How to Lament When It's All Our Fault
Reading Job During the Climate Crisis

Diana Paulding

1. Introduction

In a time of climate catastrophe, it seems that all we can do is lament. As we surpass internationally agreed limits in the increase of global temperatures, witness the extinction of plant and animal species, and experience ever more extreme weather events, grief and anxiety must surely be an appropriate response. For Christians, these experiences and emotions can inform the way in which worshippers pray. Denominations have produced liturgies that make space for climate lament,[1] and prayers are constantly being added to the resources available for Christians to voice their grief and anger.[2] In such laments, there is recognition of all that has been lost, all that will be lost, and the space to mourn.

To lament for the Earth at a time of climate catastrophe is undoubtedly a helpful way of processing the emotions and loss that are being experienced.[3] Furthermore, for communities that have historically contributed the least to the climate crisis and yet are disproportionately experiencing the consequences of it, lament can be a way of calling attention to this injustice.[4] For Western Christians, however, our collective complicity in causing and driving climate catastrophe complicates matters.[5] The excessive consumption and exploitative

---

1 E.g. The Church of England, *A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment* (London: Church House Publishing, 2020).

2 E.g. Hannah Malcolm, "A prayer for those who wish to lament the Earth," in *Rage and Hope: 75 Prayers for a Better World*, ed. Chine McDonald and Wendy Lloyd (London: SPCK Publishing, 2021); Jon Swales, "Lament & Hope: 40 prayers for the Climate and Ecological Emergency," 2023, accessed 13th September 2024, https://greenchristian.org.uk/lament-hope-40-prayers-for-the-climate-and-ecological-emergency/.

3 Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1999); Sally Gillespie, *Climate Crisis and Consciousness: Re-imagining Our World and Ourselves* (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), esp. 50–69; Nancy C. Lee, *Lyrics of Lament: From Tragedy to Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

4 This attention to injustice appears in many chapters in Hannah Malcolm, ed., *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

5 For further reflection on this difficulty, see Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, "Introduction: Christian theology and climate change in the North Atlantic context" in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 1–10.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

practices of Western societies are ravaging the Earth and have caused anthropogenic climate change. The question then arises as to the purpose and place of laments within Western Christianity. Is it appropriate to lament when one is implicated in the very catastrophe about which one is crying out to God? If it is not, what alternatives are there? How should Western Christians pray about a situation that they have had a role in causing?

In this chapter, it is argued that the current use of lament by Western Christians in climate liturgies is at odds with the biblical practice of lament, since lament is used in the Bible as a way of seeking justice for a wrong done to oneself by another. It is nonetheless suggested that lament can still be utilised within liturgies used by Western Christians, but it must be done in a way that recognises Western Christians' own role in causing the climate crisis whilst also providing the opportunity to reframe destructive and anthropocentric worldviews into ones that emphasise relationship with the rest of creation. In doing this, the book of Job can be a powerful resource and guide. Despite the contrast between Job's innocence and the contemporary readers' individual and collective responsibility, Job's use of protest against God provides a path by which humanity can engage with the divine, seek justice, and live in relationship with the suffering Earth, even at a time of crisis.

2. The problem with lament

I take as my starting point for this chapter the statement that the climate crisis is primarily the result of human action. The data are clear that the rise in global average temperatures since the Industrial Revolution is directly correlated to human activity, and that the various forms of environmental degradation that are ravaging the Earth – from plastic pollution and habitat destruction to the spilling of sewage into water systems – are also anthropogenic. That point will not be debated in this chapter. Humans, or more precisely human societies and social structures that exploit the Earth and other people in order to maintain certain lifestyles, have caused the climate crisis.[6]

For Christians who live in and are shaped by such societies and social structures, this complicity in environmental destruction raises important questions about the role and nature of prayer at a time of climate crisis. Even those who seek to live an eco-friendly lifestyle within consumerist cultures often find themselves inevitably being caught up in the structural sin of carbon-intensive consumption, just in the ordinary flow of living, let alone facing issues of com-

[6] The impact of exploitative social structures is discussed by Donna Haraway in relation to the language that is used to describe the way in which humans impact the Earth: Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, 1 (2015).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

panies that use greenwashing to sell products that continue to harm the Earth, price barriers for items that are considered more eco-friendly, and the pressures of a culture that prioritises ease and profit over true sustainability. Within such cultures, almost every member has a role in perpetuating environmental degradation, however unwillingly.

The issues that this raises for the use of lament in climate liturgy can be highlighted with reference to Walter Brueggemann's work on biblical lament.[7] Brueggemann writes that biblical lament is a way of expressing that something is not right in the world and emphasising the need for change. In lament, God is called upon to change that which is wrong or unjust. This lamenting can be done in two ways. The first type of lament takes the form of a complaint against one's enemies. Human oppressors are identified as the cause of one's suffering, and God is called upon to defend the petitioner from their enemies. The second form of lament complains against God. This is seen starkly in the book of Job. In Job, it is God who is identified as the cause of Job's suffering, and the protagonist cries out to God to "let [him] alone" (Job 7:16). In both forms of lament, the petitioner cries out to God, and does so in the hope that the one causing their suffering will withdraw their hand from them. In neither case is the petitioner the one responsible. As Brueggemann writes, "the petitioner accepts no guilt or responsibility for the dysfunction, but holds the other party responsible."[8]

When Western Christians lament at a time of climate crisis, therefore, questions must be asked as to the purpose of this lament. Whilst people need a way of expressing grief and fear, to lament to God about a situation that we ourselves have caused seems inappropriate. What are we asking God to change? Our own actions? That, surely, is up to us. If we are the oppressors in the situation, however much we may regret our role in destroying the Earth, then surely our situation cannot be changed by petitioning God.

If lament, in biblical terms, is inappropriate in the current situation, then the issue that arises is how Western Christians can relate to God from the midst of the crisis and express the pain and fear that is evoked by environmental catastrophe, whilst also praying for justice in an unjust situation in which the one praying is complicit.

In the discussion that follows, ideas from liberation theology will be utilised in order to consider the role of prayer and liturgy in confronting injustice, and these will be drawn into conversation with key biblical passages that shape Christian understanding of the relationship between God, humanity, and the Earth. Through this intersection, it will be argued that the inclusion of protest against God in climate liturgy can provide a way of relating to God at a time of

[7] Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (1986).

[8] Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," 63.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

anthropogenic climate change whilst also challenging theological concepts that have justified the exploitation of the non-human world.

3. The failure of orthodoxy

In his book *Embracing Hopelessness,*[9] Miguel de la Torre argues that Eurocentric theological approaches usually start with beliefs and ideologies, and that Christians then shape their actions on the basis of these beliefs. The worldviews and doctrinal beliefs are formed through engagement with Scripture, and people then seek to put these beliefs into practice. In this way, orthopraxis comes out of orthodoxy. Liberative ethicists, however, reverse this. De la Torre highlights that the pursuit of justice is the primary aim for such ethicists, and the first step is to take action to build justice. In light of such action, spiritual and theological understandings can be developed. In contrast to the traditional Eurocentric approach, beliefs and ideas flow out of liberative practices. Orthopraxis comes first, and orthodoxy develops from it.

A much-cited article from 1967 by Lynn White Jr can be read in light of de la Torre's ideas about orthodoxy and orthopraxis; in this article, White argued that Christianity, and particularly Western Christianity, is responsible for forming and promoting ideas and beliefs that have led to ecological crisis.[10] White emphasised the way in which Western Christian interpretations of Scripture divorce humans from the rest of creation and depict the natural world as existing only to serve humans. These anthropocentric attitudes have led to the exploitation of the natural world and the crisis that has emerged from such treatment. Just as de la Torre emphasises the Eurocentric tendency to develop beliefs and then act in light of them, White's analysis of the causes of ecological crisis cites Western Christian beliefs about humanity's authority over the Earth as a root cause for exploitative practices.

White's argument and his placement of blame on the Western Christian tradition proved controversial. His emphasis on the role of Christianity has been criticised for over-simplifying the causes of environmental degradation, with Joseph Blenkinsopp pointing out that humans were causing damage to the natural world well before the texts that the Christian tradition holds as Scripture were written.[11] Biblical scholars such as Gene Tucker have also criticised White's suggestion that the Bible promotes anthropocentric attitudes that separate humanity from the rest of creation, pointing out that texts like the

[9] Miguel A. De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), xiii–xv.

[10] Lynn White Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207.

[11] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 36.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Genesis creation stories, which White suggests emphasise humanity's unique place in the world, should in fact be read as theocentric texts.[12] Although White writes that these stories show God creating the world "explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes,"[13] Tucker argues that the Genesis creation stories in fact demonstrate a clear hierarchy where God rules over creation and humans, whilst apportioned a special role within creation, remain subordinate to God. Humans thus have a responsibility to the rest of creation but do not have the right to rule it as they please; God remains at the centre.

Despite these criticisms, White's argument has proved influential, no doubt because it does highlight an uncomfortable truth. Whilst it is an overstatement to lay all blame for the ecological crisis at the feet of the Western Christian tradition, Christian doctrines have been used to justify the exploitation of the Earth. The idea of humans having the right to exploitative dominion over the rest of creation stems from the way in which Genesis 1:26–28 has informed Christian, and therefore modern Western, thinking. Regardless of whether or not the text was meant to be anthropocentric, the right of humans to have dominion and subdue the Earth has been promoted by the Church, using Genesis 1 as its justification. Even the stewardship movement, which in its 20th century form developed as a way of countering the destructive nature of ideas of dominion within the Church and which draws on the depiction of humanity maintaining the garden in Genesis 2:4–3:24 as well as the ideas of Genesis 1:26–28, remains rooted in the concept that human presence and action is necessary for the full flourishing of the Earth.[14] This view, whatever its benefits in challenging more destructive worldviews, remains rooted in anthropocentric concepts about the necessity of humanity. It is not God who ultimately cares for the Earth, according to this worldview, but humans who do this on God's behalf. Issues with this model include its reliance upon reading the Hebrew terms *rādāh* (to have dominion) and *kābaš* (to subdue) as having neutral meanings and ignoring the predominantly violent sense that they hold in other passages, as well as ignoring the fact that humans emerged relatively late in the evolutionary process and that therefore to view humans as having an integral role in managing the natural world assumes that life on Earth was not flourishing before the emergence of humans.[15] The unintentional consequences that human action often has on ecosystems also demonstrates our unsuitability for acting as God's stewards on

12 Gene Tucker, "Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 1 (1997).

13 White Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1205.

14 For discussion of Christian interpretations of dominion and the historical impact of these interpretations, see Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), 16–77.

15 Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," in *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology*, ed. Ian Ball et al. (London: SPCK, 1992), 67–86.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Earth.[16] Besides this, Richard Bauckham points out that a stewardship model emphasises a hierarchical relationship that places God at the top, humans below God, and the rest of creation below humans. Bauckham argues that this *vertical* relationship fails to recognise the *horizontal* relationship that exists between humans and the Earth as co-creatures that are formed by the Creator.[17]

Attempts to reframe ideas of violent dominion that arose from interpretation of the Genesis creation stories into ideas of stewardship are thus replete with issues, and the dominance of these ideas in the Church today as the environmental situation continues to decline demonstrates that re-reading these texts in this way has not driven widespread change. An alternative approach has been proposed by eco-hermeneutical readings of the Bible that examine other texts than the commonly used passages from Genesis.[18] Key amongst these are Job 38–41 and Psalm 104. In these passages, a strongly theocentric worldview is promoted. In Job 38–41, God questions Job as to his understanding of the cosmos and depicts a world that is created and sustained exclusively by God. Humans appear only as corpses on the battlefield or nameless drivers, and the animals that are described are wild and free, not domesticated or depicted in relation to humans (even the war horse of Job 39:19–25 is presented in its own right rather than as an animal that only has value in relation to its use by humans). Psalm 104 describes humans in a little more detail as it depicts people at work, but even here humans are presented as having no special role or authority over the rest of creation.

These passages have been posited as an alternative way in which to consider the relationship between God, humanity, and the Earth. Rather than being used to justify an anthropocentric worldview in which humans have rights and/or responsibilities over the rest of creation, Job 38–41 and Psalm 104 depict a world in which God is directly involved in the Earth and humans have no special role in the management of creation. The narrative that arises from these passages is one that is drastically different to the dominant anthropocentric narrative that shapes the Western Christian tradition and which White argued underpins behaviour that is destructive towards the natural world.

Despite the possibilities that these eco-hermeneutical approaches to the Bible have provided, the fact remains that they have not altered the dominant narrative that shapes Western societies. Theocentric ideas of humanity's relationship

16 Heather Eaton, "An Earth-Centric Theological Framing for Planetary Solidarity" in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 19–44.

17 Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 17–22.

18 Norman C. Habel, *Finding Wisdom in Nature: An Eco-Wisdom Reading of the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, eds., *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); David G. Horrell, ed., *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Routledge, 2010), 11–20.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

with the rest of the world as co-creatures, rather than created co-creators,[19] remain an alternative perspective to the mainstream ideas of humanity's special place in creation. A further issue also arises in the so-called age of the Anthropocene, when human action impacts almost every aspect of the Earth and its ecosystems. As Bill McKibben pointed out, God's questioning of Job has a different impact in this age. He writes:

> When [God] asks, as he does in Job, "Who shut in the sea with doors… and prescribed bounds for it?" and "Who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens?" we can now answer that it is us. Our actions will determine the level of the sea, and change the course and destination of every drop of precipitation.[20]

Whilst Job 38–41 has been posited as a theocentric text that could reframe Christian understandings of the relationship between God, humanity, and the Earth, McKibben's words highlight the difficulty of reading this passage today. Whereas the character Job, and the readers of the text for centuries after, could respond to God's questioning with an admission that they could not do any of the acts that God describes, that is no longer the case. Humans *can* change sea levels. Humans *can* hunt prey for lions (Job 38:39) – as any zookeeper could attest. Humans *can* "cut a channel for the torrents of rain" (Job 38:25) – as the technology of cloud seeding demonstrates. To read the divine speeches of Job today provokes different answers as humans can confirm that they can indeed do the things that God describes. Whilst Job 38–41 has been posited as a passage that demonstrates God's ultimate care for creation and the irrelevance of human action, the power that humans have now proved themselves capable of wielding brings into question whether this text can have the same rhetorical power as it once did.

How, then, can Western Christians respond at a time of climate catastrophe? The orthodox beliefs that have shaped the way in which Western Christians act have failed. Humanity's attempts at dominion have resulted in exploitation of the Earth, careless greed, and the destruction of ecosystems. Efforts to reframe these beliefs into ones that emphasise care and protection have not brought about the drastic change that is needed to mitigate the effects of environmental degradation and climate breakdown, and are even called into question in light of humanity's power. What, then, is left?

I suggest that a reading of Job's protests in conversation with the idea, from liberative ethics, that orthopraxis should precede orthodoxy can offer a path for Christians at a time of climate crisis. By drawing upon Job to inform the way in which Christians create liturgy at a time of crisis, it is suggested that the act

---

19 For discussion of the idea of humans as co-creators at a time of environmental disaster, see Bethany Sollereder, "The Human Role Revisited on a Rapidly Changing Planet," *Ephata* 4, no. 1 (2022): 259–283.

20 Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 84.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

of lament and protest can be used to reframe beliefs, drive change, and seek justice.

4. Job's orthopraxis

The book of Job is a natural conversation partner with ideas of climate change and environmental issues due to the key role that Job 38–41 has played in eco-hermeneutical approaches to the Bible. As has been seen, however, these readings have not changed mainstream understandings of humanity's relationship with the Earth, and anthropogenic climate change raises questions about how we should read the divine speeches today. Despite these issues, there remains a key element of this passage that warrants further discussion. Whilst humans are reduced to irrelevance within the divine speeches, the speeches are still addressed to a human, namely Job. Despite the theocentric character of the speeches and the insistence that God alone creates and sustains, there is still a place for humans in their dialogue with God.

This factor must be considered within the wider context of the book. Early on, the character Job rejects the orthodoxy of his friends. Whilst the interlocutors provide numerous explanations for why Job is suffering – attributing it to divine punishment, suggesting that it is educative, and advising patience and trust in God's justice – Job rejects all of these arguments. He insists that there is no just reason for his suffering and demands an audience with God. Job's response to his suffering is not to attempt to justify it, but to protest against the injustice of his situation and lament to the one who has caused it – God.

It takes time, but eventually God does respond. The divine speeches can seem unsatisfying as they do not even mention Job's complaints, let alone provide an answer. What is important here, however, is the mere fact that God responds. This is made clear in the narrational introductions that appear in 38:1 and 40:6 where it says that "YHWH answered Job out of the whirlwind," and 40:1 where it states "YHWH said to Job." In each of these introductions Job's name is included as the direct object. God does not broadcast an announcement for anyone to hear, and does not even direct the speech to Job's interlocutors, who might also benefit from divine wisdom. God *answers Job*. Regardless of whether or not the answer is satisfactory, God does respond to Job's demands for an audience and enters into dialogue with him. Furthermore, God's statement in 42:7 that Eliphaz and his friends "have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done" has been interpreted as praise for Job's willingness to protest.[21] Job's rejection of orthodox explanations and his act of protest allow him to enter into dialogue and relationship with God.

[21] J. Richard Middleton, *Abraham's Silence: The Binding of Isaac, The Suffering of Job, and How to Talk Back to God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021); Choon-Leong Seow, *Job 1–21:*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Job's protests do not provide a direct parallel for how Christians might act at a time of climate crisis. As discussed above, biblical lament is used to draw attention to injustices that are perpetrated by another and to call for God to rectify this. In the book of Job, God is the one perpetrating violence against Job. The character cries out to God, highlighting the injustice of the suffering that has been caused and calling for it to end. The whole premise of the book is that Job is innocent. We, however, are not. Any attempt to use Job's protests as a potential path to renewed relationship with God (and the Earth) must navigate this key difference. Western Christians are not in a position to lament as Job does.

It is here that we must return to considering the anthropocentric worldview that is dominant within Western Christianity. Attempts to state that humans have not caused climate catastrophe are nothing more than denial. Nonetheless, within the narrative that has been shaped by interpretation of the Genesis creation stories (and particularly Genesis 1:26–28), humans have done exactly what God commanded. Humans have been fruitful and multiplied, and the global population continues to grow. Humans have filled the Earth and subdued it, resulting in a world in which no part of the land, sea, or atmosphere is completely free of human impact. Humans have exercised dominion over every living thing, using them for food, sport, leisure, and research. Humans have fulfilled the divine commands to the letter.

And yet this has not led to flourishing. Human action has resulted in pollution and the destruction of ecosystems which, before one even considers the impact on other creatures and parts of the Earth, is proving devastating for human health, security, and well-being. We have done exactly as God commanded, and yet are now suffering the consequences of our obedience.

It is important to reiterate that this argument is made on the basis of the worldviews that are dominant within Western Christianity, but given the continued influence of these worldviews, it is necessary to find ways forward that fit within these narratives. As shown by the continued sidelining of alternative narratives that reject anthropocentrism, we cannot rely upon the proposal of new narratives to lead to a relationship with the Earth that is conducive to both human and non-human flourishing.

Thus, from within the dominant anthropocentric worldview of Western Christianity, ultimate moral responsibility for anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation rests with God. There is no doubt that human action has caused this destruction, but the belief that humans have acted in obedience to God in doing so means that responsibility can be thought to sit with the one who ordained and encouraged this action.

Interpretation and Commentary (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 92.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

In this, there is the opportunity for protest and lament. It is appropriate to lament to God for issuing the command to have dominion, and in this way to lament the crisis that has arisen from obedience to this command. Just as Job is shown to be right to engage with God and hold God to account when it appears that God is not acting justly, so lament can be an appropriate way of responding when it is believed that following God's divine commands has not delivered the blessings that were promised.

This path of lament is not just a way for Christians to vocalise grief at the state of the Earth. The very act of lamenting reframes the relationship between God, humanity, and the Earth in a way that alternative narrative explanations have failed to do. In lament, God's power over humanity and over creation is acknowledged. Human actions may have caused catastrophe, but God is the one with the ultimate power and responsibility. Humans are first and foremost creatures, not all-powerful creators. In crying out to God as the one who holds ultimate responsibility humans are repositioned within a theocentric worldview. The narratives that are held may be anthropocentric, but in shifting responsibility onto God and protesting against God's licensing of humanity's destructive behaviour, the act of lamenting shifts the focus from humans onto God. God's presence is affirmed as worshippers address God. God remains free and all-powerful, undiminished by humanity's own power. Humans continue to recognise their own role in causing the climate crisis, but also find a way of engaging with God and the world rather than being paralysed by grief. There is no space for apathy when one is engaged in the practice of lament.

In this way, the orthopraxis of lament leads to a reframing of belief and orthodoxy is able to flow from it. Rather than ideas of how we should treat the Earth developing out of anthropocentric understandings of humanity's place in creation, the practice of lament demands justice from God. Whilst this practice of lament can arise from within the orthodoxy of Western Christianity, the practice itself paves the way to a new understanding, where God alone holds the power. Humans may hold immense influence over the Earth and have vast capabilities, but they are not the most powerful beings in the universe. Rather, humans are creatures that are subject to divine rule. Through the act of protest, we uphold God's power over us and reject the anthropocentric attitudes that have driven the climate crisis. The very narratives that are problematic provide the opportunity for lament, and yet they are then remoulded in light of that lament.

It should be noted that this approach does not expect that God will simply fix the crisis. In recognising that God holds ultimate power and humans are creatures who cannot dictate divine action, there is a relinquishing of control. God is free to respond or not. God may be responsible for issuing a command that has led to the crisis, but humanity's awareness of the failure of this command to produce blessings means that what comes next can only be the responsibility

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

of humans. Nonetheless, in reframing humanity's relationship with the Earth through lament, there is the opportunity to take a first step towards enacting this change.

5. Creating liturgy

It has been argued that lament, when directed against a God who holds the ultimate moral responsibility, is a practice that not only demands justice when it appears lacking but which can then lead to a reframing of beliefs about the relationship between God, humanity, and the rest of creation. The act of lamenting to a God who holds responsibility affirms God's power over humanity and emphasises humans' position as creatures. This theocentric attitude differs from the dominant anthropocentric view that White argued is the historical cause of the environmental crisis.

The biblical and theological basis of this argument leads to further questions about how this may be put into practice. Here I offer some preliminary thoughts on issues that must be considered in the construction of new climate liturgies that are based, not on lament for the state of the planet, but on God's responsibility for commanding humans to act in a way that brought about this state.

First, it must be recognised that the argument promoted would likely be deeply uncomfortable for many Christians. The act of lament, whilst common in Jewish tradition, has played a lesser role in Christianity.[22] Although the use of lament in liturgy has increased in recent years through its inclusion in prayers for the environment, this form of lament does not align with the biblical form of lament, as discussed. There is no protest against God in current ecological liturgy. To lament in this way, where God is held as being morally responsible, would likely be unfamiliar and uncomfortable within the Church.

Protest against God, however, is a common theme in the Hebrew Bible. Job is but one of these protestors. As Will Kynes writes, "Job joins the heroes of Israelite faith, Abraham (Gen 18:25), Jacob (Gen 32:24–32), and Moses (Exod 32:12), the psalmists who dare to cry 'Why?' and 'How long?' and prophets such as Jeremiah and Habakkuk, in confronting God and demanding that the deity make things right."[23] There is a biblical basis for protest against God. Liturgically, this biblical precedent could be a bridge for using lament and protest as a way of re-engaging with an all-powerful Creator God, under whom *all* creation – including humans – sit. To use the language and images provided

[22] Lee, *Lyrics of Lament*, 87.
[23] Will Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 184f.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

to us by Job, and the Psalms and Genesis and the prophets, could be a way of introducing this form of lament to Christian climate liturgy.

Second, it must be recognised that the possibility of reframing beliefs about God, humanity, and creation has the potential to be conceived of as a threat to one's very identity. The cultural trauma that can arise from such threatened worldviews is being explored by the author in other work,[24] but it must also be acknowledged here. The proposed reframing of understandings about humanity's place in creation on the basis of lament has the same end result as the alternative narratives that have been proposed by eco-hermeneutical approaches to Job 38–41 and Psalm 104, but it approaches this conclusion from a different angle. It is this different angle that, it is suggested, is key. The act of lamenting against God begins from within the very belief systems that it eventually reframes. It begins from the divine command to have dominion (or to be stewards), and yet in responding to that very command the act of lament positions humanity within a strongly theocentric worldview where humans do not have rights or particular responsibilities over the Earth.

By working from within these belief systems, there is the possibility to reduce potential threats to people's worldviews (which can lead people to hold on to these worldviews even more strongly). There is also another benefit to lament. Molly Farneth points out that rituals can build communities by creating shared practices and reflecting the values of those who participate.[25] In using lament to God in climate liturgy, a space can be created in which people can gather and find renewed identity together as worshippers of the Creator God. In the ritual use of lament, there is the opportunity to pray in a way that reframes beliefs to reflect the reality of the current crisis, these beliefs can shape future action and treatment of the Earth, and throughout this cycle of practice and belief there can be relationship with one another as well as with the Earth and, at the heart of it all, with God.

[24] Diana Paulding, "Responding to a Disrupted World: Reading Job in the Light of Cultural Trauma." (Doctor of Philosophy University of Exeter, 2025).

[25] Molly Farneth, *The Politics of Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783987402043-149 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -