

ANDREA BIELER / CHRISTIAN BINGEL
HANS-MARTIN GUTMANN (EDS.)

AFTER VIOLENCE

RELIGION, TRAUMA AND RECONCILIATION



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REMEMBERING VIOLENCE: PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Andrea Bieler

REMEMBERING AS ELUSIVE PHENOMENON

»For nothing is resolved, nothing is settled,
no remembering has become mere memory.«¹

The following reflections on remembering violence do not intend to offer readymade concepts and advice for how to remember ›well‹. The purpose of this essay is rather to reflect on the issue in light of current studies on collective remembering and trauma. After some introductory remarks on the elusiveness of the phenomenon, I will introduce a process-relational approach to collective remembering, which offers avenues to perceive and analyze remembering as practice. I will then allude to a few lessons we can learn from trauma theory, which can help us to reframe theological resources the Christian traditions have to offer the current conversation.

As a practical theologian, I am ultimately interested in exploring acts of remembrance which are respectful to the dead and which take the uncontrollable, at times haunting, past into account, while probing how life might flourish – at least in fragmentary ways – in the aftermath of violence.² Within the ecclesial realm, I seek to envision practices that do not simply reify the boundaries of collective identity formation in our ways of remembering, but

¹ Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5.

² See with regard to the phenomenon of haunting memories and haunting spirits from a pneumatological perspective, Mayra Rivera, »Ghostly Encounters: Spirits, Memory and the Holy Ghost.«, in *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology*, ed. Stephen Moore and Mayra Rivera (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 118–135.

rather honor the unspeakable, that which remains unresolved and which returns in unexpected places and hits those who have survived situations of violence. At times, it might also be necessary to perform rituals which invite forgetting and release; at times the disempowerment of haunting spirits might be the task of the hour.

These acts of remembrance relate in significant ways to stories of the Jewish and Christian traditions, which are deeply steeped in remembering violence and rescue: the tortured and the resurrected body of Christ, the salvage of the slave Hagar in the desert, the survival of the people of Israel fleeing from bondage in Egypt. These stories of redemption and survival have at their very heart the transformation of violence; they are stories that call upon God to remember God's people in the aftermath of violence.

As we endeavor to explore practices of remembrance in the aftermath of violence, it seems necessary to attend to the ambiguity of sacred texts as well as current practices. We just need to call to mind, as an example, the violence that is depicted in the Exodus tradition, the liberation of God's people from slavery in Egypt: the assassination of the firstborn male Egyptians, the death of animals such as locusts and horses, and the killing of the soldiers who served the Egyptian army.³ The book of Deuteronomy testifies that the chain of memory created in relation to the Exodus story can serve to protect slaves and aliens; yet it can also be used to support the command to punish Israel's enemies.⁴

Regarding our current practices, we also need to explore the negative effects that acts of memory can provoke. What are distorted practices of remembrance that might produce the opposite of what they claim to do? When does remembrance produce mere nostalgia, or deepen resentment between groups, or create a pitiful sense of collective guilt? How does remembrance look that hinders deeper processes of reconciliation? How do we take into account the different perspectives from which people relate to particular atrocities?⁵

The call to remember has been powerfully articulated with regards to the Shoah in Germany after decades of paralyzing silence on the side of the victims, the perpetrators, and those who have lived in places in-between. Philosopher and cultural critic Theodor W. Adorno wrote in 1966 an essay, *Erziehung*

³ See Exodus 10:19; 12:9; 14:30 and 15:19.

⁴ See Deuteronomy 24:17-18 and 25:17-19.

⁵ I list these questions in order to sketch out the vastness of the issue at hand. Concentrating on all of them is obviously beyond the scope of this paper.

nach Auschwitz (Education after Auschwitz), in which he claimed that the basis of all educational endeavors had to be grounded in the moral demand that Auschwitz must never happen again.⁶ This text became a kind of manifesto which inspired a heightened sense of responsibility for myriads of educators, therapists, clergy, politicians, and artists, who tried to make sense of their work and, perhaps more fundamentally, their purpose in life in the aftermath of violence – after Auschwitz.

Elie Wiesel's work as a writer who survived the Shoah has centered on the conviction that we, »remember Auschwitz and all that it symbolizes because we believe that, in spite of the past and its horrors, the world is worthy of salvation; and salvation, like redemption can be found only in memory.«⁷ For him, remembering in the aftermath of violence is a *sine qua non*, it is the key to the future; it leads into the mystery of salvation. He makes these huge claims although he is aware of the disastrous and painful dimensions the act of remembering can evoke. In *The Accident*, he grapples with the dilemma that holding on to the memory of the dead can keep those who have been hurt from deeply loving the living in the present.⁸ The desire to erase memories that are steeped in violent events is portrayed as a means of survival in the present. Wiesel reflects on the ambiguous practice of remembering within a framework of a negative theology that cannot count on God Almighty anymore. Facing the crematories of Treblinka and Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel notes, »For the first time I felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank Him for?«⁹ He awoke to the idea that he was »alone – terribly alone in a world without God.«¹⁰ The despair that this profound void and loneliness provokes is echoed in the voice of a man whom Wiesel met in the hospital of Auschwitz: »I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises to the Jewish people.«¹¹

⁶ See Theodor W. Adorno, »Erziehung nach Auschwitz.« (1966), in *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit, Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969*, ed. Gerd Kadelbach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 92-109.

⁷ Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit, 1990), 221.

⁸ Elie Wiesel, *The Accident*, trans. Anne Borchart (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962).

⁹ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 31.

¹⁰ Wiesel, *Night*, 65.

¹¹ Wiesel, *Night*, 77.

Another pioneering attempt to remember in the form of autobiographical writing and testimony culminated in an act of incredible courage which the author did not survive. Twelve years after Jean Améry wrote *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, he committed suicide.¹² In Améry's writing, the haunting quality of the past events, their powerful vividness which resists closure is very much present. Accordingly, he writes in the foreword of his book: »I do not have [clarity] today, and I hope that I never will. Clarification would amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to prevent precisely this. For nothing is resolved, nothing is settled, no remembering has become mere memory.«¹³

More than 44 years have passed since Jean Améry began writing. The situation we are facing in Germany right now is very ambivalent. The call to remember the Shoah has been taken seriously by many individuals, groups and institutions. Monuments and places to remember have been created. A huge amount of autobiographical and fictional writing, movies, and documentaries are easily available. Christians have created rituals of confession and remembrance. In 1970, we saw German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeling in front of the memorial dedicated to the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw and its dead. This gesture gained an iconic quality in the process of its reception in Europe.

We can recognize waves of memory practices and at the same time various forms of resistance to them. Religious educators in Germany perceive a certain opposition against the call to remember so powerfully articulated by the survivors of the Shoah. Many young students graduating from high school wonder why they should mourn as they do not know the victims of the Second World War, they did not participate in the violence, and they do not want to form their sense of self in relation to a past they have not created.¹⁴ It would be too easy to dismiss these thoughts as right-wing attitudes. Rather, they point to the fundamental challenge of what it takes to pass on memories of atrocities to generations who have not been involved in them as contemporaries. Other empirical studies point out that the majority of German high

¹² Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne. Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Munich: Klett Cotta, 1966). In English, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5.

¹³ Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 5.

¹⁴ See Michael Wermke, »Einführung.«, in *Die Gegenwart des Holocaust. »Erinnerung« als religionspädagogische Herausforderung* (Münster: LitVerlag, 1997), 1.

school students experience shame, a sense of guilt, as well as feelings of being paralyzed as they think of the Shoah. The haunting past captivates the hearts and minds of the younger generation. Grasping glimpses of the unspeakable terror, it seems that many educational endeavors fail in inspiring a sense of responsibility for the present as the past is remembered.¹⁵

Furthermore, there have been huge controversies with regards to the aesthetic and political dimensions of commemorative monuments. The *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, for instance, caused such a debate.¹⁶ This memorial covers a 4.7 acre site right in front of the Berlin *Reichstag* with a field of 2,711 stelae, or concrete blocks, one for each page of the Talmud. The stelae are ordered in a crisscross pattern on a sloping ground. According to the architect Eisenman, he intended to evoke an apprehensive and perplexing atmosphere for visitors who are wandering between the stelae. The whole monument hints at the ›well-ordered‹ bureaucratic Nazi system of annihilation, which was out of touch with human reason and empathy. Eisenman refused to create a pedagogical frame which could have included further explanations or educational instructions. One of the major points of critique, however, focuses on the creation of this kind of indeterminate space.¹⁷ Today, when you visit this memorial, you can see people having lunch on the stelae, sunbathing, or smoking a cigarette. The performative space that is shaped by the visitors' interaction with the memorial can create a sense of bewilderment for guests who seek to find a place of respectful remembrance. It might evoke Hannah Arendt's thoughts on the banality of evil, which hint at the ordinariness of lives lived day by day while the most severe atrocities are happening simultaneously.¹⁸ Some monuments, as some critics would say, carry the danger to trivialize and to domesticate the past.

¹⁵ See Konrad Brendler, »Identitätsformationen von Jugendlichen im Schatten der Schoah. Zur Wirkungsgeschichte der Schoah und den Chancen der Erinnerungsarbeit.«, in *Zugänge zur Erinnerung. Bedingungen anamnetischer Erfahrung. Studien zur subjektorientierten Erinnerungsarbeit* (Münster: LitVerlag, 2000), 31–56.

¹⁶ The memorial was erected in 2005, designed by the architect Peter Eisenman and engineer Buro Happold. See more on this controversy in Brigitte Sion's essay in this volume.

¹⁷ Beneath the monument, you can find a place that documents traces of the Shoah more explicitly. Many tourists, however, do not discover this place. Eisenman emphasizes that it is not part of the memorial.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006). Brigitte Sion discusses in detail the interaction of visitors with memorial sites. See her contribution in this volume.

Another individual whose voice complicates the call to remember is Miroslav Volf.¹⁹ Volf, who was himself interrogated by the Yugoslavian Secret Service and by the members of the army in the 1980s, poses the question of how victims of wrongdoings can remember in salutary rather than destructive ways so that the well-being of those who have suffered can be served. He also explores the question of what it means for the perpetrators of violent acts to remember maturely. What are the circumstances in which memory practices can prepare the ground for reconciliation? By engaging defenders of forgetting such as Freud, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, he comes to the conclusion that – at least with regard to individual biographies – forgetting as the release of remembered wrongs might be beneficial under well-defined circumstances.²⁰

And finally, we need to name the obvious fact that remembering violence does not automatically prevent violence from reoccurring in the future. While many people all over the globe tried not to forget the Shoah, new genocides did happen: for instance in Bosnia, in Rwanda, and in Darfur.

Remembering in the aftermath of violence is indeed an elusive and multifaceted phenomenon.

A PROCESS-RELATIONAL APPROACH TO COLLECTIVE REMEMBERING

»Neither remnant, document, nor relic of the past, or floating in a present cut off from the past, cultural memory, for better or worse links the past to the present and future.«²¹

CONTESTED MEMORY

I suggest a theoretical grounding for remembering violence beyond the binary of an essentialist versus a presentist approach. An essentialist approach understands memories and images from history as straightforward representations of a past that is at the disposal of those who remember, making it a discrete unit of reality, like an object or a thing. In contrast, a presentist approach

¹⁹ See Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

²⁰ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 232.

²¹ Mieke Bal, »Introduction,« in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal et al (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1999), vii.

comprehends memories as mere constructions, which serve certain purposes for the present. In this functionalist view, acts of remembering become mainly an instrument to navigate diverging interests of various groups or individuals.²²

Instead, I draw on the proposal of the sociologist Jeffrey K. Olick, who has put forward a *process-relational approach* for the analysis of collective remembering as practice. By choosing this approach, the following four assumptions are put into question: (1) Collective memory is understood as a *homogeneous unity*, which produces consensus and a sense of collective identity; (2) it is grounded in *mimetic directness*, which means that »collective memory in some way or another represents or mirrors a pre-representational past, rather than being from the very first embodied in representational form«;²³ (3) it is imagined as a *tangible object*, enfolded or set in stone in aesthetic productions such as monuments, music, poetry, or sacred texts; and, finally, (4) collective memory is a distinct and separable aspect of culture.

A process-relational approach, conversely, focuses on collective remembering as a thoroughly interactive phenomenon, in which the connections between the present and the past are constantly negotiated. It can be understood as a field in which official and vernacular memory is navigated. The notion of field, as Pierre Bourdieu has introduced it, is helpful here:

Field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in their determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as their objective relation to other positions.²⁴

Acts of collective remembering happen in different social fields, which are connected in shifting relations. Acts of remembering religious groups engage in are thus influenced by various fields, such as the political, the academic, or the educational field. Within these fields, groups and individuals relate to each other's views in their own construction of the past, and challenge each

²² See Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 8.

²³ Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 89.

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 97.

other in the struggle for hegemonic positions. Collective memory thus becomes a contested terrain that produces multiple streams of remembering. It is important to recognize that the field in which collective remembering happens is, in many contexts, not a peaceful and homogenous space. It is rather highly disputed. The question of *how* stories of violent conflicts, genocide, and enduring structural violence are told and interpreted within a framework of religious interpretation is crucial. The field of collective memory is contested and fluid. Stories emerge that have been suppressed or forgotten; marginalized groups articulate their perspectives on which remnants from the past need to be foregrounded. What is supposed to be remembered becomes a locus of struggle. Reflecting on countries such as Rwanda or Chile, where massive genocide or state violence was exercised, Lorey and Beezley state,

In the aftermath of incidents of genocide and state-sponsored violence, officials, individuals, and a broad array of social groups have attempted to shape the historical consciousness of societies. Such efforts can last for decades. Major conflicts have arisen as social groups battled for the preeminence of a certain interpretation of what happened, who is to blame, and who should be punished. One of the most troubling realities of the aftermath of genocide and collective violence was the attempt to use history in the service of forgetting; historical memory was sometimes abused in order to provide perpetrators with impunity for their earlier actions. Thus the past became key to interpreting the present and to shaping the future.²⁵

MNEMONIC MEDIA AND ACTS OF MEDIATING THE PAST

Within these fields of contestation we need to pay attention to what kind of *media of memory* are engaged since the past – if you will – comes to us through some sort of representational medium, which mediates temporal distance. A process-relational approach is thus interested in the media of memory that are introduced in the field of collective remembering. These media are not just forms that could be separated from the message they carry. Form and content are rather intimately interconnected in the usage of mnemonic media. In addition, a process-relational approach focuses on memory not so much as an act of storage and retrieval, but rather as an act of mediation, as an ongoing process in which the connections between past and present are

²⁵ David E. Lorey and William H. Beezley, ed., *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2002), xiv.

constantly modified. As we consider the act of mediation, we pay attention to the intentions as well as the effects certain acts of memory imply. These might be the production of a sense of tradition and permanence, of homogeneous collectivity, or of a revolutionary time. Some practices strive for dominance through universal truth claims; others might lift up particularity.²⁶

Peter Reichel distinguishes four types of mnemonic media, which he identifies as provisional and fluid categories:²⁷

- a) *Affective media*: These are political or religious festivals, anniversaries or high holidays of remembrance which intend to induce emotions that seek to serve a sense of collective identity and integration.
- b) *Aesthetic expressive media*: These can be monuments, works of art situated in the public sphere or in museums, autobiographical and fictional writings, as well as visuals, such as pictures and images. All of these are geared toward a deeper aesthetic truth which cannot be contained in mere facts.
- c) *Instrumental cognitive media*: These encompass the creation of historical archives as practices in historiography and documentaries. Instrumental cognitive media are evaluated according to accuracy of fact collection and how they contribute to increased historical knowledge.
- d) *Political moral media*: These include punishment, amnesty, reparations, or the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. Political moral media are judged in terms of providing justice, rehabilitation, or integration.

These media are no static means, but they change with the events they mediate: »The media of memory decisively shape not only specific memories but also memory's mediating functions.«²⁸ Remembering encompasses practices which can take on many forms. The media employed in the realm of religion can be mainly identified as affective and aesthetic expressive media. We remember in writing; speaking and not speaking; in ritualizing and in preaching; in building memorials; in the composition, performance and reception of music. We create specific times for remembrance. From the perspective of ritual theory, we might say that acts of memory in the public sphere function

²⁶ See Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 98.

²⁷ Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die national-sozialistische Vergangenheit* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), 26–27.

²⁸ Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 104.

most of the time in setting apart certain times and places. We distinguish them from the realm of the ordinary in order to create a performance space, which helps us to focus on what we otherwise seek to avoid. For instance, we gather on November 9th to remember the *Reichspogromnacht*. We gather in places which bear the marks of destruction, such as the remains of synagogues. Persons of faith do this in constant conversation with sacred texts and with the revelations and the encounters with the Divine they hold to be foundational for their lives. Acts of remembrance are grounded in aesthetic and ethical choices with regards to content and how particular media are used. We choose which testimonies to utter; we decide on the way how to evoke the name of the Holy One, how to confess our sins and the sins of our ancestors; and we settle on visual images to provoke certain responses. We develop curricula in which we teach our children and youth about the violence that has occurred in our midst and how this occurrence has shaped our sense of self and community. We seek to be mindful of the question of what it means to convey something from the past to generations who are removed from the events since they might have happened many years, even decades ago.

THE PROCESSIONAL CHARACTER OF MEMORY GENRES

Collective memory is not a clearly bounded object that can be possessed, as I have stated before. It can be better comprehended in terms of genres, as historical constructs that are the results of an unremitting and generative process put into practice in the social-verbal exchanges of conversation partners. Each individual utterance and performance consists in a »chain of speech communion«, an accumulated succession of commemorations.²⁹

Consequently, genres produce the memory of memory; they are grounded in the essential reflexivity of mnemonic practices. For instance, Abraham Lincoln has been a point of reference with regard to the chain of speech communion which has created this kind of echo, the memory of memory. John F. Kennedy's funeral was sated with references to Lincoln's funeral. Dr. Martin Luther King's appearance at the Lincoln Memorial was reminiscent of Marian Anderson's.³⁰

What we can observe here is a kind of citational practice. Commemorations that went before are referenced implicitly and explicitly in order to

²⁹ See Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 105.

³⁰ See Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 105.

give the current event more weight or a particular profile. Depending on how these citations are framed, a certain sense of traditioning will emerge. According to Jan Assmann, the memory of memory is created in a shared mental space in which a particular group refers to the construction of fixed points in the past that receive a symbolic quality. Shared narratives evolve around those points of reference, which then generate new memories. Oftentimes these narratives invite a dense sense of identification.³¹

In Christian liturgical commemorations of the Shoah, we can often find texts of Jewish writers. Especially texts from Elie Wiesel, Albert H. Friedlander, and Hana Volavkova are used with the intention – I assume – to give voice to the perspectives of the victims.³² This kind of citational practice has led to a controversial debate as to whether these good intentions inspire a space of memory in which the children and grandchildren of the perpetrator generation imagine themselves in the place of the victims, as the act of empathy dissolves in its subject-object structure. Who remembers? Who is remembered? Once these questions are not asked anymore, the challenge to find a response from the Christian side disappears.³³

Such citational practices are embedded in the *history of commemorations*, which shows the developmental character of certain memory genres. Olick, for instance, suggests for the public commemoration of May 8th between 1949 and 1995 five distinct periods in which the commemorative rhetoric surrounding this day significantly changed.³⁴ Memory genres thus have

³¹ See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 52.

³² See examples from the Christian perspective in *Liturgies on the Holocaust: An Interfaith Anthology*, eds. Marcia Sachs Littell and Sharon Weissman Gutman (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996). Elie Wiesel's autobiographic text »Night« is quoted. Hana Volavkova collected poems by children who were interned in the camps: *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1964). Quoting from those poems is another prevailing source.

³³ See Tania Oldenhage, »Walking the Way of the Cross: German Places, Church Traditions, and Holocaust Memories.«, in *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, eds. Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 90.

³⁴ Within these five periods he identifies the following themes: defeat, liberation and the German victim (1949–1969); liberation and the Pan-European future (1970–1975); normalcy and normalization (1975–1985); normalization through relativization (1985–1995), and commemoration in the new Germany (1995 – present). Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 62.

processual character that is expressed in their historical and dialogic dimensions.

LESSONS FROM TRAUMA THEORY

Mieke Bal states: »The memorial presence of the past takes many forms and serves many purposes, ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what is lost to polemical use of the past to reshape the present.«³⁵ Oftentimes, remembering in the aftermath of collective violence takes on the form of trauma. Trauma refers to an engagement with the past in the aftermath of an event of overwhelming violence in which the actual horrific event cannot be recalled and cannot be brought into consciousness. This inaccessible event however returns and haunts the survivors in ways that causes new suffering. Formerly established skills of dealing with stress and conflict shut down; a person's ability to respond to the effects of traumatic stress is impaired. Well-known categories from the world of therapy such as ›working through‹ or ›coping‹ do not seem to be appropriate. The experience of death bleeds into the present and affects one's sense of time, sense of embodied living, as well as the capacity to use language.³⁶

The distinction between knowing the (traumatic) event and the way in which that event is remembered is obscured. The traumatic event escapes accessibility – it cannot be fully known, neither by memory nor by historical reconstruction: »The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known.«³⁷ The traumatic event, as it occurs in the experience of overwhelming violence, can become a missed event, a missed encounter with death. It remains inaccessible to knowledge. This missed encounter calls for the persistent repetition of the traumatic event. For persons suffering from PTSD this repetition does not entail a cognizant remembering of the trauma. Instead, the elusive return of the traumatic event is incessantly experienced as original

³⁵ Mieke Bal, »Introduction.«, vii.

³⁶ See Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 18–21.

³⁷ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 62.

event, which causes the shock of survival. This shock is – as Cathy Caruth calls it – an awakening one moment too late, which carries the pounding question: Why did I survive?³⁸

We can see in many societies that the passing on of trauma through various generations happens in multiple ways. The very events that produced traumatizing effects return in new shapes and are repeated in new forms of violence. We can see this happening, for instance, in the United States, in Germany, in Israel, or in South Africa. Often times the violence has also horizontal character.³⁹

Trauma theory attends to a sphere of knowing that is itself continually terrorized and haunted by the violence, by the trauma of a past event. It is a knowing that remains incomplete. Or as Cathy Caruth articulates it, »Trauma ... does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned.«⁴⁰ Trauma, in this sense, is a continual awakening to an event that was not fully understood and because of this incompleteness is being incessantly made present. Or as Dirk Lange puts it: »Repetition is not the repetition of a known event but an impossible repetition – the repetition of a missed encounter, the repetition of a missed encounter with death ...«⁴¹

REMEMBERING VIOLENCE: FRAGMENTS FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

In what follows, I seek to reflect theologically on remembering violence in light of current research on trauma and collective memory. I am interested in revisiting fragments from the Christian traditions that can be drawn into the conversation by sketching out the following areas as fruitful points of contact:

³⁸ See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 62.

³⁹ Ron Eyerman claims that slavery is a site of traumatic collective memory for African Americans, a site that needs constant reflection and reinterpretation. Slavery has become a habitus, in Bourdieu's sense, something »lived and living ... inherited and transmitted ... « Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 188.

⁴⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151.

⁴¹ Dirk Lange, »Trauma Theory and Liturgy: A Disruption of Ritual.« *Liturgical Ministry* 17 (2008): 128.

the understanding of anamnesis (remembrance) as it derives from the Eucharist, the inhabitation of Holy Saturday, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit as paraclete who helps the remaining community to remember and to remain in love.

ANAMNETIC PRACTICE

Through traumatic events, a linear sense of temporality is destroyed, as life cannot be ordered in a neat timeline anymore. The past is no longer separated from the present and the future. It is rather something from the past death experience that haunts the present and that affects how we can imagine the future. One's whole life and way of being is shaped by this powerful contact with death and by the force of its return. It is an experience of excess of death which cannot be controlled and domesticated. Some theologians suggest interpreting the Eucharist in light of this dimension of trauma theory.⁴²

Many liturgical theologians assert a classical notion of anamnesis according to which the implosion of linear temporality stirs up the fullness of divine presence unbound by and simultaneously fully immersed in the past and the future God holds for God's creation. Eucharistic remembering leads, in this view, to an actualization of the Christ event (cross and resurrection) in its singularity.⁴³ In light of trauma theory, the iteration that happens in the ritual disrupts this illusion of actualization:

The force of return – of something that cannot be grasped in the singular event – the continual irruption of that event in life, both individual and communal, is here opposed to simple imitation, repetition, and memorial. Something in this event – its singularity – cannot be captured by our memories, by any act of mimesis, imitation or remembrance. [...] The resistance to facile remembering is a dissemination of context and subject; we might say that it is a ›dis-membering‹ of personal identity, of life and knowledge, of body and blood. The event returns and irrupts in the present moment, in the present context through dissemination.⁴⁴

In the Eucharist, we return to a site of state terror and torture by having a meal together. We do this by entering the chain of speech communion that be-

⁴² See Dirk Lange, *Trauma Recalled: Liturgy, Disruption, and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

⁴³ See for a discussion on anamnesis Bruce Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000).

⁴⁴ Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 140 and 142.

gins with Jesus' demand at the Last Supper, »Do this in remembrance of me«, which points to the Jewish practice of saying grace at the table and remembering the Exodus story, the liberation from slavery.

The narrative invites us into the night before the violence happens: »In the night when Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread . . .« It invites us into the space of dissemination: »Take, eat, this is my body given for you.« This invitation is not a glorification of violence; it is rather an invitation in the sharing of the eschatological body, since the story of violence told in the Eucharist is narrated from the hopeful perspective that God has disrupted the violence and the terror through the resurrection of Christ. I suggest understanding the Eucharist as a focal rite within the Christian faith, in which we are drawn into a story of divine redemption, which has at its heart the transformation of violence.⁴⁵ We return to a site of violence which is in many ways not accessible to us, which we cannot remember. We also return to the garden of the resurrection, which is in many ways not comprehensible to us and which is a frightening place, too, as the witnesses to the resurrection, such as Mary Magdalene and Peter, teach us.⁴⁶ This return is not happening in a triumphalist attitude that death is conquered; rather, the community gathered does a strange thing: People are having a meal together and believe that by doing so they commune with God. In light of trauma theory, we might understand the Eucharist as a practice which recognizes the reality of trauma inducing violence without giving it ultimate power. The site of violence cannot be represented in a simple, straightforward fashion in the act of remembrance. Here, through the medium of eating and drinking, a genre is created which holds the memory of memory. It is a space of reference, in which the force of the return, as reenacted violence, is disrupted. Instead, people are coming together to eat and drink and hear words that hint at love which gives itself radically to the other: »This is my body, take and eat.«

The Greek term *anamnesis* that is used in the New Testament in the context of the Last Supper scenes refers to a concept of remembering in which the linear perception of time implodes. By engaging in the ritual of eating and drinking, the tortured Christ is strangely made present as the Resurrected One. This presence holds both the indelible marks of vulnerability and violence as well as the transformative vision of resurrected life in the flesh. It is

⁴⁵ See Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ See Hans-Martin Gutmann in this volume, and Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 83–99.

in this complex space that the encounter with God occurs, the most intimate form of communion: Christ's body in my body. Christ's body becoming the community's body.

REVISITING HOLY SATURDAY

»Witnessing to what does not go away [...]«⁴⁷

Shelly Rambo calls this complex in-between-space the *middle* space. This is the space in which death and life are inextricably interwoven, a space in which resurrection can only be proclaimed when it testifies to the traces of death that remain. Here, the tale of redemption is not told in a linear fashion in which life triumphs over death as we march victoriously towards Easter. »Looking from the middle, we are oriented to suffering in a different way – always in its dislocation, its distance, and its fragmentation. This orientation calls for a theology of witness in which we cannot assume presence or straightforward reception of a violent event, but instead contend with excess of violence and its tenuous reception. Without witnessing to what does not go away, to what remains, theology fails to provide a sufficient account of redemption.«⁴⁸ In the aftermath of violence, Rambo calls for a *theology of remaining* which carves out a space for people who suffer from trauma, whose lives have forever changed as they have been touched by some sort of encounter with death.

Within the Christian liturgical calendar, it might be Holy Saturday which holds the middle space. While the liturgical reforms of the 20th century have recovered the Western liturgies of Holy Week, especially the Triduum, little attention is given to Holy Saturday. Triduum refers to the three days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Great Easter Vigil. If Holy Saturday is observed at all, it often happens only in very sparse forms.⁴⁹

Holy Saturday, as Cornel West claims, is a highly neglected terrain within Christian theology. It is a puzzling day, especially for those who are obsessed with the linear narrative of salvation, which moves seamlessly from Good Fri-

⁴⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 79.

⁴⁸ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 79.

⁴⁹ For instance, the Book of Common Prayer provides readings that remember Jesus' burial, evoke a sense of mortality, and a solemn preparation for Easter. An optional hymn is suggested: »In the midst of life we are in death.« The Methodist Book of Worship offers a brief prayer for Holy Saturday. The Eastern Orthodox traditions however provide a more elaborate liturgy on Holy Saturday.

day to Easter. In that trajectory, identifying with Easter is about identifying with the winning team:

That's why Easter Sunday the churches are full, but Good Friday they are empty. I'll show up when the winner pops up. But don't tell me about the main protagonist being treated like a political prisoner by the Roman Empire. Don't tell me about a senseless death based on injustice. And certainly don't tell me about the Saturday, in which, echoing Nietzsche, God is dead, even for Christians. You don't get too much theo-thanatology in Christian thought these days. But God is dead that Saturday, and there was no thought of a bounce back.⁵⁰

From the perspective of trauma theory, Holy Saturday might be interpreted as the middle space: it is the time-space which occupies the aftermath of violence, when vision is obscured and life does not feel safe anymore. Holy Saturday is the time-space that many survivors of massive violence inhabit; it is the moment after the violence has erupted, the numb and disorienting time span when it is absolutely not clear how life flourishing could ever be envisioned again.

It is the time-space in which we are to do the impossible – to witness the death of Christ. One major interpretation of Holy Saturday derives from the harrowing of hell tradition, which depicts Christ's victorious descent to hell where he breaks the chains of death and saves the departed. It is echoed in the *Exsultet* (Rejoice), the hymn that is sung to bless the Paschal candle: »This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell and rose victoriously from the grave.« Victory becomes a major image that arises from Holy Saturday and leads into the Easter Vigil.

Shelly Rambo invites us to discover another, more passive and subtle trace of the Holy Saturday tradition, which speaks to Christ's forsakenness, when the Word falls silent.⁵¹ Holy Saturday, as the middle day between death and resurrection, inhabits the abyss of hell in which God's own self is taken over by death as utmost forsakenness, desolation and disconnect. The ethical responsibility that comes with the inhabitation of Holy Saturday requires a twofold witness: The first witness relates to how we see Christ and how the Divine is present and absent in and with him. It challenges the doctrine of *divine apathia* and turns it upside down, as we are urged to reflect on divine

⁵⁰ Cornel West, »Readings and Conversations.« June 2003, <http://podcast.lannan.org/2010/06/18/cornel-west-reading-25-june-2003-video/> (accessed October 12th, 2011).

⁵¹ Shelly Rambo engages here a critical dialogue with Adrienne von Speyr's and Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday.

vulnerability marked by the experience of violence and death. From the exchange between Mary Magdalene and the gardener, we can learn that encountering the Resurrected One leads into a space where the trauma that has happened will not simply go away. It rather bleeds into the relationship and the exchange with Jesus; it creates knowledge and a way of seeing which remains incomplete and is troublesome.⁵² Reading the biblical witnesses this way, an unexpected connection occurs: Mary's witness and the testimonies of Elie Wiesel, Jean Améry, or more recently from the veterans of the Iraq war share the space of traumatic knowing and insight in all its incompleteness. What if we need to receive these testimonies as a necessary Holy Saturday practice? What if they would illuminate for us today what Mary has encountered? In light of the insight that we are threatened with resurrection, as Julia Esquivel puts it, we might receive the stammering call to become witnesses of trauma in the aftermath of violence.⁵³ This is the other aspect of witnessing which is grounded in an ethical responsibility that is geared towards Holy Saturday.

INVOKING THE PARACLETE

Shelly Rambo suggests, through her reading of the farewell discourse according to the gospel of John, that it is the middle Spirit who witnesses to what remains in this in-between-place, between death and life:

Looking through the lens of trauma, it is important to revisit the Spirit not as a figure who secures love between death and life but rather as one who witnesses to what remains – what persists – between them. This is the ever-greater Spirit of the middle, the fruit of love forged through death. The middle Spirit rewrites an understanding of love in significant ways, attesting to a form of divine presence that is difficult to see, to feel and to touch. The Spirit provides a distinctive way of orienting oneself between death and life, a way of witnessing the fractured dimensions of word and body between death and life.⁵⁴

The invocation of the Spirit in Christian liturgies is most often wrapped in images which depict her as a life-giving force that falls afresh on us, enlivens and strengthens us. Spirit is then evoked in opposition to death. The Holy Spirit is also evoked as divine force that provokes unexpected and unbound

⁵² See also Rivera, 'Ghostly Encounters', 128–129.

⁵³ Julia Esquivel, *Threatened with Resurrection: Prayers and Poems from an Exiled Guatemalan*, Spanish-English edition (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 79.

speech; in the Pentecost event embodied in the outbursting multitude of languages. Spirit falling down in burning tongues facilitates the astounding comprehension of other tongues. In these examples, Spirit is portrayed as opposite to speechlessness, disconnect, and silence. She is rarely invoked as the divine energy that emerges from the wounds of trauma and that hovers over the time-space of Holy Saturday, enabling the community to bear witness to life in the aftermath of traumatizing violence.

The Spirit as paraclete, as depicted in the farewell discourses in the gospel of John, might help to broaden our invocations of the Holy Spirit in our practices of remembrance. Jesus promises that the paraclete will come after Jesus has left them and will enable them to become witnesses. This is promised to a community who has been reduced through outside pressure and internal conflict to »bare life«. This is how Tat-siong Benny Liew imagines the situation of John's community, surrounded by an all-encompassing threat of death.⁵⁵ After the violence, after Jesus has departed, new forms of violence arise. In this situation, it is the paraclete who inspires the witness to the death experiences surrounding the community. The paraclete becomes the carrier of memories of the martyrs emerging from the middle space between death and life. The paraclete will move the disciples to become witnesses (John 15: 26–27).⁵⁶

Witnessing becomes a fragile practice: it needs to happen in the midst of threatening conflict:

If the paraclete resides in them, this figure will place them at the cusp of death and life as witnesses ... The paraclete bears witness to the things that Jesus did, and the paraclete will remain in and with them to remind them of these things. The disciples, in turn, are instructed to love and to witness. The presence of Jesus with them and the call to remain in him is delivered in a context of death. This death context not only indicates that they will be survivors – those who remain – but they will operate in the world in a particular way – remaining – in the aftermath of death.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Tat-siong Benny Liew follows Giorgio Agamben's reflection on bare life. See »Living and Giving in the Shadow of Imperial Death.« *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Religion* 1, no. 13.4 (December 2010): 1–58, [http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_1_\(2010\)_files/Peace%20Liew.pdf](http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_1_(2010)_files/Peace%20Liew.pdf) (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁵⁶ See Andrea Bieler and David Plüss, »Wenn der Paraklet kommt (Joh 15:26–16:4), Sonntag Exaudi.« *Göttinger Predigtmeditationen* 2 (2008): 271–277.

⁵⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 101 and 104.

In our practices of remembrance that seek to be attentive to the realities of trauma that surround us, we might consider invoking the paraclete as the middle Spirit who dwells in people and places who have to bear witness – trembling and in a tenuous fashion – to life and grace in the aftermath of violence.

CONCLUSION

Practical theological research which draws on critical practice theory needs to continuously delve into the analysis of acts of memory that are foundational for religious communities as well as for public discourse. How communities remember in the aftermath of violence is a vital issue for attending to the present and to the future. A critical analysis of the affective and the expressive media that are employed is crucial. As some of the essays in this volume demonstrate, churches oftentimes participate in the continuation of sectarian violence⁵⁸ or in acts of dismissive silencing⁵⁹ since they have failed to address their own complacency. It is, however, also the elusiveness of the phenomenon of memory that complicates the creation of practices that take the realities of trauma seriously into account.

In the last section of my essay, I have hinted at traditional biblical and liturgical resources that are in need of reframing so that the issues at hand can be addressed in new ways. Still, I also see the need for communities of faith to develop new rituals and to bond with artists and activists who seek to explore aesthetic expressions that address the aftermath of collective violence. If such connections are created, synergies might unfold, which spark glimpses of honesty and of hope.

⁵⁸ See Siobhán Garrigan's essay in the volume on Catholic and Protestant worship practices in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

⁵⁹ See Jean-Pierre Karegeye's essay in this volume on the genocide in Rwanda and the responses of the Roman Catholic church.

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