

Domestic Violence in light of the Fall

2021 Priscilla & Aquila Conference Elective

1. Summarising the aims and objectives of this seminar

- Important resources (by no means exhaustive!):
 - *Sydney Diocesan Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse and Good Practice Guidelines*
 - *Know Domestic Abuse Course* (<https://courses.safeministry.training/know-domestic-abuse-course>)
 - Darby A. Strickland, *Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Abuse and Helping Victims* (P&R, 2020)
- Being *attentive* to the way in which domestic violence, like all forms of oppression, needs to be understood as an evil system which takes on a life of its own and threatens to perpetuate itself beyond discrete acts and abusive behaviours
- A dynamic which calls for a particular pastoral *attentiveness*

2. Illustrating the dynamic evil of violence: Psalm 55

See over...

Psalm 55

*For the director of music. With stringed instruments.
A maskil of David.*

- ¹ Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea;
² hear me and answer me.
My thoughts trouble me and I am
distraught
³ because of what my enemy is saying,
because of the threats of the wicked;
for they bring down suffering on me
and assail me in their anger.
- ⁴ My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen on
me.
⁵ Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.
⁶ I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a
dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
⁷ I would flee far away
and stay in the desert;
⁸ I would hurry to my place of shelter,
far from the tempest and storm."
- ⁹ Lord, confuse the wicked, confound
their words,
for I see violence and strife in the
city.
¹⁰ Day and night they prowl about on its
walls;
malice and abuse are within it.
¹¹ Destructive forces are at work in the
city;
threats and lies never leave its
streets.
- ¹² If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it;
if a foe were rising against me,
I could hide.
¹³ But it is you, a man like myself,

- my companion, my close friend,
¹⁴ with whom I once enjoyed sweet
fellowship
at the house of God,
as we walked about
among the worshippers.
- ¹⁵ Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the realm
of the dead,
for evil finds lodging among them.
- ¹⁶ As for me, I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.
¹⁷ Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.
¹⁸ He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.
¹⁹ God, who is enthroned from of old,
who does not change—
he will hear them and humble them,
because they have no fear of God.
- ²⁰ My companion attacks his friends;
he violates his covenant.
²¹ His talk is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords.
- ²² Cast your cares on the LORD
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.
²³ But you, God, will bring down the
wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.
- But as for me, I trust in you.

a. Noticing the effects of violence on David:

- The enemy: vv. 3, 9, 15, 23
 - A *friend* (vv. 13, 20)
 - The violence itself: words (vv. 3, 9); threats (v. 3); abuse (v. 10); lies (v. 11), insults (v. 12); duplicity (v. 21)
- The effects on David:
 - Desperation (v. 1)
 - “my thoughts trouble me” (v. 2)
 - “they bring down suffering on me and assail me in their anger” (v. 3)
 - Anguish and terror (v. 4)
 - No obvious relief (v. 6)
 - The unique grief of betrayal (v. 12)
 - Shame? (note vv. 9-10)
- Violence which has taken on a life of its own:
 - “destructive forces” (v. 11)
 - “evil finds lodging among them” (v. 15)
- The threat to David’s wholeness and wellbeing – an alienation from what is good, a violation of his joy
- Implications:
 - The dynamic of evil in the Bible: “Deliver us from evil” (Matt. 5:13. Cf., Eph. 6:12)

b. Noticing two dimensions to David’s response:

- Calling upon the justice of God (vv. 9, 15, 23):
 - The *rightness* of anger and the thirst for vengeance
 - The implications of David entrusting just vengeance to God:
 - The importance of earthly justice *and* its limitations
 - What if David doesn’t hand over his anger to God? The agency of the oppressed
 - Note to pastors: do not underestimate the spiritual challenge in this!
- Entrusting the burden to God (vv. 16, 17, 18, 22)
 - More than mere consolation: “He will never let the righteous be shaken”
 - The invitation of one who has “carried our pain and suffering” (Isa. 53:4)
 - “I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28)
 - “a bruised reed he will not break...” (Isa. 42:3)

- “he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth” (Isa. 42:4)
- The implications of David entrusting his burden to God
 - Cultivating a posture of entrusting ultimate relief from the evil to God
- Note to pastors: do not underestimate the spiritual challenge in this!

3. Understanding the dynamic evil of domestic violence in light of the fall

a. An important study:

- Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)
 - McFadyen’s work alongside the observations of important feminist theologians: e.g., Mary Daly, Judith Plaskow, Rosemary Radford Ruether¹

b. Appreciating two implications of Adam’s “original sin”:

- The effects of Adam’s sin: a double bondage
 - The bondage of the will
 - A “dominion of darkness” (Col. 1:13)
- First implication: what it means that Adam’s sin was *not* my own:
 - An act of violence on the entire human family

Here [in Adam’s Fall] is, as it were, a complicated disease and a total aggregate of various acts, both internal and external, impinging against both tables of the law. For as by unbelief and contempt of the divine word, ingratitude, pride and profanation of the divine name, he transgressed the first table, so he transgressed the second *by want of affection towards his children, by homicide (precipitating himself and his children into death)*, by intemperance and gluttony, theft and appropriation of another’s property (without his consent), unlawful love and depraved conscience (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, IX.vi.3)

- The implication for our understanding of domestic violence: something which arises out of a condition of bondage and which serves to reinforce that bondage
- Not an excuse for blame-shifting
- A call for pastoral attentiveness to this reality:
 - We need to be agents of empathy and justice
 - We too are children of Adam swept up in this evil and need to be especially attentive to ways in which we might collaborate in its

¹ See, e.g., Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 49-55; Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980), 63-8; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 159-92.

destructive effects, even unintentionally. Such an attentiveness involves the humility to *learn* from the survivor's experience of evil

- There is a particular proactive pastoral response vis-à-vis the agency of the survivor: prayerfully, gently, patiently and persistently encouraging the survivor to entrust themselves to Christ in face of the specific situation they are in
 - Considering what this means for ministry to the user of violence *too...*
- Second implication: what it means that Adam's sin *is* my own
 - Adam's sin is unique among all sins and acts of violence: it is counted as ours in a way that no other sin ever is (c.f., Ezek. 18)
 - The "one act of righteousness" which results in "justification and life for all people" (Rom. 5:18): The righteous identity of a saviour counted to unrighteous sinners