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David J Cohen, *Why O Lord: Praying our Sorrows* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013).

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David Cohen offers this book as the first fruits of his PhD work on the Psalms of Lament. He has a strong background in Hebrew scholarship as well as an intense interest in his personal discipleship and the ways of engaging the psalms of lament in Christian liturgy and action. As he is active in leadership in the Baptist community and also teaching Old Testament at Vose Seminary in Western Australia, his purpose is two-fold.

The first section of the book (Chapters 1-6) presents his scholarly view of the psalms of lament or complaint, or otherwise called psalms in times of distress. Cohen describes the Psalter as being a “significant resource for voicing the deepest feelings and thoughts about God, humankind and the relationship between the two”.<sup>1</sup> He therefore leads the reader through the theology of the psalms of lament. The content of the psalms of distress are linked to their liturgical function and Cohen outlines how they exist within the ritual of the Israelites’ prayer. When integrated into liturgy, the distress which they describe and present to God is both personal and corporate. Cohen developed a matrix of lament which emanated from an examination of the discrete elements of the psalms of distress. Once described, Cohen built the matrix to show how these psalms can be functional for the praying community. The actions he described are: expressing, asserting, investing and imagining. His examination and deliberate move towards these functions is careful and well supported.

How to ritualise them becomes a question for the worshipping community and their ability to transform the participants through the ritual use of the psalms of distress brings Cohen to the second intention of the book.

The second section (Chapters 7 – 11) offers the psychodynamics of lament and moves into the exploration of how these psalms can be used effectively for people in distress, to bring transformation. The question arises as to why Christians are so loathe to use these psalms in their liturgical life, and even more so in their own prayer life. Cohen explores this issue fully and then offers examples of painful human journeys that come to a prayerful resolution through the use of the psalms of distress in a purposeful and ritual manner. A systematic pattern of prayer, reflection and response in using the psalms became a vehicle for the examination, and then in some cases, the resolution of painful experiences. The consistent praying of the lament, with an understanding of the matrix, brought about transformation in the examples given because the participants could make sense out of both the prayer and the painful experience.

*Why O Lord: Praying our Sorrows* therefore becomes a valuable resource in two separate ways. Firstly, as a scholarly work that assists with the understanding of the psalms of distress in a rich biblical tradition, and secondly as a resource for assisting those in distress to bring a transformation in their own lives through prayer by way of the psalms of distress.

David is a member of the Western Australian Chapter of the Australian Academy of Liturgy.

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<sup>1</sup> David J Cohen, *Why O Lord: Praying our Sorrows* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 1.