst himself remaining untainted by it. During the course of his ministry he is accused of both madness and folly, and eventually he is convicted

> as a rogue. His parables resemble the riddles of the fool, opaque to all but initiates into the kingdom governed by an alternative logic; his 'naïve' claims and his demands, rendered more lunatic by their unabashed radicalness, by not bowing to the present order, are exercises in 'not understanding' it. As the carnival king, he dwells in a realm at once real and ideal, like the rogue, clown, and fool creating his own 'special little world' … around him (Coates, p. 144).

The carnivalesque manifestations of lament serve to broaden our understanding and promulgation of dialogue. We mostly assume that dialogue relates to conversation, an act of speech, the arrangement of words. Words are privileged by and are the vernacular of the sufficiently individuated—educated—self. Consequently, well-intended, liberative conversation, often innocently digresses into a bevy of words that unconsciously aims at consensus among the already advantaged. Anthony Gibbons, in critique of German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, writes:

> Our first sentence, you once wrote, "expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and uncontained consensus." Why not say that our first gesture of recognition of another person promises a universal solidarity of human beings (Welch, p. 132).

Tom Andersen emphasized the importance of bodily expression. He taught many of us in the healing professions to expand our listening to include respect for, appreciation of, and curiosity about the rainbow of utterances and gestures that comprises dialogue. The first of his ten assumptions about language and meaning emphasized bodily expression as a language:

> *Language is here defined as all expressions* (Tom's emphasis), which are of great significance in the aforementioned communal perspective. There are many kinds of expressions—for instance, to talk, to write, to paint, to dance, to sing, to point, to cry, to laugh, to scream, to hit, and so on—and are all bodily activities. When these bodily expressions take place in the presence of others, language becomes a social activity. Our expressions are social offerings for participating in the bonds with others (Andersen, 2007, p. 88).

Lament Is for More than the *Meantime*

In another meeting towards the end of our meetings, Andrea drew for Debbie and me what she was experiencing at the moment. Andrea drew layers of wavy lines, streams of color that moved from the top right to bottom left of the canvas. The middle layer was rich in colors that, to me, were expressive of growth and vitality—shades of green and pink interspersed with white. In the top layer, the lines were thicker, more chaotic, deep purple interspersed with white. The bottom layer was weighty, dark blues and blacks. There was a sense, to me, of the middle layer burrowing through danger and restraint on the way towards freedom.

Debbie asked Andrea to put words on the experience of the canvas. Andrea spoke of the dark colors at the bottom, black and blue, as her too painful to endure past. The middle colors, green-pink-white, were, according to Andrea, Andrea in the present, the more grounded, healthier Andrea. The colors at the top, purple and white, Andrea described as water, dangerous water, which, in the near future, will flood over her and drown her if she does not liberate herself from the child/past.

Andrea's description of the canvas, and mine, while illustrative of struggle, danger and threat, reflect hope, the hope expressed by Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright, who became the country's first president after the fall of communism: "Hope is definitely not the same as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, no matter how it turns out." (Ndungane, 2007) Andrea was in a good place and moving towards a better place with the will, courage, means, company and, therefore, the wherewithal to prevail. I am not sure life for most of us gets much better than that, especially if we resist monologism's intentions for us to sleep through a world quaking in terror. Andrea knows what many of us do not, or, refuse to know. The path forward, as one awake, is a trail of tears; not wailing, tears.

Lament is with us always. Lament, as expressed through Andrea's testimonial performance of art in this session, gives us a hopeful grip on the perilous nature of our particular lives and the perilous nature of history, a means for taking our times in hand, cracking our times open through the tears of testimonial relation, tears of heaven. Lament makes *kairos* time, the fullness of time, out of *chronos* time, the linear material of lives that are both victim and perpetrator of violence.

Our challenge is to redeem lament from its thin description, as that which mourners do for a time to get through a time of tragedy, loss and transition. Our mission is to restore lament as sacrament, as earthly means for heavenly end, a way to shake life off us, as Bo the Beagle did every morning upon waking up, much shaking and noise, sending anything nesting in his coat into the air. Fully awake and refreshed, we again, as

if for the first time, see through the glass dimly that which arouses faith: “Yes, yes, Come, Come!”

Transreligious Faithfulness

“Yes, yes, Come, Come!” as a faithfulness born of lament has legs that march out of our sectarian niches, across boundaries that separate us. Lament provokes a transreligious faithfulness; faith wonderfully bereft of a predetermined trajectory, faith with no foreseeable object or reachable destiny. Faith in something is a domesticated expectancy that curbs desire and imagination. Truer faith is faith in faith, a faith that keeps opening horizons barely glimpsed through the smoked glass of testimonial relation, quested after, by steps, missteps and more steps, and never conquered.

Faithfulness that quests after and never conquers bends lament away from *telos*, purposefulness, bends lament towards the more ontic, being-ness, our being-ness at its most sacred. In Andrea’s *Revolution of Tears*, her tears are less the way towards her healing; tears are the healing event. Tears are Andrea at her most related, discursive self.

Andrea will not forget or leave behind her experiences of abuse any more than the victims of Darfur will get over their terrifying violations. Neither will I shed the memories of the violence of my childhood home. Rather, through testimonial relation we create new meanings about our experiences and rewrite the score of our memories in a transformative key. As for me, I work hard, through therapy, in prayer, with encouragement from others, to stay in testimonial relation, to put myself in community, regarding the violence. I am engaged in my own *Revolution of Tears*, and I have recruited some very good lieutenants.

Lament, then, is both invitation to dialogue about, and a challenge not to bury, the violent and hurtful dimensions of our lives, requiring, in the words of First Testament scholar, Walter Breuggemann, in reference to Israel, "enormous *chutzpah.*" (Ackerman, p. 112) By courageously staying in testimonial relation about the vicissitudes of our existence, we remain situated in lament, a positionality of faithfulness that keeps us thirsty for heaven, that is, moves us towards the redemption of history, the world's and ours.

Lament Is Political

Andrea, Debbie and I reflected on Andrea's drawing of layers of wavy lines. Debbie asked a beautiful and, by my account, brilliant question. Debbie noticed that at the bottom righthand corner of the canvas, the layers of danger, hope and pain came to something of a point and touched, barely. Debbie asked Andrea to draw the feelings associated with the place in the painting where the past, present and future touch.

At the top left corner of the canvas, Andrea drew a swirling circle of green and black, with a convex line above and a concave line below. The concave line below continues as a curlicue down the left margin of the canvas. Moving out of the right side of the green and black circle is a large, distinctly drawn tear. The tear is outlined in deep blue. Inside the tear is a lighter blue field, a white, swirling space in the middle of the field, in which there are three small hearts outlined in red, with a black streak running horizontally across each tear.

After finishing the drawing, Andrea said that the green/black swirl is her strong eye, the eye that sees and feels and creates from a more grounded place, the eye that stares down The Dictator's urgings for her to purge and cut, to stay under the spell of her

parents' home. She talks about this eye being able to cry a big tear, a tear in which water gives life rather than takes life, a tear that can contain the sorrow and violation of her childhood in a safe, "redemptive" way. I resisted interjecting baptismal language into our conversation, though my inner voice was deeply moved. Andrea went on to share in this session that the tear contained the power and passion of *The Pink Revolution*, her witness to the world for and on behalf of violated, marginalized people, her witness against people and institutions that violate and marginalize them.

Lament, as embodied in the tear Andrea imagines streaming from her strong eye, is more than mourning, bending our heads towards the ground in grief, even if done so in concert with others. Lament evokes prophetic action, which I write about in Chapter 9. The English word, lament, does not hold the fullness of the experience. In Afrikaans, a language of South Africa, two words collaborate to bear witness to the experience of lament: klaag (lament) and anklaag (accusation). Lament is judgment. Lament is the bending of the head earthward as a form of mourning *and* protest. Denise Ackerman writes:

> Lament is a coil of suffering and hope, awareness and memory, anger and relief, a desire for vengeance, forgiveness, and healing that beats against the heart of God. Lament is risky speech…because it calls into question structures of power; it calls for justice, it pushes the boundaries of our relationships with one another and with God beyond the limits of acceptability. It is a refusal to settle for things the way they are…Lament alternates between complaint and mourning and railing and accusing (p. 110-111).

Ackerman's awakening to the prophetic voice of lament came during her experience of *Black Sash*, a South African women's human rights organization that opposed apartheid for over forty years in determined and imaginative ways. In the 1950's, they started "haunting" Nationalist politicians by standing with eyes downcast wherever these men appeared in public in order to shame them (Ackerman, p. 109). I have had a similar and renewed awakening to this dual character of lament through my experience of *Women in Black*. Women, dressed in black, stand in front of the post office in Farmington, Maine, from noon until 1p.m. each Friday. They stand silently in protest of the present war in Iraq.

Lament is political. The politics of tears are dangerous to the "powers and principalities." The practitioners of monologism work overtime to try to stifle the broken hearts and spirits of the shut-out and sat-upon ones into the wailing whimpers of a thin "yes" or "no." Those who understand power as strength and defendedness fear the power that emanates from the weak and vulnerable ones who find one another, and through their solidarity, transpose their inarticulate (unconnected) wailing into articulate (connected) lament. Graffiti on a wall following a protest march in 1999 by despairing youth in Zurich, Switzerland: "We already have enough reason to weep, even without your tear gas." (Soelle, 1999, p. 82)

The Gift of Tears

Lament, overall, after all is said and done, is a manner of being in the world, a spirituality. We live in a terribly broken world. The commitment to stay awake, with eyes unveiled, as a global neighbor and citizen, unites us in the unitive dance of heads bent earthward and arms open wide, vulnerably wide, exposing wounded hearts that reach

around the circle of lament and spring outward towards our fragile planet with passion for its restoration and renewal. The sound that issues from the circle of lament "is a deafening alleluia." (Ackerman, p. 121) Lament privileges a life of joy.

Yet, the "deafening alleluia" of lament is both hard to make and hear in a culture that privileges wailing. Dorothy Soelle reflects on an experience that illuminates the challenge:

> Fulbert and I once attended the funeral of a friend and colleague who had died suddenly. He was not old. The day before he died we had shared a meal and made plans for our work together. He was a fine teacher, highly esteemed by the students; he stood for what he said. Our friend was an educated atheist, as was his wife. Both had left the church. Now we attended his funeral. We sat in the mortuary; the coffin stood at the front. We waited in silence for ten minutes, after which the coffin was placed in the hearse. We went to the grave; the coffin was lowered. When the last people arrived, it was already over. We stood around for a few minutes and then went home.
>
> The hopeless silence of the funeral is a dreadful memory. Everything within us cried out: Why did our friend die so early? What's the point of such a death? We were full of anger and sadness, but we all kept this to ourselves. Our sadness didn't come out; it found no words, gestures, no song, no curse; we remained silent.
>
> The next day, there was a meeting, and the chairperson made a brief reference to our colleague's death, saying that there should be no speeches now; instead, would we rise, please, and silently remember the departed? Death has no

> language and no expression anymore. The meager remains of expression involved rising for a few moments, standing in embarrassment, not knowing what to do with our hands. It was a relief when the chairperson returned to the day's agenda.
>
> But can we "return to the day's agenda" when someone dies? When important things occur in our lives, can one let go of mourning, praising, thinking, cursing, crying, accusing, praising, and honoring? What happens to us when our lives becomes so mute and unceremonious? Does life itself not wither when there is no language any more for all that takes place in it (p. 81)?

In Christian theology, there is too little attention given to a language "for all that takes place in life," what I call the language of tears. The redemptive power of tears, tears as agents of *metanoia*, a "turning around" to participate in God—the *Event* of Right Relation—is not richly developed in the history of theological discourse about sanctification. Protestant Christianity is most barren concerning the redemptive power of tears, Anglicans and Roman Catholics fare a bit better, Eastern Christianity has the most to offer us. In the history of spirituality, the language of tears has a more prominent place. The most fertile environment is on the margins of religious life, particularly the monastic tradition.

Patristic theologians, 100 to 450 CE, and the "mothers and fathers" of the mystical tradition—John of the Cross, The Cloud of Unknowing, Hildegard of Bingen, and Julian of Norwich—are good sources for the language of tears. In the patristic tradition, for example, there are references to the *charisma ton dakuron*, the gift of tears (A Vow of Conversion). Saint Augustine prayed for the gift of tears:

> O Sole Refuge and Sole Hope of the unhappy, to Whom we can never pray without hope of mercy, for Thy sake, and for Thy Holy Name's sake, grant me this grace, that as often as I think of Thee, speak of Thee, write of Thee, read of Thee, preach of Thee, that as often as I remember Thee, stand before Thee, offer Thee sacrifice, prayers and praise, so often may I weep, the tears welling sweetly and abundantly in Thy sight, so that tears may be my bread by day and night. For Thou, King of Glory, and Teacher of all virtue, by word and by example, has taught us to weep and to mourn, saying: *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.* Thou didst weep for Thy dead friend, and Thou didst weep over the city that was to perish (John 11: 35). I beseech Thee, O Good Jesus, through these most blessed tears, and through all Thy tenderness, by which Thou didst wondrously come to our aid who were lost, grant me this grace of tears my soul so longs for, and now begs of Thee. For without Thy gift of it I cannot possess it (Lectionary Central).

Moreover, in patristic theology, prayer is less solitary and sedentary. Prayer is more embodied, that is, that which one does and seeks to become. Saint Augustine desired a life of lament as a way to be in God.

Prayer for the gift of tears is distant from present day, mainline religious life. For the most part, prayer for the gift of tears has been exiled to the fringes of congregational and denominational priorities and practices by the engineers of a *theologia gloriae*, a theology of glory. My friend and colleague at Bates College, Sue Houchins, a professor in gender studies and African American history, was a Carmelite sister for five years. When I talked with her about the gift of tears, she replied, "Oh my, I haven't heard the

gift of tears in years. It is the center to a kind of Carmelite spirituality." (email exchange, August 28, 2008) In a culture where we are violated by the deafening sighs of wailing, the patristic idea about, and monastic practice of, praying for the gift of tears seems worthy of returning to, and is needed at, the center of liturgical life. The gift of tears is vital to *liturgia*, the work of the people, in a Judeo-Christian milieu that has drifted from the mooring of lament.

Part Two of this dissertation is a prayer for *charisma ton dakuron*. I focus on how to embody lamentational relation in our pastoral, priestly and prophetic *liturgia*. I sketch the beginnings of an ecclesiology in which the gift of tears might be more enfleshed.

Part Two

PRACTICES FOR A

PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF LAMENT

“Mockingbirds”

This morning
two mockingbirds
in the green field
were spinning and tossing

the white ribbons
of their songs
into the air.
I had nothing

better to do
than listen.
I mean this
seriously.

In Greece,
a long time ago,
an old couple
opened their door

to two strangers
who were,
it soon appeared,
not men at all,

but gods.
It is my favorite story--
how the old couple
had almost nothing to give

but their willingness
to be attentive--
but for this alone
the gods loved them

and blessed them--
when they rose
out of their mortal bodies,

like a million particles of water

from a fountain,
the light
swept into all the corners
of the cottage,

and the old couple,
shaken with understanding,
bowed down--
but still they asked for nothing

but the difficult life
which they had already.
And the gods smiled, as they vanished,
clapping their great wings.

Wherever it was
I was supposed to be
this morning--
whatever it was I said

I would be doing--
I was standing
at the edge of the field--
I was hurrying

through my own soul,
opening its dark doors--
I was leaning out;
I was listening.

Mary Oliver (1994, p. 80)

Chapter 6

MY JOURNEY FROM MODERN TO POSTMODERN PRACTICE

A framed quote served as an icon as I made the transition, in the early 1980's, from parish pastor to trainee in a pastoral counseling residency program: "Insights lie in the dark like seeds waiting for the right season. Some winters are longer than others." I heard the quote from a psychiatrist friend, who served as a consultant to the hospice program where I served as president of the board of directors. Little did I know that the wisdom of the dying persons I served through this and other hospices would lead me eventually to argue against the quote and the psychotherapeutic grand narrative of which it is a part.

The framed quote remains on the wall beside the desk in my present study. Near it is another quote of Kenneth Gergen, mentioned previously: "*Communicamus ergo sum*. (We relate therefore I am.)" The two quotes frame the 32-year formation and application of my pastoral method. By pastoral method, I mean the way I imagine the process of pastoral care and counseling and the psychotheological elements of pastoral presence. The trajectory of my pastoral method has been a movement from the dominant neo-Freudian paradigm, which privileges individual autonomy and individuation, to an evolving postmodern paradigm, which privileges relation and its discursive qualities.

My primary teachers, as suggested above, have been dying persons and their loved ones, those I served as a volunteer for five years and worked with as an administrator and counselor for thirteen years. What I learned from the community of the dying and bereaved over the course of these eighteen years, from 1975 until 1993, challenged and contradicted what I was taught in seminary and postgraduate training in pastoral counseling.

During and following my many years of sharing community with the dying and bereaved, I struggled to find a way, other than reaction to the dominant death and dying discourses, to language, and, therefore, be in conversation about, what I had learned. My struggle was resolved in a 2004 doctoral seminar in family therapy. I discovered the writings of postmodern thinkers and practitioners. For the first time, I found a therapeutic community resonant with my experience with the community of the dying and bereaved, and what I had learned about pastoral accompaniment from them. I remember exclaiming, while reading the section in Goldenberg and Goldenberg's *Family Therapy: An Overview* (2004) about Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian's *A Collaborative Language Systems Approach* (pp. 336-339), "That's what I've been trying to say!" Moreover, the postmodern discourse confirmed what I had believed and theretofore more reticently practiced—dying is living. More specifically, I found a conversation among thinkers and practitioners grounded in the moral commitment to live daily the way we mostly die and grieve—relationally. By situating myself in postmodern discourses primarily related to therapy, I have acquired a relational lens through which to see more clearly, and in a less reactionary way, the nature of my dissonance with the modernist psychotherapeutic discourse and its privileging of the individual.

The Psychotherapeutic Colonizing of Pastoral Care and Counseling

What follows is a postmodern analysis of my long struggle with the dominant psychotherapeutic pastoral method, a modernist construction that has determined pastoral care and counseling for some sixty years. I analyze three aspects of the psychotherapeutic grand narrative, which Sharon Thornton identifies in *Broken and Beloved* (2002, pp. 29-34): individual autonomy, diagnosis, and insight.

Individual Autonomy

The psychotherapeutic worldview and the prevalent pastoral method that is beholding to it privilege the individual person: pastoral care and counseling is primarily directed to the individual who suffers. The mark of psychological-spiritual affliction, apart from the more obvious suffering of illness, tragedy and trauma, is the struggle with the "self." Who am I? Where have I been? Where am I going? What's wrong with me? How can I become the me I was meant to be? I need to find myself. Am I saved? At the heart of these sentiments is a non-relational prejudice, a definition of self as bounded, not dependent on, defined by or accountable to community larger than oneself and one's own. In fact, loss of agency, the condition of dependence on community other than one's own, is considered to be a deficit of character, will, and psychological health. In the United States, healthier, "whole" persons are more self-reliant, autonomous, independent and free. Congregations and pastoral counseling centers are resources for empowering persons to acquire these characteristics, and, through such character, accomplish more Freudian aims—love and work. Congregations and pastoral counseling centers are places for those struggling with love and work to repair, revamp or redirect the self. Pastor and motivational speaker Joel Osteen and his Houston mega-church are representations of this aim. Their motto is "Discover the Champion in You." President Reagan was and is a symbol of this aim and represents its zenith. President Bush and, by extension, our nation have become emblematic of individual autonomy's dark side.

The dark side of individual autonomy is material, a capitulation and almost creedal devotedness to a market economy. The quest for individual autonomy is confined to those who have the monetary means to strike out on such a journey or those who have

at least a fair chance to acquire such means. In fact, financial success is often a significant measure of the autonomous self. Hence, financial sufficiency can be an indicator of character, not so often or easily admitted but insidiously evident in our Judeo-Christian culture. Those with such "character" need not struggle too hard for agency, control and power; they are shown deference. For instance, at most meetings of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, the most liberal and progressive diocese in the Anglican communion, the rectors and representatives from the most financially sufficient parishes have the strongest and most essential voice.

Church historian Sidney Ahlstrom documented this dark side (Thornton, p. 32) three decades ago, naming it rampant anarchic economic individualism (RAEI), which he suggests:

> destroys our sense of community by keeping human beings in a perpetual state of competition and instability from kindergarten to cemetery, and which also by the creation of corporate "persons" keeps cities, states, suburbs, regions, and neighborhoods in destructive contexts of unnecessary rapid social change, which in turn conduces to immeasurable amounts of human woe and to the general institutional instability and insolvency.
>
> Moreover [this force converges] to produce and maintain a degree of inequality not found in any other industrial developed country. This is to say that [this factor tends] to negate the egalitarian principle which is the major premise of the Declaration of Independence. As a result a large portion of the American population is virtually excluded from the implicit social contract which provides the basis of their loyalty.

> If one asks how American religious values are related to these conditions, one must stress the fact that they have been powerfully supportive rather than critical. Religious institutions have thus served a primary legitimating function (Ahlstrom, pp. 21-22).

"RAEI" continues to shape the spirit of mainline congregations and pastoral counseling centers. The pastoral care and counseling movements, now solidly institutionalized as certifying and accrediting associations—The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education and The American Association of Pastoral Counseling—to date have shown little interest in addressing RAEI issues of race, class and economics. These issues severely limit the scope of who these associations certify, the centers they accredit, and the people they serve. The vast majority of those certified are white and middle class. The centers and those they serve are mostly situated in middle-class neighborhoods and suburbs.

At the congregational level, the predominance of RAEI and the disease it causes is evidenced by the often-cited fact that the 11 o'clock hour on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in our nation. I like to point out a less fantastic but equally remarkable fact. The majority of mainline congregations understands and structures pastoral care and social justice as two different and thinly related aspects of congregational life. Congregations usually have both "pastoral care" and "outreach" committees. At best, such a structure demonstrates a private-public split or binary, that is, an inside-outside divide. Congregational rhetoric is about "going out into the world" and "serving the less fortunate." More conservative congregations exhibit righteous indignation towards under-represented and marginalized communities, totalizing them as,

among other things, deserving of their economic and social location because of spiritual or psychological laziness.

The Hospice Movement as Reflective of and Created in RAEI-Infused Environments

Not only has RAEI infected religious congregations and the institutions of pastoral care and counseling; RAEI also infused the hospice movement and is reflected in the current hospice industry. My first eight years of caring for and presence with the dying and bereaved were situated in more RAEI-infused environments. I volunteered in hospices located in the communities where I served as a parish pastor: Branford, Connecticut; Savannah, Georgia; and Pinehurst, North Carolina, all middle to upper-middle-class communities. Most hospices in the United States are located in middle to upper-middle-class communities. One of the nation's first hospices was in Marin County, California, one of the most affluent communities in America.

The pastoral presence I offered, and the dominant pastoral orientation in the fledgling hospice movement, mostly was about accompanying those with a higher degree of autonomy and power through the loss of their physical and social agency and towards some peace with greater dependence and powerlessness. When and as such peace was discovered, the discoverers more often than not were wildly enthusiastic about and fascinated with their newfound relatedness and curiousness about the possibilities of interdependence. Many "deathbed confessions" were about having squandered relations through quests for material success. I remember these eight years as a time in which I developed my own fascination with and curiousness about the power inherent in shared weakness.

In 1985, I became director of the Grady Hospice Program, at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, which, as mentioned previously, is a county hospital with a mission to the indigent poor. At the time, Grady Hospice was one of the few hospices in the United States that served poor and marginalized people. I began my work at Grady Hospice from a position of naiveté. With a strong sense of social justice at my side, originating from my childhood location at the edge of the Civil Rights Movement in Albany, Georgia, I was inspired to bring the relational wisdom and liberative practices of the hospice movement to the poor and marginalized.

I soon learned, sometimes painfully, that I had much more to learn than teach, much more to receive than give. The staff I worked with (I was one of five Caucasians among a community of 40 or 50 African Americans) and the people we served (poor Black and marginalized gay people) were the experts at, the shamans of shared weakness. I learned what now seems so obvious, that poor and marginalized communities practice the elements of hospice care every day, long before terminal illness. Poor and marginalized communities did hospice long before and to a greater degree than the hospice programs that sought to serve them.

The Grady Hospice as Teacher and Precursor of My Postmodern Pastoral Method

The Grady Hospice, as paradigm for living as well as dying well, serves as an example of a community where the classical pastoral functions of guiding, healing, sustaining and reconciling (Thornton, p. 3) individuals towards self-reliance, autonomy, independence and freedom found little traction. In the Grady Hospice community, dependence was a means of survival rather than a shackle to be liberated from. Not only did the community lack the material wherewithal to individuate, the community did not

consider individuation a worthy enterprise. There was little incentive to emulate a quest that had pushed them to the margins and resourced their impoverishment. Moreover, the poor Black and gay communities have been accustomed to depending on their kin and friends to get by. Dependence is the covenant that has held these communities together. When terminal illness brought together the poor Black and gay communities into close and newfound proximity in the Grady Hospice, the atmosphere became richly interdependent.

This is not to say that those in the community did not desire personal agency. I remember an elderly Black woman, whose melancholic demeanor was not abated by medication and talk therapy. She confided in a hospice volunteer that the hardest thing about her dying was no longer being able to cook Sunday dinner for her children and grandchildren. The volunteer arranged for an occupational therapy consult. The occupational therapist created a wheelchair path from the bedroom to the kitchen and taught a granddaughter to assist her grandmother with food preparation. The grandmother's bleak spirit lifted.

The Interdisciplinary Team Meeting as Example of Interdependence

The interdependence by which the Grady Hospice community made its way together was epitomized in the weekly interdisciplinary team meeting. The purpose of the interdisciplinary team meeting was to update the plans of care for those we served. The pastoral method I used as convener of the meetings, between 1985 and 1989, was expressive of postmodern commitments I discovered in 2004, especially the concept of polyphony, discussed in Chapter 2.

Interdisciplinary team meetings were attended by myself, as program director, nurses, chaplains, social workers, home health aides, an occupational therapist, the medical director of the program, the volunteers assigned to the particular patient-family units[5] to be reviewed at the meeting (each patient-family unit was reviewed every two weeks), and, if possible, the patient and members of her or his family. Family, in this context, meant those relatives and/or friends who were responsible for the patient's care. The nurse, social worker, volunteer, chaplain, home health aide and occupational therapist assigned to the patient-family unit each presented, in narrative form, their most recent experiences with the patient-family unit. After all the utterances were offered, a conversation ensued from which the plan of care was updated. The polyphony of utterances most always evoked new and unexpected knowledge about the patient-family unit and ourselves as caregivers. When members of the patient-family unit were present, their participation in the conversational partnership was especially valuable. In addition, their presence meant that we would not be talking about them in their absence. When the patient-family unit members were not present, we held ourselves accountable to presenting our particular experiences with them rather than our knowledge about them. Moreover, we held one another accountable to relating to the patient-family unit as the bearers of the most valuable knowledge about how and what we might do to accompany them.

Tim, Michael and the Interdisciplinary Team

The following presentation of a particular interdisciplinary team meeting in 1988 reveals the rudiments of polyphony and the particular postmodern pastoral method I

[5] Patient-Family Unit is the hospice designation for the patient and the patient's family or care network.

develop in the next chapter, known in the postmodern therapy literature as *the witnessing process.*

At this meeting (Blaine-Wallace, pp. 29-33), the medical director, Tim, usually very engaged in the conversational partnership, was silent and pensive. His demeanor perked up during our conversation regarding Michael, a young man dying of AIDS.

Tim had just returned from a home visit with Michael. Michael had asked Tim to help him take his life when the symptoms of AIDS turned from bad to worse. Michael recently had moved back to Atlanta after his lover, Samuel, died from AIDS in Los Angeles. Michael told Tim that he did not want to experience what Samuel had gone through. When it came to the point of wasting away to nothing, losing his sight, suffering with dementia, or needing to wear diapers, he wanted to take charge of his own death.

The team's response to Tim was fervent. Three positions emerged, each well reasoned, strongly defended, and earnestly debated. Some members of the team said that the situation demanded that we simply follow the protocol, which stated that any mention of suicide must be reported to and followed up on by the psychiatric service. Others felt that Michael's request was an opportunity for Tim to establish a stronger connection with Michael. By engaging Michael about what he experienced Samuel's death to be like, what he feared the most, how he wanted to manage the coming days including or not including suicide, Michael would be in a better place, a clearer and wiser position, to decide his future. Others felt that Tim should help Michael kill himself. Not by assisted suicide, but through Tim's simple acknowledgment that storage of some of the medications Michael now took would be enough to overdose when he desired.

As leader of the team, I felt that I could take one of three positions: impose the program's suicide policy and be done with it; put on my mediating hat and lead the team towards a decision that might not be unanimously supported but at least arrived at mutually; or, grow my leadership arms long and strong enough to hold the team dynamic through and beyond the meeting, trusting that knowledge would emerge through ongoing conversation.

I chose the latter, leaning heavily on philosopher Hannah Arendt's definition of truth: "Truth is one person speaking, another listening and speaking in turn." (Poteat, P. L., 1985, page unknown) Truth, according to Arendt, is not a universal absolute but a co-creational activity of particular people devising that which is meaningful for a particular time or occasion. After several episodes similar to Michael's, I found more confidence to practice what Hannah Arendt preached. Concerning Michael, the hospice team, over time, talked ourselves into a presence with Michael that held meaning and truth for Michael and us for this occasion and at this time. We laid aside the truths of program protocol or progressive, right-to-die practice. Michael died a good death by means of a circle of companions, who held out for connection over action, and held themselves together through conversation.

The pastoral method used in the interdisciplinary team meeting challenged the usual measures of productivity and profit, essential elements in our market-driven US healthcare system, and values instrumental to RAEI, and inserted relation in their place. That we were offering care outside the box of a privatized and profit-motivated paradigm was made clear to us through an audit of our program by the General Accounting Office, the watchdog agency of the US Congress. The GAO was auditing several hospice

programs around the country to determine if the Hospice Medicare Benefit was productive and profitable. I remember a conversation with the lead auditor on the team sent to Grady Hospice. He said that we spent too much time in conversation and reflection. He determined that we could increase productivity, especially nursing visits, from 3.2 to 7.3 encounters a day per nurse, by shortening our meetings and more carefully monitoring the work environment. I responded by saying that our time in conversation was our most productive activity, though he was not convinced.

Moreover, the pastoral method used in the interdisciplinary team meeting, by opening more space for many utterances, stewarding the dialogic space over time management, not privileging professional knowledge, holding out for relation over decisive and definitive plans of care, stood against another psychotherapeutic-infused pastoral method—diagnosis.

Diagnosis

Some pastors and most pastoral counselors rely on *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), and other pastoral diagnostic resources, such as Nancy J. Ramsey's *Pastoral Diagnosis: A Resource for Ministers of Care and Counseling* (1998). These resources help them have a perspective on a parishioner who is of concern or a client who presents for pastoral counseling. Ramsey's book empowers the pastoral counselor and the pastoral caregiver to "[discern] the nature of another's difficulty in order to provide an appropriate and restorative response," (p. 9) helping them "name the reality of another's experience." (p. 10) While the DSM is basic to the RAEI-infused helping industry and Ramsey's book is

a positively reviewed and in many ways helpful resource, from the perspective of a postmodern pastoral method, there are concerns when diagnosis is given such primacy.

First, diagnosis privileges the individual or family unit as the locus of the illness or dysfunction and locates how much a person or family "deviates from the society's governing social values and suitable behavior." (Thornton, p. 32) I am reminded of novelist Walker Percy's words that challenge whether such deviation is a sign of health rather than illness:

> Begin with the reverse hypothesis, like Copernicus and Einstein. You are depressed because you should be. You are entitled to your depression. In fact, you'd be deranged if you were not depressed. Consider the only adults who are never depressed: chuckleheads, California surfers, and fundamentalist Christians who believe they have had a personal encounter with Jesus and are saved for once and all. Would you trade your depression to become any of these? (2000, p. 175)

Diagnosis can inevitably lead to a denial of historical suffering (Thornton, p. 32). It de-mystifies the other and stands against the postmodern value of alterity. The other becomes known and as known no longer has the capacity to "stand before and over us" as the Other, who interprets us.

Diagnosis practices conventional hospitality, inviting the stranger to the hearths of our special knowledge and expertise, where her or his stranger-hood is erased and strangeness identified. Diagnosis makes the impossible hospitality of which Derrida speaks all the more impossible because we dare not venture beyond our hearths—clinic, office or study—to the hearth of the stranger, whereupon we are invented. Basic to my pastoral method at Grady Hospice was the Monday morning ritual of going out, with the

patient care coordinator, to the homes of those who recently had been referred to our program. We came empty-handed, bearing little more than questions and curiosity. Such a ritual enabled Grady Hospice to come closer to an impossible hospitality.

Diagnosis diminishes our humanity. At Grady Hospice, I learned to appreciate a distinction between pain and suffering made by physician and author Eric Cassel in his exceptional book, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine* (1994). Pain is what our bodies experience. Suffering is the relation we take to the pain. The people we served came to us suffering as those determined by their pain and those who treated their pain. They suffered from the relation the healthcare system had taken to them, or, more accurately, their bodies. They had trouble remembering who they were prior to sinking under the monologism of medicine. They surfaced as the descriptors that populated their medical charts—terminal, addicted, compliant, non-compliant, cachectic and so forth. In theological terms, the accidents of their nature had displaced the essence of their being. Moreover, they suffered greater inhumanity because of their social location. The descriptors of poor, Black and gay made it much harder for them to be seen and heard. Our goal as caregivers was to see through and hear more than the medical charts conveyed about the persons who stood before and over us.

At the Hospice at Mission Hill, we worked to create a relational space in which dying persons could regain the humanity they had lost during their journey through the healthcare industry. We, as caregivers, did not carry anything into the residents' rooms that contained information about them. Moreover, even though Mission Hill was licensed as an acute inpatient facility, the architects designed the facility so that any functional spaces that objectified the residents as patients, such as nursing stations and medicine

cabinets, were hidden from view. By these and other means, we, as caregivers, positioned ourselves as guests in the residents' home. The residents stood before and over us as definers of our place and role. The residents' humanity slowly came back into focus. Jesse would wear his drag queen clothes in the common area. Don would sit in the resident director's truck in the parking lot as a way to re-connect with his rural roots. The residents were able to retrieve and share some of their lost utterances. These narrative actions diminished their shame-by-objectification so that they would not have to die a spiritual death before biological death.

Insight

"Insights lie in the dark like seeds waiting for the right season. Some winters are longer than others." This quote of my psychiatrist friend positions insight as something we have, like, for instance, an internal characteristic or a piece of property. In such an understanding, persons may have more or less properties of insight than other persons. Persons often are characterized by insight's degree of presence or absence. Pastoral caregivers and counselors generally are perceived, though less of late, as having more property. As such, insight is colonizing.

That insights lie in the dark also suggests that proprietary insights are inside the self, thus perpetuating individual autonomy and RAEI. Note the language of the co-principal investigators of *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose*:

> The project is based in part on the realization that the relative amount of attention the colleges and universities devote to the "exterior" and "interior" aspects of a students' development has gotten out of balance…we have increasingly come to

> neglect the student's inner development—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality, and self-understanding (Astin, A. and Astin, H., 2003).

Persons often understand pastoral care and counseling as a way to find, restore or gain insights. When a person cannot access her insights (or "hidden potential"), she or he may come to the pastoral caregiver or counselor, who, depending on the caregiver or counselor's theoretic frame, will seek, find, dislocate, contextualize, mirror, strengthen, witness or celebrate the insight. The pastoral caregiver or counselor usually supports and encourages the one seeking help to share their resurrected insight with the rest of the world towards the world's betterment.

Insight, or knowledge, as a property we have, and for the common good, is an all too stale and violating holdover from the eighteenth century Continental Enlightenment (Thornton, p. 32). Insight as such has caused and legitimized enormous suffering in the world. First-world nations, with presumed greater—in quantity and quality—properties of insight, have colonized "less knowledgeable" people in less developed (for "lack of knowledge") continents. History records the United States' well-meaning religious missionary movements and not-so-well meaning national expansionist and containment policies. History will record our present attempt to impose democracy in the Middle East, the Middle East being less a place and more a first-world construction for the sake of gain.

Postmodern ideas challenge the modernist notion that insight is a property located in an autonomous person, community or nation. Postmodern thought and practice approach insight not as a property, but as a co-creative activity aroused through

conversational partnership. From insight or "insight-ing" comes new knowledge particular and pertinent to the dialogic partners. In fact, because knowledge is newly created *between* rather than located *in* persons, insight as something one has or obtains, to the postmodern mind, is oxymoronic. Hence, insight as constructed in Cartesian thought is an idea incongruent with postmodern epistemology.

Moreover, that the pertinence of new knowledge is limited to the partners who create it precludes the proclamation or prospering of any truth with a capital "T." Also precluded is the hubris of taking one community's possession of "Truth" across the border and into the territory of other communities to be offered or imposed. From a postmodern perspective, communities do not cross borders with their constructed truths. Rather, emissaries from a community walk around their border with their constructed truths. These emissaries pass and meet emissaries from other communities at the edge of their own border with their constructed truths. Border walkers, sharing the same borderline, discover resonance with other border walkers. Common cause is discovered. Collaboration is imagined, desired and embraced.

A pastoral method infused with the aforementioned values that stand against modernist notions of insight is required of me in my position as director of the multifaith chaplaincy at Bates College. The multifaith chaplaincy stewards roughly ten religious organizations, from Bates Christian Fellowship to Wicca, and those in between—Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian Scientist, Atheist, Hindu, Unitarian Universalist and Roman Catholic. My postmodern grounding allows, equips and inspires me to lead a multifaith chaplaincy that facilitates and celebrates border walkers and border walking. Moreover, such facilitation promotes and prospers the multifaith chaplaincy as a trans-

religious entity, which creates curiosity from and collaborative opportunities with other entities on campus otherwise wary of chaplains and chaplaincy.

In this chapter, I have mapped my journey from modern to postmodern practices. I have untangled my now postmodern approach to pastoral ministry from RAEI and its first cousin, the modernist psychotherapeutic worldview. I am now ready to articulate a pastoral method for a pastoral psychology of lament grounded in postmodern practices. This pastoral method is *the witnessing process*. The witnessing process and three examples of it is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

PASTORAL METHOD: THE WITNESSING PROCESS

"A mosaic is a conversation between what is broken."

Terry Tempest Williams (p. 20)

Pastoral care and counseling are relations co-constructed and co-sustained; they are not what one does but the way one positions oneself with the other, as more equitable than hierarchical. An observer or outside witness to the relations would have a hard time determining who the pastor is and who is the parishioner, patient, student or counselee (Anderson, 1997, p. 64). Pastoral care and counseling, then, mirror God, the *Event* of Right Relation. Moreover, pastoral caregivers and counselors are stewards of a particular kind of space, a space in which the God event is more likely to occur. In this chapter, I develop what I believe to be a space conducive for the God event. The space is called the witnessing process, a model for opening relational space that invites greater participation among conversational partners. I present three case studies in which I use the witnessing process: The Bates Office Professionals Network; The Memoirs Project; and, an interview with Esperance Uwambyeyi and Alexandre Dauge-Roth. The outline of the chapter is as follows: characteristics of the witnessing process; history of the witnessing process; format of the witnessing process; the three case studies; further reflections on the witnessing process as pastoral method; and, conclusion.

Characteristics of the Witnessing Process

In the three witnessing processes that follow, certain features stand out. First, I believe that the witnessing process invites participants into a more expansive God event than more modernist pastoral methods. The format of the witnessing process opens more

God-space, that is, territory in which a greater breadth of the Holy is embraced and shared among conversation partners, a territory the late German theologian Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the terrible and fascinating Mystery of existence.

How is this more encompassing territory created? The witnessing process equips conversational partners to stay in a respectful, welcoming and attentive position. Such sturdiness stewards a curiosity that arouses the polyphony of inner and outer voices of all participants, a myriad of co-created, mutual, non-hierarchical utterances that are expressive of the nuance and paradox of life. Lament arises naturally in such a setting. Sorrow and suffering do not need to be teased out through the appropriation of narrower conversations such as grief groups.

Because the witnessing process awakens more regions of the heart of a greater representation of conversational partners, it is a pastoral method better able to move congregations through the wailing-lamentation-solidarity-joy-justice trajectory expressive of the Judeo-Christian heritage as grief narrative. In the case study of the Bates Office Professionals Network, the reader will witness an emerging expansion of dialogical space to a size in which utterances of lament are invited and offered in a manner that thickens the possibility for change.

Second, the witnessing process is means and end. The conversation is the cure. The witnessing process is an event of dialogue for dialogue's sake that liberates in ways not imagined and certainly not pre-determined. While the witnessing process might be the means for a particular dialogue, the dialogue is the end. The modernist pastoral method, on the other hand, is more end-oriented and designed with certain ends in mind. I

believe this over-determination ties the hands of (the) God (event). As Derrida reminds us, faith in something is a domesticated faith, an expectation so determined as to not incite the "Yes, Yes, Come, Come" of those who "see through the glass dimly." Often, this "Yes, Yes, Come, Come" is the exclamation of those who experience a joy issuing from dialogue of unexpected lamentational substance. Again, this characteristic augers well for use in congregational settings. Moreover, as the interview with Esperance will demonstrate, there are witnessing processes that do not end in a spirit of completion or transformation. Yet, because the process does not privilege outcome, there is much less chance that the conversation will be determined as a failure.

Third, the format of the witnessing process, in each of the three case studies, helps prevent conversational partners from falling back into the power-over dynamic of the modernist-infused pastor/parishioner, therapy/client hierarchy. The witnessing process is "a political act whose function is to distribute power among all the different voices in the discourse, dominant and nondominant." (Griffith, J. L. and Griffith, M.E., 1994, p. 166) Moreover, the witnessing process creates a space, void of rank, for polyphonic utterances among participants. The Bakhtin-infused "dialogicality" of the process places the emphasis on creating a common language rather than solving a pastoral matter, helping the grieving and aggrieved, or curing a disease (Hoffman, 2007, p. 73). Lynn Hoffman, a major postmodern voice in the family therapy field, and an advocate of and reflector on the witnessing process, writes:

> If you stay with modernist psychology, you will forever be trying to see your job as a matter of building logging roads, putting up bridges, and the various other engineering projects. If you move to a postmodern psychology, you have to jump,

> like Alice, into the pool of tears with the other creatures. This situation is a great equalizer and carries some dangers, but it is the only source of information with the power to transform (2007, p. 66).

The History of the Witnessing Process

Before I explicate the format of the witnessing process in detail, I will present the history of the witnessing process's development.

The witnessing process has emerged, in part, from the reflecting team, a method developed by Tom Andersen, recently deceased, then professor of social psychiatry at the University of Tromso, Norway, and six colleagues. Tom and his colleagues, between 1978 and 1984, worked with "first line" professionals, mostly general practitioners from the surrounding communities, to prevent hospitalization of psychiatric patients (Andersen, 1991, p. 7). The collaborators manifested a dimension of an "impossible hospitality" by deciding not to have any facilities for themselves, but to go out to the "hearths" (p. 8) of the practitioners with whom they consulted. There, in the strangers' spaces, they were "invented." Their systemic theories grew to incorporate the changes they were experiencing as "guests" of the "first line" practitioners and the family or families for whom the practitioners sought consultation (p. 8). The excitement generated by the project energized Tom Andersen and some of the other participants to connect to other family therapy theorists and practitioners with similar post-strategic, post-structural curiosities. Principal voices in a conversation begun in the mid 1980's and continuing to today were Harry Goolishian and Harlene Anderson from what is now the Houston Galveston Institute, Peggy Penn and Lynn Hoffman, then of the Ackerman Institute,

Luigi Boscolo and Gianfranco Ceechin from Milan, and Phillippa Seligman and Brian Cade from Cardiff, Wales (p. 9).

By means of the reflecting team, the one-way mirror that traditionally had been used in family therapy disappeared and the team shifted from an evaluative position or supervising position to a witnessing position. After years of gathering courage, Tom Andersen and a co-therapist, Aina Skorpen, in 1985, risked inviting a family in treatment to hear the professional team, behind the mirror, who were observing and guiding the therapy session (p. 11-12). The greatest fear was that the consulting team could not talk honestly with those they had previously talked about in their private conversations, which risked objectifying and denigrating those who came to them for help. The public or "cleaned up" language of the consultation team became reflective rather than interpretive, tentative rather than assured, and respectful rather than totalizing. The consultation team discovered what they had imagined, that those seeking help had the wherewithal, theretofore eclipsed by the therapeutic grand narrative, to collaborate with professionals in their care and cure. A floodgate of new possibility and imaginative process opened from this embryonic polyphonic endeavor. Over time, the one way mirror became a two-way mirror, which became no mirror. A conversational partnership developed between therapists and clients in which they were barely distinguishable from one another, in a joint venture of inquiring and creating, and, as Hoffman said, "the best outcome [being] that people would feel the conversation itself was the author of what was said." (Hoffman, 2007, p. 70)

The focus on the value of the witnessing process in and of itself has created something of a divide in the wider conversation among postmodern thinkers and

practitioners. Narrative therapy takes a more hands-on, directive approach, which privileges means towards end. There are particular questions and categories of questions the therapist asks to construct the "preferred realities" of those seeking help. The reflecting team, in a narrative construction, for instance,

> [joins] with the family, supporting the development of new narrative, and facilitating deconstruction of problem-saturated descriptions. Team members then, listen to therapy sessions (1) to develop understanding (so that they can join better with the family), (2) to notice differences and events that do not fit dominant narratives (so that they can support the development of new narratives), and (3) to notice beliefs, ideas, or contexts that support problem-saturated descriptions (so that they can invite the deconstruction of those descriptions) (Freedman, J. and Combs, G., 1996, p. 173).

Collaborative practice, on the other hand, trusts the conversation to determine all the partners in ways neither pre-determined nor imagined. According to Harlene Anderson, and concerning her pioneering work with Harry Goolishian, the problems that bring people to therapy dissolve (Anderson, 1997, pp. 90-91) in conversational partnership. Presenting problems lose their relational relevance as the conversational partners re-author and are "re-authored" in the conversational partnership (Anderson, 2007, p. 30) by the conversation rather than one another. The conversational relation, in the words of social theorist John Shotter, births "arresting moments," born out of "joint action (Hoffman, 2002, p. 160)." These "openings" (Andersen, 1991, p. 35) create new and different questions that arouse serendipitous clarity, new possibilities and different ways "to go on together." Shotter's notion of "arresting moments" is different from

narrative therapy's view of "sparking moments." The former is relationally based and "arrests" those in relation. The latter is outcome oriented, an achievement or change that is announced and celebrated by the therapist.

Over the years, the focus on the reflecting team as method has loosened as the focus on the conversation as determinative has tightened. Harry Goolishian suggested to Tom Andersen that he broaden the term, "reflecting team," to "reflecting process." (Hoffman, 2007, p. 67) Harlene Anderson, as well, felt that method is too determinative and, as such, limiting. Over time, Anderson shifted from "reflecting process" to "witnessing process," a term broad enough to encompass the varied ways theorists and practitioners are thinking about and practicing collaborative therapy.

Format of My Witnessing Process

My particular orientation to and practice of the witnessing process as pastoral method is conservative. I rely, as often and appropriately as possible, on a tighter format as illustrated in the forthcoming inquiry interviews in this chapter. A tighter format works best in my particular situation because I often, as a pastor, work in the public sphere and convene conversational partners who usually do not have an ongoing connection with one another. I find that in more therapeutic environments, in which I am with conversational partners over time, the hold on format loosens as the relation evolves.

A tighter format in communities who gather around sorrow and suffering for a more limited number of meetings better enables me to create safer environments in which all the participants are invited to both reflect and witness their partners' reflections on their reflections. By reflection, I mean that which is reflexive (in line with the French *reflexion*), a thoughtful response born out of listening, as opposed to reflection as the

presentation of an idea, a thought "plucked" off the tree of one's own musings and tossed into the conversation (Andersen, p. 12).

Format does connote artificiality, rigidity and domestication. Yet, format is liberating in the case of conversational partnerships. Open, honest and mutual conversation does not easily happen. It is not the natural order of discourse in most cultures and communities (Andersen, p. x). Hierarchy, more often than not, needs to be designed away and all participants need to be invited to participate in the conversation with the possibility of offering the broadest range of utterances—words, embodied gestures and silence.

The invitation to silence was particularly liberating. Concerning the inquiry interviews that follow, I was surprised to discover how grateful and empowered participants felt when I, while developing with the participants the ground rules for the conversations, talked about silence as much more than something they were given permission to "have." They were moved often towards "outer voice" when I invited them to consider their "inner voices" as "precious gifts" for our mutual endeavor: "But we saw something in you, we trusted you, you promised us a safe place, you promised us silence was golden, silence was good, that no one had to talk." (inquiry interview with leaders of Bates Office Professionals Network, April 2007)

The format I used with the Bates Office Professionals network, the Memoirs Project and the conversation with Esperance Uwambyeyi and Alexandre Dauge-Roth was comprised of an interviewer and interviewee, and a witnessing team. In each case, the interviewer sat across from the interviewee, and the witnessing team sat together off to the side. In the case of the Bates Office Professionals Network, with a larger number of

people present, an audience-wide reflection followed the initial reflections of the interviewer-interviewee and witnessing team. In all three settings, I served as the interviewer. I asked an initial question to each interviewee: What would you like us to know about your story? With the Bates Office Professionals Network and the Memoirs Project, the interviewees were given at least a week to decide what they would offer. With Esperance and Alexandre, I asked the question at the time of the interview. I asked this question to convey a few things. First, I want to ensure that the interviewee is invited to use the conversation in a way that she most desires or needs. Second, a person or community's narrative is multifaceted and fluid. Some of the dimensions are safer to share, depending on the time, place and participants in the conversation. Some of the dimensions desire airing more than others. My question respects the authority, knowledge and desire of the interviewee, and creates the greatest possibility to open space that is generative for the conversational partnership. In addition, the question suggests that I am not trying to get to or draw out the essence or "heart" of her story, which might convey to the interviewee that I am in a more "knowing" and, therefore, violating position.

Whatever the interviewee offers, I receive the gift in a position of curiosity. I watch for utterances that I am most taken by, those words or gestures that carry with them what Lynn Hoffman calls the "presenting edge," (2002, p. 155) the utterances that reverberate the most between the interviewee and me. Moreover, I approach (not explore!) such utterances gingerly. I stay close to the participant's exact word or utterance, following the wise guidance of Tom Andersen, who once told me, in a consultation, that the exact words or gestures that are offered by the people we sit with are all that is necessary to "go on together" from "word to word. (Andersen, 1991, p. 49)

There is no need to layer, interpret or add our words about their words. When I do speak, I speak slowly and tentatively, and offer a pause upon the interviewee's completion of her offering. The pace and pause allow me to listen carefully to my inner voice and to listen to the words I offer for the knowledge the words may convey to me, believing, in the spirit of Harry Goolishian (Andersen, 2007, p. 89), that I often do not know what I am going to say until I say it. Tom Andersen writes (Andersen, 2007, p. 90):

> When one speaks aloud, one tells something to both others and oneself. At the moment, I think that the most important person I talk to is myself. Wittgenstein and Georg Henrik von Wright wrote that our own speaking bewitches our understanding.

The "not-yet-said," a plentiful and procreative dimension in generative conversations, is less a repository and more a deliverer of new knowledge. I "speak in order to listen, rather than listen in order to speak," as Jean-Francois Lyotard reminds us (Anderson, 2007, p. 244). In other words, my words seek to open more space for new questions around the utterances. I ask about the utterances in a manner that may invite an answer that is more than a "yes or no." (Andersen, 1991, p. 34) Questions that evoke more than a "yes or no" often are those that are unusual enough but not too usual or unusual, questions that arouse a creative edge that opens up the possibility of talking about matters in a different way (Andersen, 1991, p. 32, 35).

The strongest value of a witnessing team, as I see it, is the positioning of the interviewee in a listening position concerning her own narrative offering. She is able to reflect, while off to the side, on the witnessing team's reflections on her narrative. Tom Andersen calls this the "listening-at-a-distance" position (Andersen, 1991, p. 58). In

order that the interviewee remains in this position, the witnessing team only looks at and speaks with other members of the team. Hence, the testifier is not invited into the conversation, enabling her to keep her distant position. Furthermore, the testifier is better able to listen and hear when she is not gazed at or addressed during the team's reflection (Andersen, 1991, p. xi).

The witnessing team offers reflections, among themselves, in a speculative manner, by means of which questions beget more questions. The witnessing team does not analyze, interpret or offer advice. They offer the reflections in a tentative manner. Reflections are not to be negative. In order to keep the witnessing team's reflections as reflexive and relational as possible, I suggest possible questions for them to consider as they listen to the interview.

The questions I suggest were developed during my initial training at the Salem Center for Therapy, Training and Research in Salem, Massachusetts. The center uses the witnessing process, referred to as reflecting team there, both in teaching and practice. The principal faculty when I trained came from various "corners" of the postmodern community. Steven Gaddis practices as a narrative therapist in the "classic" sense. Marjorie Roberts works from a collaborative orientation. Evan Longin works in, well, an Evan Longin fashion, seeded by his experience as a trainee in the Ackerman Institute, when postmodern influences were sprouting there. Steven's questions are influenced by the outsider witness position in narrative therapy. Marjorie's questions and presence are informed by a working relation and deep appreciation for Tom Andersen. Evan's questions spring from an endless curiosity and courageous presence, honed over three decades of practice, and manifested by a vigorous engagement in and empathy for those

he sits with. Each brings her and his own spirit and rich experience into the witnessing process, never miming their teachers and forbearers, but relating with them as a "cloud of witnesses."

Some questions that I often ask, in one form or another, include: Where were you moved, made curious? What did you want to know more about? What questions would you have liked to ask that were not asked? Where was the interviewee's story like your story? In other words, where was the resonance? Is there an image, symbol or metaphor that helps capture your experience of the interviewee's story? What new knowledge did you gain in listening to the interview? What ideas, thoughts came to mind as you listened, that you would like to explore with other members of the witnessing team when you talk with one another?

I find the witness questions like the following particularly valuable for persons and communities who are testifying to their being victims of violence and oppression: Where were you moved, made curious? Is there an image, symbol or metaphor that helps capture your experience of the interviewee's story? What new knowledge did you gain in listening to the interview? These questions are quick to open a space that breeds solidarity because they invite the witness to explore places of resonance with the interviewee. The condition of victimization was present in all three of the witnessing processes that follow. Members of the Bates Office Professionals Network suffer the abuse of classism in the academy. The members of the Memoirs Project suffer being silenced because they are people of color on a predominantly white campus. Esperance is a victim of the Tutsi genocide by the Hutu in Rwanda.

The witnessing teams I put together for the Bates Office Professionals Network and the Memoirs Project were five and ten respectively. Alex was a witnessing team of one in the interview with Esperance. The best size is more than two. With three or more, there is always someone on the team in a listening position.

On the other hand, the witnessing process is possible when the conversational partnership consists of only two people. I consider all the pastoral conversations I have with students, staff, faculty, and people who come for more "formal" and "reimbursable" spiritual guidance and pastoral counseling to be a witnessing process. My inner voice is a witnessing team. I might pause, for instance, during the conversation and say, "I have some thoughts about what you are saying. Would you like to hear them?" Or, "May we pause, take some silence? I want to think about that." Or, "Let's take a break for a few minutes and let that sink in." In addition, I sometimes will write someone after a conversation with thoughts of my inner voice that come to light after the conversation.

Prior to the beginning of each of the three witnessing processes, I explained the format. I said that the interviewee and I would talk together for about twenty minutes while the witnessing team sits together, off to the side, and listens without interrupting us. I explained that the witnessing team would talk together for about 15 minutes or so at the completion of the conversation between the interviewee and me. I told the interviewee that we would listen quietly to their reflections, without interrupting. I explained that I would intervene when I thought it was time for the conversation among the witnessing team to end. I explained to the interviewee that she and I would have a few minutes to reflect on the witnessing team's reflections. I explained that after the interviewee and I had talked for a few minutes, I would open up the conversation to all in the room.

The Bates Office Professionals Network: The Diversity Workshop

The Bates Office Professionals Network (BOPN) organized several years ago in order to offer a relational space for administrative assistants at Bates College; a space where they could find support and common cause (inquiry interview with BOPN leaders, April 2007):

> I think one of the best things that we, that has come out of BOPN is, when somebody comes new, they're immediately invited to our group, so that they have a support system. Because I was a year at Bates before I met, well you, about you guys. I had a half hour for lunch, I took my lunch at 1:30 because everybody else left for lunch at noon and I had to stay and answer the phones. So I went to lunch by myself every day, and there's nobody there. I mean, so now when somebody comes new to the campus, they have a, they already have a group that they belong to, that can help them – you know, when _____ came here, she was always calling me. How do I do this, how do I do that? And I wished I'd had somebody to say, you know, how do you - what's the most efficient way to do this? I can call ten people and figure it out, but what's the most efficient way to do this? How am I going to do this without pissing somebody off. Which is a lot, you know, a lot of the culture at Bates.

The cause most common to the Network has been a need to stand with and for one another in an atmosphere in which they often have been the victims of classism in the academy. Administrative assistants have been oppressed by attitudes and behaviors, policies and practices that keep them in their lower station in the institutional hierarchy, consign them to the margins of campus discourses.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, as part of Bates College's diversity initiative, the Network was asked by the Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity Projects to offer a workshop on diversity. The leadership accepted the request at the same time that they were concerned that attendance might be low. Administrative assistants at Bates are weary of diversity initiatives because they perceive the initiatives to be mostly about race, with little attention to the classism dynamic that is at the heart of their diversity concerns. They consider themselves an under-represented minority at Bates, due to their status. They feel that their experiences of oppression are overlooked.

I was consulted as one who has worked on diversity issues from a narrative orientation. I wondered with the leadership team about offering a day-long experience for the Network in which their and others' diversity narratives about their marginalization could be heard to voice in a safer, confidential space. The leadership team was both excited and scared about the prospects of such an experience. When the Office of Human Resources offered their support and authorization for the workshop, some of the fear was abated. After three long meetings with the leadership team, including a meeting at which the leadership team experienced the process, they decided to proceed.

The leadership team worked hard to recruit participants, who were afraid that there would be repercussions if they "spoke their minds." The leadership team assured the Network members that the day would be more than and different from a complaint session, and that the narratives that unfolded would not be the property of anyone but themselves. The leadership team selected and I trained a group of respected and respectful people to facilitate the workshop break-out sessions. The facilitation team was publicized. The numbers on the sign-up sheet expanded. When the Office of Human

Resources put out a brochure of the event, more people signed up, feeling safer now that the institution legitimized the event. I created an opening statement for the brochure:

> OUR STORIES, listened to and shared, in a safe, respectful, curious, confidential, attentive, not coerced, community of peers, is a rich deposit of strength and wisdom. Together, through stories shared and reflected upon, we will mine our strength and wisdom. Along the way, we will share good food and drink, gifts, and a prize or two. And, please know that those of us who listen quietly, and do not bring our experience to voice, offer an especially generous presence, the gift of beholding. Silence is golden.

About fifty people showed up for the workshop, which the leadership team considered to be a large crowd. About half the participants were excited about the day. The other half were skeptical. All were anxious. Upon arrival, breakfast was served buffet style and participants found a place to sit around seven round tables. We believed that by having participants sit at several round tables of their choice, a convivial spirit would arise that would quiet fears.

The day began with the director of human resources welcoming the participants and sharing a story about an experience where he felt marginalized because of his lower status on the organizational chart. I then spent about thirty minutes talking about the power of stories and the manner in which we would share them at the workshop. After my presentation, we started the four-phase process.

Phase One (one hour): The participants remained in their seats at their respective tables. In the middle of each table was a toy from the era of their childhood, the decades of the 50's, 60's and 70's. The participants were invited to share a story from their

childhood related to toys. The room filled with noise, much laughter, a few tears. After an hour, we took a break.

Phase Two (one hour): I set up seven chairs in the middle of the room, one for an interviewee and one for me, the interviewer, and five for the witness team, who would sit off to our right side. I explained the witnessing process. I told the gathering that a member of the BOPN leadership team would be interviewed by me about her experience of growing up as a French Canadian in Lewiston. I asked for volunteers for the witnessing team. Three people immediately volunteered. After some silence, two of the facilitators volunteered. The interviewee decided to write her narrative and read it aloud. The witnessing team then offered their reflections, which were based on where they discovered resonance with the interviewee's story, and what they had learned from it. After the witnessing team had reflected for about fifteen minutes, I invited the wider audience to offer their reflections. A vibrant testimonial relation filled the space. After the open dialogue, we broke for a festive lunch in celebration of our emerging narrative.

Phase Three (one hour): We placed a large pencil eraser on each table. We asked those around the table to share stories of feeling or being erased at Bates College. A new courage and sense of mission, as well as a spirit of solidarity around suffering, were being "utteranced" around the room. After an hour, we broke for fifteen minutes.

Phase Four (one hour): The second witnessing process was set up. Five people more quickly volunteered to be on the witnessing team. I interviewed another member of the leadership team about a momentous experience of being erased at Bates College and her struggle and success at overcoming the erasure. The interviewee concluded her narrative by singing "All I want is a room somewhere." She received a standing ovation.

Phase Five (thirty minutes): We concluded the day with an evaluation process designed as an open dialogue. The major outcome of the open dialogue was that we must keep the energy of the day alive and expand the process to include others. After the evaluation conversation, all adjourned to a wine and cheese reception, hosted by the Department of Human Resources, for all office professionals at Bates.

The spirit of the day did spill over into the wider community. The president of the college asked for the leadership team to write up a report, which she planned to present at the upcoming meeting of the trustees.

Post-Workshop Initiatives

Three new initiatives grew out of the workshop: a summer retreat; a presentation at the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Workshop in January; and, a presentation during Staff Development Week at the end of the academic year.

About thirty people attended the summer retreat, having read beforehand, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High School*. The book was written by Melba Pattillo Beals, one of the nine students, selected by the NAACP, to integrate the high school. Most remarkable about this initiative is the fact that prior to the original workshop in April of 2007, the office professionals at Bates, as previously noted, were resentful of and resistant to embracing diversity as it pertains to race matters. Participants in the original workshop experienced solidarity around their oppression that inspired them to learn about the oppression of others. They now were eager to learn about racial oppression and to participate in the wider diversity initiative at Bates College. During the morning session of the retreat, I facilitated a witnessing process. I interviewed three people about their experience of the

book. A witnessing team of five persons reflected on the interview. After their reflections, the initial interviewees were invited to reflect briefly on the witnessing team's reflections. Then, the conversation was opened for the wider community of attendees. A spirit of common cause with those suffering from racial injustices permeated the dialogue, especially concerning the plight of Somali refugees in Lewiston. After a break, Valerie Smith, Woodrow Wilson Professor of Literature at Princeton, and Director of Princeton's Center for African American Studies, presented a lecture on *Warriors Don't Cry*. Valerie is also a trustee of Bates College.

The second initiative was a presentation on *Warriors Don't Cry* at the 2008 annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Day Workshop at Bates, a widely acclaimed and respected event, a highlight of the academic calendar at Bates. Benjamin Mays, a leader of the Civil Rights Movement and mentor to Dr. King, was a graduate of Bates. One mark of his continued "voice" at Bates is the emphasis placed on the annual workshop. I facilitated a witnessing process for the attendees of BOPN's presentation.

The third initiative was a diversity workshop in June 2008 at the first annual Staff Development Week that was led by "graduates" of the initial BOPN workshop. In the evaluations, the workshop received the highest score. We used a modified witnessing process, more akin to open dialogue.

Pastoral method as witnessing process creates relational space in which the dispossessed and marginalized articulate (literally, connect) themselves into a community that envisions new possibility and discovers the hope that springs from it (inquiry interview with BOPN leadership team, April 2007):

> I think [testimony and witness] creates a healing, because then they see that they are not alone, that the majority of us have been demeaned, you know, and had the thumb on us. But we climbed above it, and if we could show them that they're not alone and that we're here, I think it can empower them and it can heal it.

The Memoirs Project

The following report illustrates how international students at Bates College, who often are bereft of a sustained community in which to voice their homesickness and sense of dislocatedness, find solidarity and improve the quality of their lives when invited to share their sorrows and longings in lamentational community through testimonial relation.

In December 2007, Patti Buck, assistant professor of education at Bates College, approached me about participating in a memoirs project she would be conducting in the context of a winter semester course, Community Education/Community Action. She had heard about the success of the BOPN workshop, and thought that I might be able to help. The project was to be designed after and be an extension of an earlier project conducted through *The Telling Room,* a not-for-profit organization in Portland, Maine. The earlier venture was called the Story House Project, and consisted of a community-based workshop in which fifteen Portland-area students originally from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan worked with accomplished local writers on their coming to America stories, resulting in the anthology *I Remember Warm Rain*.

Lewiston, Maine, where Bates College is located, is in the midst of a large influx of Somali refugees. Consequently, Patti thought that Lewiston, and the neighboring town of Auburn, would be a great site for gathering memoirs for a new anthology of diversity

narratives. The proceeds from the project would go towards a college scholarship for a young adult girl from the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya.

Patti planned to gather four cohorts that together would represent the rich diversity of the Lewiston-Auburn area. Each cohort would have three students from the education class as well. She asked if I would recruit and facilitate a cohort of Bates international students to write their memoirs in community. The other cohorts were to be adult Somalis in Lewiston, students from Edward Little High School in Auburn, and students from Lewiston Middle School. I agreed to participate and suggested that we add two staff people to the Bates cohort, one representing a native of Maine and one from the French Canadian community, who migrated to the Lewiston-Auburn area in the early 1900's to work in the mills.

Patti also asked that I help design a model for writing the memoirs in community. I suggested and detailed the witnessing process to Patti and the three students who would be in my cohort. They liked the process. Patti thought that she would introduce the rudiments of the process to the other cohorts as well.

The Bates cohort was diverse. Joverose is Latino, a first generation American citizen. Her parents emigrated from Haiti in the 1970's. She is a freshman. Clyde is from Zimbabwe. He was and is deeply concerned about the fate of his country. He is a sophomore. Tierney is a junior. She is from Stamford, Connecticut. She comes from an upper-middle-class family. She is one of the students from the education course. Uri is Hispanic. He was born in Mexico and grew up in Texas, in a border town. He was an "illegal immigrant" until a few years ago, when he received "resident status." Uri is a rising sophomore. Doris, in her mid-fifties, works in the Dean of Students Office. She has

worked at Bates College for many years. She is French Canadian by birth. She is a practicing Roman Catholic. Theodore is from Ghana. In terms of Ghana, his social location is one of prestige and wealth. He is a freshman. Amanda is white. She is from an upper-middle-class family in Westchester County, New York. She comes to the group from the education course. She is a junior. Rick grew up in the mid- coast region of Maine and served as a high school teacher in the same town that he was raised. He is retired now and works as a writing teacher in the Bates College Writing Workshop. Lena originally is from China. Her family, for political reasons, moved to Mauritius, off the coast of South Africa. She is a sophomore. Hannah is from Canton, Connecticut. She is from a middle-class family. Hannah is in the education course. I am from the Deep South, middle class, having lived in New England for eighteen years.

The four international students were very eager to participate in the cohort. They say that they have little opportunity to talk about being away from home. They feel that the college, in many ways, has bent over backwards to accommodate them, what I have addressed previously in this manuscript as conventional hospitality. They do not want to be so accommodated. They desire to bring into their life and relations at the college the fullness of their history and heritage. They desire for the college community to be curious about the breadth of their experience and the special wisdom they bring to the campus out of that experience. In my words, they want the college, through respectful attention, to be in some small way invented, determined, and changed by their presence, Derrida's impossible hospitality. They were extremely excited about and grateful to be able to tell their stories. The three white, middle-class students from the education course approached the process in a curious but cautious manner. They felt that their stories

might be “boring” in comparison to the others’ stories. They each felt and expressed their guilt about being “privileged” (excerpt from Tierney’s story).

> I turn around to face the ten people sitting on the bench [in the bank at Tamale, Ghana]. It wasn’t that there was *no* line, I was *cutting* the line and it took me this long to realize it. I feel sick to my stomach. This entire time that I thought I was simply being smart and going to the “quicker” bank, I was going to the bank that recognized white privilege. I have never felt so conscious of my race until this moment. I’m momentarily shocked and overcome with a number of different emotions. I’m not sure what registered on my face. It’s possible that the guard noticed first my disgust at the realization that the idea of white privilege continues still even in African countries where whites are in the minority, or maybe my expression gave away my shock at my ignorance of not having realized until that moment what was happening, or to be honest, maybe he recognized my slight happiness of being given back that power and privilege I thought I had lost while in Ghana. I understand the last option seems horrible but I couldn’t keep the little pleasure I got from being considered a person of power out my mind. I knew it was wrong to think that, but at that moment, I felt like such an outsider that something that simple made me feel somewhat better. It was at that moment that I realized the true extent of white privilege at home and abroad. I understood that white privilege permeated my life on a daily basis no matter where I went. I no longer felt pleased with my power. I felt ashamed. I knew that because of the concept of white privilege it would take a lot longer than six weeks to be accepted by the Tamale community as an individual instead of a white person. I could feel

> my entire view on my volunteer work and time spent in Ghana change in that moment.

Doris, with French Canadian roots, also approached the cohort in a gingerly manner. She wondered if she was smart enough to be in the group. She also wondered, after her leadership role in the BOPN diversity initiatives, if she might bring an "ear" for the international students who might struggle to find their place at Bates College. Rick, a lover of memoirs, was eager to participate. I, too, was excited to begin the process. Inside the room of my excitement was, among other things, a curiosity about the sense of loneliness and isolation college students experience even as, or, possibly because of, living life in such close quarters. I wanted to witness how engaged and safe they would feel once they were in the room together. I was also excited to offer the witnessing process for the cohort.

The witnessing process was similar to that used in the BOPN project. Each week, we met for two hours. Two members a week would share their story, each having an hour to do so. I would interview the presenter for about 20 minutes. Then, the other nine participants would dialogue among themselves about our interview for twenty minutes. I would draw their conversation to a close. Then, the presenter and I would reflect on their reflections for five minutes or so. Afterwards, the conversation was open for all to participate. Each participant, after presenting, received a typed transcript of the conversation, which they each would use to craft her or his final document.

Two elements of the process stood out. First, the conversational partners relied less on the suggested questions. There was no need to privilege the outsider witness-influenced questions, as with the BOPN experiences, which thicken the possibility of

more conscious resonance and solidarity. The students were immediately ready to stand with and for one another in their experiences of being silenced by means of the well-intended, conventional hospitality of the college. They quickly offered one another shoulders to lean on in situations where shoulders were needed; for instance, Uri's fear and sadness over his father's predicament. The students whose positionality was that of poverty and oppression—Uri and Clyde—were quick to respond to Amanda and Hannah in a way that their guilt and shame about their positionality of privilege dissolved. In the matter of privilege and positionality, all conversational partners engaged one another around the poverty and richness of each person's positionality. The students seemed starved for conversation around matters of meaning and purpose in a space void of the performance issues that are manifest in the teacher-student hierarchy. The original purpose of the cohort, to create a publishable collection of narratives, dissolved and became something of "the homework assignment" to be done after the conversational partnership ended and the deadline for the completed narratives loomed.

Second, the opportunity for each student to be in the position of distant listener, to experience the witnessing team reflect on her or his story, was nothing short of profound for them, "earth shattering" in the most positive sense. One of college students' greatest fears is that their peers do not think much of them, or, even worse, do not think of them one way or another. This fear is manifested in students rushing through the food lines in the commons to find their "comfort zone," the area where their friends sit—athletes with athletes, "granolas" with "granolas," African Americans with African Americans, international students with international students. That a broader range of peers witnessed their testimonies, and that these peers bore witness with beautiful, attentive, caring and

respectful offerings, was extremely liberative. “Face to face” is closer for students than adults. That the students could witness reflections on their narratives without the direct gaze of their peers enabled them to hear nuances, new angles, unusual but not too unusual perspectives that opened up new space for them to consider regarding their narratives. The witnessing process enabled the students to author a more richly developed, fresher narrative.

I believe that the Memoirs Project was greatly served by the witnessing process as pastoral method. My belief was confirmed a few days ago. Patti Buck had just returned from a month of qualitative action research at the Somali refugee camp in Dadaab, Kenya. She was beaming with a report about process. She said that she used the witnessing process in the interviews. She said the process opened greater and better space for connection and new possibility than any of the several previous times she had conducted qualitative action research at Dadaab. She said that her colleagues initially were very skeptical about trying a new and different way to be with people in such great distress. Her colleagues said that the process seemed so “western.” Her colleagues now are new and enthusiastic converts to the witnessing process.

Interview with Esperance Uwambyeyi and Alexandre Dauge-Roth

During the winter semester of my first year at Bates College, I attended a weekend workshop at the college titled “From National Disintegration to National Reunification: The Legacy of the Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda.” I became interested in the workshop through what was at the time the beginning of a friendship and collaboration with Alexandre Dauge-Roth. Alex is a professor of French at Bates College, and an expert on the Rwandan genocide. His area of research is survivor

narratives. He is an untiring voice for the genocide survivors. He has engaged the Bates community in the cause of keeping the memories of the orphans and survivors alive and in the public discourse. Alex was the convener of the "traveling" workshop, which also was presented at Harvard and the University of Michigan. The presenters represented a balance of scholars about and survivors of the genocide.

I came away from the extraordinarily moving and intense workshop with a great measure of the same curiosity that inspired my dissertation: Again, what is the origin and nature of the ironic, contagious, and transformative joy that arises when victims of horrendous suffering come together to share the stories of their experiences? What is at the heart of the testimonial relation that vivified Sarah, our "maid" in Albany, Georgia, the church she attended, the residents of The Hospice at Mission Hill, and now the survivors of the Rwandan genocide?

Fifteen months after the workshop, I followed my curiosity to the home of a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, a friend of Alex. I asked Alex to accompany me. In early June 2008, as mentioned earlier in the manuscript, the section on silence, I interviewed Esperance Uwambyeyi, a survivor of the Tutsi genocide by the Hutu, which began on April 6, 1994 and lasted approximately 100 days. At least 500,000 Tutsis were slaughtered, mostly by machetes. Estimates run higher, between 800,000 and 1,000,000.

During the genocide, Esperance, with the help of an uncle, who is a Hutu and well respected in his village for his work as a male nurse, made her way to the refugee camp in what was then Zaire, now the Congo Republic. Along the way, as previously noted, she suffered many losses, including her daughter, who was taken from her arms and drowned in front of her. She lost most of her family (inquiry interview, June 2008):

> ...and my husband was killed, and my father was killed, my brother was killed, and my, many of my family, extended family member was killed, and on my husband's side they were killed. And I just try to start over life with other people, try to get, to (unintelligible) and start a new life with the injuries, the wounded hearts.

After three weeks in the refugee camp, when the genocide ended, Esperance returned to Rwanda to find that her son had lived. An uncle hid the three-year-old child. Esperance and her son, now in high school, live in Dover, New Hampshire, where she works and attends college. She has established a not-for-profit organization to assist orphans in Rwanda, *Forges: Friends of Rwandan Genocide Survivors*. Friends of *Forges* sponsor an orphan for at least $25 a month. After the interview, Victoria and I decided to sponsor Soline Mukanjundiye.

Upon arriving at Esperance's house, and after her gracious welcome, I explained the witnessing process to Esperance and Alex, noting that I would interview Esperance. Alex would witness our conversation. After a while, Esperance and I would complete our conversation. Then, we would turn to Alex and listen to his reflections on our conversation. At the completion of Alex's reflections, Esperance and I would have a brief opportunity to reflect together on Alex's reflections. Then, the conversation would be opened for the three of us to be in conversation together.

My interview with Esperance was one in which I experienced a closeness to the way I now find myself personifying God. By close to God, I mean I figuratively fell to my knees before Esperance as Other, the howling God of Mark 15: 37-38, "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." Esperance, at the execution of

her daughter, is the embodied God of Abraham, completely exposed, wrenched loose and left open by the execution of his Son (inquiry interview, June 2008):

> As we were walking, so I started to pray and asked God to receive me and, to receive me and to receive my daughter, and even I pray for them, to forgive them, because I think, they don't know what they are doing, they don't, and they didn't know, I didn't know them, but they were just, because they were (unintelligible), they were just brainwashed. They have that kind of anger that would overwhelm them to the point where they didn't think anything.
>
> As we get to the river, so they, they grabbed my daughter from my, my arms, and they throw her into the river . . . and they left her to die. And so it was my time, they throw me in the river – before they throw me I, they threw me in that river, I asked them, please, I was really scared, even I wanted to die, but I was really scared to be killed by water. I don't know why, but I was really, really scared, so I begged them to kill me with their machetes or whatever they have. But one of them said, you know, sometimes water can throw you out of, so you can survive.
>
> And so, and I did, I knew how to swim, but that time I didn't even remember, because of the fear, I didn't remember that I know how to swim. And so when I get into the river, I started to swim. But swim, the swimming goes very, very hard because of the, the river was full of dead bodies of Tutsis. I kept swimming, but sometimes it was very hard, and I was asking God, just let me die. And as I kept asking, sometimes I would swim, other times I was very, very suffering, just wished to be one of those dead people.

> But always God have his plans, so I kept swimming and trying to push away those, those dead bodies. I end up to, they would have put me, thrown me on the other side, I was trying to get out of the, the water, but the water, it was very hard for me. So one of my part was in the water, the lower part was in the water and the upper body was out of the water. It was very hard. And there was a – I don't know how you call –it's kind of a sugar cane, is it sugar cane? Yes, so there was sugar cane, that's what I, just had those sugar cane, trying to get out of there with them. But it was very hard, so I stayed there like four hours, just hanging there. And I was so afraid that they could, because that river have crocodiles, so I was afraid to be cut into pieces by crocodiles.

As Esperance told her story, I was figuratively on my knees with my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth for at least an hour. During the first hour of the interview, which was entirely spent with Esperance as interviewee, I spoke 56 words. I believe I spoke them in order to listen.

Interview with Esperance (inquiry interview, June 2008)

What follows is a portion of the interview with my intermittent reflections. After the presentation of the interview, I close this chapter with final reflections on the witnessing process as pastoral method.

First Section: My initial conversation with Esperance

> Bill: Esperance, thank you so much for being willing to share your story. Where would you begin, talking to someone you haven't met before, about your story, where would you like to begin?
>
> Esperance: It's a hard question. When you are going to talk about what

you went through in genocide, sometimes it's hard to know where or when to start, so I'm not sure what you would like to know.

Bill: Well, you used the word "hard" to begin, what makes it hard to find a place to begin?

Esperance: This, what we went through, there's no word to explain. We sometimes, it's not that you are going into bad memories, but sometimes just, you don't have any words to explain what you went through. It is, always has been a project for me to share what I went through to the world now. For many, what Tutsis went through, and what was, ended up as a genocide of Tutsis is, it's very hard. But it's my pleasure to share that, you know, I'd like people to know what we went through and try to make sure it will not happen again. Because when genocide happened – is that bothering you?

Bill: Oh no, no-no, I'm just listening.

In my second response, I mentioned the word "hard," the word that I was most curious about, and the word I experienced as the "presenting edge." I trust, too, that in spite of my stuck tongue, I was participating with embodied utterances. After all, both in terms of pastoral method and in terms of relational integrity, my tongue was best left stuck. Tom Andersen writes about the words offered in dialogue as touching, literally, the bodies of those in dialogue (Andersen, 2007, pp. 83-91). Moreover, he talks about and conveys through his manner of sitting with folks how our bodies communicate our attitude about and attention to the conversational partner or partners (Hoffman, 2002, p.152). I felt Esperance's words touch my body, literally. Just before my third and last verbal response during the initial interview, before I turned to Alex as witnessing team an

hour later—"Oh no, no-no, I'm just listening."—Esperance said, "Because when genocide happened—is that bothering you?" Her question concerned my posture. I was leaning forward, with elbows on thighs, hands on my cheek, and my mouth open. She was checking in to see if I was okay. I trust that my utterances were touching her, conveying my attitude about and attention to our conversational partnership.

The interview with Esperance and Alex was deeply moving. My tongue remained stuck to the roof of my mouth for a few days following the interview. At the same time, the interview was as disquieting as it was moving. My discomfort remains as I re-enter the experience through the inquiry interview and my analysis of it through the writing. For the last couple of days, I have felt stuck in and dissatisfied with the interview. The conversational partnership has felt incomplete, dangling in a disconcerting way. My inner voice, what I would call prayer, has been agitated. After sitting under an apple tree in the orchard yesterday afternoon, for quite a long time, with the transcript of the interview in my lap with the palms of my hands upon it, I experienced something of an opening. Esperance as Other, the God at whose feet I knelt, continued to wail, more unabatedly than wildly. She searched and searched then, and, I imagine now, to find words to convey her horror. During both the BOPN and Memoirs interviews, pastoral method opened space for lament, for a resonant, expressive choir of mutual sorrow and solidarity. With Esperance, Alex and I witnessed her inarticulate (unconnected, literally) wailing as her most predominant voice. There was, between the three of us, a meaningful conversational partnership. At the same time, there was a yawning chasm between her and us that could not be bridged (inquiry interview, June 2008):

Bill**:** Maybe we'll pause and I'll talk with Alex. Is there anything that

you've wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say up to now, before we ?

Esperance**:** As I said from the beginning, it's hard. There's a lot of, there's no words you can explain what you went through. And for us – it was just one hundred days – but for us it was like thousand and thousands of days. So there were a lot of things happening, but sometimes we try to summarize.

Bill**:** And this summary is, does the summary fall short? Are there just not the right words, or somehow is a summary sufficient enough to help you find words?

Esperance**:** What do you mean about the summary is enough to find the word? So do you think summary would not be the words used, or -?

Bill**:** The story you shared was so deeply moving, I would use the word sacred, that it almost feels disrespectful for me to say anything after hearing it, other than just standing prayerfully in silence. So I was just curious, in the words you chose to share it, did it feel like a summary to you? Or was it able to convey much of what you experienced?

Esperance**:** I said in brief, as I told you, but I think I talked the main points, you know.

Bill**:** Esperance, do you sometimes feel like you're still searching for words to share that experience?

Esperance**:** Maybe one day that word will come, but as I told you, I think there's no word to explain. There's no word to explain how one neighbor is your friends, sometimes your relatives, (unintelligible) who you went to school with, people you went to church with, your priest or the sisters, turns to you and to do

such horrible things to you, so that's why I say, it's hard to find the word.

Bill**:** Thank you. So would you listen now as Alex tells –

Second segment: Alex's reflections on my conversation with Esperance, and the open conversation that ensued

Alex**:** Because I was, because you, you were a part of the, the person who went (unintelligible), at the early moments, and so, you know, here I was wondering, you know, how different, what other conversation, were the conversation at that time, among widows, so where there is a commonness of experience that doesn't exist here. And you could speak Kinyarwanda, and was it, you know, what did it mean there, to speak among widows, and how different is it than when you try, you know, to tell the stories to us?

Esperance**:** Yeah, they're different maybe with the barrier of language sometimes to find the words. And there's really not much difference, but the difference, again, sometimes when you are speaking, you are talking with other people who know what you went through, sometimes – because we didn't, we went through not the same, same way suffering, but with suffering. Because those people had different way to make people to suffer. But always (unintelligible), when someone is telling stories, there's a kind of connection to someone's suffering, and it feels like, you know, when you are singing and someone is repeating or is, is repeating the (unintelligible), or the, singing after you – I think you understand what I mean? – is not the same as when you, even you know the people who are telling their stories, they really sympathize with you, they really, they are moved and touched, but there's something they don't

understand. Sometimes (unintelligible) why, how this could happen. We still ask ourselves why or how, but we know, we went through. But this is someone who was outside of that kind of suffering, is listening, is trying to understand, and to connect all those, all those details, to have the meaning of it and the exact explanation, it's sometimes, that's the difference. Because those, telling the story, my story, to another survivor, there's no trying to make connection with the reality and the logic. That's the difference. Because some who is outside is trying to make connections, what happen. Because sometimes when you are hearing the stories of survivors, sometimes even to myself, sometimes if I'm hearing someone's story, how this, how you, he or she could survive this and this. Even I was there and I went through.

Alex**:** Because I've found that, that for other young survivors in Rwanda, by being in this kind of proximity with perpetrators, killers, and with having also a government who asks you to move on, there are very few social spaces where a survivor can share stories without fearing rumors, being judged, or having to pretend being somebody they are not, or cannot be yet. And so a lot of them say, I want to get out.

Esperance**:** Yes, my case was the same, but most of, most, it's very hard. And as I'm here, sometimes I see, like when they, (unintelligible) process started, I wasn't there. But I don't know, what would my reaction, if I would be there, I don't know my reaction. So, which sometimes for me, there's things I, that I, doesn't affect me because I'm not there, and I am hundred percent. But if I would be there, would affect me in one way or another, as other survivors, who as you

said, there's physical, they wanted a time of grieving, they wanted a time of grieving, so here we are, after genocide, we have just to go into normal life. And we weren't normal. And you are trying, as you said, to live like a different type of life. If I am with you and I just, I seem like normal person, or I think, according to the way people would like, would expect me to react. But maybe that's not what I'm feeling inside me. And trying to live both lives is not easy, that's how some things I believe just get into, and people just explode. Because there's no, no room for them. Not because they are neglected, but maybe because the situation is not, I don't know, is not yet (unintelligible).

But now, here, as we said, the government needs to move on and try to manage the survivors, and try to manage the killers, and family member killers, all those (unintelligible). Sometimes it's like, as I say, now the survivors, they are like the, again, the victim of the system. And as we, our voices are not loud enough, sometimes, to let what we are feeling get out. Because some people, there's no, this isn't their past, we have to move on. And for some people, they are not ready. And I believe most of people, they are not ready to move on. But other people, they don't understand it, or they do but maybe they don't have a solution so they just try to cover by trying to create a new, to be creative and try this and this and this. It's hard, it's very hard, it's very hard. So I believe for any survivors who will get chance, you know, that will (unintelligible), I would like to get out of the country, and find a new life somewhere. Not bec-, not they don't like their country, but the situation is not favorable for them.

Alex**:** And then, as I was watching the pictures here, but as another space

of conversation, which was with your son, and so that's another interlocutor. And so how do you tell him the story?

Esperance**:** How tell him the story. Um, like I think like this time, there is a time it was a problem to tell him the story, when he was young. But I think the more he's, he gets all the more, you know, that to express himself what he's feeling, how he – because he was young, but he watched when his uncle and aunts killed, he was there, he saw the killers. But now, you know, to express, he's starting just to get all those things inside him (unintelligible) to express out, which is sometimes hard for me. Sometimes even we start to talk, he said, I don't like those stories, and I don't like to hear where they talk about that. Now I know, I don't have to, I don't have to cross boundaries, I have to respect his wishes. So, which is, to me is a kind of, I worry about that, because I don't know if (unintelligible) as a teenager, growing without father, growing without a sister, and knowing they didn't die with normal death. And not trying, or to be able to discuss those things and trying to, even as I said, no explanation but it is, talk about that, why that happened is, it's scary for him.

And for me, it's not just for my son. I see in general, for those orphans who are now head of household and norm-, they didn't have time to be children. Now here they are, they are struggling with their age, as a teenager, and now they are experiencing life without any father, without any sister or brother, without any means, they are just, they are wondering what, why we left. Sometimes, because you see around you, and you don't see anybody, and you don't see someone who can come and encourage you. So when I, always when I am, I'm seeing, or the

experience of my son, I think again of those who don't even have mother who can just try and know how to, to pray with the situation and, you know, to comfort someone.

Bill**:** Well, it is time to complete our conversation. Are there words you'd like to share today, to feel more complete, completed with this conversation?

Esperance**:** (Unintelligible) a word I would like, always when I am waiting to share my stories, is not just about me, is about those who cannot speak out for themselves. When I'm sharing with someone, I just ask her or him to be the voice of, of those, even he doesn't know, she doesn't know them, but to just bear witness of those who are, the suffering who are trying to struggle, to live a normal life, that's always when I'm sharing with, is my -

Bill**:** For me to be a voice for you.

Esperance**:** Yes, a voice, and try to help those who are less fortunate, who, yeah.

Alex**:** I just wanted to say, (unintelligible).

Esperance**:** That's nice, (unintelligible).

Bill**:** The need to find words, maybe the best I can say is thank you both for inviting me to sit in this very holy space, and sacred (*unintelligible*). Thank you.

This was the end of the interview.

Further Reflections on the Witnessing Process as Pastoral Method

The wailing of Esperance, that is, the aspects of her testimony that were not transposed through the pastoral method of the witnessing process into the resonant

articulation of lament, sheds additional light on the method.

First, the witnessing process as pastoral method is about creating the best possible space for relation, not deliverance. A focus on deliverance, which is the dominant focus of modernist pastoral care and counseling, forces the conversational partners into concern about outcomes. Outcomes reside beyond the immediate and present relation and into the future, where resolution resides. Emphasis on deliverance draws attention away from one another and to an unforeseen or vaguely glimpsed elsewhere. Deliverance places on relations the weight of means. As previously discussed in the beginning of this chapter, conversation is means and end. Hence, the witnessing process holds deliverance gingerly, for which there is theological precedent.

Deliverance, from a Judeo-Christian perspective, is God's work in God's time. Sometimes relation delivers a lot. Sometimes relation delivers a little. Sometimes relation delivers enough. Sometimes relation does not deliver enough. The failure of relation to deliver is less about the method and more about the human condition. In the Judeo-Christian narrative, history is bent and broken. We live in the *meantime*, between Egypt and Canaan, the place of the wilderness. We go through the wilderness together.

Second, as conversational partners we are challenged (people of the Judeo-Christian faith are summoned) to stay in relational space when relation does not move from wailing to lament. We hold hands around the lip of the abyss, withstanding and sharing our vulnerability and powerlessness. I do not walk away from or get too antsy around Esperance when and as I am disquieted and uncomfortable.

Third, we seek to broker relations that offer the greatest possibility for wailing to be transposed into lament. How might we regularly bring together other survivors of

genocide in New England for conversation?

Fourth, while pastoral method is not about deliverance, worship is. Liturgy is the drama of deliverance, from Egypt, through the wilderness, to Canaan towards a New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a history so thoroughly liberated as to be beyond our imagination. In worship, the *meantime* is contextualized in the end time. Herein lies liturgy's audacious hope. In the testimony of Esperance, we witnessed her radical reliance on faith, which she nourishes and holds onto through membership in and regular attendance at a worshipping community. Pastoral method as witnessing process, likewise, is grounded in and accountable to a worshipping community.

Concluding Thoughts

The witnessing process as pastoral method for a pastoral psychology of lament offers congregations and communities a concrete way to create and sustain the spirit and practice of a renewed ontology, *communicamus ergo sum*, we relate therefore I am. From this practical ontology of relation comes new energy and possibilities for congregations and communities to go on together through these difficult "latter days of the old violent beloved U.S.A." (Percy, 1971, p. 3) At the same time, this fresh ontology stands against the present-day congregational and community ontological violence of *homo economicus*,[6] material man, which delivers the societal expectation of personal autonomy, independence and individuation. The witnessing process is one small step in the redemption of our congregants and constituents from the present-day pandemic of "rampant anarchic economic individualism (RAEI)," which, along with the psychotherapeutic grand narrative of modernism (which RAEI also has colonized) has

[6] This phrase is attributed to philosopher and cultural critic Sam Keen, delivered in a workshop at Bates College on October 10, 2008, entitled "Fragments of a Future Religion."

held pastoral care and counseling captive.

In the next chapter, we examine the priestly vocation as that which establishes and stewards spaces in congregations and communities that invite and incite lamentational relation.

Chapter 8

PRIESTLY ACT: Creating and Cultivating North Fields

I believe the Judeo-Christian tradition, at its historical and (radically) orthodox best, prospers a vision of community in which many of the people I have referenced throughout the dissertation—for instance, Esperance, Tierney, from the Memoirs Project, Jonathan and his dad and lover from The Hospice at Mission Hill—would together find comfort and common cause. The purpose of this chapter is to present the priestly act as the work of creating and cultivating such *communitas*. By *communitas*, I mean the relational space in our liminal lives and world through which diverse peoples discover one another as fellow sojourners inspired and empowered to go on together.

I present my construction of the priestly act in two parts. First, I offer an *apologia*, an apology, in the theological sense of the word, of why I believe the priestly act is about creating and cultivating community in a way that the people referenced above are at home with and for one another, and, by extension, with and for a broken world. I support my position with two case studies, Saint Paul's Church in Brunswick, Maine, and Debbie Little Wyman's ministry, Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries, in Boston, Massachusetts. Second, I present two ways such community has been created and cultivated: Elizabeth Cochran's body map experience and a testimonial performance project at Bates College, *Art and Alterity: Beyond the Other as Enemy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

I approach the priestly act through a metaphor, in the guise of a poem, believing that metaphors open space for the sacred. I cite a quote offered by Stephanie Howson, a work-study colleague in the Multifaith Chaplaincy at Bates: "Metaphors are not to be

trifled with. A single metaphor can birth love." (Kundera, 1988, p. 5) The poem is by Laura Gilpin, *The Two-Headed Calf*, from her one published book, *The Hocus Pocus of the Universe* (1977). The poem serves as the primary text for my exploration of the priestly act (Lane, 1998, p. 36):

Tomorrow when the farm boys find this
freak of nature, they will wrap his body
in newspaper and carry him to the museum.
But tonight he is alive and in the north
field with his mother. It is a perfect
summer evening: the moon rising over
the orchard, the wind in the grass. And
as he stares into the sky, there are
twice as many stars as usual.

The priestly act creates space, a north field, where the freakishness of our lives, the deformity of our lived experience, and our sense of two-headedness in relation to the dominant cultural narrative of wholeness, is normalized. The normalization of what is culturally-determined as repulsive, objectionable, inadequate and incomplete invites relation among broken people, and incites them to share that which is otherwise hidden or shrouded out of shame and fear. A community of solidarity is established that imparts wonder, awe, celebration, encouragement and courage. Communicants witness twice as many stars in the heavens, what the Judeo-Christian experience heralds as grace. The priestly act, then, creates a dramatic, liberative reversal. The aberrant and the normal exchange places.

The priestly act as a revolutionary about-face does not, by nature, push against the conventions of mainline faith, because it is rooted in Eucharist, an oxymoronic event that is at one and the same time outrageous and orthodox. Eucharist regularly and routinely offered, with the ordained priest or pastor as presider, is the liturgical drama of reversal, a relational enactment of The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: “But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.’ ” (Luke 16: 25, New International Version) Moreover, priestly action, beyond the altar or table, fomented at the altar or table, not only turns the dominant narrative of what constitutes richness on its head, but wholeness as well.

While the Eucharistic activity mediated through *The Two-Headed Calf* is, in theory, outrageous and orthodox, in practice it is mostly tame. The problem with mainline religious life is that freaks often are not that welcome. Freaks, therefore, sheepishly limp to the altar or table, cake on the persona, remain closeted or stay away. Too much ambient light from the frosted globes of “rampant, anarchic, economic individualism” hide the starry heavens. Eucharist as it is offered and shared in mainline congregations often does not mirror the radiance of Laura Gilpin’s poem. The Judeo-Christian heritage has strayed from her original locale—the place of lament.

Why I Priest

One of the louder of my inner voices, stemming from my childhood, mimics the utterances of my father towards me from the cradle on, namely, that I am fat and stupid. This voice announces to me that I am a two-headed calf, a freak of nature. Over time, this voice, largely, has been domesticated through good family and friends, therapy and

lifelong participation in lamentation choirs. My domesticated voice of two-headedness allows and invites me into relation with broken ones as a broken one. As such, my freakishness is a principal credential of my priesthood, the guiding voice for creating and cultivating north field communities.

My first lamentation choir was actually a duet. My father belittled my mother as fat and stupid as well. We bonded over our shared suffering without calling attention to or naming such a connection. At times, joy emanated from the "singing" of our mutual woes, again without naming the song, and sometimes literally. We both love music.

I remember times in the north field with my mother, not so much the facts but the experience of being alive, witnessing a moon rising over the orchard, a summer breeze stirring the grass, gazing heavenward and seeing twice as many stars as usual. I remember being hauled to the "museum" the next morning by the hands of my father's uncontrolled yet well-targeted rage. The museum was our home. Novelist Jim Grimsley (1994, p. 5), from his first novel, my favorite novel, *Winter Birds*, writes of the violent home he dreads returning to, his desire for respite in his north field, the banks of the river:

> Beyond them, in filtered light, the house they walk toward hurdles against the edges of the fields. You already hear it waiting for you to come back.
>
> But you turn away, Danny the Lesser, and you ease towards the walls of pines whispering, "I will never go home, I will never go home." You walk to the river to listen to the slow water drifting between the banks, hoping you will find a place there to hide from this noise that begins again now, traveling low to the ground.

I blush at such testimony. The redness stems from the shame that I have carried because of the totalizing violence of modernist psychology as I learned it in "Psychology 101" and in a neo-Freudian-leaning training center. I fit so neatly into the cell designed for those with a depressed and needy mother and violent and punitive father—Bill in the cell with Oedipus, or on the pages of DSM IV.

Again, I believe that the performative art of my earliest lamentation duet, and the experience of seeing all those stars, mitigated against the violent, undomesticated image of myself as a freak with two heads. Those times in the north field kindled a desire to find other fields of lament, and, eventually, to steward such fields through a priestly vocation. I am a priest, whether ordained or not, summoned by my past to tend these fields. My priestly vocation is the work of securing and farming magical north fields for freaks and their friends on the best possible nights, fields like the one mentioned by Esperance in the previous chapter (inquiry interview, June 2008):

> And there's really not much difference, but the difference, again, sometimes when you are speaking, you are talking with other people who know what you went through, sometimes – because we didn't, we went through not the same, same way suffering, but with suffering. Because those people had different way to make people to suffer. But always (unintelligible), when someone is telling stories, there's a kind of connection to someone's suffering, and it feels like, you know, when you are singing and someone is repeating or is, is repeating the (unintelligible), or the, singing after you – I think you understand what I mean? – is not the same as when you, even you know the people who are telling their stories, they really sympathize with you, they really, they are moved and touched,

but there's something they don't understand. Sometimes (unintelligible) why, how this could happen.

I now bear witness to two Eucharistic communities within the institutional church that, as previously mentioned, have remained Eucharistic, and, therefore, demonstrate why I construct the priestly act as lament: St. Paul's Church and Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries. These communities are priested in a fashion that welcomes freaks and keeps the ambient light low enough for participants and observers to see the stars, sometimes twice as many. These communities are signposts towards the renewal of a heritage born of shared sorrow and suffering, the music of which liberates adherents, the music towards which a broken world bends a listening ear.

Moreover, I chose Saint Paul's Church and Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries as inquiry sites for the dissertation in order to demonstrate that priestly action, in each of these settings, is a difference in degree but not kind. I aim to show that Eucharist pertains across all social locations and creates relation among those from all positionalities.

St. Paul's Church

St. Paul's Church is a congregation in Brunswick, Maine, comprised of mostly middle-class, well-educated members. Its membership, while not diverse in race, class and economics, is intergenerational. There are many young parents with children, single professionals, older people who have been in the church for decades, and a new influx of retirees. Brunswick has become a popular retirement destination because of its location on the Maine coast, and the presence of Bowdoin College, with many offerings for the community.

The rector, Dan Warren, has been at St. Paul's Church for about a decade. Though he has enough years in ministry to retire, Dan says that he is having too much fun to retire. After serving churches that were more problematic in terms of resources and relational dynamics, Dan is invigorated by and is invigorating a parish that, in its convivial spirit, is making a difference.

My first experience of the parish was a visit to the Wednesday morning men's bible study, as a way for me to get to know the parish a bit before I preached there the following Sunday. Dan, knowing something about my "north field" ecclesiology, smiled and said, "I think you will like it." The bible study group's hour and a half conversation had the markings of a "lamentation choir." Men from mostly leadership positions in corporations and professions left their power and armors of defendedness at the door. They shared a palpable brotherhood, bringing to the table ongoing struggles, recent losses, present challenges, yearnings of the heart, regrets, new possibilities, much laughter, and a few tears. My presence as a newcomer, priest and psychotherapist did not deter them. I felt safe and inspired to join in with a particular woe. My experience, a few days later, at the Eucharist also was invigorating. Worship was lively, spirited, participatory and uplifting.

Dan and I met for lunch a couple of weeks later. I reflected on the men's bible study. Dan said that the parish was thriving because of many similar groups in the parish. We talked about the dynamic relation between these "lamentation choirs" and Eucharist, how one fed the other. I asked if I could interview as many of the group leaders and group participants as possible. I explained that my inquiry would be for the purpose of my dissertation, and that the interview would be less about gathering data but rather more

conversational, opening generative space for their continued life together as a federation of “lamentation choirs” whose lifeblood flowed from Eucharist. He agreed to host the interview.

We met on a Wednesday evening in the fall of 2007. We placed chairs in a semicircle. I sat in front of the group. I introduced the attendees to the witnessing process. I told them that after I had interviewed representatives from each of the groups, I would open up the conversation for all to offer their reflections. I wrote several questions on the board to guide their reflections and lessen their chance of falling into critiquing, evaluating and interpreting positions.

There were about fifty people present representing several groups: the men’s bible study group, the women’s bible study group, the evening bible study group, the altar guild, the Holy Stitchers (a group that sewed together), a group that went on retreat together four times a year, an evening prayer group, the care people’s group (members are each assigned a person to accompany through a rough time), a meditation group and an AA meeting. Each group, while lamentational in spirit, did not meet specifically to lament. Their laments were mediated through a shared experience. The following excerpts from the recorded interview illustrate how their sacred laments were refracted through mundane conversation (inquiry interview, September 2007):

> Interviewee: It is calming to do stitching or to cut fabric, and when an African family came to the church I just left in Connecticut, I invited the mother to come and help me cut fabric one day. And she couldn’t talk about the (unintelligible) that she left, the Tutsis and the Hutus, and was in a camp for four years with her four children. And there was terror in the camps, too, they couldn’t go to school.

> So the 17-year-old daughter (unintelligible) and said, we got to get out of here, and so that's how they came to (unintelligible).
>
> But to have Maria just helping me cut, and it turned into a special Christmas for the church, and I cut up a fabric that had African figures on it, I cut out her family and stitched on top of it, and that was really, it just, I was inspired by them, that was really wonderful. So, Gloria, you're also -
>
> We were talking about all the things, and (unintelligible) what I thought, the (unintelligible), and the support we get from each other, the community services making the blankets and giving them away. We have a lot of laughs in the group, (unintelligible). The satisfaction we get when we do things for others, and the education we get from all the different knitters, everyone has their own way of doing things and do different projects, and we bring them, like a show-and-tell, and (unintelligible). And the sharing and the spiritual growth we get from, you know, just being together and helping each other out. If you have a problem that week, we discuss it, you know. I also love the idea that you leave with something and you can, other parts of the week you literally can touch and find yourself really transported back to the dialogue and the energy of that meeting, which just shapes your whole week.

I experienced an honesty and vulnerability among members of these groups that had been established over time by the capacity to listen in a way that participants could complete their sentences, which, as previously noted, is a rare gift in our present culture. In the following excerpt, a member of the men's bible study group and a member of the

women's bible group give voice to a growing "linguistic asceticism,"[7] the emergence of fewer and fresher words among conversational partners as their conversations over time move from monologue towards dialogue (inquiry interview, September 2007):

> Interviewee: This is a place where I feel safe, and I hope the thread that runs through all these conversations is an honesty. And we talk to the (unintelligible), you know, although I'm probably one of the worst offenders of that because I, because of my background – as you all know, I'm trying to recover from the practice of law and it's a long process, it's a long, and I'll probably be recovering the rest of my life and taking various (unintelligible), or some – but you know, I think there's a real openness and honesty and candor about these conversations that, I wasn't always comfortable in my forte, in my public law life, about shedding, you know, the layers of – you know, I always was playing games in my court world. And game-playing doesn't exist in this group, and that's a very refreshing, that's a very refreshing environment. You know, it's something, somebody mentioned the 12-Step Program, I'm also involved in one of those, and I think it's the anonymity, the honesty, and it only works because I think, I think we were all brutally honest about our experiences and, you know, we all have a lot of warts, but it's the kind of environment that allows us to reveal those warts. And to reconcile, because this church, I mean, talk about this church, you know, and Stan's been here, you know, we haven't al-, I haven't always been together with the leadership of this church, but this group has allowed me, you know, a moment, lots of moments of reconciliation to some of the leadership that has existed. And I think it's only through this group that I was able to do that,

[7] Sam Keen, in the October 10, 2008 workshop, talked about the art of "linguistic asceticism."

because I have a tendency to harbor, you know, grudges, and I feel that this group allowed me to reconcile my own self with some of my weaknesses. And so for that I feel greatly indebted to all participants.

Susan, I'd like, may I add one (unintelligible), you know, in appreciation of Bob's comments. And in a way, Bob, it's the role of listening, and Bob is a wonderful listener and I think that, as you spoke, I, it'd be like the same face that you have now, which is that attentive, considerate, not going to necessarily pounce on something – or argue it – but taking it in, and what a wonderful gift that is to a group.

Susan: Well my, I guess it was about a year after we started the men's group that we tried to start a women's group that would be on the same par with the men's group. But as you said, women don't, they almost don't have as much of a need for that, needing letting down, you know, the barriers. I think the barriers are more (unintelligible). So that we didn't succeed in having a group that sort of shared intimate things initially. I mean, and I think most women have confidantes that they share with. And we ended up kind of choosing a wide variety of topics – and Susan (unintelligible) – typed up all these topics, and there are pages, (unintelligible) everything, from fear of death, or thoughts about death, the afterlife, about (unintelligible), about, who else, what else, you name it, some of the early women's (unintelligible). But interspersed between that, we also have times when someone has had, you know, a really, what, soul-searching happening in their life, the death of a child or – we went through that with one of our members – now we've gone through the death of two of our members, which is

> also – (unintelligible). You know, it's just, you know, as Ben was saying, it's a group that has richness, I guess is the word. And interestingly enough, we get new members and they feel the same way. We can have, you know, we're – Ann Margaret as well, the three of us sitting here – we've been in it since the get-go, and that was 2001, as we (unintelligible) gained a member, remember Edith starting to come, Nancy is just a new member. So you've got half the women in this, sitting here tonight happen to be in this group. And it's just unlike any group I've ever participated in, and I've been in a lot of groups.

In the excerpt above, the interviewees bear witness to a contagious eucharistic spirit. They talk about the maturing of their willingness to expose and share the two-headed calf-ness of their lives in the north fields that are these groups. They are seeing more and more stars in the sky. The aberrant and normal are being reversed.

Dan, as rector, initiates and supports these groups and participates in a couple of them as well. He works to bring the groups together regularly as a way to weave a larger fabric of conversational partnership. He is not threatened by or jealous of the deep relatedness, which develops from the groups. The groups, because they have shared their sorrows and sufferings in a safer-than-most, consistently available space, come to the Eucharist with a desire to participate with firsthand knowledge of the drama that unfolds.

Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries

Common Cathedral and Ecclesia Ministries, created by Debbie Little Wyman, were established among and for homeless people in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. While the members of Saint Paul's Church in Brunswick, Maine are trying to shed the skin of RAEI, those who comprise and are served by Debbie Little Wyman's ministries,

living under bridges, atop heating grates and inside ATM vestibules, are the victims of "rampant anarchic economic individualism." While Eucharist and the eucharistic spirit provide new perspectives and priorities for members of Saint Paul's, for Debbie's congregation, Eucharist and eucharistic spirit are held onto for more critical and consequential sustenance.

Debbie Little Wyman is an inveterate creator and sustainer of north fields. In the mid-1980's, she accompanied her mother towards her death in a manner that enabled her mother to see twice as many stars. The venture led her to write *Home Care of the Dying* (1985), in the mid-1980's, which became a valuable resource for hospice professionals and those who care for family members and loved ones who are dying at home.

In the early 1990's, Debbie, a successful middle manager and volunteer in human services programs, decided to act on a growing desire to become a priest of the church. Her image of the priesthood was outside the margins of the conventional and, at the time, acceptable construction of priesthood within the Episcopal church. She was not deterred (Wyman, 2008, *Journey to a Street Priesthood*):

> I'd always been president or in charge of things, and I felt a tug to get off boards of directors and into the *work*, to be quite literally on my feet. I wanted to get closer to people on the street, to help, to understand, to learn, and to see what it means to "love your neighbor" when the neighbor smells bad, talks in strange circles or not at all, or makes me want to walk away. What did the Hebrew prophets mean, what did Jesus mean, when they said if you really want to move closer to the heart of life, to the heart of God, get closer to the poor. Although I'd never been what I thought of as a "churchy" person, I thought the real work of

healing and liberation had to do with God and community and sacrament. I wanted to bring the sacraments of the church to people who may never be able to come into our buildings.

I have to say I was frightened about upsetting my life. The battle inside me lasted six or seven years. And then one day -- I think this was at a suggestion from a close friend -- I decided, "OK, for today, I will say 'yes' instead of 'no'. I will put myself in a posture of 'yes' and see what happens. I can always say 'no' again tomorrow."

Immediately, I got curious, even rather peaceful and occasionally excited about what was ahead even though I couldn't see it. I called Weston School of Theology across the street from my office, got a catalog, and took my first course. Soon I was studying liberation theology, Karl Rahner, and worshipping with Henri Nouwen in Taizé-style in a carriage house at Harvard Divinity School. I nearly completed my degree taking two courses a semester, working full time. Finally I wrote my bishop, and a few years later I was accepted as a postulant for ordination. I quit my job and went to General Seminary in New York to finish and prepare for ordination exams. You know the phrase from T.S. Eliot, "to go the way of dispossession"? That's what it was.

I came to know Debbie in 1993 when she was a member of Emmanuel Church and I was the parish rector. She had just entered the ordination process. Emmanuel was her sponsoring parish and I became her sponsoring priest.

In the Episcopal Church, there are four orders of ministry—lay person, deacon, priest and bishop. The deaconate is the ministry of service to those in need. Those who

are ordained a priest are first ordained a deacon. Those whose ministry is one of service often remain a deacon, what the church calls the vocational deaconate. The standing committee of the diocese, the committee that gives final approval for ordination, was convinced that Debbie, since she was singularly committed to a ministry with and for homeless persons, should be ordained a deacon (Wyman, 2008, *Journey to a Street Priesthood*).

> As strange as it was for me to think about priesthood, it was equally difficult for the Diocese of Massachusetts. My profile was common (white, female, middle-aged, middle-class, single) and the diocese was swamped with applicants. Despite my A average in seminary I did miserably on the general ordination exams. And I was headed quite specifically not to a parish but to the street. I had no interest in traditional ministry, and the diocese was not sure my description of street ministry was priesthood. During my entire "process" for priestly ordination, I and the powers that be in the diocese were forced into a serious engagement with each other, and with God.

Debbie insisted, with the backing of others in the diocese, that people in the streets are fearful of what happens inside buildings and, therefore, resist going inside churches where priests preside at altars. Debbie made a case for an unconventional movement of the priest and altar to the streets where people were hungry for the Eucharist, the drama that was so close to theirs. She worked hard and long to make and win her case.

First, she was ordained a *transitional* deacon, a deacon who transitions to the ordination to priesthood within twelve to eighteen months. The standing committee

would evaluate Debbie's ministry on the streets as a deacon to see if there was evidence for a priestly ministry. After about a year, the standing committee was still convinced that Debbie should be a deacon, though after several more months of Debbie's arguing her case for the priesthood, the ambivalent standing committee recommended her for the priesthood (Wyman, 2008, *Journey to a Street Priesthood*):

> I spent a year or so as a Deacon just feeling my way, trying to get to know people on the street. I met clergy in the churches in downtown Boston. I met advocates for homeless people, police, and emergency service workers. I like introducing people to each other and networking. My thought at the time was to help people be more like neighbors with each other. One gift of that first year was that I met a lot of people. But most important, I fell in love. I learned that the street really *is* where I belong, at least for now.
>
> As I came up to my ordination date, the approving committee was not able to agree that what I wanted to do was priesthood. I had a very long painful five months in which none of us knew whether I would be a priest. I think it really made me, in an odd way, even more sure this is where I need to be. I need to be somewhere the church isn't even sure it belongs.
>
> I was ordained priest in October 1995, by the Episcopal Church's first woman bishop.

Debbie created a hard won north field both for the street people of Boston and an institution, the Diocese of Massachusetts, which needed to learn that the church's feast is, indeed, more moveable than they were comfortable with. She selected a place in the large central park of Boston known as Boston Common, which was soon referred to as

Common Cathedral. In Debbie's north field there have been many occasions where twice the number of stars have been seen (Wyman, 2008, *Birth of a Street Church*):

> Right after my priestly ordination, I started going to Boston's main train station on Sundays, making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for people who spend their days there. On Christmas Eve, I found the courage to celebrate a communion service with folks I had gotten to know. It was an unlikely setting -- a round table in the main waiting room, our prayers punctuated by announcements of train departures. Eight people were in that first gathering, including Bobby, who talked about how he wished he could forgive his wife her infidelity as Joseph did Mary. Their reflections and prayers told me more about worship than my many years in seminary. I continued spending Sunday afternoons in South Station through the winter.
>
> Then, on Maundy Thursday, I was walking back up to the Common after washing several homeless feet in a service that's traditional during Holy Week. I was thinking about Jesus, and how he was always going to people, being with them where they were, healing, washing, feeding. I realized this was the church, not where buildings are necessarily, but where people are. This isn't a new thought, but it's something I finally knew. Folks I was getting to know on the street, many of whom find it impossible or are not welcome to be inside, and others -- "us" -- who want to help and learn, needed to gather in the midst of the city, in an accessible place. We needed to pray, to celebrate, to talk, and to be a presence to people who sit around or pass by. We needed to pray for the city, raise

up the concerns of the streets, bring alive a presence of hope and faith and hospitality. We needed to celebrate communion.

So that Easter Sunday 1996, I led worship on Boston Common for the first time. I was quite scared. I'm really not a brave person. I just knew what I was going to do. I asked my street friends what the best gathering place was for them, and they said it was the benches around a large fountain at one corner of Boston Common. Our altar was a cart used to stack folding chairs, with a piece of plywood on top, borrowed from a church across the street from the site I'd chosen. It was a bitter cold afternoon and I wore an alb and a stole over several layers of sweaters. We had sixteen communicants. More people gathered after the service to eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and talk.

You wouldn't believe the power of that worship on the Common, the looks on the faces of people who haven't received the sacraments for years, the witness of what felt like whole worlds coming together to pray for each other and to thank God.

That first Sunday seemed a small step, although it had been huge for me. I was a new priest and nothing was easy. Trusting in the declaration in the preface to the Book of Common Prayer that worship could be tailored to the gathered people, I had dropped all of the readings except the Gospel assigned for the day. We prayed the 23rd Psalm because I knew many people had that in their minds from childhood. We used the serenity prayer for our corporate "confession". I was worried about what the Bishop might say about the service and being outdoors, whether I might be seen as in some serious error. I was also worried about the

> park and municipal authorities since I was sure there must be laws against such gatherings. As I drove home, I made notes about changes I might make if I were brave enough to do it the next week. As that week went along, folks on the street who hadn't even been there told me they'd see me on Sunday! I couldn't have imagined at the time that we would be there the next Sunday and every Sunday at 1 p.m. since. And the design of the service is pretty much the same as our first Sunday. Everyone offers prayers; and I speak for one or two minutes about the gospel lesson and then welcome anyone to speak. What we receive ranges from songs, to cries of pain and despair, to brilliant exegesis, and the most Christ-like parable stories I've ever heard.

Debbie's ministry, Common Cathedral, has become one of the most beautiful and vibrant "lamentation choirs" in Boston. From the energy of this weekly Eucharist have come numerous, remarkable and vital programs for those without homes, with great participation by those in the greater Boston area who have homes. These programs are under the auspices of Ecclesia Ministries (Wyman, 2008, *Birth of a Street Church*).

Another Ecclesia Ministries program, Common Art, is housed at Emmanuel Church. Common Art creates a space for testimonial performance. Common Art (Ecclesia Ministries, 2008)

> provides space, materials and caring support staff to homeless people to develop their artistic abilities. People who live in shelters, rooming houses, on unclaimed couches and benches, and on Boston's streets, gather every Wednesday at Emmanuel Church on Newbury Street to draw, paint, sculpt, make crafts, and to share with other artists in like circumstances.

> For most members, Common Art is a singular chance to express their artistic gifts. For some, art is a professional path, interrupted and suspended by calamity and homelessness. For some, it's an opportunity to express unheard opinions, ideas and truths. For some, it's pure joy, an oasis of form and color in otherwise dry times. For some, it's a simple and welcome relief from daily difficulty.
>
> For many Common Art participants, art is a way of life. For others, it's a new discovery. But for all, art is passion, expressing and affirming life itself, a defiant or gentle "yes" in the face of stigma and constant struggle of poverty and homelessness.

Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries has become a national model for creating homeless "churches" and care for the homeless throughout the United States. Through support from Trinity Church in New York City and the Ford Foundation, Debbie has worked with leaders in major cites to dream and plan new street ministries.

Debbie, as the aforementioned citations confirm, practices the postmodern quality of impossible hospitality. Through Debbie's ministry, the church is moving across its hearth of comfort to the hearths of the homeless, where the church is de-centered, and, in its awkwardness, is invented by the Other (Wyman, 2008, *Journey to a Street Priesthood*):

> On June fourth, I was ordained a deacon.
>
> Two days later, I put on a knapsack full of socks, string, a first aid kit, meal and shelter lists, a prayer book and healing oil, AA meeting lists, chapsticks,

and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I took to the streets, hanging out on park benches, subway stations and meal programs in Downtown Boston.

I remember the first day. I walked from Cambridge where I live, across the Charles River to Arlington Street in Boston. I stopped in at the Café de Paris and bought two cups of coffee, walked across the street into the Public Garden and looked around. No one noticed, of course, but I felt a hundred spotlights blinding me. All the challenges to my ordination and my own doubts and fears were in my face. What was I doing here, a woman in khaki pants and a blue oxford cloth shirt with a white clerical collar? I knew I had all the usual stereotypes about homeless people and charity. I bore this crazy desire to get closer to poor people. I looked around the park for some opening, a place to sink into, someone on a bench who "looked homeless." I, who was out to help and learn, needed rescuing. I spotted a man, and went over and sat down. I had no idea what to say. I handed him one of the cups of coffee. He took it and he looked at me and said, "So, how are you doing today?" WHAM. In my first five minutes of "street ministry," I'd learned who is ministering to whom.

Debbie creates and sustains a not-knowing position:

I often ask myself, what is the difference between my sister Mary sitting at the fountain, and me? When I suffered from personal losses and mental illness, I had therapists, friends, family, a savings account. I had this network, even when I wasn't aware of having anything. Mary didn't, and she landed on the street, and now she has a long, long journey back.

> A few weeks after I learned that lesson from Mary, I was leaving a meeting downtown. There were some cookies and donuts left. I decided to go up to the Common to see if anyone was around. It was pouring rain, awful. I ran into Sam, on one of the benches. He asked if we could pray, said he had something he wanted to offer. "God, I know you are up there," he began. "But down here, things are real bad. I can't stop drinking. But tonight, I'm not praying for myself. A few days ago, my friend, Fred, died right over there." He pointed to the fountain beside the Park Street station. "When I found him, his shoes were missing. His hat was gone. He always wore his hat. These streets have turned to Hell. We need you, God. We need to take care of each other. I've lived on these streets for years. I don't have any money, but I'll beg money for my brother, if he needs it and I don't have it. I wish I'd known Fred was in trouble. We've got to watch out for each other. God, help us."
>
> Sam didn't go to divinity school. He doesn't have a spiritual director or a theological chat group. But Sam loves his neighbor and he's on speaking terms with God. Even drunk, and soaked to the bone, Sam knows God, and he lives justice and righteousness. I was learning about God.

Debbie fosters a spirit of mutuality, a space where people risk leveling power-over relations and remain open, and, therefore, vulnerable to one another (Wyman, 2008, *Birth of a Street Church*):

> Radical openness is the gift of homeless individuals who stand out there "in front of God and everybody," as my friend Ann would say, and tell the truth. "I can't stop drinking." "My boyfriend beat me up and threw me down the stairs

> yesterday and I lost my baby." When people who have nothing speak during our prayer and open gospel reflection, they set the example for everyone. In such an environment, a woman who has a job and lives in a fancy suburb will stand in the circle in tears, with several folks gently touching or holding her. She will tell 125 "strangers" about surviving child abuse. When she finishes, everyone will quietly clap and say "Amen," "Thank you," "Go girl."

Debbie creates a space for border walkers, those who walk the boundary line of their marginality in order to seek and find others on the edge of their marginality, and to engage one another in a respectful, attentive and curious manner, which creates the solidarity that initiates common cause (Wyman, *2008, Birth of a Street Church*):

> Every Sunday, we welcome people who live under bridges, people who live in suburban houses, and everyone in between. One common denominator of our church is that almost everyone would describe herself or himself in some way or another as "on the margin." This is true even of the most privileged, housed, traditionally employed persons, of whom we have a number who worship regularly. Some go to their church in the morning and then come to common cathedral. They describe themselves as searchers, renegades, crusaders, malcontents.

A Broader Definition of Wholeness

The “why of priesting” that is born out of a particular purposefulness, namely, the establishment of north fields for freaks to find one another and discover in their lamentational relation a Eucharistic joy and promise with legs, raises a legitimate question from the dominant culture, its religious communities, guilds and associations.

What about those with, seemingly, one head, who graze hard day in and day out in the heat of the day in order to produce sufficient milk to at least make enough hay to keep going, satisfied to see the normal number of stars in the night sky? What does such a north field sacramental theology offer the assistant professor of English at Bowdoin College, working really hard to make tenure, who enjoys walking over to Eucharist at St. Paul's on Sunday morning for a breather, to hear hymns and participate in liturgical responses that take her back home to those nourishing Sunday mornings in Culver City? Is the why of my priesting, and possibly Dan and Debbie's, exclusive? Is this a "members only" sacramental theology, the requirement for membership being certifiable brokenness?

My answer issues from another way of thinking about being human, aroused by the front-page picture in the July 19, 2008 *Boston Globe*. The picture is of a teenager, Fernando Vargas, fifteen years old, Hispanic, bloated, eyes wide and staring into space. The child had died the previous afternoon. During a severe thunderstorm, power was lost in one of the subsidized high rises in a struggling neighborhood of Boston. The ventilator that kept Fernando alive in Unit 169 lost power and reverted to battery power. The battery, which was supposed to last for ten hours, failed while the father was trying to acquire a backup battery just in case.

I spotted the picture while having a bagel and coffee in a local eatery. I picked up the paper, read the headline, and stared back at Fernando. Fernando's face demanded that I answer a riddle, a big riddle, at 8 a.m., just when I was itching to read about Greg Norman leading the British Open.

I spoke with myself and Fernando: Bill, what picture on this page bespeaks what it means to be human, my picture or the larger picture, just below, of several suburban women now, during harder times, shopping less at *Whole Foods* in Swampscott and more at a messier, smellier Haymarket Square in Boston's North End, where peddlers offer cheaper food? Bill, humanness, is it about the grotesque or glamorous? For that matter, which picture is closest to the *imago Dei*, the image of God? Well, Fernando, I would rather not choose. I am not into binaries these days. Binaries are not postmodern. I can say that your picture will not leave me alone, and the riddle you have asked does raise another question. How did we come to a place in our culture where, more and more, death has no place? We dress up and process death in a manner similar to the way we dress up and process our shit, in plants downstream and distant from Starbucks. Is it because death privileges bizarre and broken forms, which are not in the service of those marks that make us more human by present standards—ability and productivity (Lane, p. 33). Do these present standards bring us to pity you for being on your ventilator in Orient Heights, Unit 169, on an ordinary Wednesday afternoon? For that matter, is the person with Down's syndrome and terminal cancer less than whole (Lane, p. 33)? Is our sense of wholeness these days, with the emphasis on ability and productivity, truncated, incomplete and malnourished? Excuse me, that was a really big question. A smaller one: Does our pity benefit you in any way, bring us closer to you?

Jean Vanier, the French-Canadian founder of the l'Arche communities around the world, communities in which the "able and disabled" care for one another, has a comment about my dialogue with Fernando. Vanier finds that the most severely disabled, physically and mentally, provide a truer measure of humanity (Lane, p. 33). In the

l'Arche communities, the most severely handicapped teach those who are less impaired because they possess a greater capacity to touch others (Lane, p. 33). Their touch has something to do with attentiveness to the threads of impairments and disfigurements that are woven into the fabric of each of us. They see us in our wholeness.

I do not offer a north field theology of Eucharist, what Dan and Debbie practice, as binary, as the other, different and right Eucharistic theology. Rather, I offer it as something of a corrective in a culture that understands wholeness in a way that makes "less whole" people and "less whole" dimensions of us problematic, shameful and a project for pity and polishing. I offer a north field theology of Eucharist as gift (Vanier, 1989, p. 156):

> Look at your own poverty
>
> welcome it
>
> cherish it
>
> don't be afraid
>
> share your death
>
> because thus you will share your love and your life.

A Way of Priesting

The priestly art, in relation to a pastoral psychology of lament, is to mediate the obscenity (literally, to obscure, cover up) of suffering, a symbol of which is the cross of Jesus, in a way that makes suffering approachable and engagable, in a relational way. Our sacramental work is to find ways for those we serve to stand together and still at the foot of the cross—the execution of Jesus, the murder of Esperance's daughter, the picture of Fernando Vargas—in the midst of suffering's obscenity without fleeing figuratively or

literally after a minute or so. We help them resist the temptation to retreat into more isolated, unconscious wailing. We invite them into lamentational discourse.

As I established in Chapter 2, one way we offer the sacrament of shared suffering is through testimonial performance. We bend the stark rays of suffering into shades soft, and, therefore, safe enough to captivate attention and evoke response. Such is our priestly *hocus pocus*,[8] our relational magic.

I next discuss two sacraments of shared suffering that illustrate experiences in which the more obscene is refracted in a manner that can be approached, engaged and shared in a liberative way. First, I present an interview with Elizabeth. Second, I present the series, *Art and Alterity: Beyond the Other as Enemy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

Elizabeth's Body Map Experience

Elizabeth is a middle-aged, divorced mother, who, after much and earnest discernment, recently ended a career in management and began a journey towards becoming a social worker. I know Elizabeth both as a conversational partner in talk therapy (we met for about a year) and as a member of an Episcopal parish in which I was marginally involved as a consultant and occasional visitor.

Elizabeth, as mentioned in Chapter 2, participated in what was for her a life-changing retreat led by an Episcopal priest and attended by about a dozen people from the Diocese of Massachusetts. The retreat was held in an idyllic environment, a retreat center in a forest that bordered the sea. Each participant, in the company of other participants, created, between times of personal and public prayer and worship, with an

[8] *Hocus Pocus* comes from a phrase in the liturgy of the Eucharist, *hoc est corpus meum*, "This is my body."

array of materials that served a variety of artistic mediums, body maps: presentational testimonies representing the history, most often the painful, sometimes brutal history of their bodies-in-relation. The priest designed three sessions of communal art, each with a theme—eyes, heart, hands. Before each session, she led a meditation on the particular theme.

For Elizabeth, the session on heart was magical in the sacramental, *hoc est corpus meum* sense. She was able, with the help of her sister participants, to break open a wailing heart, literally, in an act of lamentational expression. What follows are excerpts from an inquiry interview with Elizabeth for the dissertation (inquiry interview, May 2008):

> Elizabeth**:** I can't remember the things that she might have said about heart, but I had this really strong image of – and it's partly from things that Kevin preached about – which is that the light gets, comes out through the broken parts of us. And I felt like I, in my marriage which was not very supportive of me, my heart had just gotten sort of more and more enclosed. So to portray this, I did a cut-out of a pot with very clean, clear, strong lines, and painted that sort of a dark red. And I knew what I wanted to do was open that heart up in this picture, but I, to break my heart open like that was very hard to do by myself, so I asked the other people in the retreat if they would witness me ripping my heart open. And so they stood around me while I ripped it apart, because I couldn't possibly do that all by myself. It was just too sad, and I needed to know there was, you know, there was someone else there.

They stood sort of like all around me, except I was, I had it on this table so they were, they, you know, the five or six of them were just standing close to me, not touching me but just right there, and they were willing to – I mean they had no idea what was going on in my head, except I said I need to rip this open and I really need you to be here. And I explained to them what it was and what it symbolized, and they just stood there and I tore it into pieces and then I just was quiet for a minute and I thanked them, and – so that was a really meaningful moment, because I had to ask them for something I really needed. And I'm not very good at that, but I did that a lot in this retreat, and they willingly signed right off and, you know, were there.

So I just wrote next, so I glued the pieces on and sort of made light coming out from the pot, with its lid off, and said, "God shines through the broken places, the open places in our hearts."

At this point in the interview, I was curious about the word, "God," how relational her understanding of God was (inquiry interview, May 2008):

Bill: Now, God shines through the broken places. So it, if we walk inside God, what will we find, I mean when you say God, what? I guess I'm curious about what, who, how do you talk about God?

Elizabeth: Well, God for me is ... um ... I don't know.

Bill: Is that too big a question?

Elizabeth: Well, it's a big question, not surprisingly. I mean, when you ask me what is God, to me it's the power of love, that is the, the, you know, the answer that comes right to mind. But love does so many things, and I think love is a light

> that, you know, shines on different people, and shows us different things, and we can love someone, we can see them for who they are. So it's, it's both letting in and letting out the love in my life, letting my love out, which I think I sat on for a long time. I'm letting myself be loved. Because there were little cracks where that could come in, and I hadn't let that in in along time. I mean, I certainly loved people, but I didn't allow that sort of two-way vulnerability piece into a lot of my relationships.
>
> Bill: And so in that way, is God sort of spirit between you and others, when you're kind of loving?
>
> Elizabeth: Well, God is found in the intersections of us, you know, in that being together, somewhere in that is where God is.
>
> Bill: Amen to that.

I noticed, as Elizabeth talked about the canvas, that she spoke in the present tense. The canvas was not a memento of an amazing moment a couple of years ago, a way to retell and recover. The canvas remained alive for her, came alive in the offering of it to me for our conversational partnership. The canvas continues as a medium of lament, a sacrament of which she can continually partake (inquiry interview, May 2008):

> Elizabeth: Yeah, you know, I think, I think another value to making it so concrete and real is that then it's with you. Like I really, I, this image, the broken pot, is so strong to me and so, I mean to me it's the opening up to possibility. I live with that regularly, and remember that by opening myself up I've gotten a lot. I mean, there are a lot of things that are hard in my life, but there's so many wonderful things that have occurred in these past four years, it's almost four years. And it's

been incredibly rich, I mean so much richer than much of my previous life. Because I let people in.

The sacrament continues to open new space for Elizabeth. Last September, when she matriculated in her MSW program, she designed another testimonial performance, an offspring of the canvas. She sent a letter to all her friends who had supported her through the heart work that resulted in her decision to return to school. In the letter, she put a cardboard cutout of an angel and a star. She asked each of us to put a thought, a quote, a picture on each cutout. She threw a party, asking her "cloud of witnesses" to come with their completed cutouts and celebrate her rite of passage. She now surrounds herself with these angels and stars when she cannot muster the strength and courage to take the next step, and when she desires those she trusts and counts on to watch her next step (inquiry interview, May 2008):

> Elizabeth: So I'm still working on that, and I'm still working on hanging all my angels and hearts and things people gave me. Which I would love to show you, just -
>
> Bill: Oh, I would love (*unintelligible*).
>
> Elizabeth: It was the most amazing, amazing thing. (*Leaves room briefly*.) This just reaffirms that people have, you have to share with people. So this is all, (*unintelligible*), but I have a friend who does sculpting who I think can help me on this, but, to figure out how to make this into a mobile. (*Unintelligible*) because she, I mean people did whatever they felt like, you know, they didn't necessarily do exactly my shape, which is kind of cool. So, I don't know how you want to look at this but, you know, they're, you know, people wrote all sorts of things, but

you know, look at it as -

Bill: This is just amazing. Do you keep this near you?

Elizabeth*:* I keep it by my bed, and I have, in the fall I definitely needed, you know, I said, I needed this because I knew this was going to be a really hard change, and I needed to know my friends were around me. So there are a few times when I was like really in a bad place and I thought, oh my God, I have to get out my, you know, I have to go read these, that's why I got them. That's (*name*) Beale's. Oh, that's my long-time friend, Judy, and this is (*name*) gave me. I mean, some people just did something simple, there's one from Steve. You know, they're (*unintelligible*). And one of the poems (*name*) gave me was, you know, "I Will Not Die an Unlived Life," and that one. Did I have that up here? (*Leaves room briefly*.) It's on one of these, but she (*unintelligible*). And then here's a magnet I have on my fridge that (*unintelligible*). This is from (*name*). She also gave me a, this is from the Caribbean, "The time will come when with elation you will greet yourself arriving at your own door, in your own mirror, and each will smile at the other's welcome and say, sit here, eat/ You will love again the stranger who was yourself/Give wine, give bread, give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your life, whom you ignored for another, who knows you by heart/Take down the love letters from the bookshelf, the photographs, the desperate notes/Peel your image from the mirror/Sit/Feast on your life." I can't think of his name, but anyway.

So, you know, I have all these, you know, wonderful, and all, yeah, and just reminders. "God help us to live slowly, to move simply, to look softly, to

allow emptiness, to let the heart create breaths." That's from my friend Amy.

Elizabeth tells me that she has planned an addition to the mobile of the stars and angels hanging from the ceiling of her bedroom. She also plans to build a frame for the canvas and hang it on the wall there.

My conversational partnership with Elizabeth through this interview created new knowledge for me. I learned anew that art is to Elizabeth as music is to me. These "sacraments" not only mediate the pain of our lives into safer and less violent realities with which we can be in conversation, best with others in the room, they also sustain us as radically relational selves between our "real" conversations. Our inner voices need company between our outer conversations. Our painful pasts make it harder for us to talk to ourselves straight up, in less mediated ways. Art and music are two of our more intimate conversational partners. These particular conversational partnerships are our prayers. Such prayers priest us along the way.

Art and Alterity: Beyond the Other as Enemy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

During my first two years at Bates College, there has been tension on campus, always present though sometimes under the surface, oftentimes heated and aggravated, between *Students for Justice in Palestine* and the Jewish organization on campus, *Hillel*. The issue has been the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and, in particular, the treatment of Palestinians by the state of Israel. Last year, the presidents of each organization exchanged caustic, *ad hominin* letters. During first semester this year, members of *Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine* voted to drop "Peace" from their moniker and they invited incendiary speakers to campus. The last speaker was Norman Finkelstein, a Jew, who is known for his pro-Palestinian position. The speech, which was planned to be

approximately forty minutes, with ample time for questions, lasted two hours. The last forty-five minutes of the speech was an *ad hominin* attack of Alan M. Dershowitz, the popular Harvard Law School professor and pro-Israeli voice. Dershowitz and Finkelstein have been carrying on a very public feud.

I have worked hard to make peace between the leaders of *Hillel* and *Students for Justice in Palestine*. I hosted dinner meetings in my home, between the leaders of each organization. At one meeting, we focused on hearing each other's stories, hoping that greater understanding and some empathy would emerge. At another meeting, we brainstormed about how the groups might work together to widen the conversation on campus about the conflict, such as a film series. Both meetings seemed to work in terms of their purposes. At the same time, the campus conflict did not abate. I believe that, in respect to my attempts to reach out and help, there was more going on than "playing nice" for the chaplain. I believe that, in some ways, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been so grave for so long, obscene, that it is extremely difficult for interested parties, both very close and not so close to the conflict, to move from wailing to lament, from ejaculations of despair and aggravation to a lamentational discourse from which new possibility for peace emerges. I was committed to keep trying to create spaces on campus for more lamentational, less wailing-like engagement. I was less than hopeful.

Last November (2007), a student, Anna Levy, called me to make an appointment to talk. She came to my study distraught. She had returned from a summer experience in Israel and Palestine, a program in which students worked with Israelis and Palestinians, who were working together to build peace. She returned to campus enthusiastic about and committed to creating initiatives on campus that would raise awareness of and elicit

engagement in the kinds of collaborative peace work in which she had participated. Anna's efforts were failing in the face of the ongoing fray.

Anna was distraught but not deterred. She was determined. I invited my colleague, the Associate Multifaith Chaplain, Emily Wright-Timko, into our conversation. Together the three of us tried to imagine a way forward. During our conversation, Anna remembered a friend from her summer work, a student from James Madison University in Virginia, who had brought an art exhibit to his campus, which had been very well received. The name of the exhibit was *Inside Terrorism: The X-Ray Project.* We "googled" the exhibit on my computer and witnessed a highly acclaimed and critically reviewed art installation featuring actual x-rays and CT scans from the two largest hospitals in Jerusalem. The artist, Diane Covert, explores the effects of terrorism on a civilian population. The victims include Jews, Muslims, Christians and Hindus. The exhibit was well received at other venues, including Stanford and Harvard Medical Schools, Johns Hopkins, San Jose State University and the University of Cincinnati. So we made plans to bring the exhibit to Bates.

Walking home from campus at day's end, I reflected on the earlier conversation with Anna and Emily. I realized that *Inside Terrorism: The X-Ray Project* is testimonial performance. It is too difficult for most of us to witness the news accounts and photographs of the bloody remains of victims of suicide bombers, what we readily dismiss as too obscene. It is more possible to witness an x-ray of a head and neck with a hex nut embedded in the spinal cord as an art form, in community, with conversation among co-witnesses. *The X-Ray Project* captures rays at the same time that it bends them into shades soft enough to engage.

I called Anna and Emily the next morning to see if we could meet about an idea I had to further our initiative. We met. The three of us planned a two-week testimonial performance, a series that presented the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a *sacramental* offering, a refraction of the utterly profane into more or less profound community engagement. We created *Art and Alterity: Beyond the Other as Enemy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Moreover, we were inspired enough to do the leg work required to fund it through a variety of sources—academic departments, the offices of the President and Dean of Students, The Maine Council of Churches, area synagogues, the Multicultural Center at Bates College and the Multifaith Chaplaincy. We hosted *The X-Ray Project* and four other events, a film, a chamber music ensemble, a collaborative art project, and a memorial service, which I describe below.

Film: Promises

Promises, an award-winning, PBS documentary, follows the journey of one of the filmmakers, Israeli-American B.Z. Goldberg. B.Z. travels to a Palestinian refugee camp and to an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, and to the more familiar neighborhoods of Jerusalem where he meets seven Palestinian and Israeli children. Though the children live only 20 minutes apart, they exist in completely separate worlds; the physical, historical and emotional obstacles between them run deep. *Promises* explores the nature of these boundaries and tells the story of a few children who dared to cross the lines to meet their neighbors. Rather than focusing on political events, the seven children featured in *Promises* offer a refreshing, human and sometimes humorous portrait of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The Apple Hill Chamber Players

The Apple Hill Chamber Players are unique in the world of music. They represent one of America's most highly respected performing ensemble traditions, winning international praise for vital, elegant, and eloquent performances and recordings of the chamber music literature, from 18th to 20th century masterpieces to new and commissioned works by leading composers. Founded in 1973, the Apple Hill Chamber Players are the performing artists and faculty for the internationally celebrated Apple Hill Festival in East Sullivan, NH, USA, where they are joined by professional, student, and amateur participants of all ages and backgrounds from all over the US and around the world.

The Apple Hill Playing for Peace Project is dedicated to using the traditions of Apple Hill concerts, residencies, and scholarships to further the causes of world peace and understanding—at Apple Hill, throughout the United States, and throughout the world. Annually since 1988, the Apple Hill Chamber Players have toured the Middle East, Europe, and other parts of the world, as well as all corners of the US, performing concerts, conducting master classes, and awarding Playing for Peace scholarships to bring musicians of diverse backgrounds and conflicting cultures to Apple Hill. The dramatic story of the 1992 Apple Hill Chamber Players tour of Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria was documented by Emmy award-winning Peter Rosen in the namesake PBS film and video "Playing for Peace," seen by over four million viewers.

Artsbridge, Inc.

For many Palestinian and Israeli youth, there is difficulty imagining a future that includes peace and coexistence with their neighbors. As hard as it is to imagine peace and

coexistence, it is even harder for them to recognize they have the potential to bring about positive change in their environment and their future. Through collaborative art projects, Artsbridge utilizes the art-making process to foster creative vision, empathy and skills in communication, teamwork, project management, leadership and conflict resolution. Through this process, Artsbridge empowers Israeli and Palestinian youth and positively affects how they can cope with conflict and trauma, trust and understanding, peace and coexistence, desires and fears. Deborah Nathan and Yousef Al Aljarma, founders of Artsbridge, Inc., facilitated an art experience for students, staff and faculty, using a reflecting team process.

A Memorial Service for Civilian Victims of Terrorism and War

We planned a service, which was to be led by a Jewish rabbi, a Muslim imam and a Protestant pastor. The service was cancelled twice because of snowstorms.

The events were well received, some better than others. A few of the attendees at the opening night of *The X-Ray Project* voiced concern that Diane Covert could ill afford to focus solely on civilian victims in Jerusalem. She handled the hard questions not so well. Nonetheless, the evening, overall, was convivial and opened space for good dialogue among attendees. The Apple Hill Chamber Players concert and presentation on *Playing for Peace* was a rousing success and stirring evening. The music was of the highest caliber. The musicians' stories, at intermission, of making peace through making music evoked hearty conversation. There was the story of playing a concert at the US Embassy in Israel with bombs exploding outside and a dash to cover before the final movement of the last piece. There was the story of a string quartet comprised of four teenagers from Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Syria. The Artsbridge experience had the

fewest number of participants. The experimental design of the program seemed daunting to many and kept some away. Those who attended experienced a memorable evening of reflective engagement. Yousef Al Aljarma, the co-facilitator, gave witness to his journey from stone thrower and political prisoner to a person with a vocation of family therapy and an avocation of peace making. Finally, as is often the case at Bates College, for the campus to know that such a series was happening, whether attended or not, made a difference in the campus atmosphere. We received many letters and emails of gratitude for presenting the series.

Concluding Thoughts

I have presented the priestly act, both why we act priestly and the way we carry out the priestly act, as a means to support my conviction that a fundamental priestly task is to bend, if but a degree or two, the trajectory of the Judeo-Christian narrative back towards her homeland, the north field. More specifically, I used presentations of Saint Paul's Church, Common Cathedral/Ecclesia Ministries, Elizabeth Cochran's artfulness, and the *Art and Alterity* project to create a conversational partnership at Bates around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to deconstruct the presumed sufficiency of *homo economicus* and the complicity of mainline faith in such a presumption. World conditions at the time of this writing—the near collapse of the global economy—support my case. I have attempted, through the same presentations, to raise the possibility that a mysterious and proximate joy is available to humankind through the act of handing one another along as *homo insufficiens*, two-headed calves, fellow strugglers *Marching to Zion*.

In the next chapter, I propose and seek to prosper the idea that *Marching to Zion* not only is our joy but our hope as well.

Chapter 9

PROPHETIC WITNESS

"I'm going to vote like the spirit say vote.

I'm going to vote like the spirit say vote,

I'm going to vote like the spirit say vote,

And if the spirit say vote I'm going to vote,

Oh Lord, I'm going to vote when the spirit say vote."

Rutha Mae Harris (New York Times, November 5, 2008)

Recently, I watched on television an interview with novelist Wally Lamb on the publication of his new novel, *The Hour I First Believed* (Smith, B., *207 Maine*, February 28, 2009). The novel is based on the Columbine, Colorado High School shootings of April 20, 1999. Two students killed twelve fellow students and one teacher before killing themselves.

Wally Lamb, in talking about the inspirational "sparks" for the novel, named three. First, Wally Lamb was a high school teacher. Second, he said that he is "three degrees removed" from an earlier high school shooting in Paducah, Kentucky, on December 1, 1997, in which three people died. Lamb has cousins who were close to the shooter's older sister. Third, he said that he volunteered to teach a one-time, 45-minute writing workshop at the women's maximum-security prison in Connecticut. The one time commitment turned into a weekly meeting with the women, which has continued nine years. He gathers with the women to share stories, stories they are writing and stories about their life in the prison system. He said that the community he has made with the women, a community of much laughter and tears, theirs and his, has made him an

"accidental activist" for the imprisoned: "Once you see what you see in prison you can not unsee it." There are echoes of his accidental activism throughout his new book.

The accidental activism of Wally Lamb reflects the thesis of my dissertation. Lament is a catalyst for change, a prophetic witness. In previous chapters, I defined what lament is, its psychotheological character, how it is practiced, its foundational place in the priestly vocation, how it is faithful to the DNA of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and what it contributes to the renewal of mainline religion in America. In previous chapters, the readers witnessed, and I often referred to, the by-product of peace, the derivative of compassion, the residual benefit of justice, and the offshoot of passion for liberation that springs from lamentational relation. In this chapter, I will focus on the generative consequences and outcomes of lament, and through this focus privilege them as the rationale for integrating lamentational relation into the fiber of congregational life and the practices of institutions whose mission is to serve the world.

The sacrament of shared suffering transforms. Communicants find the wherewithal to stand in the experience of obscene suffering without closing their eyes or covering up their hearts, in the company of fellow lamenters, without turning away into isolated, inarticulate wailing. Lamenters find the strength to endure, sometimes the capacity to forgive and reconcile, and the passion to make a difference.

In what follows, I will present two case studies that reflect the enduring, creative and fruitful struggle of those in lamentational relation to bend history towards peace and justice: 1) long-standing lamenter, social activist, teacher and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and her work with Mothers ROC and her battle against California's prison fix; 2) and, the Rwandan Genocide class at Bates College.

A Story of the Transformative Power of Lament

Before presenting the two cases, I offer a story, shared by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, about the transformative power of lamentational relation (inquiry interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, March 2007):

> Ruthie: Anyway, in D.C., southeast D.C., this young kid – everyone in this story's black – young kid, maybe thirteen years old, wandered into a neighborhood where he didn't belong. Another kid found him and killed him. Another kid the same age, about thirteen. That kid was pretty quickly caught by the cops, taken to court. And he came from, you know, a family that itself had just disintegrated under the weight of many different things – drugs, this, that and the other – and he was pretty much alone in the world. Nobody from his family came to court. He had a public defender and, you know, social workers and all that that kids get. But nobody who was either biological (*unintelligible*) this kid.
>
> But the mother of the dead child came . . . to court . . . witnessed the whole thing. And when the youngster was convicted and sentenced to the, kind of the juvenile sentence of til he was twenty five or whatever it was . . . twenty one . . . *she* said, as the bailiff was taking, leading him from the court, she just got up and in her grief and sorrow said, I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you.
>
> Anyway, so he goes off, he starts serving his time . . . she starts visiting him. And she's just going to sit and look at him. They would sit and look at each other. Not talk . . . they'd just look at each other. And as his time went on, eventually she started giving him a little money for the canteen so he could buy cigarettes and candy. And then as time went on – his time for release began to

approach – she started asking him, well what are you, what are you going to do? And he said, well I haven't thought about it, I don't know what I'm going to do. And eventually she came to the, his jail, and said, well I have a friend who works in construction, he needs a strong young man to do physical labor, manual labor, he said you can work for him, you know, straighten out.

Release time gets closer and she said, where are you gonna live? I haven't thought about it. She said, well, you know I have a spare room in my house, you can stay with me. So he gets out and moves into the room in her house, he works for this guy in construction, works very long days, works very hard. And eats Wendy's, you know, fast food, that kind of thing. And one day after this has been going on for a while, she encounters him in the kitchen and she says, you know, we've never broken bread together – would you like to eat with me tonight? Yes ma'am. This is the south, he said yes ma'am.

She fixes dinner, they sit down in the kitchen, they eat, finish, clean up together, do the dishes, and then she said, well you know, I've never invited you to the front room in my house, would you like to go sit in the parlor and talk? Yes, ma'am. So they go and sit in the parlor. She says to him, do you remember what I said to you the day they took you off to jail? Yes, ma'am, I do. Well, what did I say? Tell me what I said.

You said you were gonna kill me. She said, well I did. I killed the kid who didn't have more sense than to kill another child.

Ruthie: But you know, I was also thinking about you thinking about that story, that mother. And one thing that really strikes me about it is that her . . .

> inarticulate wailing, became articulate . . . understandable to *herself*.
>
> Bill**:** Well, that's what I was just thinking, that she said to the son, I killed the son who killed my son. He could say, I redeemed the mother who was going to seek retribution. So it was a mutual transformation. So they saved each other.

The capacity of the mother and child to be still with one another, for a good long time, with tongues swollen first in inarticulate wailing and then stuck to the roof of their mouths in curious, respectful and evolving relation, engendered, over time, utterances that became more and more articulate and liberative. The power to be still was not something each possessed, a character trait. Rather, the capability was community property, a co-conjured dependence on and between one another that issued from a shared experience of having little or nothing left to lose or offer to either themselves or one another.

The aptitude common to and between conversational partners who move from inarticulate wailing to lamentational discourse is a vulnerability that breeds dependence (inquiry interview, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, March 2007):

> Yeah, so it's a way in which, and here's something I want to write some day – I don't know if I'll get around to it – but I want to write a, you know, a manifesto in praise of dependence. All right? That, you know, we've got this idea that dependence is a bad thing, right? And dependence is the best thing in the world. You know. Dependence is the best thing in the world.

Dependence born of the vulnerability that fellow strugglers bring into relation with and among one another vivifies a community that resists being broken by history and takes on history. A web is established with strands strong enough to withstand.

There is a lot to withstand. The lamentational community's resistance to evil that befalls them and commitment to fight against evil that befalls others arouse the attention and action of those who have the most to lose by the community's transformative behavior. Evil, again, from the Greek, *diabolos*, is the insidious, systemized, disguised, subterranean and sometimes innocently engaged movement[9] to bend and break "the long arc of the moral universe towards justice (King, M. L., 1965)." Because lamentational transformation is local, so too is the commitment to undermine it by the protectors and benefactors of stasis. Edward Wong, in his July 24, 2008 *New York Times* article, "China Presses Grieving Parents to Take Hush Money," reported the mounting swell of protests by parents who lost children in school buildings that collapsed, reportedly due to sub par construction, during the May 12, 2008 earthquake.

> Local governments in southwest China's quake-ravaged Sichuan Province have begun a coordinated campaign to buy the silence of angry parents whose children died during the earthquake, according to interviews with more than a dozen parents from four collapsed schools. Officials threaten that the parents will get nothing if they refuse to sign, the parents say. Chinese officials had promised a new era of openness in the wake of the earthquake and in the months before the Olympic Games, which begin in August. But the pressure on parents is one sign that officials here are determined to create a facade of public harmony rather than

[9] I certainly count myself as a participant in the movement to bend and break "the long arc of the moral university towards justice." Citizens, especially citizens of first world nations, are inextricably tangled in a social web of tribe and nation that seeks to preserve and prosper its economic standing and political power and influence, often in the name of the good and just. American theologian and political theorist Reinhold Niebuhr, whose work emerged in the post World War I and Depression era, in the first sentence of his once again popular book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, names our dilemma: "The thesis to be elaborated in these pages is that a sharp distinction must be drawn between the moral and social behavior of individuals and of social groups, national, racial, and economic; and that this distinction justifies and necessitates political policies which a purely individualistic ethic must always find embarrassing." (xxv)

> undertake any real inquiry into accusations that corruption or negligence contributed to the high death toll in the quake. Officials have come knocking on parents' doors day and night. They are so intent on getting parents to comply that in one case, a mayor offered to pay the airfare of a mother who left the province so she could return to sign the contract, the mother said.

The resistance to evil and the commitment to struggle against it engenders strong opposition, and the capacity to persevere in the face of such opposition is greatest among those who bring their suffering into lamentational community. Accordingly, those who do not ground their struggle for change in public mourning stand a greater chance of fatigue, failure and a flight to retaliation and aggression (Botcharova, pp. 292, 293).

The people and communities whom I have cited throughout the dissertation have made a great difference in the world, and the seeds and harvest of their resistance and struggle for change sprout from lamentational relation and discourse hearty enough to stand down and overcome *diabolos*. What follows is a more narrow focus on the lamentational community's commitment to resist and change a broken world. I examine the roots and essence of Ruth Wilson Gilmore's passion for resistance and change in the face of the California prison industry, as well as that of Mothers ROC, a community she writes about. I observe students in the Rwandan genocide class at Bates College; how, through the process of testimonial performance about their witness with orphans of the genocide, they have been inspired to make a difference.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

"Now that you have touched the women, you have struck a rock,

you have dislodged a boulder, and you will be crushed."

Women's Political Chant, Anti-Pass Law Movement, South Africa, 1956

(in Gilmore, R.W., 2007, p. 181)

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, or Ruthie as she likes to be addressed, has spent a lifetime in and gained great respect for her participation in and mobilizing of lamentational relation and discourse that agitates for change. She was born into a family well versed in gathering inarticulate wailers into lamentational choirs that provoked prophetic engagement. Her family was touched hard, victimized by what it fought so hard against, the racist agendas of the dominant powers, who will use most any means to protect and promulgate "RAEI" as the soul of our nation (inquiry interview, March 2008):

> Ruthie: And then also, something else happened that was pretty profound, extremely profound. That is, in January of 1969 one of my cousins was killed . . . was killed in a shootout between the Black Panther (*unintelligible*) for self defense, and United Slaves, in Los Angeles. *But* . . . what occasioned that shootout was COINTELPRO.
>
> Bill: Was what?
>
> Ruthie: CO-IN-TEL-PRO. Unbelievable. You *don't* know what that is. Interesting. COINTELPRO is the Counter Intelligence Program of the FBI, okay? All right. Whew, I *knew* you'd know, I knew you'd know. Anyway, and COINTELPRO produced as much static as it could between and among political groupings, right, in the United States.
>
> Bill: Cleveland Sellers writes about that in *River of No Return*. Oh, my god.
>
> Ruthie: Right. And they managed to get people to kill each other – they did it, they did it very, very well. And so they created this war between – in L.A. –

> between United Slaves, Ron Karenga's group, and the Black Panthers, and there was a shootout one night and my cousin and this other Panther were killed.

Ruthie worked for over five decades to come up with a definition of racism. The definition mirrors her lamentational experience on the streets as an activist and exposes the wailing she, as a public education administrator and professor, heard throughout the system, a noise she boldly announces and protests. Her definition has an eye on "RAEI:" "Racism is the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." (Gilmore, 2007, p. 247)

Ruthie's lamentational definition of racism arises from the spirit of public mourning by a sector of society whose people die early, on the margins, out of sight, mostly from the direct and indirect ravages of poverty. Their "cemetery" is a profit-motivated mausoleum for the living dead, the prison industrial complex. Ruthie focuses on California, the flagship state of the prison industrial complex:

> Ruthie: The material basis for their struggle was apparent: California's deep political-economic restructuring reconfigured the social reproductive landscape, as well as the world of work. The condition of surplus labor falls most heavily on modestly educated men in the prime of life from Black and other households of color in Los Angeles; such men are also overrepresented among CDC prisoners. Fully 40 percent of state prisoners come from Los Angeles County, and 70 percent from the Southland.

Ruthie continues and reflects on the development of the prison industry in California (inquiry interview, March 2007):

Ruthie: So anyway, so I learned politics kind of at his big [state] treasurer's table, because I was . . . *I* was brought in as the student aid expert to this thing, so I was kind of *tolerated* because I knew how student aid worked. And it was kind of great that I was, you know, kind of undercover doing this. But anyway, so, several years – several years later, more than a decade later – when I started researching the prisons I was trying to figure out, well how are they *doing* this? And then I remembered those days, sitting around the treasurer's office, with these investment bankers, you know, with their fingertips like this, you know, talking about these instruments, you know, and the da-da-da-da. And I said, this has *got* to be part of the answer. And I started looking, and indeed it was, and then I eventually went and I talked to a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* – who brought me a stack of what are called official statements for bond issues, that, you know, described everything that was – they were *so* amazing, these documents – describing the need, you know, the fact that these facilities will always be used, so the bond holders need not worry about the bonds being called early, and they'll get *all* the interest they want to get over the years. Unbelievable stuff. But also you could see the shift in where state revenues come from, (*unintelligible*) large corporations, the shift to personal income, the working stiffs, right? All of these things, it's all in there. They're *amazing* documents, right, of the shift in the welfare state.

Bill: Do you think there was a moment – and the moment might have been thirty seconds, a week, a year – where somebody or some group said, hot damn, let's do prisons.

Ruthie: Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. And it wasn't, it wasn't like somebody was sitting around saying, my constituents call me up and they complain all the time about crime. What are we gonna do? It wasn't. It was really the other way around – that, I mean for sure, as I think I said last night, people running for political office were sort of legitimating that anyone would want political office by saying, what we should do is, you know, deal with the things that you, that worry you – and that would be crime. Right? There's that.

But also, once the treasurer told these guys, go away and don't come back unless you have something new, right? They came back with this student loan thing, which was new, and the treasurer – and originally, in fact it was supposed to be only for the independent colleges in the state, and then somebody – who you might know personally – leaked that to a newspaper, so that they had to open it up to *all* students in the state, in public and private schools. Right?

And, but then these *guys* would continue to try and figure out, well what, what do you need to make, what do you need to build here in California, that we can put together the deal for. Right? And as Willy Brown, who was the successor to Jess Unruh, Speaker of the Assembly said, sooner or later, everyone's going to kneel before the altar of prisons.

Ruthie's passion for racial justice, especially in the prison industry, is local and organic, that is, on the ground and fanatically zealous. Ruthie has politicized grief (inquiry interview, March 2007):

Bill: Now what keeps you going? Where do you get the energy, the momentum to keep going. Schedule another meeting?

Ruthie: We want to win.

Bill: Hmm?

Ruthie: We *want* to win. So it's not like, you know, the football player going out on the gridiron every day to practice. But it is like it. We *really want* to win. We don't, well it's just . . . the dispiriting . . . nature of the political milieu in which we struggle is something that a lot of us talk about all the time. And we talk about sometimes you just feel like giving up . . . because it just seems so enormous. And there *are* people who, you know, who will cycle in and say, okay, we gotta do this. And then are *horrified* – they can't believe that it *is* evil. When they come in they think, oh, this is people what are, you know, doing the wrong thing because they're mistaken. And if only they had a little more education, if only they had the facts, if only . . . if only if only . . . things would be different and they'd realize – they'd learn what *we've* learned, which is . . . it's not about that. It's about creating political will. It's not about facts, you know?

And there are people who just flee . . . with their hair on fire. Because they just can't believe . . . it. Right? They just can't believe it. This one guy started organizing with families (*unintelligible*) California's three strikes. He's a guy who didn't have anybody inside, he came up through Act Up, right? Gay activism, radical, direct action, everything. His day job, he's a clothing designer, you know, you know, comfortable life, and he *threw* himself into (*unintelligible*). He heard about it, he said, I know how to do things. And, you know, and we actually changed things, Act Up did. You know, I know how to, you know, in the face of a *plague*, we ch-, so I'm not afraid. Five years, he said. I have never . . . I

never thought I could be in a situation where I work *so* hard and have so little effect.

Bill: Oh, my.

Ruthie: He, he just, he got completely depressed . . . and just faded. He stopped returning phone calls and stuff. I mean, he still designs clothes and everything. I don't know what he does now. And there have been college students who get all excited and they say, oh, yeah, I'm going to be like (*name*), you know, whoever, Angela, or something like that. And they say, oh, you know, I have to go to Central America and work with indigenous people who are trying to reclaim land. There's nothing against that. But it just gives you an indication . . . of what it feels like.

Bill: So then that, that leads me to ask again. What keeps you going? You say you want to win . . . if win was a room and I walked into win, what would I see on the walls, what, you know?

Ruthie: If win was a room, what would it look like. Hmm, I don't know. It'd be really *big*. And there would be people in there -

Bill: You can cut the lights on and off.

Ruthie: Right, we can cut the lights on and off, where people will be in there, you know, making, you know, decorating decisions and, you know, doing things . . . if win was a room. I have this top idea sometimes that is . . . it's about racism, it's about kind of how I came to that definition, and then some examples of what I mean. And I talked in the beginning about how . . . you know, how a project takes over your life . . . and you really can't tell any more (*unintelligible*) the

project? And, you know, my work on racism, you know, has been my life. It's what my life is. It's what motivates me. And it *will* kill me. There's no way around it – it's going to kill me. Right? Racism is going to kill me. There's not – and you know, I'm fifty seven, and when I die – whatever I die of – racism will have been a big part of it. Right?

And so I could say that I want to win to save my own life. But it's not just my life. I mean I'm, I'm old enough to know I'm going to die anyway, right? I've gotten past my youthful immortality – for good or for ill. So there's that, too, you know. If I were to leave tomorrow and move to the south of France and . . . grow plums . . . I would still die of racism. You know?

Bill: So it's like you can't not be who you are.

Ruthie: Yeah. Yeah. And that's the way, and you know, people who are lifelong activists of the sort we were talking about last night at dinner, you know, and people, people who *do* this – I say *you*, you know, people who do this – *DO* it, and it's . . . it's about *life*. Right? And so it's not about . . . *mmmm* . . . a legal fix that, you know, declares the end of X or Y. And it's not about – and as I say in the very last chapter of my book – tweaking Armageddon.

Bill: I love that phrase, that's a great phrase. And . . . the converse of tweaking Armageddon is the Coalition.

Ruthie: Yeah, it's making these formations and taking . . . taking the risk – which, you know, all experimentation is. That, you know, we'll do this political experiment . . . that might *not* work. But if it *does* work? Then we can do something else, that we haven't been able to do before. It's pulling people

together like that. To break down all the ways in which – among other things – people imagine, especially in the United States, imagine that the divisions between us are ones that we *na-tu-ral-ly re-cog-nize*, that are the remnants of *historical* . . . um, um, ah . . . segregations of various sorts, that we have been fixing over the years, rather than our sort of *new* instantiations of . . . evil that has historical roots. Right?

Which is why I wrote that definition of racism. I was thinking about it, thinking about it, thinking about it, thinking about it.

Bill: Oh, it's very (*unintelligible*).

Ruthie: Thank you. And in the context of . . .um . . . of getting myself together to give a talk on a panel with . . . this woman, young woman named Kimba Smith who did – I forget how many years now – maybe five or six years in a federal prison. She was sentenced to 20 to life on a drug charge (*unintelligible*) and was, because of very, very hard work on the part of her parents and others, was commuted – when Bill Clinton commuted a whole lot of sentences right before he, you know, his last Christmas in office? So when Linda Evans got out of prison, Kimba Smith got out of prison. Some drug kingpin got out of prison, which I'm fine with. Anyway, so Kimba got out, and she got out and already had developed what, you know, has motivated Angela Davis all these years. And Angela Davis said, I would have been convicted and executed, if people had not organized for me. I can't *not* . . . I'm *dependent* . . . on the people who saved my life. And therefore, I know they are dependent on me. And she'll tell you, if you ask her, that she's never gonna stop doing what she does, because of that . . . that

these people saved her life. And it's true. It's not just, you know, a fluke in the law that got her, you know, acquitted. Anyway, so young Kimba got out – miraculously – and is now able to raise her child and so forth, and she was on a speaking circuit, so I met her right after she got out, the spring after she got out. And a woman named Dorothy Gaines was also released under that same Bill Clinton commutation moment, who's a mother from Alabama, Birmingham. Three kids. She was given a life sentence on drugs. And so the two of them, me, Angela Davis, and this woman named Deborah Peterson Small, who has been running a project called *Years* – ah, four years, called Breaking the Chains: People of Color in the War on Drugs. Deborah's a lawyer by training . . . an activist by inclination. And so I was, you know, I'm thinking about, well what can I say on this panel that's going to be useful? I mean, the stories that are really gonna move people are Dorothy and Kimba's stories, of course. And then everybody listens whenever Angela says *anything*, so that's really good. So, you know, what can I *add* to the discussion? At any rate, you know, I got to thinking about how, you know, we're all – all of us on this panel and all of us in anti-prison work – talk about . . . because we *must* talk about prison as racist institutions. But what does that mean? And then I, and I started to think about it, and I started finally to think about how I needed to be able to say what I think racism *IS*. So it's not about – I mean there are nine individuals with bad attitudes who, you know, cause bad things to happen. You know, is *that* what racism is? Or, you know, a hundred million, you know, individuals and individually bad attitudes. And . . . and I needed to figure out a way to talk about it structurally.

Especially in the context of . . . um . . . 9/11, and the ways in which this, you know, there are all these new rounds of racialization c*o-cur-ring* in our midst – right before everybody's eyes. Everybody's wide awake. And everybody's *watching* this. And yet people already are starting to talk as though there's something called "the Arab race." *And* something called "the Muslim race." Even on that TV show, *24* . . . they talk about racially profiling a woman because she's Muslim. And I thought, this is *fascinating*, you know? That (*unintelligible*) was race.

Bill: It's a structural genocide, I think. Now, tell me if I'm meddling . . . um . . . is your passion . . . or how is your passion, or how was your passion born? Was it . . . ah . . . like, what broke your heart, or what cracked open your heart to this work?

Ruthie: Mmm, mmm, mm, that's a great question. My family . . . in a number of ways. So, you know, I was raised by activists – my father was an organizer. He died shortly before his 82nd birthday. He went to work on Tuesday, and died on Wednesday. I mean, this is . . . so there's that. *His* father, whom he didn't like but was raised, he was raised by his father, was an organizer. Right? I mean, this is family business. Or a talent or craft or . . . so there's that, so we were race people, you know, in that old fashioned sense? Race people. And when I was a little girl, they sent me out to do my race work. And because I was a little kind of scary nerd, I, you know, I did it in education. So I desegregated a school when I was little. And that (*unintelligible*) broken open my heart. To kind of my feeling of myself in the world? Because I really *was* this little nerd. So when I went off

> to go to this school, you know, it was not, I mean, it wasn't this sort of thing like the little (*unintelligible*) on television with people throwing bricks. I just went to this *school*. Except that everyone in the school *knew* I was going there to desegregate it – this was 1960 – and I kind of knew it, but I also liked learning all the stuff I learned, because it was a much better school than the school I'd been in. And so there was *that* – that both broke and opened my heart, you know, as a *little* kid. And then everything that was happening there, you know, from 1957. So from Emmett Till forward. You know, all of that was *always*, you know, big news at the dinner table, and things, those were things we talked about all the time . . . and *did* things about.

The image of Emmett Till in the open casket, beaten beyond recognition, which mobilized the Civil Rights Movement, resonates with a "lamentation choir" examined in Ruthie's book, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007). On November 29, 1991, a Los Angeles Police Department Officer shot George Noyes to death at the Imperial Courts public housing project. George, an ex-gang member, had moved to Sacramento to get out of the gang life. He had returned home for the Thanksgiving holidays. He was shot outside the homes of his mother and grandmother. The killing is still a highly controversial matter, and concerns whether George was armed, kneeling, or begging for his life. According to the LAPD, George was a gangster run amok. According to an advocacy group, he was executed by a brutal policewoman (Gilmore, p. 196). Immediately after the death, the family formed the George Noyes Justice Committee in order to persuade as many residents of Imperial Courts that the death concerned them all. The committee met in the all-purpose room at

Imperial Courts to plan ways to fight the wrongful death (Gilmore, p. 197).

Next, George Noyes' cousins, Gilbert and Jocelyn Jones, and their mother, Barbara Meredith, combed the neighborhood, starting with three area housing projects, and asked the gangs to declare a one-day truce so that all of George's family and friends could attend the funeral. The gangs agreed to the truce in the name of the grieving mothers who had lost children to violence (Gilmore, p. 198).

At the funeral, those who spoke, especially mothers, called for a rally to protest the police murder. Soon after the funeral, the local Islam leader offered the mosque as a space where gangsters could work to extend the truce. More than five hundred people attended the protest at the 108 Street Station, announcing the end of the community's passivity, vulnerability and complicity regarding police brutality (Gilmore, p. 202). Inspired by the rally, gang leaders, led by George's cousin, Gilbert, worked to continue peacemaking between the gangs.

On February 16, 1992, just after a fundraising dance for the George Noyes Justice Committee, Gilbert was arrested and charged with taking ten dollars during an armed robbery that allegedly occurred outside the dance. Despite the testimony of numerous character witnesses, including former governor Jerry Brown and Congresswoman Maxine Waters and others concerning his peacemaking efforts, the judge sentenced Gilbert to seven years (Gilmore, p. 203). In spite of numerous attempts to squelch the mounting resonance (noise to the LAPD) of the lamentation choir formed in the wake of George Noyes death, the peace and justice initiatives continue undeterred and with increasing significance and success.

In November 1992, Barbara Meredith, Gilbert's mother, founded Mothers ROC:

Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Gilmore, p. 181) in response to her son's spurious incarceration. The seed of Mothers ROC had germinated from George's death and sprouted during the year after a small group of mourners had gained a one-day truce among gang members, spawned a protest at a funeral, and inspired gang leaders to continue to work for peace. Indications are that Mothers ROC will continue and grow in significance (inquiry interview, March 2007):

> Ruthie: I think there are a number of things going on that . . . can understand through different analytical modes. One is, I don't know if you remember but in that chapter I have this discussion about identification, and I talk about characteristics and interest and purpose, right. And I propose that a sort of sense of connectedness that's based in identity of characteristics might from time to time be powerful, but it's not powerful enough, right.
>
> And interest, which is, you know, the prevailing theory of all social life today under, you know, neo-classical economics and behavioral science, proposes that somehow there is something that you want for yourself that you can't say you want for yourself, that is enough, that's sufficient for you to do something, right. But it's quite self*ish* . . . even if the self is your dog, you know, as an extension of yourself.
>
> And then there's the kind of the third category that I suggest the mothers are engaged in, and this is this identity of purpose, right? So people might be drawn in through characteristics, and drawn in through interest, but there's something larger and more dynamic going on . . . that makes it possible, for example, for [Mothers ROC] and others to fight for now thirteen years plus

> against three strikes. Even though they know that the way in which they've formulated the struggle presently isn't going to free their own child. Right?
>
> But they fight. And they say it – I know my kid's not going to get out. But I'm still going to do this. And it's not just this benevolence expressed for other kids, but rather a sense that there *is* a greater purpose that we're fighting for, and that doing this is . . . not doing this is not an option. That's what I'm trying to say, not doing this is not an option.

A 1995 brochure summarizes the mission of Mothers ROC:

> Mothers suffer a special pain when their children are incarcerated (lost to them). It was from this pain and suffering that Mothers ROC was born! We are an organization of Mothers (and others) whose children have been arrested & incarcerated. We fight against the police abuse, the false arrests & convictions and the unfair treatment throughout the Justice System. We educate ourselves and our young about the workings of the Criminal Justice System.

Mothers ROC identifies and claims solidarity with Third World activist mothers. The name evokes groups in South African, Palestinian and South American women's struggles (Gilmore, p. 184).

Of particular note for me, since my daughter, Sarah Frances, studied and witnessed them in action, is the Argentinean group, *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. They organized under the fascist military government that ruled from 1977-1983, a time when children disappeared in the night and never returned. The group was started by mothers who had lost children in the night and found one another "in waiting rooms, court rooms and the information desks of jails and detention centers." (Gilmore, p. 194)

Together, they transposed their inarticulate wailing into deep and loud lament. From their shared sorrow and suffering, they found the solidarity and strength to demand the return of their lost children and the names of the perpetrators. They met weekly in the *Plaza de Mayo* and dressed for recognition, wearing head scarves made of diapers, on which each had written or embroidered the names of the disappeared (Gilmore, p. 195).

The group continued to meet despite fierce opposition by citizens, police, military, bureaucrats and priests. They continued to meet after the fascist government fell, and after the official admission that the children who disappeared had died terrible deaths. When a re-democratized Argentina emerged, they did not return to hearth and home but expanded their political horizons (Gilmore, p. 195).

Mothers ROC, *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* and their sister assemblies have transformed the passion of individual grief into the politics of collective opposition. Through their passion, and Ruthie's as well, I have come to understand better the seminal essay of Audre Lorde, *The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (1984, pp. 53-59), which I have read and reread. Lorde writes of the "deepest and nonrational knowledge of the feminine," (p. 53) the erotic, which male models of power have sought to domesticate by superficially relocating it to the sexual/genital act, afraid of its political/liberative power.

The Rwandan Genocide Class at Bates College

During the winter semester 2007, Alexandre Dauge-Roth taught an advanced French course at Bates College titled "Documenting the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda." The course was a venue for students to study the genocide and witness its traumatizing legacy on young adults, now students, who are mostly orphans, who lost

most or all of their family members during the genocide. As part of the course, and to provide a broader context and deeper meaning to the other requirements of the course, readings and viewings of documentary film, the Bates students were required to have an email exchange, a dialogue, with the Rwandan students. The students then presented the voices of the Rwandan students as a testimonial performance for the Bates College and Lewiston communities: *Voices from Rwanda*[10]. The students selected quotes from their correspondents' testimonies, and they edited each other's selections—though not the students' words—and translated them into English for a forty-five minute public reading. They organized their quotes around eight themes: *April 6, Before the Genocide, The Importance of Testifying, Living Together, My Family, Try to Imagine, Try to Imagine…Today,* and *Our Words*. The students dressed in black and encircled the audience. The room was dark. The only light sources were placed on the ground and were aimed up at the students reading the excerpts. The lights cast a shadow of the students on the ceiling. While an excerpt was read, a Power Point projector showed a portrait and the name of the Rwandan student from whom the public was hearing.

The testimonial performance was spellbinding. The students received a long and hearty standing ovation. The audience asked many questions and gave their own testimony to the power of the performance. Many people stayed around after the event for at least an hour, and talked with the students. What follows are excerpts from two of the eight testimonial performance themes.

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[10] *Voices of Rwanda* meets the three criteria, outlined by my colleague Alexandre Dauge-Roth, of what is referred to in the Rwandan remembering events as *commemoration*. 1. Commemoration allows the survivors and/or their representatives to hear themselves, in the retelling, again as if for the first time. Hence, remembering is restorative and liberative for them. 2. Commemoration requires another and other witnesses, listeners who stand to be changed by the testimony. 3. Commemoration is an act of resistance. The testimonial relation resists the post-killing genocide strategy of forgetting and moving on from the past. Commemoration, then, is about the present rather than the past.

Try to Imagine (excerpts from the Rwandan students' testimonies):

Excerpt One: I saw Tutsis who stayed at the border so to be killed; I saw countless women and young girls raped, even in the street. Many people who were dead along the road... were being eaten by birds and dogs. I saw how the French military refused to save the lives of those [Tutsis] who were in mortal danger, and favored the Hutu. That which will always haunt me is the death of small children and the brutality of men during this period when all that is good was replaced by bestiality.

Excerpt Two: They started with pregnant women. They would take a pregnant woman, put her on all fours and undress her. One took one leg, another took the other leg, and two took her arms. The fifth cut her stomach with his machete, removing the fetus and feeding it to the dogs on the side of the road. And we were there to watch. My mother also was pregnant.

Excerpt Three: I left alone without anything or anywhere to go. I was only 13 years old but I spent almost 3 weeks in the brush alone without having anything to eat.

Excerpt Four: They found my mom and my sister and they took them.., they went to kill them in... a recreation center where people used to meet and drink and play. Before killing them I heard that they first raped them and then they killed them using bullets.... They were lucky to be shot. Normally the Interahamwe used clubs, machetes, knives and hatchets for killing Tutsis. They told me that my young sister, she was 12 only, was also violated and raped by Interahamwe. That was the worst day. I tried to cry but I couldn't.

Excerpt Five: When I was hiding, I didn't eat. Even when I could find something to eat or to drink, I didn't take it because I didn't have any hope of living.

Excerpt Six: Before they raped and killed my mother and my brother before my own eyes, the killers also played with my life. They took flour and hot peppers... they put it in all my body parts, everywhere where I could suffer—in the mouth, in the ears, on the skin, in the eyes, without forgetting my vagina... They told me that my death will be long to come and they left me next to the bodies of my family. [After the genocide], we had to leave and go to "zone turquoise." To get there we had to walk more than 200 km with the same group who wanted to kill us during the genocide. My sisters and I, we had to lie and say that we were not Tutsis—lying to save ourselves. And never say that you weren't with your parents because that would imply that your parents were dead, and they would immediately confirm that you were a Tutsi.

Excerpt Seven: All of the members of my family were killed in a very bad way. Papa's legs were cut off and he was buried alive. Mama also was buried alive, she was with her little brother, my uncle, he and his grandmother were also buried alive. I also had a sister who fled to Kenya, I didn't know that she was still alive; she came back to our country towards the end of 1995. Concerning my living sister, she is still in Rwanda, has a job and is a student at the Superior Institute of Teaching of Gitwe. Although I feel alone, I continue my life so that my family won't be forgotten. My job is to represent my family.

I cannot imagine reading these unadulterated excerpts alone without

experiencing anything more than numbness, despair and anger: inarticulate wailing. The testimonial performance of the students (and, for them, the preparation of the testimonial performance and class participation) allowed them and us, the audience, to witness the testimonies with a sense of awe, gratitude, inspiration, and a new commitment to insure that the world "never forgets."

Our Words (what the students had to say about their experience as witnesses):

> Excerpt One: In learning about the different ways to document the Rwandan genocide, I have discovered the difference between pity and compassion. Feeling pity can be a detrimental approach whereas compassion provokes one to create social change. Having a link with a real person in Rwanda who went through this experience was what truly cemented this mind-set for me.
>
> Excerpt Two: The only true way to study the past is to find the voice of those who lived it and our class had that wonderful opportunity with our correspondences in Rwanda. Through their writings we were given an extremely personal and valuable insight into how genocide, something the world promised would never happen again, did occur. As a Bates student I can barely, if at all, relate to the terror that ravaged this small African country in 1994. That said, we must realize how important it is for us to listen to these survivors, learn from their nightmare and realize the power we have to make genocide a relic of the past.
>
> Excerpt Three: Genocide is not a revolutionary war or a tribal local war that involves only local people—it is not about "uncivilized people" fighting against each other for power or something else. Rather, it is deeper than that, and as it is seen in the German, Cambodian, Rwandan, and other cases, genocide is a

global moral challenging issue that the whole world should fight against. That is why in my own case, I continue to testify amongst my friends and milieu so that people should be involved in any means so that something like this won't happen ever again.

Excerpt Four: The UN and the French evacuated everyone with white skin, with a foreign "status." We evacuated pets: dogs and cats protected and escorted by military guard. And yet we left children, women, elderly, youth, men, teachers, doctors, farmers, families to die. Everyone with black skin, any Rwandan, those we consider "them" not "us": abandoned despite their desperate pleas, despite the fact that as it pulled out with those people and possessions we considered worth saving, the UN convoy passed the Interahamwe with their machetes waiting to massacre the innocent. I didn't realize the extent of Western racism, whether or not it's conscious, until I saw these images. We denied their humanity when we took our dogs and left their children. My reaction is to reevaluate my culture, my whiteness, and whether or not I too have learned to be subconsciously racist. It amazes me that, throughout my life, I have never learned about this horrible atrocity and I am disappointed that it is not regularly spoken of. After hearing the testimonies and watching the films, I feel a connection to Rwanda and its people and I know that I will never again live a day without thoughts of them.

Excerpt Five: My correspondent was Jean-Jacques. When he said "because you have become my friend, I want to tell you my story," it was as though I was directly affected. Someone that I cared about came face to face with hatred and

suffered immense losses. He is suffering even now, trying to deal with the return of those who killed his friends and family. He is struggling against hate, while immersed in sorrow. I feel now that I carry a bit of this weight on my shoulders. Carrying this bit of weight is my gift to my friend.

The student evaluations further demonstrate the transformative power of testimonial relation. They reflect how testimonial relation is an agent of change:

Student One: I have been fully integrated into the subject matter, shown by first hand example and emotional connections the ways in which I can make a difference. I have found that part within me that wants to make a difference.

Student Two: This was one of the best courses I have taken at Bates. It was much more than an academic course; it was a life-changing experience.

Student Three: I hope that this course remains available to future French students. I think it is important to offer courses that go beyond French grammar and literature and open our eyes to ways in which we can use our education to make change.

Student Four: This was an amazing course that had a great impact on us as students and potentially the world outside Bates as well. Our professor's enthusiasm and personal passion for the subject is inspiring. The opportunities this course provided us are beyond words.

Student Five: The instructor did an excellent job in helping us understand the sheer intimacy of genocide through concrete means such as correspondence and the conference as a final reflection. Genocide is a world-wide issue that concerns all of humanity, and such a serious and large social issue requires

alternative teaching methods to distribute the knowledge in a way that allows the students to internalize it and then use it.

The transformative experience of the students led to concrete action. Students from the class went on to start a new student club at Bates College, Students for Peace in Rwanda. Students in the club developed a plan to help support a home for street children in Rwanda and presented the plan as a grant to the 100 Projects for Peace program sponsored by philanthropist Kathryn Wasserman Davis. They were awarded a $10,000 grant. The group focused on Gitagata Rehabilitation Center, a state facility for street children in Bugasera. Five members spent several weeks at the Center in the summer of 2007, and the members who were not graduating seniors launched a series of activities at Bates last autumn to raise money for and awareness about Gitagata. One of the more productive activities was the production of greeting cards from the art work the students did with the street children during the summer visit. The greeting cards are sold to the public and the profits returned to Gitagata. The cards are in great demand.

Concluding Thoughts

Shared sorrow—as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Mothers ROC, American and Rwandan students participating in *Voices from Rwanda* verify—breeds collective opposition against evil and for the good. Lamentational ***relation*** stimulates prophetic witness.
I embolden and italicize relation, now, near the end of the dissertation, because of the place relation recently has taken in my psychotheological "home." For most of my thirty years as a pastor, priest and prophetic witness, relation represented a more shrouded and less articulated, though always engaging and arresting, thread weaving through the fabric of my ministry. Before my embrace of postmodern ideas and practices, I did not have a

language and, therefore, the wherewithal and confidence to accentuate relation as I do now.

More specifically, I am better able to understand, articulate and promulgate what I once shared, but could not define, in a doctoral seminar with Charles Gerkin at Emory twenty-three years ago. After we read and talked at great length about *agape* as ***the*** Christian virtue, love as unconditional positive regard, I said something about *eros*, about love as desire for connection, that such love seems to have a place in the discourse on sanctification. I tentatively suggested that the desire for relation, *eros*, trumps the imperative to selflessly love, *agape*. Gerkin simply said, "No, it doesn't." I could not muster an intelligible reply. I wish I could respond now, God rest his soul.[11]

My half-languaged inkling was a generative gift, which I must give credit to Professor Gerkin for arousing through dialogue. Relying on Harry Goolishian's remark, "I often do not know what I am going to say until I say it," and Tom Andersen's observation, "When one speaks aloud, one tells something to both others and oneself," I am able to say that an idea was born in discourse rather than retrieved from my inner arsenal for debate. My words to Professor Gerkin conveyed new knowledge, at least to me, even if the conveyance of my new knowledge has unfolded over almost a quarter of a century. This dissertation, in some ways, is the recorded history of that conveyance.

The final question of this writing project is before us. How might the conveyance of *eros* over *agape*, the privileging of an ethic of relation over a moral imperative "to do

[11] Recently, while on silent retreat at a monastery in the New Mexico desert, I discovered the following passage, by Thomas Merton, Catholic mystic, about Karl Barth, renowned Protestant theologian, written almost two decades before my half-languaged inkling: "Each day, for years, Barth played Mozart every morning before going to work on his dogma: unconsciously seeking to awaken, perhaps, the hidden sophianic Mozart in himself, the central wisdom that comes in tune with the divine and cosmic music and is saved by love, yes even by *eros*. While the other, theological self, seemingly more concerned with love, grasps at a more stern, more cerebral *agape*: a love that, after all, is not in our own heart but *only in God* and revealed only to our head." (Merton, 1966, p. 11)

justice and walk humbly with your God," (a paraphrase of Micah 6:8) be construed as a rudiment of a new ecclesiology?

Chapter 10

TOWARDS A NASCENT ECCLESIOLOGY OF LAMENT

"Where does the pain go when the pain goes away?"

Dr. Gloria Joseph (Lorde, p. 145)

The aim of my final chapter is to weave the foundations and practices of a pastoral psychology of lament, the material of the previous nine chapters, into an approach to congregational life in which the pain does not go away. The design, in which our mutual woes are shared and our sorrow songs[12] sung in resonant harmony, privileges *eros* over *agape*. The design reflects my belief that the passion for and embrace of God, the *Event* of right relation, is stronger than the imperative to be God-like. I write with my friend in mind, who asked the question at the beginning of the dissertation: "Bill, is this something akin to God?" I write towards the goal of tracing a shape for community in which she would feel safe, engaged and related enough to give religion another try.

My first task is to present the more *agape*-infused manner in which I experience mainline congregations acquiring and creating knowledge about suffering. I call this epistemology a hierarchy of pain. My second task is to present a more *eros*-infused means for knowing suffering. I construct this epistemology from the work of Patricia Hill Collins, a Black feminist sociologist, who has examined the Black experience through the lens of the Black church. I close the chapter with a metaphor that captures what I feel to be the soul of the dissertation, a condensation, a nugget for readers to carry with them.

[12] W. E. B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903, p. 252) wrote about the "weird" spirituals he heard at church as a young boy, songs handed down from the days of slavery, songs that "stirred him strangely," (p. 252) songs that he came to know "as of me and mine." (p. 252) He believed that these songs built the church. The songs were "bricks red with the blood and dust of toil (p. 252)." For him they echoed faith, beauty, hope, joy and peace in the "God of Right." (p. 163)

The Hierarchy of Pain

In mainline congregations of the Judeo-Christian heritage, the dominant epistemology of suffering is what I call a hierarchy of pain. The hierarchy of pain constructs difference and distance between sufferers and creates categories of suffering as well. A hierarchy of pain would look something like this. From one to five, one being the most painful, five the least: 1. Esperance and the survivors of the genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus; 2. A young Black man in the Imperial Courts housing project, Los Angeles; 3. A street person in Boston; 4. Andrea; 5. Possibly a tie between Elizabeth Cochran and myself. The converse of a hierarchy of pain is a hierarchy of privilege, in which case the above order would be reversed. Either hierarchy is a construction of difference and distance.

In the congregational setting, this epistemology of suffering, the way congregations know suffering, is something like tossing a pebble in the pond. The congregation is the pebble. The congregation tosses itself into the pond of a broken world for a variety of reasons: narratives of compassion and justice running through the biblical texts, especially the texts of the lectionaries; directives or encouragement from the denominational offices; the moral scruples of the congregants and congregations; the persuasions of the clergy and lay leadership; and the moralities of the confessions or positions of the faith traditions to which the congregants and congregations belong. Concentric circles fan out.

The nearest circle is the place where the most difference can be made, for example, a support group for the unemployed members of the congregation. The farthest circle is the realm of what I earlier talked about as the obscene, the condition that is too

hard to see or think about, obscured by reason of its grotesqueness, the improbability of being able to make a difference, or, the guilt the condition delivers.

Concerning the farthest circle, I remember a front cover of the December 1980 issue of *The Lutheran*, the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. At the center of the cover was a shiny red Christmas ornament. The reflection in the center of the ornament was a starving mother and infant, a Third World Madonna and Child. Many readers found the cover offensive, exampled by "letters to the editor," which read something like this: "Can't we even enjoy one day, the birth of Jesus Christ, without feeling ashamed to come to the dinner table!" The circles in between manifest characteristics of the extremes, depending on where the particular circle is located in relation to the two extremes.

A hierarchy of pain is not wrong or bad. As mentioned above, it constructs difference and distance between sufferers. Though real to those who construct it, the construction does not work well in terms of creating *relation to and between sufferers that inspires action and brings about change*. The epistemology is constructed from an "ought-ness," a privileging of *agape* over *eros,* which coerces more than inspires response. Coercive response does not have the octane to bridge the difference and distance the construction creates; hence, a double bind. Furthermore, the construction, with the congregation as a safer, warmer, dryer pebble dropped into a more dangerous, colder and wet environment, assumes that the lives of the congregants and congregations are less painful, not in need of respectful curiosity and attention. Hence, Dr. Joseph's curious question: "Where does the pain go when the pain goes away?"

In the remaining pages, I will seek to construct the beginning of an ecclesiology

of lament, an approach to ministry, which establishes a more effective means to create *relation to and between sufferers that inspires action and brings about change*. I draw heavily on the Black experience, especially the Black church experience—the dynamic inside the run down clapboard church building on the dusty or muddy road, depending on the weather, during the early 1960's, on the outskirts of Albany, Georgia, the congregation to which our domestic worker, Sarah, belonged.

An Epistemology for Mainline Congregations

Patricia Hill Collins, a U.S. Black feminist sociologist, proposes an epistemology—an Afrocentric feminist epistemology—which she discusses in her 1990 book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990, pp. 201-220). In the second edition (2000, pp. 251-271), Collins revised the chapter to reflect a particularly U.S. Black feminist epistemology. The revised edition provides a framework within which I consider an epistemology for mainline congregations. I trust that the epistemological material I place in the frame will help mainline religion get in better step with Flannery O'Connor's "horde of souls rumbling towards heaven," and, as Carlyle Marney imagined, a little farther along the way, say from Tilburg to Paris. I draw on four themes of her epistemology, which she derived primarily from the Black church during and before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's: lived experience; the use of dialogue; individual uniqueness and expressiveness; and, emotion and intellect.

Theme One: Lived Experience

Godly Play is a vastly popular children's education curriculum, widely used across the denominational spectrum of the Christian church in the United States and

beyond since 1972. Designed by Jerome Berryman, an Episcopal priest in Houston, Texas, "*Godly Play* teaches children the art of using religious language—parable, sacred story, silence and liturgical action—helping them become more fully aware of the mystery of God's presence in their lives." (The Center for the Theology of Childhood) The "major text" of the curriculum is a sand box. Children co-create, with figures and objects, parables and biblical stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The children and adult teachers reflect together—bear witness to their experience—during and after their creation.

Skeptics of *Godly Play* have acknowledged fear that children might not learn the facts and morals of the biblical canon through such "play." The fear has evaporated in the face of the children's remarkable attention to, curiosity about and engagement with the narratives of the faith. My four-year-old granddaughter, Sarah Grace, cannot wait to go to Sunday school, an experience I dreaded as a child.

The rudiments of *Godly Play* have not made it "upstairs," where the parents learn. Again, the wisdom of the children is overlooked. We assume the children are doing "warm-ups," getting ready to learn the adult way. I remember in my early hospice days thinking that children were not "old enough" to stay in the room when the hospice team members would talk about their grandparents, parents or siblings dying. I quickly learned that the children had much to teach the adults about dying, and were more willing and less afraid to talk about dying.

The fundamentals of *Godly Play* hold great possibility for "grown ups." Sharing in community the parables and sacred stories of our lives, experiencing the silences within and among those who participate, is a liturgical dance that conjures up the mystery

of God. We need not analyze our lived experience for their truths, like panning for gold. Telling is enough, the principal criterion for making truth, for creating new knowledge. Nor do we need, for the sake of lamentational discourse, to create special space for and define more narrowly the texts of our lived experience. We do not need to single out the narratives of sorrow and suffering. Our sorrow and suffering are interwoven into our lived experience as threads that disappear in the gestalt of a beautiful quilt. Not only is it difficult to find the clear margins of our sorrows and suffering, extracting our woes "for the occasion" turns them into narrative cadavers. We do not need to have a special session or series on "sharing our losses." Lament arises from the ordinary, mundane and regular unfolding of our lived experience in conversational partnerships. Lamentational community is that which we are rather than that which we do. St. Paul's church in Brunswick is a lamentational community, not because they have many programs about grief; rather, they have many ways and times to talk together.

The Black experience is wise to the godly play of narrating in community the lived experience of our daily lives. The Black church has been engaged in godly play "upstairs" for a long, long time. When making and assessing knowledge claims, the Black church is most likely to tell stories (Collins, pp. 257-259). Hannah Nelson writes:

> Our speech is most directly personal, and every black person assumes that every other black person has a right to a personal opinion. In speaking of grave matters, your personal experience is considered very good evidence. With us, distant statistics are certainly not as important as the actual experience of a sober person (Gwaltney, 1980, p. 7).

Ruth Shays says,

> I am the kind of person who doesn't have a lot of education, but my mother and father had good common sense. Now, I think that's all you need. I might not know how to use thirty-four words where three will do, but that does not mean that I don't know what I am talking about. I know what I'm talking about because I'm talking about myself. I'm talking about what I have lived (Collins, pp. 27, 33).

Sojourner Truth shared her knowledge of the category, woman, with these words: "Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?" (Loewenberg and Bogin, 1976, p. 235)

Mainline congregations are working hard to hold onto their constituencies and replace those who have left. At the same time, research indicates that God is still around in the societal ethos. God does not seem to be going away nearly as fast as church members. The church's response mostly is to find the right programs or a new pastor to compete with the golf courses, pilates classes and soccer tournaments. A wiser plan is to create anew or afresh what the Black church experience is—spaces for people to complete the sentences of their tired, curious, wailing, hurting, desiring, lamentable hearts for the knowledge their hearts both seek and have. Church then becomes good home, strong sisterhood, extended family in a way that the local gym cannot.

Because mainline congregations have lost a good portion of their touch and edge in prospering meaning through lived experience, the witnessing process, as presented in Chapter 7, is a good way to retrieve it. The witnessing process is a malleable method, easily adjustable to many contexts.

An initial offering might be a process for "getting to know" newer visitors and

older members. For instance, “Paths to St. John’s” might be a six-part series offered on Sunday morning. During the first session, a member of the congregation might be interviewed about the path that led her to the congregation. The questions would be less about “How did you find out about us?” and more about the nature of her spiritual quest. A good initial question would be, “What would you like us to know about your spiritual journey?” If that question is too big, “What is your first memory of church? Where was it? Who was with you?” After about twenty minutes, a witnessing team of three to five people reflect on what they heard, where they were touched, what they were curious about, how was the story similar to their stories, what new knowledge did they acquire in listening, what questions would they have liked to ask. After about ten minutes, the interviewee and interviewer are offered a chance to briefly respond. After their responses, the conversation is opened up to all participants. The process opens space that is less cluttered with information and facts and more adorned with new knowledge about “doing life,” going on together. An initial series like this creates desire for more conversations in different contexts—a reading group, bible study—for completing sentences of the heart.

Theme Two: The Use of Dialogue

Mainline congregations huddle around “knowers,” pastors and people who know more about God and God’s business and dispense knowledge in a variety of more monologic ways. At Emmanuel, the unwritten and sometimes spoken expectation was that the rector needed to be a solid “knower,” who offered especially good sermons in order not to be overshadowed by the weekly Bach cantata. The church was afraid that if the homilist were not good enough, the music program would dominate worship. The congregation talked about the cantata and sermon as “the two pillars of worship.” The

message under the message was that I was to be a performative artist before an audience, and hopefully a damn good one. My sense was that as good as worship might have been at Emmanuel, unless I added a third pillar, a pillar of dialogic relation, the congregation would be anemic, subject to dis-ease and decline.

In the Black community, knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of the community (Collins, p. 260). As bell hooks writes, "Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination (1989, p. 131)."

In the Black church, there is a call and response mode that permeates congregational life. The call and response dynamic is not suspended in worship or at the time of the sermon. For instance, the preacher inevitably will engage the congregation in dialogue, as evidenced by the title of the newest book of Teresa L. Fry Brown, professor of preaching at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia: *Can the Sistah Get a Little Help?* (2008) Congregational discourse is composed of "spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements or 'calls' are punctuated by expressions, or 'responses,' from the listener." (Collins, p. 261) All people present are expected to participate in this interactive network (Collins, p. 261). To refuse to join in is seen as "cheating." (Kochman, 1981, p. 28)

Dialogue as practiced in the Black church is fundamental to an ecclesiology of lament in mainline congregations. Through the call and response mode, inarticulate wailing is transposed into lamentational song. The role of the pastor is to ensure that the mode of call and response operates across congregation life, and to ensure that the

conversations remain dialogic. The pastor ensures that the conversations do not digress into monologic debate. To debate is to defend. To dialogue is to depend. The dialogic atmosphere creates a sense of safety, which invites an openness in which congregants, over time, bring into discourse more matters of the heart, less matters of the head.

The more the dialogic spirit pervades the congregation, the better able the congregation is to talk about awkward and controversial matters such as war, sexuality and politics in a manner that opens space for new and co-created knowledge, as opposed to the expression of differing opinions. That the congregational atmosphere should be one in which everyone has her say, which often is the benchmark, is not enough.

I encourage pastors and pastoral leadership of mainline congregations, as stewards of the congregation's dialogic spirit, to learn and practice the nine elements of a pastoral psychology of lament presented in Chapter 2. I do believe familiarity and experience with these principles will begin to shape in the pastoral leadership a theology that stands on dialogue.

Theme Three: Individual Uniqueness and Expressiveness

The Black church experience places emphasis on individual uniqueness and expressiveness (Collins, p. 263). That the Black church experience views nonparticipation in the call and response mode as cheating conveys that each dialogic partner is valued and respected for the inimitable gift that she is and brings to the conversation. Black people-in-relation reflect the Black quilting tradition: "Black women quilters place strong color and patterns next to each other and see the individual differences not as distracting from each piece but as enriching the whole quilt." (Collins, p. 263)

The emphasis on individual uniqueness and expressiveness comes to life in one of my favorite coffee table books, *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats* (Cunningham and Marberry, 2000). The photographic essay communicates the unique beauty and pride each person expresses in the selection, decoration and wearing of the hat to church. Felecia McMillan says, "We just know inside that we're queens. And these are the crowns we wear." (p. 184) In a sense, the hat will not allow her "to cheat." It is a discursive utterance. Such expressiveness is in contrast to the desire to blend and fit in that is obvious when one scans the pews of mainline congregations.

The pastor and pastoral leadership, through curiosity about the unique gift that each person brings to the conversation, privilege the postmodern commitment to alterity, which is basic to dialogic relation. Alterity demands that conversational partners cannot presume to know the other as similar. The other remains the other, and in her sacred otherness, brings, as Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard suggested, unexpected "news," "a message in the bottle," (Percy, 2000) instead of predictable "knowledge." Whereas we may seek knowledge, news finds us. As mentioned earlier, in respect to the work of Levinas, the Other interprets us. Again, the privileging of alterity is a challenge for mainline congregations because there is the attempt to fit in rather than stand out.

I am mindful of the gift of alterity offered to Emmanuel Church through the presence of the women of Safe Haven. The women lived downstairs as the others. The uniform parish of white, liberal, middle-class people, who loved classical music, knew *them* as a homogeneous community of homeless women from the neighborhood. Over time, the women made their way upstairs and broke through our thin description of *them*.

They became Sharon, Rose, Linda and Betty, to name a few, each in her uniqueness. Each became the Other, bearing sacred news from a foreign shore.

A colleague tells a similar story. Her historic parish in Washington, D.C., when at worship, ropes off a section in the rear of the sanctuary for visitors, tourists who come to see what is inside and homeless people from outside desiring respite from the cold or heat. During the sharing of the peace, the rope is removed and parishioners and guests intermingle for a few minutes. My colleague remarks that this is the most beautiful moment of the mass, both to the eye and heart.

The challenge for mainline congregations is not so much to *reach out* to others. Rather, we place ourselves in positions of being comprehended by the Other through opening our heavy and thick doors of sameness in a spirit of curiosity about, respect for, and attention to, as Abraham and Sarah learned, angels unaware.

Theme Four: Emotion and Intellect

The Black church experience marks the emotions of dialogic partners as appropriate and crucial. Emotions communicate that the person believes what she says. Conviction about what one says is as important as what one says. In the mode of call and response, participants are embodied in the utterances they offer. One does not respond unless one is moved.

Historians C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (1990, p. 5), write that W. E. B. Du Bois, the father of the Civil Rights Movement, in describing the key religious elements of the Black church in the South, noted “the preacher, the music, and the frenzy.” Lincoln and Mamiya continue:

> For this examination of the black sacred cosmos, the deciphering of the frenzy is especially important. Like most visitors to black worship services, Du Bois was referring to the intense enthusiasm and open display of emotions and feelings exhibited by the worshippers. Some worshippers "got the Spirit" and were propelled into a paroxysm of shouting. While others "fell out" and rolled on the floor in a shaking, trance-like state, possessed by the Holy Ghost. Some people stood up in the pews and waved their hands over their heads, while others clapped their hands in time with the music. Even in the midst of preaching, the worshippers carried on a dialogue with the preacher by shouting approval and agreement with ejaculations like "Amen!" or "Preach it!" or "Tell it like it is!" At other times they encouraged the preacher to work harder to reach that precipitating point of cathartic climax by calling out, "Well?" "Well?" The highlight of the service was to worship and glorify God by achieving the experience of mass catharsis; a purifying explosion of emotions that eclipses the harshness of reality for a season and leaves both the preacher and the congregation drained in a moment of spiritual ecstasy. Failure to achieve this experience often resulted in polite compliments of "good talk"[13] or "good lecture," and not the ultimate, "You *preached* today!" being offered the preacher (pp. 5-6).

In light of the passage above, and to signify its importance, I must make a key distinction between spilling and sharing emotion, a relational distinction illuminated by two "heroes" of the family therapy movement. Lynn Hoffman writes about

[13] I was the recipient of such politeness after offering a sermon in a Black church in rural Moore County, North Carolina.

> the theory of emotions underlying so much popular psychology. This view holds that we have to "get out" anger, "vent" frustration, "work through" grief. If you can get an angry person to weep or a depressed person to put their sadness in words, the idea is that their suffering will dissipate. But a relational theory of emotion sees the expression of feeling as something different; a reverberation that has the power to touch and often change (2002, p.256).

Hoffman refers to Michael White's description of catharsis:

> White (2000) has revived the Greek notion of *Katharsis*. He suggests that the original meaning of this term has less to do with purgation and more to do with moving people collectively from one place to another in an experience of transformation. I couldn't agree more (Hoffman, 2002, p. 256).

The Black church experience of *Katharsis* is illustrative of the power of community-based impassioned expression. Emotion suspends for a while the sorrows and suffering of everyday life and transforms the sorrowful and suffering into a relatedness that "touches and changes," a relatedness that reveals the faint contour and desperately desired fulfillment of "The Beloved Community." *Katharsis* gives birth to the "Yes, Yes, Come, Come!" which is the voice of transreligious faithfulness.

The power of emotion is mostly lost on mainline religious experience because of a binary operative in mainline congregations. White church separates emotion from intellect (Collins, p. 263). The incarnation of the whole self in the call and response mode is daunting for us who are inclined and invested in containing ourselves for appearance's sake. An allegiance to "rampant, anarchic, economic individualism" means that we must remain intact, defended and distinguishable selves. When we do emote, often it is in the

service of what Lynn Hoffman mentions above, purging and moving on. Mainline religion, in fact, provides mechanisms and contexts for such purgation. We have groups and retreats to emote and release in the service of reducing the stress of life both devoted and in bondage to "RAEI." When we witness or get near embodied passion in the service of relinquishing the hold "RAEI" has on us and our society, we are unnerved. Our discomfort with and fear of the emotion-packed process of call and response is evidenced by our response to the internet videos of the ex-pastor of presidential candidate Barack Obama, Jeremiah Wright, while preaching in his Chicago congregation. What we saw as dangerous anger, the congregation experienced as testimonial relation.

The way through and beyond the binary of emotion and intellect in mainline religion is radically relational. We must create opportunities for testimonial relation and steward them carefully, so that our communities can move slowly and safely into conversational partnerships in which the myriad of voices in and between us are articulated. Through such engagement, we will move from inarticulate wailing towards lament in joyful solidarity for a broken world. In other words, we need to talk, often and well. When and as we create and sustain these dialogic environments, the binary of emotion and intellect will dissolve. We will look to find the binary to heal it, and we will have lost it; it will have disappeared without any coercion on our part.

In bringing this dissertation to completion, I underline my belief that by borrowing from the Black church experience, and accommodating and customizing its epistemology of lived experience, dialogue, personal expression and communal emotion, we will return to the fundamental Judeo-Christian narrative of *grief gone public*. We will promulgate a politics of tears. Church, our churches, will sing *sorrow songs*, contagiously

joyful, ironic and infectious to outsiders, whose ears turn toward the sound, melodies that will shake the rafters of mainline religion.

A Metaphor as *Collect*

In the liturgy of many Christian denominations, there is a prayer known as *The Collect*. The purpose of this prayer is to gather up the spirit of the particular day on the liturgical calendar, a nugget that worshippers can take with them to ponder and pray throughout the coming week. I offer a closing metaphor as *Collect*, an image that might express the beginning of an ecclesiology of lament, an image that might transfer the image of the pebble in the pond to the congregational archives, an image that might displace an epistemology of difference and distance with an epistemology of relation.

For the last month, I have been writing most hours of the day from a second floor room of our farmhouse. My desk is centered in front of two large windows. I have a big computer monitor on my desk. In order to see the gardens and fields outside, I must look off to the right of the monitor. When I do, I see two Adirondack chairs, painted bright purple, placed on either side of a small, stone outcropping, placed under three trees, a tall birch tree flanked by smaller ash trees. Behind the chairs is a garden of orange day lilies and lavender mallow bushes. Bo the Beagle and Squints, our cat for nineteen years, are buried in the garden. The chairs are placed so perfectly in relation to one another (How did that happen?) that I can almost hear them talking slowly, deeply, quizzically, earnestly with one another. As I look at the scene now, Bakhtin's words come to mind: "Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence."

I believe this one-sentence prayer, mantra or intention, when and as it is integrated into congregational life, stands against and helps to overcome the primary

illness of mainline religion, “rampant anarchic economic individualism.” From the prayer a metamorphosis begins to transpire. *Homo economicus* turns gingerly toward neighbor in the spirit of *homo insufficiens*. Grace happens.

I believe that daily stewardship of this grace by the church for the world, one relational moment at a time, one relational moment after another, is a considerable and necessary transreligious contribution to the ongoing redemption of history. My particular prayer is that this dissertation is a faint summons to and a fledgling means for the church to quicken and enhance its contribution. For “we live our lives looking for that golden thread we can follow to the next clearing of light. It is momentary. We are caught in the recognition that we are not alone but belong to a quivering web of faith.” (Williams, p. 383)

CLOSING SUMMARY

“Testimony”

This microphone
with its cable coiling around it,
bows to me.
I walk up to it,
open my eyes
open
my book
open
my mouth.
That’s right, I open my mouth wide
and begin my story.
They say
I speak too softly,
that I am practically mumbling,
that they can’t hear
the screams piercing.
I open
my memory
like a rotten cantaloupe.

They say
I have not managed
to forcefully convey the pitiless rage
of the cattle prod.
They say that in matters such as this
nothing must be left
open
to the imagination or to doubt.
I take out
the Amnesty report
and begin speaking through that ink.
I urge: “Read.”
I, in my turn, coil around
my bowing accomplice,
this microphone.
I urge action as a prescription,
information as an infallible antidote
and, once every knot is untied,
I recite my verses.
I resist. I am whole.

Alicia Partnoy (2009, March 12)

I believe it is fitting to conclude my dissertation with a story. The story summarizes the key themes of a pastoral psychology of lament.

Yesterday's *New York Times* (October 18, 2008) featured a front-page story, by Jeffrey Gettleman, titled "Rape Victims' Words Help Jolt Congo into Change." The first line of the article, a quote of rape victim, Honorata Kizende, reads: "There was no dinner," she said. "It was me who was for dinner."

The Congo is starting to address "its horrific rape problem, which United Nations officials have called the worst sexual violence in the world." (Gettleman, p. 1) The impetus for the beginning of justice has been the awakening voices of the victims. Women are finding one another, and through the community they are making, discover, after years of silence and shame, the strength to tell their stories, in public venues, to a horrified world. *Wailing is being transposed into lament.*

One woman, Claudine Mwabachizi, testified at an event about being gang raped by bandits, and witnessing a pregnant woman being disemboweled in front of her. She said that women have kept these secrets to themselves. She says that she is now going public to free her sisters. *Lament builds solidarity.*

After the event, Ms. Mwabachizi shared that she was exhausted, but added, "I feel strong." She was handed a shawl with a message that said, "I have survived. I can do anything." *Solidarity vivifies the weary.*

In the city of Bukava, a center is being established by and for women to receive counseling, to learn leadership skills and self-defense. The women of the center plan to recruit and train an "army" to put an end to the ongoing wars in the Congo. They believe

that war, in general, is not good for the country, and, more particularly, enhances the climate for sexual violence. The center is named “The City of Joy.” *Vivified sufferers experience and live out a mysterious, ironic joy.*

The world is responding. The American Bar Association has established a legal clinic to help rape victims bring their cases to court. European aid agencies are sending huge amounts of money to help build new courthouses for trials and prisons for perpetrators. *Joy among sufferers is contagious to those who witness it. Joy is an infection that spreads a desire and demand for justice.*

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Appendix

List of Inquiry Interviews

1. Anchorage Peer Supervision Group
2. Andrea
3. Bates Office Professionals Network
4. Elizabeth Cochran
5. Katie Conklin and Ann Mueller
6. Nashani Frazier
7. Ruth Wilson Gilmore
8. Glenda Hope
9. Ruby Sales
10. Cleveland Sellers
11. Dylan Thomas
12. Esperance Uwambyeyi and Alexandre Dauge-Roth