

Audemus Lugere:
The Prophetic Hope of Christian Mourning

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In Search of Lament

DESPITE THE LAST CENTURY'S resurgence of interest in lament as a vital topic for theological reflection, there remains a troubling ambivalence about its place in the Church's life and theology, one that arguably betrays deeper, more systemic confusions. Notwithstanding efforts to rehabilitate lament, particularly in pastoral and practical theology, Christian mourning continues to be characteristically ambivalent, apologetic, and almost furtive, as if forbidden by faith except in extreme cases of death and loss, when it is permitted, if not endorsed. This raises the possibility that these more pragmatic approaches have overlooked deeper theoretical questions, ambiguities, and issues.¹ Additionally, if we lack the conceptual—and *theological*—resources to explain why Christians can mourn, the joy of the Christian life can begin to ring false, to smack of mere optimism rather than the radical hope of the Gospel.

¹ For insightful essays from German and Anglophone authors that address this issue, see those in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2009), and *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, ed. Sally Ann Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005). For a history of the decline of the lament in the Christian West, see Richard A. Hughes, *Lament, Death, and Destiny* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (October 1, 1986): 57–71.

There is need, then, to develop a robust Christian realism that can explicitly address the lurking theoretical and historical issues and show that hope and anxiety, or joy and sorrow, are not opposed or merely dialectically compatible, but in fact indispensable parts of the Christian life. This article proposes the work of Richard Schenk as a guide toward just such a Christian realism.² Schenk has devoted significant attention to the theme of mourning, although Anglophone reception of his work has been remarkably sparse to date.³ Themes of his work include the post-conciliar reception of *Gaudium et Spes* and historical and contemporary debates concerning human finitude, suffering, grace, and hope. In sympathy with Schenk's work, I argue for a Christian retrieval of the prophetic lament as a contribution

² My use of realism in this essay does not refer so much to a particular metaphysical or epistemological position concerning, for instance, extra-mental reality, but instead indicates a stance of human beings toward the world, viewed as (a) not of our own making and (b) the source and standard of human cognition and interpretive judgments. Such a realism is, at the same time, the subjective flowering of a genuinely metaphysical realism. Specifically, this describes a stance toward reality that is both *expansive*, in that it maintains a principled openness to reality in all its *grandeur et misère*, and *critical*, in that it seeks, through the making and harmonizing of distinctions, to articulate judgments about the nature of reality. This depends on a dynamic interplay of the qualities of *truthfulness*, by which one remains open to reality as the primary given to which the person attempts to conform his interpretive judgments, and *hope*, by which one strives toward difficult human goods and resists the extreme tendencies of pessimism or optimism. As I will argue, such a realism must play a foundational role in shaping the form of the Christian answer to the question "what may man hope for?"

³ See Richard Schenk: "'And Jesus Wept': Notes toward a Theology of Mourning," in *Soundings in a History of a Hope: New Studies on Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 102–30; "Gaudium et Spes: The Task Before Us," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 8, no. 2 (2010): 323–35; "Officium Signa Temporum Perscrutandi: New Encounters of Gospel and Culture in the Context of the New Evangelization," in *Called to Holiness and Communion: Vatican II on the Church*, ed. Steven C. Boguslawski et al. (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2009), 69–105. In addition to these works, I will also be drawing on draft versions of the following essays by Fr. Schenk that will appear (in translation from German originals) as chapters in his *Revelations of Humanity*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming): "Factus in agonia: On the Agony of Christ and of Christians"; "Hoping to be a Person: Theological Reflections on the Discontinuity of Promise and Trust"; "Can and Should We Avoid Theological Talk about God's Suffering? Reflections about the Dispute between Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar." I wish to express my thanks for advance access to this material.

toward his call for a differentiated approach to theology, an approach that attends to both *gaudium et spes* (joy and hope), on the one hand, and *luctus et angor* (grief and anxiety), on the other.⁴ My argument will converge with the trajectory of his proposals, reinforcing his conclusions from a scriptural point of departure.

Any genuinely Christian theology of mourning should be nourished by its Old Testament roots. The prophetic lament, notably that of Jeremiah, is a fertile source for understanding and deepening Schenk's theology of mourning. Relying on (but also amplifying) Yochanan Muffs's study of prophetic intercession, I argue that lament is actually thoroughly, albeit darkly, hope-filled and that, furthermore, it offers a rich typology that can inform authentic Christian sorrowing. Moreover, in its thematization of truth, providence, suffering, eschatology, sin, and human subjectivity, the prophetic lament has much to offer toward the development of a robust theology of mourning and an expansive Christian realism.

Since my goal is to situate a retrieval of the prophetic lament within the context of Schenk's broader project, my argument will begin with a summary of the capital features of his theology of mourning. The next and longest section of the present article will pull together the main threads of my proposal that Jeremiah's lament in chapter 20 is fruitfully read as a form of his intercession, which has a unique coloration by virtue of his prophetic vocation. After a close reading of the lament and an analysis of its inner logic and significance, I will briefly sketch the New Testament's witness to the Christological reconfiguration of the prophetic lament. The concluding section will summarize the convergences between Schenk and this study and offer four theses on their implications for contemporary theology in the Church.

Richard Schenk's Theology of Mourning

It is at the risk of simplification that I confine myself to summarizing only the main features of Schenk's theology of *luctus et angor*. The initial

⁴ "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* [December 7, 1965], §1). This article follows Schenk's practice of using the Latin terms as shorthand to evoke a constellation of semantically related terms (e.g., *luctus et angor* would include not only grief and anxiety but also sorrow, lament, mourning, suffering, and so on).

problem, he notes, is that the tradition lacks clear indications of what a genuinely Christian theology of mourning can and should be. The ambivalence of the inherited tradition reveals unresolved and often unremarked tensions in the philosophical and theological views that shape our approach to death and mourning.⁵ Broadly speaking, Schenk has focused on developing resources within the tradition, particularly in Thomas Aquinas, setting them in dialectical engagement with modern and contemporary accounts of sorrow, suffering, and death. The central thrust of much of his work is to establish the goodness and rationality of mourning as an authentic response to the experience of evil. This puts him in conversation with classical Platonist and Stoic views, as well as their modern heirs. In Schenk's estimation, Christian attempts to formulate a theology of mourning have been bedeviled by the presence of a Stoic indifference, on the one hand, and a Platonic spiritualism, on the other. Against the dualistic approach of Platonism, which views death in a positive and enlightened way as the liberation of the soul from its bodily prison, Schenk has stressed the negativity of death as a rupture, a destruction of genuinely human possibilities.⁶ In his view, this insight is not limited to the privileged perspective of theology, but is accessible to philosophical investigation as well.⁷ The

⁵ So, for instance, the legacy of Platonic and Stoic thought, the individualistic soteriologies in the Reformation period, and subsequent sociopolitical and existential theologies of suffering and secular, progressive ideologies has made the task of articulating a genuinely Christian theology of mourning all the more difficult and urgent.

⁶ Note that death is, for Aquinas, a complicated reality, given the sort of composite being that man is. Death is a natural consequence with respect to the corruptible nature of the body, but it is unnatural with respect to the incorruptible, spiritual nature of the soul. It is unquestionably an evil introduced into the world only through sin, and it can be overcome only through the grace of Christ. See, for example: *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, qq. 75–77; I-II, q. 85, a. 5; III, q. 50. There has been a recent explosion of interest in Aquinas's view of death. For a sampling of the arguments between the camps of "survivalism" and "corruptionism," see Turner C. Nevitt, "Aquinas on the Death of Christ: A New Argument for Corruptionism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2016): 77–99; Patrick Toner, "Personhood and Death in St. Thomas Aquinas," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2009): 121–38; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), esp. 51–54; David S. Oderberg, "Survivalism, Corruptionism, and Mereology," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4, no. 4 (2012): 1–26.

⁷ The Platonic legacy persists, Schenk observes, in the tendencies of contemporary Christian theologians to "spiritualize (at times by 'existentializing' or 'historicizing') hopes for perfection generally, even for postmortal salvation,"

anthropology undergirding this claim regards embodiment as integral to human nature: the human person is a unity, a body–soul composite. The legacy of Stoic thought is also inhospitable to mourning, since the disturbance mourning causes can compromise the soul’s rationally calibrated equilibrium. The Stoic strategy is “to view suffering distantly from the perspective of the entire cosmos,” and “from this self-distancing perspective, the Stoics attempted to view their own sufferings as if they were the sufferings of another, rather than, quite to the contrary, to view the sufferings of others as if they were one’s own sufferings.”⁸ To the extent that it has admitted this influence, Christian theology has been hampered in developing its reflections on the “programmatically anti-Stoic” virtue of compassion. Schenk’s response is to the point: “The goal of Christian mercy is not to shut one’s eyes to the suffering that is inflicted by nature or choice.”⁹

A recurrent feature of Schenk’s theology of mourning is his attention to theodicy and the implications of suffering for the life of faith. Neither Christian life nor theology are well served by approaches that deny or downplay the presence of evil and suffering in the world or the questions that this presses upon the believer. Schenk has criticized attempts to dissolve the problem of evil. Despite their differences, both Hans Urs von Balthasar’s proposals of “divinized suffering” and the “fatalistic-optimistic” perspective of Karl Rahner’s transcendental theology attenuate the real negativity of death and suffering, and hence obviate the need for a theology of mourning.¹⁰ Yet, because death and its accomplices are instances of real evil and negativity, Schenk argues, the response of mourning is actually rooted in a clear-eyed attitude toward both the human desire for immortality and the destructiveness of death. Of vital importance here is the Christian

but against this, he argues that “philosophy knows the immortality of the soul but not its beatitude; it knows of hope, not its fulfillment” (“And Jesus Wept,” 128, 108).

⁸ Schenk, “And Jesus Wept,” 128.

⁹ Schenk, “And Jesus Wept,” 128.

¹⁰ See Schenk, “Can and Should We Avoid Theological Talk about God’s Suffering?” Schenk’s ability to integrate perspectives both old and new is evident in his brand of transcendental theology, which incorporates Aquinas and Kant in order to defend human finitude against an idolatry of transcendence and to explain human nature’s capacity for perfection through the undeserved gift of grace. See also Jeremiah Alberg, “The Antinomy of the Heart and the Search for True Transcendence,” in *Habitus Fidei: Die Überwindung Der Eigenen Gottlosigkeit*, ed. Jeremiah Alberg and Daniela Köder (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 365–77.

virtue of hope, which is, on Schenk's view, the grounds for or condition of mourning.

Convergent to this point, the Second Vatican Council plays a crucial part in Schenk's theology. Schenk's study of the reception of *Gaudium et Spes* points to the need to clarify the conditions for the possibility of Christian anguish, mourning, and anxiety. In the ongoing task of receiving the full and genuine teaching of the Council, there is particular need to harvest the Council's complex presentation of the Church's place in and responsibilities toward the world. As shown in the first fifty years after the Council, *Gaudium et Spes*—particularly its memorable opening statement and its watchword of “the signs of the times”—proved susceptible to widely divergent interpretations that often reflected equally divergent views of the condition of man and society as a whole. The first wave of post-conciliar reception and interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes* was marked by a programmatic but profoundly unrealistic optimism that failed to recognize in the signs of the times anything other than straightforward indications of God's presence and action in the world. While this phase eventually collapsed under the weight of its own ponderous naïveté, it nevertheless demonstrated the need for a differentiated approach to the facticity of human nature and society. As Schenk has argued, this involves adopting a theological hermeneutic that does not limit itself—as did initial interpretations of post-conciliar theology—to the signs of *gaudium et spes*, but rather confronts the *luctus et angor* as well. Developing and grounding such a hermeneutic, Schenk argues, will prove to be a significant step toward actually receiving and putting into practice the hermeneutical strategy envisioned by the Council. In fact, “a historically adequate retrieval of the Council and of the two waves of its post-Conciliar reception points towards a more highly differentiated theology, one that can well be described in the dual call to holiness and communion.”¹¹ In Schenk's view, then, reorienting theology toward its twofold goal provides an indispensable framework for understanding the Councils teaching *and* the polyvalent *signa temporum*.

This teleological perspective illuminates the significance of a theology of mourning for the New Evangelization and the Church's engagement with the broader culture. Concerning the Church's vocation to holiness and communion, Schenk writes: “This vocation to holiness *and* communion, as rightly ambivalent as it might be, is a

¹¹ Schenk, “*Officium Signa Temporum Perscrutandi*,” 75.

timely reformulation of the age-old task to be in this world but not—at least not merely—of it. The selfhood of the Church and her critical relationality to the non-Christian world will grow hand-in-hand, or not at all.”¹² Under the rubric of holiness and communion, Schenk contends, the Church’s growth, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, becomes possible and intelligible as activity consonant with the truth of her mission. The signs of the times must be approached in light of the call to holiness and communion, which entails a stance that is simultaneously open and critical. The occasionally tragic aspect presented by the signs of the times can, on this view, be catalysts for conversion, and thus avenues toward holiness and communion. The act of interpreting and the “dual program of affirmation and admonition” that it engenders take place not at a distance, but in close proximity. This point is at the heart of Schenk’s theology of *luctus et angor*:

The Church can share in the aspirations of the world only by participating in its spoken and its anonymous tears and fears, recognizing alongside obvious signs of its progress, the symptoms of its fatal traps and hopeless dead-ends. If the Church of today cannot share in the spiritual and physical *luctus et angor* of the men and women of our day, it will soon cease to share in their *gaudium et spes*.¹³

In light of the ultimate goal of the Church’s mission, Schenk holds that it is imperative for Christians to both enter into the joys and sufferings of the world and retain an attitude of ambivalence. The Church teaches not merely from above, but also from beside the men and women of our day. This precarious balancing act requires constant struggle, both in theology and in praxis, to ground forms of life and thought in a compassionate, vigorous, and faithful Christian realism.

Schenk approaches the questions posed by suffering and mourning from a Thomistic point of departure. His approach is Thomistic in two important ways. First, he sees in Aquinas a model for addressing the ambivalence of our tradition and our times with regard to mourning. Aquinas’s contributions toward a theology of mourning arose out of his “programmatic interest in showing the compatibility and unexpected correspondence between the Gospel and an anthropology that would not only situate human being at the ontological

¹² Schenk, “*Officium Signa Temporum Perscrutandi*,” 104.

¹³ Schenk, “*Officium Signa Temporum Perscrutandi*,” 105.

border (*horizon et confinium*) between angels and animals, but also would correct the frequently all too spiritualistic reading of humanity by a new stress on the animal basis of human life.”¹⁴ Aquinas’s view of the seriousness of death follows from his philosophical and anthropological considerations, then, but this view is further developed and clarified within the context of his theological reflection on the *tristitia Christi* in his commentary on John’s Gospel. Aquinas develops his account of mourning in conversation with a slew of intellectual and cultural interlocutors, thereby exemplifying the sort of circumspect, dialectical approach that Schenk holds is indispensable.

Second, Schenk’s approach is Thomistic not only by method but also in content. In his philosophical and theological syntheses, Aquinas has drawn resources for precisely the sort of differentiated theology the Church needs. Like Aquinas, Schenk grounds his theology of mourning in a rich metaphysics of the human person that emphasizes the integral unity of body and soul in the human being. The negativity of death is due to the rupture it causes to this unity. Schenk maintains the goodness of created nature and resists modern tendencies to blur the line separating nature and supernature and their distinct conditions and tasks. For this reason, further development of a Christian theology of mourning within the context of post-conciliar theology should involve comparison between the “anguish of the followers of Christ” and the “anguish of the men of our time.”¹⁵ The distinction between nature and grace, which is a major theme of Thomas’s thought, would be of critical importance in this regard for preserving the inherent goodness of nature and the perfection—not annihilation—that grace effects. Schenk is keen to emphasize that “Grace does not abolish nature and its weaknesses, but rather presupposes them, preserves them, and weaves them into a more costly fabric.”¹⁶

Lastly, Schenk’s use of Scripture exhibits a deep sympathy with Thomas’s thought. Throughout his work, Scripture plays a decisive role not only for the answers it provides but also and especially in shaping the questions that he pursues systematically. As noted above, one major objective of the present essay is to deepen the biblical roots of Schenk’s theology of mourning. I suggest that much of Schenk’s work implicitly points to the prophetic dimension of the Church. His

¹⁴ Schenk, “And Jesus Wept,” 107.

¹⁵ See Schenk, “*Factus in agonia*.”

¹⁶ Schenk, “*Factus in agonia*.”

significant references to admonition, affirmation, interpretation, and critical relationality all highlight characteristically prophetic tasks. The following discussion turns to the lament of Jeremiah as a crucial scriptural source that can accompany Schenk's theology of mourning by making explicit its prophetic form and reinforcing it with a biblical grammar and typology.

The Grounds for Prophetic Lament

In the first twenty chapters of the book of Jeremiah, we find five complaints, or laments, by the prophet.¹⁷ Jeremiah's fifth and final lament, found in chapter 20, comes "as the climax, or rather the nadir, of a series of such confessions in Jeremiah."¹⁸ Here we immediately confront the issue of the lament's darkness and despair. How are we to understand and profit from a passage that opens with a searing accusation of God and ends with the prophet cursing his birth? At first blush, Jeremiah's lament seems both to indicate an absence of the patience and steadfast hope that should mark the Lord's prophets and to offer little of "positive" theological value. One might well ask how his lament is anything other than the private, agonized cry of a soul that has reached its breaking point.

One burden of my argument, then, is to provide an alternative view of the lament as distinctively prophetic and essentially, profoundly hopeful. These two claims interlock, however: the hope inherent in the prophet's lament emerges when the lament is understood not only as an act of a prophet, but in light of the prayer he is commissioned to offer. The lament, I will argue, is not merely something *done* by a prophet, but rather, in the context of his vocation, takes on a distinctively prophetic character as part of his task of intercession. Reading the prophetic lament as intercession foregrounds its intrinsic relationship to the wider community, which suggests already a resonance with the important social and ecclesial concerns of Schenk's theology of mourning. The first step, then, is to establish that intercession is constitutive of the prophetic mission.

¹⁷ All citations of Scripture are from the NABRE translation. Erhard Gerstenberger distinguishes between lament and complaint: "A lament bemoans a tragedy which cannot be reversed, while a complaint entreats God for help in the midst of tribulation" ("Jeremiah's Complaints," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82, no. 4 [December 1963]: 405n50). The semantic distinction is useful, but for the purposes of this article, I will continue to use the more standard "lament," although with the meaning he assigns to "complaint."

¹⁸ J. Gerald Janzen, "Jeremiah 20:7–18," *Interpretation* 37, no. 2 (April 1983): 179.

Double the Burden: Yochanan Muffs on Prophetic Intercession

In his essay “Who Will Stand in the Breach?: A Study of Prophetic Intercession,” Muffs argues that a proper understanding of the prophetic task must take into account not only the prophet’s messenger function, whereby he represents God to man, but also his intercessory function, whereby he brings the cause of the people before God.¹⁹ His argument draws its central image from the characterization of the intercession of Moses, the paradigmatic prophet, in Psalm 106: “[God] would have decreed their destruction, had not Moses, his chosen one, / Withstood him in the breach to turn back his destroying anger.”²⁰ Muffs proposes that the prophet is called by God both to carry the divine message *and* to beg God to rescind it, to serve justice and yet also to summon the Lord back to his merciful ways:

The first function of the prophet is to announce the punishment and to call on the people to repent. In this role, the prophet acts as the messenger of the Lord. But if the people does not heed the prophet’s words and does not mend the “fence” of its moral being, the Lord will come as an enemy through the “breach.” The function of the prophet is now to go up in the breach, to build a protective wall, and to prepare for the battle against the Lord. The prophet is like a mighty warrior, but his only strength is his eloquence, the strength of the prayer, which may deflect the Lord from destroying his people.²¹

This dual mission is possible, Muffs argues, because the Lord’s calling does not eradicate the prophet’s freedom and subjectivity: “Prophetic prayer is the most characteristic indication of the prophet’s total intellectual independence and freedom of conscience. The divine strong hand does not lobotomize the prophet’s moral and emotional personal-

¹⁹ Yochanan Muffs, “Who Will Stand in the Breach?: A Study of Prophetic Intercession,” in *Love & Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 9–48.

²⁰ Ps 106:23. This is referring to the incident recounted in Exod 32:7–14. See also Ezek 22:30 and Ezra 13:5. See also the use of the breach image in the crucial messianic texts Amos 9:11, Isa 58:12, and Isa 61. There is also a citation of Ps 106:30 in the Hebrew text of Ben Sira 45:23, in manuscript B (15v:2) that recounts how Phineas “took his stand in the breach of his people” (y‘md bprš ‘mw).

²¹ Muffs, “Who Will Stand in the Breach?” 31.

ity.”²² Rather, the Lord “factors in” the freedom of his servant and relies on his prophet to play an active part in the divine plan of salvation. In Abraham Heschel’s memorable phrase: “The prophet is a person, not a microphone.”²³ Human freedom is implicated in the very exercise of the prophetic office.

On this reading, prophetic intercession is rooted in the prophet’s subjectivity, his “autonomous personality,” which provides the natural basis for the prophet to stand in opposition to the Lord’s wrath.²⁴ Even as he recognizes the people’s guilt and disobedience, the prophet must represent Israel and appeal to the Lord’s mercy. By manifesting his own fidelity in prayer, the prophet both challenges the Lord to be true to his own promise and attempts to put him in a double bind in which he will lose his righteous servant if he executes his program of destruction.

The prophet’s subjectivity is an essential precondition for assuming the double burden of intercession, yet it is not undertaken on his own initiative. It is the Lord who commissions the prophet to oppose him in the breach. It is a mistake to disconnect intercession from the divine commission by which the prophet is entrusted with the word of God and empowered to stand *mano a mano* with the Lord. For instance, Jeremiah stands in the breach to oppose the Divine Warrior neither by popular acclaim nor by personal desire, but by his consecration to the Lord (Jer 1:4–5). In addition to being a free agent, then, the prophet is also set apart, totally claimed by and for the Lord: he remains an active subject but is, at the same time, entirely subjected to the Lord’s strong hand.²⁵ This tension puts tremendous strain on the prophet’s strength, to the point of provoking a crisis of hope. The prophet remains true to his calling by patiently waiting on the Lord, even in the midst of anguish and doubt.

²² Muffs, “Who Will Stand in the Breach?” 11. I am wary of following Muffs in his use of the term “independent.” The prophet does not seem to exhibit so much an independence in his relationship with the Lord as an unfettered freedom to speak to the Lord “as one man speaks to another.” Independence—Muffs also uses “autonomy”—is too strong, in my view, and implies that the prophet does not, in fact, depend radically on the Lord to sustain him in his onerous task.

²³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), x.

²⁴ Muffs, “Who Will Stand in the Breach?” 31. Heschel writes: “The prophet is no hireling who performs his duty in the employ of the Lord. The usual descriptions or definitions fade to insignificance when applied, for example, to Jeremiah” (*The Prophets*, 25–26).

²⁵ In making this point, I am going beyond Muffs, though not, I think, against the main thrust of his proposal.

The following distills this discussion into five capital features of prophetic intercession. (1) The prophet has a double burden: he represents God to the people, and the people to God. (2) The prophet is a free and active subject. (3) The prophet stands in opposition to the divine wrath and pleads for compassion. (4) The prophet is set apart, claimed exclusively for the Lord. (5) The prophet's fidelity is manifest in his steadfast trust in the Lord.

Muffs's account stresses the inherent tension between the active and passive dimensions of the prophetic office. In order to grasp what makes the prophetic lament distinctive and relevant to our purposes, it is crucial to recognize its neuralgic point of origin in the double burden entailed by the prophetic vocation. This inherent and foundational tension gives rise to and determines the unique voicing of the lament that we find in Jeremiah, for instance. The historical context for the lament illuminates the conditions of Jeremiah's intercession. As Babylon rises as the major power player in the Near East and begins to bear down on Judah, a theme of Jeremiah's preaching is his appeal to the people to look to the Lord rather than attempting, through alliance with Egypt, to evade their fate.²⁶ This charged international situation in which Judah found itself intensifies the prophetic double burden in a way that complicates and enriches Muffs's account (as Jeremiah's lament brings into relief). At a basic level, the breach metaphor implies that the moral and spiritual edifice of the people lies in ruin and the task of the prophet is to take his place in this breach on behalf of the people. Jeremiah, however, must confront not only the righteous wrath of the Lord but also the treachery and hatred of his own people. The people he represents in the breach are far from being passive spectators to his intercession; they actively seek to discredit him, if not destroy him. If it belongs to the prophet, as Muffs argues, to be "the agent of the defendant," then the defendant in this case has not only rejected representation, but has attempted to kill the court-appointed counsel.²⁷ Assaulted from all sides, Jeremiah feels most acutely the tremendous suffering involved in taking up the prophet's position, alone and exposed, "in the breach."

Against this background, I will argue that Jeremiah's lament is an intercessory act of a prophet. I will first offer a focused reading of the passage, attending especially to those key features of the prophet identified above. The next section will develop in detail the themes

²⁶ See, for example, Jer 42:7–22.

²⁷ See Muffs, "Who Will Stand in the Breach?" 30.

unearthed by the textual analysis and probe the theological significance of the prophetic lament. The third section's discussion of the Christological reconfiguration of the lament pivots attention toward the convergence of Schenk's theology of mourning and this study of prophetic lament and toward the practical and speculative gains of this convergence for today.

Analysis of Jeremiah's Lament

Jeremiah's lament in 20:7–18 is a particularly compelling instance of a prophet “pitched past pitch of grief” (to borrow a phrase from Gerard Manley Hopkins). The passage can be broken down as follows:

- 1) *The Prophet's Reproach* (20:7–10)
 - v. 7: Seduction and Deceit
 - v. 8: Bitter Fruits of Prophecy
 - v. 9: A Painful Necessity
 - v. 10: True Prophet, False Friends
- 2) *The Prophet's Trust* (20:11–13)
 - v. 11: The Divine Warrior²⁸
 - v. 12: The Divine Justice
 - v. 13: The Divine Compassion
- 3) *The Prophet's Curse* (20:14–18)
 - v. 14: The Day of His Birth
 - vv. 15–17: The Messenger of His Birth
 - v. 18: *Why?*

The verses immediately preceding this passage detail Jeremiah's beating and imprisonment at the hands of the priest and false prophet Pashhur (20:1–6). This is in response to his symbolic shattering of the potter's flask and prophecy of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonian forces (19:1–14).

When he is released from the stocks, Jeremiah gives his tormentor a new name from the Lord: “Instead of Pashhur, the LORD names you ‘Terror on every side.’ For thus says the LORD: Indeed, I will hand you over to terror, you and all your friends” (20:3–4). Jeremiah reveals the reason for his targeted prophecy: Pashhur has prophesied lies to his friends. This scene is highly charged by its references to the people's infidelity, divine justice, true and false prophecy, and the

²⁸ See Jer 21:3–10 for a depiction of the Divine Warrior against whom Jeremiah is commissioned to stand.

prophet's sufferings, and it forms the immediate background for the lament to which we now turn.

The passage has a tripartite structure, tracing a movement from dark to light to dark. The accusation in verse 7 determines the theme of the lament: Jeremiah lays a charge against the Lord.²⁹ The nature of the accusation is deception, seduction, domination, and abandonment. There almost seems to be no parallel in Scripture for this complaint, except perhaps the cry "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Ps 22:2).³⁰ Jeremiah's suffering provokes a bitter and reckless outcry. Against what? At first glance, God himself appears to be the object. The Lord has not dealt fairly with the servant he chose and consecrated even before he was born. Divine chicanery, Jeremiah alleges, led him on, and divine power overcame him. He now stands exposed and vulnerable in an increasingly unbearable situation, and all on account of the word of the Lord (vv. 7–8). He is not merely abandoned by his friends; they "watch for any misstep" he makes and scheme a way to wreak vengeance on him for his unpropitious prophecies.

The actions of his adversaries in this passage are notably vocal. They laugh, mock, reproach, deride, whisper, and scheme to trap and destroy him. Jeremiah is ambivalent; because his speech has brought him only "reproach and derision," he attempts silence. But it is too painful: the divine wrath burns like fire within him, "imprisoned" in his very bones (see 6:11). In Jeremiah's futile attempt to constrain the divine message, we are given an image of his profound interiorization of the word and its power over the prophet. Yet it is this identification with the Lord's word that lands him in an excruciating dilemma: if he speaks, he incurs hatred, reproach, mockery, and violence, but silence is a struggle of its own—"I grow weary holding back, I cannot!" (20:9).

²⁹ Samuel E. Balentine, "Jeremiah, Prophet of Prayer," *Review and Expositor* 78 (1981): 338. There is disagreement as to whether the Hebrew verbs (here translated as "seduce" and "prevail") have sexual connotations. I follow Balentine and others in interpreting this passage in terms of its connotations of seduction and rape ("Jeremiah, Prophet of Prayer," 338). For an alternative interpretation and discussion, see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 854–55.

³⁰ See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 551.

The following verse sets up a comparison between Pashhur and Jeremiah in which the issue of true and false prophecy emerges. “Terror on every side,” the nickname given by Jeremiah to Pashhur, is here cast back in his face as a taunt.³¹ This mockery goes beyond the messenger. Michael Avioz writes: “Jeremiah . . . speaks not only for himself, trying to prove that he is God’s prophet, but also in the name of God: It is the honor of God that is at stake, so if they despise Jeremiah, they are really despising God. Hurting the messenger means hurting the sender.”³² This juxtaposes two sorts of prophet: one prophesies lies to his friends and keeps peace; the other prophesies the word of the Lord and turns friends into enemies. In the background is Jeremiah’s condemnation of the false prophets who promise an empty *shalom*:

Small and great alike, all are greedy for gain;
 prophet and priest, all practice fraud.
 They have treated lightly
 the injury to my people:
 “Peace, peace!” they say,
 though there is no peace. (6:13–14)

The true prophet, commissioned by the Lord “to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant” (Jer 1:10), cannot offer such soothing falsehoods. The portrayal of a true prophet—revealed by his dedication to truth even at great personal cost—is thus a key concern of the lament. What distinguishes the true from the false prophet, according to Muffs, is the false prophet’s indifference to the people’s plight and moral disrepair. He thus has no motive to “stand in the breach to push away the divine enemy by means of the power of prayer in his mouth.”³³ Jeremiah, however, stands watch over the people and, by his admonition and prayer, attempts to mediate their conversion. Because of his consecration to truth, he cannot conveniently avoid proclaiming “violence and outrage” when this is the Lord’s message. In fact, as a form of inter-

³¹ For useful discussion of how the figure of Pashhur lends precision and depth to the form of Jeremiah’s lament, see Patrick D. Miller, “Trouble and Woe: Interpreting the Biblical Laments,” *Interpretation* 37, no. 1 (January 1983): 32–45.

³² Michael Avioz, “The Call for Revenge in Jeremiah’s Complaints (Jer xi–xx),” *Vetus Testamentum* 55, no. 4 (2005): 434.

³³ Muffs, “Who Will Stand in the Breach?” 35.

cession, lament is a deep sounding in the mission of the prophet: it not only calls for healing, but explores the wound itself. The searing pain of the lament's outcry shows that it is as much a visceral exploration of suffering as it is a plea for relief.

Thus, the prophet's lament is not concerned merely with accusing God. The cause for Jeremiah's anguish includes the foes and false friends who surround him and the apparent failure of his mission, and thus, by implication, of the word of the Lord. It is important to see this broad sweep of the prophet's lament while also noting that the prophet traces all of his anguish to its root in the Lord's dealings with him.

The language of 20:10 evokes 20:7, where the Lord is accused of deceiving Jeremiah and then prevailing over him. In 20:10, Jeremiah "overhears" his enemies' hopes to deceive him so as to prevail over him. This thematic parallel highlights the centrality of deceit and truth in this passage and points to an ambiguity that erodes attempts at understanding. Deception is presented in both cases as the condition for prevailing. From his standpoint in the prophetic breach, Jeremiah perceives his human and divine assailants wielding similar weaponry: deceit and power. The malice of his enemies, while disturbing in its own right, is more agonizing as a manifestation of what Jeremiah sees as the Lord's duplicity. The Lord had promised to make Jeremiah a "fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of bronze" that could withstand the assaults his preaching would provoke (1:18). "They will fight against you, but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you—oracle of the LORD" (1:19). Yet Jeremiah feels himself to be in danger of being overcome by his enemies and finds the Lord not at his side as support, but before him as enemy. The crisis of the prophet and his mission has called into question the very truthfulness, and therefore identity, of the God who has commissioned him.

J. Gerald Janzen proposes that we are shown here that Jeremiah's "dilemma lies in the tension between 'I am with you' and 'I send you.'"³⁴ There is a tension between divine presence and absence that belongs to the nature of the prophet's commission. This is exposed by the ambiguity in God's promise to *be with* Jeremiah (here recalled by Jeremiah's declaration of confidence): is it as comforter, or as enemy? The present one, or the entirely other? This ambiguity lies at the heart of the lament's oscillation between the very darkest despair and the light of hope. Jeremiah's confession of hope is given a central place

³⁴ Janzen, "Jeremiah 20:7–18," 181.

in the eleven verses comprising the lament's 4-3-4 structure. In verses 11-13, he expresses his confidence and trust: the Lord is with him "like a mighty champion."³⁵ Yet this does not mark a hasty resolution to the prophet's crisis. As an expression of hope, it reaches toward the day of vindication by Israel's champion, but it does not thereby turn a blind eye to threats posed by enemies without and human weakness within. Nor does it signify a decisive departure from seeing the Lord's power as wielded against the prophet himself. The hope in verses 11-13 is meant not to exclude despair, but to refocus the lament by embedding it within the scope of the action of the Lord, as defined by his power (v. 11), justice (v. 12), and mercy (v. 13).

The turn to praise then suffers a devastating reversal in 20:14, where Jeremiah curses the day of his birth. Even at the formal level, this is a shocking move.³⁶ In his discussion of lament in the Psalms, Claus Westermann writes: "What is of theological importance in the structure is that it exhibits an internal transition. There is not a single psalm of lament that stops with lamentation. *Lamentation has no meaning in and of itself.*"³⁷ Jeremiah seems to be veering ominously close to settling in despair. In his reading of the lament, Joep Dubbink accurately asserts that the nerve center of this passage is the prophetic office, the inherent tensions of which prompt a distinctly "theological temptation."³⁸ The curse is integral to the meaning of Jeremiah's lament, since its juxtaposition with the prayer of confidence and praise is characteristic of Jeremian theology, which consistently exploits stark contrasts and rejects facile resolutions of tensions. Praise and curse, according to Dubbink, "critically explain each other, but do not neutralize each other in advance."³⁹

³⁵ The NRSV translates the Hebrew *gibbôr 'ārîš* as "dread warrior," which aligns with Muffs's image of the prophet facing the wrath of the Divine Warrior in the breach.

³⁶ Indeed, some deny that these verses are part of the lament for this very reason. This subordinates the meaning of the passage and its thematic continuity to overly schematic considerations of form. For a summary of the dispute and an incisive response, see Joep Dubbink, "Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist? Concerning the Place and Function of Jeremiah 20.14-18," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 86 (December 1999): 67-84.

³⁷ Claus Westermann, "Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (January 1974): 26 (italics mine).

³⁸ Dubbink, "Jeremiah," 81. Dubbink's article is a lucid presentation of the problems with detaching the curse of vv. 14-18 from the lament. See also Westermann, "Role of the Lament," 35-36.

³⁹ Dubbink, "Jeremiah," 82.

The fact that Jeremiah's lament seems to receive no response poses an interpretive problem. Interpreting the conclusion as "deafening silence" from the Lord, Samuel Balentine has argued that response is non-essential to prayer and that Jeremiah's lament is therefore simply his "way to cope with the circumstances, a way to reorient himself towards the presence of God in times of crisis."⁴⁰ While there is certainly no additional word from the Lord in response to Jeremiah's "why?" of agony, it is not clear that we need to take this lack of *verbal* reply as the sort of barren silence that Balentine suggests or agree with his interpretation of Jeremiah's prayer as therapy or "reorientation." In verses 11–13, Jeremiah proclaims his confidence in the Lord, who "has rescued the life of the poor." Jeremiah's "why?" is the conclusion of four verses (14–18) that reveal Jeremiah to be precisely the one who needs the hand of the Lord: he is the poor man, persecuted and in danger. The order of question and answer, it seems, has been inverted, and the answer already given. The silence of the Lord is in fact a pregnant silence, one that forms part of the prophet's suffering, to be sure, but nevertheless bears fruit in his continued mission.⁴¹ The point at issue in the passage is not that there is *no* answer, but that the answer proclaimed in verses 11–13 does not all at once remove the agony to which Jeremiah's prophetic office has led him. The Lord, no less than his prophet, will not "lightly heal" a wound.⁴² In Janzen's view, the bitter conclusion of the lament reveals Jeremiah "enacting a Joban steadfastness in which doubt and patience define one another and in which even the momentary wish for non-existence is but the dark coloration of the light of faith and unquenchable vocation."⁴³ At the heart of the lament, in other words, is the prophetic office and

⁴⁰ Samuel E. Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 2 (1984): 340–41.

⁴¹ Pope Benedict XVI observes: "God's silence prolongs his earlier words. In these moments of darkness, he speaks through the mystery of his silence. Hence in the dynamic of Christian revelation, silence appears as an important expression of the word of God" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum Domini* [September 30, 2010], §21).

⁴² Dubbink points out: "Importantly, the book does not end with ch. 20 but resumes in 21.1, in the only possible way: 'The word that came from YHWH to Jeremiah.' The prophet goes his way to the end as one called. The word that almost crushed him by the great force it exudes, also takes him along on the way where he is going" ("Jeremiah," 81).

⁴³ Janzen, "Jeremiah 20:7–18," 180.

task of intercession. This is the source of the prophet's struggles and pain, but also, as Janzen rightly notes, the source of light and strength.

The Logic of Lament

This reading of Jeremiah's lament has surfaced several themes that call for closer examination. I have already proposed that Jeremiah's lament is, in a strong sense, intercessory. To some extent, this runs against certain currents in modern considerations of biblical lament, which typically take the Psalms as their touchstone. The lament psalms can then determine the interpretation of the laments of the prophets, with the result that the features peculiar to the prophet's lament are often obscured or missed altogether.⁴⁴ This section will consider Jeremiah's lament in terms of its inner meaning and broader theological significance, focusing on those features that show it to be integral to the task of prophetic intercession. As will be seen, this holds significant implications for a biblical elaboration of key themes of Schenk's theology, especially with respect to the genuinely theological hermeneutics and critical relationality that should characterize the Church's engagement with the broader culture.

In Walter Brueggemann's view, the form of Israel's lament is characterized by petition, which shows it to be "boldly dialogical": "the one who hears or is expected to hear is not addressed in hopeless despair but in passionate expectation."⁴⁵ Westermann likewise declares: "The true function of the lament is supplication; it is the means by which suffering comes before the one who can take it away. Seen from this perspective, we can say that the lament as such is a movement toward God."⁴⁶ On this reading, Jeremiah's outcry is best

⁴⁴ Hermann Gunkel's form-critical analysis gave tremendous precision to the concept of lament and has been influential in shaping subsequent interpretations of the relationship between the complaint psalms and complaints elsewhere in Scripture; see Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 121–98. See also Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981). As a general interpretive strategy, overemphasizing a prophet's dependence on the genre of complaint psalm can be problematic, as when attempts to carve up Jeremiah's lament are based on a priori considerations of form and genre, rather than on the content and thematic continuity of the text at hand.

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, "Formfulness of Grief," *Interpretation* 31, no. 3 (July 1977): 270.

⁴⁶ Westermann, "The Role of the Lament," 32.

understood as an impassioned expression of his total and utter dependence on the Lord, a supplication for divine support to vindicate (a) his righteous servant, (b) his prophetic mission, and (c) the promise and fidelity of the Lord. But this analysis would be incomplete without attention to the communal dimension of the lament configured uniquely in the vocation of the prophet.⁴⁷

At stake is the truthfulness of the Lord, which recalls Exodus 32:7–14 (cited earlier) as a key instance of Moses “standing in the breach.” Here, arguably, Jeremiah stands squarely in the lineage of Moses as a bold intercessor for the people.⁴⁸ This reading is not unanimously shared, however. Balentine, for instance, holds that Jeremiah’s laments are not intercessory (i.e., on behalf of others), but merely “the personal (private) prayers of Jeremiah, prayed by him for himself.”⁴⁹ Jeremiah’s prayer, he argues, has no clear communal interest. This reading, however, neglects what Sheldon Blank terms the “manifestly juridical” form of the laments.⁵⁰ In both language

⁴⁷ 2 Maccabees 15 is interesting as an early Jewish interpretation of Jeremiah as a monumental figure of intercession for God’s people. As Judas Maccabeus is preparing the Jews for battle, he relates a dream in which Jeremiah appears, interceding for the Jewish people: “This is a man who loves his fellow Jews and fervently prays for the people and the holy city—the prophet of God, Jeremiah” (2 Macc 15:14).

⁴⁸ Recall that Moses’s strategy of intercession was to challenge the Lord to preserve his reputation for mercy and fidelity and to prove himself true to his promises. For an interesting study of Jeremiah’s prophetic “lineage,” see William L. Holladay, “The Background of Jeremiah’s Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 2 (1964): 153–64.

⁴⁹ Balentine, “Jeremiah, Prophet of Prayer,” 334.

⁵⁰ Sheldon Blank, “The Confessions of Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, no. 21 (1948): 336. Brueggeman has also insisted on the essential communal aspect of the lament. In his view, the form of the lament defines its function: “It tells the experiencer the shape of the experience which it is legitimate to experience” (“The Formfulness of Grief,” 265). The lament does not express isolation from the community. Rather, by its *form*, the lament locates the sufferer in a communal context where meaning can be found and the suffering made bearable. The lament form is thus concerned with enhancing and limiting the experience of suffering. While I find Brueggemann’s argument to be lopsidedly sociological, his form analysis indicates the mistake involved in dislocating the lament from its communal context. Also on this point, Ellen Davis observes that “verse 13 might be seen as a sort of editorial warning against a privatized reading of the lament (one that is, perhaps, more necessary for twentieth-century readers than their predecessors)” (“Arguing for Authority: A Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 1:4–19 and 20:7–18,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 [June 1985]: 116).

and procedure, Blank sees strong similarities between Jeremiah's confessions and the law court. On this view, Jeremiah is arguing his case before God and before the people. The thrust of his argument is a plea for God to act, to vindicate him and punish the guilty, rather than a plea to receive power to vindicate himself. This underscores the public nature of what is nonetheless a deeply personal prayer. The lament of the prophetic mediator lies at the intersection of personal and national lament, as Westermann indicates: "The individual brings before God not his own personal suffering but, through his mediation, the suffering which affects the nation."⁵¹ Interpretations that attempt to see this lament in terms of a mutually exclusive either/or, *either private or public/social*, overlook the complex mediation inherent in the prophetic task.

Arguably, then, Jeremiah is in fact praying on behalf of others: his persecutors (he prays for justice to be done); the poor (with whom he identifies); and, indirectly, God himself (whose honor is contested by the mockers). We can also grant that Jeremiah is praying for himself, but we must deny that this undermines the intercessory dimension, since Jeremiah's deep identification with the people through his office indicates that this prayer may be understood as personal, but not private.⁵² Jeremiah's lament is integral to his prophetic proclamation. As Ellen Davis has suggested, his outcry exposes before the people the prophet's own argument with God, which he has undertaken on their behalf.⁵³ Jeremiah's ongoing prayer for the people, which he offers from the breach opened by their infidelity, thus attests to his loyalty to the people.

Insofar as they signify a failure of hope before God and compassion toward the people, the prophet's curse in verses 14–18 and the despair it uncovers seem to undermine the prayer's claim to be prophetic intercession. On the other hand, if the curse can be read (as Janzen suggests) as the "dark coloration" of the prophet's faith as he wrestles with the suffering imposed by his vocation, then it is here that the distinctively

⁵¹ Westermann, "The Role of the Lament," 34. The lament of the mediator is "a rare but important intermediate form" that "reaches a high point in the laments (or confessions) of Jeremiah." Moses and Elisha are also cited as precedents, and the songs of the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah are also related.

⁵² Underlying the lament, Westermann points out, is an anthropology for which "the existence of an individual without participation in a community (a social dimension) and without a relationship to God (a theological dimension) is totally inconceivable" ("The Role of the Lament," 28).

⁵³ Davis, "Arguing for Authority," 117.

prophetic dimension of the lament comes to the fore. I submit that the lament expresses the distinctly human voice of the prophet, who has identified so closely with the people *and* with the Lord that the internal tension shifts prophetic intercession into a new, plaintive register. To *fail* to mourn or lament would imply acquiescence to evil and foreclosure on the Lord's plan of salvation—and thus a failure of hope. The prophetic office demands that the subjectivity of the prophet submit to the Lord but also resist him, but as Jeremiah shows, the resistance must be rooted in a deeper submission to and identification with the one who sends him out. This submission is in fact the condition for the resistance, since it gives the prophet access to the Lord's compassion for his people and the warrant to approach the bench and plead on their behalf. It is precisely Jeremiah's faith in the Lord's care for his people that moves him to such vehemence. Michael Widmer observes that "Jeremiah is so rooted in God and His ways that his prayers often reflect the pathos of the Lord."⁵⁴ In other words, the prophet's forthright speech mirrors the intensity of the Lord's compassion.

Jeremiah's lament serves a specifically prophetic function in three ways: first, it protests the rule of evil and suffering; second, it witnesses to the (concealed) compassion and justice of the Lord; third, it refuses to drive a wedge between the mercy and justice of the Lord, in contrast to the false prophets of *shalom*.⁵⁵ While its opening salvo attacked the Lord's truthfulness and fidelity, the lament as a whole displays a profound trust in the Lord. This serves as a corrective to interpretations that read the duality of mercy and justice in God (as expressed in and exploited by prophetic intercession) as *opposition*. Jeremiah presumes that the mercy and justice of the Lord are in reality one. His lament is in fact simultaneously a challenge to and defense of God's abiding fidelity and truthfulness (contra the false prophets). It is the people who have given themselves over to treachery and deceit, not God (Jer 4:2–5). Moreover, Jeremiah's

⁵⁴ Michael Widmer, *Standing in the Breach: An Old Testament Theology and Spirituality of Intercessory Prayer* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 330. Widmer's point follows a reading of the prophets found in Heschel, whose approach parallels that of Muffs. Heschel understands the prophet in terms of sympathy with the divine pathos and notes: "[Jeremiah] was a person overwhelmed by sympathy for God and sympathy for man. Standing before the people he pleaded for God; standing before God he pleaded for his people" (*The Prophets*, 121).

⁵⁵ See Davis, "Arguing for Authority," 115–17. Davis argues for the integral connection between this lament and the ongoing controversy over true and false prophecy.

unpopular prophecies, which often interpret the religious, political, social, and moral signs of his time, find their hermeneutic precisely in divine truth. Jeremiah's encounter with the Lord enables him to discern what his contemporaries could not—or, in many cases, would not. Heschel's characterization of prophecy describes well Jeremiah's prophetic mode: "exegesis of existence from a divine perspective."⁵⁶ In this light, it is possible to read Jeremiah 20 as a commentary on the prophetic office, in which lament holds a crucial place in its service to the Word.

This *Deus veritatis*, however, may also be a *Deus absconditus*. The prophet must therefore, in his turn, be faithful to the experience of abandonment. Balentine's insight seems correct: "God's presence could not be manipulated; it could only be expected."⁵⁷ Jeremiah's experience in the breach reflects an important truth concerning the nature of the world and of God's manner of dealing with his people. God's sustaining power and governance of the world is constant, but not necessarily obvious. The divine presence cannot be controlled or even predicted by a purely human calculus. In other words, God's presence is not a function of our awareness, but surpasses it and occasionally eludes it. For this reason, we should see in Jeremiah's outcry the element of expectation, of hope. Lament points toward a deeper understanding of the divine absence that was keenly experienced by Jeremiah, understood not as opposed to the Lord's presence, but as the Lord's presence in its *otherness*, which involves both an intimate presence and an experience of distance.⁵⁸ Something like this is expressed by Augustine: *eras mecum, et tecum non eram* ("You were with me, and I was not with you").⁵⁹ In Jeremiah's case, the divine concealment is

⁵⁶ Heschel, *The Prophets*, xiv.

⁵⁷ Balentine, "Jeremiah, Prophet of Prayer," 337.

⁵⁸ Janzen asks: "Is it possible that only in the blackness of his own sense of isolation from both people and Yahweh can Jeremiah enter most deeply into an incomprehensible fellowship with God in suffering for the people? And is not the depth of such suffering and the refusal to heal it lightly (15:18a; cf. 6:14) the measure of Jeremiah's loyalty both to the people and to Yahweh? Conventionally, 'witness' connotes presence and 'sending' absence. Is it possible that the two in this instance are one? That the sense of absence communicates, strangely, a presence?" ("Jeremiah 20:7–18," 181).

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* 10.27, Loeb Classical Library 27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912); translation mine. Augustine's statement is obviously retrospective, but it arguably reflects the same reality: an excruciating experience interpreted as divine absence is seen from a later perspective to be more truly described as an absence of the creature from his Creator.

not a result of personal sin, but rather indicates his own inability, as a creature, to be fully present to God in every dimension of God's mysterious providence.

There is, however, a further point to this experience of abandonment. In his place in the breach, the prophet assumes the burden of the people, including, to a degree, their distance from God. Muffs affirms that "only boundless spiritual bravery allows the prophet to suffer the great loneliness of one who stands in the breach and at the same time to call on the people that does not listen."⁶⁰ The breach, then, is the locus of an acute tension between the divine presence and absence, and the costs of mediating between the Lord and his people are given voice in the prophet's desperate defense of truth and his protest against the false and shrunken hope that would foreclose on the divine power—and promise—to save.⁶¹

The lament is paradoxically, it seems, deeply imbued with hope. To overlook the prophet's abiding trust in the Lord's power and protection is to miss the precise motive and the poignancy of the lament. It is even possible to see Jeremiah's hope as the precondition of his lament. In contrast to that of the false prophets, Jeremiah's hope does not take its bearings from auspicious signs of political, social, or religious development, nor does it receive its impulse from a personal optimism. He remains clear-eyed about the threats of exile and the destruction of Jerusalem even as he endures persecution by the very people for whom he intercedes. Jeremiah's trust is anchored by and set within the horizon of saving truth, particularly the Lord's promise to be with him, and is thus not merely compatible with tremendous grief; rather, such grief is made possible by the very profundity and resilience of Jeremiah's hope. On the strength of his contact with the truth of God—indeed, with the God of truth—the prophet can have the courage and trust necessary to hold his ground in the face of fierce opposition.⁶² The prophetic office, which, in Jeremiah's case, is explicitly portrayed as a consecration to the truth, is thus seen to have an essential orientation to hope.

⁶⁰ Muffs, "Who Will Stand in the Breach?" 32.

⁶¹ There is a significant pedagogical dimension of the lament, as well. The tensions and movement alike of Jeremiah's prayer reveal how Jeremiah himself learns through suffering, or more precisely, by bringing his suffering and that of the people before the Lord.

⁶² See Kathleen M. O'Connor, "The Prophet Jeremiah and Exclusive Loyalty to God," *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (2005): 130–40.

The shape of Jeremiah's hope reflects the eschatological dimension of the prophetic lament. His painful knowledge of the depths of his people's wound compels him to recognize just how radical the remedy must be. The healing must be nothing short of total. The final verses of the lament are surprisingly illuminating on this point. Jeremiah's subversion of the lament form and the imagery of his curse signal a subtle but decisive rejection of any kind of immanent solution to the problems facing the poor, needy, and persecuted. The object of Jeremiah's curse is crucial: the day of his *birth*. The significance of the image is suggested by the common saying "Where there's life, there's hope." In this case, the text derives its unsettling force by calling to mind that great source of hope: new life. Jeremiah is writing in large and startling figures for a people whose spiritual vision has become increasingly myopic. Precisely by targeting birth, the emblematic experience of human hope, the prophetic curse in these final verses is deliberately excoriating a hope in the future that remains simply and exclusively human and, in this case, pursued through political and religious maneuvering. This target is the life born not under the star of fidelity to the Lord, but in the shadow of self-interest, fear, and idolatry. The life born of such hope can expect only devastating sorrow, pain, and shame. For the poor to be rescued and the righteous vindicated—the great theme of biblical intercession—in short, for all of suffering Israel to be saved, human efforts will be unfailingly inadequate. There will have to be a different sort of birth.

Jeremiah's temptation to despair of his prophetic mission dovetails with this reading. The final verses appear to call into question the adequacy, or even the *point*, of lament as a response to suffering: "Why did I come forth from the womb, / to see sorrow and pain, / to end my days in shame?" (Jer 20:18). Implicit, of course, is the realization that, considered in itself, his act of lament is insufficient as a therapeutic strategy; it simply fails to remedy the situation or to resolve the tensions it confronts. Yet, in the act of contesting the purpose of lament, Jeremiah exposes both its limits and its foundation. His confrontation with the abyss stems from his discovery of the radical failure that awaits even authentic human projects so long as they are not born of and borne up by God. It is a mark of Jeremiah's extraordinary honesty that he brings this question to light. Only because he addresses his question to the Lord does his lament bring him insight and greater trust.

From this discussion of Jeremiah, we can sketch out a working definition for the prophetic lament as *the intercessory act of a prophet that confronts suffering and refocuses hope within the horizon of the saving truth of God's revelation and action*.⁶³ In the New Testament, this undergoes a dramatic reconfiguration in the person of Christ.

The Lament Christologically Reconfigured

This section exposes the Christological framework within which the distinctively Christian form of the lament is to be found. My contention is that the Jeremian lament, once transposed into the key of the New Testament, is reconfigured as a participation in the prophetic *munus* of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, by which we are made sons and heirs to eternal life.⁶⁴

In this formulation, four motifs are at play. First, in Christ, the root of the prophetic office is revealed to be essentially *filial*. Here I follow Joseph Ratzinger's brief but illuminating comments on Christ's prophetic identity, according to which Christ stands in fundamental continuity with the Old Testament prophets even as he renews the prophetic office by giving it a new clarity and orientation.⁶⁵ Recalling the portrayal in Exodus and Deuteronomy of

⁶³ St. Thomas's treatment of prophecy in *ST* II-II, qq. 171–77, bears on this discussion. In his view, the gift of prophecy is a “gratuitous grace,” specific to certain persons for the benefit of others. It primarily has to do with knowledge: “Prophecy is a kind of knowledge [*cognitio*] impressed under the form of teaching on the prophet's intellect, by Divine revelation” (q. 171, a. 6). St. Thomas places stress on the revelatory dimension, the inspiration by and perception of Divine Truth that gives the recipient access to the “remote,” or hidden, things of God. Particularly relevant to my argument is Thomas's discussion of how the supernatural light enables one to discern, interpret, and judge concrete historical realities by a new “coordination of species” (q. 173, a. 2). While Thomas locates the grace of prophecy within the category of charismatic graces, he nonetheless allows for grades of prophetic inspiration and revelation, thus discreetly leaving open the possibility of “ordinary Christians” receiving prophetic graces to do or say things that they do not fully understand (see q. 173, a. 4). The present article's argument concerning prophetic lament would thus be descriptive of such graces at work precisely in the context of the obscurity and tragic sufferings of wounded nature. (The above translations from *ST* are my own, from the Latin at corpusthomicum.org.)

⁶⁴ For an in-depth study of Jesus's laments, see Rebekah Eklund, *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus' Laments in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁶⁵ To the extent that Jesus's prophetic identity has received explicitly theological attention, discussions have often focused more narrowly on issues such as his eschatology or a possible Moses or Elijah Christology at work in the Gospels.

Moses as the paradigmatic prophet, Ratzinger finds the “root of the prophetic element in that ‘face to face’ encounter with God, in ‘talking with Him as with a friend,’” and it is within this frame that Christ’s prophetic identity must be understood: “The true and greater Moses is, therefore, Christ himself, who really does live ‘face to face’ with God because he is his Son.”⁶⁶ If it is on the strength of this relationship, as Ratzinger suggests, that the prophet lives and speaks, then the prophetic lament takes place precisely within the Son’s communion and intimate dialogue with the Father. Furthermore, the Christian is a prophet *by participation*, such that his prophetic activity—including lament—takes as its model and decisive point of reference the person, deeds, and words of the Christ.⁶⁷ In short, the shift in the New Testament form of the prophetic lament centers on its new Christological and filial core.

Second, it is by Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit that we share in his messianic anointing as prophets. The prophetic lament involves an important pneumatological dimension, since it is by the outpouring of the Spirit that the Christian is made a son with the Son (and thus a sharer in Christ’s prophetic *munus*).⁶⁸ The Christian’s adoptive sonship and prophetic mission intersect here. The Holy Spirit not only makes us sons but also continues to form Christian life and prayer, and this

Underlying any attempt to grasp his prophetic identity, however, are more basic conceptions of the essence of the prophetic office. Some presume the prophet to be a soothsayer, essentially concerned with foretelling future events, or a radical and outspoken social critic, or an apocalyptic figure. For influential arguments, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), esp. part II (“Profile of a Prophet”); Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014). For less sweeping treatments, see J. Severino Croatto, “Jesus, Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke-Acts,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 3 (2005): 451–65; John C. Poirier, “Jesus as an Elijanic Figure in Luke 4: 16–30,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2009): 349–63.

⁶⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, foreword in Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), viii. See also Deut 18:15; Exod 33:7–23; Matt 17:5; Acts 3:22.

⁶⁷ Christopher Rowland suggests that Paul views his own prophetic mission in this way (“Prophecy in the New Testament,” in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day [New York: T & T Clark, 2010], 410–30).

⁶⁸ As Peter declares in his Pentecost preaching, citing the prophet Joel: “‘It will come to pass in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy’” (Acts 2:17, quoting Joel 3:1).

holds implications for the lament. We find in the *parrhesia* of the New Testament the Spirit's seal on the divine warrant to lament.⁶⁹ This term, which signifies boldness of speech, an audacity that continues to speak, preach, and pray even in the face of obstacles or danger, is critical for understanding how the lament shifts from the candor of a trusted servant to the boldness of a child.⁷⁰ From the Spirit comes the encouragement to employ even "stormy prayer" with the *parrhesia* of a son who can lament, "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15). Confident that the Father hears him, the Christian is free to cry out, to give voice to the suffering of creation (see Rom 8:26). From this pneumatological perspective, the lament exhibits a fundamental (positive) concern for life and, as its (negative) corollary, a radical opposition to death and to whatever threatens to destroy genuine human goods.

Third, sonship and obedience mutually define one another in Christ. This is possibly the most striking aspect of the reconfiguration, and it brings into view the soteriological significance of the lament. "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death [*ek thanatou*], and he was heard because of his reverence" (Heb 5:7). If death entered the world by Adam's disobedience, here the new Adam's obedience, manifested by his reverence and attested by his tears, reverses the curse: God saves him *ek thanatou*.⁷¹ The lament thus plays a crucial role in Christ's redemptive action, precisely as a manifestation of his perfect filial obedience. The connection established by the sacred author between the Savior's "loud cries and tears" and his filial reverence (*eulabeias*) pushes to the foreground the radical statement being made about the redemption

⁶⁹ So, for example, Heb 4:16: "So let us confidently [*meta parrhesias*] approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help." See also Heb 3:6, 10:19; Eph 3:11–12.

⁷⁰ See the entry for *parrhesia* in Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 56–62.

⁷¹ It is important to see the rich scriptural backdrop of this passage: Jesus's agony in Gethsemane (Matt 26:38–44 and parallels), the cry of abandonment from the Cross (Matt 27:46 and parallels), Jesus's weeping over the death of Lazarus (John 11:35), and, less proximately, the laments over Jerusalem (Luke 11:34–35, 19:41–44); not to mention the lament psalms such as Pss 22 and 45. See Eklund's discussion of the prophetic dimension of Jesus's laments in *Jesus Wept*, 91–108. For a critical response to studies of lament in the New Testament, see D. Keith Campbell, "NT Scholars' Use of OT Lament Terminology and Its Theological and Interdisciplinary Implications," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21 (2011): 213–26.

of mankind: it is accomplished through the humanity of the Son.⁷² In other words, by assuming flesh, by descending to the depths of man's darkness and fear, Jesus identifies completely with suffering Israel, and thus demonstrates his perfect obedience. The grounds of the Christian lament are revealed in the obedience of a son whose confidence in being heard discloses the lament's decisive prophetic orientation toward salvation.

The fourth motif, then, is the goal toward which the lament strains. The dynamism of the lament reaches out toward life, and in the events of the Paschal mystery, Christ reveals the true destination of humanity: life in abundance, eternal communion with God. While it was not without its shadows and images, the hope that girded the Old Testament laments could not foresee the astounding *novum* of the resurrection. It is within this transcendent horizon that the perspective of the lament is enlarged. To paraphrase Pope Benedict XVI, the one with hope grieves differently.⁷³ This sheds light on the second beatitude's promise of comfort to those who mourn. Christ gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, only after he has defeated death (John 14:16). As the Church continues *in via ad patriam*, it is sustained by the grace won by the resurrection, the firstfruits of the Spirit.⁷⁴ The eschatology of the second beatitude does not, therefore, eviscerate the present world of its significance by reducing the promised comfort to a merely other-worldly realization. Quite the contrary. Christian life is, in Pierre Benoit's phrase, char-

⁷² This is indicated here by the term *eulabeias*, "reverence" or "fear" (see the entry in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Walter Bauer, et al., 3rd ed. [BDAG] [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 407). This is the complementary quality to *parrhesia* (boldness). Harold Attridge notes that this scriptural text's depiction of Christ's prayer tracks closely with Philo's presentation of the ideal prayer of Moses (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1989], 150–52).

⁷³ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope *Spe Salvi* (November 30, 2007), §2.

⁷⁴ Paul's reflection on this in Romans makes explicit the connections between divine adoption, Christian hope, and eschatological groaning: "We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved" (Rom 8:22–24; see also Gal 4:1–7). For recent work on Paul's use of the lament, see Channing L. Crisler, *Reading Romans as Lament: Paul's Use of Old Testament Lament in His Most Famous Letter* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016). See also Eklund, *Jesus Wept*, 130–35.

acteristically “amphibious,” involving man in both this perishable world and the eschatological world to come.⁷⁵ The act of mourning opens a space for the Lord to enter, to act, and to heal. As Benedict puts it, “those who do not harden their hearts to the pain and need of others, who do not give evil entry to their souls, but suffer under its power and so acknowledge the truth of God—they are the ones who open the windows of the world to let the light in.”⁷⁶ Lament in fact strengthens and refocuses hope in light of Christ’s victory over death. Made sons with the Son, Christians dare to hope: “If we have died with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Tim 2:11). It is from this *terra firma* afforded by theological hope that the Christian can also dare to lament.

Implications for Theology Today

In conclusion, I want to make explicit the convergence of the foregoing discussion of the prophetic lament with Schenk’s theology of mourning and then point to the advantages that a retrieval of prophetic lament holds for contemporary theological discourse.

Even within Scripture, the lament is not a univocal term. Jeremiah’s lament displays features that uniquely belong to his prophetic calling and task of mediation. The theologically complex and vital individuality of the prophetic lament makes it a fertile source for further reflection. Yet the prophet and his lament are not mere *exempla* for narrating a theology of mourning.⁷⁷ Scripture not only concretizes our concept of lament but also “universalizes” it through typology.⁷⁸ The connection between Old and New Testaments involves relationships between types (or prefigurations) and their fulfillment, such that their linkage requires us to attend to both if we are to understand

⁷⁵ Pierre Benoit, “‘We too groan inwardly . . .’ (Romans 8:23),” in *Jesus and the Gospel*, vol. 2 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), 43. Benoit observes here that these two worlds “meet and intersect in man, and the result is an intermediate state, with a wholly original ‘amphibious’ character in which is to be found the ‘tension’ proper to the Christian life.” The essay is an illuminating analysis of Paul’s language of divine adoption and its implications for a correct grasp of Christian eschatology.

⁷⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 87.

⁷⁷ This can be easily forgotten, particularly in the settings of pastoral and practical theology, with their interest in capturing the moral imagination of their audience through concrete experiences and vivid storytelling.

⁷⁸ For valuable essays on the current status and future of typological and spiritual interpretations of Scripture, see *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012).

either. Viewing the prophetic lament through the Christological prism, then, we find a rich typology that can shape our patterns of thinking and acting in the face of anxiety, sorrow, and suffering.

Read typologically, the prophetic lament broadens the theological horizon opened by Schenk's study of mourning and helps to clarify further what his proposals entail. Schenk submits that the Church's theology needs to be characterized by a studied ambivalence in its relationship to the world. This is an ambivalence not toward mourning as such, but toward the signs of the times, the mesmeric power of which can lead to one-sided programs of affirmation or rejection. Without a more basic and considered ambivalence, the lament easily becomes mere handwringing, a sign of despair over and departure from a world going to hell in a handbasket. A proper ambivalence is the essential condition for genuine lament, giving it a clear interpretive and practical role. Locating the prophetic lament in the context of a systematic theology of *luctus et angor* enriches our understanding of Schenk's thesis of the Church's critical relationality. Schenk's theological hermeneutic generates in the practical order a robust Christian realism capable of striking the difficult balance of compassionate involvement and eschatological reserve.

The present article has indicated the mutually beneficial relationship of systematic and biblical reflections on mourning. Schenk's systematic approach secures the theological interpretation and retrieval of the prophetic lament, while the lament explicates the scriptural underpinnings of his theology of mourning. We might put the relationship this way: Schenk's principles illuminate the prophetic lament, which in turn functions as a typology that can further his project by relating his proposals to the essential conditions and tasks of the prophetic *munus* of the Church.

The following four points draw out the implications and advantages of this for contemporary theology in the Church. First, Schenk has articulated the need for a differentiated approach to the signs of the times. The lament shows how the realism of the prophets is both critical and expansive. It can hold the existence of real evil, corruption, and injustice in tension alongside the existence and providence of a good God. It is axiomatic for the prophetic stance toward the world that "tears and fears" signify a legitimate response to the human condition. In fact, the prophet can lament only because his "theological hermeneutics" permit the kind of truth telling about the world that goes beyond the extremes of dismissal and approbation, beyond flight and conformity. Because its bedrock conviction is that

this world is ruled by a God of justice and mercy, the prophet's lament can confront suffering and evil and still express hopes for conversion, renewal, and restoration.

The very profundity of the hope made possible in Christ deepens, rather than diminishes, the intensity of the Christian's lament. Yet, because it takes its bearings from Christ, the hermeneutics of prophetic lament are not ultimately grounded in mere human calculation. The significance of the vicissitudes of humanity are discerned in light of Christ, and thus *in signo crucis*, and this basis can distinguish true and false griefs and joys. Jesus's prophetic lament over Jerusalem points to this: "If this day you only knew what makes for peace!" (Luke 19:42). Christian mourning must involve a constant purification of its notion of "what makes for peace" through encounter with the living Word of God.

Second, the prophetic lament underscores the indispensability of mourning. Jeremiah's lament indicates the need to stress *theologically* the importance of (voiced) sorrow as an entry point for God's action in the world. Schenk notes that "although there are types of mourning inconsistent with the ideal of Christian life, there could be no completely Christian existence without a genuine sense of mourning."⁷⁹ This mourning is not limited to contrition over personal sin, nor even over sin more generally. The lament's concern for all forms of suffering is a corrective to views that too quickly spiritualize suffering and privatize mourning. In mourning, one acknowledges one's suffering and vulnerability and makes that a premise of the argument addressed to God. The Christian must become more, not less, vulnerable, and for this reason, his lament must necessarily extend outward to include all of creation. All of creation groans, and the eschatological lament is itself both a part of and a response to this groaning.

Third, prophetic lament offers an example for how the Church is to understand herself as in but not of the world. Schenk's incisive comment that "the selfhood of the Church and her critical relationality . . . will grow hand-in-hand, or not at all" sets in relief the Church's double burden. Muffs's analysis of prophetic intercession shows that the prophet's representation of the people is integral to his vocation. Likewise, in her prophetic dimension, the Church is, by divine mandate, implicated in the sorrows of the world.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁹ Schenk, "And Jesus Wept," 127.

⁸⁰ In its clear-eyed recognition of the world's *luctus et angor*, however, prophetic lament does not collapse into protest, because at the heart of its stormy prayer

call to shoulder one another's burdens (Gal 6:2) is normative for the life of the Church, not only within but also, importantly, beyond her visible borders. Thus, the Church admonishes and affirms in close and uncomfortable proximity. The lament's relevance for evangelization and cultural engagement consists, at one level, in the welcome nuance it can bring to bear on evangelization strategies. The joy that rightly defines New Evangelization efforts retains its authenticity only in polarity with the sorrow of being *in via*, where disappointments and tragedies continue to threaten. By its frank acknowledgment of the Church's wayfaring state, the prophetic lament chastens intemperate enthusiasm over "systematic" approaches and solutions that betray their bureaucratic origin. In contrast, the response to Pope Francis's "art of accompaniment" has shown the significant evangelical benefits of a more "proximate" approach, as well as the need for grounding it theologically so that it is neither co-opted by "liberal" assimilationist ideologies nor rejected out of hand by alarmed "conservatives."⁸¹ Theological reflection on the scriptural grounds for and typology of the Church's prophetic mission sheds light on the complexities of accompaniment. Read as a type of the Church's prophetic office, Jeremiah embodies the mode of being in-yet-not-of through his lament. The dual-perspective (toward God and toward man) characteristic of the prophet's vision is the precondition for the Church's critical relationality and, consequently, the "eschatological reserve" that she must show toward the variegated historical situation in which she finds herself. Theological attention to "social facticity" cannot, without serious costs, filter out the voices of *luctus et angor* that are themselves signs of the times pointing toward the need for more radical conversion.

Fourth and finally, a word about prophecy and theology today is in order. Recovering a sense for the prophetic life of the Church is important for theological discourse in at least two ways.⁸² First, it serves as a salutary reminder that Christian theology does not aim at

is the rock-like trust and obedience of a son. By its insistence on the primacy of the theological (rather than political or sociological) interpretation of suffering, prophetic lament rejects the common reductionisms that would dictate that the Christian respond to injustice and evil in purely sociopolitical terms. The Christian response is not limited to the possibilities of activism and protest.

⁸¹ See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), §§169–73.

⁸² For extended discussion of this topic, see Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*.

building consensus, but at the conversion of minds and hearts to the truth revealed by God. The prophet who has come in contact with the living Word has an abiding conviction that truth enjoys a certain priority over goodness. The evangelical dynamism that should characterize theology comes from the prophetic impulse.⁸³ Both the integrity of theology and its relevance to social existence hinge upon its ability to associate itself with the anguish of man, not merely with his joys and positive developments. On the one hand, this entails developing the theological grammar and resources to mediate saving truth to the world at large in an intelligible, faithful, and attractive manner. On the other, and as a strategy for encountering the world of the day, this translates into what Schenk terms the Church's "dual program of affirmation and admonition." So, for example, the development of a theology of conversion would provide clarity about the means and ends of the New Evangelization. Greater attention to a theology of tragedy—and here Schenk's work is on point—can also aid in recovering a healthy appreciation of the reality of the losses suffered in human life.⁸⁴

Second, theology articulates the framework within which prophecy operates. It is an essentially prophetic task (as we see vividly in the case of Jeremiah) to recognize and speak to the signs of the times and to confront the *gaudium et spes* and *angor et luctus* of the world within the horizon of saving truth. For an age that faces a crisis of hope, there will necessarily be a corresponding struggle to find the theological grounds for mourning, and a thin theology of mourning will secure only a flimsy hope. Schenk captures this correlation with the following programmatic statement:

A hope for goods whose loss would not be mourned would be hollow. A Church that could not mourn is one that could not hope, but also, a Church that could not hope is one that could

⁸³ In an interview with the English title "The Problem of Christian Prophecy," originally published in *30Giorni* in 1999, Ratzinger observes that "Theology, as theological science in the strict sense, is not prophetic but may only truly become living theology under the thrust and illumination of a prophetic impulse" (catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6439).

⁸⁴ See Schenk: "*Factus in agonia*"; "Hoping to be a Person"; "The Epoché of Factual Damnation?: On the Costs of Bracketing Out the Likelihood of Final Loss," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 122–54.

not mourn for long. The future vitality of Christianity will depend on the revival of these twin virtues.⁸⁵

The integral and mutual connection between hope and mourning demonstrates the inadequacy of developing a theology of *gaudium et spes* that does not align itself with a theology of *luctus et angor*. The retrieval of the prophetic lament can play an instrumental role in re-inscribing a theology of mourning into contemporary theological discourse. N&V

⁸⁵ Schenk, ““And Jesus Wept,”” 130.