

REMEMBERING AS SOCIO-HISTORIC DYNAMIC OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE *

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Abstract

If religious experience can be described as everyday experience in a religious conceptual framework, and if this framework consists of explanatory commitments, the question that this paper poses is to the genesis of these explanatory commitments. It is argued that these explanatory commitments, which are imbedded in (ongoing) oral and written traditions, are constituted by the first commandment of tradition, namely to remember. Remembering is executed by telling (the narrative). Critically opposing the epistemology of remembering of Plato and its theological basis, remembering is understood in the light of the process of socialization and the unacceptable distinction between scripture and tradition, as act of creative and imaginative interpretation and re-interpretation, that is, as socio-historic dynamic of religious experience. It is further argued, selectively following Bultmann and Taylor, that we must distinguish between the historic Jesus and Christ, the latter being understood as an inter-subjective, communal dynamic. This enables an understanding of remembering as remembering, that is, as a dangerous subversive act in solidarity with those who suffer.

1. Introduction

1.1 On a personal 'why'-note

In my study of 'traditional' dogmatics during my student years, I sensed that something was lacking for me. What was lacking, was a life-giving and life-integrating vitality, 'bloodfilled dogmatic veins'. Instead, highly sophisticated abstractions were of the order of the day, enjoyed (solely) for their supposedly intrinsic/coherent sophistication. My criticism is not directed against abstractions as such (which would be naive!), but against the hitchhiker status of such abstractions

* Paper read at the congress of the Theological Society of South Africa, at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, in July 1991.

along the multifaceted road of life, if such abstractions were not integrated into 'keeping the difficulty of life alive' (Caputo).

In my reading of the German systematic theologian Wilhelm Herrmann (a theologian of religious experience *par excellence!*) and the German New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann, I discovered the dimension I was seeking. To put it in the words of Kierkegaard on Hegel:

Er vergisst dass er existiert.

This dimension of existence was for me, the forgotten dimension, and then understood as *Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins*. Through reflection on this dimension, stimulated by Herrmann and Bultmann but also reaching out beyond both, religious experience became for me, the generic concept for my and our pilgrims voyage through history with the God of history - an open text, characterized by temporality (*voorlopigheid*) and the cautious feeling of our way - in dialogue with others who have already felt their way - along the historic quest for meaning in and dignity of life before the *Unseen Reality* (William James).

1.2 On religious experience

Religious experience as concept, which is not a terminus technicus (cf Veldsman 1990:324), is an extremely wide term which defies precise and lucid definition. Both religious and experience are furthermore relatively recent concepts, whose provenance is in the modern West (Proudfoot 1985:xii). For the sake of this paper, religious experience will be understood as expressed in the following formula (Hubbeling 1987:38):

Religious experience = ordinary experience + a religious conceptual framework.

As Proudfoot (1985) has convincingly shown, this framework is constituted by explanatory commitments. Put more elaborately: beliefs about the causes of one's experiences are themselves constitutive of the experience.¹ These explanatory commitments, which are imbedded in a specific religious tradition, thus precede the experience of the *Unseen Reality* (James).

Although the above-mentioned formula of Hubbeling is an immediate recognition of the subject matter, vital dimensions of religious experience are not named. Since this paper will concentrate on one of these dimensions, namely remembering,² a broader description is added for the sake of clarity (Veldsman 1990:342):

Religieuse ervaring is denkmatig gekonstrueerde gevoelservaring wat gekonseptualiseerd, selftransenderend en geïntensionaliseerd is, ingebed in en medebepaald deur die historiese vergestaltung van die betrokke interpreterende geloofsgemeenskap, emotief spontaan en/of doelbewus

2. Whether the distinction between remembering and recollection, from both linguistic use and from the history of concepts is valid, is questionable and of secondary importance (cf Metz 1977:163). Compare footnote 4.

refleksief, vanuit die herinnering van die oorgelewerde grondteks met God in Israel en die historiese Jesus, geesdriftig kreatief voltrek in/deur die gelowige tot hoop.³

My aim in this paper, concentrating specifically on 'remembering' as a constituting dimension of (Christian) religious experience as set out in the foregoing description, is:

- (a) to sketch in broad outlines Plato's epistemology of remembering (*anamnesis*) and its theological basis;
- (b) to look at the relationship between this act of remembering and the oral as well as the literate religious traditions;
- (d) to determine more closely the role of remembering in the tradition of Jewish-Christian thought ;
- (e) to describe remembering as a socio-historic dynamic of religious experience.

2. Remembering our residence in the realm of eternal form/ideas: on Plato and *anamnesis*

Plato's doctrine about the nature of the soul and its connection to the notion of the realm of ideal forms are both intertwined with the key concept of remembering⁴ (Koepping 1987:253). *Anamnesis*, as remembering/ recollection, is introduced in the *Meno* as a gnoseological term, analogous to the doctrine of the idea in the *Phaedo*. For Plato, *anamnesis* is the basis of formal rational knowledge and the constitutive problem of reason (Metz 1977:164).

The Greek term *anamnesis* achieves its specific meaning in the dialogues of Plato as that particular faculty of the soul that enables it to remember those things that it has seen when residing in the realm of eternal forms or ideas. However, through repeated incarnations in new bodies, the soul forgets most of the things it has seen or contemplated in the divine sphere, as mortal bodies with their imperfections, base desires, and passions dull the sensibilities of the soul that it is chained to, and thus takes on a portion of the nature or characteristics of the material body (Koepping 1987:253). True knowledge of the things seen by the soul between different incarnations or materializations in consecutive bodies is never quite lost. It is hidden but still latently there and it can be regained, brought to consciousness. This is the task *par excellence* of the philosopher,⁵ who through methodical questioning can recover such eternal truths that are beyond the varied sense experience and thus lead the intelligent soul away from the world of varied opinions to that form of true

3. In this quotation from a previous article by the author, a slight change has been made through the adding of the words 'denkmatig gekonstrueerde'.

4. Remembering and recollection, the latter being the word used by Koepping (1987), is used synonymously in this article. Compare footnote 2.

5. This giftedness of the philosopher, Plato (Koepping 1987:253) called in the words of Socrates, 'the art of midwifery (maieutic art)'.

knowledge that is beyond the empirical world and that concerns the very essence of things, which is eternal, indivisible, and pure, being removed from birth and decay, from becoming, and from the temporal and spatial contingencies of all matter. We therefore do not learn new things that were not there already, we only remember what we always knew!

For Plato, the device of *anamnesis*, therefore, is the cornerstone for the two major assertions that he puts forward in the *Phaedo* dialogue: one is the assertion that mankind has the ability to know the essence and form of things in their true reality of divine origin and that there are essences behind the contingent things of the world of the senses; the other is that there is an indivisible soul substance that participates in the divine sphere, a soul that descends from that sphere into embodiment and returns to that realm after death!

Two questions on Plato's interpretation of *anamnesis* need attention: what is then the implicated nature of concepts; how does remembering/recollection takes place?

For Plato, concepts are memory images of the ideas. In our bodily state, these memories have become so vague that we have to make a special effort to recall them. This kind of conceptual recollection/remembering is the task for philosophers (cf Brümmer 1990:54). The question that should be raised in this regard, is whether concepts are mental representations as Plato suggests or rather mental capacities, i.e. capacities to perform certain mental activities. The latter is the line of reasoning of Hare (1971) in his criticism of Plato which I would like to follow.⁶ The second question pertains to the act of remembering: how does it take place? Since for Plato the world of experience has been fashioned as an imperfect copy of the ideas, it can serve as a mnemonic to remind us of the ideas. Brümmer (1990:54) remarks in this regard that the platonic philosopher for this reason, is the very opposite of Rodin's *le Penseur* who sits contemplating with his eyes closed. Platonic recollection is done with your eyes open, looking at the world in order to be reminded of the ideas. It thus follows that there are two ways of looking at the empirical world. We can either look at it in order to learn something about it, or in order to be reminded of ideas. In the first case we extend our knowledge of the world of experience, in the second case we extend our explicit knowledge of the ideas and in this way become explicitly aware of our concepts as mental representations of the ideas. In whichever way we may look at reality, our looking is predetermined by our understanding of the origin of our concepts (language)! While Plato supposed that as philosophers we are trying to remember something we learned in a former life, I would like to argue, following Hare (1971), that our conceptual forms are not acquired through experience in some pre-existent state. They are acquired through the process of socialization by which we inherit all aspects of our culture.⁷ As Hare (1971:37) argues:

6. See Brümmer (1990) for a discussion on Hare's criticism of Plato.

7. Compare Borgeaud (1987:365-6): 'It is through practice and imitation, through the mechanical repetition of the traditional gestures and speech of his social group, that the individual, without realizing it, memorizes most of the information necessary for proper social and religious behavior. Taken in this

(W)hat we are actually remembering is what we learned on our mothers' knees, and cannot remember learning.

Thus, our concepts do not represent timeless essential forms, but are in fact aspects of our culture which are in principle subject to historical change and cultural variation.

Taking this exposition of remembering within a philosophical context into consideration,⁸ I would now like to turn to remembering as fundamental concept within the tradition of Jewish-Christian thought, focussing in the first place on the relationship in general between remembering and tradition and the transmission of tradition, and secondly on remembering as collective activity which unites the community of faith.

3. The first commandment of tradition: remember!

3.1 From origin to destiny: on tradition⁹

Traditio (handing over) and paradosis, translated as tradition, were commonly used by Latin and Greek theologians to denote the body of teachings preserved and handed down by the church as 'the Catholic faith'. However, in the modern study of religion a broader and more differentiated concept of tradition must be employed (Valliere 1987:1).

Culture depends on teaching and learning, and teaching and learning presuppose a tradition. The concept of tradition therefore applies to virtually all fields of culture (science, arts and letters, education, law, politics and religion).

A belief or practice in any field of culture may be said to be a tradition to the extent that it is received from the hands, lips, or examples of others rather than being discovered or invented (Valliere 1987:1). It is received (a) on the assumption that the authors and transmitters are reliable and therefore the tradition valid, and (b) with the express command and conscious intention of further transmission without substantial change.

Traditions in the field of culture therefore command respect because of their relative antiquity and the presumed trustworthiness of their authors and transmitters. Sacred traditions thus provide a link between the origin and destiny of

sense, memorization culminates in the acquisition of the innumerable actions, of behavior, thought and sensibility, that define a social and cultural identity'.

8. For a broader philosophical discussion of memory, see Sydney Shoemaker (1967) as well as the short discussion by Metz (1977:164ff). Bartels (1978:231) states that *mneme* from the time of Homer until the time of Christ and beyond, was one of the ideas central to the ancient and hellenistic Greek cults and religio-philosophical systems. He then adds the interesting remark that the situation may be expressed in the form of two equations: forgetting = silence = death; remembering = speech = life.

9. For the following exposition, I am greatly indebted to the article by Paul Valliere (1987).

things. Sacred traditions of all religions offer access to beginnings and insight into endings that personal experience and unaided reason cannot supply. Sacred traditions do not only address the past; they sometimes anticipate a future age or address past and future together (cf Eising 1977:574-5). In all three cases a view of time as something that can be recapitulated or at least held in synoptic vision long enough to add perspective to the present, underlies the concept of sacred tradition. The work of seizing time through myth or prophecy, explains the critical importance of memory in religious traditions. Memory defies time and change (Valliere 1987:1). It can be said, therefore, that remembering is the first commandment of tradition!

In religion, the concept of tradition may be applied to the means by which norms of belief and practice are handed down (transmission) or to the norms themselves.¹⁰ Both the transmission as well the norms themselves, must be taken into account in the genesis of our explanatory commitments and thus for the act of remembering.

A sense of tradition as normative is a basic element in all religious systems (expressed by e.g. 'The Fathers' in the Christian tradition), whether or not formal concepts of tradition exist. When formal concepts appear, they may be broad or specialized depending on their function in the system and the degree of differentiation among the sources of religious belief and practice. The function of specialized concepts is to sharpen the definition of tradition in selected areas and not to diminish the scope of tradition as a comprehensive term (Valliere 1987:2).

In the modern study of religion, the concept of tradition is used descriptively rather than normatively.¹¹ More problematic in relation to normative concepts of tradition is the 'pluralism' reflected in some uses of the descriptive concept, as when e.g. 'Christian tradition' is used to group together conflicting normative versions of Christianity.

3.2 From origin to destiny: on transmission of tradition

Traditions may be verbal or nonverbal (e.g. traditional artifacts, customs, sites). The latter cannot exist in isolation from verbal traditions as they are needed to interpret them. However, nonverbal traditions typically host multiple or successive interpretations without losing their identity or traditional status. Verbal traditions may be oral or written. The differences between the two affects the substance of tradition:

(a) forms of expression are dictated in part by the means available;¹²

10. For Valliere (1987:1), the distinction between tradition and transmission is not absolute. Religions typically resist it, especially if it is used to justify attempts to abstract the supposed essence of religion from its historic vehicles and forms of expression.

11 For example 'Christian tradition', meaning Christianity. Valliere (1987:2) comments: 'This way of speaking may be questioned to the extent that it appears to single out traditionality as the most basic characteristic of a religion'.

12. Some forms such as hymns, proverbs, riddles and folk tales, are essentially oral. Other forms, such as chronicles, law codes and commentaries, depend on writing or are fully realized only in writing. Some of

(b) written traditions are shaped in part by oral traditions;

(c) whereas oral tradition exists mainly in performance, written tradition exists also in objective form apart from its applications. Written texts stimulated the development of subtler intellectuality and greatly increased the dissemination in fixed form. As Valliere (1987:3) clearly states, writing brought about great dangers for tradition : when a tradition is put into writing, its inconsistencies become more evident,¹³ or as Borgeaud (1987:367-8) remarks:

Oral memory does not like writing: we have numerous examples of this. This is not simply because it knows that writing can place it in contradiction with itself. It is primarily because the standard of truth is different for each;

(d) oral and written traditions coexist and influence each other even after many authoritative sources of tradition have been committed to writing. Put differently: oral tradition is not a stage that is outgrown with the arrival of written tradition. People love to talk and talk preserves and extends itself by means of oral tradition. If the first commandment of tradition is remembering, then its execution is by telling (the narrative).

3.3 Excursus on oral tradition

In her interesting article on the nature and role of oral tradition, Margaret Mills (1987) questions the view of literate Western scholars that oral tradition represents a defective mechanism for perpetuating tradition. The contrasting of the fixity of belief in an immutable truth found in literate religious traditions with the variety and mutability of knowledge typical of oral tradition relying exclusively on memory, is just not on! It has become increasingly clear that in both religious and secular contexts, literary and oral methods of learning and teaching coexist and interact (Mills 1987:88). It seems that knowledge based on memory is not as ephemeral as previously had been thought, nor is written knowledge immutable in the actual conditions of social practice. Mills (1987:88) thereupon remarks that comparative research into the ways in which written and spoken words are organized and used in different societies at present, tend to complicate the picture of what oral tradition is, and of how it is related to the presumed stability of written tradition. However, overly simplistic models are giving way to less elegant, but perhaps richer, comparative views, which also offer a more accurate picture of the varieties of religious experience that are embodied in written and spoken words.

the most important forms of expression used in tradition, such as mythology and epic poetry, may reach a high level of development in either mode (Valliere 1987:3).

13. Many traditional authorities have felt anxiety about writing, among them Plato in *Phaedrus* (274c-75) where Socrates tells the following story. A wise Egyptian king who, in reply to the god who offered the Egyptians the gift of writing as a 'drug to produce memory and wisdom', observed that the invention was more likely to produce just the opposite, namely forgetfulness, since those who came to depend on it would tend to seek wisdom in an external source rather than having to look within their own souls, and so they would 'seem wise without being wise' (cf Valliere 1987:3).

For Mills (1987:88), the two great questions underlying most of the scholarship on oral tradition in religion are those of historical continuity and communicative effectiveness, the former question being prominent in the Western comparative study of religion since the late eighteenth century when the survival of preliterate belief systems in modern European settings was first recognized. It is unfortunately not possible in this paper to elaborate any further on the interesting discussion by Mills (1987:88ff) of the most provocative historical-reconstructive approach in the twentieth century of George Dumézil and subsequently of his followers. The point that she likes to make is that, although Dumézil and his followers only implicitly addressed the problem of oral tradition, the identification of traces of an original oral ideology in societies where that ideology is no longer overt, raises the question of the relative importance of self-consciousness in oral and literate traditions. In the religious context, the writing down of tenets of belief is held to facilitate the development of orthodoxy and of internally consistent bodies of belief, which in turn may contribute to the centralization of religious institutions and religious power. Dumézil's comparative studies imply amongst other things that the development of complex categorical systems of sacred and secular order is possible even in preliterate societies. The continued un-self-conscious operation of such conceptual system can be traced into the literate era, in both the literate and the oral domains of different communities. But how are these inherited pattern transmitted and institutionalized?

A second major approach to the problem of oral tradition has focused directly on the forms and processes of oral transmission.¹⁴ A serious limitation is imposed on our ability however to understand the workings of oral tradition in biblical and other traditions by the fact that the compositional history of existing texts is often undocumented, and the traditions upon which they were based, is scarce. Arguments for the oral origin of parts of the Bible proceed mainly on stylistic grounds, whereas the reconstruction of the actual process of oral composition remains inferential. Mills (1987:90) refers to ethnographic evidence from contemporary societies and the scanty indications of the compositional process gleaned from early literary which tends to enforce the idea that different societies distributed oral and literary processes in different ways. Furthermore, that there are a variety of techniques of oral composition and transmission just as there are a variety of techniques of literary composition and dissemination. These communicative mechanisms interact in complex ways. This means that within religious traditions in oral and literate societies today, virtually all societies develop special languages or communicative styles for religious contexts and that these are distinguished from everyday written or spoken language. Mills (1987:90) thereupon makes the following important remark:

It is perhaps best to regard writing not as a more authoritative or powerful *per se*, but as one of several possible strategies for marking off religious language as particularly powerful. Referring to the use of written words in

14. This approach was initiated by the American classicist Milman Parry and his student, Albert Lord, who focused on Homeric verse and subsequently expanded their research to European oral epic tradition (Mills 1987:89).

charms, Mills (1987:90) states that this use forms part of a larger *continuum* of protective magical practices that includes the manipulation of other physical objects.¹⁵

Thus, those who use literacy for protective magical purposes are using but one of several strategies for physically embodying sacred power and directing it to human ends.

To clarify the value of orality in many religious traditions, Mills (1987:91) refers to a distinction that was introduced by Gregory Bateson, namely between communicative and meta-communicative functions of language. Whereas the former convey information and content, the latter level conveys a relation between speaker and listener. While the literary mode is conceived as primarily communicative, it is the oral mode that is in the dimension of metacommunication. Since a primary goal of religious devotion is precisely to establish or reassert a personal relation between the worshiper and the worshiped, Bateson's distinction helps us to understand why the oral dimension is often critically important in both the embodiment and the propagation of religious belief and experience.

However, even within a strictly oral tradition, the religious value of orality may be differently assessed and values normally associated with literacy, affirmed. An example: some Christian Pentecostal groups locate spiritual authenticity in religious utterances that entails possession by the Holy Spirit. A preacher in this tradition would never use any sort of written notes or outline to organize his discourse in advance. And yet this ideal of oral spontaneity in devotional practice in no way alters the conviction that written scriptures are the *verbatim* word of God.

To conclude. Mills (1987) exposition of oral tradition confirms the diversity of relations between oral and literary tradition in different religious settings, and also the continuing, central importance of the spoken word as religious act. In her own words (Mills 1987:91-2):

Writing has no doubt provided a mechanism to measure the mutability of ostensibly eternal oral traditions, but when scriptural traditions are examined in particular social contexts, their own mutability is equally apparent at the level of interpretative enactment. It is in the consciousness and acts (verbal and physical) of living believers that religions manifest their meaning, and in that sense, living tradition is always oral tradition .

If living tradition in the sense of Mills is then oral tradition, and the first commandment of tradition is remembering as has been argued, how can (the act of) remembering be closer described within the tradition of Judeo-Christian thought?

4. Remembering as collective activity, uniting the community of faith

An understanding of Christian tradition and thus of history, is incomplete and impoverished without an awareness of its rootedness in the Jewish form and faith

15. Reference is made to strings, bits of cloth, beads, foodstuffs and herbs (Mills 1987:90).

tradition. The Jewish tradition is *par excellence* an oral and written tradition. As introduction to the exposition of remembering, a few remarks on the relationship between scripture (as 'frozen' tradition) and tradition (yet as the act of interpretation of scripture) must be made.

4.1 'Defrosting' of scripture: tradition as the history of ongoing interpretations

Within religious contexts, scripture refers to 'divinely revealed texts' while tradition refers to 'revelation mediated by human teachers'. This distinction between scripture and tradition, which reflects to some extent, the history of canonization in a religion, tends to be 'clear' enough in practice,¹⁶ but in theory this distinction is difficult (cf Valliere 1987:4) if not altogether unacceptable (cf Berkhof 1979:96). The unity of scripture and tradition however, as Berkhof (1979:96) rightly states, 'wordt onderstreept en tegelijk gecompliceerd door het feit dat beide niet zuiver als vastlegging en doorvertaling zijn te scheiden'. In the light of the foregoing exposition on oral and written tradition, thus of the historic-traditional formation of scripture, and the use of scripture (tradition of interpretation), I would like to support Berkhof (1979:96) in his conclusion:

Als het in de openbaring te doen is om voortgaande ontmoeting tussen God en de mensen, dan is Traditie van hetzelfde theologische gewicht als de Schrift.

Scripture cannot be used if it cannot be interpreted, and every use implies an interpretation. Interpretation, however, requires a general framework and accepted rules of discourse that scripture by itself cannot supply - they are supplied by tradition. Whatever this (hermeneutical) tradition may be, scripture can thus be understood as 'frozen' tradition, while the act of interpretation can be seen as the 'defrosting' of scripture within a new historical framework. This 'defrosting' as interpretation of scripture however, which now will be named the act of remembering, is a creative ('eine schöpferische Tätigkeit', cf Eising 1977:591) act.¹⁷

4.2 *Memoria Dei* (remembering God) in the tradition of Judeo-Christian thought

Israel's history is the unfolding of his one eternal act of remembering (Navone 1974:85).

16. In the Protestant tradition, the formal distinction between scripture (OT and NT) and the writings, e.g. of the Church Fathers and the creeds, tends to be clear. The same distinction applies to other religious traditions. The Muslim do not confuse the *sunnah* of the prophet with the *Qur'an* delivered by him.

17. A number of important issues cannot be addressed such as the question of hermeneutics, the multiformity of classical traditions, the relationship between tradition and change.

In the life of the faithful Jewish people, the act of remembering (*zakar*) constituted an essential factor, a sacred obligation, which pervaded their whole existence.¹⁸ Their covenant with and faith in Yahweh, their saviour and redeemer, their obedience to him as their sovereign and as lord of history, in their public/cultic worship (e.g. offerings, Sabbath), prayers and festivals - all of these are grounded in their experience of his gracious help in the past (cf. Bartels 1978:232). At their festivals, the people of Israel are publicly called upon to remember, and as they do so, the same God who did such great things for them in the past, speaks to them once again in the present, requiring their present commitment. In particular, Deut. developed a theology of remembering.¹⁹ The writer of Deut. has as his chief problem the relating of the new generation of Israel to the tradition of Moses. No longer has Israel direct access to the tradition of Moses and to the redemptive events of the past. It is now that memory takes on central theological significance as Israel encounters the same covenant God through a living tradition, as an actualization and re-interpretation of redemptive history! The act of proclaiming was the act of remembering, uniting the community of faith! As Childs clearly stated (in Brown 1978:237):

In times of crisis, when the role of the cult was threatened, Israel's memory assumed a new significance in renewing her tradition.

For Childs, this remembering is more than a mental act, but an 'immediate encounter, an actual participation in the great acts of redemption' (in Brown 1978:238).²⁰ Not remembering Yahweh spelt disaster and death!²¹

In the light of this short overview on remembering in the OT, Louis Dupré (1976:74) rightly states:

To the faithful Jew no act has deeper religious significance than the remembering of origins. The memory of history is a religious duty, and one which extends not only to those times when Israel felt close to God, such as the Exodus event and the Sinai revelation, but also to those which seemed far away, such as the golden calf episode, and later, the holocaust. Yet no more

18. On the theological interpretation of memory, see J. Pedersen's (1926), *Israel: Its Life and Culture*. Pedersen's psychological interpretation of memory within the Hebrew world, was attacked by James Barr (1961) in his *The Semantics of Biblical Language* and followed up by a detailed critique by Brevard Childs (1962) in *Memory and Tradition in Israel*. Compare also W. Schottroff's (1964) *Gedenken' im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*.

19. See Bartels (1978:232) for the numerous biblical references to remembering in Deuteronomium. Apart from the important theological interpretation by Deut. of remembering, it is the Psalms which contain the largest number of instances of *zakar*, the overwhelming majority of which occur in the individual complaint Psalms!

20. Brown (1978:238) himself however, questions Childs' concept of actualization, stating that Childs is stressing his interpretation of actualization too far.

21. This remembering was closely connected with 'the name' for example in Ps 6:6 where 'in death there is no remembrance of thee'.

than being a sacred obligation, the remembrance of Israel's past provides the Jew with a pattern for understanding and accepting the present, identifying with the types of the past, he (she) finds meaning in the vicissitudes of his own experience.

Within the NT, remembering (*mimneskomai* and variants) continues to play a fundamental role in the conduct of life and sustaining the life of faith, being a positive force which affects one's behavior, embracing the whole existence of man/women before God and not being a merely intellectual exercise (cf Bartels 1978:240ff)! Remembering embraces the whole of divine and human life: the 'Word' of revelation and the 'response' of faith! Remembering thus continued to be a collective activity which united the community of faith.

Bartels (1978:245-6) makes the interesting remark that the original meanings of the *mimnesko* word-group were entirely non-religious, ranging from sexual desire to the heights of philosophy. However, as a result of their adoption into the Greek scriptures as rendering of Hebrew and ancient eastern equivalents, the Greek words underwent a significant expansion of meaning, particularly along the lines of public worship. In this matter, the NT followed implicitly in the footsteps of the OT, largely defying common Greek usage. What makes this so significant is the fact that the Greek of the NT possesses so many other words relating to public worship, and yet this, the *mne*-group, is introduced into early Christian vocabulary for use in this special area, with the result that what has been an altogether peripheral meaning in profane Greek, now becomes central.

It is with the Lord's Supper in the NT that the act of remembering in its fundamental and central religious role is newly highlighted (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24):

Do this in remembrance of me .

Apart from the continuing importance of remembering in public/cultic worship (prayer, proclamation), remembering thereupon acquired a new credal content (cf 2 Tim 2:8: 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the death, descended from David, as preached in my gospel') and thus the sense of 'believing' and confessing. Within the NT, remembering in this sense of believing and confession is the work of the Holy Spirit (cf Jn 14:26), or as Adrian van Kaam states, pneumatic memory (cf Foley 1985:40).

However, unlike the broad spectrum of remembering in Judaism, Christian remembrance has concentrated more exclusively on a single chain of events, namely the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Referring to this Christocentrism, Dupré (1976:75) remarks:

Other persons and events are magnetically centered, as prefigurations or imitations, around the God incarnate. Throughout the ages Christians have found meaning and consolation in the remembrance of Jesus' life contemporary with their own. However, the christocentric nature of Christian recollection by no means restricts its function to mere recall of the life of Christ. Since its beginnings Christian piety has regarded memory as far more than a means of establishing contact with a redeemer who lived and died in

the past. Memory was, above all, the road to the inner center in which the encounter with God takes place. For that reason all cognition of God had to be a *memoria Dei*.

To conclude. Another important aspect, which I am not elaborating on, is the intimate connection of remembering and imagination. Within the OT and NT, the act of remembering is closely connected with images of God and of the relationship between the faithful and God. God is depicted for example as father, friend, shepherd, farmer, rock, fire; the faithful/church is depicted for example as sheepfold, flock, choice vineyard, tabernacle/ building/house of God, the new Jerusalem. Images (metaphors) are a central vehicle of revelation and thus of the act of remembering in religious experience. In this regard, Kathleen Fischer (1983:3) rightly remarks that imagination is fundamental in the religious experience of God and indispensable for a living faith. Imagination as creative interpretation, in my opinion, gives remembering its openness towards the future by representing the past in the present. This is my understanding of St Augustine [(1960):301] when he states in his *Confessions*:

But how is the future, which as yet does not exist, diminished or consumed, or how does the past, which no longer exists, increase, unless there are three things in the mind which does all this? It looks forward, it considers, it remembers, so that the reality to which it looks forward passes through what it considers into what it remembers.

5. Remembering as socio-historic dynamic of religious experience

I would like to argue in the light of the foregoing exposition that remembering functions as socio-historic dynamic of religious experience. Religious experience, which was described in the formula of Hubbeling as ordinary experience in a religious conceptual framework, consists of explanatory commitments (Proudfoot). These commitments are imbedded in the religious tradition of the specific faith community and acquired through the process of socialisation (Hare, Borgeaud). The religious tradition, which commands remembrance, is a living tradition, constituted not only by the written tradition (scripture), but also by the ongoing oral tradition (Mills), that is, in the act of telling (the narrative). This fact questions the traditional distinction in theory of scripture and tradition (Berkhof), paving the way for an understanding of remembering as creative and imaginative act of interpretation and re-interpretation.²² In this sense, remembering is the *Zugangspforte* to our experience and understanding of God.

Our experience and understanding of God, imbedded in the history of Israel, has as focus point the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In light of the exposition of the act of remembering, I would now like to argue one step further, namely that we must

22. In the light of the exposition of the genesis of our explanatory commitments within the act of remembering, we shall have to ask if the distinction between scripture and tradition is not but a fundamentalistic trick of theory and a metaphysical transgression in practice!

distinguish between the historic Jesus and Christ, and the latter as socio-historic force, thus taking Christ as an intersubjective, communal dynamic. This, in my opinion, is in line with the exposition of remembering as communal act of interpretation and re-interpretation. At the same time, it is in line with the genesis of the NT writings, especially the synoptic writers.

In my argument, I am re-interpreting in a new way the 'old' and controversial distinction made by Rudolf Bultmann in his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* with regard to the historic Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ. At the same time, I and selectively following Mark Kline Taylor (1990) in his controversial book *Remembering Esperanza*.

Bultmann (1984:1-2) formulated this distinction as follows:

Die Verkündigung Jesu gehört zu den Voraussetzungen der Theologie des NT und ist nicht ein Teil dieser selbst. Denn die Theologie des NT besteht in der Entfaltung der Gedanken, in denen der christliche Glaube sich seines Gegenstandes, seines Grundes und seiner Konsequenzen versichert. Christlichen Glauben aber gibt es erst, seit es ein christliches Kerygma gibt, d.h. ein Kerygma, das Jesus Christus als Gottes eschatologisches Heilstat verkündigt, und zwar Jesus Christus, den Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen. Das geschieht erst im Kerygma der Urgemeinde, nicht schon in der Verkündigung des geschichtlichen Jesu, wengleich die Gemeinde in den Bericht über diese vielfach Motive ihres eigenen Kerygmas eingetragen hat.

In his own particular way, and within a very different line of reasoning and with a very different intention to that of Bultmann, Mark Kline Taylor (1990:170) draws the same distinction:

Many Christians, and theologians among them, when thinking and writing about Christ, have written and spoken as if Christ were merely the last name of the man Jesus, making little if any distinction between the words Jesus and Christ ... The Christology I propose here will not only make this distinction; it will also reconnect Christ with Jesus only through attention to the communal, socio-historical matrix within which transformative power was experience in relation to Jesus.

Several kinds of arguments, in my opinion, can be identified and developed to support the act of remembering as socio-historic dynamic of religious experience and consequently of the distinction of Jesus of Nazareth and Christ as socio-historic dynamic (in a new sense of 'Do this in remembrance of me'):

- (a) interpretations and re-interpretations of Yahweh's acts and relationship to the community of faith in the tradition of Israel;
- (b) interpretations [rooted inter alia in (a)] of Jesus' person and work;
- (c) the interests of those claiming to be disciples of Jesus in past and present (that is, those who interpret him as the Christ);
- (d) the early movements coalescing around Jesus and his followers in culture and history (e.g. the Christologies of scholars such as Edward Schillebeeckx and

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who construct their Christologies out of a study of these movements).

This represents the complex source from which our understanding of remembering as socio-historic dynamic of religious experience should be developed further. But then, if it is

(a) developed further, it must take - in the light of the foregoing exposition (cf 2.1 'defrosting' of scripture) - anthropological theories of culture, literary-critical and political theories into account (so Mark Kline Taylor). This will promote intersubjective consensus to distinguish between different current ideologies, formulated 'in front of the classical text', claiming to be scripturally based, but not being selfcritically aware that theological conclusions are being made with regard to socio-political convictions which were not arrived at primarily by theological means (cf Kinghorn 1990); at the same time, it will enable criticism of culturally formed ideologies within scripture itself;

(b) to address (which it must!) our current historic situation in South Africa, it must be developed along the line of what Metz (1977:161) calls

... gefährlichen Erinnerung, (that is) als die in ihrer geschichtlichen und gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung ausgearbeitete Gestalt von eschatologischer Hoffnung.

For Metz, 'Erinnerung' can have a very decisive ecclesiological importance in defining the church as the public vehicle transmitting a 'gefährlichen Erinnerung' in the systems of social life. 'Erinnerung is thus understood as 'Freiheitserinnerung', which as 'Leidenserinnerung' (*memoria passionis*) acts as an orientation for 'freiheitsbezogenes Handeln' (Metz 1977:172). Remembering, then understood as remembering (see e g Mark Kline Taylor), is a dangerous subversive act, in solidarity with those who suffer, with regard to structures of domination and oppression.

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