

Pastoral Care of Abused People

Dr. John W. Kleinig
Luther Seminary – Adelaide, Australia

As for pastoral care of people who have been abused, I believe that the best way of dealing with them is outlined in the psalms of individual lament. They presuppose that shame from and at abuse is to be distinguished from guilt from sin. It is instructive that there are dozens of these psalms, while there are only, at the most, 7 penitential psalms. The individual laments follow the following pattern.

1. Address of the LORD as the starting point: appeal for justice/help.
2. Description of the trouble in a complaint addressed to the LORD.
 - a. Identification of the enemy/enemies as the cause of the trouble.
 - b. Complaint about LORD's indifference or inactivity.
3. Prayer
 - a. Surrender of right for revenge by imprecation of the enemy/enemies
 - b. Wish for LORD's blessing/help for the righteous.
 - c. Petition for deliverance.
4. Act of thanksgiving or vow of thanksgiving with a thank offering for deliverance.

What the New Testament adds to all this is the enactment of forgiveness of the enemy/enemies. This is best done after all the above and done before God as we do in the Lord's Prayer, before it is done *coram homine*. By the way I take the 'as we forgive those who trespass against us' as a present enactment, a performative utterance i.e. 'as we here and now forgive...' In most cases of sexual abuse that I have dealt with, it has not been appropriate or possible to forgive the abuser face to face.

[The Psalms of Lament] ...are a rich and underutilized resource in pastoral care. As far as I have learnt, the most decisive thing is to get people to do the first two things: appeal to God in their trouble and so confess their faith in his justice and righteousness; identify their trouble by speaking about it and name those who have abused and hurt them. The important thing here is to get people to 'voice' their anger and make a complaint directly to God so that the hurt at the abuse and the anger from it is distinguished from real and neurotic or misplaced guilt.

Personal correspondence to H L Senkbeil
16/12/98

Psalm 40:11-17 ¹¹ As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me! ¹² For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me. ¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! ¹⁴ Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt! ¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!" ¹⁶ But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!" ¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!

Psalm 56:1-13 Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; ² my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. ³ When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. ⁴ In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? ⁵ All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. ⁶ They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. ⁷ For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God! ⁸ You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? ⁹ Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. ¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, ¹¹ in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? ¹² I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. ¹³ For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Psalm 142:1-7 With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD. ² I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him. ³ When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. ⁴ Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. ⁵ I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." ⁶ Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! ⁷ Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

^{RSV} **Psalm 27:1** A Psalm of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ² When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall. ³ Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. ⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. ⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock. ⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me; and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. ⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! ⁸ Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face." My heart says to thee, "Thy face, LORD, do I seek." ⁹ Hide

not thy face from me. Turn not thy servant away in anger, thou who hast been my help. Cast me not off, forsake me not, O God of my salvation! ¹⁰ For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up. ¹¹ Teach me thy way, O LORD; and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. ¹² Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. ¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! ¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the LORD!