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Introduction

Memory and Hermeneutics

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One of the most memorable literary scenes about memory is the little madeleine that is dunked in tea by the narrator of Marcel Proust's (1871–1922) *In Search of Lost Time* – a scene that is perhaps better known from its repeated retelling than from the pages on which it is found (at least speaking for myself!). Closer to our own time, questions of memory have proved popular as well as provocative. Karl Ove Knausgård caused controversies over memory as a result of his six-volume book, *Min Kamp*, showcasing the tensions around how events and encounters are remembered and represented differently by the people who were engaged in them. The recent Nobel Prize laureate in literature, Annie Ernaux, raises questions about personal and communal memory in her use of “we” in the autobiographical novel *The Years*. At least in current debates, then, memory seems to be tantalizing because it troubles distinctions between the private and the public, the remembered and reality, story and history – as well as troubling these very terms. This special issue of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* is dedicated to the theme “Memory and Hermeneutics”. It is published in honour of Samuel Byrskog, Professor of New Testament at Lund University, in gratitude for the time he spent as editor of the journal between 2017 and 2021, and as a member of the editorial board for many years.

Byrskog's scholarship continues to be pioneering for our understanding of ancient texts and their relationship to memory. Probing the relationship between oral communication and written text, he has urged attention to how traditions are formed in dynamic ways that are not always immediately clear from the text as a finished product. Byrskog examines the Jesus tradition as it is reflected in the Gospels by drawing on theories of memory, thus opening up for a better understanding of how early Christians remembered Jesus and narrativized these memories. As he states in a 2018 article, he is not interested in trying to get behind or beyond memory to some "pure" historical origin of Jesus himself or the earliest Christian communities. "The past is always the remembered past."¹ At the same time, this does not mean that memories are just the product of personal fabrications or communal fictions. Byrskog writes in *Story as History – History as Story* that the past does not dissipate or disappear entirely, rather it "participates in the present, the present recapitulates it, and the future finds itself determined by it."² The attempt to discern how memory works, and how hermeneutical approaches can help us to understand the past in its relationship to the present is what makes Byrskog's work both fascinating and highly relevant.

The contributors to this special issue are internationally renowned New Testament and early Christianity scholars who have all worked on questions relating to memory and hermeneutics. All draw on Byrskog's work, sometimes more explicitly and sometimes more implicitly. Together with Byrskog's response, the articles gathered in this issue present an on-going scholarly conversation. This conversation builds on previous exchanges and opens up for new ones. The issue starts with "Text as Tradition – Tradition as Text: Early Christian Memory and Jesus' Threat against the Temple", by Rafael Rodríguez. Rodríguez presents the challenge of textuality in working on the origins of Christianity. New Testament and early Christianity scholars work with texts. But focusing on texts obscures the fact that these texts were part of, as Byrskog has put it, "a broader spectrum of oral performance and communication". Neglecting this "wider spectrum of orality" is misleading for the interpreter of the written text.³ Rodríguez builds on Byrskog's reflections on the form-critical concept of the *Sitz im Leben* in order to probe traces in texts that connect them to their prior performative and traditional contexts. Rodríguez explores how to read oral-derived

1. Samuel Byrskog, "Memory and Narrative – and Time: Towards a Hermeneutics of Memory", *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 16 (2018), 134, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01602003>.

2. Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Tübingen 2000, 299.

3. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 301.

texts in relation to tradition and the performance of tradition. He does so through a reading of the commemoration of Jesus' threat against the Jerusalem Temple in the years between Jesus' public life and the destruction of the temple. As Rodríguez points out, Byrskog has highlighted the role of eyewitnesses and tradents in transforming experiences and testimonies about experiences into historical narratives, but Rodríguez illuminates also the resistance to reshaping tradition amongst Jesus' tradents.

Next, Eve-Marie Becker turns to the theme of crisis in "Facing Violence and War: How Mark Memorizes Contemporary History". Becker builds on Byrskog's work on early Christian memorial and transmission processes, focusing on the *function* of literary memory. She asks how Mark's Gospel, and the Gospels that follow, grapple with experiences of crises in the authors' composition of literary memory. More specifically, focusing on violence and war, she asks how Mark's Gospel memorizes, reflects, and construes contemporary history. Becker discusses the way the gospel narratives function potentially as coping mechanisms: disaster management for Christ-believers who attempted to make sense of traumatic experiences in the wake of the Temple-destruction and the devastation of the city of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Engaging with trauma studies and empire-critical studies of the Gospels, Becker outlines the complexity of Mark's multifaceted reflections on contemporary history. She proposes different research perspectives in which the relationship of Mark's Gospel to contemporary history can be described, and shows how the gospel writer approaches contemporary history in a multidimensional and manifold manner.

Sandra Huebenthal shifts the focus to cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaft*) and memory as identity construction. In "Memory and Hermeneutics – Current Conversations", Huebenthal begins her article with the reminder that context matters, both for the production and the reception of texts. Book-ending her article with Byrskog's seminal influence on memory studies, she discusses the current state of the field. Beginning with her own context as a female German-speaking Roman Catholic New Testament scholar, she reflects on the way different lived experiences and different notions of cultural memory impact the hermeneutical perspectives brought to biblical scholarship. Huebenthal welcomes social memory theories in biblical studies, but argues that it is problematic that such theories have normally been centred on historical questions, posed in accordance with the historical-critical paradigm. Coming from a cultural studies point of view, she proposes that what such perspectives bring is not primarily historical or theological conclusions, but a crucial attention to contextualization and identity construction. She prompts us to ask: What kinds of identity constructions

do the New Testament texts invite? What kinds of identities emerge from memories about Jesus? Narratives mediate collective memories rather than reflecting historical realities. Calling her approach *Kulturwissenschaftliche Exegese*, Huebenthal proposes that we can read early Christian texts as media of social memory. They can be analyzed with narrative methods and a cultural studies framework, which can help to explain the generation and alteration of these media.

In the final article, “Hayden White and the Problem of Historical Referentiality in Markan Narrative”, Alan Kirk brings us back to the question of historicity and to what extent – and in what way – we can know the past. Kirk opens his article with a reflection on Byrskog’s contribution to his own thinking, particularly the tricky relationship between narrative formation and historical referentiality elaborated in Byrskog’s *Story as History – History as Story*. Kirk is critical of models that are indebted to Hayden White’s (1928–2018) influential views of narrative historiography. Kirk presents critiques of White, arguing along the lines that White fails to note that historical events are not just chaos, but are always already imbued with moral and cultural meanings. Through memory, the historian grapples with the past. The past therefore already has certain forms and patterns, not just according to individual memory but due to the way memories themselves are shaped by social structures and according to cultural topoi. It is true that a historical narrative is a particular representation of reality rather than reality itself, but that does not mean, Kirk argues, that it is not possible to rank different narrative representations and to pass ethical judgements on different versions of events. These critiques of White help also with understanding the relationship between memory, narrative, and history in Mark’s Gospel. Returning to Byrskog at the end of his article, Kirk reflects on Byrskog’s scepticism about getting beyond the difficulties involved in moving from Markan narrative formations to historical reconstruction. Ultimately, he argues against a firm and fast binary distinction between historical reality and narrative representation, or between history and the history of memory. Kirk calls for renewed and revitalized scholarly attention to Byrskog’s inquiry into how “history becomes story”.⁴

Byrskog’s response, “Memory and Hermeneutics – Concluding Reflections”, addresses each of the four articles, discussing the different positions and perspectives, and providing in turn new points of departure. Responding to prompts about context, he reflects on his own background and influences. Wondering what might have prompted his approach to memory and hermeneutics, he thinks for instance about his experiences as a father,

4. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 255.

where everyday occurrences with his children are turned into stories they tell each other in the future. As Byrskog insists, memory is a fundamentally hermeneutical category. It is also a deeply existential category that enables us to navigate time, shape identity, and provide understanding of our experiences. He highlights in particular three categories that are crucial for memory: referentiality, narrativity, and temporality. Memory, as he puts it, “is referential in that its images come from outside memory itself, it is narrative because it stems from and pictures a socially conditioned reality and it is temporal because it depends on time in order to navigate between the past and the present”.

Mentioning the commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans that he is currently finishing, Byrskog raises questions about Paul’s grappling with his past and present experiences in Corinth and the hopes for the future in Rome and Spain. Scholars of memory can extend beyond the historical Jesus and the Gospel narratives to focus in further on other New Testament texts, such as the Pauline corpus. As Byrskog and the contributors to this special issue demonstrate, questions of memory and hermeneutics continue to be productive and promising avenues for research in New Testament studies.

Scholarly conversations that move the field forward through the push and pull of different perspectives and positions are not guaranteed in the academy. Anyone looking back over the editorials Byrskog penned for *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* – available online – will see a scholar and an editor of a journal that is seeking to open up theology and the study of religion to the future, while not discarding the past. In a 2017 edition of the journal, Byrskog commends the fact that Paula Fredriksen’s article on Paul and Augustine – and her own memories of being inspired by Krister Stendahl (1921–2008) – sits alongside Joel Kuhlin’s article on Giorgio Agamben’s book *Pilate and Jesus*. As Byrskog writes, it is only right that our journal can contribute to the aspiration of research to melt together old and new in an attempt to move towards a future that is waiting for us.⁵ It is easy to make such statements. It is much harder to put them into practice. Byrskog does exactly that, when for instance in a 2018 issue of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*, he welcomes a lively debate about the role and relevance of biblical studies.⁶ Later, in a 2019 editorial, he reflects on his attendance at a conference in Marburg the previous summer. In Marburg, he could not help but recall the agenda-setting scholarship of figures who spent time there in the past, such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), Martin Heidegger

5. Samuel Byrskog, “Ledare”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 93 (2017), 123–124.

6. Samuel Byrskog, “Ledare”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 94 (2018), 205–206.

(1889–1976), and Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) – figures who continue to affect the present. As Byrskog points out, none of these thinkers were afraid of difficult questions. Nor were they afraid of touching on existential issues about what makes for a meaningful life.⁷ Similar questions about life, its meaning, and the contribution of philosophy, theology, and religious studies are raised in his editorial from the spring of 2020, where Byrskog reflects on the COVID-19 pandemic and the possibilities for a sustainable future.⁸

If there is a Swedish version of the famous madeleine scene, it must surely be prompted by what Swedes call *fika*, where conversations over coffee and pastries take place on a regular basis. What hermeneutical reflections on *fika* might divulge, I do not know. But if the spirit of generous and critical interchange that Byrskog’s scholarly writings and conversations in this issue and beyond are anything to go by, there is good reason to hope for a lot more to write, talk about, and remember in the future. ▲

7. Samuel Byrskog, “Ledare”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 95 (2019), 145–146.

8. Samuel Byrskog, “Ledare”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 117–118.

In memoriam Joseph Ratzinger (1927–2022)

GÖSTA HALLONSTEN

Med kardinal Joseph Ratzinger bekläder en framstående teolog påve-
ämbetet, men en teolog som samtidigt har pekat på teologins gränser:
”Kyrkan är Kristi kyrka, inte ett experimentfält för teologer”, sa han.
Det gjorde Ratzinger till en konservativ, men bland de konservativa
var han den med störst förmåga till dialog.

Orden kommer från *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim*, en profilerat evangelisk/protestantisk publikation, i samband med kardinal Ratzingers val till påve 2005.¹ Efter påven Benedikts historiska abdikation i februari 2013 och död på nyårsafton 2022 har citatet inte på något sätt förlorat i aktualitet. Han var en *vir ecclesiasticus*, en kyrkans man, och samtidigt en kreativ utläggare av traditionen, en kombination som offentligheten ofta hade svårt att tolka.

Joseph Ratzinger föddes 16 april 1927 i en from, katolsk familj i Markt am Inn i Bayern. Han prästvigdes 1951 i Freising och lade samma år fram sin doktorsavhandling i München om kyrkosynen hos Augustinus (354–430). Hans lärare, Gottlieb Söhngen (1892–1971) var ekumeniskt orienterad, hade tagit intryck av Karl Barth (1886–1968), och ledde in sin elev på ett mera historiskt och patristiskt spår än den förhärskande nyskolastiska teologin. När Ratzinger 1956 lade fram sin docentavhandling om uppenbarelseteologin hos Bonaventura (1221–1274) fick han därför kritik från dogmatikern Michael Schmaus (1897–1993) och riskerade att bli underkänd. Ratzinger uteslöt då de kontroversiella delarna och blev godkänd på en del av det ursprungligen mycket omfattande manuset. Ratzinger kunde nu fortsätta

1. Walter Schöpsdau, ”Beilage zur Wahl von Papst Benedikt XVI.”, *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 56:2 (2005), i. Alla översättningar från tyskan är mina.

att undervisa vid prästseminariet i Freising. 1959 blev han professor i fundamentalteologi i Bonn. Därifrån fortsatte han till Münster 1963, kom till Tübingen 1966 genom Hans Küngs (1928–2021) förmedling, för att slutligen tillträda en professur i Regensburg 1969. Med utnämningen till ärkebiskop i München 1977 slutade hans akademiska karriär, men på intet sätt hans teologiska verksamhet. Också som prefekt för Troskongregationen i Rom från 1981 var han verksam som teologisk skribent och flitig föredragshållare, en högst otraditionell hållning för en kuriekardinal. Inte mindre uppmärksamhet väckte det när han som påve publicerade sina Jesusböcker. De tre volymerna kombinerar en meditativ textutläggning med exegetisk fackdiskussion och gav upphov till omfattande kommentarer och diskussion både bland katolska och evangeliska exegeter.² I förordet klagade Benedikt XVI att böckerna inte är ”ett uttalande av kyrkans läroämbete” utan ett resultat av hans personliga ”sökande efter Herrens ansikte”.³ Även som *papa emeritus* fortsatte Benedikt att skriva. Texter från denna tid gavs ut på italienska strax efter hans död.⁴ Det är ovanligt med en teolog på påvestolen.⁵

Från sina tidiga studieår var Ratzinger lidelsefullt engagerad i teologin. Han kan räknas till den grupp teologer som distanserade sig från den samtida skolteologin och beredde vägen för Andra Vatikankonciliet, särskilt Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), Yves Congar (1904–1995) och Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). Men som teologisk rådgivare vid konciliet samarbetade han också med Karl Rahner (1904–1984) och Hans Küng. Rahners transcendentalteologiska konception stod dock Ratzinger främmande inför, och Küngs radikalisering kunde han inte följa. Ratzingers teologi var djupt präglad av Augustinus och den patristisk-medeltida traditionen. Med Bonaventurastudiet valde han en annan väg än den gängse thomistiska. Man kunde redan under pågående koncilium skönja de skilda vägar och konfliktpunkter som efteråt ledde till brytning mellan å ena sidan Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009) med flera och å andra sidan Ratzinger, von Balthasar, de Lubac och andra. Det är dock svårt att i Ratzingers egna skrifter belägga någon avgörande förändring. Fundamentalteologen Hansjürgen Verweyen (1936–2023) som doktorerade för Ratzinger skriver: ”Det är ett trist kuriosum att just Joseph Ratzinger, vars

2. Se Gösta Hallonsten, ”Joseph Ratzingers/Benedikts XVI. ’Jesus von Nazaret’: Spirituelle Auslegung und kritische Anfragen”, i Heinrich Assel, Stefan Beyerle & Christfried Böttrich (red.), *Beyond Biblical Theologies*, Tübingen 2012, 139–153. Bara på tyskt språkområde kom det ut ett tiotal debatt- och kommentarböcker.

3. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus av Nasaret: 1. Från dopet i Jordan till Kristi förklaring*, 3:e uppl., Skellefteå 2020, 23.

4. Joseph Ratzinger, *Che cos'è il cristianesimo: Quasi un testamento spirituale*, Milano 2023.

5. Se Jan-Heiner Tück (red.), *Der Theologenpapst: Eine kritische Würdigung Benedikts XVI.*, Freiburg 2013.

(enligt Michael Schmaus) farliga fuskverk inte ens blev publicerat, han som sedan var en ansedd företrädare för det teologiska avantgardet under Andra Vatikanconciliet, efter bara några år kom att räknas bland de värsta reaktionärerna.”⁶

Efter conciliet skrev Joseph Ratzinger 1967 den bok som före Jesusböckerna är mest känd och spridd, *Introduktion till kristendomen*. Det är en föreläsningsserie över den apostoliska trosbekännelsen, inledd med en lång reflexion över trons karaktär och dess villkor i nutiden.⁷ Tübingen präglades sedan av studentrevolten. Ratzingers flytt till Regensburg 1969 kan ses som en reaktion mot politiseringen av kyrka och teologi. Hans senare kritik av befrielsesteologin har dock även en klar förbindelse med avhandlingen om Bonaventura och dennes uppgörelse med de radikala franciskanerna och den karismatiske abboten Joakim av Flores (ca 1135–1202). Under åren i Regensburg skrev Ratzinger en omfattande eskatologi, *Auferstehung und ewiges Leben*. Bibelteologiskt och teologihistoriskt grundat gör han här upp med teser om ”Ganztod”, ”Auferstehung im Tod” och andra tendenser i samtida tysk teologi. Den bitvis skarpa polemiken vittnar om de efterconciliära motsättningarna.⁸

Förutom de två sistnämnda monografierna består Ratzingers omfattande produktion av ett mycket stort antal uppsatser, ofta samlade i antologier, vidare lexikonartiklar, recensioner och inte minst utförliga kommentarer till flera av conciliets texter. Sedan 2008 utges *Joseph Ratzinger Gesammelte Schriften* av Institut Papst Benedikt i Regensburg. Även intervjuer, predikningar, Ratzingers memoarer och rapportböckerna från conciliet ingår i utgåvan som omfattar uppåt trettio volymer. Forskning om katolsk teologi i Tyskland under andra hälften av 1900-talet kan nu glädja sig åt en lång rad vetenskapliga samlingsutgåvor: förutom Ratzinger, Rahner och Küng även Johann Baptist Metz (1928–2019) och Walter Kasper med flera.

I de samlade skrifterna ingår Jesusböckerna, men inte Benedikt XVI:s encyklikor eller andra påvliga texter. Det är dock tydligt att encyklikan *Deus caritas est* liksom *Spe salvi* är präglade av hans teologi och resonerande sätt att skriva.⁹ Däremot är de texter som Troskongregationen publicerade under hans tid inte skrivna av Ratzinger personligen. De har tillkommit i en process där ett antal teologiska experter och kardinaler medverkat. Det gäller i

6. Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger – Benedikt XVI.: Die Entwicklung seines Denkens*, Darmstadt 2007, 25.

7. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduktion till kristendomen: Föreläsningar över den apostoliska trosbekännelsen*, Stockholm 2018.

8. Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften: 10. Auferstehung und ewiges Leben: Beiträge zur Eschatologie und zur Theologie der Hoffnung*, Freiburg 2012.

9. För encyklikor och andra påvliga texter, se Vatikanens hemsida, <http://vatican.va/>, besökt 2023-05-01.

hög grad den ekumeniskt kontroversiella så kallade instruktionen *Dominus Iesus* 2000, liksom de två texterna om befrielse-teologin 1984 och 1986.¹⁰

Vad gäller ekumeniken är det känt att Ratzinger som kardinal engagerade sig för att den luthersk-katolska ”Gemensamma deklarationen om rättfärdiggörelseläran”¹¹ skulle accepteras av katolska kyrkan. Ratzinger deltog under lång tid i den informella samtalsgrupp mellan lutherska och katolska teologer som etablerats i Tyskland strax efter kriget. Den 2009 utgivna fullständiga texten till hans Bonaventuraavhandling visar i inledningen att den unge doktorn i början av 1950-talet var väl inläst på tysk, evangelisk teologi och insatt i den ekumeniska problematiken.¹² Vidare deltog han senare i den officiella dialogen med de ortodoxa kyrkorna och hälsades med en viss förväntan från östligt håll vid valet till påve.

Som teolog har Ratzinger inte bildat skola. Hans många doktorander har dock utgjort en ”Schülerkreis” som höll årliga seminarier med sin *Doktorvater* även sedan han blivit påve. Ratzinger har ingen teologisk konception i stil med Rahners. Han är inte thomist, även om han gärna hänvisar till Thomas av Aquino (ca 1225–1274), denne katolsk teologis store lärare. Trots att han ofta gjorde allmänfilosofiska och fundamentalteologiska reflektioner avslöjade han ingen specifik filosofisk prägling. Ett visst inflytande från Max Schelers (1874–1928) fenomenologi kan beläggas. Inspirationen från Augustinus gör honom måhända till ett slags ”platoniker” och i filosofisk mening ”idealist”.¹³ Närmast hans självförståelse kommer nog det enkla epitetet ”utläggningsteolog”. På sin behagliga tyska utlade han den tro och tradition som han sedan sin prästvigning gick in för att försvara – och att förstå.¹⁴ Titeln på hans postumt utgivna texter är karaktäristisk: *Che cose è il Cristianesimo?* ”Vad är kristendomen?”¹⁵

10. Troskongregationens texter finns på Vatikanens hemsida, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/index.htm, besökt 2023-05-01.

11. Se Gösta Hallonsten & Per Erik Persson (red.), ...att i allt bekänna Kristus: Den gemensamma deklarationen om rättfärdiggörelseläran. Tillkomst, texter, kommentarer, Stockholm 2000.

12. Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften: 2. Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras: Habilitationsschrift und Bonaventura-Studien*, Freiburg 2009.

13. I sin recension av *Einführung in das Christentum* kritiserar Walter Kasper Ratzingers ”latenta idealism”, något som ledde till ett meningsutbyte dem emellan. Se Walter Kasper, *Theologie im Diskurs*, Freiburg 2014, 450–471; Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften: 4. Einführung in das Christentum: Bekenntnis – Taufe – Nachfolge*, Freiburg 2014, 323–342.

14. Jämför karaktäriseringen i Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger – Benedikt XVI.*, 82: ”Till skillnad från många samtida teologer följde han redan från början principen att inte säga något som kunde bringa förvirring ifråga om den katolska kyrkans förpliktande lära. Hans lidelse för ett kritiskt studium av gällande lärouppfattningar förledde honom aldrig att försumma sitt herdeämbete, ett uppdrag som han såg sig anförtrött redan genom prästvigningen.”

15. Ratzinger, *Che cos'è il cristianesimo*.

Tematiskt sett har Ratzinger behandlat de flesta av dogmatikens och fundamentalteologins ämnen. Att hans enda monografi över ett enskilt tema rör eskatologin är nog en tillfällighet. Det finns dock anledning att lyfta fram ett tema som finns hos den tidige Ratzinger och ännu spelar en stor roll i hans senare, ja, sista texter. Det är förhållandet mellan tro och förnuft, något som i Ratzingers tänkande i hög grad har med den västerländska kulturens framväxt och karaktär att göra, eller kort sagt med frågan: ”Vad är kristendomen?”

I sin installationsföreläsning i Bonn 1959, ”Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen”,¹⁶ polemiserar Ratzinger mot Adolf von Harnacks (1851–1930) tes om ”kristendomens hellenisering”. Han försvarar kyrkofädernas logos-teologi, ett återkommande tema hos Ratzinger. Tro och förnuft, inte islam och våldet, är det verkliga temat i Benedikt XVI:s omdiskuterade föreläsning i Regensburg 2006. För Ratzinger är upplysningen ett resultat av den västerländska kultur där kristendomen ingår som en bärande del. ”Förnuftet blir inte helt utan tron”, säger han med adress till ateistiska och agnostiska förnuftstänkare, och tillägger ”men tron blir utan förnuft inte mänsklig”.¹⁷

Men frågan ”Vad är kristendomen?” har också med den så kallade ”religionsteologin” att göra.¹⁸ Karl Rahners bekanta teori om ”anonyma kristna” var Ratzinger tidigt kritisk mot. I en festskrift till Rahners sextioårsdag 1964, föregriper han kritiken mot den senare uppkomna och vanliga trefaldiga klassificeringen i exklusivism, inklusivism och pluralism. Frälsningsfrågan bör inte vara bestämmande skriver Ratzinger, och han förespråkar en ”fenomenologisk” undersökning av religionerna innan man så att säga värderar dem. Religion och kultur hör ihop, betonar han i senare skrifter. Kulturerna står i utbyte med varandra och ”religioner” kan inte jämföras som färdiga system eller statiska storheter. Evangeliet föreligger inte heller i en renodlad kulturfri form, varför begreppet ”inkulturation” är missvisande. För Ratzinger var sanningsfrågan avgörande. Det är den dialogen mellan religioner och kulturer bör handla om. Kanske var det också därför Benedikt XVI inbjöd ateister till fredsbönen i Assisi 2011.

Benedikt XVI, ”der Theologenpapst”, går inte till historien som en kyrkofurste, skrev en tysk journalist.¹⁹ Han var ”en otypisk påve”, skriver en

16. Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften: 3:1. Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen: Philosophische Vernunft – Kultur – Europa – Gesellschaft*, Freiburg 2020, 189–210.

17. Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg 2003, 110.

18. För det följande se Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften: 3. Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen: Philosophische Vernunft – Kultur – Europa – Gesellschaft*, Freiburg 2020, som samlar relevanta texter om religion, kultur och så vidare.

19. Jan Ross, ”Gott ist wichtig, ich bin es nicht: Benedikt XVI. wird nicht als Kirchenfürst

annan kommentator.²⁰ Kanske var Joseph Ratzinger också en otypisk teolog. Som teolog var han i hög grad förkunnare och försvarare av katolska kyrkans tro och lära. Men som förkunnare och apologet förblev han alltigenom teolog, en som frågar efter trons logos. ▲

in Erinnerung bleiben, sondern als Erneuerer des Glaubens”, i Jan-Heiner Tück (red.), *Der Theologenpapst: Eine kritische Würdigung Benedikts XVI.*, Freiburg 2013, 500.

20. Elmar Salmann, ”Unnützer Knecht oder letzter Platoniker? Zum Rückzug Papst Benedikts XVI. in die Einsamkeit”, i Jan-Heiner Tück (red.), *Der Theologenpapst: Eine kritische Würdigung Benedikts XVI.*, Freiburg 2013, 504

In memoriam Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936–2022)

ELISABETH GERLE

Den 21 maj 2022 nås vi av nyheten att Rosemary Radford Ruether har avlidit på ett sjukhus i Pomona, Kalifornien. Hon blev 85 år gammal. Under flera år kämpade hon med sjukdom, så det var inte helt oväntat. Ändå är det inte länge sedan hon fanns med vid det årliga mötet anordnat av American Academy of Religion. Då gick budet från mun till mun att Ruether hade mottagning i sin svit mellan halv sju och halv nio på kvällen. Vi var många som letade oss dit för att vi läst henne och hört henne i paneler. Vi visste vad hon betytt under sitt långa liv och hennes läsekrets kom att omfatta stora delar av världen. Runt henne fanns yngre forskare som hon inspirerat och handlett. Också i Sverige hade hon många vänner. Det var lätt att hälsa från någon av dem och se hennes ansikte skina upp. Lyhörd, humoristisk och intresserad.

Rosemary Radford Ruether brukar beskrivas som en av mödrarna till feministteologin. Hon föddes 1936 i St. Paul, Minnesota. 1957 gifte hon sig med Herman J. Ruether och de fick tre barn. Hennes akademiska karriär inleddes med en kandidatexamen i filosofi och historia 1958. Sedan blev det en masterexamen i antikens historia 1960 vid Claremont Graduate School, där hon även disputerade 1965 med avhandlingen *Gregory of Nazianzus*.¹ Skolad i patristik valde hon att lyfta fram andra perspektiv än de dominerande, vilka hon såg som ensidigt patriarkala och blinda för icke-etablerade tolkningar. Efter att Ruether disputerat tillbringade hon sommaren i Mississippi som medborgarrättsaktivist. Redan på 1960-talet var hon alltså inspirerad av kvinnorörelsen och medborgarrättsrörelsen. Detta fördjupades då hon 1965–1975 undervisade vid det svarta Howard University i Washington, D.C. Senare verkade hon som professor vid

1. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher*, Oxford 1969.

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary i Evanston, Illinois, och vid det gemensamma doktorsprogrammet vid Northwestern University. Hon var gästföreläsare vid Princeton, Yale, Harvard och Boston College, för att bara nämna några framstående universitet, och hon blev hedersdoktor vid mer än sexton olika lärosäten. Också Lund och Uppsala fick besök. I Uppsala blev hon hedersdoktor 2000 tillsammans med Desmond Tutu (1931–2021).

Utifrån sin klassiska bildning anlade hon ofta historiska perspektiv. Genom livet utvecklade hon en enorm bredd i sin forskning. Hon ställde nya frågor om kristendomens historia och reflekterade över kyrklig maktdynamik, men också över huruvida en manlig frälsare kan frälsa kvinnor. Frågan inspirerade kvinnor över hela världen.

I Sverige och i Europa, till exempel inom nätverket European Society for Women in Theological Research, kom hon att tillsammans med teologen Sallie McFague (1933–2019) och Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza inspirera den första generationen av feministteologer. McFague skapade ett nytt bildspråk för Gud. I stället för bilden av en kung lyfte hon fram Gud som mor, vän och älskare. Fiorenza, som är nytestamentlig exeget, menar att den anonyma kvinna som smörjer Jesu huvud enligt Mark. 14 bör ses som en profet som smörjer Jesus till kung.

Ruether var en pionjär som förde in feministiska, antirasistiska och ekologiska perspektiv i dialog med traditionell romersk-katolsk dogmatik och undervisning. Med sin skarpa blick kritiserade hon alla former av diskriminering med rötter i teologiskt tänkande. I boken *Faith and Fratricide* granskade hon traditionell kristologi och upptäckte inneboende antisemitism både i teori och praktik.² Senare påpekade hon i antologin *Interpreting the Postmodern* att det förefaller som om mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och jämställdhet mellan könen, vinster vi förknippar med det moderna, är något oväsentligt för det som då kallades radikalortodoxi och som inspirerat många av nykonservatismens representanter i det samtida teologiska landskapet.³

För den tidiga feministteologin var hennes böcker obligatorisk läsning. De finns fortfarande bland klassikerna på läslistor vid flera amerikanska universitet. Senare feministteologer började så småningom ifrågasätta det de såg som en alltför essentialistisk syn på könen, men delade ofta hennes befrielseologiska ansats.

2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, New York 1974.

3. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Postmodern as Premodern: The Theology of D. Stephen Long", i Rosemary Radford Ruether & Marion Grau (red.), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"*, New York 2006, 77–78.

Trots att Ruether utmanade det hon beskrev som patriarkala, hierarkiska paradigmen förblev hon katolik hela livet. För att förändra måste man verka inifrån, hävdade hon, och deklarerade att hon var en del av den befrielse-teologiska katolska gräsrotsrörelsen. Det var den som hade hennes lojalitet, inte den romersk-katolska kyrkans hierarki med säte i Rom. När hon i en artikel argumenterade för familjeplanering förlorade hon sin första undervisningstjänst vid ett lärosäte i Los Angeles. Men hon lät sig inte tystas. Hela livet behöll hon kravet på kvinnans rätt att råda över sin egen kropp.

Hon engagerade sig i ett antal olika frågor – alltifrån Israel–Palestina-konflikten, till antisemitism, rasism och klimatkris – både som aktivist och som forskande, författande och undervisande teolog. Det var inte bara kvinnors situation hon uppmärksammade utan också svartas och judars, tidigt även ekoteologi. Vid det stora interreligiösa mötet i Uppsala 2008, initierat av dåvarande ärkebiskop Anders Wejryd, var hon en av de religiösa ledare som deltog och undertecknade Uppsala Interfaith Climate Manifesto vid en högtidlig ceremoni i Uppsala domkyrka.

Genom åren har jag ofta återvänt till den lilla boken *To Change the World*, där Ruether argumenterar för att de bibliska skrifterna inte har ett enda tidlöst budskap utan snarare uppvisar en ständig kamp mellan profetiska, befriande insikter i olika kontexter och den mänskliga tendensen att hemfalla åt invanda mönster som sedan ges gudomlig legitimitet.⁴ Redan här menade hon att man inte kunde förstå den ekologiska krisen utan att se maktdynamiken. Industrialisering och förbrukningen av naturresurser sker inte i ett vakuum utan hör samman med utnyttjande av fattiga människors kroppar och arbete. Även de miljömässiga kostnaderna drabbar framför allt maktlösa människor. Därför kan man inte tala om hur människan härskar över naturen och utesluta den sociala dominansen. Hennes 36 böcker och över 600 artiklar visar hennes bredd. Från *Gregory of Nazianzus*, *The Radical Kingdom*, *Sexism and God-Talk*, *Gaia and God* och *Women and Redemption* till *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican*, alla banbrytande.⁵ Vi minns henne med stor tacksamhet. ▲

4. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*, New York 1981.

5. Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope*, New York 1970; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, London 1983; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, San Francisco, CA 1992; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, London 1998; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican: A Vision for Progressive Catholicism*, New York 2008.

Text as Tradition – Tradition as Text

Early Christian Memory and Jesus' Threat against the Temple

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Our perception of the textualized version of [past] history is severely distorted the moment we isolate it from its living roots. One imprisons the text in notions of textuality [...] Once we recognize a diachronic, oral dimension of the gospel tradition, we encounter immediately a context of interaction between living people and between oral accounts and written texts.

The past is not gone forever, nor is it entirely swallowed up by the present. It participates in the present, the present recapitulates it, and the future finds itself determined by it.

When written texts were employed as sources, they were never regarded as textual, semantic entities unto themselves, but were part of a broader spectrum of oral performance and communication. [...] A consistent neglect of the wider spectrum of orality misleads therefore the interpreter of the written text.¹

Written Texts and the Problem of Christian Origins

Twenty-first-century scholars of Christian origins find themselves in a peculiar situation.² On the one hand, we rely on written, *textual* remains for

1. Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Tübingen 2000, 129, 299, 301.

2. In 2004, as I was just beginning to research questions of oral history and tradition, my

nearly everything we know about earliest Christianity. On the other hand, important voices in the field claim that written texts are all but irrelevant to earliest Christianity, that written texts exhibit little more than totemic significance among communities for whom literacy was rare and, at best, unnecessary for navigating their social, cultural, and theological discursive needs. Only later, certainly after the first generation and perhaps not until after the first century, did written texts – so it is claimed – come to play a significant role in the very thing we are interested to investigate: Christian origins.³

The relevant data support two sides of a growing debate about the nature, role, and significance of literacy, scribality, and textuality among the earliest Christians.⁴ The evidence for the distribution of skills of literacy and decoding written texts – especially literary texts, such as those that would come to comprise the Hebrew Bible (including its Greek expression, the Septuagint) – suggests that such skills were rare and unevenly distributed, being concentrated especially among the elite and their slaves, in cities, among men.⁵ And yet, beginning from the very earliest period, Christian cultures were text-producing phenomena and issued a large number of texts across a broad range of genres.⁶ Moreover, multiple features of early Christian manuscripts suggest they were read by readers; these manuscripts were produced for readers and, once written, continued to be altered and emended to facilitate the act of reading.⁷

doctoral supervisor, Loveday Alexander, handed me her copy of *Story as History – History as Story* to help me sharpen my reactions – both appreciative and critical – to Werner Kelber’s seminal *The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q*, Philadelphia, PA 1983. That transaction was one of the top three formative events in my own development as a media critic of early Christianity. I am grateful to offer this essay in honour of Samuel Byrskog and his work on the character and transmission of the Jesus tradition. Nathan Shedd read an earlier draft of this essay and helped to identify and correct some of its more egregious shortcomings.

3. Joanna Dewey, “Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Traditions”, *Semeia* 65 (1994), 37–65.

4. See, for example, Larry W. Hurtado, “Oral Fixation and New Testament Studies? ‘Orality’, ‘Performance’ and Reading Texts in Early Christianity”, *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014), 321–340, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688514000058>, and the rejoinder in Kelly R. Iverson, “Oral Fixation or Oral Corrective? A Response to Larry Hurtado”, *New Testament Studies* 62 (2016), 183–200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688515000430>.

5. The classic work is William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, Cambridge, MA 1989, which has been surpassed by Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, Tübingen 2001.

6. Rafael Rodríguez, *Oral Tradition and the New Testament: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London 2014, 5. See also Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, New Haven, CT 1995.

7. See Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins*, Grand Rapids, MI 2006.

The data, then, do not require historians to choose between a literate/textual early Christianity and an oral Christianity but to recognize the various ways early Christianity comprised variegated textual communities.⁸ These communities navigated a world filled with written texts, ranging from public graffiti and quotidian economic and legal documents to personal and official correspondence to lengthy literary and/or sacred texts. Even so, the textual dynamics of the early Roman imperial period were not like those of the post-industrial, information-era societies we inhabit. In fact, it was possible to navigate one's social, political, and religious needs in relation to texts without necessarily reading those texts, as Chris Keith especially has explored.⁹ Textual communities are not necessarily *literate* communities; they are, instead, communities with distinctive interpretive and performative traditions centred on written texts.¹⁰ The present essay attempts to encounter the written remains of the earliest Jesus tradition within the broader social “context of interaction between living people and between oral accounts and written texts”, with a particular focus on the traditions of Jesus' threat against the temple, so that we might be better interpreters of written expressions of the Jesus tradition.¹¹

Beyond the Bounds of the Written Text *Per Se*

The rise of narrative criticism of the Gospels in the 1970s and 1980s produced myriad insights about the texts and offered important correctives to previous generations' historically motivated dissection of the texts. The programmatic neglect of extratextual information, however, would turn out to be an excess in its own right.¹² There are no historically or culturally unconditioned authors or readers. The decision, therefore, to ignore “historical information about the culture and biographical information about the author” and audience is, at best, a distortion of the text itself and, at worst,

8. The concepts “textuality” and “textual community” come from Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Princeton, NJ 1983.

9. See especially Chris Keith, *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee*, London 2011; Chris Keith, *Jesus against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict*, Grand Rapids, MI 2014.

10. See Rafael Rodríguez, “Reading and Hearing in Ancient Contexts”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (2009), 151–178, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X09351056>.

11. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 129, 301.

12. See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?”, in Janice Capel Anderson & Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, Minneapolis, MN 1992, 30–32. In contrast, see David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey & Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed., Minneapolis, MN 2012, 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm9t2>.

a colonial act that effaces our texts' authors and audiences and replaces them with, usually, Western academic readers.¹³

The indispensability of extratextual information is, in fact, one of the key differences between the early Christians' models of textuality and contemporary academic textuality. In the closing paragraph of *Story as History – History as Story*, Byrskog makes a significant observation:

The printed word tends to objectify the written text, which leads, on occasion, to the apotheosis of the text as a closed system. In “high-context” societies, however, with the strong oral/aural currencies of communication such as those we find in the ancient Mediterranean world, the semantic codes of understanding are to a large extent to be found outside of the written text; they are taken for granted, encoded in the culture, but not necessarily in the text.¹⁴

John Miles Foley (1947–2012) explains this taken-for-grantedness in terms of the history shared by performer and audience of a tradition that is iteratively expressed, especially in an oral-performative event. When a performer and an audience come together to experience shared tradition, they cooperate in the composition and interpretation of that tradition in the live performance. The performance's “text” – the words spoken during the performative occasion – evokes the broader tradition that transcends any of its individual performances.¹⁵ Foley encapsulates the relationships between performance, text, and tradition with the axiom “tradition is the enabling referent, performance the enabling event”.¹⁶

The primary feature of *tradition*, as an analytical concept, is its re-creation and/or re-presentation of something from the past in the present.¹⁷ As a

13. Malbon, “Narrative Criticism”, 30.

14. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 306.

15. John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, Bloomington, IN 1995, 48, n. 44, refers to a “tale within a tale”, a performative text contextualized within a “larger, implied tale – itself unformed (and unperformable) but metonymically present to the performer and audience”. This is identical to Albert B. Lord's (1912–1991) distinction between “songs and the song”. Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA 1960, 99–123. Similarly, see Ruben Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation*, Minneapolis, MN 2015, 84.

16. Foley, *The Singer of Tales*, xiii.

17. Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community*, Stockholm 1994, 20, draws our attention to the basic quality of tradition as being handed down from the past: “[Tradition is] that which comes from the past [...] those who transmit at a certain time understand the material as older than themselves. [...] Transmission is always of something that existed already before the situation arises.” A decade and a half later, Byrskog emphasized the same point: “The decisive criterion is temporal.” Samuel Byrskog, “When Eyewitness Testimony and Oral

thing “handed down” (Latin *trado*; see also παραδίδωμι), *tradition* is iterative, repetitive, and the site in which multiple events or expressions are fused together into a single entity. This “single entity” becomes the larger, untextualizable context within which individual utterances become meaningful.¹⁸ As a modern analogy, studio and live versions of music are often very different in sound, structure, instrumentation, and so on, but audiences nevertheless experience them as instances of the same thing, of “the song”.¹⁹ This larger, contextualizing approach to *tradition* sits alongside the more established sense among biblical scholars of *tradition* as individual sayings, pericope, and scenes. The term *tradition*, then, refers to both “context” and “content” of expressions – written, oral, and otherwise – of material from and/or about Jesus.

Historians of Christian origins, of course, do not encounter or interpret the spoken words of actual oral performance events. We deal with written textual remains from the first century CE as preserved in later (especially third- through sixteenth-century) handwritten manuscripts. Our texts do not arise from the interaction between performer and audience. Scholars are largely agreed that the Gospels’ written texts bear some relation to pre-Gospel tradition.²⁰ Accounting for that relation has been a challenge. In *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, Foley turns from actual oral performances to “the endemically more problematic area of the oral-derived text, that is, the text with roots in oral tradition”.²¹ Our interest here is less textual and more sociological: how do the social groups experienced with the Jesus tradition in actual oral performances perceive and interpret the written expression of the Jesus tradition? We need, then, to make two points about the early reception of the Gospels as oral-derived texts.

First, even the experience of the *written* Jesus tradition involved a performance event. Despite Paul J. Achtemeier’s (1927–2013) exaggeration that

Tradition Become Written Text”, *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 74 (2009), 43.

18. See Foley, *The Singer of Tales*, 54.

19. On the 1994 live acoustic recording of The Eagles’ “Hotel California”, the audience does not recognize the song for nearly ninety seconds; when it finally does, it cheers for almost half a minute. Despite dramatic differences between them, the 1994 acoustic version did not displace the 1977 studio version of “Hotel California”. Both are and continue to be, inarguably, the same song.

20. This was programmatic to twentieth-century New Testament *Formgeschichte* (form criticism). Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, challenged the form critics’ – especially Rudolf Bultmann’s (1884–1976) – assumption of evolutionary development from oral pre-Gospel tradition to written Gospel tradition. For a mediating response, see Rafael Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory: Jesus in Tradition, Performance, and Text*, London 2010, especially 4 (n. 3), 130.

21. Foley, *The Singer of Tales*, 60–98. Quotation from p. 60. See also Rodríguez, *Oral Tradition*.

omne verbum sonat, literary and/or scriptural texts nevertheless were often, even usually, read aloud before groups.²² Performance critics highlight the oral experience of the written word; Richard A. Horsley, for example, even prefers to translate Hebrew and Greek verbs for reading with “recite”.²³ The significance of the written word’s continuing oral qualities is often attributed to some nebulous “oral mentality” or “oral culture”. The present point, however, is simply that the *experience* of the written word in antiquity continued to be a *social* experience. The earliest readers did not typically experience the written Gospels silently and individually. They experienced the texts with others, perhaps in very similar oral performative events as they experienced prior to their encounters with written Gospel texts.²⁴ Despite the different potentialities of the written medium *vis-à-vis* oral media, the Jesus tradition continued to be recognizable *as* the Jesus tradition even in its new medium. In other words, the significant change in the tradition’s *form* (or *medium*) did not necessarily change the tradition *as context*. The experience of the written text continued to resemble the experience of the oral tradition in terms of the reading or performance event.

Second, inasmuch as the written Gospels’ earliest readers and hearers were largely the same people who gathered to hear the pre-Gospel Jesus tradition spoken in performative events, their prior experiences with the oral tradition provided the context within which they received and interpreted the written Gospel.²⁵ This is the point of the first half of Foley’s axiom cited

22. Paul J. Achtemeier, “*Omne verbum sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990), 3–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3267326>. For a corrective, see William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*, Oxford 2010, 4–9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195176407.001.0001>.

23. This is a regular aspect of Horsley’s work. See, for example, Richard A. Horsley, *Text and Tradition in Performance and Writing*, Eugene, OR 2013.

24. This explains some of the “inertia” referred to in John S. Kloppenborg, “Sources, Methods and Discursive Locations in the Quest of the Historical Jesus”, in Tom Holmén & Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus: 1. How to Study the Historical Jesus*, Leiden 2011, 241–290, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004210219_010: “It would require more effort to overcome the inertia of received usage and interpretation and to give to a saying of Jesus or anecdote about Jesus a radically different meaning” (pp. 259–260). Reformulations and reinterpretations of past traditions and sayings *do*, in fact, occur, as Kloppenborg notes, but even these reformulations and reinterpretations take place within a context comprised of “received usage and interpretation”.

25. In Gospels scholarship, the idea of a “community” has taken on connotations of a defined social group, often with a distinctive theology, whose features and concerns can be read off the surface of a Gospel produced by or for them. Without wading into that area of academic debate, my references to “the same people” (or, below, “the community”) experiencing the tradition in oral and written media highlight only the social experience of the Jesus tradition (namely that it was experienced with others rather than in isolation), something akin to terms like “social setting” or “group setting” in Sarah E. Rollens, “The Anachronism of ‘Early Christian Communities’”, in Nickolas P. Roubekas (ed.), *Theorizing “Religion” in*

above: “*Tradition is the enabling referent*, performance the enabling event.” The oral-derived written text, like the text of an oral performance before the written text, was rendered meaningful to both its author and its earliest audiences in reference to the larger tradition it brought to expression.

In other words, the history of commemorating Jesus and performing the tradition was itself part of the composition processes producing written Gospels.²⁶ This history was also itself part of interpreting the written Gospels. The Gospels were written for readers and audiences already familiar with and/or interested in the Jesus tradition; “tradition is enacted within a group knowledgeable of and existentially identified with it; its performance is a shared ritual rehearsal of the cultural memory”.²⁷ Their authors, too, must have had prior experience performing or recounting the Jesus tradition and so have learned which performative elements in which contexts resonated well with audiences, which fell flat, and so on. The people involved in writing, reading, listening to, and understanding the Gospels could draw on their own experiences with the oral Jesus tradition to fill in the texts’ narrative gaps. Both the production and the reception of the tradition were iterative experiences. The written tradition, therefore, was subject to a “continuity of reception across the supposed gulf between oral traditional performance and manuscript record” because the people experiencing the manuscript record, at least initially, were the same as those who experienced tradition in oral performance.²⁸ The continuity of the tradition was rooted in and related to the continuity of the community’s commemoration of Jesus.²⁹

Recall our quote, above, from the closing paragraph of *Story as History – History as Story*. We have now offered some explanation of the dynamics by which “the semantic codes of understanding” that are “found outside the

Antiquity, Sheffield 2019, 310. See also Robyn Faith Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture*, Cambridge 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108883573>.

26. Once Mark was composed, other Gospels were also influenced by the textuality of the Jesus tradition. If there were written sources prior to Mark (for example Q, but perhaps others as well), these may also have been a part of Mark’s compositional dynamics.

27. Alan Kirk, “Memory Theory and Jesus Research”, in Tom Holmén & Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus: 1. How to Study the Historical Jesus*, Leiden 2011, 823.

28. Foley, *The Singer of Tales*, 75. As time passed, the function of the experience of the pre-written oral Jesus tradition diminished. As Byrskog emphasizes throughout *Story as History – History as Story* and in *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 341–349, written texts went through processes of re-oralization. Even today, the experience of the written texts is not isolated from oral and other media; for one of the few scholars to recognize this point, see Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas’s Familiarity with the Synoptics*, Grand Rapids, MI 2012, 132–134, 136–137.

29. See Kirk, “Memory Theory”, 816.

text” are implicated in the production, reception, and interpretation of the written texts.³⁰ Foley offered a similar insight about traditional texts:

As a rule of thumb, the more densely coded and functionally focused a speech act, the more “additional” information is required to receive it in something approaching its cultural context. For members of the society, and especially for those skilled in performance of the particular genre, that enabling context is never “additional” but always implied, always immanent. Whether it constitutes a part of the utterance amounts, in other words, to a phenomenological question: for outsiders no, for insiders yes.³¹

At least some of the complication of reading the Gospels well is that we are outsiders, isolated from the communal performative traditions surrounding the production and earliest receptions of the written texts and informing their interpretations. These are the “living roots” Byrskog spoke of in this essay’s first epigraph, roots which are operative in the “interaction between living people”.³² That interaction is the vehicle through which the “never ‘additional’ but always implied” context of an oral-derived text has its hermeneutical effect upon the reception and interpretation of the text. For those of us lacking this interaction, this context appears to be beyond the text per se; for those steeped in this interaction, it is indistinguishable from the text.³³

Recurrent Performance of the Jesus Tradition

We thus find ourselves caught in a dilemma. The social interaction of an oral performative event is irrecoverable, and our access to the details of any single performance – let alone our ability to generalize and categorize various performative events – is lost. At the same time, we distort the texts we *do* have when we sever their connections to the “broader spectrum of oral performance and communication” that formed their originating context.³⁴ The oral-performative traditions by which the earliest Christians

30. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 306.

31. Foley, *The Singer of Tales*, 133.

32. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 129.

33. Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE*, Oxford 2001, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195140672.001.0001>, notes that “text-interpretive traditions” – the self-evident, commonsensical interpretation of a textual tradition – “come to be so closely associated with public renderings of a text as to constitute its self-evident meaning”. Moreover, this tradition “exists in the memories of both the textual performers and their auditors”.

34. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 301.

actualized the Jesus tradition are not available to us, but ignoring those traditions means ignoring vital aspects of our texts' composition and earliest receptions.³⁵ How can we proceed?

Samuel Byrskog's work recovering the form-critical concept of the *Sitz im Leben* spurs us to look for any remaining traces of our texts' connections to their originating performative and traditional contexts.³⁶ Byrskog defines *Sitz im Leben* as "that recurrent type of mnemonic occasion within the life of early Christian communities when certain people cared about the Jesus tradition in a special way and performed and narrated it orally and in writing".³⁷ We can clearly see Byrskog's concern to isolate situations in which early Christian tradents worked *on* the Jesus tradition from other activities (including working *with* the tradition) that do not affect the shape or content of the Jesus tradition.³⁸ We also can see Byrskog's belief – correct, in my eyes – that we are looking for iterative, *recurrent* activities in which the tradition itself – that is, the tradition as *content* – was the focus for at least part of the activity.

The repeated nature of these activities fuses them together into a single event in human memory, in which the unique details of a single event typically get assimilated to the regular contours of the events taken as a whole. Cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser (1928–2012) refers to this kind of memory as "episodic memory" (a neologism meant to be distinguished from "episodic memory"), memory not of a unique, individual moment (or episode) but of "common themes that remained invariant across [...] many experiences".³⁹ The once-fashionable (but hopefully now-outdated) analogy of the "the telephone game", in which a word or phrase is whispered from one person to another, *seriatim*, until the original message is unrecognizable at the end of the chain, is a poor model for this kind of recurrent event. In recurrent events, the past and the present are fused together, with the past

35. For "oral-performative tradition", see Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 8.

36. Samuel Byrskog, "A Century with the *Sitz im Leben*: From Form-Critical Setting to Gospel Community and Beyond", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 (2007), 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ZNTW.2007.001>. See also Samuel Byrskog, "The Early Church as a Narrative Fellowship: An Exploratory Study of the Performance of the *Chreia*", *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 78 (2007), 207–226, <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1504-2952-2007-03-04>; Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus*, 82–85.

37. Byrskog, "A Century with the *Sitz im Leben*", 20.

38. Byrskog follows his teacher, Birger Gerhardsson (1926–2013), in differentiating "transmission as a *deliberate act* within a special setting on one hand, and the *use* of the traditions within various activities on the other". Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 19, italics in original. Byrskog cites Birger Gerhardsson, *Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity*, Lund 1964, 43, but see also Birger Gerhardsson, *The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*, Peabody, MA 2001, 59–87.

39. Ulric Neisser, "John Dean's Memory: A Case Study", in Richard P. Honeck (ed.), *Introductory Readings for Cognitive Psychology*, Guilford, CT 1994, 114.

defining the present, giving it shape and meaning and clarifying potential courses of action within the present, even as the present provides the motivations for turning to the past and the questions such turns must address.⁴⁰ Yes, the past (or, similarly, tradition-as-content, which is “handed down” from the past) shifts and morphs as the perspective of the present moves and changes, but such shifts enable both the past and tradition to continue being relevant to the group defined by them.⁴¹ If we expect the past to remain static and increasingly irrelevant to a dynamic present, we risk missing one of the important mechanisms by which the past (and, again, tradition) performs its constitutive functions in the present.

Jesus and the Temple in Early Christian Memory

Traditions about Jesus were performed and transmitted among people who identified themselves as followers of Jesus in the forty years or so between the events of Jesus’ public activities and the writing of the Synoptic Gospels. During this same time, those traditions had to make sense of and orient Jesus’ followers to the traumatic events in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee as relations between the Jewish (or Judean) *ἔθνος* and the Romans deteriorated, leading ultimately to war (66–70 CE). Whether or not these later circumstances provided the creative, generative impulse behind any of the Jesus tradition’s content, certainly the shape and form of the tradition during this time reflected broader social, cultural, and political realities.⁴² (That is, whether or not new traditions were created as relations between Rome and Judea worsened, this worsening provided the context within which older traditions were expressed, received, and interpreted.) This would appear to be a potentially fruitful place to look for “fresh enactments of the tradition in [changing] contemporary social and cultural frameworks”, to see in the written remains of the tradition “a new kind of connection with the past” forged from “quite different vistas”.⁴³

The present question is how the iterative commemorative practices of the earliest Christian communities provided a sense of temporal continuity through time (the stability of the past) even as those practices (re)shaped

40. The examples of this kind of argument among social memory theorists are legion. See, for example, Michael Schudson, “The Present in the Past versus the Past in the Present”, *Communication 11* (1989), 105–113; Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*, Madison, WI 1995; Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, Chicago 2000.

41. See the important study by Edward Shils, *Tradition*, Chicago 1981.

42. For the distinction between *generative force* and *formative contexts*, see Alan Kirk & Tom Thatcher, “Jesus Tradition as Social Memory”, in Alan Kirk & Tom Thatcher (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, Atlanta, GA 2005, 30.

43. Kirk, “Memory Theory”, 842.

and (re)formed their images of the past to reflect and/or address new needs (the malleability of the past). For present purposes, the “fusion of past and present” refers to the synthesis of the past’s stability and its malleability in the unfolding, unceasing experience of the present. We will focus our question on the commemoration of Jesus’ critique of and threat against the institution of the Jerusalem Temple. We will begin with Paul Connerton’s (1940–2019) claim that “our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past”.⁴⁴ Understanding present events requires an interpretive framework that renders those events intelligible. Ruben Zimmermann’s definition of memory – “a process of interpretation that classifies contingent experiences into defined patterns of thought and comprehension”⁴⁵ – provides a space for us to see how traditions about Jesus’ threat against the temple provided Christians a schema for perceiving and understanding the traumatic and cataclysmic events of 70 CE.

All three Synoptic Gospels (and, of course, John) record traditions that level some sort of threat against the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus says directly to one of the disciples: “Do you see these large buildings? Not one stone here will remain upon another; each will certainly be destroyed!” (Mark 13:2; compare Matt. 24:2; Luke 21:6).⁴⁶ In the Synoptic Gospels, this follows the events of a day or two previous, in which Jesus ejected those buying and selling in the temple and overturned the tables and chairs of those exchanging coins or selling doves (Mark 11:15–17; Matt. 21:12–13; compare Luke 19:45–46; see also John 2:13–22).⁴⁷ Jesus’ threat against the temple comes up in his trial before the Sanhedrin, though the tradition insists the claim that Jesus said, “I will destroy this sanctuary made with hands and, in three days, build another, not made with hands”, is false (Mark 14:58; compare Matt. 26:61). According to Mark and Matthew, the tradition is capable of rejecting this claim; the Sanhedrin, however, does not, so Jesus is condemned for blasphemy.

Once Jesus has been condemned and crucified, nameless passers-by mock Jesus as “he who would destroy the sanctuary and build [another] in three days” (Mark 15:29; Matt. 27:40). Luke lacks any parallel to these passages, but he reflects knowledge of them in his account of the accusation against Stephen (see Acts 6:14). It is not clear if this is related to certain aspects of

44. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge 1989, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511628061>.

45. Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus*, 83.

46. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

47. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, Philadelphia, PA 1985, has persuasively argued that Jesus’ action in the temple was a symbolic demonstration of its impending destruction (and, by implication, restoration, though this latter point is more controversial).

Luke that seem to reflect a post-war perspective.⁴⁸ In John, when οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (“the Jews/Judeans”) ask Jesus for a sign to justify the temple tantrum, he invites/dares them to destroy the sanctuary before promising, “and in three days I will raise it” (John 2:19). The Evangelists’ varying portrayals here creates a nuanced distinction within the tradition: Jesus *did* announce the temple’s destruction, but the testimony that he claimed *he* would destroy the temple is emphatically false.⁴⁹

Perhaps we ought to notice that nowhere in the extant written Jesus tradition do tradents break in to point out to readers/hearers that Vespasian’s son, Titus, fulfilled the prediction of the temple’s destruction. Arguments from silence are notoriously problematic, and we should refrain from leaning too heavily on this observation. But Mark – the earliest of our extant written Gospels, which is often dated after the temple’s destruction in 70 CE – employs a number of asides from the narrator, whether to interpret a scene (Mark 7:19b) or a Semitic phrase (5:41; 7:34; 15:34) or practice (7:3–4) or to address the reader directly (13:14). Luke may more likely reflect a post-70 situation when he has Jesus refer to besieging armies encamped around Jerusalem (κυκλουμένην ὑπὸ στρατοπέδων Ἰερουσαλήμ; Luke 21:20). The Johannine narrator offers two asides to the audience during the temple incident (John 2:22, and probably 2:17). It would not be surprising, therefore, if tradents writing after 70 CE interrupted their narratives to point out to readers: “This was fulfilled in the first year of Emperor Vespasian, when Titus, his son, burned and plundered the sanctuary.”⁵⁰ None of them do.⁵¹

48. For example, where Jesus in Mark and Matthew prophesies the disciples will hear of πολέμους καὶ ἀκοὰς πολέμων (Mark 13:7; Matt. 24:6), in Luke he prophesies of πολέμους καὶ ἀκαταστασίας (Luke 21:9). Also, where Jesus in Mark and Matthew prophesies τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως spoken of by Daniel (Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15), in Luke he prophesies the disciples will see κυκλουμένην ὑπὸ στρατοπέδων Ἰερουσαλήμ, which will be the signal of Jerusalem’s impending ἐρήμωσις (Luke 21:20). For discussion, see François Bovon, *Luke*, vol. 3, Minneapolis, MN 2002, 115.

49. See Rafael Rodríguez, “Ancient Media”, in Chris Keith & James Crossley (eds.), *The Next Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Grand Rapids, MI, forthcoming, where I suggest the Gospels reject the claim that Jesus would destroy the temple.

50. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–339) brings Josephus’s (c. 37–c. 100) history and Jesus’ prophecy together to verify the passing of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new (see *Demonstratio Evangelica* 8.2.402–403; I am grateful to Ken Olson for this reference). In the autumn of 387, John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) gave his fifth homily *Against the Jews*, which explicitly cited Jesus’ words against the temple and the fulfillment of those words to validate Christ’s claims over and against the Jews’ (see *Adversus Judaeos* 5.1.6–7, 5.2.1, 5.3.13–14; my thanks to Ben Kolbeck for these references). For a discussion of this latter text, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom – Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop*, Grand Rapids, MI 1995, 62–66.

51. Writers such as Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165), Origen (c. 185–c. 253), and Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220) tend to pull from older (scriptural) prophecies found in the Christian Old Testament to explain the temple’s destruction rather than Jesus’ prediction of its destruction in the Gospels. See Christine Shepardson, “Paschal Politics: Deploying the Temple’s Destruction

This is certainly not conclusive evidence for any scheme for dating the Gospels; it is certainly insufficient for dating the Gospels before 70 CE.⁵² If, however, the Gospels were written after the temple's destruction, this is an example of tradents resisting the pressure to reshape or re-interpret the tradition in light of present exigencies. Inasmuch as Jesus' predictions against the temple are re-expressed in the aftermath of its destruction, extant expressions of the tradition leave the fulfillment of Jesus' predictions regarding the destruction of the temple implied and implicit.

We might also note the Gospels' presentation of Jesus taking up the mantle of John's critique of the temple administration and its perceived corruption.⁵³ In the Synoptics, John is primarily presented as a herald of repentance and immersion, though his preparatory role is highlighted especially through the anticipation of a "one who is stronger than me" who also is "coming after me" (ἔρχεται ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου ὀπίσω μου; Mark 1:7; compare Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; see also John 1:27). Despite the common claim that the Gospels portray John as specifically *Jesus'* forerunner, instances of the tradition are at least initially reluctant to identify explicitly the one (or One) who comes after John.⁵⁴ The ambiguity is useful for Jesus' tradents, and the question whether Jesus is John's coming one will arise naturally enough (see Matt. 11:2–6; Luke 7:18–23 [= Q?]⁵⁵). Regardless whom the historical John the Baptist thought would come after him, the Fourth Gospel

against Fourth-Century Judaizers", *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008), 233–260.

52. Though see James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity*, London 2004, for an argument for dating Mark early ("between the mid to late thirties and mid-forties", p. 208). For dating all four canonical Gospels before the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, see Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition*, Grand Rapids, MI 2022.

53. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, I am not commenting on the historical John the Baptist; instead, I am commenting on John the Baptist as a character within the Jesus tradition. As noted by Dale Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*, Grand Rapids, MI 2010, 205, "we know far less about John the Baptist than we are wont to imagine". Joan E. Taylor, "John the Baptist on the Jordan River: Localities and Their Significance", *ARAM Periodical* 29 (2017), 1, similarly makes a distinction between, (1) "[John] and his message", and (2) "the different literary sources [and] their narrative concerns". See also Joan E. Taylor & Federico Adinolfi, "John the Baptist and Jesus the Baptist: A Narrative Critical Approach", *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10 (2012), 247–284, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01003003>. Whether the historical John offered criticism of the temple, à la Qumran, or he understood his message of repentance and immersion apart from any such critique, the Jesus tradition portrays John as a critic of corruption in the temple, as we will see below.

54. See Rafael Rodríguez, "Betwixt Past and Present: Jesus and John in Tradition, Text, and History", in Werner H. Kelber & Neil Elliott (eds.), *Bridges in New Testament Interpretation: Interdisciplinary Advances*, Lanham, MD 2018, 97–117, especially 103–108.

55. See Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory*, 117–137.

identifies John primarily as a witness for the light that is (in) Jesus (John 1:7–8, 15, 19–36).

Unlike the Fourth Gospel, however, the Markan John’s message of repentance and immersion in the wilderness, apart from the temple, can be read as a critique of Jerusalem’s temple. To be sure, nothing requires this reading, at least not in the account of John’s message in Mark 1:4–8. Perhaps the scribes’ unstated question, “Who other than the one God is able to forgive sins?” (Mark 2:7), in the story of the forgiveness and healing of the παραλυτικός (2:1–12), reminds the reader that John’s message along the Jordan was at least potentially controversial. Whether or not the reader has picked up on these connotations, we can hardly miss the appeal to John in Mark 11, where Jesus explicitly roots his own opposition to the corruption of the temple leadership and its administration of the sacred rites and precincts in the divine warrant for John’s baptism (see Mark 11:27–33; Matt. 21:23–27; Luke 20:1–8; the parallel passage in John 2:18–22 makes a riddling reference to the crucifixion and resurrection rather than to John’s baptism⁵⁶). Whence comes Jesus’ authority to disrupt the temple courts and its proceedings? From the same source – so Mark implies – as John’s authority to call people to repentance without reference to the atoning mechanisms of Jerusalem’s temple.

Matthew draws this aspect of Mark’s representation of the Baptist forward into his account of John’s public activity by narrating a confrontation between John and “many of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 3:7). The Sadducees, of course, are centered in Jerusalem and, especially, the temple. Mark and Luke only mention them in their accounts of Jesus’ confrontation with the Sadducees in Jerusalem (Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40).⁵⁷ Matthew includes this story (Matt. 22:23–33); he also replaces Mark’s Herodians (see Mark 8:14–21) with Sadducees (see Matt. 16:5–12), a move he anticipates by inserting the Sadducees into his account of the Pharisees’ request for a sign (Matt. 16:1–4; compare Mark 8:11–13). These latter passages are unusual for portraying (or even referring to!) Sadducees outside Jerusalem and Judea.⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that, in Matthew, John confronts the

56. Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore*, Atlanta, GA 2000, 234–238, classifies John 2:16, 19 as “mission riddles”, that is, riddles that “play on the Johannine understanding of Jesus’ identity and mission” (p. 210). See also Thatcher’s discussion of John’s theory of memory in Tom Thatcher, *Why John Wrote a Gospel: Jesus, Memory, History*, Louisville, KY 2006, especially 24–32.

57. In Acts, the Sadducees are always located in Jerusalem. See Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6–8.

58. Josephus’s references to Sadducees, besides those places where he is describing them *vis-à-vis* the Pharisees and the Essenes (*Antiquities* 13.171–173; 18.11, 16–17; *Life* 10; *War* 2.119, 164–166), are located in Jerusalem; see his account of Hyrcanus’s move towards the Sadducees (*Antiquities* 13.293–298) and his account of the murder of James, Jesus’ brother (*Antiquities* 20.199–201). In *Antiquities* 13.298, Josephus portrays the Sadducees as having influence “only among the wealthy” (τοὺς εὐπόρους μόνον), but even here the Sadducees’ influence appears

Jerusalem Temple leadership directly for their corruption, and this somewhere just a few kilometers from Jericho, perhaps near Bethany on the east side of the Jordan.⁵⁹

Thus far we have described the written Jesus tradition without any attempt at reconstructing hypothetical tradition histories behind the texts. For over five decades, we have known – or ought to have known – that we lack the knowledge and tools to differentiate older from later utterances of the tradition, even that the tradition – as content – did not develop in ways that permit us to make such judgements.⁶⁰ The fusion of past and present that we are looking for, therefore, is not found in identifying our earliest extant forms of the tradition and then reconstructing even earlier forms.⁶¹ Instead, we use our historically informed imaginations to hypothesize and think through various scenarios that can explain the extant data and why it looks the way it does.⁶² Byrskog’s work highlights the roles of eyewitnesses and committed tradents in translating direct experience or testimony about experience (= history) into historical narratives (= story); Richard Bauckham has also worked from a similar hypothetical basis.⁶³ Their work is an important corrective to the history of New Testament scholarship that

to be restricted to Jerusalem’s wealthy.

59. Taylor, “John the Baptist”, 15–16, 18. The parallel passage in Luke 3:7–9 (= Q?) mentions neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees. In both the Two Source Hypothesis and the Farrer Hypothesis, Matthew’s πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων is considered Matthean in origin.

60. “There are no hard and fast laws of the development of the Synoptic tradition. On all counts the tradition developed in opposite directions. It became both longer and shorter, both more and less detailed, and both more and less Semitic. [...] For this reason, *dogmatic statements that a certain characteristic proves a certain passage to be earlier than another are never justified.*” E.P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, Cambridge 1969, 272, italics in original. For media-critical arguments against the utility of tradition-critical reconstructions, see Werner H. Kelber, “Jesus and Tradition: Words in Time, Words in Space”, in Joanna Dewey (ed.), *Orality and Textuality in Early Christian Literature*, Atlanta, GA 1995, 139–167; Rodríguez, “Ancient Media”.

61. See Kirk, “Memory Theory”, 814, who refers to “the end of the form-critical project of arriving at memory traces of the historical Jesus thought to lie near the bottom of a multilayered oral tradition”. In form-critical analyses, “earlier” describes ideas and formulations in the texts and not the texts themselves. So, for example, the adherents to the Two Source Hypothesis may generally judge Matthew earlier than Luke, but that does not preclude Luke from containing earlier traditions than Matthew.

62. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford 1994. See, for example, John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City*, New Haven, CT 2019, who regularly (and rightly) invokes the role of the historians’ imagination (and the importance of disciplining historians’ imaginations). See also Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 460; Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle*, New Haven, CT 2017, xii. My thanks to Bill Heroman, Nathan Shedd, Michael Barber, Matthew Thiessen, and Paul Sloan for help with these references.

63. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI 2017.

has too easily assumed a rupture between the on-going influence of eyewitnesses and the shape and content of the extant written tradition. I am, however, less persuaded by the specifics of their reconstructions. Byrskog highlights the role of James, the brother of Jesus, as an eyewitness, relying especially on the letter attributed to James.⁶⁴ Bauckham pays insufficient attention to the research showing that eyewitness testimony is subject to the same schematic and interpretive dynamics as other forms of narrativization.⁶⁵

I suggest a different hypothetical scenario. If the historical John the Baptist summoned people to repentance and the waters of the Jordan river in an act of critique of the temple and its corruption, the historical Jesus of Nazareth apparently heard this critique and resonated with it.⁶⁶ During the course of his own public activity, Jesus took up this critique, though the evidence is insufficient for us to know whether or how he differed from John in this regard.⁶⁷ If the historical John the Baptist did not intend any criticism of the temple administration (and/or was not regarded as offering any such critique), then Jesus and/or his tradents bent his memory in that direction in support of his or their own criticisms of the temple.⁶⁸ When Jesus died, he was portrayed as one who threatened to destroy the temple – perhaps (as in Mark) as critiquing the temple as a place “made with hands”

64. See Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 86–89, 167–75; Samuel Byrskog, “The Transmission of the Jesus Tradition: Old and New Insights”, *Early Christianity* 1 (2010), 449–451.

65. See, for example, Judith C.S. Redman, “How Accurate Are Eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in the Light of Psychological Research”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* (2010), 177–197, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27821012>. The response to Redman in Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 610, does not address the substance of her essay. See also Samuel Byrskog, “Eyewitnesses as Interpreters of the Past: Reflections on Richard Bauckham’s, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*”, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 6 (2008), 157–168, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17451908X349653>; Byrskog, “When Eyewitness Testimony and Oral Tradition Become Written Text”.

66. This sentence’s references to “historical” figures refer to the actual people who lived in the early first century CE.

67. That Jesus was killed for his activities in and threats against the temple, and John was not, may simply be a consequence of John staying in Antipas’s territory (at least as Josephus portrays him; see *Antiquities* 18.116–119; Taylor, “John the Baptist”, 5), while Jesus, during his final week, was active in the temple itself. It is not necessarily evidence that John’s criticisms of the temple – if he offered any – were less pointed than Jesus’.

68. As is evident from Taylor, “John the Baptist”, 11, John’s baptism was an act of *ritual* purification, and ritual immersions were practiced throughout the land (not only in Jerusalem). See, for example, Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels’ Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism*, Grand Rapids, MI 2020. The Gospels, of course, present John’s baptism in terms of repentance (βάπτισμα μετανοίας; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; compare Matt. 3:11) and release of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). This may be part of the Jesus tradition’s bending of John’s prophetic activity towards and against the temple and its administration.

(χειροποίητος) and promising to replace it with one “not made with hands” (ἀχειροποίητος; Mark 14:58)⁶⁹ – and he was mocked as such even as he hung dying on the cross.

As his followers continued to express, perform, transmit, write, read, and apply traditions from and about Jesus in the decades between his death and the catastrophic events of 70 CE, this aspect of Jesus’ message was neither neglected nor forgotten. Our perception of the earliest Christians’ views of the temple are complicated by the distorting effects of our knowledge of the events of 70 CE and the continued non-existence of the temple, as well as questions about dating certain important texts (for example, Hebrews). But the evidence seems to indicate that the earliest Christians continued to view the temple as a holy place and to offer prayer and sacrifices in the temple.⁷⁰ During this period, therefore, Jesus’ followers lived in the tension of venerating the temple as a holy place even as they commemorated Jesus’ (and John’s?) critique of the temple and its administration. Also during this period, Paul used the language of Jesus’ critique of the temple to express both his experience of suffering and his ongoing trust in God and in Christ. “For we know that even if our earthly house (ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία) – this ‘tabernacle’ (τοῦ σκίηνου) – is being destroyed (καταλυθῆ), we have a dwelling from God (οἰκοδομὴν ἐκ θεοῦ), an eternal house not made with hands (οἰκίαν ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον) in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). In John 2:19, Jesus says “destroy this sanctuary” (λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον), but he himself does not threaten to destroy it.⁷¹ Paul, similarly, observes the destruction (καταλύω) of Christians’ bodies without attributing that destruction to Jesus. Like the Johannine Jesus, though via different means, Paul exhibits confidence in the preservation of the threatened house or sanctuary.⁷² We

69. In the Septuagint, χειροποίητος referred to “hand-made” gods and their images (see Lev. 26:1, 30; Isa. 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; 19:1; 21:9; 31:7; 46:6; Dan. [OG] 5:4, 23; 6:28; Wis. 14:8; Jdth. 8:18). With the exception of Hebrews and, perhaps, 2 Cor. 5:1 and/or Eph. 2:11 (but not Col. 2:11!), the use of χειροποίητος and its opposite, ἀχειροποίητος (not found in the Septuagint) retains resonances of this anti-idolatry polemic.

70. See, for example, Matt. 5:23–24 (though this may reflect the time of Jesus rather than the behaviour of Jesus’ followers at any point between 30 and 70 CE). See also the regular portrayals in Acts of Christian activity, including worship and prayer, in the temple. Paul’s desire to spend Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 20:16; see also Rom. 15:25) also suggests that the early Christians, including Paul, did not scorn the temple in lieu of identifying Jesus as its replacement prior to 70 CE. For discussion, see Eyal Regev, *The Temple in Early Christianity: Experiencing the Sacred*, New Haven, CT 2019.

71. Only the Coptic Gospel of Thomas preserves a fragmentary tradition in which Jesus affirmatively threatens to destroy the temple himself: †ⲛⲁⲩⲟⲣ[ⲱⲣ̅ ⲛⲓⲣⲉ]ⲙⲉⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲗⲁⲗⲁⲅ ⲛⲁⲩⲟⲕⲟⲩⲥ (Gos. Thom. 71). See Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, Leiden 2014, 477–480, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004273252>.

72. The Johannine Jesus promises to raise the temple anew (ἐγερῶ αὐτόν; John 2:19). Paul expresses an assurance that he and his readers continue to have (ἔχομεν) a dwelling from God

may see here in Paul an example of Jesus' critique against the temple being applied to a new situation: placing the experience of persecution into proper perspective.

Jesus' tradents either preserved or created the idea that Jesus' critique of the temple was rooted in and continued John's critique; his authority to overturn tables and chairs and to disrupt temple activities was of the same source as John's authority to summon people to repentance and immersion in the wilderness (Mark 11:27–33; see also Matt. 21:23–27; Luke 20:1–8). My own view is that John, like the community at Qumran, understood himself to be critiquing the temple administration in Jerusalem and also calling (or simply hoping) for its reform and renewal.⁷³ Whether this was John's view or not, Matthew extends the tradition in this direction by bringing the Sadducees within the sphere of John's critique. Either way, the Jesus tradition did not erase John's voice from its own critique of the temple and its leadership; it either conscripted John into that critique or, as in my view, it preserved the memory that Jesus' own views of the temple were shaped by his predecessor's.

The Obdurate Past in a Malleable Tradition

In light of our tradents' tendencies to narrow the focus on Jesus and to exclude other sources of authority,⁷⁴ this is a surprisingly retentive and stable feature of the tradition. Once the temple was destroyed and Jesus' criticisms of the temple were seen to be particularly prophetic for prefiguring its destruction, it might be especially surprising that Jesus' tradents apparently resisted reshaping the tradition – except on the margins (for example, Luke 21:20) – to vindicate his critique. It was sufficient that readers and hearers could make the connection between Jesus' words and the current state – post 70 CE – of Jerusalem and her temple. As Byrskog noted in this essay's second epigraph, the past of Jesus' tradents was not, apparently, entirely swallowed up by their present circumstances or interests.⁷⁵ ▲

despite the destruction of their earthly dwelling (2 Cor. 5:1).

73. I agree completely with Eyal Regev that many of the New Testament texts often interpreted as condemnations of the temple *per se* aim, instead, “to create a *continuation* of contemporary Jewish ideas relating to the Temple”, and that “the NT authors do not simply react to the Temple as a ‘Jewish’ (namely, external or remote) cultic institution and symbol. They treat it as a place and a concept that are inherent to their thinking about Jesus and their own identity”. Regev, *The Temple in Early Christianity*, 314, italics in original. I would add that the temple was inherent also to the New Testament authors' thinking about God.

74. This was a major theme in Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, for example: “the constant focus on Jesus was *the* characteristic feature of the Jesus tradition” (p. 21, italics in original).

75. See Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 299.

SUMMARY

From its inception, early Christianity exhibited a kind of textuality that differs in striking ways from modern, academic textuality. While the various skills comprising literacy (reading, writing, and so on) were rare and unevenly distributed in the early Roman imperial period, nevertheless the early Christians and other Jews lived in a world crowded with texts. Many of these texts existed in some relation to traditions that already enjoyed a history of performance and interpretation. These traditions, which predated their expression in written texts, perform critical functions in the composition, reception, and interpretation of "oral-derived texts", or texts with roots in an active oral tradition. This essay applies the work of John Miles Foley and, especially, Samuel Byrskog to explore how to read oral-derived texts within the context of their encompassing tradition and the history of that tradition's performance. The commemoration of Jesus' threat against the Jerusalem Temple in the years between Jesus' public life and the destruction of the temple provides an example of such a reading.

Facing Violence and War

How Mark Memorizes Contemporary History

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The Gospels and the First Jewish-Roman War

Mark 13 – Jesus’ eschatological discourse – marks the transition from Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem to the passion events (Mark 14–15). Jesus’ eschatological discourse is, so to speak, at the juncture of the Gospel narrative and is thus fundamental to the Markan interpretation of time and history. In Mark 13 there are a number of images that refer to war, violence, persecution, and martyrdom (especially Mark 13:7–13).¹ Jesus initiates this series of predictions by announcing the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 13:1–2) and by foretelling the Temple’s desecration (Mark 13:14). Since Jesus’ eschatological speech immediately precedes the passion narrative (Mark 14–15), Mark interconnects – on the macro-level of his narrative – the incidents of war and violence directly to Jesus’ personal fortune: Jesus himself, the Son of God (Mark 15:39), will soon die a brutal death. Already since Mark 8:31ff., or even 3:6, the reader is informed about the upcoming fortune of Jesus’ violent death – a fortune which is, however, interpreted by Mark as a divine “necessity” (δεῖ: Mark 8:31). This article seeks to make sense of Mark’s “narrative agenda” from Mark 3:6 to chapter 15 in historical and historiographical terms by asking: in which way does Mark memorize, reflect, and construe *contemporary* history?² And what

1. On the interpretation of Mark 13, see Eve-Marie Becker, *Der früheste Evangelist: Studien zum Markusevangelium*, Tübingen 2017, 401–428.

2. This question is frequently left aside by, for instance, narratological studies on Mark. See,

significance do the topics of violence and war have in this context? In which form and for what purpose does Mark create *Zeitgeschichtsschreibung*?³

The Question of Dating Mark

There is a widespread view among synoptic scholars that the Gospel of Mark, which is considered by the vast majority of scholars to be the oldest Gospel narrative, was written under the influence (direct or indirect) of political and military events around 70 CE.⁴ Those events are first of all caused by the First Jewish-Roman War and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. According to the Markan narrative, Jesuanic sayings like the so-called temple-prodigy in Mark 13:1–2 and related traditions (Mark 14:58; 15:29; see also 15:38) follow directly from Jesus' life, mission, and fortune. Even beyond Mark 13–15, Jesus' life and ministry are brought into a context of temple criticism by Mark: the cleansing scene in Mark 11:15–19 and the parable on the vineyard in Mark 12:1–12 reveal massive critique of the Jerusalem Temple and its aristocracy.⁵ It seems obvious that Mark offers a perspective on Jerusalem and its temple that is not solely topical, but assumes the renewed destruction of the Jerusalem Temple – in other words, Mark looks at Jerusalem through the lens of the years 66–70/73 CE.⁶ Even if the question whether the Markan Gospel has been composed *ante* or *post eventum* 70 CE is still under dispute in synoptic studies,⁷ the evidences pointing to a *post eventum* 70 CE dating are dominating.⁸ In what follows,

for example, Scott S. Elliott, “Time and Focalization in the Gospel According to Mark”, in Danna Nolan Fewell (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, Oxford 2016, 296–306, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199967728.013.25>. An overview of important issues in Mark studies is most recently given in the contributions of *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 24/47 (2021).

3. On the term and concept, see more extensively Eve-Marie Becker, “Zeitgeschichtsschreibung im entstehenden Christentum (ca. 30–100 n.Chr.)”, in Valérie Fromentin (ed.), *Écrire l'histoire de son temps, de Thucydide à Ammien Marcellin: Neuf exposés suivis de discussions*, Geneva 2022, 241–282.

4. See Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 9th ed., Göttingen 2017, 268ff.

5. On the interpretation of Mark 12, see John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, Tübingen 2006, especially 219–221; John S. Kloppenborg, “The Representation of Violence in Synoptic Parables”, in Eve-Marie Becker & Anders Runesson (eds.), *Mark and Matthew I: Comparative Readings. Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First-Century Settings*, Tübingen 2011, 323–351.

6. See also various contributions on Mark and the War in Barry S. Crawford & Merrill P. Miller (eds.), *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark*, Atlanta, GA 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1qd8zmm>.

7. See, for example, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Minneapolis, MN 2007, 11–14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb6v7zz>, who herself opts for an *ante eventum* 70 CE dating.

8. I have dealt with the issue of dating Mark and discussing the *pro et contra* arguments for an *ante* or *post eventum* 70 CE dating comprehensively in previous work and will not repeat those arguments here. See Eve-Marie Becker, *Das Markus-Evangelium im Rahmen antiker*

the *post eventum* 70 CE dating is generally presupposed. However, no matter how we date the Markan Gospel, there can be no dispute *that* Mark emerged in the realm of the War events.

It is not only the “level of reference” to the most recent War events – such as Mark 13:14 – which makes such an interconnection of the Markan Gospel with the First Jewish-Roman War plausible. Rather, Mark even connects Jesus’ bodily fate directly to the destruction of the Temple (for example Mark 15:38). The *Christologoumenon* of Jesus’ execution by analogy with the destruction of the Temple is still completely absent from Pauline Christological thinking ten or fifteen years earlier.⁹ The inner historical connection between the violent death of Jesus and the end-time imagined destruction of the Temple is, as it seems, first established in Mark (Mark 13, 15; see also 11–12). It was not yet apparent to Paul.¹⁰

If we hold that the Markan Gospel emerged in the continuity of the events of 70 CE, most probably *after* 70 CE, this would even more so apply to the subsequent Gospel writings. While Matthew (see especially 26:61; 27:40; but also 21:41; 22:7; 24:2, 15–28) and John (see especially 2:19–21) do not provide any further clear or more nuanced hints that would exceed the Markan references to the War events and the Temple-destruction, Luke reports about Jerusalem as being surrounded by military forces which will bring the destruction of the city (Luke 21:20). Luke, hereby, shows most evidently knowledge of historical details, and thus a more clear *post eventum* 70 CE-perspective. Does the more evident *post eventum* 70 CE-perspective in Luke have consequences for dating the Gospels, so that Luke would have to be dated – much more evidently than Mark, Matthew, and John – *after* 70 CE?

The manner in which Luke reveals his historical point of view is a *literary* element in his historiographical concept. This is true in thematic as well as in narrative terms. Thematically, Luke shows a special interest in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Temple in both volumes (see already in Luke 1:5ff.).¹¹ In narrative terms, Luke reveals his historical point of view to the reader. Hereby, Luke differs from Mark: in difference to Mark, Matthew, and John,

Historiographie, Tübingen 2006, 77–100; Becker, *Der früheste Evangelist*, 53–75.

9. An exception with regard to the analogy of Christ and temple is the cultic language in Rom. 3:25.

10. Becker, *Der früheste Evangelist*, 259: “Der innere geschichtliche Zusammenhang zwischen dem gewaltsamen Tod Jesu und der endzeitlich vorgestellten Zerstörung des Tempels, wie er bei Markus hergestellt wird (Mk 13 und 15), hat sich für Paulus noch nicht abgezeichnet.”

11. See, for example, Lukas Bormann, “Jerusalem as Seen by Ancient Historians and in Luke-Acts”, in Antti Laato (ed.), *Understanding the Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Three Abrahamic Religions*, Leiden 2019, 101–122, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004406858_006.

Luke makes his hetero-referential point of view as a historian explicit right from the beginning (Luke 1:1–4).¹² Consequently, Luke also expands his narrative account much more evidently *beyond* the time-frame of Jesus' life and death (= "level of narration"). Regarding the "narrator's perspective", Luke can reach out to contemporary history as he does in his second monograph project: Acts.¹³

Gospel Writings as "Coping Strategies" and "Disaster Management"

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple becomes an increasingly important topic in early Christian literature up to the second century CE and even beyond.¹⁴ Adele Reinhartz discusses how much – in historical terms – the event of the "destruction of the Temple in 70 CE was experienced and understood as traumas [*sic*] by at least some Jewish followers of Christ".¹⁵ "Trauma studies" are a useful tool for interpreting Mark and the subsequent Gospels. In general, trauma studies have proposed a theoretical frame of interpreting historical incidents causing cultural traumata.¹⁶ In light of trauma theory, the emergence and literary development of early Christian literature appear as a "coping strategy".¹⁷ Reinhartz points out how such a coping strategy might have worked; the destruction of the Temple:

was domesticated through arguments that it was foretold by scripture and by Christ himself; that it was an inevitable punishment for Jewish transgressions such as the killing of Christ, Stephen and James, and that it had no impact at all on the beliefs and practices of Christ-confessors, whose focus had already turned from the sacrificial cult localized in a temple towards Christ as the universal savior."¹⁸

12. Hetero-referentiality is inherent to factual, that is, historiographical narratives. As the author, the narrator examines the tradition. See Becker, *Der früheste Evangelist*, 272.

13. However, even in Acts, Luke only defines Paul's arrival in Rome (in the early 60s CE?) as the narrative's historical endpoint.

14. See, for example, Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 16.4; 51–52; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.22; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.23.16ff.

15. Adele Reinhartz, "The Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple as a Trauma for Nascent Christianity", in Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn & Else K. Holt (eds.), *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, Göttingen 2014, 285.

16. See Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", in Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley, CA 2004, especially 12–15.

17. Reinhartz, "The Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple", 278: "Alexander's work suggests that the destruction of the temple will be seen as traumatic for nascent Christianity if reliable agents declare that the event violated a fundamental value of the community and therefore required restitution and reparation."

18. Reinhartz, "The Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple", 286.

We could even go a step further here and say that Mark took the passion narrative as a mirror of time experience and transformed it like a “disaster narrative” into a salvation story. The Markan Gospel hereby functioned as disaster management.¹⁹

The Markan Gospel as “Literary Memory”

In light of trauma studies, the emergence of the Markan Gospel appears to be crisis management in a more general sense. Jeffrey C. Alexander emphasizes how crisis management is not only of social but also of cultural relevance: “For traumas to emerge at the level of collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises.”²⁰ The description of the cultural crisis that caused the emergence of the Gospel of Mark as a memoir in literary form must then be extended. Further questions arise: how much can the rise of the Gospel genre – the emergence of Mark and the subsequent Gospels – be seen as a result of the Jewish-Roman War? How much and what kind of evidence for social and cultural crises do we find among Christ-believers in the last third of the first century CE? How do Mark and his successors deal with experiences of crises through their composition of “literary memory”? Is the emergence of literary memory in the last third of the first century CE restricted to disaster or crisis management?

The concept of “literary memory”²¹ enriches the discourse on the Gospels as “memory texts”.²² It aims to consider the Gospel writings as literary works that grew out of a complex early Christian memorial discourse²³ and are dedicated to the interpretation of history, remembering and interpreting, among other things, (contemporary) history. The concept of literary memory allows for what Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) calls a “thick

19. Eve-Marie Becker, *The Birth of Christian History: Memory and Time from Mark to Luke-Acts*, New Haven, CT 2017, 111.

20. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma”, 10.

21. On the definition of the Gospels as “literary memory”, see Becker, *The Birth of Christian History*, 4–5.

22. For a recent debate, see Sandra Huebenthal, “Das Markusevangelium als Gründungsgeschichte verstehen Oder: Wie liest sich das älteste Evangelium als Erinnerungstext?”, *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 24/47 (2021), 89–99; Eve-Marie Becker, “Gedächtnistheorie und Literaturgeschichte in der Interpretation des Markusevangeliums”, *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 24/47 (2021), 101–106.

23. Samuel Byrskog has done important work on the early Christian memorial and transmission processes that precede the writing of the Gospels. See, for example, Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Tübingen 2000; Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola & Jutta Maria Jokiranta (eds.), *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, Göttingen 2016. In this contribution, I ask less about the (oral) transmission processes between 30 and 70 CE and their tradents, but rather about the function of literary memory, which Mark as a pre-historiographical author shapes by interpreting contemporary history.

description²⁴ of how the Gospel story – as a whole (Mark 1–16) and on a larger scale – reflects and manages various kinds of memories and hereby construes a comprehensive interpretation of contemporary history.

Interpreting Violence and War in Mark

When applying trauma studies to the interpretation of Mark, the emergence of the Gospel narrative basically appears as a coping strategy of War events.²⁵ The Gospel narrative functioned as a coping instrument among Christ-believers who were trying to make sense of traumatic experiences which resulted from the sociopolitical and sociocultural impact of the Temple-destruction and the devastation of the city of Jerusalem in 70 CE. However, if we broaden the textual basis beyond Mark 13–15 and 11–12 (see above) and enlarge the perspective on interpretation by asking to what extent the Gospel of Mark reflects history as a literary memory, further factors and historical events come to light as possible Markan reference material for interpreting contemporary history.

Mark and Flavian Ideology

Some recent studies²⁶ emphasise the impact of the rise of the Flavian emperors on the writing of Mark's Gospel.²⁷ They classify themselves as “empire-critical” readings and consider Mark as “Reaktionsliteratur auf einen desaströsen Krieg”.²⁸ I shall point to two more recently published monographs in particular,²⁹ which interpret the Markan Gospel as a reaction *against* the political and military setting of the year 70 CE. In both monographs, published in 2016, an attempt is made to reveal semantics and

24. Clifford Geertz, *Dichte Beschreibung: Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme*, Frankfurt 1987, 7–43.

25. See also Udo Schnelle, *Die ersten 100 Jahre des Christentums 30–130 n. Chr.: Die Entstehungsgeschichte einer Weltreligion*, 3rd ed., Göttingen 2019, 322ff.

26. On the history of research, see Gabriella Gelardini, *Christus Militans: Studien zur politisch-militärischen Semantik im Markusevangelium vor dem Hintergrund des ersten jüdisch-römischen Krieges*, Leiden 2016, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004309340>. A critical review of the ideology- and empire-critical approaches is offered by Martin Meiser, “Das Markusevangelium – eine ideologie- und imperiumskritische Schrift? Ein Blick in die Auslegungsgeschichte”, in Michael Labahn & Outi Lehtipuu (eds.), *People under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Empire*, Amsterdam 2015, 129–158, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048521999-006>.

27. An overview of the research is provided most recently by Günter Röhser, “Warum eigentlich Markus? Ausgewählte Perspektiven der Forschung”, *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 24/47 (2021), especially 19–21. See also, for example, Klaus Scholtissek, “‘Grunderzählung’ des Heils: Zum aktuellen Stand der Markusforschung”, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 130 (2005), especially 865–867.

28. Gelardini, *Christus Militans*, 1.

29. Heinz Blatz, *Die Semantik der Macht: Eine zeit- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den markinischen Wundererzählungen*, Münster 2016; Gelardini, *Christus Militans*.

ideology, which affiliate the Markan Gospel with Flavian time and imagery. Along the lines of James C. Scott's concept of a "hidden transcript",³⁰ Heinz Blatz discusses how much Mark functions as a subversive counter-concept to imperial power,³¹ and Gabriella Gelardini examines whether Mark – against the background of Flavian ideology – creates his own ideas of political and military power.³²

Despite their attempt of affiliating the Markan Gospel to the *Zeitgeschichte* of its time, neither of the monographs discuss the historical

30. See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, CT 1990. In various contributions to New Testament exegesis, exceeding by far the field of Gospel studies – as is evident from, for example, Angela Standhartinger, "Letter from Prison as Hidden Transcript: What It Tells Us about the People at Philippi", in Joseph A. Marchal (ed.), *The People beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*, Atlanta, GA 2015, 107–140, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt189tt2d.10> – Scott plays an important role for describing how the earliest Christian groups, classified as subordinate groups, communicate "offstage"-like by means of a "hidden transcript". According to Scott, the term "hidden transcript" characterizes "discourse that takes place 'offstage', beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or deflect what appears in the public transcript" (p. 4). Scott's basic idea behind the concept of a "hidden transcript" – taken from social and political sciences and empirical studies of communist society – is that like "prudent opposition newspaper editors under strict censorship, subordinate groups must find ways of getting their message across, while staying somehow within the law" (p. 138). In difference to the "hidden transcript", the "public transcript" is used as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (p. 2). Scott classifies the "hidden transcript" as follows: "The hidden transcript is specific to a given social site and to a particular set of actors [...] it does not contain only speech acts but a whole range of practices [...] Finally, it is clear that the frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate – not a solid wall [...] The unremitting struggle over such boundaries is perhaps the most vital arena for ordinary conflict, for everyday forms of class struggle" (p. 14).

31. Blatz, *Die Semantik der Macht*, analyzes semantics of power (ἐξουσία, δύναμις, and σημεῖον), which he finds especially in Markan miracle stories and discourses about miracles. In contrast to how the "public transcript" of the Flavians is mediated, Blatz wants to show how the Markan texts entail "Bezüge zur Kaiserideologie" and how they undermine those "auf subversive Art und Weise" (p. 319). As a result, the Markan miracle stories appear to be what James C. Scott calls a "hidden transcript": "Das Markusevangelium [...] besetzt und ändert die römische Herrschaftssprache und stellt eine Gegenideologie zur Kaiserideologie vor" (pp. 331–332). See also my review: Eve-Marie Becker, "Heinz Blatz, Die Semantik der Macht: Eine zeit- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den markinischen Wundererzählungen", *Biblische Notizen* 178 (2018), 155–156.

32. Scott's concept of the "hidden transcript" also informs Gelardini, *Christus Militans*. See also my review: Eve-Marie Becker, "Gabriella Gelardini, Christus Militans: Studien zur politisch-militärischen Semantik im Markusevangelium vor dem Hintergrund des ersten jüdisch-römischen Krieges", *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 143 (2018), 62–64. Gelardini analyzes the Markan Gospel not only in political terms, but also in regard to military semantics as a "hidden transcript". She aims at revealing the political-military "Meta-Thema" of Mark against the background of the military events of the Jewish-Roman War (p. 466). According to Gelardini, there is no episode or narrative scene to be found in Mark, which is not "in einfacher bis hin zu mehrfacher Weise" to be brought in line with the "Kontext dieses ersten jüdisch-römischen Krieges" (p. 27, see also p. 885).

circumstances under which Mark was composed. In historical terms, Mark's *Sitz im Leben* remains rather dark.³³ In my view, the “empire-critical reading(s) of Mark” is deficient in two regards. First, in historical terms it is unclear how much the incidents of the Jewish-Roman War and the rise of the Flavian emperors should be seen as historical “triggers” for the composition of Mark, or whether these historical circumstances (only) function as the “narrative object” or “Meta-Thema” within the Gospel story, in the sense of a hidden subtext. Since empire-critical readings tend to focus on the latter, they actually fail to illuminate the historical context in which Mark and his reading audience have to be placed. Second, the empire-critical readings suggest identifying a consistent “subtext” behind Mark according to which the Markan Gospel narrative from 1:1–16:8 is arranged as “Reaktionsliteratur”, which would either propose resistance, or in any case an anti-Roman attitude. Even though Gelardini votes for a *tertium* here, according to which Mark created his own power-discourse, inspired by Roman military thinking,³⁴ she does not escape the basic dilemma which is inherent to empire-critical approaches. Independent of literary form, content, and pragmatics, *all* Markan pericopes are read alike in light of empire criticism. But what if the Markan Gospel is a more complex, multi-faceted reflection of contemporary history? My proposal for interpreting the Markan approach to contemporary history points precisely in this direction.

Mark and the Literary Memory of Contemporary History

Based on how trauma studies and empire-critical readings address and interpret the themes of violence and war in Mark's Gospel, further critical questions arise: should Mark's view on and reflection of contemporary history be restricted to the events of the Jewish-Roman War and Roman political and military history of his time?³⁵ Do we sufficiently understand Mark's Gospel by only reading it in light of the events of the War and/or the model of empire criticism? In a next step, I will show four research perspectives in which the relationship of Mark's Gospel to contemporary history can be

33. For a critical examination of form criticism and its concept of the “*Sitz im Leben*”, see Samuel Byrskog, “A New Quest for the *Sitz im Leben*: Social Memory, the Jesus Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew”, *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006), 319–336, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000178>; Samuel Byrskog, “A Century with the *Sitz im Leben*: From Form-Critical Setting to Gospel Community and Beyond”, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 (2007), 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ZNTW.2007.001>.

34. See, for example, Gelardini, *Christus Militans*, 25.

35. A more nuanced picture can also be found in Elizabeth E. Shively, “What Type of Resistance? How Apocalyptic Discourse Functions as Social Discourse in Mark's Gospel”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37 (2015), 381–406, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X15581325>.

described. Finally, four viewpoints of the evangelist on contemporary history can be derived from this.

Four Research Perspectives on Mark and Zeitgeschichte

(1) *Mark as reference to the Jewish-Roman War*: There can be little doubt that Mark refers to the historical events of the Jewish-Roman War. The Markan Gospel entails motifs and semantics of violence and war, which might point to the historical incidents of the War (see especially Mark 11–15). Mark deals with the topic of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. The destruction of the temple is even transformed into a *Christologoumenon*. The “level of reference” points to a post 70 CE-perspective, even though Mark does not reveal his perspective as a “narrator” explicitly (only Mark 13:14: τότε).³⁶ However, it is important to note that Mark refers to the *consequences* of the War, rather than depicting or explaining the sequence of events, the motives of its acting protagonists, and so on. To Mark, not the Jewish-Roman War as such, but rather its consequences for the Jesus movement (in and beyond Jerusalem) is of historiographical significance.

(2) *Mark as Flavian narrative*: On the “narrative level” of the Markan Gospel, the amount of language and discourse material, which would critically interfere with the Roman Empire, is more than limited. Does it exist at all? Do we not rather find a slightly sympathetic view on the Romans? In the discourse about whether or not to pay taxes to the emperor, the Markan Jesus supports the Roman authority (Mark 12:13–17). It is a Roman centurion who is the only one who understands who the crucified Jesus “really was” (Mark 15:39), thus contributing to the proper historical interpretation of Mark’s Gospel. Pilate’s political responsibility for sentencing Jesus to death by crucifixion is reduced (Mark 15:1–15). Apart from these occasional references to the Roman Empire and its representatives, which tend to show a rather positive or at least neutral attitude towards it, Mark is hardly interested in placing his Gospel narrative in the context of world politics. Therefore, it could best be said that Mark is written in Flavian times and is – epochally considered – Flavian literature. As such, however, the Gospel of Mark develops neither pro- nor anti-Flavian tendencies.³⁷

(3) *Mark as crisis management*: Among other exegetes, Udo Schnelle enlarges the frame of contextualizing Mark and the subsequent Gospels in contemporary history by pointing out that the earliest Christian communities had to deal with a number of different crises – both internal and external

36. See Becker, *Der früheste Evangelist*, 416.

37. For a more extensive account, see Becker, “Zeitgeschichtsschreibung im entstehenden Christentum”.

– in the last third of the first century CE.³⁸ Even though the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the collapse of the early Christian community in Jerusalem (for example Acts 8:1b) and the rise of the dynasty of the Flavian emperors might be incidents of crises, these phenomena cannot fully explain the socio-political background of Mark when composing his Gospel narrative. Besides, Schnelle emphasizes that the (brutal) death of founding figures in the earliest Christian communities³⁹ has to be seen as another eminent factor behind the emergence of the Gospel narrative (see Acts 7:1–8:1a). Another factor that causes uncertainty and instability is the problem of the absence of the *parousia*, which is evident in the theological discourse on the *parousia* delay (see, for example, 1 Thess. 4; Mark 13:21ff.).⁴⁰ It is in context of *internal* needs of self-orientation regarding Christian ethics and the interpretation of time then, as much as in light of *external* political and socio-cultural factors, that the literary genre of Gospel writing emerged:⁴¹ “Das frühe Christentum stand vor der Aufgabe, gleichermaßen die Kontinuität zu den Anfängen und eine Bearbeitung dieser aktuellen Probleme zu leisten.” Schnelle goes so far as to claim that the Gospel writing in general appears as an instrument of “innovative Krisenbewältigung” (innovative crisis management).⁴² I myself have put this idea in similar terms.⁴³

Even if we agree with Schnelle that there are external factors and internal needs that – seen as “historical triggers” – brought about the writing of the oldest Gospel narrative shortly after 70 CE, two further differentiations become necessary. First, trauma studies teach us that traumatic experiences need to have reached a level of collectivity before they can set free cultural products, such as literary texts, which would function as coping strategies.

38. In the field of New Testament studies, see also Markus Öhler, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, Göttingen 2018, 299ff., who emphasizes in particular the “innere Krisen”. Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Geschichte des Urchristentums: Ein Lehrbuch*, Göttingen 2013, 302ff., 449ff., rather defines the collisions of Christ-believing communities and their pagan surroundings as “Konflikte”. In the field of Classics, the diagnostics of “crisis” is rather avoided when describing the rise and early development of the Christ-believing movement(s). Manfred Clauss, *Ein neuer Gott für die alte Welt: Die Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, Berlin 2015; Hartmut Leppin, *Die frühen Christen: Von den Anfängen bis Konstantin*, 2nd ed., Munich 2019.

39. See especially James the Zebedee, Peter, Paul, Stephen, and James, the brother of Jesus. Mark 10:35ff.; 1 Clem. 5; Acts 6–8; John 21:15ff.; Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.197–203; Hegesippus, 2.23.4–18, 21–24; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.23.1–19.

40. See Udo Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 3rd ed., Göttingen 2016, 352ff.

41. On Mark and genre, see latest various contributions in Jacob P.B. Mortensen (ed.), *Genres of Mark: Reading Mark's Gospel from Micro and Macro Perspectives*, Göttingen 2023.

42. Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 361 (both quotations). Schnelle's view on the emergence of the Gospel genre is representative of Gospel studies in general, and Markan studies in particular. If already the Gospel of Mark, which is still seen as the oldest Gospel narrative, written *post quem* 70 CE, should reflect more contemporary history, this would apply even more so to subsequent Gospel writings (Matthew, Luke, and John).

43. Becker, *Der früheste Evangelist*, 216–217.

Can we assume that the Temple's fall already was such a collective trauma shortly after 70 CE, so that the emergence of the Gospel literature could have functioned as a coping strategy? How much did the destruction of the Temple really affect Jesus-followers and Jewish Christians in the end of the first and in the beginning of the second centuries CE?⁴⁴ Second, the field of "Historik" as a subject of history and historical theory has taught us to be careful whenever assuming that historiographical writing is caused by incidents of crisis. Ancient historiography has been produced for a number of reasons – it cannot be explained (at least not solely) as a phenomenon of "Krisenbewältigung".⁴⁵

The above-mentioned external and internal factors clearly help us to illuminate the historical background of Mark when composing his Gospel narrative around 70 CE and reflecting upon *Zeitgeschichte*. The internal and external factors mentioned might even have functioned as "historical triggers". However, the way in which Mark reflects contemporary history is more complex than that. Let me add another dimension to Mark's consideration of history by asking: What kind of *contemporary history* does Mark reflect and create in his Gospel?

(4) *Mark's approach to contemporary history*: Mark's approach to (contemporary) history takes its point of departure from his concept of a "fulfilled time" (Mark 1:15) – a concept of time that was already defined by Paul (see Gal. 4:4). According to Mark, Jesus' mission puts an end to an infinite expectation of the arrival of God's kingdom. However, there is still a time span *before* the Son of Man will return and bring an end to cosmos and time (Mark 13:24–27). Being located in this timeframe himself, Mark perceives history in a twofold way:⁴⁶ on the one hand, time and history – and this applies up to the final end of this world (Mark 13:31) – still allow for several activities *within* time. Such activities consist in narrating and interpreting the past (via the Gospel narrative), providing ethical guidance to the community/communities, and continuing the kerygmatic mission of the Gospel proclamation throughout the whole cosmos (Mark 14:9; 13:10) in the tension between revealing and concealing. On the other hand, the cosmic

44. See Beate Ego, Armin Lange & Peter Pilhofer (eds.), *Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kultes im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*, Tübingen 1999.

45. See various contributions in Eve-Marie Becker (ed.), *Die antike Historiographie und die Anfänge der christlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, Berlin 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110919530>.

46. See Oda Wischmeyer, "Konzepte von Zeit bei Paulus und im Markusevangelium", in Oda Wischmeyer, David C. Sim & Ian J. Elmer (eds.), *Paul and Mark: Comparative Essays Part I. Two Authors at the Beginnings of Christianity*, Berlin 2014, 375ff., <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272826.361>.

end of the world can already now be prepared and insofar anticipated by eschatological and/or apocalyptic thought and admonition (Mark 13:3–37; 9:1).

Mark's Fourfold View on Zeitgeschichte

As just seen, Mark has a fourfold view of the so-called “intra-temporal” activities that likewise guide his interpretation of time and history. Those four types of intra-temporal activities contribute to the shape of an “early Christian identity”.⁴⁷ In a final step, I shall briefly look at these four activities as lenses through which Mark perceives and interprets contemporary history.

(a) Mark puts the storyline about the past events and the beginnings of the history of the Gospel proclamation (Mark 1:1–3) into a narrative sequence that is organized by temporal and causal structures. The narrative is shaped as a story and interpreted plot-wise. In this account, contemporary history and world politics only matter when the protagonists of the story – primarily John the Baptist, Jesus, and the group of disciples – run into conflict with opponents, controversy partners, or enemies (see especially Herod, Pontius Pilate, scribes, Pharisees, and so on). Otherwise, the Markan story is focused on the inherent parameters of the Gospel proclamation as set and defined programmatically by Jesus himself (Mark 1:14–15).

(b) The inner-temporal period that Mark creates – that is, the period of time *after* Jesus’ death and *before* his return – requires ethical guidance and cultic or ritual regulations, such as dietary laws (especially Mark 7:1–23) or reflections on marriage law (especially Mark 10:2–12; 12:18–27). Mark 10–12 are filled with teaching sections in which Jesus, who is mostly shown in controversy with Jewish contemporaries, approves the Torah (for example Mark 12:28–34) in light of the *ethos* that defines the living conditions in God’s kingdom (for example Mark 10:17–27). Mark 12:41–44 – the passage on the generous offering of the widow in the temple⁴⁸ – gives insight into socio-economic discourses among Christ-believers. The insecure social position of widows – for example, in matters of marriage (1 Cor. 7) or financial support (Acts 6:1) – gives the historiographical writer occasion to show how Jesus authorizes their autonomous way of life. In other words, Mark uses a wide range of Jesus traditions in various didactic scenes to comment on contemporary issues of communal living of Christ-followers. In the Markan

47. See Eve-Marie Becker, “Shaping Identity by Writing History: Earliest Christianity in its Making”, *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2 (2016), 152–169, <https://doi.org/10.1628/219944616X14655421286013>.

48. See Eve-Marie Becker, “Was die ‘arme Witwe’ lehrt: Sozial- und motivgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Mk 12,41–44par.”, *New Testament Studies* 65 (2019), 148–165, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688518000346>.

Gospel, Jesus traditions are remembered in such a way that contemporary history (*Zeitgeschichte*) is reflected and contemporary historiography (*Zeitgeschichtsschreibung*) is created in the mirror of memorizing Jesus.

(c) Mark further works out conceptual ways of engaging in the spreading of the Gospel proclamation. Jesus himself had already selected his group of disciples (Mark 1:16ff.) and had sent them afterwards into missionary work (Mark 6:7–13) in order to preach “repentance” (μετάνοια: Mark 6:12). However, there remained a constant paradox regarding the disclosure of Jesus’ Messianic identity. Jesus commanded his followers not to reveal his identity but to keep the Messianic secret – a command that was frequently ignored or refused (for example Mark 1:44–45). The angel-like figure at the empty tomb, in contrast, instructed the women to announce the upcoming revelation of the risen Jesus in Galilee among his disciples – an instruction which, in turn, was initially not followed (Mark 16:7–8). By presenting this paradox of Gospel proclamation during Jesus’ earthly ministry, where Jesus’ identity was a constant matter of revealing *and* hiding, announcing *and* concealing – a paradox that extends even to the narrowest circle of Jesus’ disciples (see Mark 8:29; 14:66–72) – Mark reflects on the principles and obstacles of proclaiming the Gospel message. Probably, in the early history of Christian missionary propaganda, there were corresponding obstacles in announcing and concealing the Gospel message. The so-called Messianic secret is – seen in this way – not merely due to the abstract redactional activity of the evangelist Mark, but rather an expression of his reflection of contemporary history. In a sense, Mark’s reflection on contemporary history and on Jesus’ (Messianic) identity serves the pragmatic purpose of community building and leadership.⁴⁹

(d) It is important to see how Mark shows various options of accelerating time and anticipating the cosmic “end” of time. The hastiness in his narrative depiction corresponds to Mark’s overall idea of an “acceleration” of time in order to anticipate the *parousia* – an idea that characterizes various early Christian writings of the second and third generation in and beyond apocalyptic genres,⁵⁰ and particularly a literary writing, like Mark, that is close to an “eschatological historical monograph”.⁵¹ Not only the “delay of the *parousia*” has caused the need of accelerating time in early Christianity.

49. See Gerd Theißen, “Evangelischreibung und Gemeindeleitung: Pragmatische Motive bei der Abfassung des Markusevangeliums”, in Bernd Kollmann, Wolfgang Reinbold & Annette Steudel (eds.), *Antikes Judentum und Frühes Christentum: Festschrift für Hartmut Stegemann zum 65. Geburtstag*, Berlin 1998, 389–414, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110806069.389>.

50. See Becker, *The Birth of Christian History*, especially 147.

51. Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 42ff.

Mark – and contemporary Jewish as well as Greco-Roman authors – also shared a widespread attitude of fear and anxiety in the early Roman Imperial period.⁵² This attitude of fear and anxiety was primarily not caused by concrete experiences of crisis, but rather mirrors a certain “Zeitgefühl” during Neronian and Domitianic time (in contrast to the “Golden Age” idea), a so-called *metus temporum* (see Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.49.3; 2.72.1; Pliny, *Epistulae* 5.1.7; 7.19.6; 9.13.3).⁵³ Peter’s denial of Jesus (Mark 14:66ff.) and the escape of the naked young man (Mark 14:51–52) can be seen as narrative configurations of such an attitude of partly diffuse fear, fright, or anxiety which we even find expressed in the final Markan scene about the women at the empty tomb (Mark 16:8). Reading the Markan Gospel against the background of the *metus temporum* would even allow for moving *beyond* the identification of concrete historical crises without leaving aside the impact of contemporary history on Mark’s composition.

Conclusion

Mark reflects the history of his time and creates contemporary history by remembering Jesus and interpreting the traditions of Jesus. In other words, Mark creates a literary memory. In Mark 13 and beyond, the themes of violence and war play a special role (see also Mark 10:41–45). Here, references to the immediate contemporary history of the Jewish-Roman War resound. However, the literary processing of traumatic experience, crisis, or violence takes time. It is no coincidence that the interpretation of Jesus’ suffering and death is at the center of the Gospel of Mark. Jesus’ violent death is, so to speak, the collectively developed “cultural foil” in earliest Christianity, against which the evangelist as literary author interprets contemporary history.

The way in which the earliest Gospel writer approaches contemporary history is multi-dimensional and manifold. Even if phenomena of socio-political crisis and trauma might rightly stay on our list of possible “historical triggers” which illuminate the composition process of the Markan Gospel and Mark’s view on contemporary history, the interpretive framework should be broadened in the classification of Mark’s Gospel. We should assume various *inner* needs of the Christ-believing communities (beyond, for example, the enumeration of Schnelle) caused by mission history as well as the effects of a widespread, perhaps even diffuse “sense of time” (*Zeitgefühl*) of a *metus temporum* that compelled *and* inspired Mark in writing his Gospel narrative. ▲

52. See Alfred Knepe, *Metus temporum: Zur Bedeutung von Angst in Politik und Gesellschaft der römischen Kaiserzeit des 1. und 2. Jhdts. n. Chr.*, Stuttgart 1994, especially 77ff.

53. Knepe, *Metus temporum*, 49.

SUMMARY

Mark 13 marks the transition from Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem to the passion events (Mark 14–15). Jesus' eschatological discourse is at the juncture of the Gospel narrative and is thus fundamental to the Markan interpretation of time and history. By discussing the reading paradigms of traumatology and empire criticism, this article seeks to make sense of Mark's "narrative agenda" from Mark 3:6 to chapter 15 in historical and historiographical terms. I shall ask: in which way does Mark – the creator of early Christian literary memory in a narrative sense – memorize, reflect, and construe *contemporary* history? And what significance do the topics of violence and war – crucial for Mark 13 – have in this context? In which form and for what purpose does Mark create *Zeit-geschichtsschreibung*? It will be argued that the way in which the earliest Gospel writer approaches contemporary history is multi-dimensional and manifold. Even if phenomena of sociopolitical crisis and trauma might stay on our list of possible "historical triggers" which illuminate the composition process of the Markan Gospel and Mark's view on contemporary history, the interpretive framework should be broadened.

Memory and Hermeneutics – Current Conversations

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I have been reading and investigating the Bible with social memory theory for almost fifteen years. Initially introduced to the hermeneutical approach by Aleida and Jan Assmann at a workshop for graduate students in Berlin in 2003, memory and memory theory have continued to intrigue me up to the point that I worked with social memory theory in my second book, *Reading Mark's Gospel as a Text from Collective Memory*.¹ My first paper about the theory and how it contributes to reading the Bible at the 2008 SBL Annual Meeting in Boston was the beginning of a fascinating journey. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss memory theory with pioneers and experts in the field, learn from their experiences and benefit from their knowledge. Thus, I was happy to accept the invitation to honour Samuel Byrskog and to contribute with my impression about the current state of the field and its hermeneutical questions.

Context Matters

One of the most important lessons *Kulturwissenschaft* has taught biblical exegesis is that *context matters* and that it does not only matter for the

1. Sandra Huebenthal, *Reading Mark's Gospel as a Text from Collective Memory*, Grand Rapids, MI 2020. It is the English translation of my *Habilitationschrift*: Sandra Huebenthal, *Das Markusevangelium als kollektives Gedächtnis*, 2nd ed., Göttingen 2018, <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666540325>.

production but also for the reception of text. Fernando F. Segovia coined the axiom that “for cultural studies, the reader does not and cannot ever remain faceless”,² in other words, detached from his or her particular context. Being a scholar who works *kulturwissenschaftlich* rather than *historisch*, I begin with my own context, which provides a unique perspective on the debate. My *lived experience* is that of a female German-speaking Roman Catholic New Testament scholar whose mother’s family were Roman Catholic *Sudetendeutsche* – both lay people and priests. After the Second World War, they were expelled from their homelands and had to start over as expellees in refugee camps in West Germany.³ Questions about existential crises, memory, and identity are thus part of my DNA as a scholar, and I am naturally attracted to the generation and crisis models of Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) and Aleida and Jan Assmann. The other part of my scholarly heritage is Roman Catholicism with its strong focus on tradition as the second source of revelation besides Scripture.⁴ It makes me particularly open to orality, ritual communication, and media changes.

I make a point about my perspective, because the discourse in the field of social memory theory in biblical studies is not – as some would call it – dominated by white males but rather by *Protestant* white males, most of them English-speaking. The reformed principle of *sola scriptura* with its focus on written and stable traditions and its reservation regarding oral tradition are the elephant in the room – and they largely go unnoticed. Apart from a few exceptions, social memory theory in biblical studies is centred around historical questions and rarely married with *Kulturwissenschaft* or media theory. The luggage of the reformed tradition is a burden for the discussion as *sola scriptura* and *orality/tradition* can easily be seen as antipodes or even exclusive.⁵ Scholars from the reformed tradition do not only have different *lived experiences* but also a different tradition and thus a different *cultural memory*, which impacts their hermeneutical framework – or as

2. Fernando F. Segovia, “Cultural Studies and Contemporary Bible Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse”, in Fernando F. Segovia & Mary A. Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place: 2. Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, Minneapolis, MN 1995, 12. See also Christian Strecker, “Kulturwissenschaften und Neues Testament”, *Verkündigung und Forschung* 55 (2010), 4–19, <https://doi.org/10.14315/vf-2010-55-1-4>.

3. The impact of such a biography and family heritage was recently illustrated in Frank M. Yamada. “What Does Manzanar Have to Do with Eden? A Japanese American Interpretation of Genesis 2–3”, in Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew & Fernando F. Segovia (eds.), *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, Atlanta, GA 2009, 97–117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1fx4hdx.10>.

4. See the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* 9.

5. As pointed out by Werner Kelber, “The ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’ and the Historical Study of the New Testament”, *Oral History Journal of South Africa* 5:2 (2017), 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.25159/2309-5792/3328>.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) would say, their *Vorverständnis*. Roman Catholics like myself are much more comfortable with orality due to our heritage of Scripture and Tradition as two sources of revelation.⁶ I am stressing the point of my Roman Catholic heritage because I am convinced that it is not only a key to what makes for a unique understanding of social memory theory in biblical studies but also offers a potential.⁷ There is a treasure in the field only waiting to be recovered.

The Landscape of Memory Approaches and Typical Areas of Discussion

Social memory theory was first introduced to New Testament exegesis in the field of Jesus studies and some of the most important and groundbreaking contributions originate from there. The majority of the studies in this field still focus on questions of *Erinnerung* and *Erinnerungsweitergabe/tradition, den erinnerten Jesus* (Jesus remembered), or other early Christian *Erinnerungsfiguren*. The focus of *Erinnerung*, in other words, is on process.⁸

Using the findings of social memory theory (*kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnistheorie*) as a hermeneutical lens for a better understanding of biblical texts as *Gedächtnistexte* (that is, as externalizations of collective memories) – and thus, products – is different from what the memory approach in historical Jesus studies tries to achieve. Unlike the different Jesus memory approaches,⁹ this way of using memory theory in biblical studies neither considers the actual processes of remembering nor focuses on the origin of texts or the historical reliability of the texts' testimony of Jesus. There is no

6. A point nicely driven home in Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Paris 1680, 1.4: “Les Catholiques qui sont persuadés que leur Religion ne depend pas seulement du Texte de l'Écriture, mais aussi de la Traditon de l'Église, ne sont point scandalisés de voir que le Malheur des temps & la negligence des Copistes ayent rapporté des changements aux Lives Sacrés, aussi-bien qu'aux Livres prophanes. Il n'y a que des Protestants préoccupés ou ignorans qui puissant s'en scandaliser.”

7. Recently pointed out in Gilberto A. Ruiz, “Examining the Role of the Reader: A Necessary Task for Catholic Biblical Interpretation”, *Horizons* 44 (2017), 28–55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/HOR.2017.1>.

8. For an introduction to the differences between “Gedächtnis” and “Erinnerung”, see Mathias Berek, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: Eine Theorie der Erinnerungskulturen*, Wiesbaden 2009, 30–34.

9. As lined out in Huebenthal, *Reading Mark's Gospel*, 523–546, we can distinguish three different approaches to memory research in current studies of the early Christian literature. They have different hermeneutical foundations, methodologies, and research questions, but also points of contact and at times even overlap with regard to questions and methodology. I have called them (1) Memory, tradition, and formation of the Gospels (Jesus remembered I), (2) Memory approach (Jesus remembered II), and (3) New Testament texts as externalizations of collective memories. I have dealt with the three different approaches in greater detail in the epilogue of my book and in Sandra Huebenthal, “Die Büchse der Memoria: Evangelium, Erinnerung und der Historische Jesus”, in Gerd Häfner, Konrad Huber & Stefan Schreiber (eds.), *Die historische Rückfrage in der neutestamentlichen Exegese*, Freiburg 2021, 28–77.

digging in the texts to find the object(s) of remembrance. The texts themselves are media of memory, “frozen moments”, or snapshots in the family album of early Christian identity constructions and can be read accordingly.¹⁰ I particularly like the image of the family album as it not only shows the ephemeral character but also the necessity to look at each picture as a whole and relate it to its context. Even though some details might be particularly intriguing, it is important to keep in mind that they are part of the overall composition and gain their relevance and meaning within this composition and context.

My perception is that the memory discourse in New Testament and cognate studies currently deals with four basic sets of questions. These are:

1. Hermeneutical questions about the memory approach and its relationship to history.
2. Methodological questions how memory theory can be applied to readings of biblical texts.
3. Special questions about the interpretation of particular biblical texts.
4. Meta-reflexive questions about the impact of cultural studies on our field.

Some questions surface more often than others. Thus, some areas are in the centre of attention while others are more on the margins. This has to do with the general direction of the discourse in our discipline. At a rough estimate I would say that 50 percent of the discussion is about memory and history, 25 percent about memory and method, 20 percent about the application to biblical texts, and 5 percent touches on meta-reflexive questions about cultural studies and their impact on theology and biblical studies.

It seems that at least half of the discourse is on the question of memory and history. This is also where the bulk of the publications come from, no matter if they – as Pavel Langhammer points out¹¹ – relate to the *microscopic* or *macroscopic* dimension. In other words: No matter if contributions discuss individual pericopes, the entire canon, Jesus, or a specific book, at least half of them are about memory and history or memory and hermeneutics.¹²

10. See Sandra Huebenthal, “‘Frozen Moments’: Early Christianity through the Lens of Social Memory Theory”, in Simon Buttica & Enrico Norelli (eds.), *Memory and Memories in Early Christianity*, Tübingen 2018, 17–43.

11. Pavel Langhammer explained this in his paper “Social Memory Theory and New Testament: Dimensions of Intersections” at the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS) Meeting in Warsaw 2019. I am indebted to the author for sharing the unpublished work with me.

12. Samuel Byrskog recently touched on the question of memory, history, and hermeneutics

The discussion what social memory theory can contribute to biblical studies also belongs into that category. Most of the Jesus memory research focuses on this area, too, as do the questions about the origin and genre of the Gospels, as well as orality and historical referentiality. The entire debate about (oral) tradition and its relation to Scripture as well as the questions of transmission processes belong here.¹³ Most of the research projects, conferences, and seminars at international societies work in that area.

Compared to that, memory and method or the question of how exactly to apply the approach to New Testament and early Christian texts seem much less important. This affects questions about the relationship between social memory theory and *Formgeschichte* or *Redaktionskritik*,¹⁴ or what social memory theory adds to narrative criticism, to name just two. The EABS Research Unit “Memory, Method, and Text” is dedicated to explore the methodological potential of the approach.¹⁵ Even if roughly 25 percent of the discussion is somehow located in this area, there is a lot of work left. We have still not seen a proper set of methods as to how to read the *Gedächtnisbilder* or frozen moments of our early Christian family album. The textbook *Gedächtnistheorie und Neues Testament* is the first contribution to this field and I hope to see more projects going in that direction.¹⁶

in Samuel Byrskog, “Memory and Narrative – and Time: Towards a Hermeneutics of Memory”, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 16 (2018), 108–135, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01602003>.

13. Samuel Byrskog has greatly contributed to this discussion and it is impossible to engage with all his work here. Regarding his position on the relationship between history and memory, always with a nod to hermeneutics, see most recently Samuel Byrskog, “What is Historical about the Mission of the Historical Jesus? Rudolf Bultmann and the Hermeneutics of Memory”, in Samuel Byrskog & Tobias Hägerland (eds.), *The Mission of Jesus: Second Nordic Symposium on the Historical Jesus*, Tübingen 2015, 41–58; Samuel Byrskog, “Philosophical Aspects on Memory: Aristotle, Augustine and Bultmann”, in Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola & Jutta Maria Jokiranta (eds.), *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, Göttingen 2016, 23–47.

14. See Ernest van Eck, “Memory and Historical Jesus Studies: *Formgeschichte* in a New Dress?”, *HTS Theologische Studien / Theological Studies* 71:1 (2015), 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2837>.

15. The Research Unit was initiated in 2018 by Jiří Lukeš, Pavel Langhammer, and myself and aims both to explore how social memory theory can inform methodology and develop tools for reading and understanding early Christian traditions and texts based on the interdisciplinary theoretical work of social scientists like Maurice Halbwachs and experts on particular cultures like Jan and Aleida Assmann and others. The goal is to move beyond traditional historical questions that aim to uncover earlier sources and reconstruct the past to an understanding of these traditions and texts as diverse processes of receptions of the past among groups of Jesus followers within their different cultural contexts. Since 2022, it is chaired by Pavel Langhammer, Kyle Parsons, and Christian Handschuh.

16. Sandra Huebenthal, *Gedächtnistheorie und Neues Testament: Eine methodisch-hermeneutische Einführung*, Tübingen 2022, <https://doi.org/10.36198/9783838559049>.

For the remaining quarter of the discussion I see two different categories. Another 20 percent of the questions are about the application of social memory theory to specific texts without contributing to the general hermeneutical discussion. Plain application so to say. These are the occasions when we rather talk theology than memory and reflect upon specific questions and issues in particular New Testament books and how memory theory could be a contribution.

Only 5 percent of the discussion is on the meta-level and discusses questions such as: What do the cultural turn and the implementation of *kulturwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik* mean for theology, humanities, and biblical studies? How does our reading, understanding, and – to use an expression from Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) – self-understanding in front of the text change? Questions that are rarely discussed.¹⁷ The general tendency to incorporate social memory theory into a historical-critical or theological mindset and set of methods without paying tribute to its origin in cultural studies explains why the explosive force of the approach is often watered down and the change of perspective it demands is seldom conducted. Many so-called “memory approaches” are in fact historical-critical or theological interpretations in a new dress.

Historical Referentiality, *Kulturwissenschaft*, and Theological Questions

The largest point of discussion are questions about historical referentiality, tradition, transmission processes, and their reliability. The question what history is and what historical facts are is highly controversial even in the different approaches to Jesus research. My starting point is, however, neither theology nor history, but *Kulturwissenschaft*. *Kulturwissenschaft* is not primarily concerned with historical and theological questions. The focus is on contextualization and identity constructions at particular points in time. As stated in *Reading Mark's Gospel as a Text from Collective Memory*, I deem it

17. I admit that these 5 percent intrigue me. I am generally interested in questions on the meta-levels and how they inform context. The question what *Kulturwissenschaft* has to add to our field is the most interesting aspect of my work and the driving force behind my approach and asks for further reflection. This is particularly interesting because *kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnistheorie* and social memory theory are different concepts – and are one reason for different discourses in German- and English-speaking scholarship. While cultural studies are more about the cancellation of high culture and an active reorganization of canon, *Kulturwissenschaft* sees culture as an object of research and is more about the contextualization of what has become canon. This difference explains why cultural studies have become part of a social movement and are often pushed forward by activists, while *Kulturwissenschaft* is limited to academic institutions and carried out in critical reflection rather than in action and is interested in investigating the contexts of texts rather than deconstructing them. For a general introduction, see Aleida Assmann, *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft: Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen*, 4th ed., Berlin 2017, 16–26.

much more important to identify to what kind of identity constructions the text invites and which identity or identities that can come into existence on the basis of memories about Jesus.¹⁸ I am aware that this necessarily touches on history as I am dealing with the past. *Kulturwissenschaft*, however, does not imply historical amnesia.

It might offend the historian in us when I claim that from a *kulturwissenschaftliche* perspective history is not what has happened, but what is being remembered,¹⁹ and an identity-concrete text does not explain the events themselves but their significance for a particular group. Historical analysis would say that it is possible to get historical information out of a source and to add this information to the acquired knowledge, while *kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse* remains sceptical. Yet there are points of contact. The crucial part is the relationship between historical reality and experience. Gerd Häfner has convincingly argued that it is not possible to communicate experience without interpretation.²⁰ His conclusion that fact and interpretation cannot be separated is in line with the findings of interdisciplinary memory research. Over time, memories change, as does the evaluation and interpretation of experiences in different contexts and cultural frames. The process is inherently social, as research on family memories and intergenerational recollection has proven. Stories are shaped according to social patterns. They say a lot about the person telling the stories and maybe even more about the person than what he or she actually remembers.

Most Jesus scholars agree that the past is always mediated and never pure or directly accessible. The question is rather how to decide in which way it is mediated. In other words: What criteria can we safely apply to get behind the principles of mediation or distortion in order to explain the shape of particular texts? I share Häfner's scepticism of the memory approach as well as the memory approach's scepticism of the criteria approach.²¹ This is one of the points where *Kulturwissenschaft* and historical enquiry can meet. *Kulturwissenschaft* would add questions like:

- Is the commemorative impulse driven by the historical reality or the experience of the group?

18. Huebenthal, *Reading Mark's Gospel*, 514.

19. See Allen Feldman, *Formation of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, Chicago 1991, 14.

20. Gerd Häfner, "Konstruktion und Referenz: Impulse aus der neueren geschichtstheoretischen Diskussion", in Knut Backhaus & Gerd Häfner (eds.), *Historiographie und fiktionales Erzählen: Zur Konstruktivität in Geschichtstheorie und Exegese*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2007, 71–72.

21. For a nuanced discussion, see Chris Keith & Anthony Le Donne (eds.), *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, London 2012.

- What is the point of literary criticism, redaction criticism, and source tracking – and what is the ultimate goal of establishing the earliest layer of the text if not historical questions?
- If we all agree that history is always mediated and never pure, how can we believe that one can reconstruct Jesus’ original words, the *ipsissima verba*?
- If we realize that the remembered Jesus is very much the same as the narrated Jesus of each Gospel, where does this leave us?

I can accept the idea of the Gospels as four different – even historical – narrations read in their own contexts. What I see as problematic is the move from the texts to historical conclusions apart from general observations as well as naive mirror-reading and the augmentation of the texts into reality. There is a difference between a narrative that mediates collective memory and a historical narrative that claims to stand instead of the past. Collective memory does not represent the past, only a perspective on this past. In addition, a memory narrative is identity-concrete or emic while a historical narrative often has an etic ring to it. In this area, my approach of reading New Testament and early Christian texts as media of memory and the Jesus remembered approaches will continue to have difficulties.²²

Social Memory Theory as a Method?

When we assume that 75 percent of the discourse is about historical and methodological questions, this also explains why most of the studies are on the microscopic and macroscopic levels. We are either dealing with overall hermeneutical questions, usually with a historical twist, or concrete case studies, often on the level of pericopes. The choice seems to stand between flyover or fragmentation.

Building on Pavel Langhammer’s heuristics, I conclude that the microscopic and macroscopic levels are suitable to study hermeneutical questions, questions of tradition, orality, historical inquiry, which are tested either on the whole New Testament or on a small excerpt. Single pericopes and synoptic comparisons serve to illustrate the general theory. Work on both the microscopic and macroscopic levels is found in historical-critical and diachronic approaches, in pastoral and theological readings, and serves to explain the approach itself. Traditionally, historical-critical exegesis works at the microscopic or macroscopic level rather than the mesoscopic level, because it is primarily interested in textual growth rather than the final text.

22. See Huebenthal, *Reading Mark’s Gospel*, 534–540; Huebenthal, “Die Büchse der Memoria”, 54–62.

The mesoscopic level, on the other hand, is perfectly suited for concrete methodological work. This is, unfortunately, hardly ever done. As working on the mesoscopic level especially invites synchronic approaches (sometimes deprecatingly labelled “end-text exegesis”), historical-critical exegesis and the Jesus remembered approaches are not interested. Their questions are predominantly diachronic.

This brings us to the question of method. Social memory theory has been welcomed to New Testament exegesis on a broad level and its basic ideas are generally well received. The major theories – whether working with Halbwachs and Assmann or Halbwachs and Barry Schwartz – are widely received and considered fundamentally plausible. The crucial question remains: What does this mean for the concrete text?

The agenda I pursue for text analysis consists of a mix of narratological and historical methods: Narrative and rhetorical analyses, motif and tradition analyses, intertextual analyses, social-historical analysis, and historical contextualization.²³ Most of the steps are self-explanatory. Exhaustive narrative analysis shows that especially when we read narrative texts we are dealing with founding stories with a leading perspective with which the reader is invited to engage. The analysis of the perspectives is given much space in order to grasp the leading perspective and understand the experiences, discussions, and conflicts associated with it. Comparisons of perspectives and levels of the narrative point in the same direction: they address the unique perspective and profile of this particular text.

The analyses of the different intertextual references, cultural frames, and motifs, that are part of the methodological toolkit, might be the easiest to understand and at the same time the greatest step away from traditional methods in biblical studies. Social memory theory expects a perspective narration that is oriented towards forms and patterns available in its context, with these forms and patterns being evident in the text. In other words, we are searching for what Halbwachs called the social frames that shape perception and memory. Other than just cross-referencing or proof-texting, I expect patterns and intertextual references to engage with the overall social or cultural frame and to use them to understand the experiences described in the text. As I expect an externalization from collective memory (in this case, a text) not only to engage with existing social frames but also to create new frames for understanding and, in turn, future identity constructions, this part is particularly interesting. In traditional terminology this would be called the “theology” of the respective text. With this set of methods, it is

23. Huebenthal, *Gedächtnistheorie und Neues Testament*, 125–135.

crucial to read entire biblical books, not just individual pericopes or a set of chapters. In other words: to look at the full picture.

I must confess, when I wrote *Reading Mark's Gospel as a Text from Collective Memory*, I also fell into the trap of the usual blend of microscopic and macroscopic levels that is so common in New Testament exegesis. The mix of a broad hermeneutical perspective and a small unit as a test case provided a first idea of the potential of such a reading, looking at even the tiniest details. Unfortunately, it holds the danger of losing sight of the forest for the trees. When I started to work on my contribution on Mark's Gospel for the multivolume project *Jesus Traditions in the First Three Centuries*,²⁴ I realized that I had overlooked the Isaian frame of Mark's understanding and presentation of Jesus because I only looked at Mark 6:7–8:26. It felt like I had overlooked that the family photo was taken on a cruiser, and this explains some of the rather odd accessories and lifejackets. The lesson I learned was that there is no way around the mesoscopic level – the entire biblical book – if we aim for proper results. Context matters. Another lesson was that social memory theory does not lend itself to the analysis of texts, at any level, without adding further methods. This explains why most studies attempt to clarify historical questions or illuminate textual growth rather than to read them as media of memory.

The insights, methods, and criteria of the Jesus remembered approaches are of little help, because they cannot tell us what this means for the interpretation of the text – just as historical critical exegesis can be a failure for the preparation of sermons. We have to accept that a proper memory approach does not go with a historical-critical mindset and methodology. It cannot help us get behind the texts. Holly Hearon has clearly driven home this point.²⁵ Textual growth cannot be explained without additional sources. Social memory theory does point to memory distortion and social processes of various kinds, but these can neither help explain the growth and shaping of a particular text nor prove that a particular tradition is not prone to disruption. On the contrary, it rather demonstrates the susceptibility of interference between memory and transmission processes.

Memory research, combined with oral history research and textual criticism, has thoroughly shaken and corrected naive theories of authentic and stable (oral) traditions. It also shows how contingent the origins of

24. Sandra Huebenthal, "The Gospel of Mark", in Helen K. Bond (ed.), *Jesus Traditions in the First Three Centuries: 1. From Paul to Josephus: Literary Receptions of Jesus in the First Century CE*, London 2019, 41–72.

25. Holly Hearon, "The Story of 'The Woman Who Anointed Jesus' as Social Memory: A Methodological Proposal for the Study of Tradition as Memory", in Alan Kirk & Tom Thatcher (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, Atlanta, GA 2005, 99–118.

biblical texts and the biblical canon are. Close reading of the texts of the New Testament and the emerging Christianity, informed by cultural studies, shows above all that we are dealing with identity texts, which must be understood and read as identity texts. Just as we have learned that the creation narratives must be brought into conversation not with scientific texts but with other creation myths, because they are not models of the origin of the world but approaches to explaining the world, the early Christian texts, canonical and non-canonical, are not to be understood primarily as historical but as identity-concrete texts. They are not about what happened, but about what is remembered because it is important for one's self-understanding. It is not about history, but about identity.

From Social Memory Theory to *kulturwissenschaftliche Exegese*

In the paper I presented at the 2008 SBL Annual Meeting, I developed the above idea using Luke 24. The story of the Emmaus disciples with Jesus exemplifies how people come to a stable identity because of the location of their experiences and memories in a social framework, and how they use their own memory story to access an existing memory community.²⁶ Luke tells the story in such a way that Jesus helps Cleopas and his companion to locate their experience in existing social frames – the scriptures of Israel – in order to make sense of them. Halbwachs would call that *social memory*. At the same time, Luke-Acts provides a new social framework for the identity construction of Jesus' followers in the third (Luke) and fourth (Acts) early Christian generation. Halbwachs would call that *collective memory*.²⁷ Simply asking whether a text uses existing frames (social memory) or constructs new frames (collective memory) helps to better place a text in time. The same applies to the question how a text deals with different perspectives: are they treated equally or do we see a guiding perspective?

Kulturwissenschaftliche Exegese, as I am tempted to call my approach, does not ask what happened and does not allow going back behind the texts, but examines what is told and how it is told and balances the results with the findings of interdisciplinary memory research. Its characteristic feature is the evaluation of the results within the framework of interdisciplinary memory research and cultural memory theory, which allows for different questions than historical-critical approaches. This happens when settings where memory in its cognitive expression interfaces with cultural media of memory, the cultural repertoire of narrative and sayings genres. Looking at

26. Sandra Huebenthal, "Luke 24:13–35 and Social Memory in Luke", in Thomas R. Hatina (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels: 3. The Gospel of Luke*, London 2010, 85–95.

27. Huebenthal, *Gedächtnistheorie und Neues Testament*, 195–234.

the media of memory rather than reading the text in order to find the object of remembrance, I read early Christian texts as media of *social memory*. They can be analyzed with narrative methods, and the larger *kulturwissenschaftliches* framework helps to explain the generation and alteration of these media.

Kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse can provide new insights independent from historical-critical inquiry or *Einleitungswissenschaft*. Bringing together insights from both fields can spark new and refined discussions. The goal is not to replace historical-critical inquiry but to complement it. The power of *kulturwissenschaftliche Exegese* lies in its potential to de-canonize and re-contextualize New Testament texts and empower readers to connect the texts with their own *lived* experiences. This goes hand in hand with a de-emphasizing of *historical* and *theological* terminology and a one-sided fixation of *historical* and *theological* questions. *Kulturwissenschaftliche Exegese* can help to regain *tradition* as a living social process beyond the scribal paradigm, beyond history, and beyond dogma.

A key element is to regain the mesoscopic level and work with the individual book in its context. Equipped with the appropriate methodology that I outline in *Gedächtnistheorie und Neues Testament*, we are ready for the adventure of the full programme: the analysis of New Testament and early Christian texts as media of memory on the microscopic, mesoscopic, and macroscopic levels.

When I started working in this field fifteen years ago, the tools for such analysis were not yet available. We had to collectively explore lots of dead ends in biblical scholarship.²⁸ My impression is that the discipline is ready and we can devote ourselves to the work on concrete texts, instead of losing ourselves further in hermeneutic arguments, which are met with less understanding from the outside the longer they last. Samuel Byrskog was right in assuming that “the social memory approach may provide a ‘memory-critical’ repertoire which opens up a new framework for studying the social dynamics reflected in the Gospel narrative”.²⁹ The notion that context matters has recently been followed up by the *Next Quest*, which does not explore the historical Jesus but the context(s) of Jesus and Jesus images.³⁰ It

28. As not only Holly Hearon has shown. Cilliers Breytenbach even called it a *cul-de-sac*. Cilliers Breytenbach, “From Mark’s Son of God to Jesus of Nazareth – *un cul-de-sac?*”, in Jan van der Watt (ed.), *The Quest for the Real Jesus: Radboud Prestige Lectures by Prof. Dr. Michael Wolter*, Leiden 2013, 19–56, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004254800_003.

29. Samuel Byrskog, “A New Quest for the *Sitz im Leben*: Social Memory, the Jesus Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew”, *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006), 321, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000178>.

30. James Crossley announced this new approach to Jesus studies in his editorial “The Next Quest for the Historical Jesus”, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 19 (2021), 261–264,

will be intriguing to see what the *Next Quest* contributes to the methodical discussion and how it adds to our understanding of the memory texts in the early Christian family album. ▲

SUMMARY

This article investigates the current state of the memory debate in biblical studies from a Roman-Catholic point of view. It differentiates four areas: hermeneutical questions about the memory approach and its relationship to history, methodological questions of how memory theory can be applied to reading biblical texts, special questions about the interpretation of particular biblical texts, and meta-reflexive questions about the impact of cultural studies. It argues for a step towards a *kulturwissenschaftliche Exegese*, in order to embrace social memory theory as a hermeneutics and methodology for reading biblical text on the microscopic (pericope), mesoscopic (book), and macroscopic (canon) level.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-19030003>. Building on the *Demise of Authenticity* and the importance of context(s), the *Next Quest* seeks for a way beyond the search for the reality behind the texts and approaches the historical Jesus through the analysis and interpretation of his context as well as cultural and historical processes that form and pass on Jesus images. In July 2022, the Centre for the Critical Study of the Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM), together with the Enoch Seminar and Eerdmans, sponsored a conference on the Next Quest for the Historical Jesus.

Hayden White and the Problem of Historical Referentiality in Markan Narrative

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The work of Samuel Byrskog on the intersection of tradition formation with early Christian memory practices has been very influential in my own dealings with these questions. Particularly important was his attention to the crux issue of narrative formation and historical referentiality in the Gospels in his *Story as History – History as Story*, where he applied the powerful explanatory model of oral history to the formation of the tradition and to the writing projects of the evangelists. The tradition was formed of oral histories – that is, *stories, narratives* – grounded in eyewitness recollection, among other things attested by their residual local colour and incidental details. These materials in turn were “*narrativized* into a coherent story” by the evangelists, a cultural operation that was at the same time a programmatic hermeneutical enterprise.¹

When I read this book a number of years ago, I remember thinking that the model needed to be taken further to confront more directly the deeply engrained view among scholars, which goes back to David Friedrich Strauss’s (1808–1874) trenchant analysis, that narrative formation in the Synoptics is such as to render their materials opaque to historical enquiry. In a 2018 essay Byrskog noted that “what the world or the experience might be like ‘before’ narratives construct and order it is one of the most

1. Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Tübingen 2000, 265.

controversial issues in the scholarly debate about narrative”.² This problem has taken its own particular shape within twentieth-century Gospel scholarship. Form criticism, which all but severed the formation of the tradition from memory, was followed by redaction criticism. Redaction criticism’s natal origins in form criticism were evident in its *Sammlung/Redaktion* binary: raw “tradition” on the one hand, the theologian-evangelist’s “redaction” on the other. This entailed distinguishing Mark’s redaction sharply from his tradition, and the three-way splitting of the whole into the setting of Mark’s community (redaction), the setting of the post-Easter primitive community (tradition), and the setting of the historical Jesus.³ Its corollary was to make the evangelist Mark the principal agent for the theological and narrative formation of the tradition. Likewise entailed in the model was that Mark’s form-giving redaction of the tradition was a localized response to the social and historical crisis – the *Sitz im Leben* – of his community. That is to say, the referentiality of the Markan redaction was *contemporary*, not *historical*. In this schema the attention to the Markan “redaction” eclipses the Markan “tradition”. The latter is of interest only to the extent that it constitutes the *prima materia* that receives the imprint of Markan theology.

Narrative criticism of the Gospel of Mark is both successor to redaction criticism and its offspring. It shifts from Mark as theologian to Mark as a narrative artificer. It is an effort to overcome redaction criticism’s untenable bifurcation between Mark’s redaction and his tradition. But like its forebear redaction criticism, narrative criticism is one-dimensionally contemporizing. And where the Mark of redaction criticism is an autonomous theological genius, the Mark of narrative criticism is an autonomous literary genius. Attention to historical referentiality and to the history of the tradition is marginalized by the method. The Markan tradition is of interest only to the extent that it is subsumed to the author’s narrative project, which for its part is aimed at an “ideal audience” that still roughly corresponds, however, to the “Markan community” familiar from redaction criticism. The effect is to turn Mark’s project into a kind of narrative encoding of the contemporary realities of the Markan community, as for instance in this striking passage from David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie’s pioneering work on narrative criticism:

2. Samuel Byrskog, “Memory and Narrative – and Time: Towards a Hermeneutics of Memory”, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 16 (2018), 110, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01602003>.

3. Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies in the Redaction History of the Gospel*, Nashville, TN 1969, 28–29, 89–94.

Imagine the hearers of Mark living in a village in northern Galilee that had already been devastated by Roman armies [...] Now imagine how much the announcement of “good news”, the declaration of an “anointed one” who was “son of God”, the preparation of the “way” of the “Lord”, the announcement of the arrival of the “empire” of *God* [...] Imagine how all of this may have echoed and yet contrasted with the entrance of the Roman armies into Palestine from the north [...] By contrast, the Markan Gospel portrays Jesus waging a campaign in Galilee also, but a campaign against Satan and other manifestations of evil [...] as a means to bring restoration and healing – driving out demons where the Romans had acted like demons, restoring wholeness where the Romans had maimed [...] providing bread where the Romans had burned the supplies and fields of grain, and calming storms on the Sea of Galilee that the Romans had turned blood-red [...] The journey to Jerusalem continues to provide a contrast to Roman conquest. Along that journey, Jesus teaches that disciples are not to lord it over anyone “as the Gentile nations do”.⁴

It similarly follows from the narrative-critical centring of Mark’s autonomous authorial agency that the principal catalyzers of the narrative, and the principal determinants of its narrative referents, will be contemporary events.

Gospel narrative criticism has strong ties to modern literary criticism, which construes the text as an auto-semantic entity that constitutes an internal narrative world. This even more fundamentally precludes attention to the question of historical referentiality.⁵ Contemporary literary theory, says Paul Ricœur (1913–2005), “whether structuralist or not [...] proclaims the closure on themselves of narrative and rhetorical configurations and announces the exclusion of any extralinguistic referent”.⁶ The origins of this theoretical stance, he explains, lie in the extension of Saussurean linguistics – the play of “the signifier and the signified, excluding any referent” – to whole texts, that is, “the rejection of a referential dimension by structuralist orthodoxy”. While not necessarily problematic for fictional texts, it is inadequate for narrative works (like Mark) with an evident intentionality towards historical referentiality, that is, to a world external to the text.⁷

4. David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey & Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, Minneapolis, MN 2012, 149, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm9t2>.

5. Cilliers Breytenbach, *The Gospel According to Mark as Episodic Narrative*, Leiden 2021, 147–148, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004443754>.

6. Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago 2004, 260.

7. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 247–248.

Werner H. Kelber points out that the model of Mark the authorial mastermind is post-Gutenberg, in other words that “the author [is] a solitary genius who self-consciously and almost single-handedly composes texts”.⁸ Kelber makes this comment in his polemic against Richard A. Burridge’s taxonomic *bios* classification for the genre of the Gospels and its concomitant centring of the evangelist’s autonomous literary agency (as on the Greco-Roman model).⁹ Helen Bond’s 2020 application of Burridge’s *bios* genre designation as the paradigm for the origins of the Gospel of Mark is instructive in this regard. She finds herself in the same boat as narrative critics like Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, that is, compelled to identify features of the Markan materials that signal their pre-literary origins as the effects of the evangelist’s style and rhetoric. The local colour and realism in various of Mark’s materials are due not to a “residual orality” but to Mark’s talent for “telling a good story”. The oral-like simplicity and substandard literary quality is a deliberate authorial effect, a “tailor[ing] of his prose to the [simple, uneducated] audience, crafting his account in [...] a vibrant and entertaining manner”, in accord with the rhetorical handbooks’ recommendation to strive for “appropriateness”, that is, of a composition to its audience.¹⁰

Bond’s difficulty is that her media assumptions preclude her from accounting for the oral-written interface. She associates the attention to orality with the extremism in contemporary Gospel scholarship of the sort that would dissolve Synoptic writing into orality. She therefore rejects the “oral-derived” model for Markan origins out of hand. This leaves her unable to reconcile the written, literary dimension of the Gospel of Mark with the pre-literary origins of its materials. In consequence, she moves completely to the literary pole. This leads her to claim that the chreic forms of the Markan materials – their pithiness, their economy, their minimalist circumstantial detail – are not cognitive strategies for memory-based circulation but artifacts of the evangelist’s literary craft, radically pruning back details in order to achieve a desired rhetorical focus upon the hero of the exemplary *bios*.¹¹ The existence of *chreia* compilations, however, both Greco-Roman and rabbinic, attests to the *chreia*’s existence as a form calibrated for oral,

8. Werner H. Kelber, “On Mastering Genre”, in Robert Matthew Calhoun, David P. Moessner & Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Modern and Ancient Literary Criticism of the Gospels: Continuing the Debate on Gospel Genre(s)*, Tübingen 2020, 71.

9. Burridge’s *bios* theory is currently in retreat owing to developments in genre theory. See the various essays (in addition to Kelber’s) in Robert Matthew Calhoun, David P. Moessner & Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Modern and Ancient Literary Criticism of the Gospels: Continuing the Debate on Gospel Genre(s)*, Tübingen 2020.

10. Helen K. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark’s Gospel*, Grand Rapids, MI 2020, 88–89.

11. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 105–107.

memory-based transmission of essential cultural information.¹² Bond acknowledges that Mark received (and worked up into chreic forms) a body of pre-Markan materials. But her *bios* authorial model and dismissal of the oral-traditional media factor put her in the bind of being unable to be clear about the modes in which those “disparate sources and collective memories”, this “chaos of tradition”, existed. She refers to “collective memories”, but early Christian memory is not transmittable apart from some nexus with tradition-formation.¹³

A way out of this narrative-critical impasse seems initially to be signalled by Sandra Huebenthal in her superb narrative-critical work, *Reading the Gospel of Mark as a Text from Collective Memory*. Huebenthal breaks through the method’s closure to the history of the tradition by identifying the Markan *apophthegma* tradition with the category “social memory” within her tripartite schema *social memory, collective memory, cultural memory*. By social memory she means the face-to-face, anecdotal circulation of recollections among first-generation Christians. In this era, early Christian narrative consciousness is limited to the episodic and the apophthegmatic. This primitive Christian social memory is temporally limited, fading with the generational cohort of its living carriers. This crisis precipitates the formation of a collective memory, that is, the convergence on a more unitary narrative identity in the medium of writing. This watershed narrative project is the Gospel of Mark.¹⁴

Huebenthal’s adducing of memory theory to illuminate the Markan narrative enterprise might seem to bring with it a breakthrough in the historical referentiality question. But she insists, quite emphatically, that this is not the case. So incisive is this new Markan point of departure, so drastic the evangelist’s narrative “overwriting” of the dispersed episodic tradition, so urgent the generational crisis of cultural identity formation that is driving the narrative project, that making determinations of historical referentiality in the Markan materials is bound to be an unpropitious exercise. Mark as a narrative formation in service of a cultural identity project gives us “no insight into the question of what the events remembered in these texts

12. See John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Philadelphia, PA 1987, 306–316, and for rabbinic *chreias*, or “case stories”, Catherine Hezser, “Orality, Textuality, and Memory in the Transmission of Rabbinic Legal Narratives”, in Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie & Nili Wazana (eds.), *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Other Neighbouring Ancient Cultures*, Tübingen 2012, 279–295. See also Loveday Alexander, “Memory and Tradition in the Hellenistic Schools”, in Werner H. Kelber & Samuel Byrskog (eds.), *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives*, Waco, TX 2009, 113–153.

13. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 108–112, 154, 226, 257.

14. Sandra Huebenthal, *Reading Mark’s Gospel as a Text from Collective Memory*, Grand Rapids, MI 2020, 167–172.

actually looked like”.¹⁵ Similarly, “there is no way behind the current text; the current version is the only accessible version and reflects the narratively formed identity of the groups at that point in time, no matter what the history of the tradition was like”.¹⁶ If this were simply a claim that the narrative configuration and forms of Mark and the Markan materials present critical historiography with formidable difficulties, it would be hard to object. But taking Jan Assmann’s dictum at its face value – “one needs to be clear about this: memory has nothing to do with historical enquiry” – she in effect claims that Markan narrative is not historiographically tractable.¹⁷

Eve-Marie Becker’s solution is to approach Mark as a specimen of Greco-Roman historiographical genres, that is, as an authorially-conceived literary narrative oriented to historical events. Mark has at his disposal oral and written traditions which, in accord with the procedures of ancient historians, he perhaps supplements with personal autopsy, including engaging with eyewitnesses and informants.¹⁸ Becker’s is a powerful model that seems to offer us a solution to the problem of narrative formation and historical referentiality in Mark’s Gospel. Different from redaction-critical and narrative-critical approaches, it takes full cognizance of the evangelist’s historical intentionality, that Mark intends to write about the real past, that the work has a factual dimension, that actual human events perceived to “have caused change and motion” provide the grist for Mark’s narrativizing authorial project.¹⁹

For us the key question, however, is how Becker conceives the intersection of this source material with Mark’s narrativizing, literary activity. Disconnected events, the data, the collected knowledge of the past, she says, in that raw state do not constitute history. For this they require narrativization by the historian. This is a matter of their literary *emplotment*, which includes arrangement in a causally-connected sequence. In Becker’s view this means that history-writing inherently involves *fictionalization*. Though an implication of history writing *per se*, this is particularly evident in ancient historiography, with its blurring of historical and mythical elements, as in

15. Huebenthal, *Reading Mark’s Gospel*, 174.

16. Huebenthal, *Reading Mark’s Gospel*, 140.

17. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich 2005, 77. Assmann’s point in context, however, is that the social, cultural function of a commemorative narrative – the roles that the Masada narrative and the Holocaust narrative play in contemporary Israeli society – is quite different from the approaches to these same events taken by the critical historian.

18. Eve-Marie Becker, *The Birth of Christian History: Memory and Time from Mark to Luke-Acts*, New Haven, CT 2017, 39, 59.

19. Becker, *The Birth of Christian History*, 87.

the Gospel of Mark.²⁰ Becker's promising model therefore still works with a schematic binary between Mark's raw historical source materials on the one hand and his authorial, meaning-bestowing imposition of a narrative emplotment upon them on the other. In this respect it does not differ from redaction-critical and narrative-critical approaches.

Becker's model (and to no small extent Huebenthal's) has strong affinities to Hayden White's (1928–2018) model for narrative historiography. As such it is vulnerable to critiques that have been directed at White's model. It follows that it is through the critique of White that we can get new leverage on the question of historical referentiality in Markan narrative formations.

Hayden White on Narration and History

White famously blurs – some might say erases – the line between literary fiction writing and history writing. This is because any given field of historical data is receptive to plural narrative and hence plural interpretative emplotments. Historical enquiry, White claims, is not a matter of the uncovering and elucidation of the implicit significance of past events or entities, and of bringing to light their causal relationships. Rather, historical meaning, touted by the narrating historian as “what really happened”, is *created*, first, by the historian's pre-configuration, or pre-constitution, of a field of raw historical data, which White says do not come pre-configured, into a kind of linguistic field defining possible syntactic relationships among entities (for example agents and causes, acts and effects), and then second, by the choice of particular narrative tropes (White appropriates Northrop Frye's [1912–1991] “theory of fictions” taxonomy of Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, Satire) to emplot the entities in that field into an ideologically-laden, coherence- and meaning-bestowing story.²¹ Here, for example, White describes the Enlightenment historiography of the *philosophes*:

Dominated by a conception of rationalism derived from the (Newtonian) physical sciences, the *philosophes* approached the historical field as a ground of cause-effect relationships, the causes in question being generally conceived to be the forces of reason and unreason, the effects of which were generally conceived to be enlightened men on the one hand and superstitious or ignorant men on the other. The “lexical” elements of this system were men, acting as individuals and as groups, who were “grammatically” classifiable into the major categories of superstitious or irrational values and carriers of enlightened or rational

20. Becker, *The Birth of Christian History*, 86–90.

21. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, MD 1973, 6–7, 30–35, 426–432.

ones. The “syntax” of relationships by which these two classes of historical phenomena were bound together was that of the unremitting conflict of opposites; and the (semantic) meaning of this conflict was nothing but the triumph of the latter over the former, or the reverse.²²

A different mode of pre-figuration and choice of a different syntax of narrative emplotment would determine a different meaning-interpretation of the historical data. The outcome is equally coherent but unreconcilable narrative and moral interpretations of the same data.

For our purposes the point is that White regards narrative emplotment as a historian’s *imposition* upon past events that taken in themselves constitute nothing more than “mere sequence”, an “ephemeral flow of events”, awaiting the historian’s impress of narrativity.²³ The historian’s narrative emplotment is at the same time an imposition of meaning upon this “mere sequence”, and more precisely a moral meaning, which is presented by the mask of narrativization as the true moral meaning of events. “This is why”, White says, “the plot of a historical narrative [...] has to be presented as ‘found’ in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques.”²⁴ What narrative history-writing in fact amounts to is an ideological superstructure imposed upon historical events in pursuit of a particular social and political agenda. White further alleges that there is no non-ideological ethical vantage point from which to adjudicate among conflicting moral (that is, narrative) interpretations of a given sequence of events. Ethical stances are not to be distinguished from ideological stances, for the latter “have their origins in ethical conceptions”.²⁵ White thus denies the possibility of reason-grounded moral evaluation and adjudication among the different social agendas that can drive narrative interpretations of a given sequence of events, and rejects the possibility of critique of what Christopher R. Browning refers to as “ideological deformation” of historical narrative.²⁶

Critique of White’s Historical Narratology

Ricœur critically probes White’s historical narratology at the point of its juncture with French literary criticism of the sort characterized by the

22. White, *Metahistory*, 65.

23. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, MD 1987, 3–4, 22–25.

24. White, *The Content of the Form*, 21.

25. White, *Metahistory*, 26–27, also 21, 40.

26. Christopher R. Browning, “German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, and Historical Reconstruction: Writing Perpetrator History from Postwar Testimony”, in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Cambridge, MA 1992, 32.

extension of Saussurean linguistics, with its methodological “exclusion of the [external] referent from the linguistic field”, to the “semiotics of narrative”. White followed Roland Barthes (1915–1980) in committing the “category mistake” of extending this model to all forms of narration, and thus to historiographical narrative, triumphantly exposing its “referential illusion”.²⁷ To be sure, Ricœur says, “the fictional and the historical narrative participate in the same narrative structures”, narrative emplotment in both cases requires exercise of the imaginative faculty, and both are representational. But the error lies in the failure “to specify the referential moment that distinguishes history [writing] from fiction”, that is to say, its referential intention towards a real past, external to the text, and towards the truth of the past, or put differently, its representational intention of faithfulness to the past.²⁸ This category distinction is secured by the grounding of historiographical narrative in *memory* and the various ways – eyewitness, documentary, and otherwise – in which that memory of the past is mediated to the writer. The past, Ricœur says, “prolongs its effects at the core of the [narrative] representation”, notwithstanding the ultimate inadequacy of any narrative representation in the face of “the demand for truth arising from the heart of lived history”.²⁹

Ricœur’s account of historical narratology as truth-seeking is refreshing and bracing. The point at which White’s assertion of the moral undecidability of different narrative emplotments and interpretations really gets mired down in difficulties is in the encounter with that “mere sequence” of past events known as the Holocaust. A colloquium convened in 1992, the proceedings of which were published as *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, brought together Hayden White and Holocaust historians critical of his narrative historiography. Imagine, Saul Friedlander says in his Introduction,

what would have happened if the Nazis had won the war? No doubt there would have been a plethora of pastoral emplotments of life in the Third Reich and of comic emplotments of the disappearance of its victims, mainly the Jews. How [...] would White [...] define any epistemological criterion for refuting a comic interpretation of these events?³⁰

27. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 247–250.

28. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 253–254. See also Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Chicago 1984, 64.

29. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 260.

30. Saul Friedlander, “Introduction”, in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Cambridge, MA 1992, 10.

White tries to neutralize the threat to his theory by pleading that the Holocaust lies beyond any adequate narrative representation and therefore constitutes a special case.³¹ But even this evasion amounts to a concession that past events contain an imperative for referential and moral truth in the modes of their narrative representation. In Ricœur's words, the Holocaust is the diagnostic case of "a request, a demand to be spoken of, represented, arising from the very heart of the event".³²

We saw that in White's schema, meaning – moral meaning in particular – is an imposition upon a sequence of events by virtue of the narrative historian's emplotment of that sequence into a story. The effect is to create the illusion that a moral meaning, a particular moral order, is immanent in those events; that it has been "found" in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques.³³ That a given narrative emplotment is a construction of the narrating historian's moral programme can be readily acknowledged. But White's model fails to recognize that historical events are charged with moral and cultural meanings with their occurrence. Historical existence is a moral existence, and human agency is always positioned within a network of moral coordinates and transected on all points by a cultural semiotic. It would therefore be more accurate to say that narrative order, corresponding in emplotted form to a narrator's moral conception, *supervenes* upon the sequence of already morally charged and culturally signified events that constitute the narrator's material.³⁴

For our purposes, this allows us to reconceive the relationship of the Markan narrative emplotment to the Markan materials in terms of a continuity rather than as a sharp discontinuity. To illustrate: White takes note of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770–1831) observation that an "intimate relationship [...] exists between law, historicity, and narrativity". That is to say, law constitutes a social system, which is the framework for the constitution of a subject who could be the subject of a narrative. Noting "the frequency with which narrativity [...] presupposes the existence of a legal system against which or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate", White declares that "the more historically self-conscious the writer of any form of historiography, the more the question of the social

31. Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth", in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, Cambridge, MA 1992, 37, 54.

32. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 254.

33. White, *The Content of the Form*, 20–21.

34. I use the term "supervenes" here in the sense of its intransitive use in philosophy, as in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "Of a quality or property: to be dependent *on* (or *upon*) a further underlying quality or property for its existence; to be present by virtue of the presence of other specified attributes."

system and the law that sustains it, the authority of this law and its justification, and threats to this law occupy his attention”.³⁵ This is certainly borne out by the Markan narrative, in which the struggle over law and authority is a principal formative element in the evangelist’s emplotment. But the historical Jesus is already constituted as a subject and agent within a social and cultural matrix defined by Jewish law, a matrix destabilized, moreover, by corollary conflicts over authority and legitimacy.

The implications can be further elaborated. For White it is axiomatic that past events come to the narrating historian as unnarrativized fodder. “Real events”, he says, “do not offer themselves as stories”, which is why “their narrativization is so difficult.”³⁶ Rhetorically he asks: “Does the world [...] ever really come to us as already narrativized, already ‘speaking itself’ from beyond the horizon of our capacity to make sense of it?”³⁷ To which we answer, in fact yes, it does: though awaiting narrative emplotment, the past comes to the narrating historian already bearing a narrative complexion. The only link to the past is memory. The historian’s materials in the final analysis are memory materials. Memories take cognitive form in narrative patterns, a cognitive process deeply networked, moreover, into an encompassing matrix of cultural narrative patterns and topoi.³⁸ Against White’s “radical relativism” this entails, Martin Jay points out, that one “acknowledge the existence of formed content in the narrations the historical actors or victims themselves have produced, and use them as a check on the absolute license of the historian to emplot the past in an entirely capricious way”.³⁹

But not only are cultural narrative patterns and corollary cultural symbol systems – which include a moral order – a principal factor in the shaping of memories of historical events. They are formative of the historical actors themselves, on the one hand cognitively as subjects, and on the other hand providing the coordinates for their exercise of agency within their cultural sphere, which encompasses its social, legal, and political dimensions. Conversely, they are the cognitive categories for the face-to-face perception and reaction to a historical agent (like Jesus) by his or her contemporaries; for the agent’s cultural and social “readability”. Historical action is not pre-narrative, as White thinks. It is constitutively formed by cultural scripts and patterns of signification. Again Martin Jay:

35. White, *The Content of the Form*, 13–14.

36. White, *The Content of the Form*, 3–4.

37. White, *The Content of the Form*, 24–25.

38. A point established definitively in Byrskog, “Memory and Narrative”, 119–123.

39. Martin Jay, “Of Plots, Witnesses, and Judgements”, in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Cambridge, MA 1992, 99–100.

The factual record is not [...] entirely prior to its linguistic mediation, or indeed its figural signification. What distinguishes the events and facts that later historians reconstruct is precisely their being often already inflected with narrative meaning for those who initiate or suffer them in their own lives [...] There is, in other words, virtually no historical content that is linguistically unmediated and utterly bereft of meaning, waiting around for the later historian to emplot it in arbitrary ways.⁴⁰

To draw the further implication: the narrative inflection is itself an irreducible element of the historical data, aborigine with the historical events and the historical *dramatis personae*.

We return to our point that the Markan narrative supervenes upon its already narratively prefigured and culturally signified materials.⁴¹ But here White – and Gospel narrative critics – must be given their due: a non-trivial disjunction exists between Mark’s narrative emplotment and his narratively-inflected materials. Taken in aggregate, the latter lack narrative coherence and narrative closure – emplotment into a story that constitutes its own interconnected narrative world and exploits the hermeneutical possibilities thereby opened up. This requires the reflective work of the narrating evangelist. Far from being just a technical project, as Huebenthal rightly argued it amounts to a cultural identity enterprise of far-reaching significance, one enabled by the programmatic conversion of primitive Christianity’s formative tradition into the written medium with its property of material extension.

But one still runs up against the problem of divergent narrative representations of the same historical realities, or as Hayden White put it, “the consistent elaboration of a number of equally comprehensive and plausible, yet mutually exclusive conceptions of the same sets of events”.⁴² Along with Martin Jay, we can readily affirm with White that any given field of events can bear plural narrative interpretations. In fact, Jay says, “no uniform meaning can be assumed to have existed for all the participants in historical events”. Interpretative representations are also profoundly affected by historical, social, and cultural factors in the narrating historian’s own present, and by the historian’s historically-distanced perspective upon the past.⁴³

40. Jay, “Of Plots, Witnesses, and Judgments”, 98–99.

41. On this point likewise Byrskog, “Memory and Narrative”, 112: “The experience of the Jesus event had an intrinsic narrative structure before it was formulated narratively in memory and writing.”

42. White, *Metahistory*, 40–41, 431–432.

43. Jay, “Of Plots, Witnesses, and Judgments”, 104.

We are therefore left with the irreducible plurality of interpretative narrative emplotments. In this connection an openness to the merits of different narrative interpretations remains essential. A historical narrative is a particular representation of reality, not reality itself. “Reality is an elusive notion”, Funkenstein says. “Every narrative is, in its way, an exercise in ‘worldmaking’.” But, he continues, “it is not arbitrary”.⁴⁴ That is, against White’s claim to the contrary, rationally grounded discrimination among plural narrative accounts is possible. It is indeed possible to rank narrative representations by their epistemological virtues and to pass ethical judgements on divergent moral interpretations of historical events. Moral meaning for White is an imposition “on what in reality is a chaotic, incoherent, meaningless series of events” by the narrating historian, by virtue of emplotment.⁴⁵ But each historical event, every exercise of human historical agency, occurs within a cultural *Lebenswelt*, through which a moral order is densely woven. The exercise of historical agency already bears a moral complexion, a set of moral commitments, as an indelible feature of its historical being. We can embrace White’s point that narrative interpretations of the moral significance of events will be plural, even conflicting. We can even go further to make evaluative plurality contemporaneous with the occurrence of the events.

But this does not rule out the capacity for passing moral judgements on the truth of a narrative representation. White’s claim to the contrary is a function of his belief that no “extra-ideological” position exists from which to render judgements among plural narrative representations. The ideological and political positions from which narrating historians operate “have their origins in ethical considerations, and the assumption of a given epistemological position would itself represent only another ethical choice”.⁴⁶ This moral relativism, White’s collapsing of ethical stance into ideological stance, his making truth in ethical evaluation a mask on the ideological face, again finds its contradiction in narrations of the Holocaust, which is not the exception White claims it to be but the paradigm for innumerable other cases – the Soviet gulag, the Katyn Forest massacre, the Cambodian killing fields, and so forth *ad infinitum*.

Conclusion

We have only been able to make a few gestures at how critiques of Hayden White’s model for narrative history-writing give us leverage on the problem of memory, narrative, and historical referentiality in the Gospel of Mark.

44. Amos Funkenstein, “History, Counterhistory, and Narrative”, in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Cambridge, MA 1992, 79.

45. Browning’s summary of White’s view in Browning, “German Memory”, 30.

46. White, *Metahistory*, 26.

Byrskog has taken the measure of the formidable difficulties that are nevertheless involved, and he in fact remains pessimistic about being able to move methodologically from Markan narrative formations to critical projects of historical reconstruction. There is truth in the maxim that the “past is always the remembered past”.⁴⁷ But the critiques of White surveyed above have called into question any categorically binary distinctions between historical reality and its narrative representations, between supposedly objectively factual history and the moral experience of history in memory. Not only are narrative representations of history grounded in memory; they are distinguished by a referential intention towards a real past, towards the truth of the past.⁴⁸ To return to Ricœur’s words: The past “prolongs its effects at the core of the [narrative] representation”, notwithstanding the ultimate inadequacy of any narrative representation in the face of “the demand for truth arising from the heart of lived history”.⁴⁹ We thus find ourselves in a position to take up anew Samuel Byrskog’s inquiry into how “history becomes story”.⁵⁰ ▲

SUMMARY

In his *Story as History – History as Story*, Byrskog applied the powerful explanatory model of oral history to the formation of the tradition and to the narrative projects of the evangelists. The model needs to be taken further to confront the view among Gospel narrative critics that narrative formation in the Gospel of Mark is such as to render its materials opaque to historical enquiry. Narrative criticism works with a schematic binary between Mark’s raw historical source materials on the one hand and his meaning-bestowing imposition of a narrative emplotment upon them on the other. This has strong affinities to Hayden White’s model for narrative history-writing. White regards narrative emplotment as the historian’s imposition upon past events that taken in themselves constitute nothing more than an “ephemeral flow of events”, awaiting the historian’s impress of narrativity. Moral meaning is an ideological imposition upon a sequence of events by virtue of the narrative historian’s emplotment of that sequence into a story. Powerful critiques of White by Paul Ricœur and Holocaust historians have called into question schematic distinctions between historical reality and its narrative representations. Not only are narrative representations grounded in memory; they are distinguished by a referential intention towards a real past.

47. Byrskog, “Memory and Narrative”, 65.

48. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 253–254.

49. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 260.

50. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story*, 255.

Memory and Hermeneutics – Concluding Reflections

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Introductory Remarks

It is with much gratitude that I read the contributions to this special issue of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*. My colleague Hannah Strømmen asked me some time ago what topic I would suggest in order to discuss the research that I have been conducting during most of my academic career, and which scholars might be willing to contribute. Eve-Marie Becker, Sandra Huebenthal, Alan Kirk, and Rafael Rodríguez are dear colleagues and leading international experts from whom I have learnt much about memory over the years. I am honoured to be part of their discussion and humbled by their deep insights.

The topic I suggested was “Memory and Hermeneutics”. This choice has of course to do with my own history as a scholar and the various phases of academic life. Trained in traditional historical-critical approaches to the Bible, I early on became interested in scrutinizing all the sources available for reliable historical information about Jesus and his followers. This was not necessarily the result of a theology fostering people to think of historical facts as the corrective of Christian theology and beliefs, even if such discourses were prominent at places where I studied. It was rather the status of biblical research in Sweden and elsewhere at the time that set the agenda: first we do history, then we do theology. So, in 1994 I defended my dissertation, which dealt with matters of tradition and transmission in the

Gospel of Matthew, working within the predominant historical paradigm of the time.¹

This enthusiasm for historical studies was gradually balanced with an equally intense but less pronounced and more allusive search for a deeper understanding of how the past interacts with the present during various periods and in various places, be that from a socio-cultural perspective on different groups or with a focus on each person's sense of existing within the never-ending passing of time, including myself. In my second book, and without fully realizing its implications, I wished to move away from notions of memorization and historical reliability and place the Gospel tradition within the spectrum of a dynamic interchange between history and story in a manner reminiscent of how oral history works.² This book is dedicated to my two children, who at the time of research were still living at home, and it was of no little importance that I realized how my experiences with them carried the embryo of the stories that we one day would tell each other with a sense of nostalgia. Eyewitnesses experience things and perform their memories as individuals but – inevitably – they do so also as socially involved interpreters of the past, constantly using memory to reconfigure history in their oral stories.³

More than two decades have passed and the scholarly agenda has changed in a direction that highlights this interchange and mnemonic reconfiguration. The contributions of the present volume reflect, each in their own way, that memory is much more than – and perhaps essentially different – from mere historical reconstruction. I am pleased to be part of that scholarly transition.

Memory as Hermeneutics

In addition to the personal factors influencing the choice of this topic, I have come to realize that memory is a fundamentally hermeneutical category. The 2018 article “Memory and Narrative – and Time: Towards a Hermeneutics of Memory” is the preliminary result of my reflections on memory

1. Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community*, Stockholm 1994. For some recent reflections on this work, see Samuel Byrskog, “Jesus the Only Teacher: Further Thoughts”, in Carl S. Sweetman & Clifford B. Kvidahl (eds.), *Treasures New and Old: Essays in Honor of Donald A. Hagner*, Wilmore, KY 2017, 36–46.

2. Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Tübingen 2000.

3. See Samuel Byrskog, “The Eyewitnesses as Interpreters of the Past: Reflections on Richard Bauckham's, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses”, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 6 (2008), 157–168, <https://doi.org/10.1163/174551908X349653>. See also my inaugural lecture at Lund University: Samuel Byrskog, “När gamla texter talar: Om att tolka det förgångna”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 84 (2008), 49–57.

since the publication of the two books mentioned above.⁴ Ironically, it is indebted to the existential perspective on history that Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), who refrained from speaking of memory, developed already in the 1920s in his booklet on Jesus and maintained throughout his long and exceptional career.⁵ But it is also very much the result of studying notions of memory in antiquity and modern theories of individual, social, and collective remembering. Memory is an existential category that helps us navigate temporally and foster an understanding of reality and a sense of identity.

As far back as we are able to go in ancient Greece, people realized that their very existence depended on memory and attributed to it divine status and life-giving powers. In the very old *Homeric Hymns*, Hermes sings the praise of the immortal gods and honours *Mnēmosynē* as the first one among them (*Hermes* 429–430). When people received her gift, it was believed, they entered into a special relationship with the Muses and with all that produced life-giving energy in literature, art, and science. The past was mnemonically merged with hopes for the future as a way of living meaningfully in the present. In some more esoteric circles, *Mnēmosynē* was apparently conceived to be a river or a pool from which the dead could drink and, as a result, return to life. To remember meant to come back to life, to exist again; to drink from the river *Lēthē*, “forgetfulness”, which was also a goddess as well as a river in Hades, meant to forget one’s life and not be able to return to it.⁶

Mnēmosynē, whether a venerated goddess or a revitalizing river, faded into the background as centuries passed. Human memory remained crucial, however, and was seen as a faculty of the soul whereby people could make the absent past become present, either by forms of memorization or by other more subtle mnemonic negotiations. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and Augustine (354–430) are, as we will see, theoretical guides for Greek and Roman deliberations on how memory depends on time and crystalizes

4. Samuel Byrskog, “Memory and Narrative – and Time: Towards a Hermeneutics of Memory”, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 15 (2018), 108–135, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01602003>.

5. See Samuel Byrskog, “The Message of Jesus according to Rudolf Bultmann”, in Bruce W. Longenecker & Mikeal C. Parsons (eds.), *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, Waco, TX 2014, 3–22; Samuel Byrskog, “What is Historical about the Mission of the Historical Jesus? Rudolf Bultmann and the Hermeneutics of Memory”, in Samuel Byrskog & Tobias Hägerland (eds.), *The Mission of Jesus: Second Nordic Symposium on the Historical Jesus, Lund, 7–10 October 2012*, Tübingen 2015, 41–58.

6. For a discussion, see Günther Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*, Oxford 1971, 378–381; Richard Janko, “Forgetfulness in the Golden Tablets on Memory”, *Classical Quarterly* 34 (1984), 89–100. See also Pausanias’ (c. 110–c. 180) description of the underground oracle of Trophonius at Lebadeia (western Boeotia) in *Description of Greece* 9.39.8–13.

narratively. There are also numerous anecdotes about people who had an exceptionally good memory or who by accident lost it. The rabbis' descriptions of memorization and the rhetoricians' appreciation of *memoria* and of the widespread method of mnemonic *loci* reflect the trained practice of accurate recollection. Even in these most meticulous recollective enterprises, the underlying dynamics have always to do with how the past is made present.

Philosophers such as Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) as well as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) help us relate the ancient discussion of memory to our own time.⁷ To the extent that hermeneutics is inherent in what it means to be human, as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) insisted,⁸ memory is to be seen as the hermeneutical mode of coping with human temporality, navigating between the past and the present and making sense of our existence as the story of history is unfolding.

Three Hermeneutical Categories of Memory

The hermeneutical programme of my article mentioned above articulates the importance of three particular categories of memory: its referentiality, its narrativity, and its temporality. Firstly, to what extent can we claim that memory refers to something beyond its own internal narrative, to a reality outside itself? A mental or literary narrative is always fictional to a certain extent and involves selectivity, rearranging, redescription, simplification, and so on.⁹

Focusing on fictional and yet mimetic and realistically conceived narratives,¹⁰ such as the Gospels, we detect the historical memory of individuals and groups that negotiate creatively with their contemporary experiences and values. We might call them “mnemo-historical” narratives.¹¹ They are a

7. Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Paris 1896; Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris 1925; Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1950; Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Halle 1927; Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris 2000.

8. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1960.

9. See Knut Backhaus & Gerd Häfner, *Historiographie und fiktionales Erzählen: Zur Konstruktivität in Geschichtstheorie und Exegese*, 2nd ed., Neukirchen-Vluyn 2009; Susanne Luther, Jörg Röder & Eckart D. Schmidt (eds.), *Wie Geschichten Geschichte schreiben: Frühchristliche Literatur zwischen Faktualität und Fiktionalität*, Tübingen 2015.

10. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, Bern 1946; Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, New Haven, CT 1974.

11. See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge, MA 1997; Werner H. Kelber, “The Works of Memory: Christian Origins and Mnemohistory – A Response”, in Alan Kirk & Tom Thatcher (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and*

kind of literary synergy of the past as it might have happened and of the past as a social construction in the present. Memory is not memory onto itself, producing its own mental fantasies *ex nihilo*, but has a reference to something in the past in order to be memory. The ensuing story, then, depends on the referentiality of memory for its power to communicate what might have happened, while also being a literary fiction. It is of crucial significance for New Testament scholars to delineate this mnemonic referentiality of the four Gospels in order to understand their relationship, if any, to the past reality they claim to depict and communicate.

Secondly, memory is intrinsically narrative. The memory of each individual often arranges the past in series of episodes;¹² and people more generally tend to make the creation of stories of the past in which they are involved an important part of how they negotiate their identity. Narrative, we might say, is “the formal quality of experience through time.”¹³ Past experience is therefore an embryonic story made narratively coherent by memory.

The narrativity of memory depends on the social character of memory. Even autobiographical memory is a social construction. Halbwachs distinguished between autobiographical memory, historical memory (the past to which we have no direct relation any more), and collective memory (the past forming our realities), and he pointed out that individuals remember as members of groups.¹⁴ Autobiographical memory is thus social in that it includes social aspects into the cognitive act of remembering and hence concerns the memory of individuals in social contexts that are larger than the individual and yet related to that individual. I have previously stressed that this concept of social memory is more helpful than studies that equate it with collective memory.¹⁵

It is precisely this social dimension of memory that produces its narrative character. The reality people remember has to do with the lives lived and the events experienced together with others in a certain sequence. Moreover, not only do the contemporary circumstances of each individual

Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity, Atlanta, GA 2005, 221–248.

12. The classic study of episodic memory is Endel Tulving, “Episodic and Semantic Memory”, in Endel Tulving & Wayne Donaldson (eds.), *Organization of Memory*, New York 1972, 381–403. See also David C. Rubin (ed.), *Autobiographical Memory*, Cambridge 1986, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558313>.

13. Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience”, in Lewis P. Hinchman & Sandra K. Hinchman (eds.), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, Albany, NY 1997, 26.

14. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, 35–40.

15. I did so for the first time in Samuel Byrskog, “A New Quest for the *Sitz im Leben*: Social Memory, the Jesus Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew”, *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006), 319–336, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000178>, building on insights from the cognitive sociologist Éviatar Zerubavel.

play a significant part in the mnemonic negotiations with the past, but the communication of others' experiences and interpretations of the past also interact in the creation of new narratives. To the extent that memory entails interpreted experiences not made by the remembering individual but by someone else, it seeks conventional patterns into which each element of the past can be meaningfully integrated, becoming itself a narrative entity that creates and negotiates social and collective identity.

The Gospels indicate that the experiences of the Jesus event had an emergent narrative structure before it was embellished narratively in memory, tradition, and writing. Our scholarly ambition to overcome the mnemonic narrativity of the Gospels is visible in the tendency towards abstraction and contraction. We separate and condense information from them, be that for the purpose of historical reconstruction of sayings or actions or of theological reflection. However, while such studies are not to be rejected and have produced significant result, what we confront first and foremost through their consistent reference to the past is a manifold narrative testimony to the temporal identity of the early Christians.

It is, thirdly, but a short step to move from the narrativity of memory to its temporality. This accords with Ricœur's notion of narrative time. He was critical of chronological time and took "temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent".¹⁶ The narrativity of memory is thus closely linked to the temporality of memory. Its narrativity is even an inevitable outcome of the narrativizing force imbedded in the temporal past.

No one in antiquity is clearer on the temporality of memory than Aristotle and Augustine.¹⁷ They had different notions of time. Indeed, Aristotle was fascinated by time as he observed the changes of nature and by memory as he reflected on how to recall past reality. Augustine was focused on time as an inner feeling of extendedness and in memory as the marvelous inner space where the eternal God remains hidden.¹⁸ What unites the two

16. Paul Ricœur, "Narrative Time", *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 169. For a more extensive account, see Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols., Paris 1983–1985.

17. For a fuller discussion, see Samuel Byrskog, "Philosophical Aspects on Memory: Aristotle, Augustine and Bultmann", in Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola & Jutta Maria Jokiranta (eds.), *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, Göttingen 2016, 23–47.

18. For a discussion of Aristotle's notion of time, see Ursula Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV. 10–14*, Oxford 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199247900.001.0001>; Tony Roark, *Aristotle on Time: A Study of the Physics*, Cambridge 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511753664>. For a discussion of Augustine's notion of time, see David van Dusen, *The Space of Time: A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine*, Confessiones X to XII, Leiden 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004269316>.

thinkers is that they realized that memory requires a sense of time in order to be memory.

For Aristotle, in his *Memory and Reminiscence*, it is obvious that only those living beings that perceive time have memory.¹⁹ He states clearly that “the most important thing is to know time” – τὸ δὲ μέγιστον γνωρίζειν δεῖ τὸν χρόνον (252^b7). Recollection is possible when memory navigates in the present between different and differently interrelated images of the past, chasing one thing after the other according to how they are associated. Memory senses the order of their changes or movements, thus creating a feeling of temporality. Things that are not “in time”, not changing or moving, cannot be mnemonically apprehended, unless we make them possess qualities that relate them to some kind of narrative order and imagine them to exist “in time”.

It was partly this idea that Augustine picked up, directly or indirectly,²⁰ in Books 10 and 11 of his *Confessions* and developed into a more mystical, inner experience.²¹ Memory is the conceptual crystallization of the past, the present, and the future.²² Together with contemplation on what is present and expectation of what is to come, it constitutes each individual’s temporal experience of the past in the transient now (11.20.26). It is through this threefold inner experience that time can be measured.²³ This measurement is peculiar, however, because “time is nothing but extendedness” – *nihil esse aliud tempus quam distentionem* (11.26.33). It becomes manifest as an almost mystic sensation where everything that was, that is, and that will be create feelings of indefinite temporal extendedness. Memory is thus enlarged as time moves on and is further extended. What the mind expects “passes into what it remembers by what it attends” (11.28.37).

19. For a discussion of Aristotle’s understanding of memory and recollection, see Richard Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory*, 2nd ed., London 2004; Julia Annas, “Aristotle on Memory and the Self”, in Martha C. Nussbaum & Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, Oxford 1992, 297–311, <https://doi.org/10.1093/019823600X.003.0017>; David Bloch, *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection: Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism*, Leiden 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004160460.i-276>.

20. See Richard A.H. King, *Aristotle and Plotinus on Memory*, Berlin 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110214635>.

21. For a discussion of Augustine’s understanding of memory, see Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology*, Oxford 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199643028.001.0001>.

22. See Michael Mendelson, “*Venter animi/distentio animi*: Memory and Temporality in Augustine’s *Confessions*”, *Augustinian Studies* 31 (2000), 137–163, <https://doi.org/10.5840/augstudies200031215>.

23. See Gerard J.P. O’Daly, “Augustine on the Measurement of Time: Some Comparisons with Aristotelian and Stoic Texts”, in Henry J. Blumenthal & Robert A. Markus (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of A.H. Armstrong*, London 1981, 171–179.

So, memory is referential in that its images come from outside memory itself, it is narrative because it stems from and pictures a socially conditioned reality and it is temporal because it depends on time in order to navigate between the past and the present. These three categories – referentiality, narrativity, and temporality – can be construed in a number of ways and are deeply interrelated. All three need to play their part for memory to be memory. Memory without referentiality turns into pure imagination; memory without narrativity turns into a static archive; memory without temporality turns into achronic fantasy.

The Three Hermeneutical Categories of Memory in Four Articles

Memory takes on many different shapes and forms and might come to oral and literary expression in a number of ways. The uncertainty of memory, so often emphasized, does not derive from its inherent inability to recall the past but from its necessary embodiment in cultural forms of narration.²⁴ In the *Sitze im Leben* of the early Christian communities, the intrinsically referential, narrative, and temporal dimensions of memory could also take on identifiable and recurrent shapes and forms of oral and written character.²⁵ The four contributions of this special issue illustrate the richness of the hermeneutics of memory and are important contributions to its referential, narrative, and temporal dimensions.

Rafael Rodríguez recognizes the way written texts employ extratextual information – common and commonly performed tradition – to give meaning to those participating in various textual communities, emphasizing that the experience of the written word in antiquity remained a social experience. This performative aspect of tradition adds a significant characteristic to the re-oralization of the Jesus tradition. Some scholars think of tradition as something that the early Christians only preserved and elaborated with utmost care and in specific recurrent settings. So did I, initially, but there is more to it. The *Sitz im Leben* that I envision is, as Rodríguez recognizes, a more vibrant and existential one, where memory plays a role both in stabilizing and in performing and embellishing tradition. His article illustrates this commemorative practice well by pointing to how the tradition concerning Jesus' threat against the Jerusalem Temple resisted the pressure of

24. See Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "Memories in the Making: The Shapes of Things That Went", *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996), 301–321, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02393274>. On events from a sociological and even interdisciplinary perspective, see Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *What is an Event?*, Chicago 2017.

25. I called attention to the mnemonic character of the form-critical idea of the *Sitz im Leben* for the first time in Samuel Byrskog, "A Century with the *Sitz im Leben*: From Form-Critical Setting to Gospel Community and Beyond", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 (2007), 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ZNTW.2007.001>.

the present to reshape the past, while the early followers of Jesus at the same time continued to venerate the temple and – after its actual destruction – interpreted his threat as prophetic for their own time.

The performative aspect of tradition indicates both how tradition grew and changed in the course of its oral use and also the role that memory played within the group that identified with the tradition and drew upon their past experiences. Once we introduce the idea of the performance of a tradition that comes from the past, we also touch upon the referentiality and temporality of memory. Rodríguez aptly adds cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser's (1928–2012) notion of “reepisodic memory”, which refers to common themes that remain invariant across many experiences. This is helpful, because it expresses that during the performance of tradition, memory relates past events to present experiences of the past interchangeably. If time is not only or primarily chronological but the measuring of movement or change, or a mysterious sense of extendedness, or something that reaches language in narrativity, then the temporality of memory implies that it always travels back and forth between the mental impressions of the past and the experiences of the present existence. As indicated above, the temporality of memory in Gospel narratives remains largely unexplored.

Eve-Marie Becker focuses on the ability of memory to integrate the traumatic experiences of the contemporary history of the First Jewish-Roman War into the literary memory of the Gospel of Mark through the foil of Jesus' violent death. This illustrates well the hermeneutical character of memory. Mnemonic negotiation was essential, according to Becker, when the early Christians had to cope with the catastrophic things that had just happened and stirred turbulent feelings among them.

The article shows that the referentiality and temporality of memory find their focus not only in the distant past but also in that which is shockingly immediate and recent. It perceptively demonstrates that memory after a short while of negotiation takes literary shape in the form of a Gospel narrative and becomes a literary memory. Becker's attention to trauma studies and to the Christian literature as examples of coping strategies is important and helps us see more clearly how memory creatively struggles with that which is the recent past and painfully felt to be contemporary. There is a subtle interplay between the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of memory that is relevant to a number of New Testament writings.

By labelling the Gospel of Mark a literary memory, Becker also reinforces that memory is not only a mental activity, as Aristotle and Augustine thought, but takes on different shapes and forms, and that written texts, just like other tangible things, might serve as sites of memory. Perhaps it was as

such a site of memory that the authors of the other New Testament Gospels recalled and employed the Gospel of Mark, indicating that the comparison between the Gospels is best done with an eye to how memory works rather than to traditional redaction criticism.

Sandra Huebenthal is well-known for her expertise in cultural sciences and the modern theoretical ramifications of memory. In her article she begins with a personal note from her lived experience as a female German-speaking and Roman-Catholic scholar to explain her sensitivity to existential crisis, memory, identity, and orality. I find this intriguingly relevant and have sometimes wondered if my own upbringing as the son of a rhetorically gifted preacher and his loyal wife in cities and small villages of the very north of Sweden created a feeling that the oral word performed from memory in tight communities is more powerful and dangerously compelling than the written one, and in that way also fostered an interest in crisis and identity.

I also share Huebenthal's – and Becker's – emphasis that written texts such as the Gospel of Mark are media of memory in their own right, implying that memory studies need to free themselves from the one-sided and theologically misguided diachrony of historical thinking and move towards detecting traces of mnemonic negotiations and a sense of temporal identity among the early Christians through the ways they composed and wished to communicate their writings. Huebenthal insists that this work should be done from the perspective of cultural studies. This is helpful in redirecting our attention. The Gospels are after all cultural artefacts signalling cultural codes of memory and identity formation.

Key to Huebenthal's contribution is historical referentiality and she sides with those that maintain that fact and interpretation cannot be separated. This is congenial with the socio-cultural approach of oral history that I have previously used, although I have not given up hope that mnemonic traditions embodying some kind of historical fact can be traced through the texts precisely because we know from rhetorical handbooks how they were supposed to take form and be elaborated. The referential traces of memory might be seen in the rhetorical forms used.

The temporality of memory in narrative texts might be further delineated. What sense of time is visible in the text, and what sense of temporal identity can we detect? It might be appropriate to include detailed studies of the use of tense, aspect, and *Aktionsart* into the study of textual memory, especially perhaps Mark's strange use of the historical present. It is exactly the insight that memory, even in the form of a text, always is hermeneutical that will help us detect the early Christians' struggle to come to terms with the experience of the past in the present.

The issue of historical referentiality is important also to Alan Kirk, but from a different perspective that probes the narrativizing processes of the interchange between history and story. Interacting critically with both Becker and Huebenthal, he focuses on the American historian Hayden White's (1928–2018) influential model of narrative historiography that purposefully blurs the line between literary fiction and history writing and regards narrative emplotment as essentially a moral and ideological imposition of the historian upon past events. Kirk perceptively relates this notion of meta-history to the criticism of Ricœur, who points to White's failure to specify the referential moment that distinguishes history writing from fiction. This moment is precisely what memory can provide.

Kirk agrees with Ricœur and indicates a philosophically important insight about the nature of history and history writing. Historical existence, restricted to the temporality of what happens, is sequential and takes place within a cultural narrative order that interacts with the memory of the author creating a narrative fiction about the past. The past does not come as unnarrativized fodder, Kirk insists, but contains an embryonic narrativization that links into the narrativity of memory. I find this to be convincing. It articulates more fully the connection between historical referentiality and narrative memory and provides an important insight as to how history becomes story. As I have argued elsewhere, also in the more programmatic article referred to initially, this kind of historical referentiality is traceable not only by reading the coherent Gospel narratives with memory lenses, but also by paying attention to the various rhetorical forms that memory takes in order to make the narrative past enter into the story. No matter how critical we are of the old form-critical school of biblical studies, a new *Formgeschichte* from the perspective of memory might be in sight, albeit remotely.

Moving On

The task of reflecting on memory and hermeneutics is never-ending, and so it has to be. The challenge to go back to the texts themselves and leave the theories of memory behind is tempting in today's vast landscape of discussions on memory, but it is illusionary. Textual work makes us alter, modify, or expand our theories, which we again test on the texts. This interchange is inevitable.

I am currently finishing a commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans and find myself reflecting on how the apostle fuses his distant past and the sometimes painful memories of what he recently experienced in Corinth with the present time of communicating his gospel from the same city in

order to fulfil his hopes for the future in Rome and eventually Spain. Past, present, and future merge in the letter. The referentiality of memory consists of things in his own distant past as a Jew becoming a Christ-believer and of his more recent collective experiences in the Christian communities. The narrativity of memory is a sub-narrative that surfaces on various occasions and tells of the Messiah and his people among the nations. The temporality of memory is double-edged in that it relates to Paul's sense of what he has been and of living here and now, in Corinth, but also – intriguingly – to his use of the epistolary medium to cross geographical and temporal boundaries and make his absence rhetorically present at the time of the epistolary performance. Perhaps it is time for scholars of memory to extend their work on the historical Jesus and the Gospel narratives to the letters or letter-like writings of Paul and others. Here history and story interact in new and unexpected ways.

The debate will go on. It has been a true privilege to be part of it so far. My memory is full of good seminars and intriguing discussions with learned colleagues. These memories I cherish as true, historically and existentially, elaborating them narratively as time passes. ▲

SUMMARY

This response presents the reason for studying memory and hermeneutics in depth and employs hermeneutical categories of memory to discuss the contributions of four prominent New Testament scholars. The motive for selecting memory and hermeneutics as the topic of more profound study has to do both with the different phases of my academic life and environment, moving from historical research as an activity of distanced reconstruction of the past to approaching it as a more subtle negotiation with the past in the present, as well as with an increasing awareness of the inherently hermeneutical dimension of memory. The three categories of memory that are necessary in order for memory to be memory are referentiality, narrativity, and temporality. Memory without referentiality turns into pure imagination; memory without narrativity turns into a static archive; memory without temporality turns into achronic fantasy. From this hermeneutical perspective, I comment on the four articles proposing ways to use theories of memory in the study of the New Testament Gospels and indicate new avenues emerging from working with Paul's letter to the Romans.

David Bentley Hart. *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2019. 222 s.

David Bentley Hart är en välmeriterad amerikansk filosof och ortodox teolog. Han konverterade från den anglikanska kyrkan till östlig ortodoxi. Hans arbete omfattar ett brett spektrum av ämnen och genrer. Han är en produktiv essäist och har skrivit om så olika ämnen som konst, litteratur, religion, filosofi, film, baseboll och politik. Han är också författare av skönlitteratur. Som religionsvetare handlar hans arbete mycket om klassisk, medeltida och kontinental filosofi, filosofisk och systematisk teologi, patristiska texter och syd- och östasiatisk kultur, religion, litteratur, filosofi och metafysik.

Han publicerade en egen översättning av Nya testamentet 2017, vilket är av intresse i sammanhanget, eftersom han där lägger grunden för sin huvudtes i *That All Shall Be Saved*, nämligen att tron på eviga straff bygger på missförstånd och felöversättningar av Bibelns texter.

Han anser att orden ”evig” och ”evighet” felöversatts och missförstått, något som han försökt rätta till med sin egen översättning av Nya testamentet och skriver i sin korta inledning till *That All Shall Be Saved* att:

My chief ambition in what follows, therefore, is to try to think through certain questions about “the last things” in a way that might naturally bring me nearer to the obscure origins of the Christian conception of reality, when the earliest texts of Christian scripture were still being written, edited, sorted through, and designated as either canonical or spurious. My hope is that I can assume a vantage somehow “innocent” of any number of presuppositions belonging to the inheritance of later developments in Christian culture. In a sense, in fact, I regard this book as a companion to, or additional piece in the critical apparatus of, my

recent *The New Testament: A Translation* (s. 2–3).

I ett avslutande kapitel till sin bibelöversättning kommenterar han vissa centrala ord. Det första ordet är *aiōnios*, som på engelska vanligtvis översätts med ”eternal” eller ”everlasting”. Adjektivet bygger på substantivet *aiōn*, vilket ”can sometimes mean a period of endless duration, but which more properly, throughout the whole of ancient and late antique Greek literature, means ‘an age’, or ‘a long period of time’ of indeterminate duration, or even just ‘a substantial interval’” (*The New Testament*, s. 538).

Men talade inte Jesus om *eviga* straff? Inte om du frågar Hart. Huruvida detta stämmer eller inte visar sig vara irrelevant, eftersom Hart anser att Jesus talade arameiska och kunde läsa hebreiska och tillägger: ”if he could speak any *koinē* Greek, he certainly did not do so when teaching his disciples or preaching to the multitudes in Galilee and Judaea” (*The New Testament*, s. 541). Den slutsats Hart drar av detta är:

There can be no doubt that the words *aiōn* and *aiōnios* correspond to various forms and uses of the Hebrew *olam* or the Aramaic *alma*, both of which most literally mean something at an immense distance, on the far horizon, hidden from view, and which are usually used to mean ”age”, or ”period of long duration”, or a time hidden in the depths of the far past or far future (*The New Testament*, s. 541).

That All Shall Be Saved består utöver den korta introduktionen av tre delar: ”The Question of an Eternal Hell”, ”Apokatastasis: Four Meditations” och ”What May Be Believed”.

Harts huvudargument mot infernaliserna är att tron på eviga straff är oförenlig med tron på Guds godhet, vilket är ett nog så övertygande argument. Vad han försöker visa med sin bok är att:

if Christianity taken as a whole is indeed an entirely coherent and credible system of belief, the universalist understanding of its message is the only one possible. And, quite imprudently, I say that without the least hesitation or qualification (s. 3).

Detta är den enda möjliga tolkningen, om man som Hart menar att universalismen har bibliskt stöd medan infernalismen saknar sådant.

Oavsett om Harts utläggningar är riktiga eller ej, så återstår ett problem som flera recenserter påpekat: om eviga straff inte betyder eviga i normal bemärkelse utan refererar till en begränsad tid, så måste det väl också gälla för evigt liv. Detta är en slutsats som Hart undviker att diskutera.

Harts översättningar och bok är intressant och hans universalism tilltalande för dem som anser att talet om eviga straff är svårt att förena med tron på en kärleksfull Skapare, men hans utläggningar har inte helt övertygat mig om att Människosonen inte gav uttryck för föreställningen om eviga straff.

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Mårten Björk. *The Politics of Immortality in Rosenzweig, Barth and Goldberg: Theology and Resistance between 1914–1945*. London: Bloomsbury. 2022. 269 s.

I en artikel nyligen i *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* (98:3) lyfte Mårten Björk på nytt frågan om teologins förhållande till religionsvetenskapen. Han knyter inledningsvis an till en debatt härom året i tidskriften *Respons* (6/2020), mellan Klas Grinell och Simon Sorgenfrei och Göran Larsson, om vad metodologisk agnosticism kan innebära vid studiet av religiösa föreställningar. Medan Sorgenfrei och Larsson försvarar en traditionell sociologisk-positivistisk hållning, som inte tar ställning i teologiska sanningsanspråk

utan behandlar varje religiös föreställning som ett socialt faktum, menar Grinell att den socialkonstruktivistiska teoribildningen visar att gränsen alltid redan är korsad, och att även religionsvetenskapen förvaltar normativa ideal.

I sitt långa bidrag till denna diskussion vill Björk upprätta en brygga genom att försvara (den systematiska) teologin som ett konfessionslöst studium av det konfessionella, men som genom sitt rekonstruerande av dess trosinnehåll samtidigt kan tjäna som grund för en positiv konfessionell teologi i liberalteologisk anda. Mot dem som likt Joel Halldorf argumenterar för att den akademiska teologin alltmör saknar relevans för en kyrklig trosbaserad praktik vill Björk försvara den ”tvårumslära” som separerar kyrka och universitet, utifrån en distinktion mellan juridisk och kritisk auktoritet. Kyrkan blir då platsen för en tillämplande utläggning av texten, medan universitetet förvaltar en kritisk textpraktik. Den akademiska teologin är till sist ”studiet av det teologiska arkivet och dess influenser”, vilket han ser som en outhärlig gren av en universell akademisk kultur och exemplifierar med aktuella bidrag av Ola Sigurdson och Jayne Svenungsson.

Det är inte uppenbart hur Björks syn på teologin i slutändan skiljer sig från vad religionsvetenskapen också menar sig göra. Även den menar sig ju utifrån sin metodologiska agnosticism studera religiösa trosföreställningar och deras samhälleliga verkan i en kritisk-vetenskaplig anda. Han snuddar dock vid problemets kärna när han via Paul Verdeyen återkallar hur den västerländska moderniteten strikt kom att skilja mellan vetenskap och andra andliga praktiker. Medan teologin bevarar denna förbindelse, inte minst i praktiskt hänseende genom prästutbildningen, har den kategoriskt avyttrats inom en religionsvetenskap som betraktar icke-konfessionalitet som sitt definierande drag. Detta programmatiska vetenskapliga etos är på samma gång dess styrka och dess svaghet, då det stundtals manifesterar sig i en förbluffande tondövhet inför just de

fenomen som man menar sig vara expert på, nämligen religiösa föreställningar och religiöst liv.

Viktiga ledstjärnor för Björk i hans för-svar för teologins plats inom den akademiska kulturen är John Henry Newman och den mindre kände tyske teologen Erik Peterson. Den senare markerade likaså att universitetet utgör en plats för ett sekulärt studium av den heliga texten, samtidigt som han öppnar möjligheten för en inspirerad pneumatisk utläggning inom kyrkan och tros-gemenskapen. I Björks avhandling från 2018, *Life outside Life: The Politics of Immortality 1914–1945*, upptogs en stor del av en analys av just Petersons teologiska tänkande. Inför omstöpnings av avhandlingen till den bok som nu föreligger på förlaget Bloomsbury, har denna del plockats ut och ska enligt förordet omstöpas till en separat studie. Under den nya titeln *The Politics of Immortality* är det nu en bok i tre delar som behandlar tre separata författarskap: Franz Rosenzweig, Karl Barth och Oskar Goldberg. Den övergripande ramen är alltså ”odödlighetens politik”, med ett fokus på hur teologin kom att träda fram som ”motstånd”, inte bara i en politisk mening (vilket var fallet med Barth, vars anti-nazism representerade en principfast gren av den reformerta kristenheten). Med *motstånd* vill Björk lyfta fram också hur teologin under den första hälften av 1900-talet utmanar vetenskapens materialistiska, deterministiska och biologiska människosyn, med en hållning som betraktar livet som mer än just bara liv, som ett ”liv bortom livet”. Genom att lyfta fram dessa heterodoxa röster vill han också problematisera gängse sekulariseringsteorier, här framför allt exemplifierade av Hans Blumenberg.

Det är en på ytan brokig samling gestalter som samlas mellan bokens pärmar. Här finns den ur ett evangeliskt kristet teologiskt perspektiv självklara centralgestalten Barth, på vars svenska mottagande (och icke-mottagande) Björks handledare Ola Sigurdson en gång själv disputerade. Här finns också den tysk-judiske Hegel-forskaren och

översättaren av den hebreiska bibeln, Franz Rosenzweig, som gick bort i förtid i sjukdom efter att ha publicerat en av 1900-talets mest egenartade filosofiskt-teologiska verk, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1922). Här finns slutligen den mindre kände mytologisk-politiska utopisten och läkaren Goldberg, som utifrån en numerologisk tolkning av den hebreiska bibeln argumenterade för ett återvändande till en ursprunglig judendomen i trots mot en kapitalistisk och materialistisk och nationalistisk kultur. Även om de levde och verkade under samma tidsrymd och kände till varandra, finns få direkta förbindelser mellan dem. Björks tanke med att foga samman just dessa gestalter under ett tak motiveras av att han tycker sig spåra en gemensam tankefigur bakom deras olika ansatser: nämligen att skriva fram en bibliskt grundad livshållning som en på samma gång antimodern och hypermodern motståndsstrategi mot biologiseringen och rasifieringen av människan.

Tyngdpunkten i texten ligger på den omsorgsfulla rekonstruktionen av de respektive författarskapen, snarare än på utvecklandet av den sammanbindande ramen. Den senare förblir mer associativ. Bakom deras olikartade yttre har Björk sett något, ett tankemönster, en gemensam hållning, som trots olika religiösa hemvister och politiska slutdestinationer, ändå låter dem belysa varandra. I centrum står alltså frågan om *liv*. Det är epokens definierande tema, kring vilket den både kommer samman och faller isär. Det är ju en tid som lyfter fram viljan till överlevnad som en allt underliggande strävan. Det är en tid som definierar politiken som en kamp om livsrum och som biopolitik. Det är därtill en tid som vill rädda det genuint mänskliga som tidigare förståtts som ande och intellekt som just en kvalificerad form av liv. Hos Nietzsche samlas tidens motstridiga livsfilosofiska energier på ett förtäta sätt, som både revolt och utopi. Som individ är människan ändlig och utan hopp om evighet, men som släkte är hon ännu ett oinfriat löfte. Medan teologin tidigare menat sig kunna utlova individuell uppståndelse och evigt liv, innebär

både den biologiska och existensfilosofiska bilden av människan en djupare intellektuell utmaning. Björks protagonister förenas i sitt sökande efter en förståelse av liv som mer än biologiskt liv, samtidigt som de inte förnekar individens ändlighet. Rosenzweig är det tydligaste exemplet. Hans bok börjar med ordet *död*, som människans oavvisliga öde och i en kritik mot varje idealism som försöker väja för dess realitet, för att sedan efter fyrahundra sidor leda läsaren fram till ett evigt *liv*, som bokens sista ord.

I samtliga fall lyfter Björk fram hur de tar spjärn i en anti-reduktionistisk kritik av vetenskapens biologisering av människan, samtidigt som ingen av dem har en konventionell syn på uppståndelse och evigt liv. Det är tvärtom utifrån denna nya existentiella och teologiska utmaning som de på olika sätt mejslar fram sina tankar om ett liv som omsluter och överskrider döden, utan att därmed utlova någon individuell överlevnad. Detta andra liv är inte heller ett liv som kommer *efter* detta liv i en gängse kronologisk mening. Det är snarare ett liv som öppnar sig för den som kan gå sin ändlighet till mötes i en mer radikal mening.

Björk följer och återskapar på ett imponerande sätt den inre logiken hos dessa strävanden, samtidigt som han för det mesta avstår från att ställa de kritiska filosofiska frågor som hade kunna driva texten längre. I Barths fall vore det exempelvis rimligt att problematisera hur hans livsevangelium förmår hantera den underliggande nihilism som ligger snubblande nära i bilden av den enskilda döden som en död från döden in i livet, eller att kriget skulle visa en väg mot guds evighet. Alla dessa tre författare kämpar med att få ihop sina intellektuella livsprojekt, och alla närmar de sig gränsen mot det absurda, för att just kunna peka bortom en rådande tankematrix. Det öppnar dem för både en kritisk och en symptomatisk läsart, medan Björk som regel intar rollen av symptomatisk uttolkare. I deras inbördes motstridiga ansatser söker han snarare efter en bestående livsfilosofisk och politisk potential i en tid

som fortsatt präglas av kapitalism, nationalism och destruktiv rovdrift på naturen.

Det kanske filosofiskt mest utmanande draget som binder samman de tre studerade författarna gäller deras syn på tid och historia. Medan teologin under 1800-talet, liksom kulturen i stort, var präglad av det historiska medvetandet, så är det ett slående drag hos den generation som stiger fram under mellankrigstiden att man ifrågasätter historicismen som övergripande tankemodell. Det är Walter Benjamin som i sina sista desperata historiefilosofiska anteckningar kanske tydligast givit röst åt denna revolt mot det historiska som sådant, mot den konventionella kronologins separering av nu och då och mot tanken att det förflutna är blott och bart förflutet. Men hos alla de personer som Björk lyfter fram återfinns liknande tankegångar. Mest provocerande är den återkommande idén om hur det liv som öppnar sig på andra sidan det ändligen biologiska livet ska omfatta också de döda, som därigenom lyfts ur sin blotta förflutenhet och tar plats i en temporalitet som omfattar allt som har varit.

Återigen handlar det om en tankemodell som på ytan först kan te sig fullständigt spekulativ, men som ligger i linje med dåtidens mest radikala anti-historicistiska hermeneutiska experiment. Björks välvilliga utläggningar öppnar blicken mot denna möjlighet, samtidigt som han avstår från att försöka göra den filosofiskt begriplig, genom jämförelser med likartade filosofiska experiment, hos Benjamin och kanske i ännu högre grad hos Heidegger. Björk kan genom sin tolkningspraktik sägas exemplifiera sin ovan citerade hållning, nämligen att söka aktivera det teologiska arkivet och dess verkan, men utan att egentligen försöka ställa det till svars. Liksom i tanken på det eviga livet bortom livet, förblir tanken på de dödas räddning genom en annan tidsordning till sist därför mer av ett fascinerande poetiskt löfte än en begriplig tankefigur.

Samtidigt som han fascinerar av både Rosenzweigs och Goldbergs äventyrliga teologiskt-filosofiska experiment, framstår Björk

till sist som mest befreundad med Barth. Hans teologi framställs här på ett klagörande sätt, där den reser sig efter Darwin och Nietzsche, i Kierkegaards anda. Den tar inte strid med naturvetenskapens världsbild, men den böjer sig inte heller för dess psykologisering av människans själsliv. I stället insisterar den på att läsa världen ur skapelsens och uppenbarelseens perspektiv, som återspeglings och tilltal med ett kristologiskt fokus. För den som söker en närmare relation till gudomen kan Barth uppfattas som alltför sval och distanserad, men han har en filosofisk konsekvens som gör hans breda genomslag inom evangelisk kristenhet begriplig. Björk gör ett bra arbete med att framställa hans ärende, även om han som sagt duckar för en del av dess paradoxer.

Den centrala tankeoperation som de alla på olika sätt inbjuder till, är att kunna vrida på själva bilden av den faktiska verkliga världen så att den öppnar sig mot en annan värld. Det handlar om att se allting ur skapelsens perspektiv, och hur denna uppenbarelse i sin tur öppnar för räddning eller frälsning. Med denna blickvändning kan även den enskilda döden bli till en port för att se livet ur ett helt nytt perspektiv. För en sådan hållning är Gud inte längre – som det tydligt sägs hos Barth – teologins objekt, utan snarare dess subjekt. Teologin framhäver människan som *tiltaland* från första stund, som någon som ställts i fråga. Hennes ändlighet är då vad som också blottar henne för vad som överskrider hennes enskilda liv och ställer henne till förfogande för en räddande nåd. Teologins uppgift blir här att utveckla ett tal som kan ge röst och mening åt en sådan existentiell grundposition.

Barth beskriver Paulus utläggning i Romarbrevet som just en sådan ”abnorm, irreguljär, revolutionär attack mot den mänskliga världen” (s. 92). Därmed markerar han också en ny ton, som explicit avviker från den mer historiska och humanistiska teologin som representeras av Schleiermacher, och som är karaktäristisk för mellankrigstidens radikaliserade diskurs. Det är en mer

kompromisslös form av teologi, som vågar sig på att bryta det rationalistiska kontraktet, och som därmed också öppnar för nya former av ortodoxi.

Var Björk positionerar sig själv i allt detta är inte helt tydligt. Hans ställningstagande för en akademisk teologi som ett inlevelsefullt men historiskt och vetenskapligt grundat utforskande av det ”teologiska arkivet” exemplifieras på ett berömvärdt sätt av denna bok, som lyfter fram och för samman tre var för sig fascinerande och krävande teologiska författarskap inom ett övergripande tidsdiagnostiskt ramverk, samtidigt som han låter antyda att här finns potentiella resurser för att tolka vår samtid. Men genom att varken bryta dessa röster på något mer utförligt sätt mot varandra eller att kontextualisera dem i termer av något annat, blir avhandlingens egen röst dock svävande. Genom att inte på allvar aktivera också det ”filosofiska arkivet” framträder de som lite godtyckliga fokaliseringar på en scen vars vidare position och syftning förblir outvecklad. Den tyska idealismens stora och övergripande strävan från Kant och framåt var att utveckla en ny ram för att tala om vetenskap och tro, och därmed om förhållandet mellan filosofi och teologi. Det är delvis ur Hegels ansats att situera religionen inom en andens historia som den moderna komparativa religionsvetenskapen växer fram. Trots att alla de författare som diskuteras – och i synnerhet Rosenzweig, som själv formades som Hegel-forskare i en nykantiansk miljö – är präglade av detta tankemässiga landskap, skymtar det här bara förbi i förbifarten, i några anspelningar på Schellings sena filosofi om myten. Schelling var viktig för både Rosenzweig och Goldberg. Men det räcker inte som ramverk för att förstå de strider och utmaningar som redan hade tornat upp sig när de tar till orda. Före dem finns också Diltheys stora projekt att i Hegels anda återskapa den humanistiska forskningen som en andlig praktik, byggd på en förståelse av just *livet*. Där finns som sagt också Nietzsches kompromisslösa kritik av den nedärvda religionen och teologin,

tillsammans med Zarathustras nya livs-evangelium. Alla Björks protagonister skriver i skuggan av hans verk, medan han i boken förblir perifer.

Om man fäster blicken på ett lite större avstånd än Björk är det fascinerande att se hur teologin, eller snarare det ”teologiska arkivet”, för att återigen använda hans terminologi, aktiveras inom en bredare kulturell horisont som innefattar flera av de ledande filosofiska och vetenskapsteoretiska skolbildningarna vid denna tid. Det är likartade insatser, där man experimenterar med ett utvidgat livsbegrepp, just genom att pröva alternativa sätt att tänka kring tid och historia. Det gäller bland annat Bergsons filosofi om den skapande utvecklingen som under denna period har ett oerhört genomslag. Det gäller också Husserls fenomenologi, som på ett delvis likaklingande sätt byggs kring en tanke om ”intentionalt liv”, som en icke-biologisk, icke-naturaliserbar ”transcendental” och intersubjektiv andlighet, varigenom världen först blir gripbar. Genom sådana paralleller blir det tydligt att de disciplinära gränserna mellan filosofi och teologi alltid redan har korsats kring just frågan om vad *liv* ytterst sett är och hur dess verklighet ska tänkas i relation till *tid*. Medan den teologiska diskursen samlas kring frågor om skapelse, uppenbarelse och frälsning, så kretsar de filosofiska teorierna snarare kring sanning, frihet, och transcendens. Björk visar att dessa delvis bortglömda teologiska röster har en bäring på frågor som aldrig har förlorat sin relevans, tvärtom. Men boken pekar också mot vikten av en fördjupad dialog med den bredare filosofiska situation ur vilken de träder fram.

När det gäller den politiska bäringen av de författare som boken belyser, så är det ett tema som framträder som särskilt relevant för vår tid, nämligen Rosenzweigs och Goldbergs försök att utveckla en postnationell politik som vilar på den judiska erfarenheten av att leva i diaspora. Till skillnad från de generationskamrater som valde sionismen, söker de sig i stället mot ett kosmopolitiskt medvetande som en form av

universalism grundad i en reell statslöshet. I en värld med växande flyktingströmmar, och med en tilltagande destruktiv nynationalism som alltmer kommit att prägla också den sionistiska idén, är deras röster i dag inte bara minnen av en väg som inte togs, utan tvärtom levande påminnelser om vikten av att tänka bredare kring politik och kulturell gemenskap.

Sammantaget är detta en imponerande bok som omsorgsfullt återskapar ett flätverk av originella och vittsyftande teologiska röster ur mellankrigstidens Europa. Den bekräftar Björks eget försvar av teologin som ett unikt akademiskt rum som upprätthåller förmågan att läsa och tolka texter som annars skulle sjunka ner i ett gåtfullt mörker. Inklämd mellan en sociologiskt orienterad religionsvetenskap och en ofta historielös filosofi som avyttrat de historiska och hermeneutiska redskap som krävs för att träda in i ett skapande samtal med ett djupare intellektuellt arv, blir den på så vis också en positiv manifestation av sin egen disciplin.

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Chantal Desol. *Kristenhetens slut som västerlandets samhällsbärare*. Skellefteå: Norma. 2022. 131 s.

Att kristenheten och kristendomen skulle stå inför ett slut är i den kulturkritiska och kulturteologiska litteraturen en ofta upprepad tankefigur, som vid närmare betraktande av saken inte har någon omedelbar verklighetskontakt. I globalt perspektiv sprids kristen tro fortare än någonsin, och trots en eskalerande ökning av världens totala befolkning håller kristendomen sin ställning som världens största religion med ungefär en tredjedel av hela jordens befolkning. I Europa och USA, den så kallade västvärlden, är fortfarande cirka sjuttio procent av befolkningen benägna att uppge att de är kristna. Så varför detta tal om kristenhetens slut?

I boktiteln på Chantal Desols nyöversatta bok på detta tema finns svaret, närmare bestämt i hennes idé om att kristen trosutövning inte längre driver på den politiska, moraliska och kulturella utvecklingen i det västerländska samhället. Många människor betraktar sig fortfarande som kristna och den västerländska kulturen är i stor utsträckning byggd på kristna värden och ideal, som i sin tur kommer att vara betydelsefulla för varje omförhandling av sanningsförståelse, sedlighet och rättsuppfattning. Men detta står enligt Desol inte i strid med det faktum att kristenheten slutgiltigt håller på att förlora kampen om att definiera framtiden i västerlandet.

Hur lyder då hennes resonemang? I kortet menar hon att kristenheten som samhällsbärande definieras av det radikala skifte som ägde rum efter år 313 och det så kallade Milanoediktet. Konstantin den store (272–337) möjliggjorde då för kristna att verka öppet, efter århundraden av romersk förföljelse. Bara drygt sextio år senare, år 380 under Theodosius den store (347–395), utropades kristendomen till statsreligion i romarriket. På remarkabelt kort tid kom alltså kristenheten att etablera sig som en kulturell och samhälllig kraft som på punkt efter punkt definierade en ny riktning för framtida generationer i Europa vad gäller kult, politik, sedlighet och rättsuppfattning.

Desol beskriver i detta sammanhang en normativ vändning som innebar att man på sedlighetens område satte sig upp mot flera romerska bruk, exempelvis homosexualitet, skilsmässa, självmord och barnamord (abort). I dag kan vi enligt Desol se en motsvarande normativ vändning i samhället genom att dessa fenomen nu återigen blir moraliskt och legalt accepterade, efter 1 700 år av kristen dominans. Bland annat knyter hon 1900-talets socialkonservativa och fascistiska maktsträvanden till ett bredare scenario av (misslyckat) försvar för den kristna staten och dess värderingar mot modernitetens sekulära statsbyggen (medan nazismen uppfattas som hednisk).

Bakom denna normativa skiftning i dag skissar Desol ett annat skifte, som hon kallar ontologiskt. Hon menar att det normativa skiftet bygger på mer fundamentala principer. Den kristna dominansen vilar enligt henne på monoteismen som utvecklades långt före den kristna eran, men som först i det kristnade Romarriket får ett fullödigt genomslag. Också detta skifte i den tidiga civilisationens historia har sin motsvarighet i ett nutida ontologiskt återvändande till exempelvis panteism, vitalism och ekologism, som i sin tur kan förstås i relation till sekulära fenomen som liberalism och modern demokrati. Kristendomens hierarkiska maktordningar har successivt avskaffats, även om gamla principer ständigt ”återupptas och förvrängs” i denna process, vilket för Desol innebär att man i sista hand inte med någon entydighet kan urskilja vad som är kristet och vad som är en övervunnen kristenhet. Desol skriver: ”På samma sätt som den spirande kristendomen intog och kristnade de hedniska templen – på samma sätt kommer moderniteten att inrätta sig i moral och antropologi med kristet ursprung, för att använda dem på annat sätt och ibland kidnappa bruket och förståelsen” (s. 93). Desol sörjer inte den dominanta kristenheten utan verkar se det förgångna som ett ”främmande land”, och ett ”önskat” sådant (s. 129). Men var hon sedan hamnar i sin förståelse av nutida kristet liv blir inte klart, annat än mycket vagt i de avslutande orden från Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944): ”att sakta vandra mot en källa” är alternativet till en situation där ”evangeliet styr staten” (s. 131).

Det finns givetvis mycket mer av innehållsligt intresse att referera. Men utifrån det sagda vill jag, för det första, kritiskt påpeka att Desol skriver en bok om kristenhetens slut och det kristna arvets ambivalenta fortlevnad så sent som 2021 (året för den franska originalutgåvan), med förvånansvärt få referenser till tidigare tänkare. Exempelvis föregrep Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) redan 1882 Desols resonemang – förvisso med en

annan ingång och i ett annat tonläge – när han i *Den glada vetenskapen* hävdade: ”Gud är död: men så som människorna är beskaffade, kommer det kanske att ännu i årtusenden framåt finnas grottor där man visar hans skugga. – Och vi – vi måste besegra också hans skugga” (*Samlade skrifter*, vol. 5, s. 103). De perspektiv som erbjuds i Desols bok är för den som följt 1900-talets och det tidiga 2000-talets diskussion inom politisk teologi och sekularitetsdebatt allt annat än nydanande. I ett populärt sammanhang behöver detta inte bli till en helt nedgörande kritik, men med tanke på den politiska utvecklingen i Europa vad gäller kristendomens nya aktualitet inom framväxande nationalkonservatism blir det högst oklart hur man ska förstå bokens ärende.

För det andra, och i anslutning till detta, hopar sig frågor kring den underliggande distinktion mellan ”kristet” och ”kristet” som ständigt tränger sig på i läsningen. Å ena sidan tycks Desol utgå från att autentiskt kristet liv har sin grund i en sanningens ”källa”, å andra sidan tycks hon se den kristna utvecklingen i historien som distinkt och karaktäristisk, närmast som ett öde. Den teoretiska och teologiska komplexitet som ligger i diskussionen kring hur den kristna kultur- och samhällsutvecklingen hänger samman med den kristna trons djupaste innehåll blir i Desols framställning aldrig tydliggjord, eftersom hon så entydigt bestämmer kristenheten som en samhällsbärande kraft med ett bestämt fokus. I själva verket är hela den kristna historien i västerlandet full av motsägelser och i varje tid spelas radikala konflikter upp som kullkastar de svepande generaliseringar som förekommer i Desols framställning.

I Desols generaliseringar framkommer förvisso saker som är intressanta och tänkvärda, det ska inte förnekas. Men de flesta brännande områden för dagens teologiska och kulturfilosofiska debatter lyser med sin frånvaro. Främst saknar man en ansats till förståelse av islams nya närvaro i västerlandet, både som religiös och politisk kraft, samt den komplexa och mångfacetterade

kristna reaktion som denna närvaro har orsakat, där hela den kristna historiens olika reaktionsmönster kan skönjas i sin ofta totala motsägelsefullhet. Att i stället – i en anda av spelad överblick och distans – tala om en sakta vandring mot en källa är helt enkelt inte övertygande. Kristenheten har för övrigt inget slut, vare sig i västerlandet eller någon annanstans.

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Francis Jonbäck, Lina Langby & Oliver Li (red.). *Vidgade perspektiv på lidandets problem*. Stockholm: Dialogos. 2022. 385 s.

Ännu en bok om det religionsfilosofiska problemkomplex som går under beteckningen ondskans eller lidandets problem (eller teodicéproblemet), kan det verkligen vara något? Så länge man uppehåller sig vid det så kallade teoretiska problemet – om Gud är både allgod och allsmäktig, hur kan då Gud tillåta allt lidande som förekommer? – så kan onekligen de försök som görs för att försvara en sådan gud ofta förefalla tämligen långsökta och till och med provocerande. Den här antologin kopplar dock ett annat grepp – eller snarare flera grepp – om ämnet, vilket gör den synnerligen läsvärd.

Bokens tretton författare är samtliga verkamma inom filosofi, religionsfilosofi och/eller teologi, de flesta i Sverige. De tre redaktörerna är disputerade eller doktorander i religionsfilosofi vid teologiska institutionen i Uppsala.

Del I, ”Kritiska perspektiv”, innehåller fyra kapitel som kritiserar eller problematiserar själva projektet att överhuvudtaget diskutera lidandets problem så som man gör inom de traditionella teodicéerna, ett förhållningssätt som man brukar benämna ”anti-teodicé”. Filosofen Toby Betenson gör detta utifrån ett moraliskt perspektiv, alltså uppfattningen att det är något moraliskt suspekt med att försöka försvara eller förklara det faktum att Gud

tillåter ondska och lidande. En som gör detta visar okänslighet gentemot det fruktansvärda lidande människor utsätts för. Antiteodicéer tar ofta sin utgångspunkt i Fjodor Dostojevskijs (1821–1881) roman *Bröderna Karamazov*, vilken också blir föremål för Elena Namlis kapitel om lidandets teologi. I romanen låter författaren de tre bröderna gestalta olika sätt att förhålla sig till och leva i en värld full av lidande och ondska, av vilka Ivans är det mest radikala. Ett kritiskt förhållningssätt till hur man traditionellt brukar diskutera lidandets problem finner man även inom mycket av feministisk filosofi och teologi. Detta behandlas av Lina Langby. Hon framhåller det problematiska i att tala om Gud som allvetande och allsmäktig då dessa begrepp är alltför sammankopplade till ett patriarkalt symbolspråk.

Den andra delen, ”Alternativa problem”, består av fem kapitel som tar upp lidandets problem ur lite andra synvinklar än de traditionella. Till exempel behandlas på vilket sätt problemet kan utgöra ett sådant även för ateister, vilket är intressant med tanke på att det brukar framhållas – även bland troende – som ett kraftfullt argument mot Guds existens. Religionsfilosofen Yujin Nagasawa menar att såväl teister som ateister har problem att förena acceptandet av ”systemiskt lidande” med ”existentiell optimism”. Systemiskt lidande är det lidande som de evolutionära processerna – tack vare vilka vi finns till – för med sig. Existentiell optimism är uppfattningen att världen trots allt är värdefull och god att leva i. Nagasawa menar att de flesta människor omfattar båda dessa tankar, men att teisten har lättare att hantera konflikten eftersom hen tror att det existerar andra verkligheter än den materiella världen. Lidandet som en konkret erfarenhet i våra liv behandlas även av Francis Jonbäck och Thomas Ekstrand i deras text som tar sin utgångspunkt i en analys av Esaias Tegnér’s (1782–1846) dikt ”Mjältsjukan”; samt av Jonbäck och Carl-Reinhold Bråkenhielm i kapitlet om Guds frånvaro eller tystnad. En tanke som återkommer är

att det trots allt finns anledning att känna tillförsikt och hopp. Frågan om det fruktansvärda och eviga lidande de som begått felsteg, enligt vissa religiösa argument, tvingas utstå i helvetet, behandlas av filosofen Alex Gillham. En av de tankar som avvisas är den absurda idén att eviga lidanden på något sätt skulle kunna vara ett rättvist straff för gärningar som, hur ondskefulla de än är, trots allt ändå är begränsade.

I antologins tredje del, ”Alternativa perspektiv”, får vi möta andra livsåskådningar än traditionellt kristna, och hur lidandets problem kan hanteras inom dessa. Agnosticismen, ett nog så intressant ämne i ett land som Sverige där få säger sig vara troende men samtidigt tvekar inför att identifiera sig som ateister, behandlas av Francis Jonbäck. Religiös fikcionalism, alltså uppfattningen att de religiösa berättelserna är ren fiktion och det religiösa livet en ”låtsaslek”, behandlas av Carl-Johan Palmqvist, som nyligen disputerade i filosofi vid Lunds universitet på en avhandling om agnostisk religion. Lidandets problem finns även för en fikcionalist, då en fiktion måste vara såväl koherent som trovärdig för att vara meningsfull. Processteismen tas upp i ett särskilt kapitel av Lina Langby och Oliver Li. Denna inriktning erbjuder ett sätt att förhålla sig till lidandets problem genom att hävda att Gud inte kan förhindra ondskan eller lidandet. Gud är nämligen, enligt processteismen, inte allsmäktig på samma sätt som inom traditionell teism, och människan har en reell handlingsfrihet. Man menar också att endast en sådan gud är värd vår tillbedjan – till skillnad från den traditionella teismens gud som kan hindra lidande men inte gör det. I bokens sista kapitel resonerar Li, som bland annat intresserat sig för dialogen och relationen mellan olika religiösa traditioner, om huruvida lidandets problem låter sig förenas med tanken på karma och återfödelse. För en som tror på återfödelse och karma är det inte självklart att meningslöst lidande förekommer överhuvudtaget: lidandet kan ju vara orsakat av gärningar i ens tidigare liv (”vedergällande

karma”) och/eller ha som syfte att man ska växa och mogna som människa (”utvecklande karma”).

En diskussion som hade varit värd lite mer utrymme är det försvar för Gud som tar fasta på att Gud skapat oss med en fri vilja, och att det är människan själv som väljer att göra ont. Man kan nämligen fråga sig varför Gud, när han ändå hade chansen, inte skapade oss människor sådana att vi ständigt vill göra gott och vill undvika att skada varandra? På så sätt hade ju det goda som människans fria vilja utgör kunnat förverkligas utan att allt fruktansvärt lidande hade behövt äga rum. Frågan berörs visserligen men hade varit värd ett eget kapitel. Men detta var bara en liten anmärkning.

Boken är given kurslitteratur i alla kurser där lidandets problem behandlas, men bör också kunna läsas av den som inte är insatt i ämnet. Den sistnämnda läsaren rekommenderar jag att börja med bokens utmärkta introduktionskapitel för att därefter ta itu med de perspektiv hen anser mest intressanta. En särskild eloge till de tre redaktörerna som inte bara skrivit egna kapitel och översatt de utländska texterna, utan även lyckats samla in och sammanställa bidragen av vilka alla utom ett är specialskrivna för detta ändamål.

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Vanja Mosbach. *Voices of Muslim Feminists: Navigating Tradition, Authority and the Debate about Islam*. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. 2022. 225 s.

Att undersöka hur kvinnor som identifierar sig som muslimer förhåller sig till och positionerar sig när det gäller frågor som rör kvinnors plats och funktion i samhället i relation till deras muslimska identitet och tradition är ett viktigt och relevant religionssociologiskt ämne. Ur detta perspektiv är Vanja Mosbachs avhandling ett välkommet och behövt tillskott till forskningen om islam

och muslimer i Sverige.

I studien ingår åtta så kallade nyckelinformationer och det är deras resonemang som utgör grunden i Mosbachs avhandling som består av tio kapitel. Avhandlingens första del innehåller fem kapitel där författaren presenterar forskningsfrågor, tidigare forskning samt teoretiska och metodologiska utgångspunkter. Fokus är här framför allt en diskussion om begrepp som ”muslim”, ”religion”, ”feminism” och religiös individualisering. Med det senare avses ungefär att religion i högre utsträckning har blivit ett personlig val och att denna förändring hänger ihop med samhällsliga förändringar (globalisering och modernitet) och genom en ökad användning av kommunikationsteknologier har även en försvagning (eller demokratisering) av så kallade traditionella auktoritetens inflytande över tolkning blivit mer påtaglig. I stället för att ”lita på” eller ”följa traditionen” finns i dag ett större utrymme för personlig tolkning, menar många religionssociologer som Mosbach refererar till i sin studie.

I avhandlingens andra del återfinns informationernas egna röster. I denna del är kapitelrubrikerna tydliga och här avhandlas frågor som: ”Aspiring to Self-Representation”, ”Negotiating Islam and Gender Equality in the Private Realm”, ”Negotiating Islam and Gender Equality in the Public Realm” och ”Negotiating Religious Authority”. En förtjänst med den andra delen i avhandlingen är de långa utdragen ur intervjuerna. Dessa kan vara till stor nytta även för framtida forskare som är intresserade av både islam och muslimer i Sverige samt om hur identiteter som baseras på religion förhandlas och tar form i relation till både den enskilda individens behov och det omgivande samhällets förväntningar, krav och förhoppningar.

Samtidigt som studien anknuter och bygger vidare på den etnografiska forskning som bland annat Pia Karlsson Minganti har gjort om muslimska kvinnor bidrar Mosbach med nya och mer uppdaterade röster. På flera sätt har samtalet om islam och muslimer förändrats sedan exempelvis Karlsson

Minganti genomförde sin studie av unga muslimska kvinnor i Sverige. Detta är mycket tydligt i Mosbachs intervjuer och flera av informanterna vittnar om att dagens samhällsklimat har blivit mer ifrågasättande och hårdare gentemot muslimer och inte minst mot kvinnor som väljer att visa sin religiositet. Därmed visar Mosbach att de muslimska kvinnor som ingår i studien är påverkade av och slits mellan interna, lokala och externa faktorer – det vill säga på mikro-, meso- och makronivå – när de resonerar om sina roller som kvinnor och muslimer. Antimuslimska strömningar i samhället, men också patriarkala strukturer bland muslimer och globala händelser som terrorism i islams namn, påverkar hur informanterna förstår sin position och tolkning av islam. Dessa processer är ofta motsägelsefulla och komplexa, men denna typ av förhandlingar är givetvis inte unika för vare sig kvinnor eller muslimer. På denna punkt hade analysen kunnat fördjupas, inte minst genom att ta in religionspsykologiska teorier om hur individens och grupperns självförståelse påverkas av denna typ av processer.

Samtidigt som Mosbach uppvisar en hög grad av självreflexivitet och är nog med att resonera om sina val är det ofta som frågetecken uppstår kring själva metoden. Vad betyder det att informanterna ses som "team mates" och hur påverkas forskarens självständighet av ett sådant lagarbete? Även själva intervjuprocessen är bitvis otydlig och jag efterfrågar en tabell där det är lätt att se hur många gånger, hur länge, och när intervjuerna har genomförts. På flera ställen i avhandlingen finns återkopplingar till vad som bäst kan beskrivas som tidigare samtal mellan Mosbach och hennes informanter. Men på vilka sätt spelar tiden en roll, och kan exempelvis informanternas svar se annorlunda ut om det går lång tid mellan en första och en andra intervju, vilket verkar ha varit fallet i några av Mosbachs intervjuer? På sidan 111 har det till och med gått "a couple of years" mellan intervjuerna. På denna punkt finns en otydlighet och jag önskar därför en mer utförlig diskussion om hur exempelvis

globala händelser eller personliga upplevelser kan påverka hur en person svarar vid ett tillfälle och hur samma person svarar i ett annat sammanhang.

Även om det är viktigt att samla in ny empirisk forskning om islam och muslimer i Sverige är svaren som Mosbachs informanter lämnar inte speciellt innovativa eller nya. Frågor om hur islam ska tolkas och huruvida man ska ägna sig åt tolkning eller följa traditionen är knappast nya frågor. Inte heller frågan om att rena islam från så kallade kulturella tolkningar för att kunna återvända till en "autentisk" islam är knappast ny bland vare sig muslimer eller forskare som skriver om islam och muslimer i västvärlden (utöver redan nämnda Karlsson Minganti har exempelvis Susanne Olsson forskat om dessa frågor i Sverige). För detta ska givetvis inte Mosbach kritiseras, men det är synd att hon inte försöker att diskutera dessa aspekter mer ingående. Som läsare önskar jag mig en tydligare positionering och diskussion om vad som är nytt med avhandlingen.

En fråga där det bränner till är när Mosbach tydligt visar att de flesta av informanterna – alla förutom en – inte har läst eller tagit till sig de islamtolkningar som exempelvis muslimska feminister som Asma Barlas och Amina Wadud har producerat. Att denna litteratur framför allt vänder sig till en universitetsutbildad elit av muslimer (samt icke-muslimska feminister som kanske vill försvara islam) är värt att undersöka djupare. När informanten Shirin säger: "[T]he religious institutions have shown no interest in delivering the Islamic feminist message. That message, if you ask me, is completely absent" (s. 199), är detta något som Mosbach borde ha lyft upp i sin analys. Varför fördjupas inte denna fråga också med de övriga informanterna och varför har författaren inte försökt att besöka de miljöer där informanterna själva tar del av olika typer av muslimska budskap (moskéer, föreningar) för att själv försöka ta reda på vilka diskussioner som finns eller som saknas om kvinnor och islam i dessa miljöer.

Trots dessa kritiska anmärkningar är Mosbachs framställning lätt att läsa och den som är intresserad av att ta del av hur muslimska kvinnor kan förhandla och resonera om identitet, feminism och islam kan hitta flera bra resonemang i avhandlingen.

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Ulrich Schmiedel. *Terror und Theologie: Der religionstheoretische Diskurs der 9/11-Dekade*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2021. 436 s.

När de två flygplanen kraschade in i World Trade Center den 11 september 2001 förändrades världen. De religiöst motiverade attentaten och (den kristna) västvärldens svar på dem aktualiserade på ett skakande sätt religionens roll i allmänhet och dess plats i det offentliga i synnerhet. I sin föreliggande habilitationsskrift argumenterar Ulrich Schmiedel för behovet av en religionsteoretisk reflektion i (den främst engelskspråkiga) teologin, politiken och, särskilt, den politiska teologin i kölvattnet av 11 september-attackerna och "kriget mot terrorn". Den bakomliggande frågan är hur olika religiösa, kulturella och politiska traditioner definierar religion och hur de sedan implementerar denna definition i skapandet och upprätthållandet av sin världsbild i mötet med den andre. Boken uppstår ur en nödvändighet som författaren ser växa fram i vår tids svårighet i att förhålla sig till religionsbegreppet som antingen anses höra hemma enbart i det privata eller tolkas som en kraft som ser sig själv som den slutgiltiga allena rådande makten. Utifrån från analyser av religionsdebatten som uppkom årtiondet efter den 11 september 2001, undersöker Schmiedel möjligheten för en praxisorienterad och dialogökande religionsteori som inte fastnar i uppdelningen mellan vän och fiende som författaren ser som den tyske juristen och politiske teoretikern Carl Schmitts (1888–1985) arv, vars ande

fortfarande "spökar" i debatten.

Jag läser boken i mångt och mycket som ett, om än mycket nyanserat, försvarstal för den politiska teologin och i förlängningen också för liberalteologin, där författaren uppmärksammar oss på vilka nya insikter vi kan nå med hjälp av den liberalteologiska verktygslådan. Den för detta ändamål grundläggande religionsteorin ger Schmiedel attributen *koalitionsbaserad* (*koalitionär*) och *komparativ*. Han ser den grundad i Friedrich Schleiermachers (1768–1834) åtskillnad mellan erfarenhetsintryck och erfarenhetsuttryck i religionen. Den universala transcendentserfarenheten (som erfarenhetsintryck) blir till ett redskap som öppnar för en erkännande och pluralistisk dialog. Religion är inte längre onåbar på en teoretisk nivå utan kan öppnas för kritik och självkritik – *sårbarhet* är ett begrepp som Schmiedel har funnit hos teologen Marianne Moyaert och som införs i sammanhanget här – och blir därmed ett gemensamt reflekterbart element inom den mänskliga livsvärlden.

Det huvudsakliga syftet med boken är att peka på en möjlig väg att undkomma det dominerande tankemönstret "vän och fiende" i mötet med den (religiöst) andre. Schmiedel söker samtalet som bygger på en ärlig öppenhet och föreslår att det ska ta sin utgångspunkt i våra erfarenhetsintryck, det vill säga i våra transcendentserfarenheter. Dessa och deras väg till att bli erfarenhetsuttryck bör sedan reflekteras gemensamt.

Terror und Theologie är uppdelad i nio kapitel. Kapitel 1 erbjuder en introduktion till bokens ämne, nämligen "Religionstheorie am Ground Zero". Schmiedel formulerar sin kritiska frågeställning och presenterar sin lösningsansats här. Hans metodiska grepp utgår från Michel Foucaults (1926–1984) diskursanalys, där fokuset för Schmiedel ligger på att skilja det "sägbara från det osägbara", det vill säga vad som sägs om religion, identitet och relation och vad som inte sägs.

Det andra kapitlet är en redogörelse för bokens grundantagande att Schmitts på 1930-talet utformade identitetsbegrepp som

skapas ”ur intet” i konflikten, delar in aktörerna i tankemönstret vän–fiende. Samuel P. Huntington (1927–2008) vidareutvecklade denna idé och tillämpade den på kulturen i sitt tal om civilisationernas kamp, vilket skildras i bokens tredje kapitel. Dessa tankegångar utgör, på skilda sätt, den religionsteoretiska grunden i de fyra teologiska modeller som författaren presenterar och systematiskt analyserar i de efterföljande kapitlen.

I kapitel 4 presenterar Schmiedel den amerikanska etikern och politiska filosofen Jean Bethke Elshtain (1941–2013) och hennes politiska teologi som bygger på Augustinus (354–430) och Huntington. Elshtain exemplifierar här en position som spelar ut islam och kristendom mot varandra där, förenklat, islam står på den onda sidan och kristendomen – som här liknas med den amerikanska kulturen – på den goda. Det onda ska bekämpas, därav är kriget mot terrorn i praktiken ett krig mot islam.

Kapitel 5 fokuserar på den amerikanske teologen och etikern Stanley Hauerwas och hans pacifistiska position som på många sätt motsätter sig Elshtains. Schmiedel tecknar en teologisk bild av Hauerwas som visar på hur även han fastnar i vän–fiende-mönstret, men där vännen är den fredssökande kyrkan som måste vara stark i kampen mot (den amerikanska) kulturen som är på villovägar. Hos både Elshtain och Hauerwas saknar Schmiedel förmågan till ambivalens. Att vara fast i vän–fiende-mönstret betyder i båda fallen ett svartvitt seende.

Författaren anser att teologen och etikern Rowan Williams, tidigare ärkebiskop av Canterbury, bidrar på ett mer nyanserat sätt. Williams vill hitta en pluralistisk ansats som han bygger upp med hjälp av en apofatisk trinitetsteologi. Genom att bygga på treenigheten säkerställer Williams en öppenhet för den andre som ger honom möjligheten att undkomma vän–fiende-dikotomin och utforma en interaktiv teologisk pluralism. Schmiedel menar att Williams ändå inte lyckas att slå sig fri, då resonemanget hamnar i ett normativt förutsättande av treenigheten

som utesluter andra religioner. Denna brist hos Williams härleder Schmiedel ur avsaknaden av en utarbetad religionsteori i hans modell.

Bristen på självreflektion i debatten finner författaren påtalad av den amerikanske politiske teologen William T. Cavanaugh som ifrågasätter ”myten kring religiöst våld” (s. 257). Cavanaugh anser att problemet ligger i upplysningens åtskillnad mellan det religiösa och det icke-religiösa. Religion anses där per definition vara den nedtryckande, (och därigenom) våldsamma makten som får stå till svars för krig som egentligen har andra orsaker. Men även Cavanaugh hamnar enligt Schmiedel i den Schmittska fällan: Myten om religiöst våld ersätts hos Cavanaugh av myten om icke-religiöst våld. Den liberala staten (och Cavanaugh tolkar liberalteologin som dess konkubin) är våldsutövaren och den heroiska kyrkans roll är att verka för ett annat samhälle. Det Cavanaugh förbiser, enligt Schmiedel, är inte bara att religionsteorin behöver reflekteras men också *vad* som faktiskt är produkten av denna reflektion och *hur* den blir en del av den politiska teologin.

I kapitel 8 kommer Schmiedel slutligen fram till Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003) som utarbetar en politisk religionsteori som förvandlar religionens pluralitet från att vara ett problem till att vara dess utgångspunkt (*vom Problem zum Programm*). Här blir det möjligt att både diskutera och kritisera religionsbegreppet. Författaren identifierar tre kännetecken i Sölles teologi som är grundläggande för en politisk teologi efter 11 september 2001: Åtskillnaden av erfarenhetsintryck och erfarenhetsuttryck, en apofatisk grund som genom sin öppenhet förhindrar en förhastad dogmatisering och instrumentalisering samt vikten av kontextualitet. Med detta ”öppnar Sölle religionsteorin på ett sätt som gör att den fungerar som ramen som kan spännas upp kring politiska konflikter, i vilken både kristna och icke-kristna röster hörsammas” (s. 308).

Det avslutande kapitlet sammanfattar boken och summerar Schmiedels position

som vill ge en utblick på konturerna av en koalitionsbaserad och komparativ religions-teori, ”som kan möjliggöra samtalet med islam i den politiska teologin efter 11 september” (s. 368). Han betonar att religionsbegreppet aldrig kan vara neutralt och alltid är konstruerat. Denna insikt möjliggör en gemensam och jämförande reflektion av begreppet som sedan blir användbart i praxis. Ur praxis till praxis.

I min läsning fastnar jag vid begreppet *sårbarhet* som lånas av Moyaert. Den svenska (liberal)teologiska läsaren torde ha tämligen lätt att ta till sig begreppet, som bygger på en grundläggande öppenhet gentemot den andre samt ett öppnande av sig själv för den andre och den andres annorlundahet. Den mindre liberalteologiske läsaren undrar förmodligen vad detta ska betyda i praktiken. Talet om sårbarhet må vara meningsfullt så länge vi under ordnade former sitter vid det gemensamma bordet, men bär det i situationer av kris och konflikt? Kan det inte rentav vara livsfarligt i en kris? Vi är alla med om att bevittna ett fruktansvärt krig mellan Ryssland och Ukraina. Skulle någon av oss uppmuntra ukrainarna att visa sig sårbara, visa svagheter i det egna systemet, för den ryska armén? När man väl har blivit sårad, är det inte då man som farligast, likt ett skottskadat djur som bara har angreppet kvar som sista försvar? Här hade jag önskat att Schmiedel hade valt att fördjupa diskussionen av sårbarhetens prisma som förefaller centralt för hans argumentation. Resonemangets konsekvenser vid dess implementering i teologi och politik hade behövt stavas ut. Liberalteologins kritiker riskerar annars att tolka det som ett bekräftande av ett förmodat otydligt regelverk. Och det, tycker jag, vore väldigt synd.

Vidare hänger begreppet identitet kvar i luften efter läsningen. Schmiedel vänder sig mot det av Schmitt influerade identitetsbegreppet (skapat ”ur intet”, ledandes till vän-fiende-kategoriseringen). Det förblir oklart hur Schmiedel själv ser på hur identitet – ett av bokens mest centrala begrepp

– skapas. I diskussionen om Sölle sympatiserar han med hennes syn på identitet som processartad tillblivelse som snarare liknas vid ett fortlöpande (ofärdigt) arbete än vid en kamp (där den som kämpar alltid redan är definierad av kampen). Även denna förståelse upplever jag vara mycket meningsfull, jag hade bara gärna sett den bättre underbyggd och situerad i det stora fältet av identitetsforskning.

I förlängning av denna diskussion uppkommer frågan kring Schmiedels huvudspörsmål: huruvida vi kan befria oss från det schmittska ”vän-fiende”-arvet. Jag tänker att Schmiedels arbete är mycket förtjänstfullt här. Schmitts tankesätt begränsar och leder oss lätt in ett tankeschema där vi närmast *söker* en fiende att definiera oss gentemot. Frågan kvarstår dock hur Schmiedels förslag står sig i krisen, när verkligheten obarmhärtigt konfronterar oss med oss själva och den andre som inte vill oss väl – det är just i detta läge som frågan om vem som är vän och fiende faktiskt kan vara livsavgörande. Ligger det något i Schmitts, på många sätt destruktiva, arv? Inte för att vi bör orientera oss utifrån det, utan för att det belyser något som den mänskliga empirin hindrar oss att bortse ifrån i den yttersta av situationer, i konflikten? Det är essentiellt vem som definieras som vän och som fiende, även om både Schmiedel och jag önskade att det inte vore så. Dock ligger en av Schmiedels förtjänster i denna bok i att peka på den preventiva potential som ligger i det gemensamma religionsteologiska och religionsteoretiska arbetet och som minskar risken att konflikter uppstår genom en ökad förståelse men också ett avinstrumentaliserat och självkritiskt religionsbegrepp. Detta är ingalunda en tecknad försäkring, men kanske ett försök till ett ständigt pågående tecknande av tillit. Och visst är det den som behövs mer än någonsin i efterdyningarna av den 11 september.

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