

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.