

FORGETTING TO REMEMBER:
THE CRISIS OF SPIRITUAL ALZHEIMER'S IN THE PEOPLE OF GOD

by

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For my parents, Allison, Chris and Dale

*Without all three, I could not be
the person I am today.*

Thank you

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTINA JOANNE CHILDS
FORGETTING TO REMEMBER: THE CRISIS OF SPIRITUAL ALZHEIMER'S
IN THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Under the direction of Dr. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, PhD

Remembrance is a central theme in the covenant between God and God's people in the Hebrew Bible. Yet, consistently in the text and in the world, God's people too easily forget God, forgetting what God has done for God's people in the past, who God is to the people of faith now and thus who they are and how they are to interact as the people of God. This faith forgetfulness has led the people of God to put others and other things in God's stead, leading the people away from God and away from their identity as the people of God.

To support this premise, parts of the pattern of not remembering and its negative effects in the biblical text (specifically in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Judges) will be briefly highlighted, as well as how notable biblical scholars have supported this reading of the text. Historical and philological criticism will help to explore the background of what the theme and theology of remembrance meant for the Israelites in their context and language. Rhetorical criticism will be used to help the listener understand what these stories of remembrance and the lack thereof would have elicited in the hearer then and today.

When the people of God do not remember who God is and thus who they are in relation to that God, the lack of remembrance becomes their faith's death knell. Thus, the idea of faith memory will be introduced for application and simultaneous correction to the habits of the modern Church. The Christian faith must change the way it remembers in the Church or it, as a faith tradition, will not survive. Further, the Church must understand that the lack of remembrance, remembrance of faith memory and of God, is a fundamental failure of the people of God and an ethical issue that must be corrected. A modern parable describing this chronic faith forgetfulness as a spiritual type of Alzheimer's disease will be used to help convey the urgency and import of the problem at hand.

CHAPTER 1

REMEMBERING OUR FORGETFULNESS

As the Hebrews passed out of bondage and slavery in Egypt, there was great anticipation, great excitement, a vision of new lives and new possibilities, a new land, a new place. Ah, but then there was the desert. Maybe Egypt was not so bad after all. At least we could eat well. Sweet Egypt. You remember, don't you Moses? Sweet Egypt. . . .What a fool I must have been to think of anything better than slavery. What a mistake it was to be tricked into thinking that God had anything more in store for me, that my seat and loaves could belong to anyone other than my master's slave taskmaster—that, in fact, it could belong to me and be put toward the service of one whom no pharaoh may rule. Ah, sweet Egypt. . . .Think old master Pharaoh would take us back?¹

Nancy Hastings Sehested paints quite a picture of the faith memory of the ancient Israelites. Both powerful and moving, this imagining of the Exodus story renders well what it must have been to move from the Exodus (Exod 13) to the Gold Calf (Exod 32), from being a faithful people to an adulterous people. This movement can be embodied in the ideas of remembering God or forgetting God and the results of each.

Is a spiritual forgetfulness the root of all sin for the people of God? Paul Tillich expresses humanity's capacity to forget God in this way: "The human mind, however, forgets this inadequacy and identifies the sacred object with the ultimate itself. The sacramental object is taken as holy in itself. Its character as the bearer of the holy,

¹ Nancy Hastings Sehested, "We Have This Treasure: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18," in *A Costly Obedience: Sermons by Women of Steadfast Spirit*, ed. Elizabeth Smith Bellinger (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 1-2.

pointing beyond itself, disappears in the act of faith.”² Continually, the people of God forgot to look past the objects used in the worship of the Holy and settled instead for a faulty memory and faulty worship, which plagued their relationship with the Creator time and again in the biblical text. Forgetting God and moving on to what humanity deems better, faith memory is crucified on self-serving altars. Religiosity reigns when the people of God forget the reason for their existence.

Is Faith Remembrance an Ethical Concern?

Margalit Avishai, in *The Ethics of Memory*, says,

Are we obligated to remember people and events from the past? . . .this is based on a distinction between two types of human relations: thick ones and thin ones. Thick relations are grounded in attributes such as parent, friend, lover, fellow-countryman. Thick relations are anchored in a shared past or moored in shared memory. Thin relations, on the other hand, are backed by the attribute of being human. Thin relations rely also on some aspects of being human, such as being a woman or being sick. . . .Because it encompasses all humanity, morality is long on geography and short on memory. Ethics is typically short on geography and long on memory. *Memory is the cement that holds thick relations together, and communities of memory are the obvious habitat for thick relations and thus for ethics.* By playing such a crucial role in cementing thick relations, memory becomes an obvious concern of ethics, which is the enterprise that tells us how we should conduct our thick relations.³

Avishai thus firmly plants faith memory in the context of communities of memory as an ethical area of concern. As Chapter 2 will explore further, the ancient Israelites, whose

² Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), 59.

³ Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7-8, emphasis added.

narrative is contained in the Hebrew Bible, were a community of memory who had the ethical charge to pass on the memory to each successive generation.

Remembrance is crucial to almost every aspect of life; without memory, recall, and deliberate reminders, we would not be able to function. Elie Wiesel found great power in memory, saying “without memory, all existence would be barren and opaque . . . For me, hope without memory is like memory without hope.”⁴ Memory and reminders both play important roles in remembrance, without which much of our lives would be in chaos.

When the people of God do not remember who God is and thus who they are, that lack of remembrance becomes their faith’s death knell. As we see in the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, there are more ways to die than physical death and that is the danger of forgetting who we are as a community and who God is in relation to the community. Thus, the lack of remembrance or forgetfulness is a fundamental failure of the people of God and an ethical issue that must be corrected.

Thesis Question

This paper will explore the thesis question: How important is remembrance for the faith of the people of God, both in the Hebrew Bible and in the twenty-first century? Chapter 1 is the introduction and exploration of the scholarship behind the importance of remembrance. Chapter 2 lays the foundation of the thesis, exploring how the theme of

⁴ Elie Wiesel, “Nobel Lecture: Hope, Despair and Memory,” From *Nobel Lectures: Peace 1981-1990*. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-lecture.html (accessed November 28, 2016).

remembrance was understood by God's people in the period immediately after the Exodus from Egypt. Chapter 3 dives into the scholarly and even psycho-social side of faith memory while Chapter 4 applies the knowledge gained from the previous chapters in order to explore the implications of faith memory for the people of God today. Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing the findings, using the lens of Alzheimer's disease as a modern parable for the lack of faith memory in the people of God.

Historical Background for the Study

The theme and theology of remembrance was not explored until the 1960s, when Brevard S. Childs, P.A.H. De Boer, and Willy Schottroff separately published seminal works on remembrance.⁵ While much of the research on remembrance has been devoted to explaining the Eucharist,⁶ portions of these publications are devoted to the Old Testament background of remembrance. The Old Testament narrative of the ancient Israelites gives us a firm foundation for a theology of remembrance that should propel us towards remembrance as a transformative way of life for the people of God today. This paper contains research on a variety of aspects of faith remembrance: the ancient Israelite understanding of remembrance, the Hebrew terms dealing with the theme of remembrance, the psychology of remembrance and cultural identity, and the rather

⁵ Robert A. D. Clancy, "The Old Testament Roots of Remembrance in the Lord's Supper," *Concordia Journal* 19 no. 1 (Jan 1993): 35.

⁶ Specifically, the research has centered on the meaning of the words attributed to Jesus in 1 Cor 11:24-25: "This do in remembrance of me," a text that is used as the institutional words of the Eucharist.

poignant parabolic parallel between the memory care of Alzheimer's patients and the pastoral care of the people of God who so often fail to remember their faith well. The historical moorings of remembrance will be crucial to a correct understanding of the application to the twenty-first century.

A weakness of this paper is my deficiency in the Germanic language; two of the three primary scholars who have published on remembrance have done so in German only. Thus, the author of this thesis must rely on secondary sources to evaluate the Germanic writers.⁷ I believe a strength of the research I am undertaking is the practicality and even prophetic nature of the implications of remembrance for the people of God today. The Christian Church in North America has been declining for some time and I believe that a theology and praxis of remembrance is a crucial and needed step in the right direction if concurrent generations are to know God through the Church.

Pastors and ministers of the Church hold the responsibility to carry the story of God to the people, to help them to remember and remember well. Many articles exist that parallel the pastoral care of Alzheimer's patients with the pastoral care of the church, yet there are some distinctions to be made. Notably, there is a difference between people who do not remember and people who cannot remember; also, there is a difference between accidental forgetfulness and actively choosing to not remember. Remembering

⁷ I will rely on Fritz Chenderlin and Brevard Childs primarily for understanding of de Boer and Schottroff. See Fritz Chenderlin, *"Do This as My Memorial": The Semantic and Conceptual Background and Value of Anamnesis in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982).

something and recalling something are also distinctions which should be made, especially in the context of people afflicted with Alzheimer's. The Hebrew Bible contains a story of the failures of God's people time and again and the root of these failures of disobedience, faithlessness, and waywardness are directly linked to an active failure to remember well.

Methodology and Details of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to uncover the proposed importance of remembrance for the faith continuity of the people of God and the danger of the lack of remembering who God is and thus who we are and how we are to interact in the world. To uncover and support this premise, the paper must show a pattern of not remembering and its negative effects in the biblical text and in the people of God today. This pattern will be paralleled to the most extreme form of not remembering (the condition of Alzheimer's) to show its crucial importance in our praxis and theology. If this thesis is unpacked properly, the reader will be persuaded that we must change the way we remember in the church or our faith tradition will not survive for future generations.

The paper will approach the theme of remembrance through a social-ethical model, by which the reality of the situation of remembrance will be examined (Chapters 2 & 3); a critical reflection given on the situation in the church today (Chapter 4); and a normative proposal put forth (Chapters 4 & 5). This approach will use historical and philological criticism to show the background of what the theme of remembrance meant for the ancient Israelites in their context and language. Rhetorical criticism will be used to help the reader understand what these stories of remembrance and the lack thereof would have elicited in the hearer then and today. The thesis will point the reader to a

theology and practice of remembrance as an essential to the faithful continuation of the people of God.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Remembering our Forgetfulness

Chapter 2: Why is it Important for the Israelites to Remember?

Chapter 3: How is Remembrance Important for Faith?: A Look at Faith Memory

Chapter 4: Why is it Important for the Church to Remember?: The Impact of Faith

Memory on Faith Continuance

Chapter 5: Forgetting to Remember: The Spiritual Alzheimer's of the People of God

CHAPTER 2

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE ISRAELITES TO REMEMBER?

Remembrance is a central theme in the covenant between God and God's people. In the Hebrew Old Testament, we see calls to remember, calls to not forget, and calls to memorials and rituals of remembrance. The narrative of the wilderness wandering of the Israelites is filled with instances when the people remembered God and when the people forgot God. I will explore the use of the language of remembrance, sharing the insights of modern scholars who have worked in constructing a theology of remembrance since the 1960s.

What is the Language of Remembrance in the Hebrew Bible?

זָכַר (*zakhar*)

In the Hebrew Bible, זָכַר (*zakhar*) is the verbal root that means “to remember, think about, meditate on.”¹ The subject of זָכַר (*zakhar*) can be God or humanity. God is the first subject of remembrance in the Bible (Gen 8:1).² Humanity is the most common subject of remembrance in the Bible; when God calls the people to remember, it is

¹ Nancy deClaisse-Walford, “Remember, To,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 761. Also see Dianne Bergant, “Memorial, Memory,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 31.

² Other instances of God's remembering are in Gen 9:12-17, 19:29, 30:22; Exod 2:24, 6:5; Lev 26:42, 45; 1 Sam 1:19; and Ps 105:8.

usually to remember three things: the Exodus from Egypt (Exod 13:3), the Sabbath day (Exod 20:8), and the wilderness wanderings (Deut 8:2).³

Lexicographers differ in their understanding of the etymology of the Hebrew root זָכַר (*zakhar*).⁴ The objects of the verb זָכַר (*zakhar*) within the Old Testament are interestingly distributed: “the great acts of Yahweh (ca. 22x), Yahweh himself (17x), his commandments (9x), sins (7x), special days (3x).”⁵ Bowling believes there can be three distinct meanings for זָכַר (*zakhar*): 1) completely inward mental action, 2) inward mental action followed by external action, and 3) audible speech that invokes a past event into a present reality.⁶ Johs. Pedersen finds that זָכַר (*zakhar*) appears frequently connected with action.⁷ In many instances, a word in the Old Testament that might seem to be just a mental process to a modern reader was regarded by the ancient Israelites as a call to action.⁸ Childs critiqued Pedersen here as Childs believed the Hebrews were surely aware that thoughts do not always end in action; for instance, in Num 11:5, while the

³ deClaissé-Walford, “Remember,” 761.

⁴ Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, Studies in Biblical Theology 37, ed. C.F.D. Moule (Chatham: W. & J. Mackay & Co LTD, 1962), 9-10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶ Andrew Bowling, “*zakar*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. I, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 241.

⁷ Johs. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture I-II* (Denmark: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1959), 106. Pedersen’s views are summarized in Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 18. Cf. Pss 115:12, 136:23, 106:4 and Jer 14:10.

⁸ Bowling, “*zakar*,” 241.

Israelites were thinking about fish in Egypt, it did not result in fish in their hands.⁹

Childs, however, took Pedersen's claims too extremely (of course thinking about a fish does not necessarily mean the presence of a fish) and did not give Pedersen enough credit.

זכרון (*zikkaron*)

Closely linked to the word זכר (*zakhar*) is זכרון (*zikkaron*) which means "memorial."¹⁰ The Israelites needed to remember God's past actions, particularly the Exodus from Egypt, in order to continue to build their faith in Yahweh.¹¹ The cultic memorial, זכרון (*zikkaron*), brings the past into the present as God becomes involved in the remembrance; when God's people observed the ordained festivals, the power of God that was present in the inciting event would be made present again through remembrance.¹² זכרון is found in Exodus 12:14, 13:9, 17:14, as well as numerous other instances in the rest of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and the Prophets.

שכח (*shakah*)

שכח (*shakah*), the Hebrew word for "to forget, ignore, wither," is used 102 times in the Hebrew Bible and ten of those occurrences use שכח (*shakah*) as an antonym for זכר

⁹ For a more thorough look at Childs' critique of Pedersen see Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 29.

¹⁰ Bergant, "Memorial, Memory," 31.

¹¹ See also Deut 7:18, 16:12, and 24:18.

¹² Bergant, "Memorial, Memory," 32-33.

(*zakhar*—remember).¹³ Humanity is usually the subject of שכח (*shakah*). Childs believes that most frequently שכח does not stand for a “psychological act of having a thought pass from one’s consciousness, but [is] an outward act of worshipping other gods (Deut 8:19), of forsaking someone (Isa 49:14), [or] of not keeping the commandments (Deut 8:11).”¹⁴

Victor Hamilton goes even further, stating:

Forgetting is not simply a psychological act of having a thought pass from one’s consciousness . . . To forget God is to ignore his commandments (Deut 8:11). To forget God is to follow other gods (Deut 8:19); to forget God is to stand in fear of harm and danger, to live fretfully and timidly (Isa 51:13). To forget God is to challenge him (Ps 106:13). The Bible would indicate that satiety is the major factor for forgetting God (Deut 8:12ff.; Hos 13:6 for example).¹⁵

שכח (*shakah*) is not as innocent as it may seem; for ancient Israel to forget what God had done in their history and thus who they were in relation to that God could be considered corporately missing the mark, corporate sin.

When in the Hebrew Bible were the Ancient Israelites called to Remember?

From the Decalogue, through the Pentateuch, and thoroughly entrenched in the Psalms and the Prophets, the idea of remembrance is more than a minor current.¹⁶

Remembrance was a strong theme in the preaching of the Deuteronomist, advancing

¹³ Victor Hamilton, “*shakah*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. II, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 922-23. Cf. Deut 9:7, “Remember (זכר), never forget (שכח) how you provoked Yahweh your God in the wilderness.”

¹⁴ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 18.

¹⁵ Hamilton, “*shakah*,” 922.

¹⁶ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 49.

זכר (*zakhar*) as a theologically significant action. Deuteronomy 8 appeals to the people to remember since God's identity and ancient Israel's identity as the people of God were permanently linked in their historical memory. People are to remember past events not for past events' sake, but in order to encourage obedience in the future.¹⁷ Obedience for obedience's sake, however, is not the answer; without the corporate memory of the people's covenant history, obedience would fail to be redemptive.¹⁸ Memory thus serves the community by promoting ancient Israel's awareness of who God is in relation to the people and thus who they are as a people. Memory unites past with present; there is one communal, redemptive story.

Focusing mostly on the Wilderness narrative (Exod 12- Deut 34), specific references to remembrance and forgetting of God and God's actions in the Hebrew Bible are found in Exod 13:3, 13:8-11, 19:3-8, 32:1-3; Deut 6:12, 6:20-25, 8:2-3, 8:13-20, 9:7, 16:3, 16:12; and Judg 8:33-34. In the book of Exodus, for example, we read that God does something spectacular (ex. Exod 12), the Israelites worship and/or obey God in response to God's action (ex. Exod 12:50-51), God calls them to remember what has happened (ex. Exod 13), the Israelites agree to remember (ex. Exod 12:50-51), the Israelites quickly forget to remember what God has done and who they are in relation to God (ex. Exod 14:10-12), the Israelites fall away from worshipping God and God alone

¹⁶ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

(ex. Exod 14:10-12), God gets their attention and calls them to remember again (ex. Exod 14:15-30), and Israel returns to their God, having remembered what God has done and who God is (ex. Exod 15:1-21) until they forget again and start the cycle over (ex. Exod 15:22-26).

Exodus 20:8 is the portion of the Decalogue that contains a charge to cultic remembrance: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”¹⁹ In essence, when the Decalogue says to “remember” the Sabbath, it is using remembrance as a “paranetic term calling for the people to be aware of this special day in such a way as to set it apart from the ordinary days of the week.”²⁰ The Sabbath is the only festival in the Old Testament that is not given a specific type of cultic observance; it is set apart by rest.²¹ Israel celebrates Sabbath as a constant reminder of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Deut 5:15). Sabbath is the sign that Israel remembers God throughout the generations; it is the very sign of the relationship between Yahweh and Yahweh’s people.²²

Why is Remembrance Important for the Israelites?

Memory becomes theologically significant when a generation is removed from the redemptive past actions of Yahweh. Jebasingh shines light on the importance of this

¹⁹ From the New American Standard Bible.

²⁰ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 48.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 53-54.

reality: “The church, being the receiver, is expected to be faithful to keeping up the covenant with God through remembrance. In the world of identity crisis, where people forget their roots and their origin, it is a prophetic call indeed to ‘remember His works.’”²³ The ancient Israelites’ faith memory was handed on through worship and tradition, providing community and continuity with those from the past and those to come in the future.²⁴ Knowing their history, Israel understood better who they were and where they stood with their God. Ritual and festival celebration helped generation after generation remember the mighty works of the God of Israel and served as reminders to future generations of who Yahweh is.²⁵ The festivals of Unleavened Bread, Weeks/Pentecost, Booths, Passover, and even the Sabbath were to inspire the same remembrance of Yahweh’s past actions in the life of the people of God.²⁶ The remembered action of the past remains active as the people of God for generations and generations celebrate the rituals and festivals of remembrance together.

How did the Israelites Understand the Importance of Remembrance?

To discover what remembrance meant to the ancient Israelites, we must consider the significance of memory to them as recorded in the pages of the Hebrew Bible.

²³ J. Jebasingh, “A Theological Appraisal of רָמַז (Remembrance),” *Bangalore Theological Forum* XLVI no. 2 (December 2014): 86.

²⁴ Allen Verhey, “Remember, Remembrance,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 668.

²⁵ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 55.

²⁶ See also Exod 23:14; Lev 23:5-8; Num 10:10, 28:16-25; Deut 16:1-8.

Israel's memory is "literary-theological,"²⁷ a faith received in the text from communal faith memory which, when reenacted, forms the foundation of their theology. For the ancient Israelites, a thought occurred when, according to Childs, an "image enters the heart and immediately influences the will. Thought which does not lead to action is a meaningless flash."²⁸

The most common motif of remembrance in the Bible is the Exodus from Egypt, as we see in Deut 5:15, 15:15, and 16:3, for example.²⁹ Humanity's primary responsibility is "to remember the mighty work of God which is an act of praising God (Exod 20:24; Isa 26:13, 48:1; Amos 6:10; Ps 45:18)."³⁰ Memory is used to inspire trust in Yahweh in the present; if Yahweh has done this or that in the past, then surely Yahweh can do something great again.³¹ Remembrance links the past with the present and the future. Jebasingh writes,

For the people of Israel, 'remembrance' is always God's initiative and in turn, man remembered God and His gracious works. 'Remembrance' is an integral part of Israel's Cultic experience. It is through memory, Israel

²⁷ Jebasingh, "A Theological Appraisal," 84.

²⁸ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 17.

²⁹ Jebasingh, "A Theological Appraisal," 77-78. Other verses with remembrance as a motif include Deut 16:12, 24:18, 24:22, and 1 Chr 16:12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

³¹ While outside of the scope of this paper, the Psalms are a rich resource of faith memory; the genre of lament in the Psalms is especially poignant for the importance of faith memory as declarations of trust in Yahweh are based on Yahweh's past actions which then give the lamenter hope for the future, that Yahweh will intervene on their behalf again.

could recall and re-enact ritually in the divine act of creation and redemption.³²

Nancy deClaissé-Walford says, “Memory, the account of the actions of God on behalf of the people, is the fundamental shaping element of the faith of ancient Israel.

Remembering is a communal activity through which identity and right living are realized and maintained.”³³ She suggests that the action of remembering in the Old and New

Testaments is more than psychological memory; “remembering is about covenant and requires response.”³⁴ Remembrance in the Bible is more than recollection; remembrance

is an “active, participatory event, in which God and people somehow mysteriously

interact.”³⁵ So while signs (and festivals) are linked to remembrance, remembrance is

also very closely linked to relationship. Childs writes,

The verb *zkr* comes to mean a recognition or discernment which turns one toward God. Zimmerli defines it as a ‘genuine reaching out after a reality, which in the very act becomes a new and living present.’ Cut off from the presence of God in Babylon, the exiled people search for signs of his reality. In memory of their past tradition and acknowledgment of their sin, they experience a new encounter with the God of their forefathers. Memory as a recalling of the past with discernment approaches the act of repentance. Redemptive history continues in Israel’s obedient response. Although separated in time and space from the sphere of God’s revelation in the past, through memory the gulf is spanned, and the exiled people share again in redemptive history.³⁶

³² Jebasingh, “A Theological Appraisal,” 75.

³³ deClaissé-Walford, “Remember,” 761.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 60.

Thus, the people of God can encounter God through the medium of memory. Childs maintains that “To remember is to grasp after, to meditate upon, indeed, to pray to God. . . . The Priestly terminology conceives of history as the unfolding of the divine purpose through the interaction of divine and human memory.”³⁷ The noun זכרון (*zikkaron*—memorial) actively engages the memory of Israel in Exod 13:9: the law of unleavened bread is a “‘sign on your hand’ and a ‘memorial between your eyes.’”³⁸ Israel is only obedient to Yahweh in as much as she keeps her focus on the Divine. Childs further reiterates that,

Because the Torah is a dynamic expression of Israel’s relation to Yahweh, each new generation must be continually reminded of Israel’s redemption (Deut. 11:19; 30:11; Josh 1:8). The *zikkaron* reactivates the original event in Egypt (v. 3). By participating in this event Israel reaffirms her relationship with Yahweh. Therefore, the memorial actively serves to the end that the law of Yahweh be in Israel’s mouth (v. 9b). . . . Israel’s remembrance became a technical term to express the process by which later Israel made relevant the great redemptive acts which she recited in her tradition. The question of how to overcome the separation in time and space from the great events of the past became the paramount issue.³⁹

Israel’s memory must be contemporized in order to carry forward the truths of the tradition. Childs believed that participation in the festivals was ancient Israel’s way of renewing the redemptive tradition in her memory and also participating in its power.⁴⁰

³⁷ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 65 and 68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 69 and 75.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

How can Succeeding Generations Faithfully Remember an Event they did not Experience?

How does a generation that was born in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt, who has not seen the mighty, redemptive acts of Yahweh, come to believe that those acts actually happened and that Yahweh is God? The Deuteronomist (or writer(s) of the Deuteronomistic History) addressed this problem by restating the tradition in ways that the new generation could understand and believe.⁴¹ The story of the wilderness wanderings of the ancient Israelites was the original source of the theology of faith memory.⁴²

The Deuteronomist knew that the greatest danger to Israel's identity and community was not from outside influences but from the communal forgetfulness that plagued the Israelite people from the start (Deut 8:11, 19).⁴³ The daily medicine for their malady of forgetfulness was to tell and retell the story. Remembering is not simply recollection but should spur the community to faithful obedience as response (Deut 8:1-2, 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18, 24:22). Judges 8:34 clues us in to the intensity with which the biblical authors viewed Israel's lack of remembrance; the Deuteronomist showed that the cycle of disobedience, which was so prevalent in Israel's history, was directly caused by

⁴¹ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 77.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴³ Verhey, "Remember," 668.

the failure to remember. The failure to remember was “not mere absentmindedness; it was covenant unfaithfulness.”⁴⁴

The point is not simply to remember the past but to use its memory as a foundation for belief that if Yahweh worked then, Yahweh will work again. Religious commandments and instructions without stories supporting their value are meaningless to those who strive to be faithful people of God. The memory of Yahweh’s redemptive acts is the anchor during times of trial and despair when the ancient Israelites and the people of God today are tempted to forget Yahweh. The commandments also serve as a reminder of the redemptive history; in obeying the law of God through the memories of their faith in God, the people are reminded that something has happened in the past that changed everything. Childs states,

. . . in times of crisis, when the role of the cult was threatened, Israel’s memory assumed a new significance in renewing her tradition. . . . each new generation was challenged to enter God’s redemptive time, to participate itself in the Exodus. The dynamic quality of the Exodus event is seen in the events becoming a vehicle for a reality which then continued throughout Israel’s history.⁴⁵

Through memory, a real, one-time event in redemptive history stills acts and results in redemption in the present.⁴⁶ Childs believed the way this happened is through actualization: “When later Israel responded to the continuing imperative of her tradition through her memory [of the Exodus] . . . Israel [had not] again crossed the Red Sea . . .

⁴⁴ Verhey, “Remember,” 668.

⁴⁵ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 80 and 84.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

Rather, Israel entered the same redemptive reality of the Exodus generation.”⁴⁷ The quality of time trumped the chronology of time. Childs believed the remembered event was an equal witness to the original event that declared what God did/does, who God was/is, and thus who the people of God were/are.⁴⁸ The sign acts of remembrance are associated with past and future salvation of the people.⁴⁹ When the people of God remember God’s actions in the past, they become part of the story of redemption. Redemptive history is the united sum of God’s action and the people’s response.⁵⁰

Is Remembrance Always a Past-Oriented Event?

Remembrance is an act of covenant renewal for future generations; without it, the covenant will not be renewed. Memory allowed the ancient Israelites to have hope for the future: God had shown up and would show up again.⁵¹ Memory in the Old Testament is “constitutive of identity and determinative of conduct.”⁵² Verhey observes,

. . . memory remains related to the formation of identity and the determination of conduct. David ‘remembers’ Abigail by wooing and marrying her (1 Sam 25:31); he does not ‘remember’ that Shemei was his adversary when he spares his life although he is fully aware of the past (2 Sam 19:19). When the men of Shechem remember that Abimelech is their kinsmen, they are ‘inclined to follow him’ (Judg 9:2-3). Even Joseph’s

⁴⁷ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹ Jebasingh, “A Theological Appraisal,” 81.

⁵⁰ Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 89.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵² Verhey, “Remember,” 667.

memory of his dreams (Gen 42:9) is not merely recollection: God's guidance forms him and his conduct.⁵³

Interestingly, Jebasingh sees a reciprocal relationship between God and humanity in the act of remembrance: Israel is to remember the mighty acts of God and who God is in relation to them; then, God remembers the promises and covenants that God made with them. Remembrance by both God and humanity is necessary to keeping the covenant.⁵⁴ Faith memory reminds the people of God of their identity: They belong to Yahweh. Memory makes the faith real in the present and not just in the past; this memory must be passed on if the faith is to be passed on.

Conclusion

All of the concepts and significance of remembrance in the Hebrew Bible are interrelated: Yahweh made a covenant with humanity, which Yahweh remembered by acting to fulfill the promises that were made. The Israelites and their ancestors were called upon to remember the covenant and how Yahweh had acted, and they were to pass down that faith memory to all succeeding generations. The passing down of memory gave each succeeding generation their identity as the people of Yahweh who were called to never forget that truth. When the Israelites forgot, they were awakened to their sin through undesired consequences (for example Exod 32:27-28 and Num 11:1-3), which turned their attention back to the identity from which they had strayed. The Israelites then called out to God to remember them and the covenant that Yahweh made with their

⁵³ Verhey, "Remember," 668.

⁵⁴ Jebasingh, "A Theological Appraisal," 83.

ancestors. In the circular process of remembering, not remembering, and coming back to remembrance, the right relationship between Yahweh and Yahweh's people was restored only when remembrance was valued. In the next chapters, we will explore in more depth how the biblical narrative witnesses to the current cycle of disobedience in the people of God today.

CHAPTER 3

HOW IS REMEMBRANCE IMPORTANT FOR FAITH?

A LOOK AT FAITH MEMORY

Faith memory is a phrase this paper will use to denote the type of memory that allows a faith tradition, based in historical events, to spread to those who, while not being present for the original events, still consider the faith tradition personally and corporately applicable and true. Biblically, faith memory was passed down from those who could remember (the ancestors) to those who were not alive when the memories were made (the descendants).¹ Pedersen says of faith memory,

When the soul remembers something, it does not mean that it has an objective memory image of some thing or event, but that this image is called forth in the soul and assists in determining its direction, its action. When man remembers God, he lets his being and his actions be determined by him. . . .To remember the works of Yahweh and to seek him, i.e. to let one's acts be determined by his will, is in reality the same.²

Biblical faith memory, thus, is a remembrance of the past works of God, which in turn affects who God's people are in this world. Our works (or actions) and our identity are two sides of a single coin. What is described here as works tied to identity is captured by

¹ Stephen Sapp, "Living with Alzheimer's: Body, Soul and the Remembering Community," *The Christian Century* (January 21, 1998): 60.

² Johs. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture I-II* (Denmark: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1959), 106-7.

Matt 7:17-18, a passage about good trees and good fruit and bad trees and bad fruit.³ Our actions, also known as works or fruit, tell much about our identity; this is why remembrance of God includes remembering what God has done in the past for God's people and letting that knowledge inform Christians' actions and identity today.⁴

What Is the Nature of Christian Faith Memory?

What makes up Christian faith memory cannot be distilled to a series of facts and details of past occurrences. Brevard Childs believes, "It is a fundamental error in interpretation to conceive of redemptive history as a series of scientifically verifiable, historical data to which a religious interpretation has been added."⁵ What gives the Old Testament its uniqueness is that it contains "layer upon layer of Israel's reinterpretation of the same period of her history, because each successive generation rewrites the past in terms of her own experience with the God who meets his people through the tradition."⁶ In revisiting the past experiences that Israel had with God in the Exodus from Egypt and the providence of God for the people in the wilderness, Israel could remember not just the

³ Matthew 7:17-18 (NASB) says, "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." See also Luke 6:44-45.

⁴ By interlinking works and identity, I do not mean to disregard grace. Believers are given the persistent grace of God that can transform lives, even the most corrupt of lives; my purpose instead is to show only that what we do says much about who we are if we are not changed by grace in the meantime.

⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, Studies in Biblical Theology 37, ed. C.F.D. Moule (Chatham: W. & J. Mackay & Co LTD, 1962), 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

details of the events themselves but the fruit of God's character, power, and faithfulness to them that would be necessary for Israel's faithfulness to God in the midst of an idolatrous world.

How does Memory Help Faith?

Augustine believed that memory makes present what is no longer present, holding the tension between the past and the future in the human's being.⁷ He explored memory as a way to find God, believing God lived in his memory.⁸ Welz says, "Memory makes co-present one's actions in the past and one's plans about the future," concluding, "God is to be found in memory and the self in relation to God."⁹ Both Augustine and Welz believe memory is directly linked to our relationship with God, and thus to our identity as God's people. Yet, how can that happen when something outside of our control keeps us from our memories? What happens when parents do not teach their children faith memory or when natural ailments and disease prevent us from remembering well? This will be further explored in chapters 4 and 5.

⁷ Aurelius Augustinus, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. J. G. Pilkington (United States of America: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1943), Book X. Found in Claudia Welz, "The Future of the Past": Memory, Forgetting, and Personal Identity," in *Impossible Time*, Religion in Philosophy and Theology 68, ed. Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Ulrik Houllind Rasmussen, and Philipp Stoellger (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 204.

⁸ Aurelius Augustinus, *De Trinitate* (Bucher VIII-XI, XIV-XV, Anhang: Buch V). Lateinisch-Deutsch, ed. and trans. Johann Kreuzer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001), 544-45 (section 24, 35). Found in Welz, "The Future of the Past," 205.

⁹ Welz, "The Future of the Past," 204-5.

Is History the Same as Faith Memory?

Hans M. Barstad instructs us that “memory (‘tradition’) and ‘history’ are strongly interrelated, but not identical. . . .history is an attempt to get access to past memory subsequent to the occurrence of the historical event.”¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur does not equate memory and history but maintains, “to memory is tied an ambition, a claim—that of being faithful to the past.”¹¹ Philip Davies describes faithfulness to the past memory of a historic event. He writes,

It [memory] is our history. Nor is it a disinterested recollection, but something basic to our identity and our future. Our memory of what we have experienced enables us at each moment to sustain identity. Total amnesia is a total loss of self. We are, except in a purely biological sense, what we remember. This is true for both individuals and groups.¹²

Further, Davies explains,

But what happened and what people remember as having happened are not identical. What the insider regards as the real past the outsider sees as just the insider’s past. . . . Westerners share the Bible as part of our past—*as long as we remember what its story is.*¹³

¹⁰ Hans M. Barstad, “History and Memory: Some Reflections on the ‘Memory Debate’ in Relation to the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 530, ed. Philip R. Davies and Diana V. Edelman (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 8.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21.

¹² Philip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 178.

Thus, history is not exactly the same as faith memory. Faith memory seeks to remember the memory of the event in each new generation in order to share the faith of the original event with those who were not originally present.

Can their Past Impact our Future?

Elie Wiesel states, “To remember is to allow the past to move into the future and shape its course.”¹⁴ Richard Miller says, “We deliberately communicate our memories out of a desire to connect ourselves across generations. On that view, we remember the past because of the future.”¹⁵ Miller continues, “Memory brings the past into the present. . . . by ‘memory’ I mean the recollection of the past so that it continues, in some degree or fashion, in the present.”¹⁶ Since the remembered past impacts the present, “our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order.”¹⁷ The future of Christianity, then, depends immensely on the type of faith memory we sustain. W. James Booth says memory is “a kind of making present of the past, an (attempted) abolition of the distance created by the passage of time and the ensuring of the persistence of the past

¹⁴ Quoted in Richard B. Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens of Memory,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37 no. 3 (September 2009): 536, from Elie Wiesel, *Ethics and Memory* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 15.

¹⁵ Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 536.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 533-34.

¹⁷ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.

into the present.”¹⁸ How we communicate faith memory then impacts the faith of those who follow, because our communicated faith memory is the only direct connection to the past that future generations will have.

Does Faith Memory Affect Identity?

Many people have studied the importance of memory and faith memory for the sustainment of individual identity. Miroslav Volf says, “Whatever we do with our memories, our identity shifts, however slightly, in the process of using them.”¹⁹ Our identity is thus forged not just from internal memory but from the outside in a way which we cannot fully account for or understand.²⁰ Claudia Welz believes the dialectic interrelation between remembering and forgetting is “decisive for the formation and preservation of personal identity.”²¹ Welz concludes from Augustine and Locke that

. . . memory is also the factual condition that preserves the identity which a person develops in the course of time, because memory determines a person’s self-image and, in turn, the impressions others can have of this person’s self-understanding as it takes shape in attitudes, words and deeds.²²

¹⁸ W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), x.

¹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 69.

²⁰ Welz, “The Future of the Past,” 212.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²² *Ibid.*, 206.

Maurice Halbwachs explored remembrance at a corporate level, understanding that individual remembrance depends on the remembrance of others as well, creating the concept of collective memory.²³ Jacques Le Goff agrees that, “Memory is an essential element of . . . individual or collective identity . . .”²⁴ Memory helps to define a community’s identity, yet that same memory out of context would not hold the same significance.²⁵ Booth even calls memory the “fabric of a community’s way of life.”²⁶ If these statements are true, this framework for thinking about memory’s impact on identity firmly shows the foundational framework of faith memory for faith identity and remembrance.

Which is Most Important, Individual or Communal Faith Memory?

An argument can be easily made that individuals, not groups, remember; thus, for groups to remember well, each individual must participate in sharing the individual memories well with others in the group.²⁷ Miller states, “We are not only shaped by our memories, we shape them: the relationship between identity and memory is circular. If we were only our memories, we would lack a framework for interpreting ourselves and

²³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22-24.

²⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 98.

²⁵ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, xii. For a similar idea, see Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), 58-59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii.

²⁷ Welz, “The Future of the Past,” 206.

for setting priorities for action-in-time.”²⁸ So, by participating in group meetings or rituals where the past can be remembered, we reinforce who we are individually and corporately. Each time individuals and groups remember the past, the event of remembrance is shaped by the priorities of the present; Welz believes the concerns, beliefs, interests and aspirations of the present all have an active role in shaping how we remember the past.²⁹ Maurice Halbwachs concludes that one does not remember well in isolation but must engage with others in verbal elaboration of the memory.³⁰ Yet, Miller points out that “collective memories are not always and everywhere remembered by everyone in the group.”³¹ It is an important duty of faith to help those who forget easily to remember well; when we lapse into forgetfulness as a Christian body, we most likely lapse in our being Christian.

While important, individual memory is not the most important in the journey of Christian identity³²; communal memory creates the context for the individual believer’s

²⁸ Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 540. Further, on page 545, Miller writes, “Without memory we would lack the practical identity on which we presume to hold ourselves accountable for the past or commit ourselves to future projects. Memory is constitutive of individual and collective identity insofar as it connects us to our past and enables us to plot and plan our future. . . .Memory is to be esteemed, then, because it is central to identity, and identity is a necessary practical premise on which we base responsibility for the past and commitment to the future. . . .the obligation to remember is a kind of metaduty.”

²⁹ Welz, “The Future of the Past,” 206.

³⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 53.

³¹ Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 537.

³² Sapp, “Living with Alzheimer’s,” 59.

identity in that group and with God. We need others to make sure that we are “retrieving, perpetuating, and making sense” of our memories well.³³ Hauerwas knew that faith memory requires “a corresponding community capable of remembering, and reinterpreting for the community, remain[ing] the key to continuing a distinctive way of life.”³⁴ Halbwachs thinks that individual memory is possible only through social engagement. Miller shows that faith narratives “depend on memory to be recalled and transmitted in the formation of communities that bridge generations.”³⁵ Faith memory is made up of narratives of God-events carried through generations and centuries as the community of God sought to continue in its faithful existence.

The remembrance of Jesus and of the Exodus are metanarratives that have defined our corporate relationship with God and others. Biblical remembering is communal: God made the covenant with all God’s people, not just individuals.³⁶ The Deuteronomist considered memory to be essential to the continuity of the people of God.³⁷ The Pentateuch includes four commands (Deut 6:10; Exod 12:26, 13:14, 13:8) to teach

³³ Lisa W. Lamb, “To Remember Well Together: Preaching and Memory in Ethnically Diverse Congregations,” *Word & World* 28 no. 4 (Fall 2008): 426.

³⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering,” *Interpretation* 34 no. 4 (Oct 1980): 357.

³⁵ Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 533.

³⁶ Robert E. Van Voorst, “The Biblical Concept of Remembering and Ministry to People with Alzheimer’s Disease,” *Reformed Review* 54 no. 2 (Winter 2000-01): 104.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 101. Cf. Deut 6:20-25 and 8:1,2.

children (the next generation) the meaning of faithful and communal rituals and laws.³⁸

Van Voorst points out, “In the Bible . . . memory involves both past and present and is always put to work to preserve covenant relationship.”³⁹ Hauerwas knew that faith memory requires “a corresponding community capable of remembering, and reinterpreting for the community remains the key to continuing a distinctive way of life.”⁴⁰ Hauerwas defines a community as “a group of persons who share a history and a common set of interpretations about that history which provides the basis for common actions.”⁴¹ Further, Hauerwas declares

For the Scripture forms a society and sets an agenda for its life that requires nothing less than trusting its existence to the God found through the stories of Israel and Jesus. The moral significance of Scripture, therefore, lies exactly in its power to help us remember the stories of God for the continual guidance of our community and individual lives. To be a community which lives by remembering is a genuine achievement, as too often we assume that we can ensure our existence only by freeing ourselves from the past.⁴²

James Barr points out that,

All ‘acts of God’ and incidents of the story make sense because a framework of meaning has already been created by previous acts, remembered in the tradition; they are ‘further acts of one already known,

³⁸ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Eng. ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

³⁹ Van Voorst, “The Biblical Concept of Remembering,” 106.

⁴⁰ Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” 357.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 365.

of one with whom the fathers have already been in contact and have passed on the tradition of this contact.’⁴³

What happens when not everyone in the group remembers something in the same way? Connerton addressed this question as he examined the process by which group memory is shared and sustained; he writes, “our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past.”⁴⁴ If different ones in the group have conflicting memories of the past foundational stories of the group, splits will occur. Meaning becomes different depending upon the memories the group holds true; Connerton points out that this is easily seen across generations as communication becomes impeded by the different sets of memories held by different generations.⁴⁵

How does a Faith Community Aid Faith Memory?

We need a community in order to remember well. If we are left to our own memories without the input of the faith community, our memories may quickly become falsely imaginative or even delusional. Lisa Lamb writes that as we remember as the corporate church, we simultaneously acknowledge the limits of individual and cultural memory as it applies to faith. We come to the community of faith humbly confessing our

⁴³ Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” 365, referring to James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1996), 147.

⁴⁴ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

individual limits in faith memory in favor of the communal faith memory of God through time and space.⁴⁶ Further, David Augsburger writes,

Re-membering, in its root meaning, is to reconnect member pieces of data, fact, and fragmented story into a coherent account. In deep remembering, members of a community or group that have been dismembered are re-membered. The severed is reunited, the broken made whole.⁴⁷

We cannot remember well alone. A faith community is integral to faithful memory of the God who has come and will come again.

How can Faith Memory affect the Local Church?

Nils Alstrup Dahl talks about preaching as a restoring of memory: “what we understand generally by ‘to preach’ – namely, to deliver a sermon in the church – no longer corresponds to the *kēryssein* of the New Testament, but rather closely to *hypomimnēskēin*, to restore to memory.”⁴⁸ Lisa Lamb states that preachers must recognize that the individuals and communities to which they preach are formed by their memories; that preachers/ministers have the capability to remind the community of

⁴⁶ Lamb, “To Remember Well,” 429-31. Her quote follows, “As we choose to remember *in church*, we acknowledge that our own memory-constructing capacities are faulty, and that those of our culture have been as well. We too readily don the distorting lenses of self-justification, self-condemnation, or nostalgia. . . . Membership in a community of faith can be a powerful antidote to pride and may even undo its distorting effects on memory. We enter the community of faith confessing that we need others, and we need the word of God, to re-collect us, to give context and clarity to our memories.”

⁴⁷ David W. Augsburger, *Hate-Work: Working through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 75.

⁴⁸ Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 19. See also 2 Tim 2:14; Titus 3:10; Jude 5; 2 Peter 1:12; 1 Cor 4:17

memories which they might have forgotten; and that preachers/ministers have the opportunity to enter into the remembering process and teach their congregants to remember well by “interpreting and framing the past in ways that extend grace and truth to self and others, rather than pride or bitterness.”⁴⁹ Thus, we should preach in order to cultivate communities of memory.⁵⁰ People come to the church and choose it as the “primary community of memory that frames and informs their past. Any choice to come to church involves an implicit recognition that one’s own interpretation of the past is limited and may need correction or broadening, reframing in the light of a larger story or a conflicting perspective.”⁵¹

Conclusion

The Christian and Jewish faiths believe that God has intervened within time, constituting a sacred history of divine deeds that have impacted the people of God.⁵² For a faith that is based on the memory of what God has done, to lose that memory is a profound problem.⁵³ It is a dark night of the mind experience when a faith community loses its memory. The people of God today must respond to this knowledge by helping each other to remember and remember well. The Hebrew Bible gives the faithful very

⁴⁹ Lamb, “To Remember Well,” 424.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 429.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Sapp, “Living with Alzheimer’s,” 54.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

practical advice on how to remember well and further studies in the practical application of the importance of faith memory are to come. To close, Frederick Buechner poetically says this about remembering who God is and what God has done for the faithful people:

All that is the past. All that is what there is to remember. And *because* that is the past, *because* we remember, we have this high and holy hope: that what he has done, he will continue to do, that what he has begun in us and our world, he will in unimaginable ways bring to fullness and fruition.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember: Uncollected Pieces* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 12.

Chapter 4

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH TO REMEMBER?:

THE IMPACT OF FAITH MEMORY ON FAITH CONTINUANCE

The Hebrew Bible is the story of how the Israelites were taught to live faithfully and their response to that invitation/command. As discovered in Chapter 2, the Israelites did not remember God and God's past actions in their corporate history well enough and they strayed from their God. Forgetting God is a common ailment of the people of God in modern times as well, one that must be remedied daily as Christians strive to remember all that God has done and thus who God is and who we are in relation to God. When faith memory is not prioritized, practiced, and expounded upon, a chronic, corporate identity crisis can easily occur. This type of faith identity crisis can only be treated with practices that aid faith memory. This chapter explores what it means for the people of God to remember well today, laying the final groundwork for the next chapter which will propose further study into a transformative parallel between the care of Alzheimer's patients and the care of the chronically forgetful Church.

Is Forgetting God Idolatry?

Forgetting God is not defined here as a momentary and casual lapse in recall. Forgetting God is best defined by the willful choosing to not remember what God has done, which lends itself to then forgetting who God is. Faith memory tries to combat the

tendency towards forgetting God, like a balm to a wound that does not heal easily. Of course, when the Hebrew Bible says, “Israel forgot God,”¹ it means that Israel had chosen to serve and worship an idol instead of God. Idol worship, or the worship of something other than the one true God, is a common ailment of the people to which the Hebrew scriptures bear witness. Jones defines idolatry thusly, “an *idol would be an object that claims to be transformative but is only partially so or is destructively transformative. It evokes and plays upon our longing for transformation, but cannot deliver on the promise.*”²

Because the ancient Israelites consistently leaned towards idolatry, we see in the narratives of Judges a continual cycle of disobedience. The judges (and prophets) of ancient Israel were the memory-bearers, the ones who reminded Israel of her faith memory when she chose not to remember for herself. Like rebellious children who have short attention spans, selective hearing and partially developed long-term memory, the people of God must be constantly reminded and refocused to stay on target. After the time of the judges, the prophets took up this same mantle. Forgetting God is חטא (*chata*—sin), the sin of the people of God which has not ended.

Pastors and ministers today are called to be like the judges and prophets of old, calling the people of God to remember the who, what and why of our faith existence. We share the message of the faith, which is both important and good news, that we serve God

¹Judges 8:34, NRSV.

²James W. Jones, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Transference and Transcendence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 123.

because God did such and such and that is important because of this and that. Yet, what happens when the people of God *do* forget and fall away from God?

Part of the fallenness of humanity is our tendency to willfully forget and replace God. Yet, is forgetfulness acceptable in some cases? The motive of our forgetfulness drives its warrant. Do we forget God because it makes our lives easier? Paul Ricoeur believed self-forgetfulness was a way to freedom from distress.³ Perhaps the same is true of faith memory: Forgetting the faith might feel like a path to freedom from distress. Forgetfulness is not the failure to retrieve a file in our memory, but a failure to create a memory. On this topic, Bolles said “forgetting is like striking out at the plate. . . .we want to know why we failed and what we can do to strike out less often, but the issue becomes more practical and less mystical. With good coaching and good effort, we might even improve.”⁴

The possibility of forgetfulness could be the necessary shadow side of faith memory. Wiesel noted in his Nobel Prize speech that the Talmud teaches, “without the

³ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 505, using Kierkegaard’s argument for forgetting as the liberation of care found in Søren Kierkegaard, “What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the Air,” *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 155-212.

⁴ Edmund Blair Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting: An Inquiry into the Nature of Memory* (New York: Walker and Company, 1988), xvi.

ability to forget, man would soon cease to learn.”⁵ Claudia Welz reminds us that we are able to remember because we are able to forget;⁶ she adds,

Forgetting is just as selective as remembering. . . . Total recollection would be identical to total forgetting because if one could reach complete presence by recollecting everything this complete presence would cancel out the past as past--- that is, as something which by definition cannot be completely present any more.⁷

Richard Miller directly noted that “anamnesis requires some measure of amnesia . . . if we remembered everything, we would be insane.”⁸ Miller summarizes Paul Ricoeur’s view of forgetfulness,

Forgetting is both a threat to and a source of memory. On the one hand, it reminds us of our finitude . . . In the active struggle to remember, we tacitly acknowledge an unconscious depth of traces and images of the past, both individually and collectively.⁹

We can only remember because forgetting is possible and/or has occurred.¹⁰ Our call to remember, however, is not to remember everything. The call to remember is a call to

⁵ Elie Wiesel, “Nobel Lecture: Hope, Despair and Memory,” from *Nobel Lectures: Peace 1981-1990*. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-lecture.html (accessed November 28, 2016).

⁶ Claudia Welz, “The Future of the Past”: Memory, Forgetting, and Personal Identity,” in *Impossible Time, Religion in Philosophy and Theology* 68, ed. Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Ulrik Houliind Rasmussen, and Philipp Stoellger (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 202.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁸ Richard B. Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens of Memory,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37 no. 3 (September 2009): 540.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 553, summarizing ideas proposed by Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 284 and 429-30.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 594.

prioritize the most important aspects of life, a large part of which is faith memory. Our call to faith memory, to remember what God has done and thus who God is and who we are in relation to that God, is a call to interest and attention.¹¹

Forgetfulness is inevitable if the object of memory is interpreted as boring or unimportant. Bolles says,

Absentmindedness results from automatic or routine behavior, from not paying attention. If a life is largely dull routine, many of its details are forgotten the instant they occur. . . . Factual memory stays generalized unless a person pays attention to aspects of context that make a particular incident unusual. . . . All memory depends on active movement up through its levels, and action demands physical energy. . . . Memory depends on staying interested, staying alert and staying active.¹²

Bartlett says the “active settings which are chiefly important at the level of human remembering are mainly ‘interest’ settings . . .”¹³ These findings are crucial for Christianity as they point to the reality that, if the faith is not viewed as interesting or impactful, it is more easily forgotten.

How Does Faith Memory Continue?

People pass on what they want others to remember, what they value most. In order to keep a child safe from danger, parents teach the child quickly and clearly what behaviors are expected of her/him (such as not climbing over the railing of a bridge, etc.).

¹¹ See Bolles’ model for remembering in Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting*, 23-41 and 90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 236-37.

¹³ Sir Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 214.

Because advice like this can preserve life and calm a parent's protective instincts, knowledge of potential dangers will be carried on in the memory of that family. What is important to us and our survival is what we pass on. If faith memory becomes unimportant for a generation, that becomes the impetus for a communal faith memory and faith identity crisis. Assmann, building upon the work of Halbwachs, says of memory,

Memory lives and survives through communication, and if this is broken off, or if the referential frames of the communicated reality disappear or change, then the consequence is forgetting. We only remember what we communicate and what we can locate in the frame of the collective memory.¹⁴

Remembering and forgetting are social phenomena. Thus, the call to faith memory is a call to intentional action to remember God and to remind those who have forgotten.

Stanley Hauerwas writes that Christian scripture witnesses to the question of remembrance, not focusing simply on the accuracy of the narratives, but focusing on what a Christian community must be and do to be faithful to God.¹⁵

What Encourages Remembrance?

How can we encourage faith memory when the people of God are habitually forgetful? One way is by repeating the stories of God's actions in the past found in the Bible and in church history and letting that faith memory inform and impact our beings

¹⁴ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Eng. ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23. Also see Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 52-53.

¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, "The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering," *Interpretation* 34 no. 4 (Oct 1980): 366.

and our actions. Pastorally, ministers can care best for their congregations when they take faith memory seriously. John Patton describes pastoral care as the “hearing and remembering that takes place in pastoral relationships based on the conviction that God hears and remembers us.”¹⁶ Patton explores how pastoral care is intimately tied with the art of remembering, saying, “Pastoral carers “re-present” or remind persons of God by remembering and hearing, and affirm by their action that God continues to hear and remember them.”¹⁷ Listening to and repeating the stories of the people of God is one way we can best care for faith continuance. Yet, is it that simple? Other aspects of faith memory that deserve attention include time, place, education, connection (rituals and commemorative ceremonies) and bodily practice.

Time. Holidays and special events are times of remembrance for most groups of people. Depending upon one’s nation, religion, culture, etc., every group of people celebrates the remembrance of past important events that shaped their history and society. Miriam Bush observes that “every celebration, every high holy day, that emerges from the Scriptures and the Judeo-Christian tradition is a feast of remembrance, recalling what God has done and continues to do.”¹⁸ To remember well, Christians remember in time, about events that happened in the past through traditions of remembrance.

¹⁶ John Patton, *Pastoral Care: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸ Miriam Baar Bush, “A Feast of Remembrance,” *Reformed Review* 54 no. 2 (Winter 2000-01): 119.

Place. Places are important for faith memory. Halbwachs and Le Goff tie memories to physical objects, architecture, and geographical location.¹⁹ Booth iterates that “habit and space are less vulnerable to the erosion that afflicts other, more intentional acts of remembrance.”²⁰ The sensory input of place as experienced through our bodies creates memory. Space bears witness to memory, furthering the dilemma of faith memory when one lives far from the original geographical locations of the foundational narratives of Christian faith memory. Further complicating the importance of place in faith memory is the internet worship culture in the United States, allowing one the comfort of not leaving home while participating in a service of worship broadcast online. What happens to faith memory in a culture that is increasingly isolated and individualistic, where religion is broadcast into the home through the internet and TV without need to move location or be involved corporally corporately?

Education. Christians are called “to live in the memory of Jesus’ words.”²¹ Celebrating the Christian year serves as the generational handing down of Christian faith memory. As congregants remember the stories of the faith through the annual journey, they are invited to become part of the story, a continuance of God’s actions in the world.

¹⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte. Étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 128, and Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 71.

²⁰ W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 30.

²¹ Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 70.

Remembering faith memory in this way requires leadership that can instruct the congregants on the purpose and reason behind the remembrance. Education is needed, and the minister is the primary educator of a congregation. Because memory usually contains personal references as the anchor of the event remembered, the minister must make the stories of what God has done as real to the congregants as when the events occurred.²² Le Goff sees Christian teaching as memory²³ in itself because only through education can one who never personally experienced the faith events of the past come to believe that those events have import on their present life. Liturgy, figurative repetitions, and memorization are also important tools of faith memory.²⁴

Connection (Ritual and Commemorative Ceremony). Humans innately look for connection to something outside of themselves, whether that be another person, a God, nature, etc. In Christianity, connections through faith memory and the intentional practice thereof (through ritual and commemorative ceremony) are formational for the Christian life. Assmann discovered that “rituals are part of cultural memory because they are the form through which cultural meaning is both handed down and brought to present life.”²⁵ A commemorative ceremony is where the community is

. . . reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative. This is a collective variant of . . . personal memory, that is to say

²² Bartlett, *Remembering*, 308.

²³ Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 70.

²⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 70.

²⁵ Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 6.

a making sense of the past as a kind of collective autobiography, with some explicitly cognitive components. . . .An image of the past, even in the form of a master narrative, is conveyed and sustained by ritual performances.²⁶

The ancient Jewish community practiced the importance of commemorative ceremony in the festal celebrations of the Jewish calendar. Christians should take note that commemoration and ritual are not outdated or foreign to our faith memory but in fact are vital to our continuance as a people of God. Christianity must put into practice new ways of commemorating God's actions in the past and present that will aid future generations of the faith in their faithfulness to God.

Bodily Practices. Bodily faith practices are also avenues of intentional remembrance. Yet, many times in the practices of Christianity in the United States, bodily social memory has been forgotten.²⁷ Connerton further connects bodily practice with commemorative ceremonies: "commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit, and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatism."²⁸ There are many types of bodily practices that are bearers of memory, two of which are incorporating practice (memories shared only at the place and time of the bodily activity) and inscribing practice (intentionally permitting information to be

²⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

stored outside of the human mind).²⁹ The form of a ritual is just as important as its content³⁰ and the use of bodily practices to aid faith memory are worthy of consideration.

The importance of time, place, education, connection (rituals and commemorative ceremonies) and bodily practice for faith memory might point to the problem that our generational and cultural steering towards low-church, break-with-tradition models of being the church are also exponentially increasing our future forgetfulness when it comes to faith memory. Presence, of self, community, and God, helps ingrain faith memory.

Calls to Remember

One of my strongest memories from my time as an undergraduate student were words spoken during a time of ritual remembrance in chapel: “remember your baptism.”³¹ The diverse calls to remember faith memory, whether that remembrance is in the past or in the future, are crucial for the people of God. Eric Barreto calls baptism a ritual of remembrance.³² The Eucharist is another call to faith memory which helps the Christian faith community remember well. In the partaking of communion, we are quite literally

²⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 72-73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

³¹ Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN. Student Chapel services, 2008-2012.

³² Eric D. Barreto, *Thinking Theologically: Foundations for Learning* (USA: Fortress Press, 2015), 30.

“re-membering Christ’s body, a knitting together of the body of Christ by the participation of many in His sacrifice.”³³ Cavanaugh said further,

Anamnesis is not the mere recall of ever-more-distant past events; it is rather, in John Zizioulas’s apt phrase, the ‘memory of the future.’ The Eucharist enacts the presence not simply of what Christ did in the past, but also and especially the future fulfillment of Christ’s work through the Spirit.³⁴

Cavanaugh’s definition of the power of faith memory in the practice of the Eucharist is enlightening when applied to all practices of faith memory. Prayer can be another mode of remembering well while caring for others; Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes says prayer is a pastoral care act of remembering who God is and who we are.³⁵

Symbolism plays an important part in faith memory as well. The cross, the fish, the altar, the steeple and even clerical vestments are filled with memory and meaning for those to whom the traditions and stories of God and God’s people have been handed down. Symbols call the viewer to remember something or someone greater than the symbol itself. Two examples of powerful symbols that aid faith memory are water and stone. From the washing of feet in Genesis to the soul cleansing waters of baptism in Matthew, water has played an important role in the faith of God-followers. Stone memorials, fountains, and reflecting pools are ways humanity chooses to designate a

³³ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology, ed. Gareth Jones and Lewis Ayres (Padstow, Cornwall, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 229.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

³⁵ Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes, Pastoral Care and Counseling, McAfee School of Theology, Lecture “The Use of Prayer and Scripture,” Spring 2017.

place of remembrance, rebelling against the acidity of forgetfulness and embracing the common story that unites.³⁶ These symbols are what humanity used to remember well, to both “preserve sacred memories and to educate for the future.”³⁷ The symbols of water and stone are still used to remember today, in both secular and religious circles, and can be more intentionally utilized in faith memory.

Witness as Memory-Bearer

Booth says, “It is the habit-memory of that past, as well as explicit remembrance, that is essential to the identity of lives led in common, the persistence of the meaning and value of those relationships.”³⁸ But who makes sure that that memory is continued? Booth continues, “To bear witness, then, is to remember, to be a living memory, to guard the past, to ask others to do likewise, and to illuminate the traces of the past and their meaning.”³⁹ This is another crucial aspect of faith memory that persists: witnesses must bear the memory to those who have forgotten and to those who have never known.

The witness to an event bears the memory and shares the memory with others, thus shaping the descendants to come. Bearing witness to collective memories as passed

³⁶ For a more detailed discussion on how water and stone memorials are used in modern-day remembrance, see Booth’s *Communities of Memory*, 106-11.

³⁷ Marie A. Conn, “From the Rock Came Living Water: Stone and Water as Vehicles of Ritual Memory,” in *Not Etched in Stone: Essays on Ritual Memory, Soul, and Society*, ed. Marie A. Conn and Thérèse McGuire (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 14.

³⁸ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

down from generation to generation continues a singular common identity for a people group. Naturally, as more and more time accumulates between the original shaping story and those that are called to remember the story, more reminding must occur for the story to be as central as it formerly was to the identity of the people. Booth poignantly reminds us,

We bear witness because of a felt moral obligation, because of justice, and because, in our bonds of filiation, we love and desire remembrance. Yet, as I also have suggested, it is a difficult intimacy between witnessing and memory: a burden, a struggle . . .⁴⁰

We know that human memory is not foolproof. Witnessing to the faith memory of a group is subject to inaccuracy and distortion if we are not accountable and careful.⁴¹

Being part of a community that is to persist in the future means that one is responsible for bearing witness to the founding stories of the community through acts of memory.⁴²

Is Faith Memory Ethical?

Harkening back to the same question asked in the first chapter of this thesis, one can see that faith memory has strong ethical import. Summarizing Avishai Margalit's *The Ethics of Memory*, Miller emphasizes that "memory should generally be understood only in ethical, not moral terms. . . .To say that we care about a person is to say that we remember him or her. Accordingly, a failure to remember would say something about our

⁴⁰ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, 87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xiii.

lack of care.”⁴³ Miller pointed out that “. . . many religions regularly ask their adherents to recall foundational events, persons, and decrees. That memory has been generally neglected in the field of religious ethics is an odd fact indeed.”⁴⁴ Freud, while studying the conscious and unconscious, theorized that neither memory nor forgetfulness is innocent: both involve agency as memory and forgetting can both be desire-driven.⁴⁵ Memories can come and go, based somewhat upon our desire to be intentional about our remembrance. Because of the voluntary nature of much of memory (though not all), memory is thus linked to agency and, “with that, our moral responsibility.”⁴⁶ Because memory is not simply individual and private, human agency is used to make known our memories publicly, both in formal and informal channels.⁴⁷ We choose which memories are important to share or important to not share. Ricoeur linked memory to responsibility and identity, as a practical base for accountability.⁴⁸ Stanley Hauerwas explains that a biblical ethic

⁴³ Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 28; summarized in Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 541.

⁴⁴ Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 534.

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960), 27; summarized in Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 538.

⁴⁶ Miller, “The Moral and Political Burdens,” 535.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 561.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 551, summarizing Ricoeur’s understanding of Locke in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 102-9.

. . . requires the existence of a community capable of remembering in the present no less than it did in the past for the formation and acceptance of the Scripture as the ultimate moral authority for Christians. Where such a community does not exist the most sophisticated scholarly and hermeneutical skills cannot make Scripture morally relevant. . . .The authority of Scripture derives its intelligibility from the existence of a community that knows its life depends on faithful remembering of God’s care of his creation through the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus. . . .The formation of texts, as well as the canon, required the courage of a community to constantly remember and reinterpret its past. Such remembering and reinterpretation is a political task, for without a tradition there can be no community. That we no longer consider remembering as an ethical or political task manifests our questionable assumption that ethics primarily concerns decisions and politics brokers power.⁴⁹

If faith memory is then an ethical task, as Hauerwas concludes, can faith memory also be creative?

Is Faith Memory Creative?

What is the creative process of faithful remembering? “As listeners to Scripture acquire the discipline and skill of learning to remember Israel’s past—and that of the church throughout history—as their own,” Lamb said, “they gain a transferable skill of empathetic imagination towards others.”⁵⁰ For Edmund Bolles, remembering is an act of imagination; he promotes an idea of memory that is less concrete and more creative: “Remembering is a creative, constructive process. There is no storehouse of information about the past anywhere in our brain.”⁵¹ His book shows that the importance and strength

⁴⁹ Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” 357.

⁵⁰ Lisa W. Lamb, “To Remember Well Together: Preaching and Memory in Ethnically Diverse Congregations,” *Word & World* 28 no. 4 (Fall 2008): 431.

⁵¹ Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting*, xi.

of true memory is not storing an “infinite amount of information” but helping us to “remember/imagine an infinite number of experiences.”⁵² Thus, “memory is a living product of desire, attention, insight, and consciousness.”⁵³ We can see that this is true with the memories we hold dear from our individual faith memory: memories of retreats, camps, and mountain top experiences stick with us longer than the three bullet points from our weekly homily. Thus, a person does not have a great memory, rather someone can be described as a great rememberer. Bartlett describes memory in this way:

Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable mixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form. It is thus hardly ever really exact . . . and it is not at all important that it should be so.⁵⁴

Yet, we must not get too imaginative with our recollections, as imagination without limits surely creates fanciful and untrue faith stories. Bergson submits that “to picture [imagine] is not to remember.”⁵⁵ Ricoeur says,

A phenomenology of memory cannot fail to recognize what we have just called the pitfall of the imaginary, inasmuch as this putting-into-images, bordering on the hallucinatory function of imagination, constitutes a sort of weakness, a discredit, a loss of reliability for memory.⁵⁶

⁵² Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting*, xiv.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 213.

⁵⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1919), 173.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 54.

Imagination in faith memory must not be scorned, but, in our embracing imagination as a tool of faith memory, we must give it fair limitations.

Conclusion

What may be concluded from this chapter? The people of God need to be intentional about faith memory if we are to be the faithful, enduring people of God. We may be post-Christendom in many parts of the developed world, but let us not be post-biblical, post the story of God's people then and now. The emphasis on the remembrance of faith memory implies a very cause-and-effect result. When you remember what God has done, then you know who you are in relation to God, and you follow God's ways. When you do not remember what God has done, you no longer remember who you are in relation to God, and you do not follow God's ways. This statement runs a risk of oversimplification for the necessity of pointing out the utter cruciality of faith memory for the healthy and faithful continuance of Christianity. We remember, must remember, and cannot fail to remember our God and God's actions in faith memory if we are to continue as a faithful people of God.

CHAPTER 5
FORGETTING TO REMEMBER: THE SPIRITUAL ALZHEIMER'S OF THE
PEOPLE OF GOD

What do we do when our faith memory is faulty? How do we measure how much and to what extent our faith memory is lost? How do ministers help people remember the faith story and notice when the faith memory has been tainted? It is important to remember as a people of faith; Christianity is the story of God's remembering, thus the pastoral carer takes this as her example to remember and hear the person cared for.¹ Essentials—for the pastoral care of people who do not remember faith memory well—are the practices of listening, remembering, and patience.² By listening, remembering, and patiently working with a forgetful people, faith memory can become central and formative again, as remembering the story of God reminds the people of their place and identity in God's story as well.

Remembrance as Pastoral Care

Pastors are caregivers who remember faith memory for the Church that cannot remember for itself. Caring for a church that is confused and forgetful, pastors can choose

¹ John Patton, *Pastoral Care: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 62.

to stand in the gap as witness-bearing, faithful rememberers and faith memory guides along the journey. While not literally true in a one-to-one correlation, I suggest a story of spiritual Alzheimer's disease as a modern parable for the faulty faith memory of the people of God. The Israelites of the Hebrew Bible and the people of God today experience and participate in the dire effects of a spiritual type of Alzheimer's, a forgetfulness and inability to recall the most identifying aspects of their faith past, aspects which affect their faith identity in the present. A modern parable of this nature helps the reader visualize the gravity and lasting effects of a faulty faith memory. If the people of God cannot remember, if they forget what God has done for them and who God truly is continually, then it becomes a minister's charge to help the people to remember, even if the cure for a chronic faith forgetfulness is never found.

Remembrance as Gift and Grace

Can remembrance be a gift, even an act of grace? When some have forgotten what God has done and who God is, might the act of helping them to remember be a life-giving act of pastoral care (whether done by a pastor or by another faithful one)? Daniel Aleshire states that one way faith develops is as "a gift of God. It is shaped by life and tradition. Faith is 'remembering God,' and it changes as attention and memory change. It does not change in the predictable ways developmental processes bring about change."³ If this is true, Aleshire says that ministers then must help "people live reflectively and openly to the presence of God. . . .merging of thinking and feeling into an imaginative

³ Daniel Aleshire, *Faithcare* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 43.

knowing.”⁴ That remembrance can be a gift is further observed by Miriam Bush, who says, “Memories remind us from whence we have come, who we are, and whose we are. . . .When we obey God’s command to remember, we participate in the liturgy, the work of the people, and we recall God’s grace toward us.”⁵

When the people of God do not remember well, identity and clarity of mind and purpose are casualties, not unlike the effects of Alzheimer’s disease. In speaking of the effects of Alzheimer’s, Bush says, “Without memory we are adrift in a sea of uncertainty, confusion and fear. Remembering is surely a precious and priceless gift of grace.”⁶

Further,

When we no longer know ourselves or remember from where we have come, to be remembered and known is a gift of grace. . . we, like God, must remember one another on behalf of one another. Remembering is not solely an individual act. . . .Corporate memory is a powerful reality.⁷

When one cannot remember the basic self-identifying stories of one’s past, it becomes very hard to remember who one really is.⁸ Donald Capps says, “To have a sense of self, one surely needs to know where and to whom one belongs.”⁹ Some people may lack

⁴ Aleshire, *Faithcare*, 43 and 47.

⁵ Miriam Baar Bush, “A Feast of Remembrance,” *Reformed Review* 54 no. 2 (Winter 2000-01): 119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸ Donald Capps, “Alzheimer’s Disease and the Loss of Self,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 62 no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2008): 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

faith memory, not because they have a lack of desire but because of the detriments of metaphorical genetic predispositions of the faith, passed down century by century in the corporate code of the people of God.

North American values of individualism and extreme productivity do not leave room for valuing remembrance or valuing those who struggle with remembering well.¹⁰ These values have seeped into the church: we value individual articulation of the content of our belief, but what happens when one with Alzheimer's, physical or metaphorical, can no longer do that?¹¹ What if the church was equipped to gather around local and regional bodies who had forgotten our story and creatively, lovingly, help them to remember our story? As Van Voorst says, "this terrible disease that destroys memory can help us remember, and minister out of, the most basic truths of the Christian faith."¹² In describing faith memory, he says further,

The main place where humans remember God, and where God remembers us, is not in the individual believer's experience but in the corporate worship of God. Moreover, in the festivals of Israel, the people remember before God his gracious acts for their salvation and recommit themselves to the covenant by retelling the story so as to apply it to themselves. Here again, memory leads to transformative action.¹³

¹⁰ Robert E. Van Voorst, "The Biblical Concept of Remembering and Ministry to People with Alzheimer's Disease," *Reformed Review* 54 no. 2 (Winter 2000-01): 103.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 102.

Conclusion

Remembrance and commemoration are important in Christian worship because “to ‘remember Jesus Christ’ does not mean to preserve in memory an image of him but to let this memory form our thoughts and actions.”¹⁴ If Claudia Welz is right in saying, “We can remember or forget only that which we have experienced and witnessed personally or learned by proxy, for instance, through history lessons or media transmissions,”¹⁵ how can someone remember God’s story or faith memory correctly if that one has not been taught? We coax, demand, and hammer people to read their Bibles and pray, but do we even realize why that is so important for the continuance of the faith? Bolles says,

. . . All memory depends on active movement up through its levels, and action demands physical energy. As people grow older and have less energy, moving up the staircase may become more and more like climbing a real flight of stairs. They can do it, but it takes longer and the temptation to stop at a lower level grows more enticing. . . . Memory depends on staying interested, staying alert and staying active.¹⁶

Like the Israelites, in every new generation and period of the Church we must constantly remind each other of our faith memory, of what God has already done for God’s people, so that we may have good moorings for faithfully living into the future. The Church

¹⁴ Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 20-21.

¹⁵ Claudia Welz, “The Future of the Past: Memory, Forgetting, and Personal Identity,” in *Impossible Time, Religion in Philosophy and Theology* 68, ed. Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Ulrik Houliind Rasmussen, and Philipp Stoellger (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 210.

¹⁶ Edmund Blair Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting: An Inquiry into the Nature of Memory* (New York: Walker and Company, 1988), 236-7.

must use the past actions of God in history as a compass, pointing actively into the future and not staying dormant in the past.

Without remembering well, the Church will stray from its identity and the people we seek to care for will never know the reason for the Good News we try to proclaim. Without faith memory, the faith cannot continue in its unadulterated form and will instead spread idolatry in the stead of the worship of God. The problem of the forgetfulness of God's people is not a new one but it is a problem that each and every new generation must choose to confront; will this generation be the one that remembers God well or will this generation be the one that drops the ball? We must choose to remember well or our faith will drift off into a sea of forgetfulness for which it was never meant, and the lasting effects will be on our hands.

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