Down memory lane to a better future

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ABSTRACT

In the body of research on an ethics of forgiveness, scholars differ about the place of remembrance in the act of forgiveness. One line of thought follows the argument of the philosopher Nietzsche, who maintained that people cannot live in the present when they are prisoners of the past. Without forgetting, the human species would have to relive the past continuously, and would never live in the present moment. Without forgetting, there can be no future. An opposite opinion follows the argument of Wiesel, who said that he discovered that only memory could help him to reclaim his humanity after the inhumanity of the Holocaust. What is therefore the relation between forgiveness and forgetfulness? This article deals with this question from a Christian ethical perspective. With a biblical-theological hermeneutical model as angle of approach, the investigation focuses on the evidence provided, in this regard, by the institution and meaning of the relevant feasts in the biblical history. These are the Passover, the Feast of the Huts, the Feast of Purim and the Lord's Supper. The study reaches the conclusion that remembrance is an essential part of forgiveness, and should be a core ingredient in socio-political transition.

INTRODUCTION

Remembrance is an essential part of the process of healing in socio-political transition. When discussing the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, De Gruchy (2002:23; 178) expresses this view, held by many scholars in the field of social reconciliation. Boraine, a leader in the discourse about transitional justice, holds the same opinion. He says the following about the work of the TRC in South Africa:

> *The emphasis (in the South African process) was on a common memory that would allow all South Africans to agree that this did happen, and that it must never happen again; that despite our divisions and differences, we can and must work together. It is this memory, which is accepted by those who applied the apartheid policies, those who opposed them and the large group in the middle who denied any knowledge of what was really happening around them. To reach that point in such a short space of time, after so many years of oppression and degradation, was a giant step forward, even though South Africa still has many steps to take.*
>
> (Boraine 2008:206)

Smit (2007:311) also emphasises the need of a community in transition to develop a common memory, with reference to Niebuhr's view. He contends that where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community, and where community has to be formed, common memory must be created.

The debate regarding the need or needlessness of a common memory in turbulent times is not a new topic in human rights discourse. In an interesting study about Holocaust remembrance, Krondorfer (2008:233) explains the two major lines of thought in this regard by presenting the viewpoints of Nietzsche on the one hand and Wiesel on the other. He indicates that Nietzsche held the view that people cannot live in the present when they are prisoners of the past. Without forgetting, the human species would have to relive the past continuously, and would never live in the present moment. Without forgetting, there can be no future. Nietzsche labelled remembering of the past a sick passion and claimed that there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present, without forgetfulness. Many perpetrators took up this position after the Holocaust. On the other hand, Wiesel proclaimed that he will never forget the Holocaust even if he is condemned to live as long as God Himself, because only a clear remembrance of a painful past can prevent a repetition of gross violations of human rights and can restore the human condition after the reign of evil. Wiesel discovered that only memory can help him to reclaim his humanity (Frunză 2008:109).

Remembrance is a major topic in Jewish ethics, and this fact becomes evident in Krohndorfer's discussion of the Holocaust remembrance. On the other hand, he claims that 'any appreciation of forgetting is complicated by Christian appeals to forgiveness' (Krohndorfer 2008:261). He continues, 'it will be prudent not to stereotype Christianity as a religion of forgiveness and Judaism as a religion of remembrance' (Krohndorfer 2008:261). His comparison of Jewish ethics of remembrance and the Christian ethics of forgiveness therefore raises the valid question: 'Does forgiveness in a Christian ethics of forgiveness compel forgetfulness?' Is there any space for remembrance in a Christian ethics of forgiveness? This question is often asked regarding the South African transition. Smit responds to this question in a thorough and convincing article in which he says:

> *Christian faith is based upon memory. To remember is a fundamental activity of Christian faith. In every worship service the Christian community remembers. We remember the good message, the gospel. We remember the story of Christ's life, suffering, death and resurrection. Christian worship is rooted in remembering. God urges us to remember, to commemorate, and the congregation is reminded and exhorted to remember, to celebrate, to be renewed and transformed and to love God and others.*
>
> (Smit 2007:309)

In this investigation I endeavour to find an answer to the question of the relation between remembrance and forgiveness from a Reformed perspective and a biblical-theological hermeneutical model. Taking into account Smit's thesis, the research question can be formulated as follows: 'What is the place of

remembrance in a Christian ethics of forgiveness?' The central theoretical argument of this investigation is that remembering the past in the act of forgiveness is essential for renewing the present and planning the future. Examining the meaning of remembrance necessitates a clear viewpoint on a Christian ethics of forgiveness. Therefore, the main tenets of such an ethics of forgiveness have to be outlined by way of an introduction to the main topic under discussion.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON AN ETHICS OF FORGIVENESS

A Christian ethics of forgiveness reveals that forgiveness can only be effective when certain conditions are met (*cf.* Jr 5:1; 2 Ki 24:4; 2 Chr 7:14; Is 55:7). Firstly, human forgiveness requires true repentance. The Scriptures teach that God forgave in response to repentance (Bash 2007:24). When forgiveness is prompted by true repentance, a new way of life arises. According to Jones (1995:66), this way of life is a fidelity to a relationship of friendship that must be learned and re-learned by people on their journey towards holiness in God's eschatological Kingdom. It is a way of life that requires the ever-deepening and ever-widening sense of what life with God and God's creatures entails. Repentance and forgiveness are therefore central in the Christian way of life. This is true for Christians in their calling in all spheres of life, whether in the macro sphere of politics or in the micro sphere of marital relations.

Secondly, the injustice of damaging social conditions must be confessed, as David confessed his sins to God and the prophet in Ps 51. Jones is to the point with the following statement:

> *Repentance and confession must be practiced in specific and concrete ways, as part of the larger craft of forgiveness, if they are to result in that truthfulness that empowers people for faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.*
>
> (Jones 1995:19)

His argument roots in Bonhoeffer's view of the cost of discipleship, which is still a powerful reminder of what true forgiveness entails. Christ's sacrificial and atoning death makes self-knowledge and repentance possible, but repentance and confession is a condition for forgiveness, otherwise forgiveness becomes cheap. Smit (2007:322) correctly states that confession is not easy, forgiveness is not cheap, and that reconciliation is not superficial.

In this respect, Smit (2007:315) makes a sound case for the need for inter-personal and inter-communal confession, such as was done in the proceedings of the South African TRC. People had the opportunity to confess to each other and to heal broken relations through mutual forgiveness. These actions strengthened the social fibre of the new reality in the country. Smit (2007:310) rightly contends that confession need not be done in public. However, public confession has the ability not only to heal, but also to feature as an example to the community at large of the powerful effect of the reconciliation brought about by forgiveness. Here again, confession should be characterised by a determination to rectify social injustices and economic injuries caused by the system. Confession must have an impact on inequalities by way of concrete intentions and plans for redress and restitution. A confession that does not promise and plan something new and better in the socio-political context is a meaningless exercise. Such a confession does not comply with the Christian concept of self-denial with the purpose to attain something new and better for the neighbour in need.

Thirdly, forgiveness should inspire a willingness to promote social justice in a general sense. True repentance is much more than mere 'lip-service' and false piety. Translated into a socio-political praxis, this repentance should manifest as a willingness to restore and to redress. Seen against the background of the South African context, white people have to admit that they were wrongly benefited by the system at the expense of black interests, but this submission has to be contextualised in a willingness not only to restore the human dignity of black people, but also to redress the socio-economic injustices that had been developed by apartheid. The willingness must be a willingness on the part of white people to sacrifice through concrete deeds of sharing their wealth in an orderly and legitimate fashion. The Restitution of Land Rights Act (Act 22 of 1994) makes provision for such restitution, and this process should be supported by all who are sincere with their repentance in order to be forgiven.

Hauerwas (1983:90) reminds us that God made Christians agents of the history of the Kingdom. Christians should therefore not only be active agents in the restoration of distorted relations, but also whistle blowers whenever and where-ever the table is set for new social injustices that may emerge. Forgiveness therefore requires an ethos of 'this may not happen again'. The confessing person is the most able agent of this ethos, because the guilty party is in the best position to illuminate the causes of the unjust worldview and system. Who can be better agents against racism than white people in South Africa, and who can be better agents against anti-Semitism than Germans?

Fourthly, repentance, confession and the implementation of social justice must be answered with forgiveness, which entails a closing down of all enmity, with an elimination of bitterness and a willingness to start the new relations with a clean slate. 'Forgiveness' that still nurtures blame, hate speech and continuing references to the uneasy past cannot be described as a virtual image of God's forgiveness and a sign of the new reality that can be brought about by the gift of forgiveness. These conditions indicate that forgiveness is indeed costly.

Lastly, Christians must learn to live as forgiven people. Hauerwas (1983:89) stresses this important virtue in the ethics of forgiveness. Just as forgiving people have the responsibility to refrain from blame, hate speech and constant negative and accusing references to past conditions, forgiven people should refrain from living with the frame of mind of victims. This condition can emerge when forgiven people continue to live with a guilt complex and self-reproach. Forgiven people should be active in nurturing the new reality – manifesting the Kingdom by living in the spirit of reconciliation.

The Church has a highly important role in the promotion of a spirit of repentance and forgiveness. Smit (2007:313) reminds us that God took mercy on the godless, the unjust, the guilty, and in fact on God's enemies. The Christian church has been given this message of reconciliation to proclaim and administer. In societies recovering from hostility, injustices and injuries to many people, such as the present South African community, churches should be active agents of the art of forgiveness with everything it entails.

Where does remembrance fit into this pattern in the ethics of forgiveness? Taking into account Smit's (2007:309) viewpoint in this regard, I am of the opinion that the theological meaning of the call to remembrance in some of the feasts in the biblical history sheds light on this question and that it will therefore be worthwhile to investigate this material.

THE ROLE OF REMEMBRANCE IN THE BIBLICAL FEASTS

The Old Testament's calendars of festivals name the most important festivals of Israel from the Old Testament period. They are clearly comprehensible in their theological significance and development. These festival calendars are found in the Covenant Code (Ex 23:14–17), in the so-called Law of Yahweh's privilege (Ex 34:18–24 J and JE), in Deuteronomy (Dt 16:1–17), in the Holiness Code (Lv 23:4–44), and in the post-exilic reformulations of the Priestly document (Nm 28–29) (Preuss 1992:224). In this discussion, three of the feasts mentioned in these codes and maintained throughout biblical history are important to consider. These are the Passover, the Feast of the Huts and the Feast of Purim. New Testamentical materials that

will be considered are the institution of the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–26; Lk 22:15–20) and its further development in the prescriptions of the Holy Communion (1 Cor 11:23–28).

The Passover

The Passover was the most ancient feast on the Jewish calendar. Researchers have asserted from very early times that this pastoral rite dates back not only to the Mosaic period, but probably to a still remoter past (Von Rad 1957:251). Biblical material about the institution and the meaning of this feast can be found in the priestly tradition (Ex 12:1–28; Lv 23:5–8; Nm 9:1–14; Nm 28:16–25) as well as in Deuteronomy (Dt 16:1–8). According to the cultural-historical research of De Vaux (1988:485), the Passover had to be celebrated at the full moon in the first month of a year beginning with spring. According to the priestly account, every family chose a one-year-old lamb, a male without a blemish, on the tenth day of the month; this lamb was killed at the twilight on the fourteenth, and its blood was sprinkled over the lintel and the styles of the door of the house. This was the zebah sacrifice, the meat of which had to be roasted and eaten on the same night of the full moon; not a bone of the sacrificial lamb could be broken, and the remains of this religious meal had to be burnt. Initially another feast was also instituted, namely the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (Ex 12:17). It seems that in the ancient history of Israel these two feasts were sometimes celebrated separately, and other times simultaneously. However, they commemorated the same event, namely the liberation from bondage in Egypt. In both forms the feasts were commemorated after the exile, and although they made use of different symbolic acts, the deeper meaning remained the same.

Prominent modern-day Old Testament scholars such as Von Rad (1957), Westermann (1978), Preuss (1992), Brueggeman (1997) and Birch *et al*. (1999) have investigated the theological meaning of the Passover in the Old Testament in depth. Although the rite of the Passover was observed long before the time of Moses, the meaning changed from a 'festival of flocks and herds' to commemorating the redemptive act of God, and it became part of the Temple cult (Westermann 1978:173). The feast commemorated the act of deliverance in the exodus story, when Yahweh elevates and exalts Israel and changes their circumstances for the better.

Brueggeman (1997:176), in his explanation of the theological elements of Exodus 12, indicates how the verbs used in Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh's exodus activity are rich and varied and may be given a variety of nuances appropriate to the semantic fields from which the terms arise. What is important in the use of these verbs is that Yahweh is the subject. The cluster of verbs becomes a poignant and elemental way in which Yahweh is characterised in the testimony of Israel. At the core of Israel's God-talk is the persistent claim that Israel knows no God except the One who in an ancient remembered time acted in a way that made the life of Israel as a nation a genuine historical reality. When Israel began telling of its subsequent history, about what happened in other times and places and circumstances, Israel characteristically retold all of its experience through the powerful definitional lens of the exodus memory.

Passover became the symbol of the retelling of the story of Israel's exaltation by way of its deliverance. In the words of Brueggemann (1997:177), the retelling of this episode is shaped as entry by Yahweh into the oppressive situation governed by the Philistine gods, and as a powerful, inexplicable emancipation for Israel. It is a retelling of the story of a miraculous liberation. However, it is not only about a one-time deliverance, but also a testimony to the fact that Yahweh is the God of salvation – in the past as well as in the future (Vriezen 1966:280).

The Passover is therefore a feast of remembrance of God's liberating acts in the history of Israel, and his promise of deliverance in the future. Passover reminded God's people of his covenantal promise that came true in his divine intervention in their history in order to exalt them as his people. Passover also promises them that God will be their God and will intervene again on their behalf in times of affliction and suffering. Israel's life and history will become incomplete and fruitless if they disregard the remembrance of the message of Passover. Remembrance is first of all a remembering of Yahweh as the God of the covenant, the God of grace who lives in close communion with his people. Remembrance in this sense was therefore essential in Israel's culture, politics and religion. This was also a core element of the preaching of the prophets.

However, Passover was also a call to Israel to remember their own predicament in the time of slavery (Dt 16:12). They had to remember that they had been oppressed and that they had been slaves. They were not a nation, but were made a people by God, and he gave them land and liberty. The remembrance of their slavery serves also as the introduction to the monopleuric Ten Commandments. God teaches them how to live a new life of dignity and respect in a free land. This new life can be appreciated only when they remember the past undignified life of slavery and oppression. The remembrance of the Passover therefore meant remembrance of the liberating, just and gracious God, as well as their own hopeless and miserable life as slaves in a foreign land.

The metaphor of slavery and the exodus commemorated in the Passover reaches a new height in the theology of the New Testament. The slavery of Israel in Egypt was used by New Testament authors as a metaphor of humankind's slavery in the bondage of sin, and the exodus as a metaphor for the redemption of the sinner by God in Christ. According to Hebrews 8, the exodus from Egypt points to a higher and deeper redemption by a mediator higher than Moses, and that is Christ. The Passover commemorates the old covenant, but also points to the new covenant that finds its full meaning in Christ. Put into the complete perspective of biblical theology, the Passover and its metaphoric meaning in the New Testament is an urgent call to remember. Believers should remember

- that they are slaves in the bondage of evil; and
- that God is the redeeming God.

These constant remembrances give meaning to the new life of liberty and dignity. Furthermore, remembrance changes life into a life of gratitude – a topic prominent in the theology of the apostle Paul as he indicated in the structure of his letter to the Romans.

When the theology revealed by the meaning of the Passover is applied to the Christian ethics of forgiveness, we can reach the conclusion that the new predicament brought about by the act of forgiveness can be meaningful and appreciable only when it is balanced with remembrance of God's saving act of redemption and humankind's inability to overcome evil without this saving act. Forgiveness reaches its full meaning when it is accompanied by remembrance of the sins of the past.

The Feast of the Huts

The second great feast of the year is called, in the English versions of the Bible, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. According to the cultural-historical explanation of the feast by De Vaux (1988:495), 'tabernacles' is a transliteration of the world used by the Vulgate, but means little to a modern reader. 'Booths' is just as meaningless, and it is not quite so familiar. 'Huts', which is the literal translation of the Latin *tabernacula*, tells the reader more, but it may also lead him/her into error because the feast never involved the erection of huts. In Hebrew, the feast is called *sukkôth*, and the correct translation of this is 'huts'. The name *sukkôth* first appears in the later religious calendars (Dt 16:13, 16; Lv 23:34) but the feast itself is certainly the same one as that referred to in the two oldest calendars (Ex 23:16; 34:22) as the 'feast of Ingathering' (*'asîph*). It was the most important and the most crowded of the three annual pilgrimages to the sanctuary.

De Vaux (1988:500) explains that certain scholars saw a similarity between the Jewish Feast of Huts and the cult of Bacchus at vintage time. This unhappy suggestion has from time to time been taken up by a few modern writers. Another writer has seen a connection with the Feast of Adonis-Osiris, and from this perspective the *sukkôth* would then be the equivalent of the arbour erected over the bier of Adonis. However, there is only one reference to the practice of this rite, and it comes from Alexandria during the Greek period. Nonetheless, the oldest texts leave us in no doubt about the character of the feast when it is described as a farmers' feast, the feast of Ingathering, when all the produce of the fields (Ex 23:16) and all the produce of the threshing-floor and of the presses (Dt 16:13) had been gathered in. When all the fruits of the earth had been gathered, and the olives and the grapes had been pressed, the farmers assembled to give thanks to God.

More important, however, is the fact that the Feast of Huts, like the Passover before it, and the Feast of Weeks in later times, became connected with an event in the history of salvation. It should be seen within the context of the theology of the saving God in history, as described by Westermann (1978:28). Irrespective of its earlier meanings, the essence of the feast was that the Israelites had to live in huts, says the Bible, in memory of the 'huts' (*sukkôth*) in which Yahweh made their fathers live in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. The meaning is expressed in Leviticus, which reads as follows:

> *Live in booths for seven days. All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*
>
> (Lv 23:42–43)

Although this feast therefore started as a harvest festival and had an agrarian background, as was the case with many other feasts in the history of Israel, it became a feast of commemoration – a feast of remembrance just as the Passover (*cf.* Vriezen 1966:281; Zimmerli 1978:128). They had to remember how God let them dwell in booths when He brought them out of Egypt and into the wilderness. The specific meaning of the remembrance embodied in the feast becomes apparent in the wilderness traditions in Exodus.

Birch *et al*. (1999:128) point out that the wilderness traditions taught Israel about hardships and God's providence. They explain that the wilderness traditions immediately following the deliverance at the sea include crises about adequate water (Ex 15:22–27; 17:1–7) and sufficient food (Ex 16:1–36). There is also the story of an attack by an enemy, the Amalekites (Ex 17:8–16), and a narrative on Moses' reunion with his father-in-law, the Midianite priest Jethro, who helps him organise the governance of the people Moses now led (Ex 18:1–27). The authors briefly note the following important themes that appear in these initial wilderness encounters.

- God's salvation does not guarantee life without hardships. The world outside of bondage is also a world with dangers and struggles. Needs are not automatically met, and the lack of food and water for Israel carries the threat to the people's welfare into the most basic of human needs.
- In the context of such struggle, even bondage can begin to look attractive. Faced with the wilderness, some would choose the security of bondage over the struggle in freedom. This attitude becomes evident in Exodus 16:3: 'If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread'.
- In the wilderness struggle, the people turn on Moses, Aaron, and God (Ex 15:24; 16:3, 9; 17:2–4). This conflict is the beginning of a complex set of traditions concerning the people's complaint and rebellion in the wilderness, which continues on through the Pentateuch. The memory of exodus deliverance is not enough to engender trust in the Lord's providence. Moses increasingly must intervene and mediate between his rebellious people and God (see Ex 16:11–12; 17:4–7).
- In these chapters, God's response is gracious, merciful and providential. Only later in the wilderness traditions does the people's rebellion evoke God's anger and judgement. In the midst of these wilderness trials, the biblical narrative emphasises God's ability to provide for the people's needs. The resources to sustain life in the wilderness struggle come from God and are trustworthy. God's victory over the chaotic power of Pharaoh, who opposed God's creation, is now reflected in God's use of creation to give life in the wilderness.
- The manna story in Chapter 16 is especially important. Israel returns often to reflect on this story of the people's need and God's providence (Nm 11; Dt 8; Jos 5:12; Neh 9:20; Ps 78:24). Every day, the people could trust that the manna would be available. Every day, the people had to gather and eat it. Important economic insights were drawn from the manna story. Manna always miraculously provided just enough for the people's needs: 'those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed' (Ex 16:18). Resources were keyed to need and excess was not possible. Later, covenant provisions for economic life reflect some of the lessons learned from reliance on the manna from God. Even in the New Testament, the apostle Paul appeals to this same story for the principle of providing for each other's needs and avoiding excess when he takes up his collection for Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:13–15).
- It is Yahweh who gives the resources that provide life in the deadly dangers of wilderness, but Israel must trust in the reliability of God's provision and avoid the temptation to hoard or control the blessings God provides. The people of God had to learn to receive God's gifts; to attempt to grasp these gifts is to lose them (Ex 16:20) (Birch *et al*. 1999:129).

The Feast of the Huts is therefore a feast of remembrance. Israel was called upon by God to remember his act of salvation from the bondage in Egypt. But the remembrance was also more than that. They had to remember how God guided, protected, nourished and cared for them in the wilderness, and that God is a righteous and holy God that not only delivered them from the bondage in Egypt, but judged them according to their obedience or disobedience to him as the one God. They should remember him as the God who 'will have mercy on whom [He] will have mercy, and [Who] will have compassion on whom [He] will have compassion' (Ex 33:19). He made them stay in the wilderness for forty years. However, this time came to an end and therefore they had to also remember him as the forgiving God who sets the example of forgiveness and justice in their social life. As God is holy, they had to be holy. Throughout their long history, even in exile, the prophets reminded Israel of God's acts in history as a motivation for obedience to God, maintenance of justice in social life and holiness in their social spheres.

Of high importance in the remembrance required in the Feast of Huts was the command to the people to remember why they had to dwell in the wilderness. The dwelling in the wilderness for forty years was God's punishment for their disobedience and idolatry. They disregarded his laws and had no faith in his promises. They had to remember the sins of the fathers and the consequences of their deeds. In addition, this remembrance had to serve their intentions not to repeat the sins of the fathers in their arrangements of their social relations and the observance of their religion. Time and again the prophets reminded them of the sins of the past and God's judgement and forgiveness as a motivation for seeking justice, peace and holiness in lifestyle (see Wright 2004:48).

The Feast of Purim

Another feast of remembrance in the biblical times was the Purim, which was part of the later feasts in ancient Israel. The ritual of this feast is described in the rabbinical writings and after a day of fasting the feast took place on the thirteenth day of the month Adar (De Vaux 1988:514). The events that led to the institution of this festival are described in the book of Esther, which presents a

historical survey of how the Jews escaped an attempted genocide in the time of King Ahasuerus (Es 9). The Jewish girl became the queen in Persia and when the villain Haman endeavoured to deceive the king into an agreement to exterminate all the Jews in Persia, Esther and her uncle Mordechai intervened in a clever way to save the Jews from extinction and from the wrath of Haman.

In order to commemorate this deliverance from the ancient Holocaust, the Feast of Purim was established and became an important festival on the Jewish calendar. The purpose of the festival was to celebrate the chosen by lot first for the destruction, then for the deliverance of the Diaspora Jews (Zimmerli 1978: 130). It was called Purim because Haman used the word *pur*, which means *lot*, to decide when the genocide should take place. The Jews took it on themselves and their descendants and all who joined them to without fail keep these two days according to what was written. They undertook to remember these days at the same appointed time every year. They promised to uphold these days, to remember and keep them throughout every generation, in every family, province and city. They agreed that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

As in the Passover, the Jews commemorated the saving act of God. As people in the Diaspora they still knew and honoured God as the God of deliverance, and this confession was kept alive by way of this new feast. It was therefore a feast of remembrance that reminded them of their own predicament in a foreign land, but also the reality of God's saving acts in history. The continual celebration of Purim is another indication of how important remembrance was in the development of the faith and commitment of the people of the Old Testament and the formation of the ethics of the Old Testament. Remembrance was an integral part of their religion and culture.

The Holy Communion

The early Christian Church interpreted these feasts in the light of the gospel of salvation of Christ. They attached a deeper meaning to these feasts, which entails that they are in essence indicative of the saving God's deliverance of humankind from the bondage of sin. This deeper meaning reached prominence in the institution of the Holy Communion, which became the central feast of commemoration in the New Testament dispensation.

In the early evening of the arrest of Jesus, he and his disciples gathered to prepare for the Passover. He broke bread and offered them wine and related the bread and wine to his body and blood. He would be the sacrifice that would bring about forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:17–19; Mk 14:12–21; Lk 22:7–14). Paul describes this event as the institution of the Lord's Supper. Paul passes on what he has received from the Lord. In his description of the Lord's Supper, several elements of the feast come to light. It is a feast of remembrance. Paul quotes the words of Jesus: 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor 11:24) and 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1 Cor 11:25). The Lord's Supper is also a proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes, and a symbol of the communion of believers – with the past, present and future church (Welker 200:117). Furthermore, it is a solemn declaration that believers will love each other and that they will live a holy and chaste life, because no one should eat the bread and drink the wine in an unworthy manner.

However, it is also an eschatological event, because the Lord's Supper points to the Second Coming in the words 'until He comes', and in doing so generates hope and expectation. Moltmann says in this regard:

> *Without the memoria passionis Christi – the memory of Christ's passion – there is no Christian meditatio vitae futurae – no Christian meditation on the future life; and conversely, without hope for the coming of Christ, the remembrance of Christ loses its power.*
>
> (Moltmann 2008:103)

He continues to say that all eschatological horizons must be founded on the remembrance of the raising of the crucified Christ, because Christian eschatology does not talk about the future as such, but about Jesus Christ and his future. This is the future that is symbolised, *inter alia*, in the Lord's Supper.

For the purposes of this investigation, the aspect of remembrance in the Lord's Supper should be reflected upon. This remembrance is much more than 'merely a mental act of recalling' (Welker 2000:126). In his prominent book on the Lord's Supper, Welker discusses the deep and extensive meaning of the remembrance we are called upon. He explains that the remembrance renders present the totality of God's reconciling action in the person of Christ himself, with all that He has accomplished for us and for all creation. It is a remembrance of his incarnation, servant hood, ministry, teaching, suffering, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. To add to this it will be fair to say that the remembrance is all about God's involvement in this world in the work and sacrifice of Christ and in the omnipresence and powerful work of the Spirit. The remembrance is not a passive re-calling of the work of Christ, but a re-encountering of the living Christ (Brits & Swanepoel 2007:47). Welker (2000:127) continues to say that this remembrance is also a foretaste of the *Parousia* and the fulfilment of the Kingdom.

Further to Welker, one can conclude to say that in the Lord's Supper we are firstly called upon to remember that God is concerned about the human predicament and that he is the liberating and renewing God of history. He heals and restores his creation; he restores human dignity and founds humanity; he promotes the good, the peaceful, and is the source of the love in the world. In Christ and through his Spirit he expands his rule of justice, peace and reconciliation over all humankind. He renews and protects his injured creation. This all-encompassing act of God is what should be remembered when the Holy Communion is administered.

However, part of this remembrance is God's judgement on evil and injustice. Secondly, just as Israel had to remember their disobedience to God in the Feast of the Huts, the communicants in the Holy Communion should remember the guilt and blemishes of their sins and to be aware that the God of history has no patience with humankind's inclination to bring forth evil acts such as ecocide, genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, xenophobia, infanticide, oppression, social injustice and all other forms of institutionalised evil. He punishes any revolt against his reign of peace – who sows evil will reap its fruits.

Thirdly, the people of God should remember that they are not passive onlookers in the expansion of God's reign. They are co-workers. Just as Christ they are servants, stewards and prophets of the reign of God (Vorster 2007:18). They have to be active in the struggle against institutionalised evil and promoters of reconciliation and love. As God forgives, they should be forgiving and be willing to redress where-ever social injuries may occur. The Holy Communion is *inter alia* a feast of remembrance, which focuses the eyes of God's people on his all-embracing reign; his comprehensive action of restitution, healing and change and the responsibility of people to become involved in this process by faithful submission to Christ and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Remembrance in action and a better future

What does the theology of the biblical feasts mean in a socio-political transition with its quest for forgiveness? What are the implications of this theology for perpetrators who preach forgetfulness as essential to forgiveness? What does it mean for victims with vivid memories of a past of suffering? Taking the deeper meaning of the remembrance of this feast into consideration, it means that there can be no better future without

remembrance. The road to a better future is along memory lane. Forgiveness does not render memories invalid or unfair. No, memories give substance to forgiveness and motivate a willingness to become involved in healing the present and planning a better future. As such, remembrance is a powerful, life-giving ingredient in a process of healing.

Powerful remembrance is more than a hollow recalling of the past. It is such a powerful remembrance that was preached in the feasts of the Old Testament and is advocated by the Holy Communion in all its forms in Christianity today. The following characteristics of remembrance, as revealed by the biblical feasts, ought to be outlined in order to indicate the indispensable part of such a powerful remembrance in the ethics of forgiveness for a socio-political transition today:

- Remembrance must first of all be a remembrance of the saving act of God. He is the God of salvation who changes and transforms situations and institutions distorted by the reality of evil for the better. He is the author of the history of the world and humankind who establishes peace, love and dignity where-ever these noble gifts are trampled. He brought new life where people experienced hopelessness and despair. He set new futures when people saw no future at all. This message was the main thrust of the feasts of the Old Testament and is still the essential preaching of the Holy Communion. The remembrance of God as the saving God is the source of hope for people in despair, and is the motivation for societies in socio-political transition and in the quest for reconciliation. The church has the calling to keep this remembrance alive and to translate it into a message of hope for the poor and the oppressed, as Moltmann (1965) explained in his classic and influential study. He inspired a new enthusiasm for a relevant Christian message based on the confession of God as the saving God in history.
- At the same time, remembrance must be a remembrance of the reality of evil and humankind's bondage in sin. This is because of humankind's desire to become like God, but instead we became a god against God (Bonhoeffer 1995:23). This is the reason for the ever-present pockets of hatred, injustices, oppression and exploitation amongst humans. Evil breeds social injustices such as slavery, institutionalised racism and xenophobia, sexism, discrimination against the poor, human trafficking, wars, genocides and all other forms of degradation of humanity. Remembrance, as expressed in the feasts of the biblical history, brought this reality to light and called upon the people of God to repent and confess and to struggle against evil. Therefore, forgiveness can never obliterate the awareness of the reality of evil and the possibility that the evil of the past can re-emerge in new forms of dehumanisation. To forgive is to remember what went wrong and to be determined not to repeat the wrongs of the past. Remembrance therefore serves as a deterrent against new injustices.
- Both victim and perpetrator should remember. The victim should remember the past in order to play a restoring role in the healing of the society in transition. Only the sick can say what health entails. The victim should determine whether and when the new dispensation is healed from the injustices of the past. The perpetrator should remember in order to take personal accountability and responsibility for healing the institutions. Only by remembrance of the past will perpetrators be willing to become active in restitution, which is such an important ingredient of reconciliation.
- Remembrance by victims also poses some conditions. When they are involved in a process of socio-political transition, remembrance for them entails *inter alia* that they should remember that the Gospel precedes ethics (Wright 2004:379). Remembrance, as it is explained in the biblical feasts, must be applied without anger or revenge. This condition regarding victims is perhaps the most difficult condition in the call to remembrance and forgiveness. In a socio-political transition leaders and civil society should design means and methods to calm down upheavals of anger and revenge, which have the potential to derail reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Biblical theology as it is portrayed by the place and meaning of the feasts of the Old and New Testaments teaches that remembering the past is essential for healing the present and planning the future. A community that wishes to become a humane and peaceful community should be willing to walk down memory lane.

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