

## **Salvation for Earth? A Body Critical Analysis of Psalm 74**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In Psalm 74 the god metaphor is strictly and forcefully male. In Israel the king was a man, and the man was king. So the God of Psalm 74 is king, a man, and thereby the cult is constituted. Nature, Earth and her components are simply the stage on which the cult is enacted, and does not have intrinsic value. The values underpinning the god construct in Psalm 74 are ethnocentric and androcentric. This text should be regarded as a cultural artefact that renders no contribution towards an ideology which regards Earth and her components as intrinsically valuable.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

‘The rediscovery of the mode of supplication in the Psalms of Lament will contribute towards a sense of communal responsibility. These Psalms have the potential to remind humans about their interrelatedness and direct share and influence in matters of public concern’. Expanding upon this argument, Brueggemann (1984:67) foresees the possibility that our general sense of apathy and abdication of shared responsibility might in this way be removed.

This sounds like good news for Earth. If it is indeed possible to turn humankind’s apathy towards the wellbeing of Earth and its components into a sense of interrelatedness and shared responsibility, the Psalms of Lament might prove to be valuable sources for eco-justice. With this possibility in mind, I will examine Psalm 74.<sup>1</sup> The aim will be to reveal the values underpinning the rhetoric about and construction of the god character in the psalm, since it is recognised that values wherein femininity is incorporated, specifically with regard to the construction of a god character, lead to a more just attitude towards Earth. Where Earth and natural elements are employed in the rhetoric about God in Psalm 74, it needs to be determined whether these natural elements or images enhance or support a god character that can be utilised as regulating ‘body’, as authoritative highest norm regarding the ideal of interrelatedness and

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<sup>1</sup> Human (1993:204) categorises Psalm 74 as lament together with Psalms 44, 60, 77, 79, 80, 102, 109, 57:8-12 and 60:7-14, with the definition of lament being a text that represents a community’s complaint to God about their evil fate.

shared responsibility. It is indeed the ultimate ideal in eco-theology to retrieve values and norms, also as represented by authoritative figures like the god(s) of the biblical texts and contained therein, which serve the important principles of eco-justice. Interrelatedness is one of those principles.

The world within which, according to Brueggemann, this Psalm of Lament might serve as catalyst to new shared responsibility and interrelatedness, is pervaded by a value system that leads to a virtually natural discrimination against women and an accompanying 'right' to Earth. Dichotomies, whereby, amongst others, masculinity is prioritised over femininity, lie at the heart of these value systems. A hermeneutic of suspicion that these dichotomies are underpinned by the gender ideologies in the texts of the Old Testament will serve as framework for my analysis.

I am suspicious of the cosmology contained in this text, given the cultic context within which it is employed, and fear that it exists only to serve the closed, unsympathetic, male monotheism of Israel. If that is true, the 'rediscovery' of this particular Psalm of Lament will not serve eco-justice, but only enhance the Western dualisms of gender (male:female) and culture:nature, inferiorising the second element and so contribute in destroying our world. However, in Psalm 74:12 Earth is described in a particularly positive light as far as the intentions of God are concerned: 'But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth'.<sup>2</sup> Will a supplication to this God indeed enhance Earth's intrinsic value, and restore her voice?

Who exactly is this 'king from old'? He is referred to as God, that is, the ideal symbolic body of the community, a regulating body that moulds and refines the values and norms of the community. Body criticism as analytical tool regards the body as 'text' reflecting the deepest values and convictions of a community. The bodily based metaphoricality of human abstract concepts, including the construction of god characters, makes the analytical method of body criticism a valuable tool in revealing the ideological values foundational to constructions such as this god character in Psalm 74, the 'king from old', from whom a religious community expects and demands restorative action.

## B CONTEXT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Religious communities in their rituals and prayers find themselves clad with authority that symbolises the dominant discourse of that community. A liturgical moment, or prayer, although typified as part of the spiritual life of the community, is a bodily construction. Spirit or mind is always embodied. The mindset (or bodily image) of Psalm 74 is an unconscious one. The abstract concepts, with which a religious group busies itself, are metaphorical, a meta-

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<sup>2</sup> The New International Version of the Bible.

phoricity flowing from the dominant perspectives in terms of body ideology. These metaphors represent the ideal or regulating body of the community, and culminate in the god character. The 'body' of the god character is reinscribed upon and lived through the 'bodies' of the community.<sup>3</sup>

Psalm 74 is a construction of and from a disoriented community. The central theme of the Psalm displays a catastrophe (Human 1993:204). As community lament in the context of religious supplication it is language filled with emotion and imagination that endeavours to unravel the mysteries of life as touched by God (Coetzee 2003:37). The lament forms part of the struggle for dominance in the discourses of the community. It is therefore filled with intention towards the humans constituting the community.<sup>4</sup> When supernatural forces are personified, it is accepted that they also harbour intention or purpose about humans. To fully comprehend the content of Psalm 74, it is vital to remember that much of religious activity entails the exposition and/or modification of the intentions or purpose of supernatural forces, the gods. Therefore, the ascribing of intention with regard to rhetoric in a religious milieu brings into focus the body ideology of the author or authors, whether that authorship resides in a particular person, or in the community's circumstances that created that rhetoric. The metaphorisation of a god, either the distorted god that has to be modified, or the ideal god that has to be promoted, represents embodied mind, unconscious schemata and metaphorical structurisations as rhetoric of power.

Brueggemann (1984:68) describes the context of Psalm 74 as the destruction of the sacred principle underpinning all reality, the mechanism that holds the world together. A variety of possible historical situations as foreseen by Gerstenberger (2001:79-80), Caldwell (1993:60), Kraus (1992), Kim (1984:64-65), Floysvik (1997:14) Schaefer (2001:184) Human (1993:204, 214), Brueggemann (1984:67) *et al.* all culminate in the identification of a situation in which the survival of the community in a hostile world is at stake, and God is entreated to act in salvation. Certain aspects of this context provide clues for the metaphorisations contained in the psalm, such as the motives of destruction, brutality, conquest, desacralisation, shame, loss of value and the enemy. It sounds like the cries of a person being raped! But who is being raped? Is it possible that our ravaged and raped Earth can identify with this person, and hope to be rescued in the way proposed by the psalm? It is necessary to investigate the body metaphorisation within the text of Psalm 74 to clarify the ideology about the body in terms of the gender of the creator god of Israel.

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<sup>3</sup> For the embodiment of mind, unconscious thought and metaphoricity of abstract concepts, see Lakoff & Johnson (1999).

<sup>4</sup> It is a fundamental trait of community discourse that human relationships have intention or purpose, according to Coetzee (2003:37).

## C THE 'BODY' IN AND BEHIND PSALM 74

The dilemma addressed in the lament concerns the profanisation of the cult. As such the crisis represents a threat to the domain in Israel that belonged to men and to which they had access. Women are different by definition, and their difference was recognised and enhanced by rituals that associated impurity with menstruation and the giving of birth. These rituals barred them from the holy, the sacred. Only men had access to the holy and to God. The temple and cultic activity confirmed masculinity (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994:141). Therefore the destruction of the temple and profanisation of the cult endangered masculinity as understood in Israel in a serious way. The author struggles with the cause of the dilemma. The acts of God are thus measured and questioned in terms of a male orientated ideological code as understood by the men of Israel. In particular, God is entreated to 'act like a man'. As will be shown, the lament therefore confirms the body ideology as it developed in Israel.

### 1 Emotionality versus rationality

In the first verse God's behaviour towards Israel is depicted in emotional terms. The incomprehensibility of his rejection and anger centres on the irrationality of those acts. Why would anyone hand over his flock, his community, his property, his inheritance to the enemy? The why question attempts to probe the anomaly of God's anger towards his own people (Basson 2005:186). Certain assumptions are made, however. In following verses solutions to the problem are suggested.<sup>5</sup> In the suggested solutions the rational ability of God is assumed. It is taken for granted that God has the ability to reflect rationally and remember. The word 'remember' in verse 2, 18 and 22 denotes inner brain functions ('mental acts') (Basson 2005:194). The current crisis situation requires the actualisation of the acts of redemption and salvation of the past, and therefore apparent unreasonable emotionality must be replaced with thought, with rationality. The remembering that is expected from God, furthermore entails more than thought processes. It is expected that it would lead to action, deeds that will solve the current crisis. The contrast between how things were in the past, and how things are now, the things God has to think, remember or rationalise about, serves as motivation for the required deeds of God, because he himself will find the situation unsatisfactory (Brueggemann 1984:69).

In terms of the cherished duality of emotionality and rationality in modern Western society, a duality that probably existed in antiquity in the metaphors of uncontrollability and control, the anger, rejection and the unawareness of God in Psalm 74 represent the negative, that which is atypical. Through his atypical

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<sup>5</sup> Rogerson and McKay (1977:127) show that the current suffering of the community is a manifestation of God's anger towards and rejection of the Israelites. Verse 1 should be seen as a plaintive cry, rather than a cry for an explanation.

behaviour the crisis is caused. God is attributed with potential control, rational and controlled thought and the ability to reflect as positive traits that will lead to the necessary action. The implications in a society where emotionality (un-controllability) is seen as a female attribute in contrast to male rationality (control) is very clear.

## 2 Ownership, responsibility and the patriarch

In the eyes of the community of the lament God acquired ownership of Israel. The quality of that ownership and the body ideology, specifically in terms of gender, is illustrated by the responsibilities and potentialities that are attributed to the owner, God, in verse 2. The expression ‘people you purchased of old’ implies the duty to rescue, analogical to the family milieu where the kinsman rescues his family from danger or need. This responsibility rested upon the male kinsman. In that way the equilibrium and wholeness of the family were restored. The patriarch functioned as the protector and defender of the family.<sup>6</sup> The description of God in Psalm 74:2 by the expressions ‘purchased’ and ‘inheritance’ connects with the idea that family relationship entails responsibilities, but projects a certain body ideology upon Israel’s owner. The call to and expectation of salvation are firmly grounded in the patriarchal society of Israel.

## 3 Feet

In two expressions God is entreated to utilise his feet to Israel’s salvation. The first expression ‘Turn your steps to these everlasting ruins’ in verse 3 employs God’s feet as a symbol of the power of salvation. Eilberg-Schwartz (1994:125) has shown that the feet of God opens up to important theological reflections. Thus the sanctuary of the ark in the temple was seen as God’s footstool (Ps 99:5, 132:7, Lam 2:1, 1 Chron 28:2). Both Ezekiel and Isaiah described the temple as the resting place for God’s feet (Ezek 43:7, Isa 66:1). In Israel the foot had a symbolic power of its own: it was associated with submission, dominance and the impounding of the property of another (Schroer & Staubli 2001:184). To tread someone or something underfoot was regarded even then as an act of the greatest humiliation. In the patriarchal order it was important for men that nobody, especially no woman, would tread upon their dignity. Feet as symbolisation of dominance and submission were also clearly associated with royalty (see for example God’s promise to David in Ps 110:1). The call upon God to turn his steps to the destroyed sanctuary was definitely not an in-

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<sup>6</sup> In the case of a murdered relative, the kinsman should take revenge by killing the murderer. The next of kin becomes the avenger of blood in the context of the family law. Jepsen, according to Basson (2005:195) remarks that it means ‘das, was eine Sippe an Leben, Freiheit und Besitz verloren hat, wiederherstellen. Soweit der einzelne Sippenangehörige das nicht selbst tun kann, tritt der nächste Verwandte als *go’el* verantwortlich für ihn ein’.

vitation for a woman to wander through the ruins with bare feet or in sandals so that her elegant tread could be appreciated (Schroer & Staubli 2001:184)! God must come to be enlightened about the destruction, to confirm his presence, and symbolically restore his dominance over the enemy.

The second instance where the use of the feet is implied, is in verse 22: 'Rise up, o God, and defend your cause'. Malul (2002:164) shows that the word *hmllq* was used in a forensic milieu to notate a judge that practices jurisprudence and further instances of law and covenants. Law, ownership of property and engaging in covenants were activities belonging strictly to the world of men.

#### **4 Hand**

The right hand of God was connected to blessing and governance (rule) in the Ancient Near East. It became a symbol of the highest god, a concept that the Israelites also applied to their God. Kings rule over their subjects with the hand, and the sceptre or staff supported this power symbolism. The hand was also often associated with power, brute force and dominance (Schroer & Staubli 2001:164). The complainant in Psalm 74 accuses God of the inactivity of his right hand, the concealment thereof, and attributes the dominance and destruction of the nation by the enemy to this behaviour of God. Noteworthy of the use of 'hand' in Hebrew is the connection with the male sex organ. 'The circumlocution "hand" emphasises the mighty and powerful aspect of the male organ' (Schroer & Staubli 2001:166). The embodied meaning of the expression 'right hand' cannot be ignored, even where the use is clearly metaphorical.<sup>7</sup> The submissive, subjective and inactive behaviour of God, as symbolised by the concealment of the right hand, is the cause of the current crisis. It can only be rectified by typically male action, with powerful and potentially procreative action, as symbolised in the metaphors of raised right hand (and associated erect penis). That the hand, as symbol of power and procreation, denoted sexually associated action by a man will be shown when the centrality of sex in the structurisations of ancient societies is foregrounded in the following section.

#### **5 Dishonouring barbarians**

The most remarkable aspect of Psalm 74 is the transition of the perspective of dishonouring and destruction of the nation (us, sheep of your pasture, people, tribe of your inheritance, Mount Zion) to a perspective of dishonouring of God himself. Already in verse 10 the association is made between the enemy that humiliates the nation and the foe that mocks the name of God. In verse 18 it is stated explicitly that it is the perspective of the author that it is God himself

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<sup>7</sup> 'Embodied meanings of images cannot be easily dismissed even from passages that seem obviously metaphorical' (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994:71).

who is being mocked and dishonoured. From verse 19 onwards the subject of the tribulations of the nation is God! For example: 'Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts'. In verse 22 the motivation of God to act is categorically described in terms of God's recognition of his own dishonouring by fools. The key to the body ideology behind this transition, or split perspective, as it were, lies in the contents and meaning of the word *lbn* (foolish people, fool).

To fully comprehend this metaphor notice must be taken of the centrality of sex in the structuring perception of antique society. Malul (2002:298-299) shows that the sexual act, or sex in general, constituted a civilising mechanism. From the stories of Enkidu and Adam it seems that sexual knowledge was seen as a way of transferring an unknown entity from the anti-structure to the structure, which thereby attains the status of a member of that structure. Sex was the structural principle that defined and maintained the social structure.<sup>8</sup> On cognitive level sex was something that happened within the community for procreational purposes, and thereby the structure of society was maintained. An excellent example of the centrality of sex as structuring factor is the use of the word *lbn* and translated with 'foolish people' or 'fools'. The *lbn* was a typical outcast in the ancient world, because he challenged society with his deeds. As anarchist he endangered the foundations of the civilised community. In Psalm 74, as in Psalm 14, Isaiah 32 and Deuteronomy 32, exactly this happens. Foolishness in terms of barbaric behaviour was seen as dangerous to the existence of the nation. What is especially noteworthy, is that foolish or barbaric behaviour clearly referred to a variety of sexual transgressions, for example in Genesis 34:7, Deuteronomy 22:21, Judges 19:23,24, Judges 20:6, 2 Samuel 13:12, Jeremiah 29:23. The fact that sexual transgressions had such an important place within the definition of barbarism or foolishness, and recognising the semantic context of the expressions 'dishonouring' and 'foolishness', it is clear that sex was regarded as an important factor connoting the border between structure and anti-structure. In terms of the concept of concentric circles descriptive of the community and its sanctuaries by Malul (2002:453), the crisis in Psalm 74 is simply this: the worst has happened; the barbarian or fool from the non-world has entered or penetrated and defiled the

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<sup>8</sup> 'Sex's operative function in maintaining social structure lies in its role in the procreation scheme of the kin group (cf. Reicke 1956, who talks of procreation, rather than sex in the strict sense, as a principle of civilisation; and cf. now extensively Delaney 1991). In fact, the whole idea of sex as a civilising means, by distinguishing structure from anti-structure, has to be understood in the framework of the kin group where it is resorted to for the purpose of procreation. For the kin group stands for society at large, and the kinship mold is the underlying structural principle of all social groupings. In that case, sex is the mark of belonging to the group, for in the latter it finds its natural function. Outside the borders of the social group where procreation is not needed, there is no sex' (Malul 2002:298).

central and most sacred space, the place occupied by God himself. God has to choose: either to endure the dishonouring and impurity it brings, and therefore to step out of the structure himself, or to act towards purification. That act of God will have a sexual implication, because of the sexual nature of foolishness. When the complex structure of the relationship between God and Israel in terms of masculinity and femininity, as described by Eilberg-Schwartz (1994:142), is taken into account, and the responsibility that rested upon the men of Israel to act like a 'good wife' towards God, is integrated into an analysis of the dishonouring that took place in Psalm 74, the picture takes on an even more sinister hue. The honour of God's wife is being ravaged. Analogical to a rape situation, the absence of the 'man' or the man's powerful hand affords the fool the opportunity to force the woman, the wife, into submission. The man, that is God, is called upon to fulfil his duty and rescue his woman. The scene is interspersed with the patriarchal and male dominant body ideology of ancient Israel. This is even more profound in the cosmological metaphors in verses 12 to 17.

## 6 God the creator king

Israel endures a new chaos. In the past the creative action of God transformed chaos into order. If God cannot be forced into action by his observation of the destruction, then the motivation must come from God's own character and the covenants of the past (Brueggemann 1984:70). In a mixture of cosmology, myth, history and flattery the God from whom powerful action in the current chaotic circumstances is expected, is metaphorised.

The hymnal section of the Psalm, verses 12 to 17, consists of two themes. After the salutation, in which God is addressed as king, and is depicted as ruling from above or over Earth, as intervener who can change circumstances on earth, verses 13 to 15 contain expressions depicting godly power over water and creatures of the waters. In mythical language the true character of God is stated in triumphant terms. God's historical deeds of salvation in cosmic terms are described within the mode of forceful dominance. 'Split open', 'break', 'crush', 'give as food to the creatures of the desert', 'open up', and 'dry up': salvation is described as forcefulness and control. The entity thus brutally controlled is that aspect of femininity that leads to impurity, namely moistness or fluidity. God alone has the power to establish life in the womb, and so he breaks open fountains and streams, and dries up rivers. The theme of dominance establishes a conflict between God and nature, because nature (Earth) is depicted as an object which can only be a living space for the cult if the powers that are part thereof are conquered and controlled. 'The mythological picture reappears in the psalm as poetic symbols of the continuous conflict between God and earth's destructive forces as embodied in the enemies' (Basson 2005:190-191).

In verses 16 to 17 another theme surfaces. Where the brutal dominance over the waters was destructive, the control here depicted is creative. The powers that establish and enable life, namely day, night, sun, moon and seasons remain the property of and under the mighty hand of God. The cycles of day and night and summer and winter symbolise God's presence over the whole Earth. Yet the author briefly metaphorises God not only as powerful redeemer, but also as creator of diversity, as stated by Schaefer (2001:183): 'With the merism day-night, 'the bounds of the earth', summer-winter, the psalmist embraces the diversity created by God (vv. 16-17)'. The hand of God, however, remains the instrument of control and creation, a bodily metaphor that relates with procreation and the male domain.

Where the subject of the lament in verses 1-11 and 18-23 seems to be the collective entity of the nation, the kingship of God in the cosmology of 12-17 is depicted as individually empowering. The connection between the cosmos and the individual is a rhetorical strategy. The salvation of the individual from the barbaric enemy is an integral part of God's cosmic rule (Brown 2002:144). As in the cosmology of Genesis 1, the cosmos that God establishes is complete, whole, and closed. Any uncontrollability, unboundedness or subversiveness is a danger to the structure of the community. The solution to the crisis, salvation for Israel, rests in the challenge to God to be as patriarch has constructed him: controlled, whole and upright, that is, a man.

#### **D THE BODY IDEOLOGY IN PSALM 74**

To summarise, the symbolisation of a god in the lament Psalm 74 metaphorises a male bodily image, as is illustrated by the following:

- The destruction of the cult, the domain of males, is seen as a crisis for the whole community. God is called upon to act like a man, to act with brute force and control in establishing salvation.
- The character of God is depicted in terms of ownership, activity, dominance and intervention.
- The crisis was caused by God acting like a female, in dishonouring or ignoring the covenant responsibilities, inactivity, and sympathy towards chaos.
- The author endows God with rationality and controlled thought. The emotional is negative: it is not how God was known before. Emotionality within the character and acts of God, as female trait, is out of order and negative.
- The relationship between God and Israel is typified by patriarchal responsibilities.

- The necessity for God to utilise his feet in salvation illustrates the male body ideology since forceful dominance and practice of law are described as godly abilities.
- The call to raise up his hand, and no longer conceal it, metaphorise male kingship. Forceful and potentially procreative action (in terms of the use of the ‘hand’ as sublimisation of the male sex organ) is ascribed to God.
- With the description of the crisis as the result of foolishness or barbarism, with the accompanying structural endangering connotations, God is entreated to fulfil his male duties towards his ‘wife’, his dove, whose honour is being ravaged.
- The cosmological hymn in verses 12-17 represents two bodily images. In the first, creativity (procreativity) is represented as forceful dominance over moist and thus chaotic entities. God is also depicted as the ruler over all extremities, in line with the patriarchal view that only God can establish fertility. Where there are signs of diversity in the second theme, it remains dependent upon the kingship motive of verse 12. In Israel the king was a man, and the man king. Thus the God of Psalm 74 is king, therefore, male.

## **E ECO-THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

I suggest that the recognised six principles of eco-justice<sup>9</sup> feature as follows in Psalm 74:

### **1 Intrinsic Value**

Value belongs to the temple, to the cult. In fact, the poem confirms that the centre of hopeful existence is to be found in the cult. Its destruction leaves an uninhabitable, inhospitable and barbaric society. Earth without the temple has no value. Even the metaphor in verse 5, where the losses are depicted in terms of the destruction of the trees in a wood, stands in service of the cult. In what follows, the value of the wood of the trees is only contained in potential cultic objects, as carved wood panelling in the temple. Furthermore, Earth is only a geographic object, a place where destructive forces rule at will. Earth and her components only have value as the stage where the cult is enacted.

### **2 Interrelatedness**

The cosmology of Psalm 74 is subject to and in service of the relationship of the people with their God. The dynamics that make life possible flows from the god construct, and not from the dynamisms of the entities of creation. Earth’s

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<sup>9</sup> See Habel 2000.

relatedness to sea and water are not depicted as interrelatedness, but as antitheses where moistness or fluidity represents the forces of chaos that endanger life on Earth. Rivers are not dependent upon natural fountains and streams, sun and moon are no natural life-giving entities, and seasons are not part of ecological diversity. Everything is related and subject to the will, and in Psalm 74:1, the emotional instability of God.

### **3 Voice**

The voices heard in Psalm 74 do not belong to Earth. The lament of the community is the lament of the cult. The voices that roar and clamour are those of the fools and enemies. The subjects in the lament are the lamenting community, the enemies of God, and God himself. Even the descriptions of sea, inhabitants of the sea, animals of the desert, streams, rivers fountains, day, night, sun, moon, seasons, summer and winter do not afford them voices or the ability to participate as entities in their own right, but are only utilised as symbols of the work of God's hand.

### **4 Purpose**

The design of the cosmos in Psalm 74 stands in service of the kingship of God. God's dynamic interaction with the cosmos is shown to be an act of salvation upon Earth. Given the condition of the crisis from which salvation is needed as an endangering of the cultic relationship between the nation and their God, the main purpose of God's action is to validate and restore the relationship between Israel and their god. This is the only purpose that is served by the entities of creation and their creator.

### **5 Mutual Custodianship**

The important partnership or mutuality which is engaged in Psalm 74 is that between God and the people of God. Mutual custodianship only resides in God that has to act in a forceful dominant manner to save the cult, and the people who undertake the responsibility to praise the name of God. The Psalm is theocentric, ethnocentric and androcentric, and definitely not ecocentric.

### **6 Resistance**

It is clear that injustice features as dominant theme in Psalm 74. That injustice is depicted, however, as acts of destruction and dishonouring by the enemy, a destruction of the relationship between Israel and their God. Even the inaction of God in terms of restoring justice leads to resistance, resistance from the people against their circumstances and their God with his concealed right hand. God is entreated to resistance against the fools. Earth and her components are simply objects that serve to illustrate God's masculine powers of dominance.

## F CONCLUSION

As is the case in Genesis 1,<sup>10</sup> Psalm 74 shows no metaphorisation of Earth as subject, or the creator god as empathetic partner that assigns and appreciates intrinsic value to and in Earth and her components. The forceful, dominant male god construct of the Psalm leaves no room for femininity and empathy, only room for the (male) people of God to live as God's 'wife' within the cult and the covenant.

Only for a brief moment diversity within cosmic entities is recognised in verse 15 to 17. This diversity, however, does not serve eco-justice in its own right, but stands in the service of male dominance. Psalm 74 is the product of a patriarchal community that not only bars women from access and contact with their God, but also gives no living space for Earth in her own right. The traces of awe in the Psalm are focused upon God as mighty and forceful ruler.

This text should be regarded as a cultural artefact that renders no contribution towards an ideology which regards Earth and her components as intrinsically valuable. In terms of the concept of a god as social power mechanism which arises from the process of evolution (Viviers 2006:15), the God of Psalm 74 represents a primitive god construct, because it empowers the members of the in-group to each fulfil its role in society, it disciplines the group mercilessly to *this* particular culture and damn all outsiders.

Rediscovering this Psalm of lament is dangerous for Earth and all of her children.

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<sup>10</sup> See Venter 2007.

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