EMBODYING EUCHARISTIC MEMORY: 
HOW THE EUCHARIST SHAPES 
THE CHURCH’S PAST, 
PRESENT AND 
FUTURE

by

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ABSTRACT
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Memory shapes both individual and communal identity. This identity forms the lens through which we see ourselves, the world and the “other.” The powerful effect of memory also influences our decision making. In addition, this lens has the ability to distort the “other” as an enemy who threatens our identity. This vilifying of the other can be attributed to previous conflicts and wrongdoings, both suffered and committed, between two groups of peoples or nations. The pain and suffering of such memories can prevent reconciliation and forgiveness from occurring and perpetuate violence.

In this essay, I argue that the liturgical practice of the Eucharist forms and sustains a Christian community that is characterized by reconciliation and forgiveness in an unforgiving world by challenging that community to remember its past and future in the present. My methodology is threefold and begins with addressing and summarizing what scholarship has said concerning the link between memory and identity. This includes a study of collective memory that was initiated by Maurice Halbwachs. In addition, I explain how collective memory is formed and how it plays a unique role in any and every community. Following this, I turn my attention to research done by various theologians – with special attention given to Miroslav Volf – who have implemented memory into their theologies of reconciliation and forgiveness. After that, I show how the Eucharist plays a central role in the formation of the identity and character of the Christian community. To conclude my argument, I present three scenarios in which the Church can currently embody Eucharistic forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Church’s participation in the Eucharist shapes and maintains her identity as the incarnate presence of Christ’s body on earth. The Eucharist allows the Church to identify with the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It is a foretaste of new creation, which is characterized by ultimate reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus, it is through interpreting present and past events through the lens of the Eucharistic memory that the Church can live in the world as a community characterized by reconciliation and forgiveness.
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INTRODUCTION

We live in a world that is diverse and complex with countless cultures and peoples, each with their own sense of identity. Identity, whether on the individual or cultural level, forms our understanding of the world and how we relate to it. There are multiple factors that affect the construction of identity, but one of the most basic factors is memory. Memory shapes identity. It is not only personal identity that is created, but also national and cultural identity. This identity forms the lens through which we see ourselves, the world and the “other.” The powerful effect of memory is not merely restricted to our perceptions; it also influences our decision making. In addition, this lens has the ability to distort the “other” as an enemy that threatens our identity. This vilifying of the other can be attributed to previous conflicts and wrongdoings, both suffered and committed, between two groups of peoples or nations. The pain and suffering of such memories can prevent reconciliation and forgiveness from occurring.

Different groups of people and individuals of the same geographical region can share the same past, but not share the same memories due to the cultural framework in which they operate. This means that whenever a conflict occurs, there are at least two sides to every story. Throughout history there have been those declared as “winners” and “losers.” The latter are often written off as being on the “wrong side of history.” One’s memory of triumph can, at the same time, be another’s memory of suffering. Memories are not always shaped by positive experiences and stories of success. The memories of suffering and of defeat can often be just as powerful or even more so than narratives of triumph. A sense of loss, injustice, humiliation, and resentment can muster up an immense and powerful amount of motivation. The heroic capacity to endure amid great adversity can summon up a sense of moral strength and intensity even more potent than pride in achievements. These kinds of negative identities gain their strength by having a
common enemy, which individuals can hate together even if for different reasons. By choosing one perspective from which to tell history, narratives have the power to ostracize, not only single individuals, but entire groups, from the national community – symbolically as well as literally.

What is the Christian to do about the seemingly unavoidable effect of memory on identity? To venture forward, there must be a point where memory and theology intersect. Otherwise, neither the Christian nor the Christian faith has an answer for the lack of forgiveness and reconciliation in this world. Robert Vosloo addresses the issue that this poses the Church:

Christians and churches have often withdrawn from the public conversation – thus leaving it open to secular construal. Often this is accompanied by a type of detached criticism of the attempts to deal with these issues, rather than by a more constructive, albeit critical, engagement. This “detachment” can, on the one hand, be the result of a type of nostalgia that longs for the “good old days” On the other hand, it can also be a lazy legitimization of the status quo… a theologically deficient view of repentance and forgiveness that robs Christians of the resources to think and act in a constructive way with regard to these issues. Such a theologically deficient view, which can result in either moral paralysis or misguided action, can be called a static view of repentance and forgiveness.¹

Fortunately, the study of memory has not been limited to the fields of psychology and sociology; the study of memory has been picked up by many theologians. One of the first theologians to incorporate memory and theology was Augustine. He thought of memory as being inherently communal and that there is an inherent ethical component to it. In Book X of his Confessions, Augustine wrote a lengthy essay on the nature of memory. His rationale for writing on memory, simply put, is that it is only in his memory that he finds himself, as well as God. He writes, “In the huge hall of my memory… there I also meet myself and recall myself… Behold how great a territory I have explored in my memory seeking thee, O Lord! And in it all I have still not found

thee. Nor have I found anything about thee, except what I had already retained in my memory from the time I learned of thee. For where I found Truth, there found I my God, who is the Truth."2 In addition, Augustine acknowledges the mind’s limited capacity to grasp itself, as well as to apprehend and comprehend God: “This faculty of memory is a great one, O my God, exceedingly great, a vast, infinite recess. Who can plumb its depths? This is a faculty of my mind, belonging to my nature, yet I cannot myself comprehend all that I am.”3 This journey into his own mind illustrates a paradox of memory. In what for Augustine is a question of identity and belief, there is the necessity, duty and obligation to remember the past in its reality. He could never find the solution to the enigma of memory, yet his speculations have remained a touchstone for theologians and philosophers writing on memory.

The notion that there is a moral responsibility for the Christian to remember rightly has been revived in recent scholarship. The hope of these theologians is to create a way for Christians to interface with memory in a way that does not erase the memory of past wrongs or justify them, but reinterpret them into the Christian narrative. One of the major contributors to a Christian theology of remembering is Miroslav Volf. In agreement with Augustine, Volf believes that people have a moral obligation to “remember rightly,” which is a concept he posits in his book *The End of Memory.*4 He regards it as remembering justly for the sake of the wronged person as an individual, as well as for what is just for those who have wronged that person and for the larger community. His reasoning for this is that remembering any wrongdoing or suffering rightly is never a “private affair” even if the suffering happens in the isolated space of

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3 Ibid., 10.8.15.
one’s own mind.\textsuperscript{5} The remembering of any suffering, inherently, contains public significance; relations between the victim, the wrongdoer and the community at large are involved. Also, in congruence with Augustine, the ability to fulfill one’s obligation to remember rightly is limited by human fallibility and particularity.\textsuperscript{6} Though people cannot claim to represent the whole truth, Volf rejects radical postmodern claims that all claims to truth are merely manipulative and self-protecting. Partial perspectives can still be pursued truthfully and lovingly, and memory can be pursued not as a means of self-vindication but as an ally in efforts for reconciliation. This makes the central question for remembering rightly not \textit{whether} to remember, but \textit{how to remember rightly}. This must consist of not only what is right for the wronged person as an individual. It must also entail what is right for those who have wronged that person and for the larger community. Failure to remember rightly often results in the perpetuation of wrongdoing and giving space for the escalation of violence.

For Volf, remembering rightly is part of the Christian identity. He points to the Eucharist as the source of Christian memory and identity, but his work focuses primarily on the Christian individual, in remembering rightly, and not the Christian community at large. Though he does not fail to acknowledge the need for the Christian community in forging a corporate memory of the Eucharist, there is no explanation for how that corporate memory is created and sustained. In accordance with Volf, I will argue that memory plays a crucial role in Christian identity. The purpose of this thesis is explicitly to make the connection between Eucharist and collective memory. The communal participation of Eucharist helps form and maintain the memory and identity of the Church. The way by which I want to make this connection is by exploring Volf’s

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid., 12.
\item Ibid., 51–53.
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idea of “sacred communities.” A sacred community is, simply put, a community whose worship and practices bridge the gap between a past event and the present. The Church is such a community and the Eucharist is the practice that bridges the gap between the Passion event and today. I believe that the communal participation of the Church in the Eucharist solidifies her collective identity and memory. The Church, thus, interprets the past and current events through the lens of this sacred memory. This enables the Church not to look upon the violent past begrudgingly, with hatred, but with a vision for reconciliation and forgiveness. Therefore, I will argue that the liturgical practice of the Eucharist forms and sustains a Christian community that is characterized by reconciliation and forgiveness in an unforgiving world by challenging that community to remember its past and future in the present.

My argument will be divided into three chapters. In Chapter One, I will address and summarize what scholarship has said concerning the link between memory and identity. This scholastic survey will begin with the study of collective memory that was initiated by Maurice Halbwachs, who explored the relationship between individual memory and the memory of groups. In addition, I will explicate how collective memory is formed and how it plays a unique role in any and every community. In Chapter Two, I will turn my attention to the research done by various theologians – with special attention given to Miroslav Volf – who have implemented memory into their theologies concerning reconciliation and forgiveness. Here, I will address the issues of trauma and distorting memory, followed by a section on how to “remember rightly.” In Chapter Three, I will begin with a short explanation of the concept of “sacred community,” which Volf explains in *The End of Memory*. Then, I will use the Old Testament Israelite community as an example of a prototypical sacred community. By juxtaposing the Passover meal

7 Ibid., 99–100.
to the Eucharistic meal, I will show how the Eucharist plays a central role in the formation of the identity and character of the Christian community. It is a foretaste of new creation, which is characterized by ultimate reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus, it is through interpreting present events through the lens of the Eucharistic memory that the Church can live in the world as an agent of reconciliation and forgiveness.
CHAPTER ONE: MEMORY AND IDENTITY

“What is more important about the past than facts? The answer is memory, because memory, whether personal or collective, belongs to us. It 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.”¹ As this statement by Phillip R. Davies declares, there lies a close connection between memory and identity. They are neither equivalent nor synonymous terms, but memory serves as a touchstone for identity and vice-versa. Memory is something that a person can, though not physically, possess. Therefore, memory has a direct link to the identity of individuals and communities alike; this link enables it to shape them as well. However, this link between memory and identity can be traversed in both directions. This means that individuals and communities can shape certain memories to narrate past events in a way that protects their identity and preserves their way of life. The purpose of this chapter is to establish some foundational points. First, that memory has a direct link to individual and communal identity. Second, that memory has a formative element that enables it to shape individuals and communities. Third, that that memory can also be shaped by communities to narrate events that protect commonly held values and beliefs. It is upon this foundation that the remainder of the argument will be built.

Memory: A Basis for Identity

Memory is about the relationship between things remembered from the past and living in the present. It is of great significance both for individuals and for communities. Memory is a

basis for identity in that it anchors and orients us in time by providing an explanation for how we have come to know the situation we find ourselves in. This is crucial because memories change over time, with elements added or subtracted, and with perspectives shifted as new experiences call for or even require a different grasp of the past. This dialectic of sameness and change allows us to negotiate the shifting currents in our own day-to-day existence.\(^2\) From a psychological perspective, “identity” refers to one’s capacity for self-reflection and self-awareness. This capacity for reflection and awareness is also related to the culture in which one finds her/his-self. Identity is important for a person’s sense of self and how they relate to others. Identifying with a particular culture makes people feel they belong and gives them a sense of security. It also provides access to social networks, which provide support and shared values and aspirations.\(^3\)

The cohesive dimension of memory is maintained most efficiently in a constructed narrative of the past that is then shared as a common legacy or heritage by a people. People are constantly in the process of writing and rewriting the stories of their lives in order to make sense of the world around them. Their memories become part of this story and part of their sense-making efforts.\(^4\) E. Byron Anderson says,

> Without a personal story by which to name oneself, without the resources of memory by which to construct such a story, the human self is not a self but free-floating fluff subject to each little breeze, waiting to be deposited where one is not wanted. Without the memories needed to make a story, the person remains disconnected from that which gave it birth, from that which would receive it for the future, even from that which would threaten its

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destruction. Without such memory we remain “immersed in the present” where our only question can be “Where and who am I?”

Even before such an epistemological question can be answered, there are the preliminary questions of “Where have I been?” and “Where am I going?” that cannot be answered without memory as well. Being anchored in memory gives us the capacity to be free from entanglement in the immediate present, thereby, making it possible to ask about a past and to imagine a future. When all that exists is the present, the opportunity for a story, history, or imagination is bleak; all that remains is an elusive and quickly fleeting “now,” which leaves all questions concerning the self unanswerable.

It is important to recognize that memory is not an objective thing that one can possess or lose. Rather, memory can only be in the act of remembering. Memory is not a passive object that can be attended to like a written text, but a “process of active restructuring, in which elements may be retained, reordered or suppressed.” Furthermore, the performance of memory must not be limited to recollection and the retrieval of isolated facts or life events. It is not computerized data retrieval. The performance of memory empowers a person to construct a self, or “re-member.”

David Hogue writes, “Because memories constitute the self, each time we remember an event from our own lives, the self is transformed. The act of re-membering is an act of self-reconstruction. Each time we remember the events that have shaped our lives, we are re-membering who we are.” Re-membering as the construction of the self means individuals are

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6 Ibid., 126.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 David Hogue, Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 75.
capable of weaving together narrative sequences that have meaning. For the sake of a particular narrative, one will attempt to integrate isolated or strange phenomena into a single unified process. The act of remembering, the act of constructing a narrative for one’s life, enables a person to identify oneself with a particular life story.

Memory speaks not only of the past, but also in the present and toward the future. As human narrative knits together past, present, and future, the location of the present can be understood as “temporality rich with sedimentations of the immediate past and intimations of the immediate future.”

However, it is not only memory that shapes the present and future, but the present and future also shape and define the way in which memory is constructed. The way in which we remember is always already conditioned by our anticipations. If we approach the past with a different set of possibilities, we creatively transform it. Thus, it is not only a personal narrative that is constructed, but also a personal memory. Memory is read and interpreted through the lens of present concerns and future hopes while it is shaping and defining those concerns and hopes. What results in all of this is a dialogue between past, present and future. Within a person’s present lies the relationship between the past and future, in which the past as constructed within the self projects the future, a future which always remains unknown yet which can be perceived by way of imagination, hope, and anticipation.

Memory provides individuals with an identity—who and what they are. However, we are not just shaped by memories; we can also shape the memories that shape us. Remembering is a gathering of fragments because we have deliberately forgotten certain aspects of the past. Due


11 Ibid., 127–28.

to this, over the past few decades, the term “memory” has started to replace the term “history” when referring to the past. The primary reason for this is claims of validity; skepticism has developed with regards to authoritative claims of knowing or mediating history. Instead, there has been a movement towards the multiplicity of stories from ordinary storytellers. This is because there is a real threat perceived by researchers as the “manipulation of the past” for public relations or political agendas. Memory can result from an experience and/or a re-construction of a past experience. When constructing a memory, certain historical events can be reshaped or concealed for political purposes and gain.

The process of forming a memory is a discourse that becomes the molecular structure of a person or community. Within any group of people, there will almost invariably be competing or even opposing voices. These voices must be orchestrated together in order to produce a unified, solidified core of set beliefs and to create a common bond between the past and the present. So, just as memory revolves around concrete events in time, it is a negotiation of one’s identity that takes place concerning those events. The negotiation of memory is guided by social norms of remembrance. Just as a culture has social norms for behavior, values, etc., there are social norms for remembering that inform us about what should be remembered as well as what should be forgotten. These social norms can be enforced in formal settings like museums and old battle grounds, or in less formal settings such as the family table where older family members reminisce and share stories. It is the use of these social patterns, through which narratives are conveyed that individuals feel connectedness through emplotment where they provide historical meaning to both their past and present. Gaétane-Diane Forget aptly put it this way, “The past is

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13 Wielenga, “Healing and Reconciliation After Violent Conflict,” 211.

14 Ibid., 212.
never able to survive unto itself. It can only survive if it is reconstructed within the framework of a cultural present. This reconstruction starts with the present and reaches back into the past. The past is, in fact, a cultural projection. History becomes the recollection of events that occupy man’s thoughts. What triggers the remembering of a particular set of events rather than another is the framework of [humanity’s] present.”

This means that two different groups of people or even individuals of the same geographical region may have lived the same past, but remember it differently due to the cultural framework in which they operate. As a result, negotiation must occur in order to produce a unified narrative that is whole.

It is argued that this sense of identity, which is a result of the negotiation of memory, is an illusion because some people within a community may never know or even meet all their fellow-members. However, in each of their minds lives the image of their communion. By embedding oneself into a narrative via emplotment “we manage to provide both past and present events with historical meaning.” Narratives are how people provide past events in their minds with meaning, which may not be an objective meaning, but rather a manufactured meaning through the social structures that idealizes the values and beliefs of a certain group.

**Collective Memory**

In the same way individuals have complex narratives about their lives that incorporate their memories, it can be argued that communities and nations have what are called “collective memories.” The term “collective memory” emerged in critique of the totalizing aspects of

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historiography. The person credited with this term is Maurice Halbwach (1877–1945). He was a philosopher and sociologist who took an interdisciplinary approach to the study of memory. According to Halbwach, “collective memory” is a social phenomenon that is the heart of any group. Without it, society would cease to be. In this context, a person gains identity or meaning through participation in a social framework. Individual stories are only meaningful when they are interpreted from collective memory, which provides a social framework for a meaningful interpretation of individual experiences. Collective memory is powerful because it has meaning for the group that remembers it. This communal search for meaning establishes and clarifies identity. The collectively remembered past clarifies for people their personal and group identity, which is always an “identity-in-relationship.” Collective memory plays its role in sustaining group identity.

Locating Collective Memory

The next step in understanding collective memory is discovering where it is located. Is it located outside of the individual or within? Those who believe the former do not treat collective memories as aggregated or shared individual memories, but as social representations contained, not in the head, but in the world. This means that the focus is on how society, not individuals, forms and maintains public representations of the past. Thus, these scholars do not regard collective memory as a collection of individual memories or some mysteriously constructed

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18 Wielenga, “Healing and Reconciliation After Violent Conflict,” 212.


reservoir of ideas and images, but rather as a socially articulated and maintained reality of the past. Their argument is that a collective memory as a set of ideas, images, and feelings about the past is not located in the minds of individuals, but in the resources shared between them. Other notable scholars pinpoint collective memories outside the individual by drawing a distinction between communicative and cultural memories. As the name indicates, communicative memories are transmitted between people through communication; for instance, a joke told by one person to another, or an experience transmitted by a member of one generation to a member of the next. Cultural memories can last for centuries. Cultural memories occur when communicative memories are transformed into “objectivized culture,” the “culturally institutionalized heritage of a society.” That is, they are maintained by objects in the world. Since they are embedded within objectivized culture, and not individuals, cultural memories are not temporally bounded. Moreover, and importantly, they preserve the supply of knowledge from where a group derives an awareness of its identity. On this view, cultural memory, not communicative memory, grounds the collective identity of a society. Scholars who locate collective memories in the world are not denying that it is individuals, rather than groups or social resources, doing the remembering. However, from their studies they perceive memory as


23 Ibid. Author’s emphasis.

24 Ibid., 186.
being so deeply enveloped in society that individual memory cannot be separated from social influences on memory.\textsuperscript{25}

However, here are those who locate collective memory within the individual. These scholars of collective memory decry that it is people memorizing and remembering, not social resources or practices. Archives, commemorations, or memorials do not memorize or remember – people do. The shared individual memories creating a collective memory must bear a collective identity, but they are, nevertheless, shared individual memories.

Moreover, there is a third approach to locating collective memory, which serves as a middle ground between the first two. This is the epidemiological approach. At the heart of this approach to the psychology of collective memory is an understanding that a memory spreads across a community not because of societal memory practices and resources or by individual cognitive efforts, but through a complex interaction between the two.\textsuperscript{26} An epidemiological approach can still treat collective memories as shared individual memories, but locate them in the interaction between what is out in the world and what is in the head. By studying collective memories this way, the study involves at least two components: (1) the exploration of the design of the mnemonic or social resources, practices, or tools – that is, what is in the world – and (2) the effectiveness of these instrumentalities, which would include biological constraints on mnemonic practices and resources.\textsuperscript{27} In this way, it is possible to view the two opposing approaches to the study of collective memory not as representing incompatible claims about collective memory, but, on the contrary, as representing two sides of the same coin. The

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 188.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 189. In the chapters to follow, I will adhere to the epidemiological approach concerning collective memory.
individual must be taken seriously, even if the individual is deeply embedded in a social world. For a collective memory to form, society must construct, maintain and reconfigure memory practices and resources, but it is equally important for these practices and resources to be effective in altering the memories of members of a community. Of the three approaches to addressing collective memory, I will take the epidemiological approach, which serves as a middle way between the first two. My reasoning for this is that memory is relational. Memory cannot be isolated to an object, group or individual. The interaction between a sign, symbol, social practice or mnemonic device and an individual stirs up memories of their personal life as well as memories of their community in which they live. They work in tandem to create and maintain a collective memory.

How Collective Memory is Shaped

Now that I have identified the location of collective memory as being in the interaction between sign, symbol, social practice, mnemonic device, and the individual and their community, I will explore how that interaction produces and shapes collective memory. Collective memory research examines how the process of memory formation is a social and collective experience, rather than one that is wholly psychological and isolated. One common media that communities use in the process of memory formation is story-telling. The stories that communities tell about themselves are an important part of this process, as they seek to socialize new members into their fold. In his article, “A Model for Comparative Collective Memory Studies: Regime Types, Cultural Traditions, and Difficult Histories,” Mark A. Wolfgram develops a general model for the process of collective memory formation.28 He begins with what

he calls a standard way of thinking about cultural production, and the generation of meaning and shared understandings. This standard way can be as simple as when two or more individuals encounter a cultural object that functions as a representation of the past, such as a film or a museum exhibition and participate in a discussion with each other about their understanding of the object. Regardless of whether they succeed or fail in coming to some shared understanding of what they have experienced, some meaning or understanding about the object has been created. This can then be shared with others. All of this has taken place within some context or cultural matrix, which affects everyone’s interpretation of the object and how they have attempted to communicate this with the other individual. The cultural matrix will differ significantly depending upon the level of overall freedom in the society.  

In addition to his general model for collective memory formation, Wolfgram takes into account the change of collective memory over time. At the end of any type of significant event or conflict there is an immediate drive by society to define it in a way that smoothly fits into the master narrative. For instance, after a war there are certain questions that need answers: “What explains and justifies this mass death and destruction?” “Why did it happen?” “Who are the victims and the perpetrators?” “Who engaged in resistance or collaboration?” “How do varying parties label the end of the conflict, either as liberation or a defeat?” If there is a far-reaching consensus in the society about these questions, the society will begin to establish a clear master narrative and the range of future discussion will begin to narrow. There are four internal factors that Wolfgram believes must be kept into account when referencing his model of collective memory formation: 1) the memory-market dictum, 2) state-society relations, 3) the cultural

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29 Ibid., 14. For his argument, Wolfgram is comparing the distinctions between authoritarian and democratic societies and how they have dealt with violent histories.
matrix and 4) generational turnover.\textsuperscript{30} The memory-market dictum is a formulation that helps us analyze the different cultural objects that are being created in each society: “As memory makers need access to ‘capital’ to reach the market, the more market dependent and capital intensive a given mode of representation is, the more likely one is to find it in tune with the times.”\textsuperscript{31} The “capital” that Wolfgram refers to will primarily take either a financial form or a political one. This means that communities help shape and create collective memory by fueling cultural objects with whatever “capital” yields the desired product, thereby quieting the voice of the minority and the marginalized. State-society relations have a profound impact on the overall changes that develop or fail to develop in each case. The memory-market dictum reveals that when a broad social consensus exists, minority views can be easily silenced. This is especially true if the state does not take an active role in encouraging communities to challenge existing “truths” about the past.\textsuperscript{32} The cultural matrix is the context in which debates that challenge existing truths occur. Within this matrix, according to Wolfgram, is symbolic and cultural power. An example that he provides is the increasing prevalence and importance of Jewish voices in West German society over the course of post-WWII. Jews living in West Germany were less than one percent of the population and lacked control of any financial resources that could account for such a change. What happened was a shift in the symbolic power of being Jewish in West German society, as a result of the changing boundaries of the cultural matrix. Discussions about the Holocaust flourished from the 1970s through the 1980s, and Jewish voices, opinions and statements became relevant to West German society. They had a greater validity to speak

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 18–19.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 22.
and to be heard than in previous decades. Discussions between any two individuals, even if they remain the same two individuals, will change over the course of a lifetime as the boundaries of the cultural matrix shift, and the types of cultural objects that represent the past change over time. This is generational change. However, another way in which generational change matters is the intergenerational dialogue that develops in the society and within the family, especially between those that experienced war and those born into the postwar society. When the word “generation” is said, it is important to explain that, in addition to the typical biological generation, there are social generations marked by historical events. There are often statistically significant differences in what different social generations and age cohorts think about past events. These are never homogenous groups; different age cohorts have a range of feelings and sentiments about past events. The transference of information about the past, especially the place of one’s family in the scheme of national history, is critical to the overall social process of collective memory formation. These internal factors lead to the continuous formation of collective memory in a society over time.

Maintaining Collective Memory

Collective memory is continuously formed to fit the particular narrative of a community, but how does a community prevent memory from deviating too far from their narrative? The answer is found in tradition. Tradition is, in a sense, the consciousness of a group which links one generation to those previous and those to come. It enables them to remain the same people as they go forward through history. In short, tradition is “a principle that ensures continuity and

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33 Ibid., 23.

34 When using the word “tradition,” I am speaking of it as a set of practices, which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior through repetition.
Memory and tradition are processes by which both personal and social narratives are maintained. They condition the lives of individuals and communities, describe their present and shape their future. They are shaped and practiced by virtue of rite, ritual, social habit, and truth claim. By utilizing tradition, individuals and communities make meaning of the present and begin to envision and build a future. Just as important, they are a cure for forgetfulness, which tends to destabilize the future, refute the present, and be imprisoned by nostalgia. Memory and tradition are participatory in that they are performed by persons and societies in the construction of self and society.

Humankind exists not only in mind but also in body, located in and interacting with the world. As stated in a previous section, memory is not solely an internal mental activity; it is something that is performed in the body in the form of habits and rituals, but this is sometimes ignored, because such human activity is taken for granted. Regardless, those memories are solidified in the body as performative memories: “memories constantly reconstructed in and by their performance and oriented, even when not dependent on narrative, toward past, present, and future.” These bodily memories provide a connection between personal memory and that social memory we call tradition. The body is a constant center of action in, with, and toward the world. It bears the memories of our lives in daily life and moves constantly toward that end over which it has no control; the body exists only in the present. These memories are decisive, not necessarily for how one thinks about the world but for how one is in the world. Anderson writes that the body memory of habit “establishes just how we are in the world… it is an active

35 O'Collins and Braithwaite, “ Tradition as Collective Memory,” 35.
37 Ibid., 130.
immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting
and regular manner.”38 Those body memories carried in habit and ritual results in the person and
community gaining a hold on one’s being-in-the-world in certain ways. It is the enactment of
shared bodily memories in the form of rite and ritual that enable the construction of collective
memory. It may be the way children play a game, families gather for a holiday meal, or religious
communities worship.39 As these memories become habituated in the body, systems of
classification and ways of social being are created. Since what is performed is something to
which the performers are habituated, the content of what any group remembers in communal
exercises maintain persuasive and persistent force. Thus, manners of speech, proxemics, posture,
and nonverbal actions that define various persons as black or white, female or male, powerful or
weak, Christian or Muslim can be inscribed on the body and in bodily memory.

Sometimes, it is the political need to preserve a particular memory that a tradition is
intentionally invented. Those who hold power maintain, construct, and reconstruct the social
narrative to achieve social cohesion, the legitimation of institutions, and the socialization of
individuals and groups. The more that these artificial traditions become part of habitual body
memory and acquire the status of the tradition, the less likely are they to be questioned or
challenged.40 Cori Wielenga answers this concern of political coercion in two ways. The first is
to argue that, although individual memories are “lived,” the way in which they are narrated to
oneself and others is also, to some degree, constructed. The second is to point out that collective

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 131.
40 Ibid., 133.
memories tend to take on a life of their own.\textsuperscript{41} No matter the strength of a political agenda to construct a particular narrative, a movement that occurs within the collective memory process reminds us of the individual process in that it is dynamic and complex, holding contending narratives in tension. This is what differentiates collective memory from the project of recording history. An official history is written down by one or several experts with an authoritative voice, but collective memory describes a more complex and dynamic process that occurs somewhere between official history and individual memory.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, we have seen that memory and identity have a unique relationship. First, one’s identity as an individual can be found in memory. Not only do memories shape the identity of individuals, memories can also be shaped by the people that possess them. In addition to defining identity, memory it also locates where one is and identifies his or her relationship to the rest of the community and the world. In addition to this, one is constantly shaping and molding his or her identity to fit the particular narrative of one’s life to which he or she desires to adhere. Memory connects the past and the future into the present. An individual would be stuck in the present with no way to connect to the past or formulate a future if it were not for memory. In the same way that individuals have complex narratives about their lives that incorporate their memories, communities and nations have collective memories too. Collective memory is the result of a complex interaction between societal memory practices, as well as resources and individual cognitive efforts. Through multiple internal factors, a social framework is constructed that shapes collective memory in order to maintain the overarching narrative of a community.

\textsuperscript{41} Wielenga, “Healing and Reconciliation After Violent Conflict,” 213.
Tradition is one of the most important ways that communities preserve and perpetuate collective memories. By utilizing tradition, individuals and communities make meaning of the present and begin to envision and build a future. Memory is not solely a cognitive activity; it is something that is performed in the body in the form of habits and rituals. Both individual and communal identity is shaped by memory in both thought and deed.
CHAPTER TWO: MEMORY AND RECONCILIATION

Now that we have seen the connection and interdependence between memory and identity, it is time to delve further into the study of memory in the life of individuals and communities. The goal of this chapter is to show how memory is inseparable from the reconciliation process; John Barton considers it a “requirement.”¹ Even though memory is essential for reconciliation to occur, in ironic fashion it can be the very obstacle that stands in the way. Memory can either act as the bridge that connects opposing sides, or it can be the gap that separates the two. To demonstrate the truth to this claim, I will accentuate the effect that past violence and traumatic memories have on one’s actions. Remembering the violent past forms an important part of the reconciliation process, on both an individual and communal level. Memories of past harm and violence must be acknowledged and dealt with in an ethical way that produces justice and mercy. To refuse to address such painful memories in a truthful manner would be unethical. This distorts memory and adds insult to injury. The pinnacle of distorted memory leads to a kind of cultural amnesia, which is a complete loss of personal and cultural identity. After this happens, forgiveness becomes a therapeutic action which only serves to benefit an individual. In the latter half of this chapter, I will then turn my attention to the research done by various theologians who have implemented memory into their theologies concerning reconciliation and forgiveness. Here, I will address the issues of distorting memory and forgetting, giving special attention to Miroslav Volf’s use of memory in the reconciliation process, which he has termed “remembering rightly.”²


Remembering the Violent Past

There is a point where memories of pain and suffering are no longer simple memories. Traumatic memories are more than negative memories that we possess. These memories express loss that hovers at the edge of extinction and death; this could be literal extinction and death or it could be the death of one’s view of the world and identity. Examples of literally life-threatening memories coming out of mass death in recent history include the Armenian Massacre of 1914–15, the Jewish Holocaust in WWII, the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 and the terror attacks of 9/11. To this day they remain untamed and uncontrolled, coming back in unwanted flashbacks to those who have survived of how close they came to extinction. These memories can be traumatic and invasive to the degree that they can no longer be controlled or quelled. They are triggered by contemporary events that at first might seem unconnected to those terrible moments in the past. As stated previously, the memory of pain and suffering inflicted by another can hinder reconciliation from occurring between the two parties. However, remembering the violent past forms an important part of the reconciliation process, on both an individual and a communal level. Despite this, it is rare to witness such an event. What makes traumatic memories so difficult to deal with? I will answer this question by identifying traumatic memory and the dangers that must be avoided when dealing with these memories of suffering.

As discussed in the previous chapter, memory plays an essential role in shaping identity. It is by remembering that an individual interprets and pieces together the narrative of her or his life. The pieces are put together in the way that makes the most sense and provide clarity for the

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individual. The effect of trauma throws this process into disequilibrium. Trauma disrupts the narrative coherence of our lives. If one’s personal narrative held to the belief that the world was good and that certain people were to be trusted, experiencing violence at the hands of a friend or family member would lead to a breakdown of social and personal structures and belief systems. One’s memories of the traumatic event needs to become part of a new narrative that helps to make sense of the world again. The more senseless the trauma, the harder it is to integrate the trauma into an existing personal narrative.\(^5\) Narratives that grow out of trauma continue to terrorize the lives of people without warning and in unwanted ways. The seemingly omnipotent prowess of painful memories can be daunting; it feeds on emotions that are buried beneath the surface. Moreover, the narratives that emerge are like images reflected in a mirror; they always reflect the primal terror of the original traumatizing events. In cyclical fashion, they never evade those founding events and remain subservient to them.\(^6\) This fact was exemplified by Nigel Hunt in his work with WWII veterans.\(^7\) Hunt describes how, directly after the war, the official policy was to forget the trauma that occurred and that veterans were encouraged not to talk about their experiences in the belief that these memories would ultimately fade away. As they became older, however, the memories of the war they suppressed did not weaken, but instead became even more pervasive and difficult to ignore. Likewise, nations that suppress or conceal an aspect of their past may find that these memories persist and are often voiced in violent ways.\(^8\) When

\(^{5}\) Ibid., 210.


\(^{7}\) Nigel Hunt, *War, Memory and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

\(^{8}\) Ibid., 146.
bottled up and ignored, the stress of traumatic memories builds up within people until an evitable eruption occurs.

It is important to understand that those who have been victimized by traumatic events are not the only ones who are affected by its memory. There are three parties that are impacted by the violent past: the victims, the perpetrators and those I will term “on-lookers.” Up to this point, everything that has been said concerning the impact of trauma has been related to the victims. However, those who caused the trauma, the perpetrators, are bound by its memory as well. The very identity of the perpetrator is transformed by the event. In order to make sense of the event, the victim(s) and the on-lookers reconfigure their narratives. This can lead to identifying the perpetrator(s) as an eternal threat to the one’s identity, which always aligns them on the opposing side. The perpetrator is perceived as the embodiment of the evil that was committed against the other. Concerning the perpetrator(s), they must continue their life with the burdensome memory of the violence they incurred. It is also intrusive and possibly just as painful as the memory of the victim. When being met with this traumatic memory, the perpetrator’s identity is brought into question: “Is this who I am?” “Do I hate that person/those people?” Are my actions justified?” The answers to these questions are dependent upon how the event(s) is interpreted into the narrative of their life. If not dealt with truthfully or ethically, it will either lead to the hatred of the other or perpetual self-loathing. Lastly, the way that the on-lookers remember the event also affects their identity. Whether or not they stepped-in or remained on-lookers is a reflection of who they believe themselves to be and what their role is in relation to the world. Also, the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) accommodate the action or inaction of the on-lookers into their narratives. There is much at stake for all parties involved when it comes to remembering traumatic events and integrating them into the narratives of their lives.
The effect of traumatic memories of the violent past does not only persist in the present; it forces its way into the future and makes its presence known to future generations. The following generations can be weighed down by the memory of their forefathers. They can both benefit from the sufferings of their ancestors and suffer the consequences of their misdeeds. The weak who suffered at the hands of the strong and the rage they hold makes way for tomorrow’s perpetrators. According to Volf, “sin has the ability to create a bond between persons which goes beyond the bond that their interrelations in and of themselves create. Evil committed and suffered both severs relationships and weaves a thick network of perverted ties that keep victims and perpetrators returning to each other—in thought, in person, in progeny, or in succeeding generations—to commit new offences in an attempt to rectify the old ones.”\(^9\) This partly explains the power of sin; it is neither located within nor outside of the person but both in a person and in social relations.

**Mind Tricks**

The Danger of Distortion

Memories are vulnerable to distortion. They are odd in that they have a limit, in which they can be less reliable than other forms of knowing. This is due to the fact that what is remembered has already happened in the past and is not unfolding before us. The temporal gap between the present self and the former event that transpired allows space for falsehood to slip in. The falsehood does not necessarily come in by means of intentional lying, though it can at times; it occurs from the imagination supplying what the memory is lacking. There is, often, an

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unintentional distortion that happens because of the gap in time.\(^\text{10}\) People are so familiar with the routine of remembering that they think that they remember the facts, but this is not always true. Our imagination comes to the aid of our faulty memory and we unwillingly trade fiction for truth. William James notes how the likelihood of error increases as memories of more complex events are recalled:

> The most frequent source of false memory is the accounts we give to others of our experiences. Such accounts we almost always make more simple and more interesting than the truth. We quote what we should have said or done rather than what we really said or did; and in the first telling we may be fully aware of the distinction. But ere long the fiction expels the reality from memory and reigns in its stead alone. This is one great source of the fallibility of testimony meant to be quite honest.\(^\text{11}\)

People have the inclination to embellish their memories and it is done often and even innocently in the act of storytelling. Even though these embellishments are honest mistakes, the motivation behind them may be a subconscious desire to present the storyteller in the best light possible. It is commonly known that repression of memory does not lead to healing, as repressed memories do not disappear, but instead tend to interfere with healthy functioning, and may lead to a repeat of the trauma either as victimizer or victim.\(^\text{12}\) The violent past must be dealt with truthfully if there is to be any hope for reconciliation and forgiveness.

The distortion of memory can lead to what Volf calls “false memory syndrome.”\(^\text{13}\) Volf defines false memory syndrome as “a condition in which a person’s identity and interpersonal relationships are centered around a memory of a traumatic experience that is objectively false but

\(^{10}\) Volf, *The End of Memory*, 45.


\(^{12}\) Wielenga “Healing and Reconciliation After Violent Conflict,” 216.

\(^{13}\) Volf, *The End of Memory*, 47.
in which the person strongly believes.”\textsuperscript{14} This means that a person can ardently proclaim to remember an event, which did not occur, but is actually believing a product of their imagination as an objective event. No person is immune to falling victim to this syndrome. Our memory specializes in approximating remembered events.

Amnesia

Given the pain involved in traumatic memories, another common temptation is to choose to forget and live life as though nothing ever happened. Without memory, however, the road to reconciliation and hope becomes closed and forgetfulness acts as a blockade. Attempts at reconciliation that sidestep the truthful dealing with the past result in a static view of repentance and forgiveness that blocks genuine reconciliation and communion. Our hope lies through memory. One of the problems with willful amnesia is that it removes the responsibility of personal accountability. The victims, perpetrators, and on-lookers shy away from the past and the acceptance of their guilt for hatred or contempt for the other. According to Vosloo, amnesia is the “great enemy of an ethic of responsibility.”\textsuperscript{15} By choosing to forget, we fail to face personal guilt and, as a result, we disqualify ourselves from having a “potentially liberating experience of being faced by God and others.”\textsuperscript{16} Living in a culture of amnesia and forgetfulness robs us of the opportunity both to imagine a different future, and to participate in this future. Vosloo says it well this way, “Without memory no stories, without stories no communion, without communion no willingness to reconciliation, without reconciliation no truth, without truth no justice, without

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
justice no peace.” The erasing of memories will not aid the reconciliation process. Painful memories must be healed and there must be a space where this can take place and where lives can be re-narrated.

Even as we acknowledge that we cannot remember everything and must, to some extent, repress or even intentionally forget that which is not meaningful, we must, at the same time, be aware of our forgetfulness. Johann Metz speaks of the difference between memories of “false consciousness,” in which “the past becomes a paradise without danger,” and “dangerous memories,” which “make demands on us” and “in which earlier experiences break through to the centre-point of our lives and reveal new and dangerous insights for the present.” Without such memories, the narratives of self and community remain incomplete; they tell only part of the truth. Without such memories, the narrative of our lives remains a fiction of comfort and ease, even though a closer look would be enough to prove otherwise. In claiming the memories of suffering, we come to wrestle with the seemingly unwelcome “as ifs” in our own lives, incorporating those memories into the way we live the present and live toward the future. In telling the tales of suffering, a new truth emerges that re-members a fragmented social narrative and brings it to a form of wholeness not previously possible. At both the personal and social level, suffering is truly a “dangerous” memory as it is re-membered in self and society. What we make of such memory comes with both risk and possibility. We may risk simply reversing the ordering of social power, such that the oppressed now becomes the oppressor; or, we may find in such memory the power to say, “never again” to events such as the Armenian and Jewish

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17 Ibid., 35.


holocausts and to use such events as sources of energy that drive activism on behalf of non-discrimination and equality.

Another threat to the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation is their separation from truthful memory and a vision for the future. Often forgiveness is misconstrued in a manner that seeks to benefit the person who offers forgiveness or the one who is in repentance. This results in a static view of forgiveness. When the practices of repentance and forgiveness are viewed as a self-therapeutic strategy to make oneself feel better, it comes at the cost of suppressing the past. Vosloo believes that this causes the injustices to the other to fade into the background, because one’s preoccupation to free her or his conscience has taken center stage: “The emphasis is no longer on the restoration of the communion with the other, but on using the other as means of improving the own condition. Thus, the search for truth and justice are relegated to some form of private soul-searching that fails to engage with a concrete other.”

Once the practices of forgiveness and repentance are separated from truthful memory and a vision of a hopeful future, the stagnant view that we are left with makes the cycles of deception, exclusion and violence impossible to break. Over against a static view of repentance and forgiveness that neglects truthful memory, the importance of remembering well must be highlighted. This implies the memory of wrongdoing transgressions, as well as the memory of one’s wrongdoing healed in Christ. What needs to be claimed is not only guilt, but also forgiveness.

Therapeutic Forgiveness

Another danger to reconciliation is the occurrence of what L. Gregory Jones calls “therapeutic forgiveness.” Jones claims that this kind of forgiveness is a result of contemporary

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21 L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 35–69. In this section of his book, Jones analyzes the ways in which Christian practices and understanding of forgiveness have been
understandings and practices of forgiveness in modern Western culture. He names three issues that have resulted in the diminishment of forgiveness. First, emphasis on “individual autonomy” and “inevitable progress” has marginalized the concept of forgiveness in general. Forgiveness and reconciliation are designed to foster and maintain communal relations. However, if individual autonomy is the focus of society, then forgiveness becomes relatively insignificant. Also, if society is on some supposed path of inevitable progress, there is not much use to reflect on the past wrongs and sufferings, as forgiveness requires, to restore it through reconciliation.

The second problem that Jones identifies is one of the ambiguous legacy of Christianity concerning forgiveness. Forgiveness was theologically fundamental for both the people of Israel as well as the early Christians. It was through a set of necessary communal practices that the early Christians genuinely characterized and witnessed to the eschatological salvation given by God that is vital to the “grammar” of forgiveness. However, Jones notes that as Christianity distanced itself from its Jewish ancestry, by the fourth century, practices and mindsets of forgiveness began to derail. An example of this was the practice of Christian confession in the West. While originally and primarily a communal practice, confession became used in individualized and privatized contexts and forgiveness became an exchange between an individual and God with no regard for consequences upon the Christian community or social and political life. Though the rhetoric of forgiveness remains a staple of Christianity and worship,

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22 Ibid., 37.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 38.
25 Ibid.
the practices and ideas concerning it have been transmuted. The third issue also results from modern Christianity as well. There has been an increased secularization of the Christian language. This means that nontheological language has been adopted by Christians to describe Christian theology and life.\textsuperscript{26} This has led to the co-opting of the grammar of Christian forgiveness by a therapeutic grammar. Psychological language and practices have become more powerful than the language and practices of the gospel in the Church. The mindset of therapeutic forgiveness has prevailed in Western culture and the Church despite its corrosive effects that produce disciplinary techniques that stand in opposition to Christian practices, and distorting and diluting the concepts of Christian community, sin and forgiveness. Though the language of therapeutic forgiveness appears like the gospel, it is not a simple translation of it.

**Healing Memory**

The healing of traumatic memory cannot be achieved by suppressing the painful memories of the past; they always come back in other, unwelcome ways. It would be a mistake to fall victim to the idea that ignoring memories of past suffering will allow a person to live in peace without further threat from that pain. The past must be redeemed. For the Christian, this is simply one aspect of the Christian vision of salvation. The question is a matter of whether or not Christians should strive to redeem the past by looking past questions of truth and justice. The answer to this question is an emphatic, “No!” This would place an individual within a fictitious world that is neither stable nor true. In addition, to ignore the painful memories of the past would be to risk the dangers of distortion and amnesia mentioned in the previous section, neither of which lead to the healing of traumatic memory.\textsuperscript{27} It is only through acknowledging the truth of

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Volf, *The End of Memory*, 73.
the past that memories can be reached and healed. The truth is what sets a person free from the psychic injury caused by being wronged and also freedom from guilt for the wrongdoer because it illuminates the darkness that has a grip on both.28

Healing comes not so much from the act of remembering itself, but from “interpreting the memories and inscribing them into a larger pattern of meaning – stitching them into the patchwork quilt of one’s identity.”29 This may be accomplished by establishing a pattern of meaning in a new narrative. Remembering the past as it actually happened will not heal traumatic memory on its own. Rather, over time these memories must come to be embedded in new narratives that do not perpetuate negative emotion. This can prove to be incredibly difficult, especially when individual memories can and often do compete with one another for the claim on truth. It is important to remember, however, that each individual and community sees and remembers things from their own perspective, and those perspectives are always influenced by personal interests. No one possesses the ability to step outside of oneself to establish an objective view. At best, individuals and communities remember partially. Therefore, no person or community can claim to represent the truth in its entirety. However, it would be premature to adhere to radical postmodern claims that all claims to truth are merely manipulative and self-protecting. Partial perspectives can still be pursued truthfully and lovingly, and memory can be pursued not as a means of self-vindication but as an ally in pursuit of reconciliation.30 The heart of this pursuit is not laying claim to truth, but having people on opposing sides begin to observe each other’s truths with the kind of empathy and understanding that will allow for reconciliation

28 Ibid., 75.

29 Volf, The End of Memory, 214.

to begin to take place. For the violent past to be remembered in such a way, it is essential that the collective memories that are formed are coherent and meaningful. However, a coherent narrative must remain flexible and complex to incorporate the many contending narratives of individuals. The collective narrative developed will have to be such that it can be incorporated by individuals into their individual narrative. In instances where there is a history of violent conflict between different groups of people, how the past is remembered will have a significant impact on whether individuals in these groups will be able to reconcile or whether there will be a return to violence. Healing of memories can be seen to have been reached only when these two narratives can give way to a new, common narrative that both sides can claim. According to Volf, there are two things that integrating painful memories into the narrative of our lives entails. First, positive meaning must be given to them within the narrative. This does not involve creating false memories but finding a way to use a painful memory to help others who may have suffered in a similar fashion. Second, if memory of suffering seems devoid of meaning, a person must hope for some meaning to be revealed at the end of history. This is especially important for Christians, who believe in the Final Judgment where all will be revealed.

Not only must memories of wrongdoing be redeemed. Identities must be redeemed as well. For reconciliation and forgiveness to take place, attitudes toward the victims and the perpetrators must find a place in a new narrative that removes the toxic tension surrounding the events passed. Victims must be seen as more than hopeless and hapless passive recipients of what happened; ways must be found to restore their capacity to act. Concerning perpetrators,

31 Ibid., 221.
33 Volf, The End of Memory, 76–78.
their identity must not be tied solely to an evil deed; their humanity must be restored. \(^{34}\) This requires new encounters between victims and perpetrators that do not repeat the horrors of the past but rather initiate new pathways into the future together. For the Christian, Jesus Christ renews identity and opens new possibilities. Identity, then, is not conferred on Christians by humans, but by God and how God relates to us. Thus, it is not memories of suffering or committing wrongdoing that defines an individual, but a person’s narrative that is now centered on Christ.

In order for there to be a shared vision of a brighter future together, there must be a shared memory of the past. Without dealing with the past truthfully any act of repentance and forgiveness becomes an empty gesture lacking meaning and promise. The healing of memories can only be reached when these two narratives can give way to a new, common narrative that both sides can claim. \(^{35}\) However, this poses a perplexing question: “How do we maintain our own identity without endangering the identity of others?” “How do we protect the identity of the other without forfeiting our identity?” For Volf this openness to the other precedes justice and truth. For this openness towards otherness Volf uses the concept of embrace. The concept is a way of expressing that “the will to give oneself to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity. The will to embrace precedes any ‘truth’ about others and any construction of their ‘justice.’” \(^{36}\)

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\(^{34}\) Schreiter, “Sharing Memories of the Past,” 114.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

Though succeeding generations may appear doomed to repeat the violence of their ancestors, they are the exacts ones who are able to create a different future. According to Schreiter, contemporary experience indicates that a key to the healing of memories is the successive generation that comes after the generation who experienced the traumatic event as adults. “It is as though the trauma has frozen the adult generation in the frame of the moment of the trauma. It is their children, who wish to honor the memory of their parents’ suffering but who also have come to their maturity in the time after the traumatic event, who will find the way forward.”37 This does not excuse the first generation from seeking reconciliation and forgiveness, but it does well to emphasize that the importance of the narrative, which is passed down to the next generation, cannot be overstated. The way traumatic memories are transmitted becomes a key in a process of building peace.

**Remembering Rightly**

In Miroslav Volf’s book *The End of Memory*, he explores the topic of the memory of wrongdoing suffered by a person who wishes to love the wrongdoer instead of casting hate or disregard toward them. He uses his personal testimony of being detained for months and being interrogated by the government of Yugoslavia.38 The act of remembering a wrongdoing is a struggle in itself. Remembering wrongdoing can be potentially dangerous. On the one hand, there is the possibility that a person remembers only parts of the incident that causes displeasure with oneself. On the other hand, the act of remembering can be driven by the desire to repay evil with evil. So, Volf considers the central question of memory not as whether to remember, but

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how to remember rightly.\textsuperscript{39} The focus of his book is to find out what remembering rightly involves.

From the start, Volf recognizes that remembering rightly cannot simply refer to what is right for the wronged person. It must extend to what is right for wrongdoer and the rest of the community. He correctly points out that no wrongdoing suffered is a private affair. Remembering suffering is a public matter since each party involved and others are caught up in it.\textsuperscript{40} To remember in a way that is right for the wrongdoer does not require justification of the wrongdoing. Rather, it is justifiably to condemn that very action. For the Christian, condemnation is a part of the reconciliation process not an isolated judgement. “We condemn most properly in the act of forgiving, in the act of separating the doer from the deed.”\textsuperscript{41} This is precisely what Christ did for all of humanity: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us,” (Ps 103:12). The identity of the wrongdoer is endangered by failing to remember rightly. It is at risk of being permanently stained by an isolated action. To remember rightly is to remove the stain without eliminating the humanity of the wrongdoer.

Remembering Truthfully

In the third chapter of The End of Memory, Volf states that remembering rightly is part of a larger discussion concerning redemption. To remember rightly entails the redemption of the past. If the present and future were to be redeemed and the past left untouched, redemption would be incomplete. Wounds of the past must be tended to if the danger of being infected with hate and revenge is to be avoided. In order to properly address the wounds of the past, one must

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 11. Author’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 15.
“remember truthfully.” Volf addresses remembering truthfully as a moral obligation. This obligation is simply one side of the general obligation to tell the truth – from a biblical standpoint. We cannot remember everything frame by frame in our minds due to our limited capacity to remember; but when we do remember it must be done as truthfully as possible. The importance of this obligation is heightened especially when a story reflects well or poorly on the storyteller’s character or that of another. If one were knowingly to portray an innocent person as a wrongdoer, then they would be wronging that innocent person. When a perpetrator remembers untruthfully, their retelling of the story is a continuation of the original wrong committed; and when a victim remembers untruthfully, their story is a violent counterstrike on the perpetrator in response to the injuries they suffered. By failing to tell the truth, the memory of suffering not only continues in one’s memory, the pain and hatred burrow deeper in the mind of the individual. This obligation to truthfulness is, in essence, an obligation to do justice. Beyond the fact that truthful remembering is a way to act justly towards others, it is a prerequisite for reconciliation between the parties torn apart through harm done to one another.

Remembering rightly is a cooperative venture to seek out truth. The moral obligation to remember rightly has widespread resistance. This resistance stems from the belief that the truth is dangerous, especially when differing parties claim to know the truth. The conflicting truth claims give even more reason to “cross swords” once again. However, Volf claims that a

42 Ibid., 44.
43 Exod 20:16; Jam 5:12.
44 Ibid., 55.
45 Ibid., 56.
confusion lies between claiming to possess the truth and the moral obligation to seek the truth. If one claims to possess the truth, then it is unlikely that the thought that others may be right and that they might be wrong will cross their mind. The obligation to remember rightly counters this dangerous possibility. Remembering rightly allows us to use our imagination to enter the world of the other and to look upon past events from a different perspective.

Loving Memory

Within the obligation to remember truthfully lies not only a prohibition of speaking falsely towards others, there is also the urging to speak well of others. The commandment that forbids false witness is fulfilled not just by “a manner of speech which harms no one,” but one that “benefits everyone, reconciles the discordant, excuses and defends the maligned.” The way in which we retell the memories of the past ought to offer reparations and sustain the bonds between us and others. This means that, along with the wrongdoings that one committed, the good deeds they have done must be remembered as well. The suffering that one has caused must not be applied to the entirety of their identity. In addition, those who desire to speak the truth lovingly do so with the awareness of their own shortcomings in mind. The ultimate aim of remembering truthfully with love is “to bring about repentance, forgiveness, and transformation of wrongdoers, and reconciliation between wrongdoers and their victims.”

It is vital to understand how one can remember wrongdoing in a truthful manner that produces forgiveness and reconciliation without abandoning justice and vice versa. As discussed in the previous section, these traumatic memories can hijack our thoughts and distort the truth.

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46 Ibid., 56. Author’s emphasis.

47 Martin Luther, as quoted in Volf, The End of Memory, 63.

48 Ibid., 65.
without our consent and sometimes even without our awareness. However, if we are to believe that there is a moral obligation to remember rightly, then there must be some hope for achieving this goal. Even though humanity is limited in its ability to remember, piecing together small memories bit by bit, Christians look forward to the Day of Judgement as when Jesus Christ will judge the history of the world with limitless knowledge and faultless memory.

**Conclusion**

Memory is inseparable from the reconciliation process. It is only through remembering that wrongs of the past can be brought into the light and forgiveness made possible. However, remembering the violent past can be dangerous in that traumatic memories are unpredictable and often uncontrollable. For most, it may seem to be better to suppress such memories below the surface of our consciousness. However, this would prove to be even more dangerous and detrimental to any individual or community. The distortion of memory is the first danger that arises, which can occur within a person’s mind without their awareness or consent. When distortion creeps in, false realities are created which tend to place the wrongdoer in a bad light while putting the one remembering in the best light possible. Denying memory altogether, amnesia, would result not only in a warped reality and false sense of identity; it could lead to a complete loss of identity. Both dangers result from our mind’s inclination for self-preservation. This inclination must be resisted because it has the potential to injure others by not speaking truthfully about them. Failing to remember in a truthful manner is unjust and unethical. We have the moral obligation to remember rightly. Miroslav Volf shows that remembering rightly is a multidimensional concept. First, to remember rightly one must remember truthfully. This addresses the ugliness of suffering endured while, at the same time, acknowledging the humanity of the wrongdoer. The aspect of remembering rightly is also about speaking the truth in love. To
speak truthfully brings forth not only the bad deeds but also the good character found in the other. This is a safeguard against a single act defining a person’s entire identity; it repels the staining effect of dehumanization. Remembering in this manner allows for justice to be executed properly. Condemnation and forgiveness belong in the same conversation when speaking of justice. Without dealing with the past truthfully and without a vision of a common future, deeds of repentance and forgiveness become empty gestures, gestures devoid of meaning and promise. To put it differently no reconciliation, justice or peace through repentance and forgiveness are possible without truthful memory and hopeful vision. It is through the process of remembering rightly that the past can be redeemed, identities can be restored and peaceful futures can be imagined together. Up to this point the focus has been primarily on the individual and how she or he can foster forgiveness and reconciliation. In the final chapter, we will see how the Church as a corporate body can become a community that remembers rightly in a hurting, unforgiving world.

CHAPTER THREE: THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRED COMMUNITY

In this final chapter, I will explain how the practice of the Eucharist creates and sustains a community that is characterized by forgiveness and reconciliation. To do this, I will explain the concept of sacred memory and sacred community that is utilized by Volf in *The End of Memory*. Following this, I will use the Old Testament Israelite community as an example of a prototypical sacred community whose identity is formed through the memory of the Exodus event recalled in the Passover meal. By juxtaposing the Passover meal of the Israelite community to the Eucharistic meal of the Church, I will show how the Eucharist plays a central role in the formation of the identity and character of the Christian community. It is a foretaste of new creation, which is characterized by ultimate reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus, it is only through interpreting present events through the lens of the Eucharistic memory of the Church that she can live in the world as an agent of reconciliation and forgiveness. To end this chapter, I will present three general scenarios in which the Church can embody forgiveness and reconciliation and how that embodiment is informed and shaped by the Eucharist.

Sacred Communities

In *The End of Memory*, Volf describes sacred memory as the particular memories that preserve the historical record of a sacred community. For example, in the Old Testament, the centrality of memory in the life of the Jewish people shaped their way of life. In Joseph Yerushalmi’s book, *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, he writes:

> Only in Israel, and nowhere else, is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. Its reverberations are

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everywhere, but they reach crescendo in the Deuteronomic history and in the Prophets. “Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past” (Deut. 32:7). “Remember these, O Jacob, for you, O Israel, are my servant; I have fashioned you, you are my servant; O Israel, never forget me” (Isaiah 44:21). “Remember what Amalek did to you” (Deut. 25:17). And, with hammering insistence: “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt” (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18).³

The communal call to remembrance brings a religious group into accountability of who they are and who they claim to be. Volf believes that there are four formal features that are common in sacred memories: identity, community, the future and God.⁴ In the paragraphs to follow, I will detail and explain his rationale for these four features of sacred memory.

First, sacred memory defines the identities of those within a religious group and, in reverse fashion, those individuals identify with a specific sacred memory. This means that sacred memory is a matter of identification. Yerushalmi describes memory as something that draws a series of situations from the past into which a person can be “existentially drawn.”⁵ The function of sacred memory is not so much to convey facts about the past as it is to transmit the past into the present. Sacred memory spans the gap of time, and places the past and present into the same space; it re-actualizes the event in the present for the people living today.

Second, it is important to recognize that sacred memories are communal or collective memories. Looking back to Halbwachs and his work on collective memory, individuals do not remember alone but as members of a group. It is in society or a community that a person acquires and retains their memories. Within a sacred community individuals receive the content

³ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, WA; Univ. of Washington, 1982), 9–10.


⁵ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 44.
of sacred memories of events in an indirect fashion from the community. Religious communities
revitalize sacred memories in new contexts continuously just as much as those memories define
and shape religious communities. If the community were to be taken away, the sacred memory
would dissipate; remove sacred memory and the community erodes into non-existence.⁶ This
interdependence between community and memory reveals their vibrant life and that they cannot
survive stagnation.

The third feature of sacred memories is a concern for the future, in addition to the past.
According to Volf, people normally remember the past and hope for something in the future;
however, he claims that memory and hope interact with each other. Not only do they interact
with each other, they influence each other.⁷ When a community looks at a sacred memory of the
past, they also look forward into the future with expectation. What this means is that what was
experienced in the past is expected to be a reality in the future. The way in which a particular
community reacted to a past event is how that community will behave in response to similar
events in the future. If a sacred memory was one of deliverance, then deliverance is to be
expected for future events. If it is one of faithfulness, then faithfulness will be anticipated for the
future. It is in sacred memory that the future meets the past and present.

The last feature that Volf lists in his discussion of sacred memory is the notion that all
sacred memories are memories of God. What he means by this is that when one regards sacred
memory in this fashion, God is manifest in the present. It is not only the history of a religious
group, it is the history of God at work within the world as well.⁸ By serving as a reminder of


⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 101.
God’s action in the past of a religious group, memories of God also give hope and promise for the future. As God was and is tells of what God will be and do; this promise also shapes and informs the actions of a religious group.

Sacred memory shapes the identity of a people when it is welcomed and practiced within community. The ways in which it does this is by providing a sense of who one is, where they belong, what is the expectation for the future and in whom or in what they will put their trust. Sacred memory provides a framework that a group can use to engage the world and address memories of wrong-doing and suffering that maintains their identity as a sacred community.

In order for sacred memories to be preserved, they must rely on the sacred communities that remember them. Collective memory is maintained by being repeated from generation to generation. Memories that are not repeated and shared within a community eventually fade away and are forgotten. Sacred memories must be passed down by means of narrative, ritual, and tradition from one generation to the next. This is particularly important after the generation, which witnessed the event firsthand and their children have died.

One of the foundational ways in which any sacred community preserves its sacred memory is through the enactment of tradition and liturgy. It is through the experience of tradition and liturgy that a scared community celebrates the ultimate truths about faith, God, humanity and the world through the interaction of signs, words and symbols that are invested with practical and symbolic significance and efficacy. They are a group’s faith in motion; they convey, recommend, instill, and impart a particular vision of faith and way of life. They build faith and

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form identity, both personal and communal. There is a very vivid and immediate interaction between the present and the past, so that the remembrance is not simply a looking back to the past, but something which affects our understanding of it in the present, and as such affects our understanding and perception of specific events.\textsuperscript{11} Tradition is always, in some sense, a passing-on or handing over of memory of what has been; yet here there is no direct transfer of memories and practice, but a recreation of past memories and traditions as current practice.

In a sense, the traditions and liturgy of a sacred community could be considered formative practices that shape virtue. Michael Rhodes considers this in his article “Forward unto Virtue,” where he explores the relationship between practices and the imbedded intentions within them to shape the character of the practitioner.\textsuperscript{12} Rhodes first establishes a working definition of formative practices. By drawing on both ancient and contemporary accounts, he suggests that formative practices are “\textit{telos}-shaped, embodied, social actions that carry an embedded intention to shape the character of the individual practitioner, the politics of the community, and the world ‘out there.’”\textsuperscript{13} He continues on to suggest that if a particular practice is shaped by the end at which it aims, then it implies that formative practices are shaped by the narrative that gives meaning to that end. The story-telling of a community orients its members toward particular goals, and these storied goals determine the nature of particular practices.\textsuperscript{14} The goal or aim of a particular practice shapes every aspect of the practice. By speaking of “embedded intention” in

\textsuperscript{11} Paul Hedges, “Remembering and the Creation of Sacred Place: Glastonbury, Anglican Christian Theology, and Identity,” \textit{Implicit Religion} 17, no. 3 (September 2014): 299.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 120. Author’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
formative practices, there are two opposing opinions. On the one hand, there is the view that suggests intentionality playing a significant role in formative practices. This means that nobody performs a practice without the intention to achieve its goals. However, moral formation can often occur through practices without the conscious awareness or consent of participants. An example of this, given by Rhodes, could be any child’s participation in ecclesial practices such as the Lord’s Supper or anybody’s participation in “cultural liturgies,” such as communicating primarily through a smart phone, shape people without their conscious intention.\(^{15}\) The use of the term “embedded intention,” then, suggests that practices themselves carry intentions to form, but that a complete understanding of that formation is elusive. Practices shape in ways that are beyond cognition and irreducible to cognitive explanation. Thus, formative practices shape the character of practitioners by fostering particular virtues and moral vision within them.

In addition to shaping the character of individual practitioners, formative practices shape the politics of a community. This is because they embody a community’s way of decision-making, defining membership, and conducting everyday business. It is formative practices that instruct a community on how to operate as a “polis.”\(^{16}\) At the same time, this formation should not be understood as a linear progression beginning with a narrative and moving through the other elements. A community’s stories, politics, practices, and account of character all operate, as Rhodes puts it, “like a feedback loop, each element influences and is influenced by all the others.”\(^{17}\) We require virtues to be able to tell our story faithfully or to maintain the political structures of our community. Practices foster character, but without character we cannot

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 122.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
appropriately engage in practices. The shape of a community’s political life provides the infrastructure within which the community’s practices can be performed faithfully. In short, people within particular communities experience moral formation through engaging in the mutually reinforcing elements of that community’s narratives, account of character, formative practices, and politics.

Old Testament Israel as a Sacred Community

Throughout the text of the Hebrew Bible, the witness of the text is directed to the formation of a community in relation to God that is not limited to Israel or any subgroup of Israel at any given historical time or place. The Hebrew Bible contains more than narrative, but it is the narrative framework that still serves to relate the community of faith meaningfully to other types of biblical material. Law, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature all assume a community formed by its memory and reinterpretation of a story which told of God’s promise to their ancestors, deliverance out of bondage in Egypt, revelation of the law at Sinai, covenant with the people, Davidic kingship and temple on Zion, and judgment and redemption through the crisis of exile. The story even came to understand the God of Israel as one with the God who created the world and who, when that world became broken, desired the redemption of all creation and peoples. The story is added to and developed but is assumed as the identity-forming, narrative-shaped reality of the community’s life. Even wisdom literature – the least reflective of Israel’s story – uses Israel’s name for God, finds contact with Israel’s story in the role of God as Creator, and finally relates wisdom to Torah in Sirach. The community is not formed by the text or the story per se, but by the belief that the narrative witnesses to the reality of the community-shaping

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encounter with God in historical time and space. Narrative mediates this encounter to new generations of the community but does not create it.

The way in which Israel’s community and character shaping narrative is significantly formed is by its remembering and reinterpreting of God’s previous actions on its behalf. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word zikar, “to remember,” signifies the calling forth of a thing or an event into the very being of a person in such a way that it affects their demeanor, decision, and action.  

This word can carry two meanings: first, it can be classified as a passive sense of memorandum, a thing worthy itself of remembrance; second, it can have an active meaning, a memorial that calls something else to remembrance. An example of this verb can be found in Exodus 13:9 where the law of unleavened bread was made to be a “sign on your hand” and a “memorial between your eyes.” The memorial is an expression of the divine will. It reminded Israel of her responsibility to the Torah. Israel’s act of remembering actualized the past event in the present and evoked some kind of action. It formed solidarity with their fore-fathers. The zikkaron reactivates the original event in Egypt and participation in this event reaffirms Israel’s relationship with YHWH.

The Exodus is one of the most significant collective memories for the people of Israel. The Exodus event was the foundational experience in the life and memory of the Israelite community. It provided the historical ground for its experience of emancipation redemption through the salvific activity of YHWH. It is a central memory retold in narrative form from one

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21 Ibid., 69.

22 The Exodus event is to be understood in this paper as Israel’s emancipation and redemption out of the land of Egypt.
generation to another. The centrally important canonical text of Exodus 1-15 gives evidence not only of originating memory, but of communal reclaiming and reinterpreting of that memory. The account of Passover (Exod 12:13) is shaped by liturgical forms of remembering this crucial moment in the story of God’s action on Israel’s behalf. The community’s liturgical way of remembering becomes itself incorporated into the story. Throughout Israel’s history, this collective memory has formed the basis of identity, ritual, and activity. Despite the fact that this sacred memory has been solidified in writing, the collective memory of the Exodus has been reshaped to address circumstances faced by the people of Israel time and time again.

The Passover Meal

The Passover meal of the Israelite people is a ritualized meal that recounts their entire history of salvation. The hagadah is a form of ritualized communal meal prayer. The participants are to enter into the story, the meta-narrative of salvation and retrace the steps of their ancestry, thereby giving a multigenerational backdrop to the story of God’s intervening on Israel’s behalf against which one comes to understand his/her own place in that history. The hagadah does not imply that the Exodus is in some way called forth out of the past and into the present, but rather that each generation of Israelites to follow is able to identify with its predecessors back to the Exodus generation itself that all may be thought of as included in the latter. The Jewish meal tradition is a memorial that operates as both a religious and formative event. The memorial prayer functions as a meta-narrative. Through a communally proclaimed organizing story, the history and mission of a people is clarified and articulated, thereby providing cohesion and an

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ethical framework to a people, in essence forming them into a community. The Old Testament material presents the Passover meal in ways that resonate with the theory of formative practices outlined above. First, Exodus presents the Passover meal as an ongoing ritual practice that would shape the politics of Israel’s identity. The Passover meal is intertwined with the primary sign of membership in the covenant community, and failure to keep it leads to expulsion from that community. The passage in 2 Chronicles 30:1–31 makes clear that Passover also served as a transforming practice under King Hezekiah as well. This can be seen in Hezekiah’s emphasis that all the people from across the divided kingdom should join. The account of the Passover in Ezra 6:19–22 indicates that the feast included Jews returning from exile and all of those who had joined them from other people groups. In short, to celebrate Passover in the Old Testament is to be a part of God’s people, the Israelite community, and provisions are made for everyone to participate. Second, the Passover meal as it is presented in the Old Testament forms moral vision and the virtue of memory in participants. The concern is not that God be thanked properly but that the redemptive experience be a living reality for each Israelite in every age. Through participation in the “compressed narrative” of YHWH’s liberation from Egypt, Israel was to embed future generations into the community’s story of salvation so that each successive generation could say they were celebrating Passover because of what, “the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt,” (Exod 13:8). The rhythm of Exodus 13 is one of memory and liturgical responsibility. The close connection between the virtue-forming power of the embodied

24 Ibid.

25 Exod 12:48 instructs foreigners who want to participate in the Passover meal to be circumcised first; see also Num 9:14.

26 Rhodes, “Forward unto Virtue,” 126.

27 Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1991), 139.
reenactment of the Exodus and the Passover meal itself is seen where YHWH declares that the meal will be a sign and memorial, “so that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth,” (Exod 13:9). The righteous requirements of the law are, in some sense, ingested in the Passover, as the meal practice forms the virtuous habits of memory, gratitude, and obedience in participants.\textsuperscript{28} The mind is not stable enough to maintain the life-giving word. The body is called into the service of memory.

Other treatments of the Passover from the Old Testament also emphasize this formative role of the celebration. Deuteronomy 16 not only reiterates the memory-forming intention of the Passover meal, but provides a symbolic interpretation of the unleavened bread as the “bread of affliction,” (Deut 16:3). 2 Chronicles 30:7–9 couches the renewal of the Passover in terms of rejecting Israel’s ancestors’ unfaithfulness. Further underscoring the virtue-forming element of the meal, their renewal of the Passover spills over into a larger scale rejection of idolatry and illicit religious practices, as well as widespread acts of worship.\textsuperscript{29}

Furthermore, the Passover’s formation of memory and moral vision among participants not only looked back to the Exodus, but could also look forward to coming restoration. The narrative of Israel’s flight from Egypt in Exodus 1–15 depicts the event as “the consummate expression of divine power and national redemption” and so as “the temporal-historical paradigm in whose image all future restorations of the nation are to be manifest. A concord between the first and succeeding redemptions is the issue, for each generation looked to the first exodus as the archetypal expression of its own future hope.”\textsuperscript{30} In other words, the exodus from Egypt emerged

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 127.

\textsuperscript{29} 2 Chr 30:14; 31:1–10.

as a theological-literary motif, “a lens of historical perception and anticipation.”\(^{31}\) Through this lens, past events were retro-fitted to this framework and future events were pro-fitted to it because for Israel the exodus from Egypt is where “the once and future power of the Lord of history is revealed.” This movement culminates in the association of the Passover with the Lord’s future eschatological redemption, a development at least as old as the Septuagint’s translation of Jeremiah 38:7–9, which declares that such redemption will come “during the feast of Passover.”

The prophet Micah provides a case in point, as he foretells a time when Israel will arise from the ruins of the Assyrian empire. First, the prophet speaks to God, “Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvelous things,” (Mic 7:14–15). Of this passage, Fishbane states, “The reference to exodus here serves to articulate the felt inner unity of Israel’s history with God. The past is prologue, and so deliverance tomorrow will come according to the pattern of deliverance already revealed in days of old.”\(^{32}\) Likewise, Isaiah prophesies Israel’s return from exile as nothing less than a second exodus: “There will be a paved way for the remnant of His people, which will remain from Assyria, even as it was for Israel when he came up from the land of Egypt,” ( Isa 11:16). Again, in Isaiah 43, the exodus event is cast as a former thing to which the new salvation and restoration will correspond.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

Lessons from the Exodus Memory

Since the purpose of this section on the Israelite people as a sacred community hinges on the effect that remembering has on their identity, their attitude and their behavior towards themselves, the world and God, it is important to remark on some of the practical ways in which this formation occurred. The first texts encountered in the Old Testament that directly connect the Exodus experience of Israel with communal ethical behavior were concerned with Israel’s treatment of slaves and aliens. The helplessness of slaves and aliens within the Israelite community characterized Israel’s situation while enslaved in Egypt. This scenario brought into question Israel’s prescribed treatment of such people. Deuteronomy 15:12–15 answered the question for the treatment of fellow, temporarily indentured Israelites:

If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your treasure or you wine press. Give him as the Lord your God has blessed you. And then, remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. This is why I give you this command today.

Concerning the treatment of aliens living amongst the Israelites, the memory of Israel’s redemption from Egypt is appealed to: “Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak from the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord you God redeemed you from there. This is why I give you this command,” (Deut 24:17–18). It was through the appropriate remembrance of their own slavery and liberation that the Israelites understood their responsibility to treat their own slaves and aliens differently than the way in which they were treated in Egypt. God served as the model and not the Egyptians. Volf says that if they emulated the Egyptians it would be “to return to Egypt even while dwelling in
the Land of Promise.” On the other hand, to duplicate the Divine is to re-actualize the deliverance that God had achieved for them.

The importance of imitating YHWH expressed what lay at the root of Israel’s identity as a people: a people who were delivered as a result of the grace of God. Therefore, to deny that grace to other slaves and foreigners would be, in effect, a contradiction of their very identity. The temptation to imitate their former Egyptian hosts was a constant threat to their identity. Thus, the instructions on justly treating slaves and aliens were implemented by incorporating remembrance and explicit commands. There lies a special importance in linking memory with commands. It would be insufficient for the Israelites simply to remember that they were slaves in Egypt; they must also remember that it was God who redeemed and liberated them. “The memory of wrong suffered becomes exemplary when God’s command to do justice and love mercy directs it and God’s liberation of the downtrodden undergirds it.” It is through the adherence to God’s commands that this memory is most properly preserved.

The Israelite people of the Old Testament was a sacred community whose identity, actions and perception were centered on the foundational memory of the Exodus. This story was repeated from generation to generation, instructing and forming their community as one liberated by the grace of God. This memory of a past event informed the present and gave hope for the future. It served as the framework for the Israelites’ interaction within their community and with those on the outside. Now that we have a more than adequate example of a sacred community, we will explore how the Church is, similarly, a sacred community.

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33 Volf, End of Memory, 105.

34 Ibid., 106.
The Church as a Sacred Community

Christian Tradition affirms that God is a relational-trinitarian being of Father, Son and Holy Spirit exemplifying eternal and perfect communion. Just as God is relational and is in eternal communion with God’s self, humanity is to be formed in that communal likeness. This communion is with God, humanity and all of creation. Therefore, people are not intended to live as isolated islands that are removed from society. Christians can only fulfill their purpose when they are in loving communion. However, when we refuse our call to communion, we allow violence and domination of others to become our purpose. This refusal also distorts memories of pain and suffering as events that are more neutral than morally corrupt. Cycles of violence become accepted as inevitable occurrences. It is sin that results in a separation or a break in communion with God. Sin also disrupts communion with other people. It is always present in the world in which we live. Therefore, forgiveness and repentance are always necessary to avoid becoming numb to injustice and restoring communion.

Memory and commemoration in the New Testament shows that the Christian exercise of memory has the function of transforming believers’ perspectives and actions. New Testament faith and thought reflected that of the first-century Jewish milieu; it was a faith dominated by memory of salvific events in the past and yearning for a future whose character is determined by that past. The Eucharistic meal shares the basic framework of the Jewish pattern of the great festive meal. A particularly similar aspect of the Eucharist to the Passover meal is its role in the establishment of the covenant community; also, like the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it celebrates renewal. There is also evidence that Greco-Roman cultic and associational meals operated as formative practices that shaped the identities and moral character of participants. In a culture in

which issues of honor, shame, and reciprocity constituted primary categories for economic and interpersonal relationships, meals provided an essential context for the earning, distributing, and recognizing of honor and status, as well as for forming relationships of reciprocity. At meals, food became part of a “hidden transcript” that enabled groups to determine who was in and who was out, and where each individual insider stood in relation to all the others. Meal participants bequeathed, received, and competed for honor at meals, and honor or shame was created at meals through such practical issues as who got invited to the meal, where people were seated, and through the quality and quantity of food given to a particular guest. Unequal menus served as a part of the “essential elements of the meal’s boundary-marking” in the community, serving to define and solidify identities.  

**Eucharistic Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

**Eucharistic Priority**

Before proceeding to further discussion on the Eucharist, it is important to understand why the Eucharist has been used as the primary tool for Christian commemoration and memory. More than a few theologians consider the Eucharist as the foundation of Christian liturgy and worship. Chris E.W. Green calls the Eucharist “a mandated rite” that “belongs at the center of Christian life with one another and before God in the world.” Schmemann views Eucharist as “the Sacrament of the Church, her eternal actualization as the Body of Christ, united in Christ by the Holy Spirit.” In fact, he considers any liturgical theology that places anything other than the

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36 Rhodes, “Forward unto Virtue,” 130.


Eucharist as its foundation for its whole structure as “defective.”

Dennis Sontillano even uses the theme of Eucharist as nourishment. Just as ordinary food nourishes the physical body, the Eucharist, in which Christ is both signified and contained, maintains, supports, promotes and fosters growth of a person’s spiritual life depending on his or her personal disposition and devotion. If the liturgy is truly the elucidation of worship and imparts a particular vision of faith and the way of life, then the Eucharist must play a central role in the formation of this vision and way of life. Jesus knew that spiritual amnesia or forgetfulness was one of humanity’s greatest enemies; so, he commanded his disciples to remember, to celebrate and to share in his one and all embracing self-giving sacrifice to God the Father. This reason is why the Eucharist is considered to be the heart of the Church’s life and mission.

In addition, by reviewing what has been said up to this point one can understand why the Eucharist has priority among the multiple commemorative practices of the Church. First, memory has an essential role in Christianity. Next, there lies a noetic aspect within the practice of remembrance. It is through performative acts of remembrance that values and knowledge are imparted to their participants concerning God, themselves and the world, which would not be as easily accessible otherwise. Third, narrative and ritual acts of remembering trigger decisive moments in their participants as well as determining appropriate actions and attitudes based off the knowledge experienced in commemorative practices. The practice of Eucharist involves these three things in tandem.

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39 Ibid.


“Remembrance and commemoration have thus held a central place in early Christian worship, in the preaching to the churches, and in thanksgiving and prayer.”\textsuperscript{42} Dahl cites passages that report the early Church’s regular and faithful observance of the Lord’s Day.\textsuperscript{43} It was the Lord’s Day that took “pride of place” in the liturgy and worship of the churches.\textsuperscript{44} At the center of this special day was the celebration of the Eucharist. In addition to this, the celebration of the Eucharist is amongst the Church’s practices that has been commanded: “Do this in remembrance of me,” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). Dahl explains that though there are many avenues that theologians have explored concerning the Eucharist, there is a consensus about its importance in the daily life of the Church:

Historians of liturgy belonging to diverse confessions agree in seeing in anamnesis, commemoration, a fundamental theme or, one can justifiably say, the fundamental theme of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the early church. The commemoration was not something that took place essentially within individual believers, in their subjective memory. The celebration itself, i.e. thanksgiving, sacrifice, and sacrament (mysterion) was a commemoration, an anamnesis of the death and resurrection of Jesus where the history of salvation was re-presented by the sacramental commemoration.\textsuperscript{45}

The Eucharist stirs the memory in two ways. First, it is a causative memorial, drawing to mind linkages and associations between the sacramental elements and the death of Christ. Second, it links past, present, and future in a single fold, recognizing that Christ is part of history and

\textsuperscript{42} Nils Alstrup Dahl, \textit{Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church} (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1976), 21.

\textsuperscript{43} Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 6:2; Rev 1:10.

\textsuperscript{44} Dahl, \textit{Jesus in the Memory}, 21.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
foreshadowing his coming again.\textsuperscript{46} Schmemann said, “Christian worship, by its nature, structure and content, is the revelation and realization by the Church of her own real nature.”\textsuperscript{47} Not only does the Church come to knowledge of God in the Eucharist, but also knowledge of her own identity.

Eucharist as Remembering Rightly

The task of this section is to explore how the Eucharist creates and sustains the Christian community. As previously stated, the act of remembering is not passive but is quite active, and it leads to a transformation of the participants. In most every Christian tradition, the Eucharist is a transformative event on a certain level or to a certain degree. The participating community undergoes transformation. Through the Eucharist, the Church becomes what she receives, which is the body and blood of Christ. This transformation does not involve individuals being transubstantiated into the real presence of Christ; rather, it is a collective embodiment of Christ’s real presence in the world. The liturgical celebration of the Eucharist is the preeminent vehicle through which the Christian narrative of salvation through Jesus Christ is communicated. The narrative is not simply told, rather through ritual it is inhabited and thereby forms the moral character of the individual Christian and the Christian community.\textsuperscript{48} The Church owes her very being to Christ. She is His body manifest; and the Church, as the active body of Christ on earth, depends constantly on the Holy Spirit, through whom the eschaton breaks into history, the catholicity of the Eucharistic community is manifested, and the mystery of communion is


\textsuperscript{47} Schmemann, \textit{Introduction}, 29.

\textsuperscript{48} Allman, “Eucharist, Ritual & Narrative,” 60.
experienced. At this point, Augustine serves as a well-known reminder that the Eucharist is unlike all other sorts of food inasmuch as transformed bread and wine does not simply metabolize into the human body, but in fact changes the recipient into part of the Body of Christ: “Nor shall you change Me, like the food of your flesh, into yourself, but you shall be changed into Me.” So, it is more than just a community that is formed; it is the body of Christ that is made incarnate on earth. L. Gregory Jones states this formation like this: “As people are formed in and through friendships with particular people and shared activities in particular practices, they are acquiring habits of acting, feeling, and thinking that are bound up with certain conceptions of the Good. Through particular kinds of friends, and paradigmatically through friendship with the Triune God, a person is inducted into the shared practices of Christian life. In so doing she is enabled to see the world, her life, and her actions in a distinctive and less untruthful way.”

In the Apostle Paul’s writing to the Corinthians concerning the practice of the Eucharist, we can see that there was the intention of a communal transformation that was supposed to take place in the life of the church there. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul accuses the Corinthians of shaming the “have nots” by allowing the powerful patrons of the church to enjoy priority service, privileged seating, and larger, better portions of food during the Eucharistic meal. This would have been seen as their normal, culturally appropriate prerogative. But Paul declares that such a performance makes it impossible for them to eat the Meal at all: “When you come together, it is

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49 Alkiviadis C. Calivas, “The Liturgy: The Church’s Faith in Motion,” The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 49, no. 3–4 (September 2004): 221.


51 L. Gregory Jones, Transformed Judgment Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990), 76.
not really to eat the Lord’s supper,” (1 Cor 11:20) It can be suggested that the “moral defects” in the character of the Corinthians made their practices ineffective. Paul clearly sees it as impossible to pair the Eucharistic meal with shaming the poor.\textsuperscript{52} Paul summarizes his complaint with the simple accusation that their Lord’s Supper gatherings are not for the better, but for the worse and, for Paul, the gathering of the church ought to be for the betterment of the church:

“Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse,” (1 Cor 11:17). This suggests that Paul may have understood the Lord’s Supper as a practice that would shape the character of the congregation. John Chrysostom is exceptional in drawing out this point. He argues that the Lord’s Supper, practiced aright, fostered virtue and solidarity within the community. John Chrysostom’s commentary on verse 17 paraphrases Paul’s words about coming together for the worse: “because ye do not go forward unto virtue. For it were meet that your liberality should increase and become manifold.”\textsuperscript{53} Chrysostom thus directly connects Paul’s condemnation with the Corinthians’ failure to embody the practice of the Lord’s Supper in such a way that it would foster and increase the virtue of the participants and of their community. Such a performance of church actually makes it impossible to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The church’s formation ought to have been patterned after the true story of Christ’s sacrificial death, but instead had been coopted by the Corinthian culture’s stories, approach to virtue, and deforming practices of honor-seeking, social stratification, and sociocultural discrimination. “Remembering” in the Eucharistic meal does not refer to mere mental recollection. Instead, remembering includes the Eucharistic practice, which forms participants’ identities through embodied participation in the “story-

\textsuperscript{52} Rhodes, “Forward unto Virtue,” 132.

\textsuperscript{53} Chrysostom, as quoted in Rhodes, “Forward unto Virtue,” 133.
shaped Supper” and through the power of the redemptive event the Supper narrates.\textsuperscript{54} As previously stated, the Passover meal re-actualized the redemption of the Exodus for later generations of Jews, by forming their identity and sense of telos in line with God’s redemption. Similarly, the Eucharist shapes participants’ identity around the narrative of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, making real to them that God’s act of salvation in the past is nevertheless for the present participants. This remembering in the New Testament is always bound up with a transformation of attitude and action, such that, “to ‘remember’ the poor is to relieve their needs.”\textsuperscript{55} Paul emphasized proper practice of the Eucharistic meal because he believed the formative impact of that practice would ripple out into every aspect of the Corinthians’ lives. Formative practices do not just require character, political practices, a shared story, and a communal telos. They cultivate virtues, embed participants into a narrative, shape a community’s politics, and orient the community towards that shared telos.\textsuperscript{56} Due to this belief, Paul promotes a renewed Eucharistic practice that would, by God’s grace, form believers into people who would live lives of solidarity with the marginalized, love for their neighbors, and generosity toward the Other.

\textbf{Anamnesis}

\textit{Anamnesis} is the remembrance of the story of Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension. This word is used to convey the Hebrew concept of “active” or “effective” memorial.\textsuperscript{57} The Western words for “memory,” “memorial” and “remembrance” are examples of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 134.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 135–36.
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the limit of translation. These words translate the Greek anamnesis, but “memory,” “memorial,” or “remembrance” do not convey all the power and shades of meaning of the word. Concerning the Eucharist, there are three ways in which anamnesis can be used: first, it can operate as a general term designating the remembrance quality of the liturgy of the Eucharist; second, it is part of the rubric of 1 Corinthians 11:24–25 where the disciples are instructed “do this in remembrance of me”; third, anamnesis can be seen as the verbal formula that appears in the Eucharist prayer of Christian liturgy, where the mode and content of the worshipers’ response to the command is articulated by an act of offering.  

Anamnesis is more than a formula or a method for remembrance; there is an aspect that is in itself unpredictable and mysterious. Our participation in memory is made possible by the Holy Spirit, who is the living memory of the Church. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in John 15:26 as the “reminder of Christ.” The Spirit does not work independently from the Godhead but “he will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” The Spirit can be seen as the memory of the truth, which derives from the depth of the communion between the Father and the Son. Through the operation of the Spirit, Christians can know the truth about Jesus and can become his witnesses. The Spirit reminds us of the words and works of Christ, making visible the self-sacrificing love of Christ. The sensus fidei is an aspect of faith and the spiritual instinct, “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth”, which helps the faithful to adhere to the life and teachings of Christ, “penetrate it more deeply with right judgement, and apply it

59 John 16:13.
60 Quy, “Maurice Halbwachs’ ‘Collective Memory,’” 247.
61 Ekpo, “From Amnesia to Anamnesis,” 120.
more fully in their daily life.” The *sensus fidei* is that spiritual interpretive instrument given to all the faithful, “which enables them to recognize and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice, and to reject what is false.” The *sensus fidei* is the pneumatic gift of the Holy Spirit given to all the baptized for the flourishing and increase of the Church. It is an expression of the empowerment neither of the hierarchy nor of the laity, as if this were a goal in itself; it is rather an empowerment of all the faithful to contribute to the work and life of the Church in a spirit of service and love. The *sensus fidei* helps the faithful to collectively see and hear the voice of Christ the Good Shepherd who speaks to us in the everyday events of life and ultimately in the Eucharist. The Eucharistic memorial is made possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit. “The Eucharist is not only the sacrament of the life-giving presence of Christ but also the most significant indicator of the action of the Holy Spirit.” The Christ event—the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ—was made possible through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. “In the Spirit, Jesus is conceived, anointed, and empowered. Possessed by the Holy Spirit, he preaches, heals, and drives out evil spirits.” In the light of this same Spirit the Church re-lives the Christ event and reproduces the pattern of divine action in Christ. The Church continues the actions of Christ through the influence of the Holy Spirit—when the Spirit breathes, humankind, the cosmos and all reality comes to their perfect consummation in Christ. The Holy Spirit “leads the believing assembly, through their remembering, to thankfulness, the ‘memory of the heart’. This in turn leads us to Christ who, in his dying and rising for us, in his self-offering, will lead us to the Father. The Holy Spirit also enables the praying assembly to respond with the gift it has

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62 Ibid., 121.
63 Ibid., 123.
64 Ibid., 124.
received, Jesus Christ, and with its own self-offering.” Through the power of the Spirit, the Eucharist is confected; through the power of the Spirit the Church becomes truly what it is: the Body of Christ—and continues the mission of love, forgiveness and healing initiated by Christ.

Eschatology

The Eucharist provides hope for the future, where perfect communion will be made possible by the second coming of Christ. As mentioned earlier, sin is a constant threat to humanity’s call to communion. Any telling of the Christian meta-narrative, if it is to be faithful to the future hope of the story, must include the eschatological. The *anamnesis* of the Eucharist does not only remind the community of the past events; it also brings to the present the promise and hope of the Christ who “is to come.” Some would even say that *anamnesis* looks more to the future than to the past as an eschatological formula. According to Schmemann, “the event which is “actualized” in the Eucharist is an event of the past when viewed within the categories of time, but by virtue of its eschatological, determining, completing significance it is also an event which is taking place eternally.” This means that Eucharist transcends ordinary narrative and story. It not only brings the past to the present, but also draws the future aeon into the present. Schmemann explains this phenomenon this way,

The Coming of the Messiah is a single event of the past, but in His coming, in his life, death and resurrection, His kingdom has entered into the world, becoming the new life in the Spirit given by Him as life within Himself. This Messianic Kingdom or life in the aeon is “actualized” – becomes real – in the assembly of the Church, in the εκκλησία, when believers come together to have communion in the Lord’s Body. The Eucharist is therefore the

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65 Allman, “Eucharist, Ritual & Narrative,” 64.

66 Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8.

67 Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology*, 256.

manifestation of the Church as the new aeon; it is participation in the Kingdom as the parousia, as the presence of the Resurrected and Resurrecting Lord.\textsuperscript{69}

We see that there persists a chronological tension in the celebration of Eucharist. Past events and promises are recalled, by a presently gathered community which is participating in the history of salvation and asking for God's intercession, all of which takes place in expectation of Christ's return. The Eucharist makes the memories of Jesus alive and transformative among the faithful.

More than a simple remembrance, the sacrament collapses the barriers between past, present and future. Christ becomes present among us today, we become part of His body moving forward toward the exemplification of His completion of history.\textsuperscript{70} Thus the Eucharist is the actualization of the new aeon within the old, and the presence and manifestation in this age of the Kingdom of the Age to Come. The eschatology of the Eucharist does not renounce the world or seek to escape it. On the contrary, it is the affirmation of the reality, the certainty and the presence of the Kingdom of Christ which is within the Church and breaking out in the present.\textsuperscript{71} This “new beginning” that is to come, has already occurred in the present through the journey of Christ into the world.\textsuperscript{72} Through his life, death and resurrection, Christ brought the Kingdom of God into the world, which is characterized by forgiveness, restoration of humanity’s communion with God and one another.

The Pauline text in 1 Corinthians 11 commands the church in Corinth to perform the Eucharist “until he [Christ] comes,” which points to a quality of anticipation in the Eucharist.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{71} Schmemann, \textit{Introduction}, 73.

\textsuperscript{72} Jones, \textit{Embodying Forgiveness}, 118.
Just as the Israelite memorial of the Exodus recalls the redemptive act of God in the past in anticipation of future redemption, the Christian practice of Eucharist celebrates the life of Christ, in its entirety, which includes his second coming. Christ brought forgiveness and reconciliation to humanity from God, restoring the communion that was lost. This was only given in part, as humanity still lives in a sinful world. However, the Eucharist is a prayer by the Church in which she cries for Christ’s swift return and that in the Eucharist she may have a foretaste of new creation. This continual cry paired with an imminent expectation of Christ’s second coming, prevents the Church from decaying into a static stagnant faith. When the Church remembers the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, she also remembers the eschatological future. Living by faith with hope is a way of life embedded in memory. In order to live such a life, Christians must remember well. They must remember not only the death and resurrection of Jesus but also the eschatological future embedded in his death and resurrection. Without that memory of the eschatological future, the future that they hope for becomes disconnected from the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection.

Now that we understand that proper Eucharistic practice forms the Church into her proper identity, I will show precisely how it shapes the Church so that she is characterized by forgiveness and reconciliation. Jones says that “forgiveness is not so much a word spoken, an action performed, or a feeling felt as it is an embodied way of life in an ever-deepening relationship with the Triune God and with others. A Christian account of forgiveness ought not simply or even primarily to be focused on the absolution of guilt; rather, it ought to be focused on the reconciliation of brokenness, the restoration of community with God, with one another

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and with all of creation.” The focus and goal of repentance and forgiveness is the restoration of communion and the healing of brokenness, not the claiming of the freedom to live apart.

Repentance and forgiveness are not dislocated episodes in the lives of autonomous individuals, but part of a narrative that has a telos in the restoration of communion. It is not something inconvenient that one handles strategically in order to maintain or gain power. It does, rather, require the brokenness before the other that reveals the openness to a common future. This implies that repentance and forgiveness cannot be separated from, for instance, the commitment to the healing of personal relationships, church unity or the care of creation. Repentance and forgiveness are an embodied way of life that are a part of the way we live. They are integral to one’s own character and vision, and one’s social location and historical situation. Jones explains that forgiveness is inherent to the life of the Church:

Forgiveness must be embodied in specific habits and practices of Christian life paradigmatically as we become part of Christ’s body the Church. Learning to embody forgiveness involves our commitment to the cultivation of specific habits and practices of the Church. This learning typically at the hands of exemplars who are more skilled than we are is similar to the ways in which a person learns to become an excellent physician or an accomplished pianist. Indeed just as Aristotle emphasized the importance of learning a craft for learning how to live so there is a craft of forgiveness that Christians are called to learn from one another, and particularly from exemplars, as we seek to become holy people.

This “craft” of forgiveness involves the continual process of unlearning sin through living in communion with the Triune God, with one another, and with the whole of creation.

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74 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, xii.


76 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, xii.
Through the practice of the Eucharist Christians remember Christ’s broken body. It is the memory of this broken body that serves as model and source for the body of Christ to embody reconciliation. The Church is the body of Christ made present on the Earth and the Eucharistic meal is a space where people can mourn over the injustice to bodies and keep the memory of those bodies alive.\textsuperscript{77} The failing witness of one part of the body of Christ against the crimes against humanity leads to the “piling up of dead bodies.”\textsuperscript{78} When the body of Christ celebrates the Eucharist, reads the Bible or talks about its new identity in Christ, we need to be mindful of this distorted memory. These memories are only kept alive if victims and perpetrators can find the space to read together and celebrate together. The lack of church unity counters the embodiment of truthful memory and hopeful vision and fuels a static account of forgiveness.\textsuperscript{79}

The wounded body can find healing for its disunity through the remembrance of the wounds of Christ and may find the resources to embody hope through the remembrance of Christ’s resurrection.

It must be remembered that part of the memory of the death and resurrection of Christ is that Jesus died not only in solidarity with those who have been wronged, but also as a substitute for offenders. Christ died for the wrongdoers, the enemies of God. According to Volf, “the sacred memory of the Passion will be flawed if it contains only the pair ‘suffering/deliverance.’” It must also include the more dominant couplet, “enmity/reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{80} This important theme of enmity and reconciliation is rightly seen in Romans 5 where the Apostle Paul explains the

\textsuperscript{77} Vosloo, “Reconciliation as the Embodiment,” 40.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Volf, \textit{The End of Memory}, 115.
significance of the Passion. Reconciliation with God is explicit, but the overarching scheme has reconciliation amongst people in mind as well.\textsuperscript{81} Love is found at the center of the Apostle’s presentation of the Passion. Love, not only for victims of suffering, but also for perpetrators.

What it means for Christ to have died for the wrongdoer is not to view Christ as a third party who was punished for the wrongdoer. This is because Christ is not a third party at all. On the one hand, Christ is one with God due to his divinity. Thus, it is God, working through Christ’s death, who bears the brunt of humanity’s transgression against God and frees humanity from just retribution. On the other hand, Christ is one with us on account of his humanity. So, we who die in Christ are freed from guilt. This oneness of Christ eliminates any notion of him being a third party; instead, Christ is seen as an actor in the act of forgiveness and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{82}

Since there is no third party involved in Christ’s Passion, his self-sacrifice is a gift given to the wrongdoer by the one who was wronged. The wrong is condemned but the wrongdoer, who receives forgiveness and repents, is freed from guilt and punishment.

Jesus never misleads or deceives his followers about the cost to become and to remain his disciples. If we desire to be his followers, then the requirements are clearly outlined. Those requirements demand the same giving of ourselves, the same pouring out of ourselves as contained in the eucharistic giving of Jesus. Early in his ministry Jesus explains that self-denial, bearing one’s cross, and full conformity with his example are the standards for genuine discipleship. When celebrating Eucharist, it is in this same spirit and with the same intensity of discipleship to which Jesus calls us. It is only within the context of this discipleship that we can

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{81} Romans 15:7 insists that Christians receive one another “just as Christ also received us.” This suggests that God’s embrace of humanity provides a model for humanity to embrace in its own, human way.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{82} Volf, \textit{The End of Memory}, 117.}
celebrate the eucharistic mystery of Christ's total self-giving.\footnote{Roger Michael Mahony, “The Eucharist and Social Justice,” \textit{Worship} 57, no. 1 (January 1983): 55–56.} The total giving of Jesus in the Eucharist is for the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of all creation according to God’s plan. It is common for people to struggle with the generosity of God’s forgiveness of sins and of one another’s faults. In his final commissioning of the apostles, Jesus stresses that they continue the great gift of the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation authentically.\footnote{Luke 24:45–53.} Each authentic celebration of the Eucharist necessarily becomes a total immersion in the will and work of the Father, after Jesus’ example. Our sharing in the Eucharist must reflect that same commitment to affirming the Father’s will and plan in our own lives. Any contrary attitude totally dilutes the measure of our giving over our bodies and pouring out our blood after Jesus’ example.\footnote{Mahony, “The Eucharist and Social Justice,” 57.}

Since Christ commanded that the Church partake in the Eucharist for the forgiveness of sins in his memory, and for the proclamation of his death for our salvation until the end of the world, our continuing celebration of the Eucharist must clearly call all of us to be reconciled to the God and to one another. So much human misery and tragedy is caused by people unwilling to accept forgiveness in their own lives and to offer forgiveness to others. Jesus’ constant message of God’s mercy, the forgiveness of sins, and the reconciliation of all people is contained most especially in the celebration of the Eucharist.\footnote{Ibid., 58.} As the Church, we must not allow divisions to be present among us, or irreconcilable differences to develop or pride to impede reconciliation. Our most authentic celebration of the Eucharist will flow from a gathering of communities fully committed to repentance, to the forgiveness of sins, and to reconciliation among all people. If we
do not enter the eucharistic celebration with this spirit, we can stifle the full effectiveness of Jesus’ total forgiveness through his body and blood.

In the Eucharist, the Spirit gathers a community that is not based upon biases, socioeconomic or familial ties. Rather, it is an open call that seeks to assemble an open Church, from amongst all nations and peoples, that crosses over its normal boundaries into the territory of those who are outside of their fellowship. In a similar manner, the Spirit uses the Eucharist to allow the Church to see her own boundaries crossed as well. This is because entry into the Christian community is not decided by any sort of privilege of class or family, or by any close friendship. The experience of the Eucharist is not made to mimic the table etiquette of the world. It would be easy for Christians to resort to a friendship-based communion, but that would be a poor substitute for the fellowship that the Spirit seeks to gather. Christian communion is not a guarantee of constant harmony and endlessly reciprocated good feelings. It is a “people who are related, responsible and united to one another.” Human fellowship is not magically created by Eucharist but it creates a community focused on Christ that is not fenced off from the world but equipped to go into it. The Spirit gathers people to forgive and love one another, despite differences, past sufferings and wrongs. The communion of the Church serves as a witness of forgiveness and reconciliation to the world.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, Volf’s concept of “sacred community” has been addressed as a religious community that is formed and maintained by its sacred, or collective, memory of salvation. The Israelite community of the Old Testament is a prototypical example of a sacred

87 Jon Coutts, A Shared Mercy: Karl Barth on Forgiveness and the Church (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016) 183.
community whose identity was maintained through the re-telling of the Exodus event at the Passover celebration. This collective memory shaped their perspective of God, themselves and the world. It was through the lens of their shared past that the future was anticipated. In comparison, the Church is also a sacred community whose identity is shaped and maintained in similar manner. Just as the Passover meal stirred up Israel’s sacred memory, the Eucharist stirs up the sacred memory of the Church and reminds her of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. This act of remembering, *anamnesis*, re-actualizes the self-giving of Christ in the present and allows for the Church to experience the saving grace of Christ. Christians are called into loving communion with God and the world. Being in communion prevents memory from becoming distorted because it is not allowed to remain stagnant. In order to maintain this communion, forgiveness and reconciliation is necessary. Sin separates people from God and one another. The Eucharist recalls the forgiveness and reconciliation given by God through Christ to the world. As the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she is transformed into the incarnate body of Christ on Earth. This transformation into the likeness of Christ leads the Church to embody his forgiveness and reconciliation here on Earth. Through truthful remembrance in the Eucharist, the Church is compelled to embody these Christ-like qualities in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. Just as Christ gave himself as a gift for the forgiveness and restoration of the world, so too the Church is called to give herself as a gift for the continuation of that mission.
CONCLUSION

Memory is a powerful tool that shapes and influences individuals and communities in thought and deed. It has the ability to unite but also to divide people and communities. Memories of suffering, in particular, have the potential to cause division, and prevent forgiveness and reconciliation between communities. Memories of suffering and wrongdoing can lead to limiting the identity of oneself, community and the other to their role in an event. This greatly hinders the chance of forgiveness and reconciliation from occurring.

At the beginning of this essay, my goal was to argue that the liturgical practice of the Eucharist forms and sustains a Christian community that is characterized by reconciliation and forgiveness in an unforgiving world by connecting the Eucharist to collective memory. The way in which I contended Eucharistic practice does so is by challenging the Church to remember its past and future while living in the present. My argument began with an analysis of the relationship between memory and identity. Memory serves as a basis for identity where one’s personal identity and worldview is shaped. Going beyond the individual, the collective memory of any group or community shapes its identity and relation to the rest of society and the world. In addition, memory itself can be shaped by the community at large in order to protect communal identity, values and beliefs.

Following this, I highlighted the relationship between memory and reconciliation. They are interdependent upon each other. Even though reconciliation is dependent upon memory, memory can stand in the way from it even happening. I demonstrated this by explaining the effect of traumatic memories and memories of suffering. Without dealing with such memories truthfully and ethically, one runs the risk of distorting memory. This distortion heaps violence upon violence and further divides communities. The way in which this distortion can be
prevented is by doing what Volf calls “remembering rightly.” It is only through facing the ugly face of the violent past together that reconciliation can be possible.

In the final chapter, I began with a section on sacred communities which explained how a religious community maintains its sacred memory and passes it on to its descendants through rituals and traditions. I used the Israelite community of the Old Testament as an example of a sacred community whose worldview, attitude and action were interpreted through the lens of their central memory of the Exodus. By comparing the emphasis on remembering in the Israelite community to the emphasis shown in the Church, I argued that the Church is a sacred community as well whose worldview, attitude and action are shaped by the narrative of Christ’s Passion. By participating in Eucharist, the Church is called to remember and this remembering prompts bodily expression in the world. The life of the Church is to be seen and interpreted through the memory recalled in the Eucharist. By doing this, the Church embodies the memory of Christ by acting as a vehicle for forgiveness and reconciliation.

To conclude, I will present three scenarios in which the Church can incorporate the memory of the Eucharist in its life and witness in the world. First, the Church must seek forgiveness and repent for any wrongs that has been committed among her members and also against those outside of the Church. Second, the Church must offer forgiveness and reconciliation to those who have persecuted and even killed Christians. Third, the Church cannot stand aside as a third party in a conflict, but must act as a vehicle for reconciliation between any conflicting groups.

It is only natural that we begin with the Church seeking forgiveness for her sins; for as Matthew 7:5 commands, “first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” The Church is not yet the spotless and pure bride for
whom Christ is returning. She lives in a world of sin and sinful desire. This by no means excuses sin, but explains why the Christians in the Church have perpetrated wrongdoing against each other and outsiders. People often point back to the Crusades as the stereotypical event through which the Church tragically sinned. However, one does not need to look that far back to see the shortcomings of the Church. People who identify as Christians have been seen in the news spewing hate and committing violence against various groups. This has often been done under the guise of the good fight for our faith, self-protection, way of life and even national preservation. One such example is the infamous Westboro Baptist Church.88 So, how does the Church seek forgiveness for sins committed by her members? It must be remembered that the call for communion begins in the Church, but also extends outward to the world. The Eucharist is a command for Christian communion with all of creation. When we, as the Church, commit sin against others, we separate ourselves from them. It is our Christian duty to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matt 28:19) We hinder this mission by allowing offense to set up barriers between us and the world. By participating in the Eucharist, the entirety of Christ’s memory is recalled. Christ’s sacrifice is proof that sin requires judgement. However, it also shows that Christ sought forgiveness and reconciliation on behalf of creation. By seeking forgiveness, the Church preserves her identity as a communal body that seeks the restoration of communion with the world. The hands of the Church must constantly be outstretched toward the world for embrace, even if the world refuses such an act.

Next, how can the Church use the memory of the Eucharist to forgive and offer reconciliation to the world? From its inception, the Church has been persecuted and many of its

88 The official website of Westboro Baptist is https://godhatesfags.com/.
members killed for her faith. From the pre-apostle Paul to contemporary enemies of the faith, the Church has been a victim of wrongdoing and suffering. Once again, by remembering rightly in the context of the Eucharist, the Church becomes a community that seeks out the wrongdoer, not in revenge but in forgiveness and reconciliation. Christ’s sacrifice took on the sin of the world and put it to death, without putting the perpetrator to death. The sin of the world was condemned in order that reconciliation with the world could be made possible. As noted earlier, the Church was once separated from God but was brought near through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. So, as the Church remembers her former state as an enemy of God, she must also seek to restore communion with those who have set themselves as enemies against her and God. Eucharist continually reminds the Church, “while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly,” (Rom 5:6). The Church is called to be pro-active and not reactive to violence and suffering inflicted against her.

Lastly, how is the Church to act as a vehicle for forgiveness and reconciliation as a witness of violence between conflicting groups? This can be as large as a conflict between warring nations or as small as a town’s treatment of a minority. This last category may be one of the trickiest due to natural inclination of people to pick sides and declare a just cause for a particular group while condemning the other. Conflict is not always that clear-cut and can be complicated. The Eucharist is a constant reminder to the Church that Christ did not die on the cross for the sin of a few but for the sinfulness of humanity. In addition, a proper remembrance of the life of Christ informs the Church, “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him,” (John 3:17). Rightly remembering this prevents the Church from aligning herself with any group based on any cultural bias or quest for vengeance. The Church seeks the restoration of the world by
eliminating the enmity within it. When the Church does this, she does not act as a disassociated third-party. Just as Christ gave his life on behalf of God and humanity, so the Church must give of herself for all of creation. This willful sacrifice is an offering to provide reconciliation between two conflicting groups as well as their reconciliation with God. This is because any sin committed against a fellow human is also a sin against God. Therefore, as the body of Christ, the Church must constantly work to provide the opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation to occur.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


