Lament as Dangerous Memory: An Eschatological Hope and Sanctified Vocation

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Introduction: The Danger of Forgetting Lament

The gift and prophetic power of lament was largely absent in the Wesleyan holiness evangelical churches that reared me in their bosom. My white suburban middle-to upper middle-class sisters and brothers in the faith were nursed on hymns, songs, and eventually choruses focused on praise. Most local communal worship services centered on the individual sins people committed and celebrating God's forgiveness of those sins. In addition, the celebration of sanctification invited people to experience further healing of the individual disease of sins they struggled with. The communal worship and soteriology of my local church was focused on getting the oppressors and victimizers forgiveness and help them be more individually moral. This is a salvation on the front side of the cross, for convicting and finding forgiveness for the King Davids of the world. In addition, this Wesleyan holiness soteriology from the place of power was often focused on individual morality through individual piety. Altar calls seeking God's forgiveness and deeper consecration were the individualistic "sacramental" practices and really *the telos* not only of communal worship, but really for the entire local church. While sinners (victimizers and oppressors) finding forgiveness is key to the Gospel, there was an imbalance by not properly paying attention to those on the *backside of the cross* both on a personal and systemic level.[1]

This limited Christian proclamation of the Gospel and communal worship liturgies failed to pay attention to the Bathshebas and Uriahs of the world. Where was lament? Where was the place to cry out against the injustice done by the powerful upon the wounded and oppressed or the naming of systems/liturgies of oppression and injustice being implicitly and explicitly exacerbated in congregations like mine in their daily lives. In addition, with limiting worship to praise and simply being happy for the forgiveness I received, there was no space given to the cries of those who had been sinned against. When guilt, shame, or despair arose, the solution was always simple, confess your sins and if you have faith and truly believe those feelings will go away. The problems for this ethos of a local church worshipping community are beyond the full scope of this paper. However, this paper will celebrate how liturgies of lament provide a space for prophetic naming of injustice and oppression done to both

[1] I have recently written a book with my colleague Diane Leclerc where we explore atonement and church practices for those who have been sinned against. See *Backside of the Cross* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022).

individuals and in larger structures of systemic oppression. Lament first helps to have a proper hearing/remembering of the sins and evil done in the world. It brings to light things that have been kept in the dark. In addition to lament helping to remember the evil done it also calls upon the church through the eucharistic empowerment of the Spirit to participate in helping to work against oppression and injustice. All of this will be done in and through participation in the divine memory of God. This is central to a Wesleyan soteriology and specifically the gift of sanctification, way beyond an induvial moral piety, into a costly discipleship where Christians are invited to better become the martyr church, more faithfully being and becoming the body of the crucified and resurrected Christ.

This paper will *first* begin by exploring how liturgies are inherently political as a *dangerous memory* both in exposing sin but also becoming further immersed in the divine memory of the Triune God, the church's ongoing salvation. *Second*, the paper explores how the practice of lament enables a proper remembering of sin and evil and by protest remembering a God who has yet failed to extinguish sin and evil. *Third*, the conversation considers the eschatological dimension of lament as both a transforming divine human encounter and empowerment. *Finally*, as the church properly laments it provides both a *dangerous memory* of the evil in the world and then a *dangerous memory* of Jesus Christ and the call to costly discipleship. After lament and intercessions, the eucharist becomes a practice of dangerous memory that empowers Christians to be the martyr church, the body of Christ in the world as a participation in the dangerous memory of the renewal and redemption of all things.

LITURGY AS DANGEROUS MEMORY

Liturgies are embodied actions that do something. Liturgical practices shape imaginations regarding what has happened, is happening, and in hope what will occur. These imaginations then shape behaviour based on the embodied hopes and ideals shaped by these imaginations. Ethics is always shaped by eschatology. Communal worship in particular embodies practices regarding past, present, and future events in creation. Specifically, eucharistic theology draws upon the power of *anamnesis* in celebrating the power of the practice. While this word in English is often translated as memory, the idea of memory in the eucharistic and broader liturgical context requires more careful nuancing. In eucharistic theology the idea of memorialism celebrates a remembering for things done in the past. In the eucharist a memorial view invites Christians to mentally resurrect past events and specifically the power and depth of Jesus' sacrificial death and dynamic resurrection. This remembering is one of mental imagination recalling the story of Jesus as passed down in the church's kerygma. However, the power of *anamnesis* in the eucharistic atmosphere is not simply working hard to imaginatively recall past events, but this memory by the epicletic invocation to the Father by the power of the Spirit invites Jesus to be powerfully present. In this way the Eucharist is a *dangerous memory* inviting a powerful divine-human encounter all caught up in the memory of God.

This paper will draw upon the imaginative concept of ***dangerous memory***. While the word *danger* often has connotations of things that are bad and to be avoided, in this paper *danger* connotes something that should cause awe, respect and powerful transformation. The danger

pushes against ignorant homeostasis by the powerful. Similarly, the idea of *anamnesis* is a memory that provides a present encounter with that which seeks to further transform even in ways that are not easy or comfortable. Moreover, this *dangerous memory* invites a response that is not comfortable or convenient but demands full surrender. This paper will work to remain somewhat disciplined with the phrase *dangerous memory,* yet it will do so with a variety of settings and contexts all of which are a call away *from toxic forgetfulness into the transformation of dangerous memory in the Triune God.*

Dangerous Memory: The Intersection of Political and Liturgical Theology

While often misunderstood, all liturgical theology is inherently political, and all political theology is inherently liturgical. Our practices shape our understanding of individuals and communities. Individuals and communities always engage in actions that are moving towards ideals and hopes which are deemed as good, true, and beautiful. Bruce T. Morrill in his book *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* offers a helpful resource exploring how these unique areas of thought and action are inextricably connected. [2] In addition Roman Catholic theologian, Johann Baptist Metz also demonstrates how crucial it is to see how social and economic systems demonstrate a clear anthropology and eschatology. Metz argues "that an analysis of this political and social situation is essential to theology, which must then explore the message and viability of the faith precisely in relation to the present historical context.[3] The field of liturgical theology in its growing engagement in *anamnesis* has simultaneously looked to Metz' concept of *dangerous memory.* Morrill finds Betz compelling in calling for a "method by which theology must recover the salvific and emancipatory content of Christianity's traditions for contemporary humanity, with special concern for the suffering and the victims of injustice.[4] In other words Christian liturgies are to participate in the cosmic redemption of all things. Metz' succinct definition of political theology is a "praxis of faith in mystical and political imitation."[5]

Along with Metz, Morrill also celebrates the work of Alexander Schmemann who also recognizes how this intersection of the mission and viability of the church must address how societies are caring or abusing its people. Morrill's project is clear and a helpful foundation for this paper. The church's engagement in the *dangerous memory* of Jesus Christ, requires a proper *dangerous memory* of the ways in which humans have been and are being mistreated. It is in this anamnetic dangerous memory of Christ that both illumines evil, but also calls the church to engage in liturgical (as political) action as part of its calling to participate in the renewal and redemption of all things as the kingdom of God comes to earth as it is in heaven. It is this fusion of mysticism and praxis in both Schmemann, Metz, and Morrill that provides the theological scaffolding and cornerstone of this paper. The church's liturgy can and should become a place of the transformation of society.[6] Specifically for Metz the *memory* of Jesus

[2] See Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Book, 2000).

[3] Morrill, xiii.

[4] Morrill, xiii.

[5] Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 77.

[6] Morrill, 75.

is *dangerous* as it calls for the church to continue the ministry of the Incarnation by "the conversion it requires of its practitioners, away from a privatized view of salvation, and in the threat it poses to the conventional (evolutionary) wisdom of society."[7] In the infamous words of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, the church is to do much more than make the world nicer as it is simply the grease in the wheels of unconstrained capitalism and the rule of power and violence. [8] ***The main thesis of this paper claims that as the church liturgically encounters the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ, it calls for the church to properly lament the dangerous memory of human sin, evil, and abuse. And from this posture of lament the church is eucharistically empowered by the Spirit to be sent out into the world to seek justice for people of all tribes and nations as a participation in the renewal and redemption of all things all in the memory of the Triune God.***

REMEMBERING THE DANGEROUS MEMORY OF LAMENT

The beauty of God's creation is juxtaposed with the horror of evil. The Christian hope and conviction, considering the apocalyptic irruption of the resurrection of the crucified God, is that sin, darkness, injustice, oppression, and death do not have the final word. Revelation 21 proclaims that in the new heaven and new earth that God will be very close and dwell with God's people. God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away"[9] It is the eschatological hope that the things that should not be, will not be. This is the *first dangerous memory*, which is the foundation of lament. God is working to make all things new. It is this prophetic prayer in God's goodness, power, and love that provides the very breath to the hopeful protest of lament. Hence, while the church prays and the Triune God brings more fully the new creation every day, there is a vast *not yet* where the powers and principalities of death are still brooding over the face of the earth. Like dementors scouring the earth bringing a chilling kiss of death and sucking the very memories of hope and life out of people: sin, evil, oppression, and injustice yet remain.

It is curious how local churches have dealt with the lingering principalities and powers of evil and destruction. In my denomination, as noted above, systemic evil structures and institutions were *toxically forgotten*. The focus was always on my personal responsibility for the evil I caused and the required confession and repentance. But why ignore these larger structures of injustice and oppression? From my observation this occurs especially in local churches saturated in privilege and intentional naïve ignorance. Walter Brueggemann has said well that within the Royal Consciousness, those in power do not want to upset a system, unjust and evil though it may be, if it threatens to take away one's power providing stolen comfort and convenience.[10] "Good" people in power certainly do not wish harm upon others, yet if the entire system must be dismantled for justice and mercy for all, it is easier to simply *toxically forget* the *dangerous memory* of lament. Not only will those in power resist the *dangerous*

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[7] Morrill, 140.
[8] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press,1989), 40, 41
[9] Revelation 21.4, *Common English Bible.*
[10] See *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), especially chapter 2 "Royal Consciousness: Countering the Countercultural.

memory of lament because they benefit from those structures, but they also must confess how they are complicit in them. William Cavanaugh noted in his powerful work *Torture and Eucharist* that the Pinochet regime worked diligently to keep the oppressed isolated by discouraging any attempt at a polis of protest. Moreover, the government both posed the greatest threat to the individual while also promising to be their only salvation.[11] For some the church has been no different. It is for this and many other reasons, the church has often forgotten the *dangerous memory* of lament. One further reason for failing to remember laments is that for those who are comfortable it names the randomness and indiscriminate suffering to which none are excluded. When a mother asks why her child died of cancer? Or why the drunk driver killed her father? Rather than leaning into God's silence, the church fills the silence with false and terrible answers to alleviate their own anxiety. Saliers says poignantly and powerfully "the silence of God cannot be silenced by easy rationalization, or by easy appeal to some self-evident will of God."[12] In addition, if laments are suppressed and silenced, praise and thanksgiving becomes empty and shallow. Westerman adds "Something must be amiss if praise of God has a place in Christian worship but lamentation does not. Praise can retain its authenticity … only in polarity with lamentation."[13]

The church's first act of prophetic protest against these principalities of oppression, systems of injustice, and powers of death is to bring them into the light through lament.[14] To allow them to remain in the dark both gives it persistent poisonous power and further alienates the victims of its machinating. The book of Psalms provides a wonderful gift for a proper remembering of lament. Don Saliers provides solace that my denomination was like many other Protestant denominations in suppressing laments.[15] While the revelation of Jesus may challenge some of the Psalms' thirst for revenge, Saliers notes how Psalm 88 creates a space for those protesting and doubting God's goodness, love, and even existence. In my Christian formation, questioning and doubting God were often considered unpardonable sins. Yet while my life was richly blessed and privileged, for many who have suffered much, such discouraging of doubt or protest is suffocating. Laments are a gift both at the individual and corporate level. Psalms 74 and 79 are representative of laments over being oppressed by powerful enemies, while Psalm 83 laments the destruction by natural disasters.[16] For ancient Israel the liturgies of lamentation sought out God to help them in their suffering and with this plea for help was often a cry and complaint of protest that God had allowed such suffering to occur. It is noteworthy that laments do not arise from a place doubting God's love or power, but from a posture confident in God's power and seeking God's love to show them mercy to help alleviate their anguish. Claus Westermann suggests that laments for ancient Israel illuminate their belief that in "ancient Israel's understanding of history, [was] an understanding which sees past, present, and future as bound together under God's control."[17] For Wesleyan Christians in the 21st century there remains a powerful question as to whether

[11] William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing) 1998.
[12] Saliers, 121.
[13] Claus Wesermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Know Press, 1981), 267.
[14] Ephesians 5:11-14.
[15] Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 120.
[16] Saliers, 120.
[17] Claus Wesermann, *The Living Psalms,* trans J. R. Porter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 23.

such a belief either in God's ability or activity warrants laments today. The ghosts of Auschwitz' protest atheism may have become an embodied dirge that perhaps has infiltrated the most pious pockets of Wesleyan evangelicalism, either resulting in subtle atheism or a resigned practical deism. Laments, even in pain and anger, are ultimately an act of trust and worship in a God who cares and who will act.

[Excursus: This is perhaps one reason North American evangelicalism has moved away from lament to God and settled for allegiance to nationalism. If God is not going to act and provide me safety and security, then maybe a nation propped up by a military machine with thousands of nuclear warheads can provide my security and safety.]

Westermann highlights several common movements in the liturgies of lament.

1) A complaint and accusation to God that God has failed to live up to God's covenant promises.
2) A complaint that enemies have been allowed to cause pain and suffering
3) A complaint that not simply have individuals suffered, but all of God's people are being threatened.
4) Reminding God of God's past actions of mercy, grace, and favor
5) Then an appeal to have that favor come again to alleviate the present source of pain and anguish.[18]

Lament provide**s** the proper space to cry out against the injustice done against humans and names God's failure to remember by allowing the innocent to suffer. Saliers notes that laments provide a powerful truth telling about real suffering both today and in some cases for many generations past. To pray these psalms amidst vast cultural contexts became a living hermeneutic of continued occasions where God's apparent failure to uphold promises was named.[19] Most specifically David Power notes how the Holocaust called into deep question God's faithfulness to the covenant in the wake of evil genocidal attempts at the hands of the Nazis. "If the Covenant were to be kept as the foundation of the people's existence and identity, they felt the need to recall it in a way commensurate with their awful sense of abandonment."[20]

Reality and Redemption in God's Memory

The church's lament and larger context of worship calls God to *dangerously remember* God's promises and covenant. Schmemann notes, "Without any exaggeration one can say that the commemoration, i.e., the referral of everything to the *memory of God,* the prayer that God would *'remember,'* constitutes the heartbeat of all of the Church's worship, her entire life."[21] In the Old Testament specifically, but certainly confirmed in the New Testament, Israel and Christian's major sin is forgetting God. This toxic forgetfulness is not an amnesia of God, but a life of idolatry imitating the creation and not the Creator (Romans 1:25). This calling God

[18] Claus Wesermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Know Press, 1981), 267.
[19] Saliers, 122.
[20] David N. Power, *Worship: Culture and Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1990), p. 160
[21] Schmemann, *The Eucharist,* 123.

to remember is also not divine amnesia but specifically in the laments is pleading for God to act, rescue, and redeem God's people from suffering and exile.

In addition, Schmemann notes that beyond human "natural memory" trying to resurrect the past, the goal is to be caught up into the divine memory which is reality itself.[22] "God's activity of remembrance is the source of humanity's creation and sustenance."[23] It is therefore in Christ that humanity finds salvation in God's memory. "Through the Incarnation, Christ—'perfect God and perfect man'—saves humanity by bestowing divine remembrance of all the created order and offering, in turn to God, 'perfect human remembrance of God,' exercised as 'love-self-sacrifice and communion with the Father.' "[24] In this way laments as part of the broader liturgy are a *dangerous memory* inviting creation and God to also be caught up in the divine memory of God, which is God's work of salvation, redemption, and restoration for all creation. Human participation in the dangerous divine memory is not cognitive knowledge about God, but participation in the very triune life of God.[25]

LAMENT AS ESCHATOOGICAL HOPE AND PNEUMATOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Laments rightly express the anger, pain, fear, and anguish both to God and to the world. As stated above laments bring into the light the deeds often done in the dark while also being grounded in the hope of a God who also mourns and is present in the very midst of the evil God also allowed. Laments call God to act, while also calling for those in places of influence and power to participate in the undoing of injustice that God will work.

Lament as Eschatological Prayer

One of the most well-known Psalms of lament is recorded as being prayed by Jesus on the cross. From the cross Jesus cries out "My God, my God why have you forsaken me."[26] Jürgen Moltmann in his seminal work *The Crucified God* notes Christianity has largely ignored Christ's cry of dereliction. The church has failed to reflect and ponder what it means for Jesus to cry out in pain and protest against the Father. Yet Moltmann also notes that as Christ fully entered into godforsakenness, now Jesus Christ by the Spirit joins in the lament of pain and protest. In Jesus Christ, God became the God of the godforsaken.[27] Not only do laments call for God to better fulfil covenant promises, laments also name the evil done by those who gluttonously benefit by the oppression of others. As Brueggemann notes above, within the purview of the Royal Counsciousness, the powerful must remember the *dangerous*

[22] Schmemann, 143.
[23] Schmemann, 128.
[24] Schmemann, 143.
[25] Perhaps part of the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17.
[26] Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34
[27] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

memory of their complicity in the suffering of others. By the Spirit, Jesus joins in our lament. "The God whose very life takes on the suffering of all cries out with us against ourselves."[28]

Considering the breadth of Psalm 22, the cry in anger and pain is calling for a God in whom there is trust to act. "Come quick and help me! Deliver me from the sword. Deliver my life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion. From the horns of the wild oxen you have answered me!" (CEB, 22:19b-21). And on the heels of this request for God to act there was a recognition that ancestors before trusted you [God] (v.4) And even before God has moved to deliver the Psalm ends in a chorus of praise that God will act. "Let all those who are suffering eat and be full! Let all who seek the LORD praise him! I pray your hearts live forever! Every part of the earth will remember and come back to the LORD; every family among all the nations will worship you. (vv26-27). In this way Psalm 22 models lament as complaint against God for a lack of action and faithfulness to covenant promises, while also grounded in the hopeful conviction that God will act, is trustworthy, and will be found faithful. In this way most laments are prayers grounded in eschatological hope.

Theologically the depth and complexity of this psalm's movements do not match all laments found in Scripture and it is important that we do not ask those lamenting on Sunday to make sure they end on a happy faithful note by Monday. In fact, the Gospel of Mark does not include an affirmation of faith and trust in God by Jesus on the cross, but simply notes "Jesus let out a loud cry and died."[29] The primary point is this, laments offer authentic and sincere pain, protest, critique, asking God to be the God of the covenant promise. Yet these cries taking place in the church's liturgy do not come from a place of doubt but of trust that God will act. Briefly it must be stated that seeing laments as an eschatological hope and prayer does not always mean my individual circumstances of pain, torture and abuse end, but a promise that God is not against those who suffer innocently and that one's current suffering is not eternal. Jesus was killed, six million jews died in the Holocaust, violence seems to go unchecked. Yet to say laments are an action of eschatological hope is to say that evil, sin, and death do not get the last word. Christ's resurrection is the first fruits of the full renewal and redemption of all things.

Don Saliers, in his book, *Worship as Theology*, notes that Christian liturgy as rite and prayer is thoroughly eschatological and is best recognized as eschatological prayer and action.[30] In the encounter with God, the liturgy is the art of receiving God's future for the world. "The greeting and singing, the reading, the telling, the praying, the offering, the blessing, breaking, pouring out, and receiving always point to what God will yet do with us."[31] Eschatology is a radical openness toward the future. "The eschatology of primary theology enacted in the liturgical assembly thus looks to and works within the arena of history as the arena of God's glory."[32] Any eschatology that fails to envision the glory of God in our history fails to comprehend the future glory and reign of God on earth as it is in heaven. While eschatology

[28] Saliers, 124.
[29] Mark 15:37.
[30] Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 14, 17.
[31] Saliers, 104.
[32] Saliers, 67.

is the memory of the future it is thoroughly historical. Louis Chauvet asserts that to devalue history is to devalue eschatology.[33] Hence, in our prayers and specifically laments we offer our eschatological prayer and hope for present and historical liberation. In our prayers we invoke the future of God in our present *pathos* (our present pain and suffering), in light of God's abundant *ethos*.[34] Laments are eschatological prayers that take God's promises and the Church's eschatological vocation seriously.

How precisely does lament function eschatologically? Liturgy on the Lord's Day is gathered in the deep *pathos* of the memory of God with us. With Schmemann all of reality if found within divine memory. Still deeper is the *pathos of hope* for God's promises yet to be fulfilled.[35] The eschatological dimension is not simply a wish for utopian bliss or pious whining. This hope is grounded precisely in the real brutality of our *pathos* and God's self-giving. "The gathered body, comes out of the *pathos* of living and struggling, seeking God together with restless hearts."[36] In the encounter with God, the Church is embraced by the One who calls us to hope. Remembering who God is does not negate our *pathos*. Rather Saliers suggests that actually our *pathos* is given honour and dignity in our anamnetic worship of God.

Not leaving liturgical space or room for human *pathos*, also limits one's eschatological vision and the resulting vocation in and for the world. It is here that beseeching and thanksgiving go together. "To pray for and with and out of a suffering world is to learn again the commingling of praise and blessing."[37] Further Saliers comments that true *pathos* only comes from the depths of thanksgiving. "To pray for and with and out of suffering forces the liturgy to yield its tremendous consolation and the depths of thanksgiving we should never know without it"[38] Saliers is arguing for a wholistic *ordo* that recognizes the eschatological dimension to worship. With the devastating reality of suffering in our city and around the world, to deny the cry of lament, is a statement that forgets what God has eschatologically promised and results from a failure to remember God. Lament is not only a statement of who God is and what God has promised, but also is an eschatological prayer and statement that places emphasis on the gap from what is, human suffering, to what will be, complete liberation from the oppression of sin and death to being with and in God. The liturgy is a continuing prayer of intercession: a cry on behalf of the world. In our intercessions we stand in solidarity "with those who are also victims of our complicity."[39] In the intercession not only does the Church remind God what God has promised, but also names its eschatological vocation to be in the world offering healing and hope and calling for justice to the oppressed and downtrodden. In a similar fashion to the Jewish conception of time, we remember the past deeds of God that hold the world in order and existence; "but now we also beg God to remember the current

[33] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence,* 240.
[34] Saliers, 68.
[35] Saliers., 26.
[36] Saliers, 26.
[37] Saliers, 33.
[38] Saliers, 33.
[39] Ibid., 35.

need of the world, to gather our future into the promise of God's own future."[40] So that we have both past and future, truth and promise.

Ritual memory leads to an existential memory. Anamnetic worship leads all to the crucifying path as liberation and it is sacramentally also the work of Christ. The Church becomes Christ's living memory in the world.[41] Furthermore, the liturgical *ordo* extends the ultimate hope to our lament in the celebration of the Eucharist. The risen one was none other than the crucified one. The early church believed that the "risen one shows his wounds to the church, and therefore that God's mercy is present in the midst of the places of public horror and shame, that the meal of the foretaste of God's reign and is a meal from the wounds of Christ."[42] Thus the Eucharist is the meal where the healing and hope are offered from the wounds of Christ and where the hope of Resurrection is the profound victory over any pain, hardship, oppression or injustice.

It is essential that thanksgiving and lament be juxtaposed. Thanksgiving without lament could mean an acceptance of the status quo. "As if the truly religious heart would rise above all actual material suffering to perceive some unearthly religious meaning and so to praise God for all conditions and realities, as if there were no need of God's promise or God's future."[43] Lament alone could be a refusal of comfort and of hope, a choice to hold on to bitterness, as if there were no truth to God's hopeful promises. The absence of lament denies God's eschatological promises, refuses to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, and most powerfully fails to recognize its own culpability. Refusal of lament is a refusal to care for justice and to maintain the status quo.[44] Conversely, to engage and perform the dangerous memory of lament then moves the congregation in eschatological hope to intercession. "We cannot do justice to the biblical notion of lamentation unless we reconnect it with the promises of God out of which we make prayer for the world and for others."[45]

Within this eschatological foundation of hope, the conversation moves from lament as theory to the real by considering the past and present of slavery and the church's *toxic forgetfulness* and hopeful *dangerous memory.*

THE DANGEROUS MEMORY OF SLAVARY

Shawn Copeland's powerful prose *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* provides a helpful case study both for the dangers of the toxic forgetfulness of slavery and refusing lament and the salving and liberation lament and dangerous memory offers. One of the great lessons from the 20th century is the notion that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[46] While there are many who have not had the luxury to learn history, there are many more who can soak in history

[40] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), 56.
[41] Chauvet, 261.
[42] Lathrop, 71.
[43] Ibid., 57.
[44] Saliers, 35.
[45] Saliers, 125.
[46] George Santayana, *The Life of Reason,* 1905

and choose not to. Certainly, the learning of history is not like learning math, but a recognition exists that history lives fully within both objective facts and subjective interpretation. Whether it be persons who deny the reality of the holocaust or those who attempt to soften the brutality of slavery in the United States, all lose when hard and painful history is ignored and silenced.

Dangerous Memories Make Demands

When dangerous memories are properly named it often demands a responsibility to this awareness, especially from those in power.

> These "dangerous memories" of the maldistributed suffering of black children, women, and men under chattel slavery make demands on our lives. This suffering holds neither pedagogical nor ascetic power; it means to break, not temper, the spirit. It is suffering of a negative quality that all too often ended in the death of enslaved people.[47]

Whether the conversation concerns the treatment of the American Indians, enslaved Black Americans, or persons held captive at Japanese internment camps, such *dangerous memories* have often been ignored by the United States educational system until the past few decades. It is noteworthy the same practice occurred in the German educational system which largely ignores the Nazi regime in its educational system. However, even though painful and perhaps costly to the privileged homeostasis, encountering these dangerous memories is a necessary step for the flourishing of all.

Regarding slavery Copeland notes that "Our public memory as a nation suppresses the depth of our entanglement in racial slavery, consigns it to a misbegotten past, and conceals from ourselves its ambiguous confession, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the tragic consequences of our selective memory."[48] Copeland further notes that this call to *dangerous memory* is not simply for the pagan masses, but is also central for anyone attempting to properly do theology.

> These living black bodies signify the nation's unexamined questions and unresolved anxieties, disturb the nation's aesthetics, and curb the nation's quest for the putative and unreflective postracial. As remainders of the property regime of racial slavery, these living black bodies enflesh the "dangerous memory" of chattel slavery. How are we to understand history and memory in the shadow of the plantation? How might dangerous memories of chattel slavery be important in doing theology today in the United States? What are the tasks of theology in the face of such suffering in history? For the Christian theologian, the suffering and death of the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth rebukes our amnesia, our forgetfulness of enslaved bodies, and our indifference to living black children, women, and men. The memory of his passion and death interrupts our banal resignation to some vague misbegotten past, our smug democratic

[47] Shawn M. Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience Copeland* (Orbis, 2018), 43.
[48] Copeland, 113.

> dispensation, our not-so-benign neglect; it interrupts our affected worship, our pretentious platitudes about justice. [49]

Copeland powerfully asserts that one can find deeper illumination in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by taking seriously the lives and witness of persons enslaved and mistreated in the United States. James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is but one example among many that offer a *dangerous memory* not only of hard past events but embodies how a proper encounter with these dangerous memories offers illumination and transformation today. Copeland is clear that many Christians, not only in the south, but all across the United States failed to drink deeply of the *dangerous memories* of chattel slavery, both in the past and today.

The Church's Toxic Forgetfulness

The *dangerous memories* relentlessly beg the question. How could Christians who claim to love Jesus and the Gospels have supported slavery and its abuse of people. Copeland names powerfully,

> The church either forgot or failed to remember the central teaching of the imago dei: that all human beings bear the imprint of the divine image and, therefore, possess equal dignity before God. And, during the antebellum period, the church either forgot or failed to remember its responsibility to offer a prophetic witness to slaveholding society.[50]

It is this very dangerous memory that humans were denying other humans as being fully created in God's image. As such, they were deemed not fully human and less valuable and worthy of respect. Even worse of course is how often these enslaved humans were treated more poorly than farm animals and pets. Martin Luther King affirmed this very failure. King asserted: "So long as the Negro or any other member of a minority group is treated as a means to an end, the image of God is abused in [him or her] and consequently and proportionally lost by those who inflict the abuse."[51]

While there are many devastating lessons from the *dangerous memory* of chattel slavery, one of the most important is to see how easily humans could dismiss another human being as being fully created in God's image. Whenever abuse and violence is done by humans upon other humans, it is a failure to see each person as God's beloved. As a theologian and not a sociologist or anthropologist, it also seems the case that this behaviour to dehumanize other humans is a toxic poison that is taught by other humans. It is my experience that children do not learn to be racist on their own, but simply imitate the behaviour of relatives and friends. This is but one of the steps that military training must do, preparing soldiers for war. An enemy cannot be seen as a beloved fellow human being created in God's image, but simply an evil "thing" that must be eliminated. So, this dangerous memory asks the prophetic

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[49] Copeland, 113-114.
[50] Copeland 119.
[51] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 97.

question- who today do individuals and groups and political parties and local churches and denominations deem as not fully being created in God's image?

From Cain and Able forward humans have failed to see other humans, for a variety of reasons, as being fully created in God's image. Yet this poison does not have to and will not exist. Yet in the 21st century while it appears some progress is being made, there is still much work to be done. Copeland notes that

> Thus racism stands as both personal sin and social disorder, entailing not only individual prejudice but the exercise of religious, historical, cultural, social (i.e., political, economic, technological) power to keep one race privileged and secure and other races disempowered and vulnerable.[52]

So how can we participate in the full redemption where every person is loved and valued fully as created in God's image, we must confess and repent of our toxic forgetfulness. Miroslav Volf notes, "forgetting is the opposite of memory. Forgetting includes both unintentional failures to notice something or someone and intentional acts of erasure or deletion of what once was known."[53] Yet in the 21st century it seems that all toxic forgetfulness is active, rather than a naïve passivism. Ricoeur suggests that

> The danger is that forgetting is not simply passive but also habitually active. People refusing to want to hear. When there is a "strategy of avoidance, evasion, [or] flight entails the same sort of responsibility as that imputed to acts of negligence, omission, imprudence, [and] lack of foresight." [54]

So rather than active and intentional forgetfulness, we are invited into the gift of dangerous memory.

Christian Memory

Rather than toxic forgetfulness, often committed to at best not rock our comfortable boat of privilege or at worst not accepting our complicity in structures and systems of oppression, Christians are to be a people on anamnetic memory. Especially seeking out dangerous memories of oppression that have been silenced and forgotten for far too long.

> The Christian practice of memory professes to be radically different. Christians oblige ourselves to remember. We mark ourselves with a sign that neither can be erased nor easily forgotten. The cross of the crucified Jew traced on our bodies at baptism initiates us into a new life, into a community constituted by memory, into intimate and irrevocable relatedness to all creatures. Moreover, the memory of the suffering Jewish Jesus opens the church over and over again to other crucified victims in the past and in the present. The Christian practice of memory nourishes and eases thirst,

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[52] Copeland, 123.
[53] Miroslav Volf, The End of Memory (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 145.
[54] Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 449.

> interrogates and revises perspectives, habits, and daily life. Memory and love require that the church act and live in history in imitation of the gracious and healing presence of Jesus of Nazareth, who loved human beings and loved being human to the end—and loves still. To fulfill that ethical obligation as church, we—who member it—must refuse to turn away from and must look directly at the dreadful history of chattel slavery. We must assume responsibility for the memory of chattel slavery, protecting that memory from trivialization, outright rejection or denial, and voyeurism; moreover, theology calls the church to lament.[55]

Copeland names this hard remembering must move the church to lament. It is crucial to name that this lament is not simply for the victims of current and past oppression, but what is often also forgotten is that when any human devalues another, they are also devaluing their own humanity. Said positively, only those who fully recognize and embrace the full humanity of other persons are they themselves living into the full human flourishing God desires.

Truly these dangerous memories are a means of grace.

> The black children, women, and men who lived and died in chattel slavery oblige us to remember, and to mourn. Their lives in chattel slavery come to us as dangerous memory. This memory cannot be erased, for the very bodies of the descendants of those who remained and survived continue to provoke the memory of an unapproached and unresolved past that reaches into the present and must be engaged. In risking memory, overcoming forgetfulness, collectively taking responsibility, commemorating, we lovingly embody ethical responsibility for the past in the present for the future. The love of an unreservedly loving God will hold us in our risk, will not allow us to forget, will hold us in hope.[56]

Moving from the *toxic forgetfulness* to the *dangerous memory* of chattel slavery it is also necessary for Christians to also move away from forgetfulness to the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ.

THE DANGEROUS MEMORY OF THE CRUCIFED AND RESURRECT CHRIST: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP/SANCTIFICATION

While creating the space for lament as dangerous memory is a first step, the church is eucharistically then empowered to continue the ministry of Jesus as the body of Christ to work with compassion and care. The way of Jesus is a dangerous memory that has too often been toxically forgotten by the church. Among too many Christians, Jesus has been celebrated for what he can secure for us, while also forgetting the cost of discipleship to accept the gift he offers. Many like to be fans of Jesus, but not followers.

> The ministry of Jesus is a dangerous ministry. Discipleship costs. The praxis of compassionate solidarity that he inaugurated on behalf of the reign of God disrupted social customs, religious practices, and conventions of authority and power. Without

[55] Copeland 125-126.
[56] Copeland, 129.

> hesitation, Jesus made the cross an undeniable condition for discipleship (Luke 9:23; 14:27). By his own death on the cross, Jesus incarnated the solidarity of God with abject and despised human persons. The disciples who heard and responded to his word and the deed of his life came, even if haltingly, gradually, fitfully, to dedicate their lives and their living to the concerns, commitments, and compassion of the God of Jesus. In this way, they placed their lives at the disposal of the cross.[57]

There is no Easter without lent. There is no resurrection without crucifixion. The life of discipleship is not about masochism, but with Jesus for those who want to be disciples they are joyfully invited into a life of compassion and care for all who are naked, hungry, and without shelter. Salvation is by grace through faith and one's works testify to the fruit of one's discipleship. From the first to twenty-first century, to be a disciple means we do not seek a life that is easy, comfortable, and convenient, especially when those around us are suffering. Copeland presses further," The crucified Jesus is the sign of the cost of identification with poor, outcast, abject, and despised women and men in the struggle for life. He incarnates the freedom and destiny of discipleship."[58] The call to take up our cross and follow Jesus is to fully embrace the dangerous memory of Jesus. Luke 14:27-33 is clear only those who will take up one's cross and follow Jesus are disciples. Just like the parable one does not begin to build or go to war without counting the cost as to whether or not they can finish the task. The dangerous memory of Jesus invites us, along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to count the *cost of discipleship.* The Way of Jesus is the way of the cross. The way of the cross, especially for those in power, is to use that power to seek justice and mercy for all, even if the journey and results cause discomfort to those in power.

The danger of failing to remember the dangerous memory of Christ is a failure to actively and intentionally remember those presently who suffer and are marginalized by powers and principalities. "If we would be disciples of Jesus, we must be willing to recognize and alleviate hungers—whether for food or truth or justice, whether our own or those of others. A praxis of compassionate solidarity, justice-love, and care for the poor and oppressed is a sign that we are on the 'way' Jesus is."[59] For Wesleyans this is part of the journey of sanctification. Romans 12:1-2 invites a willingness to offer our lives back to God as an act of worship. Our care for all sisters and brothers and especially those suffering is the call for all the disciples of Jesus. Copeland prophetically mirrors Jesus' invitation and challenge. "All who would be his disciples, especially those of us who have the luxury to stand and watch hungry women and men, are called to critical self-examen and a praxis of compassionate solidarity."[60]

With Matthew 25 when we have *dangerously remembered* the poor, sick, naked, and in prison Christ will remember us. But when we have not remembered for the poor, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, and visited those in prison Christ will simply say *Depart from me I*

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[57] Copeland, 143.
[58] Copeland, 147.
[59] Marianne Sawicki, Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 90-91.)
[60] Copeland, 156.

never knew you. The prophetic call of dangerous memory rings forth, if you have failed to remember those who are marginalized and oppressed, it is a sign and fruit of a failure to remember Christ, who in turn will fail to remember us, a truly dangerous amnesia.

So, we must better engage in the eschatological dangerous memory of lament. These laments are gift for all the church, those who suffer and those cause the suffering and those who must remember the suffering. Naming the suffering and evil in lament then invites the church eucharistically to be sent by and with the Spirit to participate in the healing, renewal, and justice for all peoples that God is working in the new creation. This is the joyful vocation of the church to participate in God's memory, the healing of all tribes and nations.