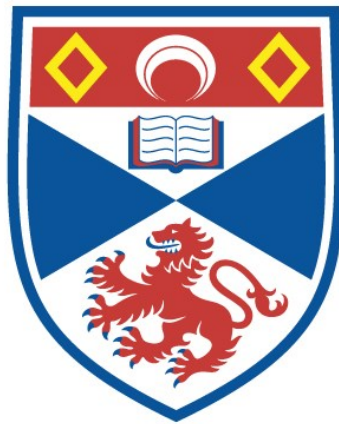


MEMORY IN THE NEW CREATION : A CRITICAL RESPONSE  
TO MIROSLAV VOLFF'S ESCHATOLOGICAL FORGETTING

M. Jane McArthur

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

MEMORY IN THE NEW CREATION:  
A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO MIROSLAV VOLF'S  
ESCHATOLOGICAL FORGETTING

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Divinity in candidacy for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy.

M Jane McArthur



St Mary's College, St Andrews, Scotland. March, 2004

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Th E 707

To my mother  
and the precious memory of my late father,  
whose influence continues.

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I respond to Mirolsav Volf's proposal that in the eschaton painful memories will be forgotten in order not to detract from the joy of the New Creation. Through consideration of the constitution of personal identity and memory I will show that his proposal is problematic if, in the New Creation, persons are to be continuous with themselves. In my chapter on forgiveness I show that that it is possible, through forgiveness, for people to come to remember even the most painful of experiences without experiencing pain anew, I will show that painful memories can be healed and transformed, and thus that eschatological forgetting is not necessary. I will argue in the final chapter that, just as in his resurrection body Christ bore scars of the crucifixion, so in the New Creation we too will bear scars from our earthly lives.

The main sources in the chapter on personal identity are John Macmurray, Alastair McFadyen and, to a lesser extent, Paul Ricoeur. The work of Gregory Jones is significant in chapters 2 and 3 (looking at memory and forgiveness respectively). In chapter 4 (New Creation) I have drawn on the work of Jürgen Moltmann as well as that of Bauckham and Hart.

## DECLARATIONS

I, M Jane McArthur, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

March 2004 signature of candidate \_\_\_\_\_.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 1999 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in November 2000; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1999 and 2004.

March 2004 signature of candidate \_\_\_\_\_.

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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I wish first to record my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Professor Trevor Hart, whose unstinting, unflagging support, advice and encouragement throughout this project kept me believing it was possible. I have lost count of how many drafts he read and how many questions I asked - and I hope he has too! His imagination and faith enabled him to see where I was going with this even at times when mine did not.

Thanks too to Professor Alan Torrance who made available an unpublished article and kindly gave permission for me to use it in this thesis. His enthusiasm and encouragement have been an inspiration. Dr Gregory Jones also made available a recent article seminal to my thesis prior to its publication and supplied the necessary bibliographic information following publication. I also wish to record my grateful appreciation of Dr Roy Kearsely who, by his godly example and long-suffering patience in the early days instilled within me a love of theology.

The postgraduate community at St Mary's has been an unanticipated bonus. The Theology Research seminars and ITIA seminars have been a source of intellectual stimulation and enrichment as well as providing an opportunity to learn the art of presenting papers and fielding questions. The whole St Mary's



experience would have been somewhat impoverished without the informal contacts and friendships made along the way.

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It would be impossible to quantify the support and love I have received from my family over the years and it gives me great pleasure to dedicate this thesis to my parents.

And finally...thanks be to God "who is, and was, and is to come".

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing from his personal experience of the atrocities of war during the Balkan crisis in the early 1990s, together with his observation of the unimaginable horrors suffered by those around him, Miroslav Volf suggests that the experience of suffering of some people in this life is so horrendous and so all-embracing, that even in God's New Creation, where according to the Christian eschatological imagination there will be no more suffering, the memory of having suffered will continue to cause suffering. Such continued suffering, he suggests, has the potential to diminish the joy and perfection of the New Creation. Volf, therefore, presents the thesis that victims will forget painful memories in God's New World. Initially in considering this he refers to 'non-remembering'<sup>1</sup> but as his discussion progresses he refers instead to 'eschatological forgetting'<sup>2</sup>.

On a superficial level non-remembering and forgetting may appear to be synonymous. There are, however, subtle but important differences between the two that will be considered in chapter 2. Something that is forgotten is lost while that which is non-remembered has lost its power to inflict pain or damage. For Volf either the memory of horror is erased in the New Creation, or the joy of the New Creation is marred by the memory. "The alternative," he says, "is either heaven *or* the memory of horror.... For if heaven cannot rectify Auschwitz, then the memory of Auschwitz must undo the experience of heaven."<sup>3</sup> This is unthinkable for it would mean that evil, or the memory of evil, was more powerful than the Christian God, the God is who sovereign over evil.

There is, of course, something attractive about Volf's thesis. The thought of our most painful memories being permanently erased is surely appealing to most people, particularly to those who experience the most heinous suffering. Would not those who have undergone torture, or lived through the horrors of

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<sup>1</sup> Volf, 1996: 132f

<sup>2</sup> Volf, 1996: 140

<sup>3</sup> Volf, 1996: 135f (original emphasis)

war, or victims of terrorist attack, or indeed everyone who has known the pain of bereavement welcome the opportunity to forget – forever – the memories that continue in this life to haunt them and cause untold, unrelenting suffering and grief?

I think not. Perhaps, at first glance, they would but such appeal may mask significant difficulties.

To begin with, our experience of good and bad, pleasure and pain are inextricably mixed up. To fully erase the memory of suffering would seem logically also to necessitate the erasure of some positive memories and of the people associated with these memories. Suppose, for example, that the painful memories of the parents whose child was murdered were erased. They would then be left with the new agonising question, “where is my child?”. Were they to forget their suffering but remember their child had been murdered they would surely begin to question themselves, asking what kind of heartless monster they must be to have experienced the murder of their child without suffering.

It seems, then, that the only way it is possible for the memory of suffering to be fully erased and not replaced with new suffering, “Where is my child?” or “How could I experience such loss without feeling pain? I must be a terrible person,” is for positive memories also to be erased. The parents would have to forget their joy the day their child was born, their excitement when she took her first step or said her first word. These along with every other memory from the child’s short life, including the child’s relationships with others – peers, grandparents, teachers – would also have to be erased.

Such erasure of memories is, I suggest, a serious threat to the integrity of our sense of personal identity. The erasure of memories (good or bad) and the disentanglement or abstraction of the ‘self’ from webs of relationships with others which such erasure would entail poses a significant question mark against the sense in which such a ‘healed’ self would actually be the same person at all. My thesis will be that rather than being erased in the New

Creation our most painful memories will be transformed. In arguing this I shall contend for a significant difference between what Volf initially discusses – ‘non-remembering’ – and the ‘forgetting’ that he later proposes.

In this dissertation I shall consider the following question, which Volf’s contention provokes: Is the discontinuity indicated by the Christian claim that human suffering, loss and transience will be redeemed in God’s New Creation compatible with the equally strong claim that human beings will be recognisable to themselves, to others and to God in the New Creation because in some meaningful sense they will indeed be ‘the same person’?

The central question, then, has to do with the sense in which ‘persons’ may be redeemed or healed of that which characterises them in this life while yet remaining identifiably the same person. Chapter 1, therefore, looks at what sort of thing ‘personal identity’ is and how it is constituted. The chapter begins with consideration of issues drawn from a variety of sources – literature, philosophy, theology – about the nature of the self. It then moves on to consider time and the conception of the self, embodiment, the constitution of the self in relation to others, and memory and personal identity.

Chapter 2 looks in more depth at memory in particular. Memory is central to our experience and understanding of ourselves and our lives moment by moment and year by year. Without memory we would have no clear sense of our own identity for our memory of who we are and what we have been enables us in large measure to make sense of the present moment. Memory makes available to us people, places and experiences that have shaped our identity over time and – as we remember them – continue to do so. So vital is this link that some have even sought to define ‘selfhood’ in terms of our possession of a specific set of memories.

The chapter begins with a discussion of what memory is and the difference between the memory of facts or skills learned and the memory of people, places and events experienced, the memory, in other words, which is

constitutive of personal identity. It goes on to consider memory as an activity of imagination, making present to the mind people and places from the past. Many factors, such as perception, forgetting and the introduction of new information, can distort memory making it less than one hundred per cent reliable. Some memories continue to cause damage to the self. In these situations the distortion can have a positive affect as the meaning of memory and thus of the past event is reinterpreted. The chapter also considers the fact that, while we do not remember every single mundane event experienced on a day-to-day basis, to forget formative memories would change us in some way. It goes on to consider that, with memory being constitutive of personal identity, to lose the memory is potentially to lose the sense of self. The chapter looks at how our stories – the stories we recall and relate – can shape our identities. It also considers that we must remember if we are going to forgive or be forgiven. Forgiveness and reconciliation enable us to ‘remember well’ because they change the meaning of the past event but cannot take place if the action to be forgiven is forgotten. Likewise, painful experiences that are forgotten or denied will not heal but fester. Finally, the chapter considers what it means to ‘remember well’. ‘Remembering well’ is only possible when we are willing to forget and is made possible through forgiveness, which transforms the meaning of the past enabling us to gain new perspective on people and events.

In chapter 3 the focus shifts to the theme of forgiveness which picks up on ‘remembering well’ from chapter 2. Forgiveness, I shall argue, does not change the past but changes the meaning of the past as we experience it from the perspective of the present. Thereby, it also changes the meaning of our present. It is not our memories that are changed by forgiveness, but their meaning and the power they have to cause continued pain and suffering. Forgiving and being forgiven can change our understanding of ourselves and others.

Before looking at what constitutes forgiveness, the chapter considers some of the things that forgiveness is commonly confused with but is not – condonation, pardon, mercy, modifying one’s moral judgement and excuse.

It looks briefly at whether or not resentment has to be present before forgiveness is necessary and at whether repentance is sufficient reason to forgive. It then considers that, for some, forgiveness is too costly and acknowledges that there are others for whom it is apparently not costly enough. The chapter considers forgiveness as a way of life which takes a lifetime to learn. It looks at the fact that we do not 'forgive and forget' but, rather, forgive and 'remember well', and that even after forgiveness given and received an action's consequences can remain for victim or perpetrator or both – suffering may still continue. Despite this, however, forgiving and remembering well gives victim and perpetrator the freedom to move on. The chapter asks if there are limits to forgiveness, if there is such a thing as the unforgivable, and considers the gulf between God's forgiveness, which is unconditional, and interpersonal forgiveness, suggesting that God's forgiveness is a model for us.

Volf accepts the inevitability that the mere memory of having suffered will continue to cause suffering in lives lived in this world. His concern is with the suggestion that it might continue to do so in the New Creation. The next and final stage of our argument will therefore consist in a treatment of this theme in its wider location within the structure and logic of Christian hope for God's promised future.

For Moltmann, as we will consider in chapter 4, the starting point in our consideration of the eschaton has to be what we already know from experience and its transformation. "The future of God...(begins) in the transforming thought of the present."<sup>4</sup> And, according to Travis, "Eschatological hope...is essentially a matter of extrapolation from present experience of God and trustful acceptance of what the God thus experienced is believed to have revealed through Christ and his apostles."<sup>5</sup> In my consideration of the New Creation in chapter 4, therefore, I will look both at present experience, referring back in particular to the importance of

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<sup>4</sup> Moltmann, 1973a: 55

<sup>5</sup> Travis, 1980: 138



relationality and memory from previous chapters, and at what we can know from Christian Scripture.

Eschatological language, whether biblical or otherwise, is of necessity figurative. This is shown by Bauckham and Hart who state, "Since eschatological thought is an imaginative picturing of the unimaginable, we may have to use alternative images to represent different aspects of the eschatological hope, but we can understand these images as different angles on the one eschatological reality."<sup>6</sup> To illustrate the point they draw attention to a passage in Revelation 19 (11-21) which uses two alternate images in this way. "There is no need," they tell us, "to prefer one image to the other, precisely because both are *images*...both give *imaginative expression* to the hope that God must finally remove evil from his world before it can be new creation. The alternation and combination of the images serves to remind us that both are images."<sup>7</sup>

From this we can see that any statements we make about the eschaton are limited because the eschaton goes beyond our experience in the here-and-now, beyond what we can imagine and beyond the limitations of language. "If what is to be transcends our ability to conceive it, what words should be used to describe it?" asks Williams.<sup>8</sup> As Bauckham and Hart indicate, however, if we do not use the limited experience, imagination and language available to us, we have no other way of speaking of God and his promised future. "When we speak of the new creation we do so using language appealing to pictures and states of affairs, drawn from this old order, the world as we know and are used to talking about it...we don't actually have any other language to use!.... Strictly speaking, language belonging to the here-and-now is not fitted to speak of anything more than the here-and-now. But of God and his promised future, speak we must unless we would be content with agnostic silence."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bauckham and Hart, 1999: 138

<sup>7</sup> Bauckham and Hart, 1999: 140 (original emphasis)

<sup>8</sup> Williams, 1997: 306

<sup>9</sup> Bauckham and Hart, 1999: 81f

Given all the above, the argument of this dissertation ought not to be understood as seeking to establish in concrete terms what will be the case in God's New Creation. We cannot know this in any certain way. But nor can Christians afford to be agnostic or remain silent about the New Creation, and the imaginative logic of eschatological language permits and requires us to ask questions about what (given the shape of our experience of the here and now, and given the sort of images and depictions found in Scripture) we might reasonably suppose may be the case. The argument of the dissertation will effectively be that, given what we experience and understand of what it is to be a person in this life, and given some of the things which Scripture encourages us to suppose or imagine of the shape of the eschaton, it is more rather than less likely that Volf's contention about eschatological forgetting is wrong, and more rather than less likely that memories of this-worldly suffering will remain part of our particular personal identity in some form in the New Creation.

The chapter looks first at hope. It starts with consideration of the nature of 'secular' everyday hope and hopelessness before turning to consider the distinctives of Christian hope. It then looks specifically at the theme of New Creation, attending in particular to the tension between elements of continuity and discontinuity which characterise the way this hope is constructed. A discussion about physical and emotional scars illustrates the coexistence of continuity and discontinuity. A scar illustrates continuity because, as a healed wound, it is a permanent reminder of a painful incident from the past. It also illustrates discontinuity because it is a wound that is healed, and because it is healed it no longer causes the intense suffering it once did, thus no longer constitutes a threat to the wellbeing of the one who bears it.

Finally the chapter's focus returns to hope as such, considering the impact that hope in the New Creation has – or should have – on life now, in terms of both its impact on suffering and the action which it motivates.

Having explored and discussed these issues, it is my conclusion that far from our most painful memories being erased in the New Creation as Volf

suggests they will indeed be healed and redeemed. I have suggested that this is necessary if we are to be ourselves – the selves to whom the promises of God are made in this life through his Word - in the New Creation. I have also indicated that the presence of such memories is in no way threatening to the joy and perfection of the New Creation because they will be 'remembered well'. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 4 and touched on again in the conclusion, the healing for which the Christian hopes in the New Creation can begin in the this life.

## Chapter 1

### BECOMING BEING:

#### AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONSTITUTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Who are You? Asked the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I-I hardly know, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning but I think I must have changed several times since then.' 'What do you mean by that?' said the Caterpillar sternly, 'Explain yourself!' 'I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself you see.' 'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar.  
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*)

#### 1.1 Introduction

As indicated in the introduction, this thesis is a response to Volf's contention that in the New Creation our most painful memories, those which he feels threaten to continue to cause suffering even in the New Creation where there is no suffering, will be erased. I shall argue, however, that if significant formative memories were to be erased this would undermine our sense of personal identity, our sense of self. To undermine the sense of self raises problems for the claim that in the New Creation we shall be – and shall know ourselves and be known by others to be – the same persons. In this chapter I will consider how, within mainline twentieth century theology and philosophy, personal identity has been thought to be constituted, looking in particular at the roles ascribed to relationship with others and to time. Memory will also be looked at briefly though this will be considered more fully in chapter 2. These should not be seen as alternative models of constituting the self but as complementary and overlapping. In considering the relational aspect we shall be thinking about the synchronic constitution of personal identity (identity at a specific time), while the temporal factor looks at how identity is constituted diachronically (identity over time). Memory looks back at the self over time from the viewpoint of a specific point in time. Time gives meaning to both relationship and memory.

The nature of the self, which is highly enigmatic, has been an issue of concern to theologians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, medical scientists and historians, as well as poets and novelists. The self has been variously thought of as something and nothing; as always present and constructed now and again; as the very core of one's being and a complex add-on<sup>1</sup>.

The casual observer of the subject might be excused for assuming that the question "What is the self?" is a simple one to answer since the experience of being a self is common to all humankind. The shelves of books, however, which address the issue, and the diversity of opinion that exists, bear witness to the fact that it is far from being the simple matter it may at first appear to be. Indeed, Paul Ricoeur refers to the, "(E)minently problematic character of personal identity".<sup>2</sup> This 'problematic character' is reflected in the ways people struggle to answer the question 'what' or 'who am I?' Moltmann also expresses the opinion that understanding and knowing the self are a problem when he says, "So in practice man is the greatest puzzle that man has. He needs to know himself."<sup>3</sup>

Stevenson and Haberman state in their book *Ten Theories of Human Nature*, "To hope to finish this book with some final or complete truth about human nature would be foolish."<sup>4</sup> The same could be said about this chapter. It is not an attempt to be the final word on the metaphysics of the self or an exhaustive phenomenology of the self, but rather seeks to explore our sense of the self, concentrating on those aspects of contemporary consideration of the subject which seem to be most relevant to my case against Volf. Identity as a metaphysical concept is not something we can adequately define or describe but our experience of being self – our sense of our own identity - is. It is not the nature of the self as such with which I am concerned here but rather with our sense of self. I will begin with some thoughts on the

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<sup>1</sup>Brockelman, 1985: 7

<sup>2</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 141

<sup>3</sup>Moltmann, 1971b: 2

<sup>4</sup>Stevenson & Haberman, 1998: 225

experience of being self drawn from various sources to illustrate something of the wide-ranging interest in the subject.

Søren Kierkegaard is among the many who have pondered the issue of what personal identity is. He asks, "But what then is this self of mine?...if I were required to define this, my first answer would be, 'It is the most abstract of all things and yet at the same time the most concrete.'"<sup>5</sup> Thinking of the same question, John Newton writes, "I am not what I ought to be; I am not what I would like to be; I am not what I hope to be. But I am not what I once was; and by the grace of God, I am what I am."<sup>6</sup>

Thinking beyond just her own self to human life in general, Alexandra Taylor, a character from a novel, asks on the death of her fiancé Eric Morro, "What is a life? Is it merely water running through our fingers, impossible to cling to? Does it leave a trace like salt from seawater? Or does it simply vanish, invisible, transformed into vapour without our notice? Does it evade our description? Yes, yes, yes and yes."<sup>7</sup>

The following poem, written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in prison, betrays his sense of confusion as he struggled to make sense of his 'self', of who he was.

### **WHO AM I?**

"Who am I? They often tell me  
I would step from my cell's confinement  
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly  
Like a squire from his country house.  
Who am I? They often tell me  
I used to speak to warders  
Freely and friendly and clearly  
As though it were mine to command.  
Who am I? They also tell me  
I bore the day's misfortune  
Equably, smilingly, proudly,  
Like one accustomed to win.

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<sup>5</sup>Cited in Macquarrie, 1982: 9

<sup>6</sup>Cited in Keyes, 1986: 249

<sup>7</sup>Brewer, 1996: 11

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?  
 Or am I only what I myself know of myself,  
 Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
 Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
 Yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
 Thirsting for words of kindness, for  
 neighbourliness, tossing in expectation of great events,  
 Powerlessly trembling for friends at infinite distance,  
 Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
 Faint and ready to say farewell to it all?  
 Am I one person today and tomorrow another?  
 Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
 And before myself a contemptibly woe-begone weakling?  
 Or is something within me still a beaten army,  
 Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?  
 Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine,  
 Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine!"<sup>8</sup>

Part of Bonhoeffer's confusion seems to be the difference between the 'self' he experiences and the 'self' observed by others. It appears from the consternation expressed in the poem that Bonhoeffer had not set out to present to others such a different self from the one he knew. Susan Howatch's character, Charles Ashworth, on the other hand, deliberately keeps his true self hidden behind a mask of falseness but, like Bonhoeffer, comes to a stage where he finds this overwhelming and confusing. "I looked in the glass and saw the spy behind the clergyman, the image beyond the image, and beyond the spy was yet another man, the image beyond the image beyond the image. Reality blurred; fantasy and truth became inextricably intertwined. I told myself I had imagined the distant stranger but as I felt my personality begin to divide I covered my face with my hands."<sup>9</sup> Ashworth's fellow-character in the same novel, Lyle Christie, who later becomes his wife, also expresses dissatisfaction at hiding behind a mask and a deep yearning to be her true self. "Oh if you only know...how much I long to put aside *my* glittering image and be the woman / really am."<sup>10</sup> Expressing a similar dissatisfaction with the false image of herself, Rebecca Davitch – another character from fiction – asks herself, "How on earth did I get like this?

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/opb/bonhoeffer/legacy/whoami.html>

<sup>9</sup> Howatch, 1988: 70

<sup>10</sup> Howatch, 1988: 336 (original emphasis)

How? How did I ever become this person who's not really me?"<sup>11</sup> What these reflections have in common is the struggle many people experience at some time or other simply of being themselves in the face of changing circumstances.

Locke states, "To find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for; which I think, is a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself...it being impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive."<sup>12</sup> For David Hume, on the other hand, 'self' cannot be observed, but only a series of perceptions. Whenever he tries to pin down self he only ever finds a perception or emotion, therefore he concludes that the self cannot be observed apart from such perceptions. He writes, "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never *myself* catch at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception."<sup>13</sup> According to his way of thinking, "Since we are never aware of any enduring self, we are never justified in claiming we are the same person we were a year or a minute ago."<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Hume's contemporary Thomas Reid had no difficulty locating the self, as long as he viewed it temporally. Reid states, "My personal identity, therefore, implies the continued existence of that individual thing which I call *myself*. Whatever self may be, it is something which thinks, and deliberates, and resolves, and acts, and suffers. I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks and acts and suffers. My thoughts, and actions, and feelings change every moment; they have no continued, but a successive existence; but that *self*, or I, to which they belong, is permanent and has the same relation to all the succeeding thoughts, actions and feelings which I call mine."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tyler, 2002: 20

<sup>12</sup> Locke, 1975: 211 (II.xxvii:9)

<sup>13</sup> Hume, 2000: 165 (1.4.6.3)

<sup>14</sup> Solomon, 2000 (www)

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Brockelman, 1985: 14



According to Buddhist thought, the very existence of the self is an illusion and it is only when we come to an acceptance of this that we attain truth. The Buddha, who encouraged his followers to be aware of the various aspects of themselves and to strive towards the total extinction of the individual self (Nirvana) states, "Where self is, truth is not. Where truth is, self is not."<sup>16</sup> This is a striking contrast to the Christ who says, "I AM...the truth."<sup>17</sup> It is paradoxical to use terms such as 'I' when saying there is no such thing – what sense is there is a statement such as "I do not exist" or "My self does not exist"? James Giles responds to this line of reasoning by stating that to say 'I think' does not presume the existence of an 'I' any more than to say 'it thunders' presumes the existence of an 'it'. According to the Buddha, Giles tells us, terms such as 'self' and 'I' do not refer to anything but are merely grammatical devices<sup>18</sup>. Were this the case we need not be concerned about the erasure of painful memories undermining the self. It is not, however, the Christian belief. The Christian belief, as we shall consider, is that the self will be wholly self – healed and redeemed - in the New Creation for God's promises are "for you and your children"<sup>19</sup>.

John Macquarrie who makes a similar observation to Hume, saying that when he attempts to plough the depths of self he finds perception rather than the subject of perception<sup>20</sup>, suggests that humanity is a natural endowment of Homo Sapiens in much the same way as being feline is for cats, and yet unlike cats, it is at the same time something which has to be discovered and striven after throughout life. In saying that humanity is a natural endowment he is saying that being a human being is a natural endowment, that it is, quite simply, being born as a human being. In saying that it has to be discovered and striven after, on the other hand, he refers to what we have been calling personal identity. He refers, that is, to that which makes you uniquely you and me uniquely me and distinguishes each of us from every other being. Influenced by existentialist thought, he suggests, that 'human becoming'

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<sup>16</sup> <http://Koolhost.com/buddhaonself.htm>

<sup>17</sup> John 14:6

<sup>18</sup> Giles, 1993: 185, 188

<sup>19</sup> Acts 2:29

<sup>20</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 40

would be a more appropriate term than 'human being' because of this continued learning and growth. "Becoming suggests process, transition, incompleteness, movement from non-existence to existence (or the reverse)."<sup>21</sup> He later states, "One is engaged in the life long task of becoming a person, of sculpting the raw material of life into a truly human shape."<sup>22</sup>

The thought that our personhood is a given and has, at the same time, to be striven after and worked at is also found in Bauckham who writes, "All we are and have is given us. Along with all we are and have, we are given some freedom to choose what we make of ourselves. This is the very limited sense in which we may be said to create ourselves.... It is true that what we are is not something static; we are the selves we become. And it is true that we have limited freedom to become what we choose. But this is no more than making something of what we are given."<sup>23</sup>

Etymologically, the term 'person' is closely related to the term 'role' for the term 'person' comes from the Latin '*persona*' which means social, legal or theatrical role; the part one plays in society or on stage. But we cannot reduce a person to the roles she or he plays. "Being a person," says McFarland, "is understood to be something more fundamental than any role we play. Although a person may have many roles (chemist, mother, wife, daughter, administrator), she is only one person; and while roles can change, personhood tends to be part of who we are."<sup>24</sup> To define personal identity too narrowly, in terms of a specific role, could be threatening to the person's sense of self if there is a major change in circumstances such as loss of a job or death of a friend or partner<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 2

<sup>22</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 43

<sup>23</sup> Bauckham, 2002: 39

<sup>24</sup> McFarland, 2001: 209

<sup>25</sup> McFarland, 2001: 209

Having considered briefly the kinds of questions related to the experience of being or having a 'self' we now turn our attention to the constitution of the 'self', considering in particular relationality and temporality.

## **1.2 The Constitution of Self in Relation to Others**

Such is the centrality of other people in constituting and maintaining our identity that Ford can say, "To ask 'who am I?' leads straight to the other people who are part of me. Is there any layer of self where there are no others?"<sup>26</sup> Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann make the similar observation that our identity is shaped and maintained by social relations<sup>27</sup>, and Ricoeur writes, "The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other."<sup>28</sup> This can be seen in the way we introduce people to one another – 'my colleague', 'Linda's husband', 'George's daughter', 'my father's brother' – nearly always in relation to another.

### **1.2.i Macmurray and McFadyen: Being In Relation**

John Macmurray (*Persons In Relation*) and Alastair McFadyen (*The Call To Personhood*) have similar theses concerning the constitution of the self. Both argue that the self is constituted only in relation to others. "Individuality, personhood and selfhood," states McFadyen, "do not...refer to some internal or independent source of identity, but to the way one is and has been in relation."<sup>29</sup> They are, of course, only two among many who discuss this but, coming from different disciplines - philosophy and theology respectively - and the works having been published some 30 years apart, it will be a useful exercise to consider them together here.

*Persons In Relation* is the companion volume to *The Self As Agent* in which Macmurray rejects the traditional Cartesian 'I think therefore I am' definition

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<sup>26</sup>Ford, 1997: 3

<sup>27</sup>Berger & Luckmann, 1979: 194

<sup>28</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 3

<sup>29</sup>McFadyen, 1990: 18

of self and substitutes action as the basis for self. To view self as a thinking being, he argues, is isolating. Furthermore, such a statement carries the implication that if I am incapable of thought I do not exist. This raises ethical questions about the status as persons of babies who have not yet developed the capacity for independent thought, the severely mentally retarded who may never develop it and those who, through illness, injury or serious emotional trauma have lost this capacity. It is not through thinking about existence that self knows self exists, argues Macmurray, but through doing, through actively taking part in existence<sup>30</sup>. This leads him to posit that our existence depends on the existence of the other. This, the main thesis of *Persons In Relation*, is laid out clearly by Macmurray in the introduction where he tells us that the book's main purpose is, "(T)o show how the personal relation of persons is constitutive of personal existence; that there can be no man until there are at least two men in communication."<sup>31</sup>

Macmurray argues that thinking causes one to become detached and subjective because it necessitates withdrawing from action and from all other practical personal relations with others. It isolates one from the other because the thinker is always 'I', never 'you'. This said, however, he also makes the point that even our thoughts do not exist in a vacuum but require some frame of reference external to the self to ascertain their veracity or falsity<sup>32</sup>. The self as agent, on the other hand, cannot be isolated but must be in relation to the other. The active self as opposed to the isolated thinking self exists as a person and, just as the 'self' is personal, so too the 'other' is personal. The 'I', that is, exists only as part of 'you and me'. Of course it hardly need be said that each person is both subject ('I') and object ('you' or 'other')<sup>33</sup> - I am the 'other' to the other's 'I'. This interdependence between self and other, between the 'I' and the 'you' is reminiscent of the philosophical anthropology of Martin Buber.

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<sup>30</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 17

<sup>31</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 12

<sup>32</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 20ff

<sup>33</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 25

"Man", says Buber, "becomes an I through a You."<sup>34</sup> Buber distinguishes between the 'I' of 'I-It' and the 'I' of 'I-You', or 'I-Thou', making the point that there is no 'I' apart from one or the other<sup>35</sup> but also that the 'I' of 'I-It' and the 'I' of 'I-You' are very different 'I's. The 'I' of 'I-It' experiences the other as an object while the 'I' of 'I-You', or 'I-Thou', relates to the other as a person. Buber puts it this way, "The world of experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation."<sup>36</sup> The I of I-You is relational while the I of I-It is experiential<sup>37</sup>.

For Feuerbach too, "Where there is no 'Thou' there is no 'I'"<sup>38</sup>. This, Macquarrie cautions, needs to be stated and emphasised in today's highly individualistic culture<sup>39</sup>. The implication here is that the further a person retreats from connection with the other the more they lose sight of their true self. Brian Keenan, who was kidnapped and imprisoned in Lebanon in the 1980s, initially was held in solitary confinement and later was in with another prisoner. Reflecting on the way they related to one another and of their importance to one another, he says, "No man is singular in the way he lives his life. He only lives it fully in relation to others.... We cannot know ourselves or declare ourselves human unless we share in the humanity of another."<sup>40</sup> "If it is indeed the case that there is no 'I' without a 'Thou'," writes Macquarrie, "if everyone needs the confirmation of dialogue with the other, the distance and the relation of community, the vivifying atmosphere of the 'between', then to deny and seek to diminish the humanity of the other is to deny and diminish one's own humanity."<sup>41</sup> I will return to this and discuss it more fully elsewhere in this chapter.

By way of explanation Buber tells us that the I of I-It is 'Ego I' and is set apart from all other egos whereas the I of I-You is 'person I' and is in relation with

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<sup>34</sup> Buber, 1970: 80

<sup>35</sup> Buber, 1970: 53f

<sup>36</sup> Buber, 1970: 62

<sup>37</sup> Buber, 1970: 111

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Macquarrie, 1982: 88

<sup>39</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 88

<sup>40</sup> Keenan, 1992: 277,287

<sup>41</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 89f

other persons<sup>42</sup>. The difference between the two is that while the 'person I' acknowledges the self, the 'ego I' is totally absorbed and preoccupied with the self and with all things 'mine'<sup>43</sup>. The egoist has self and the seeking of the self's own ends at the centre. The egoist or I-It way of experiencing others comes from the world of autonomous reason and rationality. It demands control, analysis, and hypothesis of the other, and sovereignty over the other. Macquarrie states that to reduce 'I-Thou' to 'I-It' is the essence of slavery – one person has become the possession, object and instrument of the other. If there is no 'I' without 'Thou' then this kind of objectivisation of the other must similarly affect the slave owner<sup>44</sup>. Of course this does not only apply to slavery, the same applies to other forms of exploitation where the other is treated as an object and less than an equal. Moltmann writes, "People who understand freedom as domination really only know themselves as determining subjects, and everything else as their property, their object.... They do not know other people as persons."<sup>45</sup> To relate to others as objects, freedom is in the form of rule - but there can be no freedom for the ruled, only for the ruler. If human subjects relate to each other as subjects then freedom is in the form of community – all are free<sup>46</sup>.

The devastating effect on a person of continually being objectified and experienced as 'It' instead of being related to as 'You' can be seen in the autobiographical works of David Pelzar whose mother, while David was a young child, stopped using his name when speaking to him or about him and called him, 'the boy'. She later dropped this too, calling him 'It'. Remembering that time, Pelzar writes, "You are a *nobody!* An *It!* You are non-existent...she had stripped me of my very existence.... I would have been relieved if she had returned with a knife and ended it all."<sup>47</sup> Again, in a later book Pelzar writes, "I know deep inside that I do not now, nor will I ever,

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<sup>42</sup> Buber, 1970: 111f

<sup>43</sup> Buber, 1970: 114

<sup>44</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 89

<sup>45</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 155

<sup>46</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 159

<sup>47</sup> Pelzar, 1995: 40 (original emphasis)

deserve any love, attention, or even recognition as a human being. I am a child called, 'It'. I am all alone inside."<sup>48</sup>

The personal, or 'I-You' way of relating, on the other hand, displays mutuality and equality, possible because the 'I' gives up what Newbigin would call any "sovereign claim of autonomous reason"<sup>49</sup> over the other. No one is one hundred per cent 'person' or one hundred percent 'ego' but oriented toward one or other<sup>50</sup>.

While it is widely acknowledged that 'I-It' makes the other an object and that if the self objectifies the other then it too becomes an object for the self is neither disclosed nor realised<sup>51</sup>, Macmurray does think it legitimate and, at times necessary, to relate to the other not as 'you' but as 'it'. The relation of self with other, he tells us, can be personal or impersonal. Examples of impersonal relations would be an employer interviewing a job applicant or a judge trying an accused person. In treating the other impersonally we treat the other not as a person but as an object<sup>52</sup>. In the case of an employer interviewing the job candidate this would mean an almost mechanical analysis of the candidate's skills compared with the requirements of the job. In the case of the judge trying an accused person, the judge is assessing the available information about the accused's reported actions in the light of legislation in an attempt to establish guilt or innocence. Even within personal relations, Macmurray suggests there is an element of the impersonal, which enhances rather than undermines the personal. "The impersonal attitude is justifiable when it is itself subordinated to the personal attitude when it is adopted for the sake of the personal, and is itself included as a negative which is necessary to the positive."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Pelzar, 2000:4

<sup>49</sup> Newbigin, 1994: 61

<sup>50</sup> Buber, 1970:114f

<sup>51</sup> Gay, 1998: 296ff

<sup>52</sup> Macmurray, 1961: 33

<sup>53</sup> Macmurray, 1961: 35

That our humanity is relational is not a new idea. It is as old as humankind itself. As the creation narrative shows, we were created for community, not for isolation. Because we were thus created to live in community and not in isolation, a self who tries to live in isolation diminishes his or her own selfhood. "The goal is to become a person-in-community, for no person exists in isolation, though a self may try to do so, and in so doing diminish its own personhood...the natural direction of the human being is outward.... The egoist, on the other hand, is concerned with his own centre...curved in on himself.... So instead of achieving his aim of self-aggrandisement, he slips back into a subhuman existence."<sup>54</sup> The loner not only deprives others of company and community but also causes damage to herself or himself. To dehumanise the self is to dehumanise the other but it is a two way process and to dehumanise the other also dehumanises the self. As Macquarrie notes, to reduce I-You to I-It leads to slavery and exploitation - one person has become the possession, object and instrument of the other<sup>55</sup>.

Trevor Hart makes a similar point when he states, "Whenever and to whatever extent we slip into *purely* impersonal and objectifying modes of approach to the human other we run the risk of dehumanising the other (and thereby ourselves also in the process). Again in relating to persons (participating in human communication) we need both objective and personal modes to be held together as two aspects of the same interpretative activity."<sup>56</sup>

Bonhoeffer also gives some consideration to the damage done to the individual who isolates himself or herself from the community and fellowship of others. His concern is with the spiritual damage. "Sin," he tells us, "demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is

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<sup>54</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 43, 46

<sup>55</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 6

<sup>56</sup> Hart, 2000: 321f



his isolation. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person."<sup>57</sup>

Buber's main concern is with the effect on the self of relating to the other as 'it' instead of 'you'. His concern here is the emotional effect on the person of isolating self from others. "By setting himself apart from others, the ego moves away from being."<sup>58</sup> It can also have a devastating and dehumanising effect on the other to be used as an 'it', to be merely experienced and not related to. The devastating and dehumanising effect of being related to as "It" rather than "You" is seen in the story of Gunther. Gunther was a handicapped child born in Germany in 1914. He was starved of communication and love as well as food by the grandmother with whom he and his father lived. To ensure he kept quiet his grandmother dosed him with medicine. "Not that he cried very much – or loudly – if and when he did. Since his crying had always been ignored in the past, he had given up crying as an infant means of telling his needs."<sup>59</sup> On the rare occasions his grandmother spoke to him it was to tell him, "You're a nothing. You're nothing but a nothing.... You're such a nothing you don't even know what a nothing is."<sup>60</sup>

When he was seven years old Gunther was taken to 'Bethel', a village-community providing care for children and adults with learning difficulties. Learning that the child did not speak, Bethel's administrator asked Gunther's grandmother if she spoke to him. "'What's there to say to the likes of him?' snapped the grandmother."<sup>61</sup> Gunther responded positively to the care he received at Bethel, he responded to being related to as 'I-You' after seven years of being experienced as 'I-It'. Within a few days he was able to say his name and over time he learned to walk, talk, sing and read, to love and be loved.

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<sup>57</sup> Bonhoeffer, 1976: 87

<sup>58</sup> Buber, 1970: 114

<sup>59</sup> Hong, 1976: 14

<sup>60</sup> Hong, 1976: 15

<sup>61</sup> Hong, 1976: 20

We have seen, in this section, the difference between, and the different effect on both self and other of, relating to the other as person and experiencing the other as object. In order to relate to the other as person we need to know what it is to be related to as persons and, as we will consider in the following section, the foundations of relating are laid in our earliest days.

### **1.2.ii Laying Foundations - Relating From Infancy**

Macmurray traces the early development of personal relationships between persons back to early infancy. He makes the point that as far back as Aristotle, babies have traditionally been seen as potentially rather than actually rational, acquiring personality through forming habits, which in turn create character. We will return to this idea of habits creating character when considering Paul Ricoeur's thinking on narrative identity. Character might be defined in this traditional view as a systemisation and organization, by the potentially rational infant, of 'animal impulses'. Macmurray, however, challenges this view citing Ian Suttie for whom infants are more like human adults than animals. Although closer to his own view Macmurray feels Suttie goes too far in the opposite direction<sup>62</sup>.

Macmurray sees babies neither with fully developed personalities like adults nor as merely having the potential to develop personality at a later stage but actually beginning to develop personality from their earliest days. He devotes a large section of his book to considering how this takes place, focussing on the relation between the dependent infant and the nurturing adult mother figure. Macmurray makes the point that although usually the biological mother, this caring, nurturing role can be fulfilled by any caring adult of either gender<sup>63</sup>. Having clarified how he is using the word, Macmurray goes on to use the term 'mother' to refer to the caring, nurturing adult in an infant's life.

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<sup>62</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 44f

<sup>63</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 50

Macmurray's theory of an infant's development through relations with the other is very similar to object relations psychology or object relations theory in which the other is related to as object. Thomas Klee defines object relations as, "A psychodynamic approach to human behaviour, development, relationships.... Within modern object relations theory, objects can be people (mother, father, others) or things...with which we form attachments. These objects and the child's developing relationship with them are incorporated into the self."<sup>64</sup>

Price describes object relations theory, thus, "Object relations theory is based on the observation of the psychological development of the child from the earliest stages of infancy. In object relations the attachment of the child to the mother forms the primary matrix from which the self, in the context of an ever-widening circle of relations, is formed.... Object relations...describes the person as a composite history of interpersonal relations."<sup>65</sup> Price later indicates that generally adults are unaware that their very earliest cognitive processes are a result of their very earliest object relations, "However, this does not mitigate the fact that most adults could not perform their abstractive reasoning processes had not their mothers, or some parent or parent figure, bonded to them by talking, cooing, holding, and generally being available for them in order that they might become psychologically attached."<sup>66</sup>

It has been suggested that 'human relations theory' may be a more appropriate term but Klee disagrees because we form attachments not only to other human beings but also to things and animals. For example, many children form relationships with stuffed animals and other toys, and adults may form relationships, albeit self-destructive relationships, with alcohol. Both adults and children form relationships with animals<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Klee, 2000-2002 (www)

<sup>65</sup> Price, 2002: 132

<sup>66</sup> Price, 2002: 271

<sup>67</sup> Klee, 2000-2002 (www)

The young infant, Macmurray tells us, very quickly learns to communicate and to expect his<sup>68</sup> mother to respond to his communication. This expectation is based on memory as the mother establishes a pattern of withdrawal and return<sup>69</sup>. The memory of the mother's faithful and repeated return enables the child to hope that she will do so again. This hope, when, fulfilled, in turn becomes a memory on which renewed hope may be founded<sup>70</sup>.

We can illustrate this with reference to a situation where loss of memory results in loss of hope. Ruby suffers from dementia. Once a week her husband Tom goes out with his friend, assuring Ruby before he goes that he will return in three hours. Three hours later when he returns Tom invariably finds Ruby in a highly agitated state because she thinks he has left her. She has no memory of the previous week, much less of the many years when Tom has been faithful to his promises to her, thus she has no reason to hope that he will return<sup>71</sup>.

Long before they learn to talk, human infants have learned complex methods of communication and can generally make their needs, wants and feelings known. Although some animals use basic communication techniques, human beings are unique in having life shaped by communication from their earliest days. Communication remains fundamental and determinative in personal experience throughout life<sup>72</sup>. This, Macmurray argues, is because throughout life and not only in infancy persons are persons only in relation to others. In infancy the foundations are laid for relating to others whether directly or indirectly, personally or impersonally throughout the whole of the rest of life. Dysfunctional adults with poor social skills are often found to

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<sup>68</sup>For the sake of simplicity I will use masculine third person pronouns for baby and feminine third person pronouns for mother in this section of the paper.

<sup>69</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 87ff

<sup>70</sup>We see in this an example of the overlapping of relational and temporal aspects of personal identity together with memory as indicated at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>71</sup>As told to me by their grandson (names have been changed)

<sup>72</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 67

have been infants who were not related to adequately by a caring, nurturing adult figure.

We perhaps come to realise how skilled young infants are at communication when the skills are absent, or at least appear to be absent through not being employed. Young babies whose cries elicit a negative response or no response can learn not to cry even to express hunger or discomfort. They sit or lie still and quiet, staring wide-eyed at their supposed-carers. Thus very young children who have suffered from abuse or neglect are often described as being in a state of 'frozen watchfulness' or 'frozen awareness'<sup>73</sup>. For example the wide-eyed stares and silence of the Romanian orphans shown on television in the early 1990s shocked and unsettled the viewing public. "The orphans were so neglected that they failed to show any emotions at all. They didn't cry or show anger or even respond to people coming in and out of the room."<sup>74</sup> It was shocking to be confronted in our own living rooms by images of children who had been depersonalised through only ever having been experienced as what Buber would call, 'I-It', never related to as 'I-You'.

The skills a young child acquires as he develops do not equip him for independent survival but for personal community for, as we have discussed, persons, no matter how self-sufficient they may appear to be, do not exist in a vacuum but always in relation to other persons. The early stage of an infant's mobility, for example, is not a precursor to independence as is the case with other animals. Increased mobility does not increase the young child's ability to care for himself but in fact increases the potential danger thus creating a need for even more care, supervision and protection.

In considering where the earliest foundations of personal identity are laid, McFadyen goes further back than Macmurray. Macmurray traces it back to earliest infancy. McFadyen goes right back to the circumstances of conception. Knowledge of the circumstances surrounding his or her conception - for example if from rape or an incestuous relationship or from a

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.newman.ac.uk/studweb/abuse/physical.html>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.csuchico.edu/engl/faculty/engl1Tom/The%20Orphanages.html>

casual 'one night stand' - can have a psychological impact on a child and subsequently on an adult. He then considers the fetal relationship with the mother. In this, the mother's health, diet, emotional well-being, economic and social status during pregnancy are all factors<sup>75</sup>. That a mother's attitude towards her developing unborn child can have serious consequences for the child postnatally and on into adulthood is recognised by counsellors. Although we have no conscious memory of what happens to and around us while in the womb, it is believed by some that unconscious memories exist and can influence our lives, not only in the early days but throughout our lives. Counsellors will, at times, take counselees 'back to the womb' in their memories within the counselling session in order to explore deep-seated problems. Michael Gabriel is a counsellor and hypnotherapist who employs this practice. He believes that the mother's feelings and emotions, both positive and negative, have a deep impression on the unborn infant and that these impressions have potential consequences for the infant's future life. Gabriel writes, "The body does not forget what eludes the mind. Who we are today is due, to a significant degree, to our experiences in the womb, and to the way each of us has responded to those experiences."<sup>76</sup> Just as adverse physical conditions such as drug or alcohol abuse can cause irreparable physical harm to the growing fetus so too it is believed that adverse emotional conditions can cause irreparable emotional harm. This is, however, a controversial area in counselling.

### **1.2.iii Building On The Foundations – Continuing To Relate in Adulthood**

Interpersonal relations are a vital part of our existence not only in childhood but also in adulthood. "In ourselves we are nothing; and when we turn our eyes inward in search of ourselves we find a vacuum.... It is only in relation to others that we exist as persons.... We live and move and have our being not

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<sup>75</sup>McFadyen, 1990: 87

<sup>76</sup> Adzema (www)

in ourselves but in one another."<sup>77</sup> That relationality is a central part of our human make up perhaps accounts for why, as a penal method, solitary confinement is so difficult for prisoners and why it is so often used as a form of torture. Since the beginning of time humankind was made to be in relation with one another, not in isolation. "To be in the image of God is to subsist in relations of mutual constitutiveness with other human beings.... Personal beings are social beings, so that of both God and man it must be said that they have their being in their personal relatedness."<sup>78</sup> We can, then, never reach a stage in life when we have no need of other people. Those who try to live as if they had reached such a stage suffer and deprive others as a result.

Of course, the relations which we consider most important to ourselves, and those most influential in shaping the self, are those with whom we have direct personal contact, but dependence on the actions of others who are unknown to us - indirect relations - is also essential to our being and our well-being. The chaos that would ensue if emergency and essential services were withdrawn, and indeed does ensue from time to time during periods of industrial dispute, whether of firefighters, postal workers, petrol tanker drivers, or whoever else, illustrates this. There would be no fire service, crime would go unchecked, we would have no health services, no social services, roads would not be repaired - if indeed they were ever built - rubbish would not be collected. There would be no telecommunication or postal services, no Internet or E-mail. We could not go to the supermarket to buy food but would each have to milk our own cow and slaughter our own pig, which we would cook along with our homegrown vegetables over firewood that we had collected ourselves. John Macquarrie touches on this. He writes, "Perhaps there was a time in the dawn of human history when each individual did everything for himself - secured his own food, made his own clothes, built his own shelter and so on. But it soon was discovered that

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<sup>77</sup> Macmurray, 1960: 211

<sup>78</sup> Gunton, 1993: 3, 229

it is much better for each to acquire skill...and then exchange his products with others."<sup>79</sup>

Personal identity is formed, in part, through social processes therefore the identity of any person is related to the identities of others. Related that is, but not restricted. Otherwise a person's identity would have no meaning beyond a particular social situation. There would be no continuity. Similarly, although our personal identity is defined by how we relate to and respond to others, giving of ourselves and receiving from others, it is not reducible to our relationships<sup>80</sup>. No-one's personal identity is reducible to the sum of the relationships she or he has with others. As Gestalt psychologists have sought to show, the whole is always different from and greater than the sum of the parts<sup>81</sup>. Just as a face is more than simply a collection of features so the personal identity of a person is more than a collection of her or his relations. Remove all the parts, however, whether the 'parts' constituting personal identity or the 'parts' constituting a face, or whatever else, and nothing is left. (Nothing left, that is, only if we see identity as wholly constituted in relation to others.) As we will consider, however, it is not possible to entirely dissociate from all relations. There are those who remain with us, influencing us for better or worse, for the rest of our lives even from the other side of the world or from the grave. We are not identical with any of our relations but are what McFadyen would call a 'sedimentation' of significant relations throughout life<sup>82</sup>. "Personal Identity is a sedimentation of a significant history of relations which will have had both a societal and an interpersonal aspect."<sup>83</sup>

Price states that object relations theory shows, "How the person is shaped by a social context: by relation to an 'other'"...(and) "how interpersonal relations

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<sup>79</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 87

<sup>80</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 27

<sup>81</sup> Gleitman, 1991: 76

<sup>82</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 40

<sup>83</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 256



are the fundamental building blocks of an individual's personhood; each person is shaped by his or her peculiar history of personal relations."<sup>84</sup>

Drawing attention to the centrality of relations to a person's being, Price notes that through our encounters with others we have the power to shape their persons but, like McFadyen, is clear that this does not mean relation to others is harmful to the self. He writes, "A relation is not peripheral or incidental to human ontology but is constitutive of the human essence.... One person can actually affect the being of another at the deepest level.... It is important to keep in mind that in healthy interpersonal encounter there should be no loss or confusion of identity. The identity of each human being becomes increasingly distinct in relation to the other."<sup>85</sup> This is surely what it means for our identity to be a sedimentation of significant relationships. Hart makes a similar point, stating that our identity being a sedimentation of relationships, "does not detract from but rather reinforces our own identity (ipse-identity in Ricoeur's phrase) as the particular person we are and no other can ever be or become."<sup>86</sup>

Harriet Harris, in a critical response to McFadyen's thesis, asks what we were prior to sedimentation from relationships? If, I would suggest in response to Harris' question, relationality begins in earliest infancy as Macmurray describes then sedimentation too begins in our earliest days. There is, therefore, no 'prior to sedimentation'.

Harris, who is less than comfortable with McFadyen's way of thinking, concedes, "We could describe one's character or personality and one's sense of oneself (even one's sense of oneself as a person) as sediment from a history of interactions and relations up until now. My sense of myself is affected by affirming and discouraging reactions I have received from others.... My sense of myself as a person (my belief that I am a person, and my corresponding view of personhood) is more stable, learned from infancy,

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<sup>84</sup> Price, 2002: 231

<sup>85</sup> Price, 2002: 237ff

<sup>86</sup> Hart, 2000: 311

and through the filter of my culture, and affected by the philosophy, theology and psychology I have read. Personal identity is affected by none of these things but is found in that history of interaction or line of continuity.”<sup>87</sup>

The last two sections have considered relating in infancy and adulthood respectively. We have seen that communication in infancy does not prepare us for independence but for relationships throughout life and that we never outgrow the need to be in relation. We considered that personal identity is related but not restricted to the identities of others. With our identities thus related to the identities of others, and formed in relation with others, the others' betrayal of us, or the death of significant others could be a serious threat to the self. It is to this that we now turn our attention.

#### **1.2.iv Vulnerability Caused By Being In Relationship**

Each relationship influences our personal identity and contributes toward making us what we are and what we will become. This is true of both positive, constructive, harmonious relationships and negative, destructive, conflictive ones. For Ford the impact on the self of a deep wound inflicted by another - particularly a significant other - indicates just how vital others are to us. “When someone deeply hurts us it is one of the worst forms of overwhelming. It can dominate a whole life.... The extent of the misery is a measure of how vital other people are to us. Because others are so deeply part of us, when core relationships go wrong our whole being is threatened.... The wounds that critically disfigure the heart,” he continues, “are given and received between lovers, husbands and wives, parents and children, friends, long-term colleagues and partners – any relationship where deep trust and loyalty create potentially tragic vulnerability.”<sup>88</sup> Thus the psalmist expresses his pain at being hurt and betrayed by a friend when he writes, “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship

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<sup>87</sup> Harris, 1998: 218f

<sup>88</sup> Ford, 1997: 13ff

as we walked with the throng at the house of God."<sup>89</sup> If the person inflicting the wound is not very important to us the impact is less. For example, an insult or slight from a stranger will have considerably less impact on us than one from someone whom we love and respect, hence the verse from Michael Card's song about Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ,

**Why?**

"Why did it have to be a friend  
Who chose to betray the Lord?  
Why did he use a kiss to show them?  
That's not what a kiss is for.  
Only a friend can betray a friend  
A stranger has nothing to gain,  
And *only a friend comes close enough*  
*To ever cause so much pain.*"<sup>90</sup>

McFadyen, as we will see, insists that a person's individuality and uniqueness - the autonomy of his or her identity - is not harmed but enhanced by being in community. He also indicates the threat to the person from the loss of significant relationships. He writes, "Where we are caught up in the dynamics of genuine community our integrity and autonomy are not threatened in relation, but rather enriched, enlarged, intensified, empowered. The reverse is also perceived to be the case, that loss of relation does not constitute but imperils genuine autonomy."<sup>91</sup> We can also see this through the effect the death of someone close can have on an individual.

Rowan Williams illustrates the overwhelming effect the loss of significant relationship by death can have on the self by looking at Mary Magdalene's apparent loss of herself in the death of the one who loved her and affirmed her. "It is not simply the Lord's body that has been carried away - it is the Lord who has loved and affirmed Mary, and so, in a sense, it is Mary herself who has been 'carried away'." And following the resurrection, "Mary is offered her name, her identity, the name which specifies her as a person with a particular story.... Mary goes blindly back to the tomb and finds herself....

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<sup>89</sup> Psalm 55:12-14

<sup>90</sup> Michael Card, *Why?* (emphasis added)

<sup>91</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 106f

Mary is not dead because Jesus is not dead.... Mary lives because Jesus lives."<sup>92</sup> He cites the following poem which paints a graphic picture of the devastation suffered by Mary in the death of her Lord and master.

**Mary Magdalene** (by Saunders Lewis)

"About women, no one can know. There are some,  
Like this one, whose pain is a locked sepulchre;  
Their pain is buried in them, there is no fleeing  
From it and no casting it off...  
...Deep calls unto deep, a grave for a grave,  
A carcass drawing towards a carcass in that unhappy morning;  
Three days was this one in a grave, in a world that died  
In the afternoon. It is finished,  
The cry that drew blood from her like the barb of a sword.  
It is finished. Finished. Mary fell from the hill  
To the emptiness of the last Easter....  
A world without a living Christ, the horrifying Sabbath of creation,  
The abyss of the hundred thousand centuries and their end,  
Mary lay down in the grave of the trembling universe.  
...All the flowers of memory withered except the rain of the blood  
...God was extinguished,  
in the dying together, in the burying together."<sup>93</sup>

We may seek to end a negative, destructive, conflictive relationship but Macmurray tells us that no matter how much conflict exists within a relationship, the relationship cannot be annulled, only refused. This is because to annul an action would be to reverse the past, which clearly is impossible. This is something to which we will return in chapter 3. Macmurray gives the example of a parent disowning a child who has behaved in such a way as to bring disgrace on the family. The parent may even insist that the child does not exist but such insistence is only necessary because of the actuality of the child's existence. Even killing the child is not the answer as this serves only to remove the child's potential future and not the past. The relation of parent-child remains a fact<sup>94</sup> as does the influence the relationship has had on the parent's self.

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<sup>92</sup> Williams, 1982: 44ff

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Williams, 1982: 45

<sup>94</sup> Macmurray, 1961: 92ff.

Conflict, or apparent conflict, within a relationship need not be destructive despite appearances. Both Macmurray and McFadyen give examples of situations where what appears to be conflictive is actually constructive. In his consideration of the infant in relation to the mother, Macmurray notes how, as the young child develops he must gradually learn to do for himself what the mother does for him. The how and when of this learning process is the mother's decision. She has to refuse to do for her child what the child has come to expect of her. This, he suggests, could be perceived by the child as a breakdown in the relationship, and the perceived isolation from the other threatens the child's very being. "The child can only be rescued from despair.... By a revelation of (the mother's) continued love and care which convinces him that his fears are groundless."<sup>95</sup> Macmurray does not consider what happens when the relationship is fractured, when the mother's love and care are not continued, when the child's fears are not groundless. What often happens in these sad situations - unless another takes the place of the mother and provides the love and care necessary for the child's healthy development - is that the child grows into a dysfunctional adult unable to relate appropriately to others and unable to offer adequate care to his or her own infants, thus perpetuating the cycle.

Just as Macmurray discusses what the infant perceives as the mother's withdrawal when she ceases to respond in the way the child expects in order to teach the child to do certain tasks for him or herself, so too McFadyen discusses what he calls 'recodification'<sup>96</sup>. Recodification takes place in order to maintain the relationship and may, like the mother's actions in Macmurray's example, look like withdrawal. He gives the example of the drug addict's parents who, out of love and concern for their son or daughter, put the child out of their home in order to face him or her with the reality and extent of the problem. This is a painful exercise for both parents and child but it is not withdrawal. It is positive action on the parents' part for the benefit of the other who, in this case happens to be their own child, even although at the time it may feel to the child like negative, conflictive action and be painful

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<sup>95</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 90

<sup>96</sup>Macmurray, 1961: 169

for the parent. The parent lets go of the child but not of the relationship. Writing of the parable of the Prodigal Son, Volf makes the point that although the prodigal's father let him go he never let go of the relationship for, "The relationship did not rest on moral performance and therefore could not be destroyed by immoral acts."<sup>97</sup>

In this section we have seen that the greater a person's significance in our life, the greater will be the hurt of their betrayal or loss. The loss of a relationship, however, does not equal the loss of the relationship that has been. The Prodigal's father, for example, let go the person who was his son without letting go of the relationship.

The last three sections all draw on the thought of John Macmurray and Alistair McFadyen in the area of persons constituted in relation with others. The following section considers alternative views.

### **1.2.v Criticism of McFadyen & Macmurray**

In contrast to what McFadyen and Macmurray say about being what we are because of relations with others, Elliot says we relate to others as we do because of what we are, and we are what we are, he says, because of conscious and unconscious memories of our narrative<sup>98</sup>. In other words, he is indicating that it is not a matter of being persons because we are in relation with others but relating because we are persons; and it is that relating which enriches and fulfils our identities. Taking a similar position to Elliot, Harriet Harris challenges McFadyen's thesis that personhood is relational as "logically confused and ethically precarious."<sup>99</sup> She questions the claim that personhood is relational arguing rather that persons relate, that it is persons who precede relations not relations that precede persons. Harris argues that while personhood is not relational perhaps we can say that our sense of being a person is, and perhaps also our self-esteem. She identifies that a,

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<sup>97</sup> Volf, 1996: 159

<sup>98</sup> Elliot, 1995: 192

<sup>99</sup> Harris, 1998: 214

"Frequently occurring problem in McFadyen's work and elsewhere is that discussions about personality or about the sense of one's self are treated as discussions about personhood (what it is to be a person) and about personal identity (what it is to be the same person over time)".<sup>100</sup>

Harris concludes that, "To be a person is to have certain capacities whether or not these capacities are realised."<sup>101</sup> This is based on the Aristotelian thought that persons are beings with the capacity to acquire skills (such as understanding and decision-making) but just because a capacity is not realised does not mean the being is any less a person. In this case to be a person would be to have the capacity for relation whether or not the capacity was realised. Harris here seems to be thinking of the relationships in which we deliberately participate but there are also those relationships that exist without choice or effort on our part, such as parents, siblings, grandparents or neighbours, as indicated in the following quotation from Hart. "Our existence and our identity is given and shaped in the complex network of relationships which we inhere in life, some of which are obviously closer than others...and some of which are 'given' to us at birth by virtue of biological accident, or by virtue of our immediate social location, and others we choose to enter into, thereby modifying who we are."<sup>102</sup>

Like Macquarrie, Harris makes a helpful distinction between what it is to be a person and personal identity. Personhood, she suggests, is what it is to be a person and personal identity is what it is to be the same person over time<sup>103</sup>. She discusses the numerical and qualitative identity of persons, and clarifies that when we speak of change in a person whose personality has changed in some way – we might say, she suggests, following Christian conversion, that a person 'is not the same' – we are saying that the numerically identical person is no longer qualitatively identical with her or himself<sup>104</sup>. We will

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<sup>100</sup> Harris, 1998: 216f

<sup>101</sup> Harris, 1998: 234

<sup>102</sup> Hart, 1999a: 32

<sup>103</sup> Harris, 1998: 217

<sup>104</sup> Harris, 1998: 217

consider numerical and qualitative identity in more detail later in this chapter in the section on temporality.

Harris draws attention to and criticises what she perceives to be discrepancies in McFadyen's reasoning. For example, he says that our identity is the same in different times and places, and that it is defined in relation to others. Harris argues that it cannot be both<sup>105</sup> but her argument surely denies that our identity remains constant in the face of growth and change. As we will consider in the section on temporality, personal identity remains constant - we are who we were yesterday -even in the face of change and discontinuity. She also challenges McFadyen's assertion that personal identity can be both a line of continuity and the way one exists for others, on the basis that the continuity of the self would be regardless of others and if personal identity is a way of being for others then we cannot assume continuity. "My personal identity...cannot be, as McFadyen would have it, both a 'dynamic line of continuity' and the way one exists in relation to others (p. 317), for if it is a line of continuity it is that regardless of relations to others, and if it is a way of being for others there is no logical reason why it should be continuous."<sup>106</sup> I would suggest, however, that it is a denial of personal integrity to say that we cannot have continuity of the self while being for others. As will be discussed in the section on temporality, keeping one's word - being faithful to one's promises - is one of the ways considered by Ricoeur in which identity is ensured a permanence in time. In Jesus Christ we see the ultimate example of 'being for others' but we also see a continuity of identity from his preincarnate self<sup>107</sup> to his post-resurrection self<sup>108</sup>.

Harris cautions that to define personhood relationally, as opposed, say, to simply recognising that personhood is constituted in part by relationships, can result in having degrees of personhood, measured by the quality of relationships, and she insists, "We need to affirm the personhood of those

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<sup>105</sup> Harris, 1998: 218

<sup>106</sup> Harris, 1998: 219

<sup>107</sup> John 8:58

<sup>108</sup> Luke 24:39



who have been relationally impoverished.”<sup>109</sup> Harris’s distinction between personhood and our sense of being a person is both helpful and important here. To define personhood solely on the basis of relationship might infer that the person whose personal relationships are strong and positive is more fully ‘person’ than the one with a history of damaged and damaging personal relationships; or that the person with many personal relationships is more fully ‘person’ than the person with few. Harris also notes that some relationships are harmful and undermine individuals, and suggests that damaged or broken relationships do not call personhood into question, thus implying that personhood as such cannot be thought to be wholly contingent of relationships. Rather, she argues, the fact that broken and damaged relationships can damage a person is evidence of that person’s personhood<sup>110</sup>. For all these reasons – that defining a person relationally can result in having degrees of personhood, that some relationships can be harmful to the person, and that broken damaged relationships can damage the person - Harris states, “We need an ethic which distinguishes the identity of individual persons from the sum of their relationships.”<sup>111</sup> As we have already noted, McFadyen also notes that personal identity is not reducible to our relationships<sup>112</sup>.

Harris turns her attention briefly to Macmurray. She says, “The thrust of Macmurray is not that a being becomes a person through relations, but that humans are persons because relationality is central to human life.”<sup>113</sup> She is happier with this interpretation of Macmurray than with McFadyen’s thesis. In Macmurray, she notes, human beings are personal because they are born with the need to communicate with others. “It is not that relations precede persons so much as that personal existence is created as relational.... That human infants are born needing to communicate with others locates them already in the realm of the personal.”<sup>114</sup> In McFadyen, by contrast, persons emerge from relations. She is concerned because this seems to imply that

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<sup>109</sup> Harris, 1998: 229

<sup>110</sup> Harris, 1998: 229ff

<sup>111</sup> Harris, 1998: 231f

<sup>112</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 27

<sup>113</sup> Harris, 1988: 225

<sup>114</sup> Harris, 1998: 225f

humans can fail to become persons, but qualifies her concern because McFadyen also says persons are, “created with the metaphysical status of personally related to God.”<sup>115</sup> Harris makes the important, if rather obvious, observation that a person must be a person before interpersonal relations are possible<sup>116</sup>. In other words, interpersonal relations are possible only because persons exist. “We are urged to view persons as relational,” says Harris, “yet do not relations need to be understood as personal if they are to be the sort of relations from which persons arise?”<sup>117</sup> For Zizioulas, relationality distinguishes what it is to be a person from what it is to be an individual. “Being a person,” he writes, “is fundamentally different from being an individual or a ‘personality’ for a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within his relationships.”<sup>118</sup> We will return to Zizioulas below.

McFarland expresses this same view, that it is preferable to see personhood as the basis of relationships and not the result of them. He states, “I concur with Harris’ view that it is important to distinguish the claim that relationships define the way in which we are persons from the idea that relationships constitute our personhood as such.”<sup>119</sup> McFarland cites McFadyen saying, “There is essence and personal identity only in communication”<sup>120</sup> and argues that, “It seems preferable to view personhood as the basis for our relationships rather than their product. It is because we are persons that we exist in relation, not the other way round.”<sup>121</sup> I suggest that personhood is the basis of relationships, as McFarland indicates, but that without relationship personhood is stunted and unfulfilled and the sense of self seriously diminished. At the end of the day the areas of disagreement between Harris, or McFarland, and McFadyen are not very important – they all agree that personhood is in some way bound up in relationships and without relationships the self would be impoverished.

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<sup>115</sup> Cited in Harris, 1998: 226

<sup>116</sup> Harris, 1998: 226

<sup>117</sup> Harris, 1998: 225

<sup>118</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 105

<sup>119</sup> McFarland, 2001: 205

<sup>120</sup> Cited in McFarland, 2001: 205

<sup>121</sup> McFarland, 2001: 205

Important as interpersonal relations are in the constitution of personal identity, these relationships are secondary in significance to our relationship to God. "In theological sense the 'person' comes into being through God's summons."<sup>122</sup>

In this section we have considered the view that human beings relate because they are persons. This contrasts with the view in earlier sections that we are persons because we are in relation with others. We considered Harris' concern that to define personhood relationally can result in degrees of personhood. We also looked at the important distinction she makes between our personhood and our sense of being a person. Having considered self in relation to others (whether in relation because we are persons or persons because we are in relation) we turn now to look at self in relation to God as the ultimate other.

### **1.2.vi In Relation to God**

In considering the centrality of personal relations - or personal community - to our being, John Macquarrie insists that the self is nothing if considered in isolation. It only has value and meaning in relation to others, with God being the ultimate Other. "My ego is only an abstract fragment, and to fulfil myself I have to get out of myself...the fragmentariness of the individual must be overcome by joining himself with others. Finally, perhaps, he must transcend towards God and find his true centre there.... Only through losing the narrow egocentric self can a fuller humanity be attained."<sup>123</sup>

This idea, mentioned by Macquarrie, of God being the ultimate Other to whom we relate is central to McFadyen and can also be found in Macmurray. Whereas Macmurray, writing as a philosopher, introduces God as the ultimate universal Other only towards the end of *Persons In Relation*, McFadyen, writing as a theologian, does so right at the beginning and makes frequent reference to it throughout *A Call To Personhood*. "Human being is

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<sup>122</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 80

<sup>123</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 46

therefore to be described as...a being addressed as Thou to God's I.... It is the divine intention that human beings shall be free in relation to Godself as God's dialogue partners."<sup>124</sup> In other words, God communicates as dialogue partner to humankind while showing respect for humankind's (God-given) freedom and independence. God gives us the freedom to respond however we want. The one freedom we do not have is not to respond, as everything we do or say is a response even if we do or say nothing. God gives us the freedom not to become, and the freedom - and indeed the ability - to become what McFadyen describes as his 'dialogue partners'. God calls us, we respond to his call by either accepting it and becoming his 'dialogue partners', or rejecting it and going our own way.

Whereas Macmurray simply presents God as the ultimate universal other, McFadyen goes further, suggesting that relations with others are only right when God, in the person of Christ, is at the centre. In support of this he cites Bonhoeffer who says, "Christ stands between us, and we can only get into touch with our neighbours through him."<sup>125</sup> Both Bonhoeffer and McFadyen suggest here that social relations are modified through redemption because redemption transforms the relation to God. Such statements might be taken to suggest that by definition Christians are always in right relationship with others because their relationships have been redeemed, but such a claim ignores the countless schisms and factions which punctuate the history of all denominations as well as the very existence of denominations. It also denies that those who are not Christians are capable of relating to others, saying that only Christians can be capable. While it is true that relationships with others are changed as our relationship with God is changed and transformed, care must clearly be taken not to appear to be making false claims that only Christians are capable of healthy relationships or that Christian relationships are always healthy. The transformation of interpersonal relationships takes place because redemption gives us a new framework of meaning within which to operate<sup>126</sup>. "It is only through the incorporation of persons into

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<sup>124</sup>McFadyen, 1990: 119f.

<sup>125</sup>Cited in McFadyen, 1990: 58

<sup>126</sup>McFadyen, 1990: 114

God's interaction with us that persons and relations become properly constituted, although this reconstitution remains incomplete. It is only therefore by viewing persons and relations against the horizon of redemption...that we can come to a proper understanding of them."<sup>127</sup> Perhaps the answer to why this should be is found in Hauerwas' comment that we are no self until we are the self God called us to be<sup>128</sup>. We cannot begin to understand others unless and until we have begun to understand ourselves, and surely if the self is unfulfilled and incomplete then self-understanding will be very sparse.

T.F. Torrance also considers that we can only fulfil our potential as persons, whether in relation to others or in other areas of life, through God. "I submit that it is only through a divine Trinity who admits us to communion with himself in his own transcendence that we can be consistently and persistently personal, with that kind of freedom, openness and transcendent reference which we need both to develop our own personal and social culture and our scientific exploration of the universe.... What we need is the recovery of spiritual being, being that is open to personal reality and not impersonal in its own self-centredness."<sup>129</sup>

The world remains fallen but the orientation of individuals is transformed if they respond appropriately to God, receiving his forgiveness and justification. McFadyen is careful to point out that responding to Christ gives a person a transformed orientation rather than a complete new beginning. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, seems to suggest that there is a complete new beginning when he writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."<sup>130</sup> Identity, however, is not abandoned when it is renewed<sup>131</sup> and previous relations which formed that identity are not negated. The newness refers to qualitative newness, not numerical newness. As we will consider in chapter 3, it is not the past but

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<sup>127</sup>McFadyen, 1990: 116

<sup>128</sup>Hauerwas, 1984: 36

<sup>129</sup>Cited in Gay, 1998: 285

<sup>130</sup>2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>131</sup>McFadyen, 1990: 51

our perception of the past that changes<sup>132</sup>. It is possible to suppose, then, that in redemption God does not destroy identity but recreates it. The continuity between fallen and redeemed reality lies in God's continuity and faithfulness<sup>133</sup>.

While McFadyen sees persons as persons-in-relation to others and with God, Craig Gay seems to suggest, like Macquarrie where he speaks of 'human becoming'<sup>134</sup> that personhood is a goal towards which we strive, that it is something we become rather than something we are. Gay states, "We become *persons* only in *relation* to other persons."<sup>135</sup> He goes on to say that we only become persons as we move towards communion with others and ultimately with God. In support of this he appeals to Kierkegaard's contention that the degree of self-consciousness it is possible for us to reach is determined by the others to whom we relate and that full selfhood is only possible in relation to God<sup>136</sup>. Gay seems here to conflate our being with our sense of being. He writes, "Christianly understood, then, personal existence is the creative act of the personal God who graciously calls us into relationship with himself."<sup>137</sup>

McFarland, on the other hand, says that to say personhood is constituted in relation to others and to God excludes those unable to relate to God<sup>138</sup>. This, at first glance, seems to assume that being in relation to someone (or something) equals being in a conscious relationship with them, but whether or not persons are consciously in relationship with God, they are related to him as creatures to creator. That we can be unconsciously in relation to others and to things is indicated by Colin Gunton where he says, "I am related to you as a distinct person, to cabbages and stars and oceans as distinct beings, albeit as those whose substantiality takes a myriad of

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<sup>132</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 67

<sup>133</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 71f

<sup>134</sup> see introduction to this chapter

<sup>135</sup> Gay, 1998: 279

<sup>136</sup> Gay, 1998: 279f

<sup>137</sup> Gay, 1998: 280

<sup>138</sup> McFarland, 2001: 205

different forms."<sup>139</sup> McFarland, however, goes on to make the important point that our personhood is dependent, not on our response to God but on his treatment of us. "We are persons because Jesus reveals us as such, not because we possess a certain number of ontological characteristics.... Our being human is simply a function of our being created human beings like Jesus, quite apart from how we may respond to God's address in Jesus.... *We are persons because God, acting in Christ treats us as persons.*"<sup>140</sup> We also find this thought in Moltmann where he says, "Human beings are intended to live in this relation to God. That gives their existence its inalienable, transcendent depth dimension. In their relationship to the transcendent God, human beings become persons whose dignity must not be infringed."<sup>141</sup>

Having established that Jesus is the image of God ("He is the image of the invisible God." (Colossians 1:15)) and that we are made in God's image ("Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness'.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26f)), McFarland suggests that to show what a person is the Gospel directs us to the risen Jesus. This in turn, he suggests, points us to the crucified Jesus and, in so doing, we are enabled to perceive the other. "If we want to know what a person is, the Gospel narratives point us to the risen Jesus; but in the very process of pointing to Jesus they direct us to look behind him, to the crucified man on Golgotha and, thereby, to the various other reputable and disreputable human characters whom he is not...so that to look at Jesus becomes the means for perceiving the other as other.... This suggests that the *imago Dei* is properly conceived not as a model to which individual beings may or may not conform, but as a lens through which individuals are able to be perceived as persons. That human beings are created 'in' this image means that they are the kind of being whose personhood is disclosed in Jesus."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Gunton, 1993: 204

<sup>140</sup> McFarland, 2001: 213, 217 (emphasis added)

<sup>141</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 122

<sup>142</sup> McFarland, 2001: 212f

John Zizioulas also points us to Christ as the means of discovering what humankind is when he says, "The mystery of man reveals itself fully only in the light of Christ."<sup>143</sup>

### **1.2.vii Relationality Within The Trinity**

In his attempt to understand and explain why as persons we need to be in relation with other persons, Volf turns his attention to the perichoretic relationships within the Trinity. There he finds a model for our inter-relatedness with and interdependence on one another. He writes, "The others are part of my true identity. I cannot live authentically without welcoming the others – the other gender, other persons, or other cultures – into the very structure of my being. For I am created to reflect the personality of the triune God.... The one divine person is not that person only, but includes the other divine persons in itself; it is what it is only through the indwelling of the others.... Every divine person is the other persons, but is the other persons in his or her particular way.... The same is true of human persons created in the image of God. Their identity as persons is conditioned by the characteristics of other person in their social relations."<sup>144</sup> He makes a similar point elsewhere about the mutual indwelling and interdependence of the Trinity. "The identity of each Trinitarian person cannot be defined apart from the others.... The Son is the Son because the Father and the Spirit indwell him; without this interiority of the Father and the Spirit; there would be no Son."<sup>145</sup> He notes that whether we endorse a traditional hierarchical view of the Trinity or the more recent non-hierarchical view, we can agree that the life of God is a life of, "Self-giving and other-receiving love."<sup>146</sup>

John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton both consider the question of relationality within the Trinity and the absolute necessity of the Trinitarian relations to the being of God. Zizioulas writes, "Outside the Trinity there is no God.... The

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<sup>143</sup> Zizioulas, 1975: 433

<sup>144</sup> Volf in Gundry-Volf & Volf, 1997: 59

<sup>145</sup> Volf, 1996: 128

<sup>146</sup> Volf, 1996: 127



being of God is identified with the person."<sup>147</sup> That is to say that the being of God is identified in the person who God is, not in the substance of what God is<sup>148</sup>. He emphasises the importance of loving relationship such as is found in the Trinity, to the person by insisting that in the absence of love personhood is diminished. "Outside the communion of love the person loses its uniqueness and becomes...a 'thing' without absolute 'identity' and 'name', without a 'face'."<sup>149</sup>

In Gunton we read, "According to the teaching of perichoresis, the three divine persons are all bound up with one another, so that one is not one without the other two.... The persons do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in relations. Father, Son and Spirit are eternally what they are by virtue of what they are from and to one another. Being and relation can be distinguished in thought, but in no way separated ontologically."<sup>150</sup>

Gunton polarises the concepts of perichoresis (which, he says shows, "the ontological interdependence and reciprocity of the three persons of the Trinity") and particularity ("Which in Trinitarian theology is a way of pointing to the distinctiveness of the persons")<sup>151</sup>. Zizioulas applies these same concepts of perichoresis and particularity to human persons in relation. He writes, "For someone or something to be, two things are simultaneously needed: being itself (*hypostasis*) and *being in relation* (i.e. being a person). It is only in relationship that identity appears as having an ontological significance, and if any relationship did not imply such an ontologically meaningful identity, then it would be no relationship.... The significance of the person rests in the fact that he represents two things simultaneously which are at first sight in contradiction: particularity and communion."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 41

<sup>148</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 42

<sup>149</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 49

<sup>150</sup> Gunton, 1993: 153, 214

<sup>151</sup> Gunton, 1993: 152f

<sup>152</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 88, 105

We find further consideration of these twin themes of perichoresis and particularity in Hart who writes, "Generality and particularity, then, far from being opposed to one another, are mixed together and require one another, being mutually self-constitutive and self-defining.... The general, or 'shared' is necessary as a familiar backdrop in order for us to identify particular versions of or departures from it; while particularity requires a certain sort of generality in order to be significant and meaningful to others."<sup>153</sup>

Also considering Trinitarian relationships, Gay expresses concern that because it is unfashionable to think theologically people today tend to lose sight of the importance of our relationality. "While modern post-christian thought retains a vague awareness of the importance of individuality and personality, its refusal to ground these notions in God's self-revelation means that it can have no real consciousness of the relational essence that forms the absolute ground of each of us, an absolute ground that transcends psychological and/or cultural advantage."<sup>154</sup> This could explain why modern western secular society is so highly individualistic and lauds absolute independence of the individual over mutual interdependence. Zygmunt Bauman similarly expresses concern that postmodernity with its emphasis on individual autonomy renders relationships, "Fragmentary and discontinuous, fostering disengagement and commitment avoidance."<sup>155</sup> Fragmentariness, disengagement and commitment avoidance may well be typical features of postmodern relationships as Bauman suggests, but theologically speaking, "To be a human is to be created in and for relationship with God and with other human beings.... Communion is being in relation, in which there is due recognition of both particularity and relationality."<sup>156</sup> Heathy relationships, then, are not characterised by disengagement and commitment avoidance but by engagement, commitment and perichoretic mutuality.

In the last two sections we have considered persons in relation to God and God in relation with Godself. In section 1.2.vi we considered God as the

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<sup>153</sup> Hart, 1999a: 38f

<sup>154</sup> Gay, 1998: 286

<sup>155</sup> Cited in Volf, 1996: 21

<sup>156</sup> Gunton, 1993: 83

ultimate other to whom we relate and the transformation brought about in our interpersonal relationships by a transformation in our relationship with God. 1.2.vii shows that we find our model for our inter-relatedness and interdependence in the perichoretic relationships in the Trinity. We saw that each person of the Trinity is as he is because the others are as they are. Both perichoresis and particularity are necessary. In the next section we will consider mutual indwelling and otherness in relationship as it refers to relationship between persons.

### **1.2.viii Mutual Indwelling And Otherness In Relationship**

Volf discusses the self in healthy relation to others. "The self," he tells us, "is dialogically constructed...I am who I am in relation to the other.... Hence the will to be oneself, if it is to be healthy, must entail the will to let the other inhabit the self; the other must be part of who I am as I will to be myself."<sup>157</sup> This inhabitation of the one by the other is also found in Ford who suggests that the people closest to our hearts give a clue to our identity<sup>158</sup>. He tells us that there are those in whose presence we always live, even when they are not physically present with us. Our connection to them is crucial to our sense of self. "We find ourselves," he says, "partly by remembering those who are most deeply woven into us and by continuing to relate to them.... They may be on the other side of the world or they may be dead, but they are constantly before us and within us."<sup>159</sup> This same thought is expressed the following poem by Frederick Beichner.

#### **Remember**

When you remember me,  
It means that you have carried something of who I am with you,  
That I have left some mark of who I am on who you are.

It means that you can summon me back in your mind even  
Though countless years and miles may stand between us.

It means that when we meet again, you will know me.

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<sup>157</sup> Volf, 1996:90

<sup>158</sup> Ford, 1999: 18

<sup>159</sup> Ford, 1997: 3ff

It means that even after I die, you can still see my face  
And hear my voice and speak to me in your heart.<sup>160</sup>

Our perception of others and our relationships with them is compounded by the fact that we are not relating only to the otherness of the other whom we perceive but also to what Ford calls the community of his or her heart. "We constantly come up against the sheer otherness and difference of each other. And we do not just have to do with an individual, but with the community of his or her heart, and all the secrets of those relationships."<sup>161</sup> Of course, not only do we have to do with the community of the other person's heart, the other person also has to contend with our personal community, for, as Ford says, some people are so much a part of our identity that something of their identity is woven into our thinking and feeling<sup>162</sup>. While, as I have said, this compounds the already complex nature of our interaction with the other, our encounter with the other's heart-community can also help us as we get to know the other and as the other gets to know us for, "The people closest to us give a clue to our identity – a mental picture of them stirs memory of the past as well as future hopes and fears."<sup>163</sup> The part someone plays in the life of another can continue (consciously or unconsciously) to exert an influence, either positive or negative, for many years, perhaps for the rest of the other's life, and through that person on the lives of others.

We might say, then, that the emotionally healthy person can cope with both solitude and community, shunning neither and perhaps even needing both. Bonhoeffer expresses this dual need paradoxically when he says, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community...let him who is not in community beware of being alone.... Only in fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in the fellowship."<sup>164</sup>

Central to Volf's *Exclusion And Embrace* are, as the title suggests, the themes of excluding and embracing the other. Although he recognizes that

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<sup>160</sup> [www.jasonmccutcheon.com/PoemsQuotes.com?RID=67](http://www.jasonmccutcheon.com/PoemsQuotes.com?RID=67)

<sup>161</sup> Ford, 1997: 88

<sup>162</sup> Ford, 1997: 2

<sup>163</sup> Ford, 1997: 18

<sup>164</sup> Bonhoeffer, 1976: 57

the embrace metaphor is not appropriate in all cultures – in some it indicates too high a degree of intimacy while in others it is too commonplace – he defines it as, “The will to give ourselves to others and welcome them, to readjust our identities to make space for them.”<sup>165</sup> This theme of giving and receiving resonates with elements of McFadyen’s account where he says, “(A) personal relation is one characterised by the call and response, the gift and return of dialogue”.<sup>166</sup> It is not, however, embrace at any cost. The will to embrace, Volf tells us, is dependent on expressions of truth and actions of justice. Without truth and justice embrace cannot happen<sup>167</sup>. “Without the will to embrace the other there will be no truth *between people* and without truth between people there will be no peace.... Inversely, the will to embrace cannot be sustained and will not result in an actual embrace if truth does not reign.... Telling what one believes to be true is a way of being loyal to a relationship; telling what one believes not to be true is a way of defecting from a relationship.... We speak truth because community matters to us and we sustain community that matters to us by speaking truth.”<sup>168</sup>

Volf describes in detail what he means by embrace and it will be helpful to summarise it here. In embrace we open our arms, wait, close them and then open them again. Anything less is not embrace<sup>169</sup>. He points out that the metaphor would easily be applied to a handshake where we open our hands, wait for the other then, close and re-open our hands. To open the arms, the first stage of embrace, gives the message, “I do not want to be myself always; be part of the other...suggest the pain of the other’s absence and the joy of the other’s anticipated presence.”<sup>170</sup> It is also a sign that I have created space in myself for the other. The next stage, waiting, respects the integrity of the other who may not want embrace. He gives the example here of women for whom past embrace has turned into rape. An embrace cannot be fulfilled unless the other reciprocates. We cannot force this or it would not

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<sup>165</sup> Volf, 1996: 29

<sup>166</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 18f

<sup>167</sup> Volf, 1996: 29

<sup>168</sup> Volf, 1996: 258ff (original emphasis)

<sup>169</sup> Volf, 1996: 14

<sup>170</sup> Volf, 1996: 41

be embrace. Embrace does not coerce or exploit the other, it offers and invites; it does not grasp the other but reaches out to the other.

The goal of embrace is to close the arms, giving a situation where each is the host and each the guest. Even in this action, however, it is important that each maintains his or her own boundaries. We need to respect the particularity of ourselves and of others<sup>171</sup>. To act otherwise embrace becomes what Volf calls a, "self-destructive act of abnegation"<sup>172</sup>.

Finally the arms are opened again. If this does not happen the embrace is cancelled because the other is being coerced and exploited. "In an embrace the identity and alterity of the self is both preserved and transformed and the alterity of the other is both affirmed as alterity and partly received into the ever changing identity of the self.... The other must be let go that her alterity – her genuine dynamic identity - may be preserved; and the self must take itself back into itself so that its own identity, enriched by the traces that the presence of the other has left may be preserved."<sup>173</sup> "Sin's more immediate goal is...to violently reconfigure the pattern of its interdependence, to 'put asunder what God has joined and join what God has put asunder.'<sup>174</sup> This Volf calls exclusion, his other core theme.

Exclusion cuts us off from others, assuming a position of 'sovereign independence' in which the other emerges as at best, the enemy and at worst a nonentity. It is important to recognise that exclusion differs from having legitimate boundaries. "For without boundaries there would be no discrete identities and without discrete identities there could be no relation to the other."<sup>175</sup> I will return to the theme of boundaries toward the end of this chapter and will look here at what Volf says about exclusion.

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<sup>171</sup> Hart, 1999a: 37

<sup>172</sup> Volf, 1996: 143

<sup>173</sup> Volf, 1996: 143ff

<sup>174</sup> Cornelius Platinga cited in Volf, 1996: 66

<sup>175</sup> Volf, 1996: 67

Volf looks at the life and ministry of Jesus and his followers with social outcasts. From this he concludes that, "The real sinner is not the outcast but the one who casts the other out."<sup>176</sup> He goes on to define sin as, "The exclusion of the other from one's heart and one's world" – in other words, to refuse to embrace the otherness in others<sup>177</sup>. A problem arises when the other is not what I wish the other to be (this can take many forms – for example, the other may be too aggressive for my liking, or may be more talented than I am) and I try to force the other to be less like other and more like me, so that in relation I can be what I want to be<sup>178</sup>. Those who continually experience the exclusion by others of their unique otherness may eventually exclude, "their *own* self from the will to be oneself."<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, to exclude the other is to exclude God<sup>180</sup> for, as Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."<sup>181</sup> The way we treat others reflects the way we treat God in whose image humankind is made. Buber makes a similar point when he observes that we cannot have an I-You relationship with God and I-It with everyone else. If we use people only for our own ends we will treat God the same way<sup>182</sup>. A similar point is made by Moltmann who notes that to do violence or turn away from one made in God's image is to do violence or turn away from God<sup>183</sup>. "God," he says, "has a relationship to every embryo, every severely handicapped person and every person suffering from one of the diseases of old age, and he is honoured and glorified in them when their dignity is respected."<sup>184</sup>

In a discussion of what it means for us to relate to that which is other than ourselves, Moltmann cautions against excluding others by rejecting their otherness for to do so limits not only the other but also the self. To know only

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<sup>176</sup> Volf in Gundry-Volf & Volf, 1997: 49

<sup>177</sup> Volf in Gundry-Volf & Volf, 1997: 49

<sup>178</sup> Volf, 1996: 91

<sup>179</sup> Volf in Gundry-Volf & Volf, 1997: 54f (original emphasis)

<sup>180</sup> Volf in Gundry-Volf & Volf, 1997: 29

<sup>181</sup> Matthew 25:40,45

<sup>182</sup> Buber, 1970: 156

<sup>183</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 20

<sup>184</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 84

that which is like self is to know only self. To know only 'like' is to know nothing we did not already know. "The fascination of knowing is missing. The interest in knowing is paralysed."<sup>185</sup> He tells us that we have to come close to others and form relationships with them if we are to know them and have them come close to us and form relationships with us. To treat the other as a reflection of the self and not as other, he says, undermines both knowledge and community<sup>186</sup>. Macquarrie, however, indicates that this kind of reaching beyond the bounds of self and into the realm of the other described here by Moltmann can be so frightening and threatening to some persons that they fail to manage it<sup>187</sup>.

Moltmann makes the suggestion that "other is only known by other" and that "the acceptance of others creates community in diversity."<sup>188</sup> The epistemological statement, 'like is only known by like', he tells us, indicates that unlike (other) is finally unknowable – cognition equals recognition. Early Greek philosophy extended 'like is only known by like' to include 'similar'. So, in perceiving the different, we perceive within the 'different' that which is 'same' or 'similar', that is, that which corresponds in some measure to self<sup>189</sup>. Moltmann states, "We respect and recognise other people and those who are strange to us when we stop trying to make them like ourselves but attempt to open ourselves for their particular character."<sup>190</sup>

In this section we have seen that other people are so much a part of who we are that their identity is interwoven with ours. Thus, the other who is part of me continues to exert influence on me and is present in my interactions with others even when absent. Even when the other dies the fact of our relationship and its influence does not cease. We looked at embracing/including the other and said that even in embrace the particularity of the self and of the other is not denied. We also looked at

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<sup>185</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 136

<sup>186</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 135

<sup>187</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 43

<sup>188</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 136

<sup>189</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 137

<sup>190</sup> Moltmann, 1999:19



excluding/rejecting. To accept or reject the other, we said, is to accept or reject God.

In our relations with others, our perception of sameness and difference often begins with our perception of the physical – skin colour and ethnic group, maleness and femaleness, youth and age. “Human beings are particularised and identified by their bodies because they are the chief means by which to distinguish one person from another.”<sup>191</sup>

### **1.2.ix Embodiment and Name**

Embodiment gives identity a concrete recognisability - and concrete evidence of continuity. Although the body is arguably, as McFadyen describes it, the, “First and best tool in the identification of persons,” identity, as we are considering, is a great deal more than the body<sup>192</sup>. Other sources of recognition – secondary sources - are habits in speech and behaviour, and artefacts such as birth or marriage certificates<sup>193</sup>.

Paul Fiddes also acknowledges that, although inseparable from it, the person is more than the body and the body’s experiences. “We can think of the person as being more than the body, and even more than a collection of mental and physical events, and yet still being *inseparable* from the body...the ‘I’ is a distinct self with thoughts, feelings and actions which is not reducible to the body.”<sup>194</sup> The same activities are mentioned by Thomas Reid who, in describing the self, as we have seen says, “I am not thought. I am not action. I am not feeling; I am *something* that thinks, and acts, and suffers.”<sup>195</sup>

In addition to the body being the primary tool in identification it can also give information about how we relate to others, for example ‘laughter lines’ gives

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<sup>191</sup> Gunton, 1993: 45

<sup>192</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 77

<sup>193</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 76

<sup>194</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 90 (emphasis added)

<sup>195</sup> Cited in Shoemaker, 1963: 45 (emphasis added)

an indication of good humour. In certain situations we can use our bodies to convey social meanings such as sexual interest, or being in need of assistance, or boredom<sup>196</sup>. While there is a great deal more to the 'self' than the body, it is almost impossible for us to imagine a non-bodily existence of ourselves. To say, for example, 'I am over six feet tall' is a shorthand way of saying 'my body is over 6 feet tall'<sup>197</sup>. Daniel Price makes the same point that we do not say 'my body has a toothache' but rather, 'I have toothache'<sup>198</sup>. Likewise reference to a person other than ourselves often includes reference in some way to the person's body – 'the tall man', 'the blond girl' – or we point to them, or use a name, which conjures up a physical image for the listener<sup>199</sup>. Identity, then, is inseparable from, but more than embodied continuity.

In considering the question of personal continuity, Paul Fiddes (2000), Derek Parfit (1989) and John Hick (1979) all show an interest in the *Star Trek* style 'body transporter' device which apparently dissolves the body into its component atoms and reassembles them elsewhere having transmitted the necessary information, if not the component atoms, by radio wave to the new location. 'Travellers' lose consciousness and wake up in their new body in the new location. This raises the question – is the replicated person the same person as the original?<sup>200</sup> According to Hick, if the replica has exact body similarity and the same memories, and be the only one of that person in existence then it is the same person<sup>201</sup>. Fiddes qualifies what Hick says by adding that identical body must include identical brain state, and memory must include the consciousness of being the same person with the same beliefs, habits and so on<sup>202</sup>.

Parfit considers that in teletransportation the person is destroyed and is recreated elsewhere, complete with all her or his memories, preferences, and

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<sup>196</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 88

<sup>197</sup> Shoemaker, 1963: 18

<sup>198</sup> Price, 2002: 276

<sup>199</sup> Shoemaker, 1963: 15f

<sup>200</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 76

<sup>201</sup> Hick, 1979: 280ff

<sup>202</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 77

such like. The 'replica', as he calls it, is qualitatively but not numerically identical with the original self<sup>203</sup>. If then, a replica of the self lives on through replication although the self is destroyed, Parfit questions why he would be reluctant to enter the scanner. "My reluctance to enter the scanner and travel by teletransportation," he suggests, "would thus show that I have an unhealthy preoccupation with my own ego from which I need to be released. It also shows that I think there is some kind of 'deep fact' about 'me' that the device will fail to reproduce."<sup>204</sup> For Fiddes, "Parfit's reflections are highly valuable for our concern about future hope.... It...highlight(s) the inadequacy of a mere 'replica' idea, and urges us towards a view of re-creation that is more than reproduction."<sup>205</sup>

This hints at the line of thought that says for post mortem identity to have continuity with mortal identity, the resurrection body has to be made up of the same atoms as the old body, brought back together and re-energised<sup>206</sup>. Augustine seems to have anticipated the logical arguments against this, which says the body destroyed by fire or devoured by animals or cannibals cannot be reconstructed because it no longer exists and counters it by appeal to the omnipotence and providence of God. "For the earthly matter of which mortals' flesh is created is never lost to God: but into whatever dust or ashes it be dissolved; into whatever vapours or mists it flee away, or whatever substance of other bodies it be converted, or even into the very elements, into whatsoever animal's or men's food it be reduced, so as to be changed into their flesh, it returns in a moment of time to that human soul which in the first place made it animate."<sup>207</sup> Fiddes notes that for "The power of divine omnipotence to reconstitute the same matter cannot be defeated even by a person's being eaten by fishes or cannibals."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Parfit, 1984: 199f

<sup>204</sup> Cited in Fiddes, 2000: 83

<sup>205</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 83f

<sup>206</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 79

<sup>207</sup> Augustine, cited in Fiddes, 2000: 79f

<sup>208</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 80

Parfit asks, "Why we would want to have a centred unitary subject at the heart of personal identity."<sup>209</sup> Fiddes follows this by asking why he would want his resurrected 'me' to be exactly the same as what he calls 'me', and states, "Unless there is continuity of identity doubt is cast on the value of our present existence with its trials and decisions...and the faithfulness of God is not clear if divine promises are to be fulfilled to a different person from the one to whom they were made."<sup>210</sup> In answer to Parfit's question, Fiddes writes, "We hope for a preserving of personal uniqueness not because our egos are so important that they must remain; rather it would be a denial of the love of others who have made us what we are, if the result of their love were to be absorbed into a cosmic whole."<sup>211</sup>

Something of the importance to the self of preserving personal uniqueness in the face of change is seen in the experience of one-time *Superman* actor, Christopher Reeve who broke his neck in a horse riding accident, leaving him quadriplegic. He states in his autobiography that he was in despair and feeling that death was the only solution to his situation. Reeve believes his life was saved because his will to live was restored by these simple words spoken by his wife, "You're still you. And I love you."<sup>212</sup> This shows both the importance of a sense of continuity even in the face of radical bodily changes (also reflected in the book's title, *Still Me*) and how continuity of the self is in part constituted and sustained by certain relationships.

"It is not the sameness of my body," says Ricoeur, "that constitutes its selfhood but its belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body this is."<sup>213</sup>

Significant as the whole body is for concrete recognisability and evidence of continuity, Ford points out, the face is perhaps the primary locus for relating

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<sup>209</sup> Cited in Fiddes, 2000: 84

<sup>210</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 84

<sup>211</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 108

<sup>212</sup> Reeve, 1999: 28

<sup>213</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 129

because all five senses are located on the face<sup>214</sup>, and Macquarrie reminds us of the rather obvious but important point that we are aware of the faces of others before we ever see our own, and even then we never see our own faces directly<sup>215</sup>. The face is our means and mode of orientation towards the other. The self is revealed to the other and the other to the self face to face. "The way in which the other presents himself...we here name face."<sup>216</sup> That the self of the other is somehow disclosed in his face is suggested by Levinas through his use of the word 'epiphany'. He writes, "The other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us."<sup>217</sup>

In many places in the Old and New Testaments God is known in the 'face of God'. God's face in Scripture represents Godself<sup>218</sup>. Clearly when the Scriptures speak of God's face being turned toward or away from people, or people seeking God's face, it is Godself that is being turned toward or away from people and Godself whom people are seeking. So too in our personal encounters with others the face is the physical aspect that is turned toward the other. This point is emphasised by Levinas' insistence that in the face we find, "a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses...the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed."<sup>219</sup>

Levinas seems to suggest that it is the face more than anything else that encapsulates and presents to others the true being of a person. "To seek truth I have already established a relationship with a face which can guarantee itself, whose epiphany itself is somehow a word of honour.... The

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<sup>214</sup> Ford, 1997: 19

<sup>215</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 85

<sup>216</sup> Levinas, 1969:50

<sup>217</sup> Levinas, 1969: 194

<sup>218</sup> For example, "The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you." (Numbers 6:25), "On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them.... And I will certainly hide my face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods." (Deuteronomy 31:17f), "Look to the Lord and seek his strength, seek his face always." (1 Chronicles 16:11), "My heart says of you, 'seek his face!' Your face Lord I will seek. Do not hide your face from me." (Psalm 27:8f), "The face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Peter 3:12).

<sup>219</sup> Levinas, 1969: 66f

face in which the other – the absolutely other – presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion of authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural.”<sup>220</sup>

It is surely because a person’s face is what physically identifies her and distinguishes her from the next person more than anything else that the recent concern expressed over the possibility of face transplants is justified. Peter Butler, consultant plastic surgeon, has researched the possibility of using face transplants from people who have just died for patients whose faces have been seriously disfigured as a result of injury or disease, in much the same way as healthy organs from people who die are used to replace diseased organs. In a survey of people’s attitudes, including doctors, nurses and lay people, Butler found that while most people would be willing to accept a face transplant if they required it, few would be willing to give consent to their faces being used<sup>221</sup>.

Often when painting a self-portrait, the artist will represent himself or herself by painting his or her face. Appendix 1 shows a series of self-portraits by William Utermohlen, a professional artist who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease at the age of 61 years. From prior to his diagnosis he painted self-portraits at regular intervals. Each was a self-motivated attempt at self-portrait and not a copy of earlier paintings. The first was painted at age 60 and is a good representation, bearing a strong facial resemblance to the artist. By the time the second was painted at the age of 62, Utermohlen appears to have had difficulty representing features. The third, at age 63, shows a skewed sense of proportion (see, for example, his ear). This is the first portrait in which there is no context or background filled in. In the fourth, painted when the artist was 64, the features are blurred together and disjointed. By the time the fifth portrait was done, when he was 65, Utermohlen had resorted to using a pencil and his drawing was more

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<sup>220</sup> Levinas, 1969: 202f

<sup>221</sup> [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2516281.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2516281.stm)

abstract and primitive. His other work at this time apparently was also abstract<sup>222</sup>.

It is unlikely that Utermohlen would have been able to express verbally his sense of his disappearing self but he showed his feelings graphically through his art as his representations of himself moved from being a good physical likeness, through blurring and disproportion and finally to unrecognisable abstract. His artistic impressions of himself are a good illustration of the increasingly blurred and confused sense of self he is likely to have been experiencing over the years as his illness progressed. As we will consider in chapter 2, when, due to illness or injury, a person's sense of self is blurred or confused, as represented in Utermohlen's art, the identity of the person is not lost, even although it is lost to him or herself. It is sustained through the memory of those who care about him or her.

"The identity of a person's whole life history," says Moltmann, "is indicated by his or her name. Through my name I identify with the person I was in the past, and anticipate myself as the person I will be in the future."<sup>223</sup> Faced with the question, 'who are you?' the first answer most people would give is their name. Name identifies us, or as Bauckham puts it, "A name symbolises identity."<sup>224</sup> When those who know who we are hear our name or see it written, they know it refers to us, but if we started using a different name people would not know. If, for example, I stopped using the name I have used all my life and started using my maternal grandmother's name – a name which bears no resemblance to mine<sup>225</sup> – people would not know who I was unless of course they could see or hear me. It is not uncommon for offenders to give police a false name in the hope of escaping prosecution. When detected, however, instead of escaping prosecution they find themselves convicted of an additional offence – 'attempting to pervert the course of justice'. Sometimes people deliberately give themselves a new

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<sup>222</sup> Crutch, Isaacs & Rossor, 2001: 2130f

<sup>223</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 87

<sup>224</sup> Bauckham, 2002: 40

<sup>225</sup> My name is M Jane McArthur, my grandmother's was Norah Morrison, neé MacLennan.

identity by formally and legally changing their names. While in the Balkans in the years following the Balkan crisis, I met people who had changed their names in an attempt to alter their preferred national identity to fit the country in which they lived. For example, Dragan lived in Croatia but had a Serb name. He changed his name to Ivan, a popular Croat name.

Primo Levi felt that if only he and his fellow-prisoners could hold onto their names while in concentration camp they would be holding onto their identities. He writes, "Nothing belongs to us anymore.... They have even taken away our name: and if we want to keep it we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage somehow so that behind the name something of us, of us as we were, still remains."<sup>226</sup>

The idea that name symbolises identity is not new. When we read in the book of Genesis Jacob asking, "Please tell me your name," (Genesis 32:29) he was asking God to reveal his identity. God responds to Jacob's request by blessing him. In blessing Jacob, God reveals his identity, thus answering Jacob's question.

With name symbolising identity, biblical statements about God giving us a new name (for example, Isaiah 62:2, Revelation 2:17) might be thought to be problematic, suggesting that in the New Creation our 'newness' will be numerical rather than qualitative. This, though, misses the point of what it means to be given a new name in Scripture. Rather than losing what we are, to be given a new name is to be given something more. When Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah they did not cease to be themselves, nor did Simon when he became Peter or Saul when he became Paul. Women who marry usually change their surnames to their husband's name. I suggest that this change of name signifies a taking on of something new rather than lost identity. The person's single status is lost, but not her identity unless her identity has been defined too closely in terms of the role played as a single person, in which case the change in circumstances could be

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<sup>226</sup> Levi, 1987:33



threatening to her identity. So too when God bestows a new name it does not symbolise a loss of identity, but a taking on of something new, thus adding a new dimension to existing identity.

While not denying that name symbolises identity, Neil Anderson stresses that name is not identity. Name, he says, is name. It is not our identity any more than nationality, profession, denominational preference or height and weight, though our identity can be shaped by any or all of these factors. We are not our name and we are not the sum of our preferences, interests and activities. We make the choices we do because of who we are and not the other way round. Anderson emphasises this point by asking, "Is who you are determined by what you do, or is what you do determined by who you are?"<sup>227</sup> Hauerwas makes a similar point when he says that 'I' is not determined by what we do or do not do but that 'I' must somehow stand behind what we do<sup>228</sup>.

This section has considered that although we are clearly more than body, embodiment gives concrete recognisability and concrete evidence of continuity. We have seen that the primary bodily locus of relating is the face. Ford notes that we cannot separate face and self but neither can we identify face with self. Just as we are more than body so, says Ford, we are more than face<sup>229</sup>. For Levinas, as we saw, the face is both the expression of the self and the self who is expressed. We considered too that in Scripture reference to the face of God is reference to Godself.

We also considered that, while we are more than a name, our name identifies us. Using biblical characters and married women as examples we saw how a change of name does not detract from the self but can alter our identity in a positive way by adding something to it. Having considered the relational aspect of the self we will now consider the temporal aspect.

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<sup>227</sup> Anderson, 2000: 23f

<sup>228</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 41

<sup>229</sup> Ford, 1999: 19

### **1.3 Time and the conception of the self**

#### **1.3.i Understanding Time: Understanding Self**

John Macquarrie states, "Perhaps the first thing to be said about a self is that it needs time. It is through and through temporal...it is essential to a self to exist over a stretch of time.... A material thing too exists in time.... But the peculiarity of a human self is that it lives in awareness of time."<sup>230</sup> It is, then to time that I turn in this next section.

Augustine says of time that he knows what it is until someone asks him. "For what is time?" he asks. "Who could find any quick or easy answer to that? Who could even grasp it in his thought clearly enough to put the matter into words? Yet is there anything to which we refer in conversation with more familiarity, any matter of more common experience, than time? And we know perfectly well what we mean when we speak of it, and understand just as well when we hear someone else refer to it. What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know."<sup>231</sup> Whether or not we embrace Augustinian theology we cannot but agree with him in this. Time, the passage of time, memory of time past, anticipation of future time are experiences we all share whether consciously or not and yet trying to explain what time is leaves most of us frustrated at the inadequacy of language.

Time not only makes sense of self as we remember what has been and anticipate what will be, it also enables us to make sense of the words someone utters or the notes played by a musician. Because we remember what has just been said and anticipate that more is to come we can make sense of the 'but' or the 'and' or the 'however' in the middle of a sentence. Without memory and anticipation when listening to a piece of music, a single note or chord would be no more than that but memory of what has been and anticipation of what will be give that note meaning and context. Thinking of time past, present and future, and the crucial role of memory and anticipation, musician George Rochberg writes, "We live between memory

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<sup>230</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 42f

<sup>231</sup> Augustine, 1997: 14, 17

and anticipation.... We live in time and through time. We are both of it and immersed in it. The present therefore is more than the moment of physical existence in which we feel pain or joy.... The present is destined to join the vast accumulation of all other lived moments of life...everything consciously or unconsciously becomes a part of memory."<sup>232</sup>

In suggesting that any conception of self is determined by an understanding of time, Paul Brockelman essentially makes the same point as Macquarrie. He suggests further that a phenomenological understanding of how we experience time helps us to understand the self because life is shaped and ordered by time. Brockelman insists that a phenomenological analysis of time would help our understanding of the nature of 'self' because time, he says, is a fundamental and all-inclusive concept. "Our lives as a whole, as well as our activities, are bounded and shaped by time in a remarkably continuous and pervasive manner." He adds that the world in which we live and our experience of ourselves is formed and ordered by time<sup>233</sup>. Time, Brockelman continues, changes everything<sup>234</sup>. Of course it is not time but processes taking place over time that cause changes. A child does not grow and develop simply because time passes but because over the course of passing time he or she is nourished and nurtured, kept safe and stimulated, played with and taught. In saying that life is shaped and ordered by time and that time changes everything, Brockelman is saying we each have a history which gives shape and continuity to our identity and which makes the self comprehensible. He goes on to say that it is not only past and present time but also our hopes for the future that make us what we are. "To know 'me' it is not enough to know my past and present. You must also know my hopes and dreams, who 'I' want to become."<sup>235</sup> In other words, he says, to know me the other needs to know what I have been, what I am and what I hope to be<sup>236</sup>. He later states, "There is no existing or personal identity which does not have its own history and anticipated future as part of itself. Remembering

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<sup>232</sup> Cited in Harrison, 2001 (www)

<sup>233</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 10

<sup>234</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 10f.

<sup>235</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 63

<sup>236</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 64

my history and anticipating a future I am seeking to appropriate are essentially elements of me.... I am who I am because of who I have been in the past and who I shall be in the future...'I' am a story in the process of happening."<sup>237</sup> It is not surprising then, that David Hume, who had a fragmented view of time, seeing no link between one moment and the next, found the 'self' to be elusive.

In this brief section we have seen that because the self exists over time, an understanding of time can assist in understanding the self. Memory of past time, experience of present time and anticipation of future time are all important as we seek to make sense of the self over time.

### **1.3.ii Narrative Identity**

The temporal dimension that we are considering is central to the thinking of Paul Ricoeur with regard to personal identity<sup>238</sup>. He makes the observation that without the temporal dimension we cannot speak of personal identity,<sup>239</sup> and from this observation seeks to develop a theory of narrative as it applies to the self. This, he calls 'narrative identity'. Human lives, he tells us, are understood through stories that interpret events. "(D)o we not consider human lives to be more readable when they have been interpreted in terms of the stories that people tell about them?"<sup>240</sup> We can understand the self, whether our own or another's, by telling the self's story through the filter of interpretation. Or, to put it another way, "Narrative identity means reading and rewriting one's life story in the context of a web of narratives. Identity then is based on the narrative, or more precisely, on a variety of narratives that are part of a vast laboratory for thought experiments."<sup>241</sup>

Even this is not straightforward, however, for the temporal dimension which facilitates understanding of the self by giving it a history can also distort

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<sup>237</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 74

<sup>238</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 113ff

<sup>239</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 114

<sup>240</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 114n.

<sup>241</sup> Streils, 1999 (www)

understanding and introduce doubt. With the passage of time we become less certain both about what Ricoeur calls numerical identity and what he calls the qualitative identity of something. For example, it becomes less certain whether the pen I am using today is the same pen (numerical identity) or a pen the same as (qualitative identity) the pen I used last week. Is it one and the same pen or is it two separate pens that look the same? If the pen has been continuously in my hand all week I can be confident that it is the same pen, but if I left it down and returned to it later it may be the same one or it may simply be one that looks that same. Similarly, we can know that two men are wearing two similar suits if they enter the room together but if one leaves the room before the other enters it is less certain whether they are wearing one and the same suit (numerical identity) or suits which look the same (qualitative identity).

Drawing attention to the two major different uses of the concept of identity, Ricoeur distinguishes between identity as selfhood (numerical identity) to which he applies the Latin term *ipse*, and identity as sameness (qualitative identity) to which he refers by the Latin word *idem*. As in the illustrations of numerical and qualitative identity using pens and suits *ipse* and *idem* are different. Selfhood is not identical to sameness<sup>242</sup>. While selfhood and sameness are not identical, they do overlap but, "This overlapping does not abolish the difference...my character is me, myself, *ipse*; but this *ipse* announces itself in *idem*.... Here the two poles of identity accord with one another...one cannot think of the *idem* of the person without considering the *ipse*."<sup>243</sup> Referring to selfhood, *ipse* answers the question 'who?'; 'Who is self?' 'Who am I?' 'Who are you?' *Idem*, on the other hand relating to sameness, answers the questions 'what?' and 'why?' 'What remains the same as before?' 'Why is my hair not the same colour as it once was?'<sup>244</sup>.

It is the element of doubt, introduced with the passage of time, which makes it more difficult for victims or witnesses of crime to confidently identify the

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<sup>242</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 116

<sup>243</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 121

<sup>244</sup>Ford, 1999: 87

perpetrator. This is less likely to be a problem if identification takes place soon after the event. The lack of certainty is partly due to the problem of memory and partly because personal appearance can alter over time. Ricoeur tells us that, "Doubt is not far away when we compare present perception with a recent memory."<sup>245</sup> How much closer that doubt becomes when comparing present perception with a distant memory. Not only does the passage of time distance us from our immediate perception thus introducing an element of doubt regarding identity, it also causes difference and change. Despite this change we know that persons are the same persons over time because of what Ricoeur terms the 'uninterrupted continuity' between the first and last stages of an individual's development<sup>246</sup>. He takes as an example an oak tree being 'the same' as the acorn from which it grew even although the passage of time has brought about an enormous difference between the two.

Parfit uses a similar illustration of a caterpillar which transmutes into a chrysalis then later becomes a butterfly. He notes that continuity of identity over time depends on the "spatio-temporal physical continuity of the object."<sup>247</sup> In other words, there has to be continuity despite change. The life cycle of a caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly is the continuous existence of a single organism even although it may be physically unrecognisable at one stage of its development from the previous stage<sup>248</sup>.

Like the acorn and oak tree or the caterpillar, chrysalis and butterfly we change over time, although perhaps our changes are less dramatic. The majority of our body's cells are renewed several times in the course of our lives, our thoughts, feelings and knowledge all change and yet we are in essence the same persons<sup>249</sup>. This is because of the spatio-temporal physical continuity discussed by Parfit. Despite many changes and differences – whether physical, visible differences or not – each person's

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<sup>245</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 117

<sup>246</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 117

<sup>247</sup> Parfit, 1984: 202

<sup>248</sup> Parfit, 1984: 203

<sup>249</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 13

personal identity is, as we are considering, the same over time. Media stars such as Madonna and Michael Jackson may seek to reinvent themselves and give themselves a new image but their personal identity – their *ipse* – remains the same with the new public image – the new *idem* – incorporated into their personal narrative. To say that a person's identity is the same over time, therefore, is not to say that it is static. Identities, or selves are not static. They grow and develop and later they degenerate and decay, but despite this fluidity and change there is continuity.

Thus we can look at photographs of ourselves from childhood and from adulthood and recognise both as ourselves. As with the acorn which becomes an oak tree, many changes are wrought in our appearance over time. Perhaps we now have grey hair where it was once dark brown or none where there was once a mop of curls, we may gain or lose weight or become stooped. Changes in the 'self' over time are not limited to our physical appearance - our knowledge may have increased through the development of new interests, or decreased as the result of a brain-wasting disease or injury; changed interests and social networks may have given rise to changed priorities and values. So much about what makes us 'us' changes yet we still recognise ourselves, and indeed others, as the same persons, and are recognised by others. The fact that our genetic code which is individually unique, remains the same throughout life, no matter what changes occur, ensures a 'permanence in time'<sup>250</sup>. It proves scientifically what we instinctively know about ourselves and those around us. The identity of the self is not dependent on the body remaining qualitatively the same but on, "Its belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body it is."<sup>251</sup> (Or, as we shall consider in the following chapter, on someone doing so on our behalf if we are unable, due to impaired memory to do it for ourselves.)

In seeking an answer to the following, "Is there a form of permanence in time which can be connected to the question, 'who?'...that is a reply to the

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<sup>250</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 117

<sup>251</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 129

question, 'Who am I?'"<sup>252</sup>, Ricoeur identifies two models of permanence in time in addition to bodily continuity which, because they do not require technical scientific research, are more readily accessible to us than our genetic code. Both relate to what we might think of as our personal integrity. They are character and self-constancy, or keeping one's word. He writes, "The fact of character is what makes us most inclined to think of identity in terms of sameness. Character is the self under the appearance of sameness."<sup>253</sup> Ricoeur further defines character as, "The set of distinctive marks which permit a reidentification of a human individual as being the same"<sup>254</sup>. He suggests that permanence of character, which he says is immutable, gives expression to a considerable overlap between *idem* (what we are or sameness) and *ipse* (who we are or selfhood), whereas keeping one's word indicates a gap between the permanence of self and same<sup>255</sup> - between who we are and what we are. This seems to indicate a considerable tension between an overlap of *ipse* and *idem* on the one hand and a gap between them on the other. Ricoeur, however, suggests that narrative mediates between the two in the constitution of personal identity, thus lessening the tension. He writes, "The polarity I am going to examine suggests an intervention of narrative identity in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance where selfhood frees itself from sameness."<sup>256</sup> In a case study based on Ricoeur's narrative identity, Jeanette Corey-Guernes states, "The conflict between *idem* and *ipse*-identity is resolved, for the most part, with Ricoeur's work of their mutual feature, *permanence in time* as fundamentally characteristic of the *ipse* and only secondarily characteristic of the *idem*."<sup>257</sup> We will return to character in the following section.

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<sup>252</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 118

<sup>253</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 128

<sup>254</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 119

<sup>255</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 118

<sup>256</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 118f.

<sup>257</sup> Corey-Guernes, 2000, www (original emphasis)



Narrative is essential to our sense of personal identity not only because it is a means of communication through which we get to know the other (the another's self) and allow the other to know our self but also because it enables us to know our own self. The linking together of individual events and experiences into a story gives meaning and continuity to the self. "Who I am is tied up with that narrative meaning which lies within my actions and binds them together into a single meaningful plot or personal story.... I am a series of events that are strung together coreferentially into a meaningful narrative whole.... 'I' am an emerging story in the process of happening.... The very notion of self involves memory, decision and anticipation.... Remembering my history and anticipation of a future I am seeking to appropriate are essentially elements of 'me'.... I am who I am because of who I have been in the past and who I shall be in the future.... 'I' am a story in the process of happening."<sup>258</sup>

Anderson and Foley make the point that if family expectations are too overpowering, children are unable to write their own stories and this inability can continue throughout life<sup>259</sup>. This should cause us to ask how, in the absence of their own narrative, they can make sense of their own personal identity. We would not question, however, the existence of their self, only their sense of self. Also thinking about the role of narrative in our sense of the self, Stephen Crites writes, "A man's sense of his own identity seems largely determined by the kind of story he understands himself to have been enacting through the events of his career, the story of his life."<sup>260</sup>

If it is the case that being able to tell our story enables us to make sense of and know ourselves as Crites, Brockelman and Ricoeur, among others, are claiming, then it is a logical assumption that if there are gaps in our knowledge of our own narrative then there will be gaps in our knowledge and understanding of ourselves. For this reason Life Story Book work is an important area of work done with young children who are separated from

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<sup>258</sup> Brockelman, 1985: 72ff

<sup>259</sup> Anderson & Foley, 1998: 62

<sup>260</sup> Cited in Hauerwas, 1977: 78

their birth parents in their formative years and are being placed with alternative permanent families. "Children who are separated from their birth-parents often have little sense of their own past and identity. One way of helping them recover the past and clarify the present is by doing story work with them, recording their lives in words, images, photographs and documents."<sup>261</sup> The Life Story Book, usually in the form of a scrap book or loose-leaf folder, would include basic facts of the child's early history, photographs or drawings (by the child) of significant places and people, and perhaps, where appropriate, documents such as a copy of the child's birth certificate. The life story book would include information on the child's birth parents and family, schools or pre-schools attended, any significant information on the child's health or disabilities, the country and town where the child was born and places he has lived, and any special memories the child himself might have of his early life<sup>262</sup>. The book would not be filled but blank pages left at the end for the child to continue adding to her or his own storybook after moving to the new family. Where appropriate the birth mother is also encouraged to write a letter for her child, which he would be given when he reached an age of understanding. In such a letter, the mother would share with the child simple facts about herself, the child's father, siblings, grandparents and perhaps explain briefly why she felt she had been unable to care for him. Obviously the appropriateness and content of these letters varies enormously but they can be very useful in enabling a child who has been separated from his family of origin at an early age to fill in the blanks in his narrative identity and to give him an enriched sense of his own personal identity. "As a person's identity becomes defined so the kind of story he tells about himself takes on a richness and depth which draws on his cumulative experience of life."<sup>263</sup>

As we shall consider in what follows below, our own personal narrative is indivisibly interwoven with the personal narratives of others. Just as our existence and our story impinge on the life story of others, so their existence

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<sup>261</sup> BAAF, 2002: 18

<sup>262</sup> [www.baaf.org.uk/pages/publish/mylife.htm](http://www.baaf.org.uk/pages/publish/mylife.htm)

<sup>263</sup> Gillett, 1987: 86

and story impinge on ours. David Augsburger writes, "One's individual story is framed in a larger communal story which gives definition to our identities as persons.... Stories give us *vision*.... One's personal story is inadequate told as an individual tale of a solitary life. It is in need of another's story, of others' stories to complete it."<sup>264</sup> In narrative we see the interaction between the temporal and relational aspects of selfhood.

We can see the interaction between our own personal story and the stories of others illustrated when we consider ourselves at an earlier stage (for example in childhood) through the memory of our interactions with others, and from the fact that we generally relate our narrative in relation to others because they are a part of it<sup>265</sup>. The Prodigal Son, for example, rediscovered his true self only when he remembered the other from his past (his father). His memory of interactions with his father, and of his father with family servants reminded him of who and what he had been in relation to others, enabling him to imagine who and what he might yet be.

Due to this interaction of our narratives with the narratives of others, we are, to some degree, both accountable to one another and responsible for one another. "Narrative selfhood," writes MacIntyre, "is correlative: I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account.... I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover this asking for and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives."<sup>266</sup>

Ricoeur is not alone in acknowledging the major role played by narrative in our understanding of the self. Hauerwas notes that our ability to have a character depends on our recognising the narrative nature of our lives. "The fundamental category for ensuring agency, therefore, is not freedom but narrative."<sup>267</sup> He is not saying, however, that narrative dictates how the character is shaped, but is simply drawing attention to the importance of

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<sup>264</sup> Augsburger, 1996: 118ff (original emphasis)

<sup>265</sup> Elliot, 1995: 9

<sup>266</sup> MacIntyre, 1985: 218

<sup>267</sup> Hauerwas, 1984:43

recognising the narrative nature of our lives<sup>268</sup>. For Hauerwas, that we are both physical and spiritual means we have a history and are able to own our past, linking past events into a narrative that makes full sense of the self. It looks backward and forward giving both purpose and direction<sup>269</sup>. Our place in a narrative, he tells us, depends both on people who went before us and people now<sup>270</sup>, for stories generally have more than one character and while we may be the main character in our own narrative we also have 'walk-on parts' in the narratives of others. Each person's story, as we have just seen, is incomplete without the stories of others. Hauerwas suggests that it takes courage to face our narratives truthfully and asks about those whose negative past prevents them from being able to respond to or to tell truthful narratives. He questions whether this means they are prevented from being an agent and unable to be true to their own character. Hauerwas sees the solution to this problem in becoming part of God's story and states that no-one is so crippled by the past that they are unable to respond to God's story and become part of it. He goes on to say that it is only by making God's story our own that we make our life our own and are enabled to accept what has happened to us, and thus to accept ourselves and what goes to make us ourselves. We are enabled to accept ourselves as we are, he suggests, because we accept God's acceptance of us. This, in turn, gives us confidence to trust self and others<sup>271</sup>.

In the last section we have looked at the narrational aspect of personal identity. We saw that we are able to understand lives – our own and other people's – through the stories told about them and as a result saw the importance of providing information for children separated from their birth families at a young age.

In a discussion of Ricoeur's narrative identity we considered the difference between the numerical and qualitative identity of an object. We saw the difference between *idem* (identity as sameness) and *ipse* (identity as

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<sup>268</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 45

<sup>269</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 36

<sup>270</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 45f

<sup>271</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 44, 48

selfhood). We saw too the uninterrupted continuity of the self despite many changes. This uninterrupted continuity of self is ensured, Ricoeur tells us, by two modes of permanence in time – character and keeping one's word.

### **1.3.iii Permanence in Time**

Ricoeur describes character as being an 'absolute involuntary' in the area of decision-making, contrasting it with motives which he describes as a 'relative involuntary'. 'Absolute involuntaries' are these qualities which we do not choose and we cannot change. They are, as the term suggests, both absolute and involuntary. The other two absolute involuntaries Ricoeur identifies are the unconscious and being alive<sup>272</sup>. The nature of these other absolute involuntaries identified by Ricoeur suggests to us that a person's character is the very essence of the person. Character and self cannot be separated any more than being self and being alive or self and the unconscious can be separated. Character, says Ricoeur, is that which permits identification and re-identification of an individual as the same individual over time and is unchanging. He calls it the "lasting disposition by which a person is recognised."<sup>273</sup> That our character is our very essence is also indicated by Hauerwas, for whom character is not just something that shows on the surface and develops out of the choices a person makes, it is what we are. He states simply and unambiguously, "We are our character."<sup>274</sup>

It could be argued that character is less steadfast than Ricoeur and Hauerwas seem to suggest. People are often said to be acting 'out of character' when acting or speaking in unexpected ways. The very fact, however, that such a statement can be made is a clear indicator that an individual's character is generally consistent and, in normal circumstances, can be relied on to prescribe standards of behaviour and speech. That a person acting or speaking in a surprising manner can be said to be acting

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<sup>272</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 119

<sup>273</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 121

<sup>274</sup>Hauerwas, 1984: 39

'out of character', therefore, reinforces rather than weakens Ricoeur's argument about character. 'Out of character' behaviour elicits different responses in observers. We might look for reasons for the behaviour - is the person ill or upset? Has she won the lottery? Has he received bad news? We may dismiss behaviour we consider to be 'out of character' or, on the other hand, we may attach greater significance to it. For example, an angry outburst from someone who is generally placid and even-tempered is likely to be taken more seriously than the same outburst from someone who is known to be volatile.

Ricoeur does not make the claim, however, that character is static. Rather he explains that it develops as we form new habits and adhere to new values. He draws attention to the close linguistic link in Greek between character (ethos) and habit (hthos)<sup>275</sup>. That we acquire new habits shows that character has a history<sup>276</sup> and because character has a history, so too does personal identity. As we have already considered, being permanent does not mean being permanently static.

Ricoeur's other indicator of permanence over time is, as I have said, keeping one's word. It is about being faithful to oneself as well as to others. Ford also comments on the fact that loyalty to one's own word ensures continuity amidst change saying, "Promising is one of the main ways in which a shape of life is maintained through good and bad overwhelms."<sup>277</sup> Ricoeur suggests that for this reason we keep our word even over trivial matters and even when we change our opinion for keeping one's word, he says, challenges time and change<sup>278</sup>. Keeping one's word, says Ricoeur, is an expression of the constancy of the self. It symbolises both faithfulness to a word given and also constancy of relationship<sup>279</sup>. There is a sense in which we are always whatever we have been to someone at some stage and may be called upon to answer for that however we have changed and however

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<sup>275</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 120

<sup>276</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 122

<sup>277</sup>Ford, 1997: 43

<sup>278</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 124

<sup>279</sup>Ricoeur, 1992: 123

our opinions and values have changed in the interim. As Alasdair MacIntyre states, "I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others – and I may at any time be called upon to answer for it – no matter how changed I may be now.... The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the unity of a character."<sup>280</sup> Hannah Arendt makes a similar point, emphasising the importance of keeping promises, and of having promises to keep to the integrity of our identity. "Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities...depend on plurality on the presence of others, for...no-one can feel bound to a promise made only to himself."<sup>281</sup> Elsewhere Arendt says, "The remedy for unpredictability is the faculty to make and keep promises...binding oneself through promises serves to set up in the ocean of future uncertainty islands of security without which even continuity...would ever be possible in the relationship between men.... Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises we would never be able to achieve the amount of identity and continuity which together produce the 'person' about whom a story can be told."<sup>282</sup>

Moltmann also speaks of the relationship between being true to our promises and true to ourselves where he writes, "Through the promises I give, I make myself in all my ambiguity unambiguous for others and for myself. In promising we commit ourselves and become dependable.... In faithfulness to our promise we acquire identity in time, because in being reminded of our promise we are reminded of ourselves.... Those who forget their promises forget themselves; and those who remain true to their promises remain true to themselves...if we break our promises.... We lose our identity and no longer know ourselves."<sup>283</sup> And again, "Through the promise I make, I make myself – equivocal though I am – unequivocal for others and for myself. In promising we commit ourselves.... People who remain true to their promises remain true to themselves too.... If we break them, other people distrust us – and rightly so, for then we lose or deny our identity, and in the end no longer

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<sup>280</sup> MacIntyre, 1985 217

<sup>281</sup> Arendt, 1958: 237

<sup>282</sup> Cited in Holloway, 2002: 34f

<sup>283</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 87

know ourselves."<sup>284</sup> If character is, as Ricoeur says, "The 'what' of the 'who'."<sup>285</sup>, keeping one's word might be said to be the 'who' of the 'what' - faithfulness to oneself and one's word (the who) taking priority over the content of that word (the what).

Defining character, Ricoeur states, "Character, I would say, designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized."<sup>286</sup> Some people undergo such enormous changes in the course of their lives that it can be difficult to see a connection between what they were and what they have become, difficult to recognise the set of lasting dispositions which, for Ricoeur, designate character. This can often be seen in Christian conversion. For example Saul, the Christian-slayer became Paul, the passionate Christian preacher, missionary and theologian who wrote these words, undoubtedly from personal experience as well as from observing others, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"<sup>287</sup>. Paul became completely unrecognisable in terms of his values and behaviour although the single-minded passion with which he pursued his goal is recognisable in both the old Saul in his persecution of the church, and the new Paul with his missionary zeal. Before her conversion to Christianity Irene<sup>288</sup> engaged in a wide range of illegal, immoral and unsociable behaviours. When asked five or six years later if she missed her old lifestyle, she stated that she did not because she is 'no longer the same person'.

For someone to say, 'I have changed' presupposes existence of an 'I' who has changed. If the 'I' was not the same person throughout, if there was not a sense of continuity, the 'I' could not have a concept of discontinuity and could not say, "I have changed". *Idem* (what we are or sameness) may change; *ipse* (who we are or selfhood) remains constant or, to put it another

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<sup>284</sup> Moltmann, 1999: 157

<sup>285</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 122

<sup>286</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 121

<sup>287</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>288</sup> Not her real name.



way, our qualitative identity may undergo changes but not our numerical identity. We always are numerically identical with what we were in the past. The garden which is a blaze of colour in June may be dull and drab in November but no-one would suggest it was a different garden. It has changed drastically but is undoubtedly the same garden. Bauckham writes, "One may want to change oneself and can, to an important extent change oneself. But one cannot exchange oneself for another. Not even Christian conversion is such a change, though it may feel like it."<sup>289</sup>

In this section we saw that, for Ricoeur, character permits the identification and reidentification of a person over time. We considered that character, which he describes as the very essence of a person, is permanent but not static. The other model of permanence in time discussed by Ricoeur is keeping one's word. We considered that there is a sense in which we are always whatever we have been to someone at some stage and may be called upon to answer to it however our opinions may have changed. In these situations faithfulness to oneself and one's word takes priority over the content of the word.

#### **1.3.iv Distorted View of Self**

As we have seen the 'self' grows and develops throughout life and is shaped by many factors such as our own past experiences and future expectations, the relationships we have with others and with God as the ultimate other, the knowledge we have and values we endorse, where, how and with whom we spend our time, and so on. It stands to reason that if the self is formed and reformed through these different influences then negative and destructive experiences, relationships and values will have an adverse affect, resulting in a negative, distorted sense of self. "The quality of intimacy between carer and child in the earliest years" writes Pattison, "is significant in shaping the child's sense of self.... If the carer's gaze is loving and empathic the infant's

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<sup>289</sup> Bauckham, 2002: 40

self-esteem is confirmed and enhanced.... If the mother's face is absent, or is unresponsive and fails to reflect the baby's feelings...then the child's sense of self will not be enhanced and may be damaged. This may prevent it from gaining a proper sense of self."<sup>290</sup> (In the case of a blind infant the responses between carer and child would be tactile or aural<sup>291</sup>.)

Of course, the potential for a person's sense of the self to be damaged exists throughout life and not only in infancy. The way we are treated by others can be destructive. This is perhaps most graphically and most horrifically seen in the treatment of Jews and other minority groups by the Nazis in the Holocaust. McFadyen writes, "The deliberate destruction of the human spirit prior to the destruction of their bodies and completed in the industrial use of some Jewish remains was a practical expression of the ideological denial of Jews' humanity which, in the end, Nazis required Jews themselves to experience."<sup>292</sup>

Writing as one who experienced this destruction at first hand, Primo Levi describes his arrival in concentration camp then writes, "Our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man."<sup>293</sup> He invites us to, "Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves and at the same time of...everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself."<sup>294</sup> In the following poem, *Shemà*, Levi appeals to those of us who have not been stripped of possessions, comforts and dignity to consider the plight, and indeed the status, of those who have. The last verse is a plea not to forget the horrors of the holocaust. It is an urgent plea with serious consequences threatened for failing to remember. It echoes loudly the words of the *Shemà*, from which the poem takes its title, words familiar to all Jews, from the words of God's command to his people not to

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<sup>290</sup> Pattison, 2000: 98

<sup>291</sup> Pattison, 2000: 99

<sup>292</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 103

<sup>293</sup> Levi, 1987: 32

<sup>294</sup> Cited in McFadyen, 2000: 103

forget his deliverance of them from Egypt, as found in Deuteronomy chapter 6.

**Shema**

You who live secure  
In your warm houses,  
Who return at evening to find  
Hot food and friendly faces

Consider whether this is a man,  
Who labours in the mud  
Who knows no peace  
Who fights for a crust of bread  
Who dies at a yes or a no.  
Consider whether this is a woman,  
Without hair or name  
With no more strength to remember  
Eyes empty and womb cold  
As a frog in winter

Consider that this has been:  
I commend these words to you.  
Engrave them on your hearts  
When you are in your house, when you walk on your way,  
When you go to bed, when you rise.  
Repeat them to your children.  
Or may your house crumble,  
Disease render you powerless,  
Your offspring avert their faces from you.<sup>295</sup>

Another way in which the self can be distorted and damaged is by the absence of appropriate boundaries between persons. Alistair McFadyen expresses concern that some persons, in particular women, lose their identities in their relationships. "Women are those whose sense of self is submerged in relationships to others to the extent that one may speak of a loss, dissipation or diffusion of self and identity: a virtual collapse of self into relationships."<sup>296</sup> This happens when those involved fail to maintain appropriate boundaries between one another. "For without boundaries there would be no discrete identities, and without discrete identities there could be no relation to the other."<sup>297</sup> In his discussion of this Volf writes that in our relationships with others we need a balance between our separateness and

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<sup>295</sup> Levi, 1988: 9

<sup>296</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 136f

<sup>297</sup> Volf, 1996: 67

connectedness or, as he says, between separating and binding<sup>298</sup>. He writes, "The formation and negation of identity always entails the drawing of boundaries, the setting of the self as distinct from the other.... We are who we are not because we are separate from others who are next to us, but because we are *both separate and connected, both distinct and related*; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.... Identity is a result of the distinction from the other *and* the internalisation of the relationship to the other."<sup>299</sup>

Volf borrows the terms 'separating' and 'binding' from Cornelius Plantinga's description of creation. "So God begins to do some creative separating: he separates light from darkness, day from night, land from water, the sea creatures from the land cruiser.... At the same time God binds things together: he binds humans to the rest of creation as stewards and caretakers of it, to himself as bearers of his image, to each other as perfect complements."<sup>300</sup> This separating and binding, Volf notes, results in complex patterns of interdependent relations. To have separation without binding results in self-enclosed and isolated beings<sup>301</sup> while binding without separating would result in the kind of problematic, destructive situation we have been considering. Both are required. "We become truly ourselves when we are truly for others," but this does not mean, as Paul Fiddes indicates, and we have already seen in Volf, "That we do not resist as well as respond to others."<sup>302</sup>

Another factor which commonly distorts self-image is shame. Shame wounds the self and threatens the identity. It is extremely destructive. "As a state of being, shame takes over one's whole identity. To have shame as an identity is to believe that...one is defective as a human being. Once shame

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<sup>298</sup> Volf, 1996: 65

<sup>299</sup> Volf, 1996: 90ff

<sup>300</sup> Cited in Volf, 1996: 66

<sup>301</sup> Volf, 1996: 65

<sup>302</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 106

is transformed into an identity, it becomes toxic and dehumanising.”<sup>303</sup> Shame can be deeply demoralising and dehumanising<sup>304</sup> and not only for a brief interlude but throughout a person’s life. With this in mind Pattison seeks a remedy. “Spoiled, soiled identity must be restored and people must be given face by and within the human community if they are to live full and responsible lives.... In the restoration of face, one might hope that Christianity has a part to play.”<sup>305</sup> He goes on to suggest that Christians should expose the shameful self to God and in so doing, like Augustine find God no longer hidden. This, he argues, allows an end to isolation from God and others<sup>306</sup>. In view of our discussion on relationality, it is interesting to note Pattison’s observation that shame does not occur in isolation. “No one is shamed in social isolation...even if they are on their own when they experience the shame.”<sup>307</sup> The root of shame is found in relationships.

In considering those whose negative pasts prevent them from being able to form their own character, who are pulled in so many different directions that they have difficulty remaining loyal to one ‘self’, Hauerwas also suggests that becoming part of God’s story is a solution. As we have seen, he states that no one is so crippled by the past that they are unable to respond to God’s story and become part of it<sup>308</sup>. Of course, he does not limit being part of God’s story to those at risk of being crippled by their destructive past (or present), but indicates that no one is truly self until she or he is the self God called her or him to be<sup>309</sup>.

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<sup>303</sup> John Bradshaw, cited in Pattison, 2000: 93

<sup>304</sup> Pattison, 2000: 204

<sup>305</sup> Pattison, 2000: 183f

<sup>306</sup> Pattison, 2000: 203

<sup>307</sup> Pattison, 2000: 91

<sup>308</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 44

<sup>309</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 44

T.F. Torrance makes the similar observation that we cannot be truly human unless we know God as that is what we are created for. "Unlike the other creatures of the world, man lives truly as man only in conscious and thankful relation to the grace of God, and in the consciousness of his own creaturehood...for it is only when a man knows himself to be a creature utterly dependent on the grace of God that he is able in his knowledge of God so to live in a thankful fashion corresponding to the motion of grace he reflects in the mirror of his intellectual life in the glory of God.... Of supreme importance here is the interwovenness of the knowledge of self."<sup>310</sup>

In this section we have considered some of the factors that can distort and damage our sense of self, such as the way people treat one another – we thought particularly here of the treatment of concentration camp inmates – the absence of appropriate boundaries, and shame. We looked at how a distorted sense of self can be healed by becoming part of God's story.

Knowledge of self, as we have seen, is not possible without knowledge of the self's narrative. Where there are gaps in our own narrative there are gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the self. To know and understand the self, then, we need to remember what has been in the past.

### **1.3.v The Place of Memory in Personal Identity**

Memory of what has been in the past and anticipation of what will be in the future are, it seems, both crucial elements in the constitution of our sense of the self. Without memory our past is lost to us; our sense of who we are, of who we have become, of how the 'I' has come to be just who the 'I' has become is diminished. Without hope, on the other hand, we lose our vision of what will be and who we will yet become and if we lose our vision, we lose our sense of purpose for, "Where there is no vision the people perish."<sup>311</sup> Life today loses meaning if there is no concept of tomorrow and often people who attempt suicide later acknowledge that they did so because they felt their life

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<sup>310</sup> Torrance, 1965: 101

<sup>311</sup> Proverbs 18:29

was meaningless. Where we have been (memory) and where we are going (hope) together inform our picture of who we are. In the words of John Macquarrie, "Through memory we bring with us our past; through anticipation and the projects of the will, we reach out into our future. This is the basis of that feeling of identity which belongs to a self."<sup>312</sup>

So important does Nietzsche see our past experience in making us what we are that he writes, "Only...through the power of using the past for living and making history out of what has happened, does a person first become a person." And so important does he see our past in shaping our present and our future that he continues, "The glance into the past pushes them into the future...they look backwards only to understand the present by considering the previous process and to learn to desire the future more keenly."<sup>313</sup>

Holloway also acknowledges the importance of remembering what has been as we move towards the future. He says that we should not make the journey into the future without what he calls a 'rear view mirror' but nor should our gaze be fixed in the 'rear view mirror' of the past. "In order to move forward safely," he says, "we have to keep an eye on what is behind."<sup>314</sup> Both memory and hope are discussed in detail in separate chapters. In this section I will look briefly at memory as it relates to the constitution of the self.

Who and what we are - our personal identity - is to a large extent determined by where and when and with whom we grew up and what we have done in the past<sup>315</sup>. Our experiences and our relationships over time all contribute to the selves that we are today. In leaving home the Prodigal Son pulled himself out of the relationships that made him what he was, cutting himself off from where and with whom he grew up and from what he had done in the past. Volf observes that it was only when he remembered the other from his past (his family, and in particular his father) that he was able to rediscover his

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<sup>312</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 43

<sup>313</sup> Nietzsche (www)

<sup>314</sup> Holloway, 1994: 80

<sup>315</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 36

true self and, from this, observes, "There is no coming to oneself without the memory of belonging. The self has been constructed in relation to others, and can come to itself only through relation to others."<sup>316</sup> It was the memory of his significant others that reminded the prodigal who he himself was. It is interesting to note that even after all that had passed he still thought in terms of 'My father'<sup>317</sup>. In the film, *The Wedding*, Shelby Coles, great granddaughter both of a slave-owner and of a slave, tries to sort through her confused thoughts and feelings, and concludes, "In order to understand who you are you have to first understand where you came from."<sup>318</sup> In this way, the Prodigal Son came to an understanding that life for him need not be as it was when he remembered those who were part of his past; he understood who he was by understanding where he came from.

In order to have a sense of continuity of the self over time, in order for our personal narrative to unfold over time, in order for us to understand who and what we are, in order for us not to find ourselves elusive as did Hume, our past has to be available to us today. This happens through memory. "Memory acts in the present to represent the past.... It is memory and its tokens that provide the substantive grounds for claims to corporateness and continuity."<sup>319</sup> Without the corporateness and continuity which memory gives us, without memory making our past available to us, our selves would be only what we experienced them to be at any given moment. Self would, perhaps, be reduced to no more than the perception it was for Hume. That memory has a crucial role in identity is alluded to by many writers. Charles Elliot, for example states, "Memory defines, or helps to define, the self, and thereby constitutes the identity of the believer before God."<sup>320</sup> And Mark Santer, "It is through our memories, through our recollection of the past, and through what others have told us about the past that we identify ourselves as we are."<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Volf, 1996: 157f

<sup>317</sup> Volf, 1996: 158

<sup>318</sup> *The Wedding*, ABC, 1999

<sup>319</sup> Antze & Lambeck, 1996: xxiv f.

<sup>320</sup> Elliot, 2000: 245

<sup>321</sup> Santer, 1988: 128



Considering the role of memory in our sense of identity and the connection between the self today and the self of memory, Sydney Shoemaker makes the observation that since an 'I' statement can only be made by an 'I' who exists at the time of making it then a statement such as, 'I went for a walk yesterday' is both a present and a past statement. By this he means that it concerns a presently existing 'I' (for the statement could not be made if the 'I' had ceased to exist) and a past event done by someone who existed at the time referred to in the statement (yesterday). How do I know that I went for a walk yesterday? I know because I remember. "My memory," says Shoemaker, "can inform me of the existence of a self at  $t_1$  and of its properties and activities at that time, of the existence of a self at  $t_2$  and of its properties and activities at that time, and so on, but it seems that any statement that identifies a present self with a past self...necessarily goes beyond what can be known solely on the basis of memory."<sup>322</sup> He clarifies that in addition to such a statement being based on memory it is also based on what 'I' know about the present 'self'<sup>323</sup>. Shoemaker makes a similar statement elsewhere, "Persons have, in memory, a special access to facts about their own past histories and identities and of other persons and other things.... When a person remembers a past event there is a correspondence between his present cognitive state and some past cognitive and sensory state of his that existed at the time of the remembered event and consisted in his experiencing or otherwise being aware of its occurrence."<sup>324</sup>

I have been considering memory here not so much as constitutive of identity, but as that which links us to our past thus enabling us, and those around us, to form and indeed retain a picture of the self. Memory gives continuity to personal identity. It enables us to make sense of who we are and, as Parfit says, "Memory makes us aware of our own continued existence over time."<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Shoemaker, 1963: 126, 130

<sup>323</sup> Shoemaker, 1963: 136

<sup>324</sup> Shoemaker, 1970: 269, 271

<sup>325</sup> Parfit, 1984: 205

For some thinkers, of whom John Locke is best known, the memory is the self, and that which is not remembered is not a part of the self. "If I cannot remember past thoughts and actions, then they are not part of myself."<sup>326</sup> For Locke, if someone cannot remember something she or he previously said or did then she or he is not the same person as the one who spoke or acted. A similar line of thought can be found in Thomas Reid who gives the oft-cited example of a general who could remember an act of bravery as a young soldier but could not remember stealing apples as a child, an event he could remember when he was a brave young soldier. Even although it defies the logic which says if  $A=B$  and  $B=C$ , then  $A=C$ , Reid argues that the general was the same person as the young soldier but not the same person as the child even although the young soldier, because he could remember the childhood theft, was the same person as the child. Mackenzie suggests that the solution to this problem lies in the 'overlapping recollection' – C remembers being B, B remembers being A therefore C was A even if C does not remember being A<sup>327</sup>. This concept of 'to remember is to be' is strongly reminiscent of Descartes' 'to think is to be' and has, as we have seen very serious ethical and pastoral implications for those whose rational capacity is limited for whatever reason.

Mackie also considers Reid's gallant officer story and suggests that in order to avoid the problem that arises in it we need another criterion or constituent of personal identity rather than Locke's consciousness alone. He notes that memory is fragmentary<sup>328</sup>. He also notes, however, that Locke would not have been blind to the fragmentary and unreliable nature of memory when he made the statement and concludes, "But since with these difficulties fully in sight he repeated the assertion that personal identity extends as far as consciousness, he must have meant this literally: having identified a person at a particular time we are able to take as belonging to that person all and only those past actions and experiences which he could now be brought to recollect, and presumably all and only those future person-occurrences for

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<sup>326</sup> Kenneth Winkler in Ralston, 1999 (www)

<sup>327</sup> Mackenzie, 1983: 169

<sup>328</sup> Mackie, 1976: 179ff

which he feels a concern somewhat like the special, intimate concern that one feels for one's present self."<sup>329</sup>

There is a school of thought within psychology which similarly believes we need a chain of memories linking past-present-future to be the same person<sup>330</sup>. They claim that consciousness has to be present in order to be, not just the same person, but a person at all, thus they would argue that a fetus is not a person. Likewise, when cognitive ability and consciousness are lost as a result of damage or disease they would claim that the victim ceases to be a person<sup>331</sup>. They would go as far as to say that because we have no conscious memory of it we were never fetuses or infants. "No person was ever a fetus and no fetus ever becomes a person."<sup>332</sup> To say that we were never fetuses or infants contradicts both what McFadyen says about the potential long-term influence of in-utero experiences and what Macmurray says about the foundations of personal identity being laid in infancy. It also makes a mockery of the somewhat controversial back-to-the-womb counselling mentioned earlier in this chapter.

In this section we saw that memory and anticipation are both essential in making sense of the self. Who and what we are is shaped by where, when and with whom we grew up. Without memory of the 'where', 'when' and 'who' of our pasts it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of the self. In a previous section we considered the importance of narrative. In this section we saw that memory is needed in order for narrative to unfold over time.

Our memory, of course, comprises recollections of both negative, destructive and positive, affirmative relationships, of painful and pleasant experiences as we will consider in depth in the next chapter.

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<sup>329</sup> Mackie, 1976:182

<sup>330</sup> Olson, 1997: 74ff.

<sup>331</sup> Olson, 1997: 24ff.

<sup>332</sup> Olson, 1997: 74

#### **1.4 Summary and Conclusion**

The enigmatic nature of the self has given rise to much pondering on the subject. The introduction to this chapter includes a collection of questions and statements from a variety of theological, philosophical and fictional sources about the nature of the self in order to illustrate this enigma. It also serves to illustrate the wide-ranging interest in the subject; to show, as Zizioulas says that, "Diffused today throughout all forms of social life is the intense search for personal identity."<sup>333</sup> The chapter, as indicated in the introduction, seeks not to be an exhaustive phenomenology of the self but to explore our sense of self.

In the first main section, which deals with relational aspects of the self, we considered that persons are persons only in relation to others and consequently to experience others as objects instead of relating to them as persons dehumanises both self and others. Mistreatment of others, having only 'I-It' relationships with others instead of 'I-You' relationships - is damaging to both self and other. To dehumanise others is to dehumanise the self and to dehumanise the self dehumanises others. The foundations of relating to others are laid in infancy although being in relation continues throughout life. As a result of inter-relating with one another, our identities are related to, but not restricted to, the identities of others. This is a theme to which we return at several points in the chapter.

We considered that the influence of others can continue to shape our identities (positively or negatively) long after a relationship has ended or after the other has died. Clearly not all others have the same degree of influence as not all relationships are of equal significance in our lives. The greater a person's significance in our life the deeper will be the hurt caused by the loss of the relationship or by the other's betrayal.

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<sup>333</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 47

As we also saw, some suggest that we are not persons because we relate to others but that we relate to others because we are persons. This, however, seems to miss that we all are in relation whether or not we are aware of it, to miss that we are born in relation. It misses too the difference between relationships which are deliberately chosen and those which are a given. Harris expresses concern that if personhood is defined relationally, it could come to be seen as being contingent on the quality of our relationships with others. This, in turn, could result in degrees of personhood, determined by the quality of relationships.

God, of course, is the ultimate Other to whom we relate (whether or not this relating is conscious and deliberate) and because redemption transforms our relationship with God, our social relations are also transformed.

Each person of the Trinity is, and is as he is, because the others are, and are as they are. We find a model for our interrelatedness and interdependence in the perichoretic relationships of the Trinity. As in the Trinity, so in relationships between human persons both mutuality and particularity are required. We considered Volf's themes of exclusion and embrace, and noted that even in embrace the particularity of self and other is not denied. We are who we are because we are connected to others and because we are separate from them.

Embodiment gives identity concrete recognisability and concrete evidence of continuity although we are more than our body. The body's primary locus of relating is the face. For Levinas, the face is both the expression of the self and the self who is expressed. Similarly Godself is frequently represented in Scripture as 'the face of God'. The face as an expression of the self is illustrated in the self portraiture of Alzheimer sufferer, William Utermohlen. His artistic impressions of himself became increasingly obscure as his illness progressed and his sense of self became increasingly obscure.

We also considered that while we are more than our name, name identifies us. Name is often used to symbolize a person's identity although, as we also saw, a change in name need not undermine identity.

The other main section of the chapter looks at temporal aspects of the constitution of personal identity. The self, we said, exists over time, therefore an understanding of time helps us make sense of the self.

We looked at Ricoeur's narrative identity and saw that narrative allows us to know other and self because we understand lives through the stories told about them. Our stories do not stand alone but need the stories of others to give them completeness. In his consideration of narrative identity, Ricoeur distinguishes between numerical and qualitative identity; between identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*). Although a person's identity develops over time she or he is in essence the same person – this is ensured by character and keeping one's word which Ricoeur says are both models of permanence in time.

We looked briefly at some of the factors that can distort our sense of self – for example, ill-treatment by others, absence of appropriate boundaries, shame – and said that a distorted sense of self can be healed by becoming part of God's story. This theme will be developed in the chapter on forgiveness.

We said that memory of the past and anticipation of the future (both of which are dealt with in detail in later chapters) are essential to our sense of self. Memory is required for our narrative to unfold over time. To say, however, as Locke does, that our memory is our identity denies identity to those without memory of the past. What others, and God as ultimate other, remember of us is also important to our personal identity. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

The centrality of relationship with others in the constitution of personal identity places on each of us a responsibility for the well-being, not only of our selves, but also of others. To habitually cut the self off from others deprives the self of the enrichment of relationship, causing the self to become something less than God intends. Similarly it deprives others of being enriched through being in relation to us.

As indicated in the introduction, time, relation and memory are not intended to be alternative formulae for the constitution of personal identity. The temporal and relational aspects are, I suggest, mutually dependent on one another. Relationships change with time and develop over time, we lose contact with some 'others' (although we do not lose the contact that has been, it remains ever a part of us) and establish new contacts with different 'others'. The passage of time would be meaningless to personal identity were it not for the existence of others and our relationships with them. Memory gives continuity to personal identity by making our past available to us. "Our sense of where we have come from and who we have been bears powerfully (if often subliminally) upon our sense of who and where we are, and shapes our priorities, our desires, our patterns of behaviour in the here and now; sometimes for better and sometimes worse."<sup>334</sup>

We have seen, then, that relatedness to others (with God as the ultimate other) and our experience of having our existence across time are both constitutive of our self and our sense of self. The next chapter will focus on one aspect of our existence as relational beings situated in time, namely memory. Volf's contention that certain painful memories will be lost or forgotten at the eschaton implies that our temporal, relational self will be eroded in some way. This presents problems if, as I will consider in chapter 4, we believe that personal identity is retained in the eschaton for, as we have seen in this chapter, without the temporal and relational aspects of the self, little remains that could be called self.

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<sup>334</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 2000: 58

## Chapter 2

### Being Through Remembering

"Abruptly the poker of memory stirs the ashes of recollection and uncovers a forgotten ember, still smouldering down there, still hot, still glowing, still red as red."<sup>1</sup>

"God gave us memory that we might have roses in December."<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.1 Introduction

In the introduction I referred to Volf's thesis that some people's experience of suffering in this life is so enormous that the mere memory of having suffered will continue to cause suffering in the New Creation. There is as I said, something attractive about Volf's thesis – part of us wants to believe it, wants it to be true.

Given the place our memories have in the constitution and integrity of personal identity, and in our sense of our own identity, however, I disagree with Volf's thesis and argue that rather than being erased our memories will be transformed. Rather than forgetting our negative, destructive experiences we will 'non-remember' them, or better, we will remember them well. A forgotten trauma or failure may continue to affect a person adversely, limiting her or his present and future functioning. If it is not remembered it cannot be confronted so continues to cause damage. The person may be aware of a sense of dis-ease or dysfunctional relationships, of insecurities or an inability to fulfil potential but be unaware of the cause. On the other hand, a non-remembered incident is one which is not forgotten but can be left alone because it has been dealt with, there is no further reason to call it to mind. Non-remembering is volitional and distinct from memory which has been lost and forgotten. It is there but is not called to mind. There are also those memories which are 'remembered well'. These are the memories of pain and

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<sup>1</sup> Manchester, W, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/q115683.html>

<sup>2</sup> Barrie, JM, <http://www.thinkexist.com/asp/search.asp?page=2&keywordin=memory&author>



trauma that have been redeemed and healed, the conscious awareness of which cause no upset or pain to the one who remembers. Non-remembering and remembering well will be considered below.

Before entering into further discussion with Volf's thesis it will be helpful to look at what memory is, to look at what it is that Volf believes will be miraculously erased at the eschaton and I believe will be miraculously transformed.

## **2.2 What Memory Is**

According to Martin and Deutscher there are three basic different types of memory all of which draw on the past, either past learning or past experience. The three types they identify are memory of events and experiences, memory of information or facts, and memory of how to do something. We remember a fact of history because we learned it and an event because we experienced it. We do not remember historical events we did not experience; we only remember that they occurred.<sup>3</sup> For example, I may remember that the Council of Chalcedon took place in October 451 or that the Scots were defeated by the English at Culloden in 1746 but I do not remember the Council of Chalcedon nor the battle of Culloden. We have to observe or experience something if we can be said to remember it.

Both the memory of how to do something, such as how to make a telephone call or how to ride a bike, and the memory of information (factual memory) concern remembering what has been learned. We remember how to ride a bike because we learned the skill. We remember that hundreds of Scots lay dead and dying on Culloden field following the last battle to be fought on British soil because we learned the historical fact.

The memories which will either continue to cause suffering in God's New Creation or will be transformed, however, are not memories that have been

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<sup>3</sup> Martin & Deutscher, 1966: 161ff

learned. They are, rather, the memories of events we have observed or experienced at first hand. They are the memories of things we have done, of things that have been done to us, of places we have been and people we have encountered. It might be said that they are 'our own memories'. It is for the most part memories from personal experience which are constitutive of personal identity, not the memory of skills or knowledge; although the memory of the experience of acquiring certain skills and knowledge, like any other experience, can be formative. This, of course, is the case particularly when the process of acquiring certain skills and knowledge has been painful or traumatic. We should recognise too that the possession of particular skills and knowledge may also contribute to our sense of who we are. It is the memories from personal experience, which are constitutive of personal identity, not the memory of skills or facts learned.

In an attempt to explain just how we retain what we do in our memories - whether facts, skills or experiences - Howe looks at the way an organised person stores items in such a manner that they can be found easily. He gives the examples of a warehouse manager, or a library cataloguing system, which ensures vast numbers of books can be stored and found. He looks too at computer files which, he says, are stored in a similar organised and logical manner.<sup>4</sup> It is not difficult to see how his parallels could be extended to illustrate what may happen in situations where specific memories evade us. We are all familiar with the frustrating experience of being unable to locate a library book because it was left on the wrong shelf by a previous reader or the perhaps more frustrating experience of being unable to retrieve a file which we know is stored in our computer's memory because we do not know where in the memory it is stored. Howe suggests that this kind of loss of long-term memory is more likely to be a lack of retrieval ability than disappearance<sup>5</sup>. It is somewhat like losing a golf ball during a game of golf - the ball still exists but is hidden - we cannot find it. Or it is like the elusive computer file - easy to locate if we look in the correct folder but otherwise seems to us to have disappeared.

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<sup>4</sup> Howe, 1970: 10

<sup>5</sup> Howe, 1970: 48

Norman Malcolm's taxonomy of the different kinds of memory differs slightly from that of Martin & Deutscher. Malcolm distinguishes between factual memory (memory of things learned), perceptual memory (memory of things perceived) and personal event memory (memory of events we have experienced). He suggests that it is logically possible for people to have factual memory but no perceptual memory. By this he means it is logically possible to remember people and places while unable to visualise them whereas, on the other hand, it is not logically possible the other way round; not logically possible, that is, to have perceptual memory but no factual memory. Otherwise, he claims, we would forget what we were about to do or even forget half way through doing something what we were doing. (This is a common experience of people suffering from dementia.) Reading, writing and speaking would all be senseless activities for we would have forgotten the beginning of a sentence before reaching the end of it. Similarly when listening to a piece of music we would hear only notes, not a tune for we would have forgotten what went before. Factual memory, then, is for Malcolm independent of perceptual memory but perceptual memory presupposes remembered facts. For example, my remembering the fact that there is a coffee table in a room I have visited would not be negated by my inability to visualise it. By contrast the vivid mental image I have of the table (my perception memory) presupposes the fact that the table exists, or at one time existed. There is, of course, always the possibility that such a table has never existed, that my mental image of it is not perception memory at all but is imaginary. This is a theme to which I will return a little later.

Malcolm argues strongly that personal and factual memories are essential to humankind but not so perception memory. "A being without factual memory would have no mental powers to speak of, and he would not really be a man even if he had the human form."<sup>6</sup> And again, "Could creatures who never remembered anything they perceived or experienced have anything like human powers? Surely not. For... they could not have many of the concepts that human beings have, and could not do many of the things that human

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<sup>6</sup> Malcolm, 1963: 212

beings do.”<sup>7</sup> Such statements have massive ethical implications, similar to those raised by Joseph Fletcher’s indicators of personhood, or, as he calls it, ‘humanhood’. Fletcher’s indicators are self-awareness, self-control, a sense of future, a sense of past, the capacity to relate to others, concern for others, communication and curiosity<sup>8</sup>. These indicators of personhood are largely missing in persons in advanced stages of Alzheimer’s disease and other such illnesses and some or all are absent in people suffering from amnesia.

A human being who fails to fit Fletcher’s criteria of being a person, or fails to remember in the manner which is outlined by Malcolm, whether as the result of a birth defect, disease or injury, is at risk of being seen as a ‘human non-person’ which Rae points out can fuel the argument that euthanasia, abortion or infanticide do not actually involve the killing of a ‘person’<sup>9</sup>. Rae draws our attention to the fact that many of the criteria by which Fletcher defines personhood are missing in all of us while we sleep<sup>10</sup>. He makes an important distinction between the mind being unable to recall facts and experiences and the mind being missing altogether by observing the difference between losing the function of a leg and having the leg amputated. The non-functioning leg, he tells us, “may be defective but it is still real.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly the fact that a person’s mind is, for some reason, apparently unable to function and remember does not equate with it being absent, even if there are those, such as Fletcher, for whom it would be anathema and who would question its value.

### **2.3 Memory and Imagination**

Mary Warnock asks why we value memory so highly<sup>12</sup>. The answer relates to our sense of continuity over time, to what Ricoeur would call our narrative identity<sup>13</sup>. It enables us to see our lives as a pattern and to make sense of

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<sup>7</sup> Malcolm, 1963: 221

<sup>8</sup> Rae, 1993: 236

<sup>9</sup> Rae, 1993: 236f

<sup>10</sup> Rae, 1993: 240

<sup>11</sup> Rae, 1993: 242

<sup>12</sup> Warnock, 1987: vii

<sup>13</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 113f

them. This sense of identity is derived from our recollection of events, in recalling 'our own memories', not in the remembering of skills<sup>14</sup>. Such conscious memory – that is, the recalling of events from the past - is a mental activity. It is valued highly because it is a uniquely human activity<sup>15</sup>. Aristotle, however, does not see it as a uniquely human activity but extends it to all animals with a sense of time<sup>16</sup>.

Primo Levi discovered the value of memory when, in concentration camp, he underwent the dehumanising experience of being stripped of everything else which might evoke memory and sense of identity, including his name and his hair. We touched on this in the previous chapter in the section on embodiment and name. Levi writes, "But consider what value, what meaning is enclosed in...the hundred possessions which even the poorest beggar owns: a handkerchief, an old letter, the photo of a cherished person. These things are part of us, almost like limbs of our body; nor is it conceivable that we can be deprived of them in our world, for we immediately find others to substitute the old ones, other objects which are ours in their personification and evocation of our memories."<sup>17</sup> In this way, Levi used memory to make sense of his life in the midst of a situation devoid of sense. Perhaps it is because the high value of memory and its function in our sense of our personal identity were recognised that camps such as Auschwitz were designed as places to destroy both existence and memory of existence.<sup>18</sup>

If survival in concentration camp was to be possible, inmates had to remember life before and life outside the camp – Auschwitz was not the whole memory. "That remembering itself was an act of resistance," writes Banner, "is emphasised by the bureaucratic and brutal techniques which the camp system employed to discourage that remembrance."<sup>19</sup> Those who were unable to remember failed to survive because they became too

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<sup>14</sup> Warnock, 1987: 10

<sup>15</sup> Warnock, 1987: 9

<sup>16</sup> Sorabji, 1972: 48

<sup>17</sup> Levi, 1987:33

<sup>18</sup> Banner, 2000: 27

<sup>19</sup> Banner, 2000: 88

vulnerable in a system which abolished identity<sup>20</sup>. While some remembering was an invaluable antidote to the camp system's attack on identity and integrity, too much remembering had a negative effect. "There was a balance to be attempted between remembering and forgetting which was difficult to achieve but vital for survival."<sup>21</sup> It is not only memory that is vital for survival of those suffering under dehumanising and depersonalising regimes, but also hope. As we will consider in chapter 4, Viktor Frankl describes the devastating effect on concentration camp inmates who gave up hope of freedom, concluding that, "The sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect."<sup>22</sup> Hope will be considered in chapter 4.

It appears from what Malcolm says that it is logically possible to remember things, people, and places as mere facts without picturing them in the mind. But image and other sensory cues clearly play a very significant part in memory. It is almost impossible, if not entirely impossible, to recall a facial expression or a piece of music or the taste of something without recalling a sensory image. Aristotle commented on this saying, "When we remember there is something in us like a picture or impression."<sup>23</sup> For this reason memory, which is an activity of the imagination, and the imaginary can, at times, become confused. Warnock makes the point that both memory and imagination involve thinking of things, people or places in their absence<sup>24</sup>. She says that if we are unable to identify the relation between an image in our mind (memory) and the past event which the image represents then we are unable to distinguish between memory and imagination,<sup>25</sup> but that just because memory and imagination can get confused it does not mean that they are the same thing any more than a tadpole and a newt are the same thing just because someone confuses them<sup>26</sup>. If, as I have said, memory is an activity of the imagination then perhaps it would be more accurate to say

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<sup>20</sup> Banner, 2000: 88

<sup>21</sup> Banner, 2000: 95

<sup>22</sup> Frankl, 1962: 75f

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Warnock, 1987: 13

<sup>24</sup> Warnock, 1987: 12

<sup>25</sup> Warnock, 1987: 16

<sup>26</sup> Warnock, 1987: 35

that it is memory and the imaginary that get confused instead of, as Warnock says, memory and the imagination.

In an attempt to distinguish between memory and imagination (or, more accurately, between memory and imaginary), Hume says that images of memory are sharper than those of imagination<sup>27</sup>. In reality, however, this is not always true to experience. Memory is often blurred and vague while imagined images can be very vivid and sharp. For example, we can have a clear image of a scene from a dream while the image we have of a past experience is vague and sketchy. Also attempting to distinguish between memory and the imaginary Shoemaker writes, "Memory images are characterised or accompanied by an analysable feeling of pastness."<sup>28</sup> But is it not the case that some memory images 'feel' very current, very 'now', while some imaginary images have a feeling of pastness? Loftus and Garry discuss how imaginary images can come to have a feeling of pastness. They consider the effect of suggestion on memory, citing psychology research where eyewitnesses of a crime were given false information by a bystander, such as the colour of the vehicle, which they 'remembered' and reproduced when recounting the incident. They also cite studies of people "remembering" childhood events which did not take place because of suggestion by others or being shown doctored photographs. They conclude, "False memories sprout when a person believes that a made-up event is plausible. They become seedlings when he believes that the event happened. Finally, they take root when he embellishes the belief with the kinds of sensory details that make it feel like a real memory."<sup>29</sup>

It may be that at least to some extent such distinctions between memory and imagination are false for there is significant overlap between the two. David Keck suggests that the distinction is not substantial. "Memory, in some senses of the word may seem to be grounded in the imaginative...faculties of the mind.... Given the interwoven characters of memory and imagination it

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<sup>27</sup> Warnock, 1987: 19

<sup>28</sup> Shoemaker, 1967: 267

<sup>29</sup> Loftus & Garry, 2001: 22

may be that the distinction between memory and imagination is a distinction of connotation more than anything else.”<sup>30</sup> How could we remember in the absence of imagination and how could we imagine in the absence of memory? Returning to our coffee table – how could I imagine one if I had no previous memory of coffee tables from which to create it and how could I remember a specific one if the imagination did not produce an image of it?

Steiner tells us the arts produce nothing new but rather something different using pre-existing materials. “The artist re-counts, he inventories the extant.... Perhaps artistic fantasy only recombines, makes a mosaic of, juxtaposes via montage and collage what is already there.... Has any painter invented a new colour?... Even the most anarchic (the word means ‘un-begun’) of twentieth-century surrealist or non-objective artefacts re-combine, disorder deliberately in space or in time shapes, materials, acoustic elements selected from what is available to our sensory perception. No art form, it can be argued, comes out of nothing. Always, it comes *after*.”<sup>31</sup> So too when the imagination produces what appears to be an original image it could be said to be reproducing something out of the raw materials of previously perceived and remembered images or building on previous knowledge. The seed of the old is contained in the new and the seed of the new is contained in the old. “Remembering is not just a process of passively receiving impressions but of creatively constructing a representation.”<sup>32</sup> This close relationship between memory and imagination is also recognised by Aristotle who writes, “It is apparent, then, to which part of the soul memory belongs, namely the same part as that to which imagination belongs. And it is the objects of the imagination that are remembered in their own right.”<sup>33</sup>

Several philosophers (Locke, Russell, Harold, Furlong, Hume) argue in different ways that we have to believe an event took place if we can be said to remember it, that it is disbelief that distinguishes memory from imagination. Others (for example Benjamin and Saunders) challenge the view that we

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<sup>30</sup> Keck, 1996: 70f

<sup>31</sup> Steiner, 2001: 267 (original emphasis)

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, 1989: 31

<sup>33</sup> Sorabji, 1972:49



have to believe if we can be said to remember, claiming that memory is possible without belief. For example, we have all experienced situations when we have been unsure whether we are remembering something or imagining it - we neither believe nor disbelieve that it took place. Perhaps, then, it is the absence of disbelief rather than the presence of belief that something took place that is necessary<sup>34</sup>. Neither side addresses the problem of misbelief however. We can believe something took place when in reality it did not, so vivid was our imaginary image of the 'event'. Our belief is false. What we believe to be an image from our memory is in fact imaginary, thus it is not enough to say with Locke, Russell, Harold, Furlong, and Hume that it is belief that separates the real from the imaginary.

Martin & Deutscher also consider the possibility of not believing something but remembering it. They give the example of an artist who believes he has painted an original scene but his parents recognise it as a scene from the artist's childhood. He does not believe that he remembers it yet reproduces it in detail<sup>35</sup>. This perhaps illustrates Steiner's belief that art recreates rather than creates. Another similar example might be Helen Keller's childhood experience of writing a story only to discover later its close similarity to an already existing published story which, it was concluded, had been read to her some time earlier but of which she had no conscious memory. She genuinely believed it to be a creation of her own imagination. Writing of that experience she says, "I never suspected that was the child of another mind."<sup>36</sup>

Martin & Deutscher do not, however, consider the scenario of believing something to have taken place but not remembering it. For example, all drivers have had the experience at times when driving a familiar route of finding themselves at a certain point of their journey but with no memory of passing through an earlier place. They believe they did pass through the non-remembered place otherwise they could not have arrived at where they

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<sup>34</sup> Martin & Deutscher, 1963: 167

<sup>35</sup> Martin & Deutscher, 1963: 168

<sup>36</sup> Keller, 1903: 63ff

are now but they do not remember a certain part of the road. Also, we all believe that we were born yet none of us actually remembers the event.

In the rest of this chapter, I will look at various aspects of memory in order to show why I believe that Volf is mistaken when he says that painful memories will be forgotten at the eschaton. The aspects of memory which I will consider are memory and the self, reliability of memory, interpreting the past, forgetting, memory and identity, the place of story-telling, forgiveness and reconciliation, healing the past, and remembering well.

#### **2.4 Memory, Its Loss And The Self**

"We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives 'narrative' and that this narrative *is* us, our identities.... For each of us *is* a biography, a story."<sup>37</sup> For this reason people who, through illness or injury, have no memory often invent stories in order to invent identity<sup>38</sup>. Studies of patients with Korsakov's syndrome, for example, indicate that with the loss of memory goes the loss of a sense of identity, and patients are often observed to flit between personae in an attempt to find one that fits and to enable them to be in touch with the past.<sup>39</sup>

Memory of what has been in the past and anticipation of what will be in the future are both crucial elements in the constitution of the self and in our sense of self, as discussed in the previous chapter. Without memory our past is lost to us; our sense of who we are, of who we have become, of how the 'I' has come to be just who the 'I' has become, is diminished. Without hope, on the other hand, we lose our vision of what will be and who we may yet become and if we lose our vision, we lose our sense of purpose for, "Where there is no vision the people perish."<sup>40</sup> Hope looks for progress from where we are now. Where we have been (memory) and where we are going

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<sup>37</sup> Sacks, 1986: 105 (original emphasis)

<sup>38</sup> Sacks, 1986: 106

<sup>39</sup> Elliot, 1995: 27

<sup>40</sup> Proverbs 28:29

(hope) together inform our picture of who we are. John Macquarrie puts it this way, "Each human being... says 'I', he calls 'mine' a particular strip of history, which extends through memory into the past and through anticipation into the future, and to which he is giving shape and direction by what he is doing in this present moment. So each human being is... engaged in his or her task of fashioning a unique human life-story."<sup>41</sup>

Our personal identity, who and what we are, and how we experience it, is to a large extent determined by where and when and with whom we grew up and what we have done in the past. Our experiences and our relationships over time all contribute to the selves that we are today. This reminds us of the thought from Warnock, considered above, that we value memory so highly because our sense of identity over time is derived from our recollection of events. Loftus and Garry also indicate that our memories are some of 'the most precious things we possess' because, "they define who we are as individuals and create a shared past that bonds us with others."<sup>42</sup>

In order to have a sense of continuity of the self over time, in order for our personal narrative to unfold over time, in order for us to understand who and what we are, in order for us not to find ourselves elusive, our past has somehow to be available to us today. This happens through memory. "Memory acts in the present to represent the past.... It is memory and its tokens that provide the substantive grounds for claims to corporateness and continuity."<sup>43</sup> Without the corporateness and continuity which memory gives us, without memory making our past available to us, our selves would be only what we experienced them to be at any given moment. Self would, perhaps, be reduced to no more than the perception it was for David Hume. Hume, who had a fragmented view of time, seeing no link between one moment and the next, found the 'self' to be elusive. In searching for himself all he could find were his perceptions. Ricoeur makes the observation that Hume's perceptions were made *by someone* and cites Roderick Chisholm who

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<sup>41</sup> Macquarrie, 1982: 85

<sup>42</sup> Loftus & Garry, 2001: 22

<sup>43</sup> Antze & Lambeck, 1996: xxiv f

comments with some irony, "*Someone* is stumbling, observing a perception. With the question Who? - who is seeking, stumbling and not finding, and who perceives? - the self returns just when the same slips away."<sup>44</sup> His radical empiricist principle of the prioritising of the present moment gives Hume a fragmented view of time and this, in turn, contributes to his distorted view of self.

Jimmie G. was a patient of neurologist, Oliver Sacks whom Sacks met in 1975<sup>45</sup>. Suffering from Korsakov's syndrome, Jimmie spoke in the past tense when speaking of his childhood but the present tense when speaking of his young adulthood in 1945, not as if he was remembering it but as if he was currently living it even although it was some thirty years earlier. He was somewhat surprised when his brother visited that he should look so old, having no concept that he himself had also aged thirty years. Of the present he could remember nothing from one minute to the next. Sacks says of him, "He is, as it were, isolated in a single moment of being, with a moat or lacuna of forgetting all round him.... He is a man without a past (or future), stuck in a constantly changing meaningless moment."<sup>46</sup> Sacks refers to him as a '*Humean* being'. Later, however, he argues against Hume's assertion that we are nothing but sensations and perceptions, saying that we own our perceptions<sup>47</sup>.

Jimmie G., however, apparently showed no sign of Korsakov's syndrome when participating in Holy Communion. He communicated, partook and remembered<sup>48</sup>. Pattison states that liturgy has a central role in shaping Christians' identities and that people form an idea of themselves in relation to the worshipping community through the words spoken, sung and read in a service of worship<sup>49</sup>. This was surely something of Jimmie G.'s experience as witnessed by Sacks. Similarly Bell and Troxel comment that often people with dementia respond to religious symbols and vestments because, for

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<sup>44</sup> Cited in Ricoeur, 1992: 128

<sup>45</sup> Sacks, 1986: 22-41

<sup>46</sup> Sacks, 1986: 28

<sup>47</sup> Sacks, 1986: 119

<sup>48</sup> Sacks, 1986: 36

<sup>49</sup> Pattison, 2000: 236

many, religious practice and faith define who they are as persons and this is not lost in dementia<sup>50</sup>.

From her experience as a chaplain in a residential home for elderly people with dementia, Margaret Goodall writes of the need for repetition and structure in worship services for people with dementia<sup>51</sup>. She writes of the importance of physical symbols such as a cross, candle and open Bible for, she says, "they are important as ways into the imagination and memory."<sup>52</sup> In fact she notes, citing Anthony Thiselton, "Not to use symbols...in liturgy...is to fight with one hand tied behind one's back."<sup>53</sup> She observes, "While the candle is being lit the silence seems full of meaning as memories of special occasions, church, birthdays, Christmas or candlelit suppers are kindled."<sup>54</sup>

It is Goodall's experience that the words of the Lord's Prayer are often repeated by those who have apparently lost speech although she has found that closing eyes during prayer tends to be unhelpful as it excludes the physical cues to memory<sup>55</sup>. She has also found that it is helpful to stick to familiar hymns rather than introduce new unfamiliar ones. "Hymns are a very important part of the service. The music can trigger words from time long past and even in those who are unable to sing a response can be seen – a foot moving to the music, a nod of the head or someone clapping."<sup>56</sup> Alison Frogatt makes the same point, that even those without other speech often join in the Lord's Prayer and familiar hymns<sup>57</sup>.

Staff at Williamwood Home, Glasgow, a residential home for elderly persons with dementia, also find this.<sup>58</sup> They have, in consultation with the local

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<sup>50</sup> Bell & Troxel, 2001: 36f

<sup>51</sup> Goodall, 1999: 96

<sup>52</sup> Goodall, 1999: 96

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Goodall, 1999: 96

<sup>54</sup> Goodall, 1997: 25

<sup>55</sup> Goodall, 1999: 98

<sup>56</sup> Goodall, 1997: 25

<sup>57</sup> Frogatt, 1994: 13

<sup>58</sup> I visited Williamwood House in summer 2002 when I had the opportunity to interview the unit manager and one of the care workers.

clergy who conduct worship in the home on a rota basis, compiled a list of well-known hymns for use in their short services of worship. They too find that residents who otherwise appear to remember very little join in singing the familiar hymns or saying the Lord's Prayer. Pat Ellis, a care worker in the home said that other well-known songs which would have been familiar to the residents from their youth can have a similar effect but that they tend to tire of them quickly in a way they do not tire of songs or prayers which are a part of their religious worship. A possible explanation why people who are no longer able to recognise and respond to, or communicate with other people are apparently able to recognise and respond to religious songs and symbols, and communicate with God is that the essence of the self is spiritual rather than physical or mental. Reams suggests that, "The reality of self is not grounded in the physical body, nor even in the mind...self is essentially spiritual in nature." He continues, "Who do we think we are? The image of self created by thought includes identifying ourselves as the physical body, emotions or thoughts. It can also include identifying with our career, nationality, or a host of other things...who are we?... We are soul, infinite and eternal, and the true ground of our being is the unlimited, infinite realm of spirit."<sup>59</sup> This, perhaps, is why in worship, the One who is the object of our worship remembers us even if we do not remember him, or indeed ourselves. So, as we worship, God relates to and communicates with us, which enables us to relate to and communicate with him.

Neil Watson, Unit manager Williamwood Home, commented that even seeing a minister in a clerical collar can stimulate memory for his residents. Similarly Margaret Goodall finds that it helps stimulate memory for the residents with whom she works if she wears formal clothes or a cassock while conducting worship<sup>60</sup>.

On the whole it is Goodall's experience and the experience of the staff at Williamwood Home that a service of worship, "Might bring a sense of comfort and reassurance to those who live in a world that has become increasingly

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<sup>59</sup> Reams, 1998 (www)

<sup>60</sup> Goodall, 1997: 25

alien to them.”<sup>61</sup> One of the residents in the home where Goodall is chaplain, however, found it difficult to worship in a strange setting (i.e. not in a church) because, for her, it emphasised her losses<sup>62</sup>.

When Debbie Everett's grandmother suffered from dementia Everett found herself struggling with questions such as, "What did this fading away mean in regard to her relationship with God and with her world? Certainly God had not forgotten her for 'her name was written in the palm of God's hand...' (Isaiah 45:16). Yet I wondered wasn't it still possible for her to continue to experience God, others and her world in her new reality, though differently expressed?"<sup>63</sup> Alison Frogatt seems to be in no doubt that persons suffering from dementia do continue to experience the God who remembers them. "For Christians a service of worship with hymns, familiar prayers and Bible readings can often reach that earlier worshipping self, the person who knew about God, believed in Jesus and felt the divine love."<sup>64</sup> This connection, she observes, can help families - people struggling with questions such as Everett's - to feel that the one they love is not entirely lost to them<sup>65</sup>.

Jimmie G. can be contrasted with Willie, another of Sacks' patients, also suffering from Korsakov's syndrome. Jimmie was lost and despairing the loss while Willie's fantasy world of confabulation and his frantic search for meaning was a barrier to meaning. Thus, while Jimmie found himself while participating in the ritual of Holy Communion, this was impossible for Willie<sup>66</sup>.

Antze and Lambeck describe memory as the 'phenomenological ground of identity', explaining that by looking back at what has been we implicitly know who we are and recognise the various circumstances that contribute towards making us us<sup>67</sup>. Even although memory is not always entirely reliable

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<sup>61</sup> Goodall, 1999: 98

<sup>62</sup> Goodall, 1999: 101

<sup>63</sup> Everett, 2000: 20

<sup>64</sup> Frogatt, 1994: 13

<sup>65</sup> Frogatt, 1994: 13

<sup>66</sup> Sacks, 1986: 106

<sup>67</sup> Antze & Lambeck, 1996: xvi

memory enables us to have a sense of our identity over time<sup>68</sup>. It is to the reliability of memory that we now turn our attention.

## **2.5 Reliability of Memory**

Without going into detail Jones suggests some of the factors that he believes can 'distort' memory, making our memory of an event or conversation somewhat different from the original event or conversation. Of course, the original event or experience is also subject to each person's individual interpretation as she or he experiences it. The distorting factors suggested by Jones include perception, emotions, biases, prejudices, previous experience, cultural issues, gender-related issues and suggestion by others. Jones writes, "We know how easy it is for our memory to play tricks on us...how easily our memories are distorted by such factors."<sup>69</sup> We might also add 'later experience' and the length of time involved to this list of distorting features, as noted by Charles Elliot<sup>70</sup>. Garry and Polaschek also consider the effect of later experience. They point out that recalling memory is not like replaying a film where events and conversations are exactly the same each time and the sequence of events is the same. We revise the script although the theme remains constant. "Every performance is at once similar and different." They continue, "We are continually extracting new information from old experiences and filling in gaps in ways that serve some current demand."<sup>71</sup>

Primo Levi also notes how memory becomes distorted over time through over-telling and through interference from extraneous features. "Human memory is a marvellous but fallacious instrument.... The memories that lie within us are not carved in stone; not only do they tend to become erased as the years go by, but often they change, or even increase by incorporating extraneous features.... Even under normal circumstances a slow degradation is at work, an obfuscation of outlines, a, so-to-speak, psychological oblivion

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<sup>68</sup> Priest, 1998: 56

<sup>69</sup> Jones, 2001: 243

<sup>70</sup> Elliot, 1995: 21

<sup>71</sup> Garry & Polaschek, 1999 (www)



which few resist.... It is certain that practice...keeps memories fresh and active...but it is also true that a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallised, perfected, adorned, which installs itself in the place of raw memory and grows as its experience."<sup>72</sup>

Fictional character David Mosford, a historian, considers how the memory keeps the past alive by repeating and retelling stories. "David loved the past. He was a historian by training but a sentimentalist at heart.... Memory is like a series of time loops, he thought, and the people we love are recorded, repeating forever, gestures and actions that the mind has randomly chosen as their emblemata. And people we don't love too."<sup>73</sup> He goes on, like Levi, to acknowledge the fallaciousness of memory. He considers how memory changes by incorporating extraneous features. He thinks back to the time fifteen years before when he first brought Helena, who later became his wife, to meet his father. "And in the tape loop of Davy's memory old Mr Mosford lifted his hat decorously to Helena. But that wasn't true. He didn't wear a hat...but he...carried a metaphorical trilby for just such occasions. Memory had supplied the hat."<sup>74</sup>

Although we have noted from Jones that memory can be distorted or changed over time it is unlikely that it is time alone that causes the change, just as we saw in the previous chapter that it is not time alone that brings about growth and development in a child. Challenging the view that time is a causal factor in forgetting, J.A. McGeoch says, "In scientific descriptions of nature time itself is not employed as a causative factor nor is passive decay with time ever found. In time iron, when unused, may rust, but oxidation, not time, is responsible. In time organisms grow old, but time enters only as a logical framework in which complex chemical processes go their ways."<sup>75</sup> He suggests, instead, that it is the interference caused by subsequent information and experiences that causes the forgetting. Charles Elliot also

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<sup>72</sup> Cited in Banner, 2000: 116

<sup>73</sup> Mourby, 1997: 121

<sup>74</sup> Mourby, 1997: 122

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Underwood, 1983: 236

notes that the length of time between event and recall can affect memory because new experiences or information can influence how we remember<sup>76</sup>. This reinterpretation, caused by new experiences will be considered below.

According to Jones, memory is also affected by sin. "Sin is both a cause and effect of forgetting."<sup>77</sup> We forget because we sin, we sin because we forget. The adulterer forgets his or her spouse, the rich forget the poor. Sometimes in certain situations we find ways of deliberately forgetting - is this to absolve ourselves of guilt? Does the adulterer absolve him or herself by forgetting the spouse who is being betrayed? Do the rich absolve themselves by forgetting the poor and hungry? I would suggest that far from absolving the guilty party, such creative forgetting serves only to intensify the offence. It adds the insult of forgetting the victim to the injury of the sin against the victim.

We forget God, we forget others and we forget our own sin in order to make life more tolerable for ourselves, says Jones<sup>78</sup>. This observation was also made by Augustine who says, "I had noticed my iniquity but I had dissembled it, and contained it, and forgotten it."<sup>79</sup> Because of our habit of conveniently forgetting the inconvenient there is, as we will consider below, frequent biblical exhortation to remember and the church has memory-evoking rites and rituals - baptism, Eucharist, communion of saints, and the medieval practice of *lectio divina*<sup>80</sup>. The hymn-writer demonstrates her awareness of remembering and the tendency to forget when she says, "Tell me the story often for I forget so soon."<sup>81</sup> Something of the impact of the church's memory-evoking rites has been considered above while considering the effect on people suffering from dementia of participating in religious ritual and worship.

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<sup>76</sup> Elliot, 1995: 21

<sup>77</sup> Jones, 2001: 243

<sup>78</sup> Jones, 2001: 244

<sup>79</sup> Cited in Jones, 2001: 244

<sup>80</sup> Jones, 2001: 244

<sup>81</sup> Arabella Hankey, *Tell Me The Old, Old Story*

While this tendency and temptation to forget God, our own sin and the sin of other people can present a problem, Jones also draws our attention to the problem of the ever-present painful memory which can be so powerful as to hinder our present functioning and rob us of any future hope. He also asks, "How do we cope with these situations in which forgetfulness might help to enable the healing of our psyche and our relationships?"<sup>82</sup> It is memories such as these which are the subject of Volf's concern.

As well as looking at some of the factors that distort or change memory, Jones identifies several of the dynamics affecting specific memory<sup>83</sup>. These dynamics, which often overlap, are

1. Difficulty in coming to terms with a single horrifying incident that sears itself on the memory such as rape or the murder of a child.
2. Horror of repeated abuse which continues to 'perjure our souls' long after the abuse stops, especially when visible or invisible wounds or scars remain.
3. Horrors from the past that pervade a culture.
4. Horrors which the self perpetrated, for example Nazi soldiers who played a part in the Holocaust.

Of these often overlapping and intertwined dynamics Jones says, "We need to disentangle several different dynamics involved in the discovery of 'so much traumatic memory' - dynamics which all-too-often converge in our most difficult psychological, social and political dilemmas: of the Middle East, of Bosnia... of oppressive and broken family relations, just to name a few. But disentangling them will help us understand the different yet overlapping issues involved in coping with searing memories."<sup>84</sup> The intensity of the challenge presented by any of these searing memories depends on how deeply entrenched they are in a person's mind or in the community. This disentangling of overlapping searing memories is an important first step in learning to remember well.

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<sup>82</sup> Jones, 2001: 244

<sup>83</sup> Jones, 2001: 245

<sup>84</sup> Jones, 2001: 245

Even without these distortions, memory is not entirely reliable. The most obvious reason for this is quite simply that we forget - whether such forgetting is temporary or permanent is unimportant when considering the issue of unreliability. The fact that I may be able to remember clearly tomorrow something of which I only have a hazy recollection today does not alter the fact that today's memory is somewhat unreliable on account of its lack of clarity. It is, however, perhaps more accurate, albeit more cumbersome, to say we fail to remember certain events. If the image were forgotten it would be lost to us. With non-remembering the image remains available to us, it is not lost but is not present to the memory because we are not calling it to mind. This is reminiscent of the missing golf ball that really still exists despite our difficulty in locating it. (As already indicated and will be returned to, while non-remembering enables us to live with a painful past, our ultimate goal should not be volitional non-remembering but remembering well.)

Amnesiac Leonard Shelby, a fictional character from the film *Memento*, was well aware of the unreliability of memory. He stated, "Memory's unreliable ... Memory's not perfect. It's not even that good. Ask the police; eyewitness testimony is unreliable ... Memory can change the shape of a room or the colour of a car. It's an interpretation, not a record. Memories can be changed or distorted, and they're irrelevant if you have the facts."<sup>85</sup>

Richard Holloway illustrates the unreliability of memory with the following anecdote. "Meyerhold, the great Russian theatre director used to tell a story from his days as a law student at Moscow University. One of the professors would arrange for a powerful thug to rush into the classroom in the middle of a lecture, there would be a fight, the police would be called and the troublemaker removed. Then the students would be asked to recount what had happened. Each would tell a different tale. Some would even insist there had been not one thug but two. 'Hence,' the professor would explain, 'the Russian saying, "He lies like an eyewitness".'"<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Memento*, Newmarket Films, 2001

<sup>86</sup> Holloway, 1994: 57

The other main factor influencing the reliability of memory which I would like to consider here, and to which I have already alluded, is interpretation. Mark Freeman argues that we do not simply look back at past events but that we pass them through the filter of interpretation. He looks at how we create our 'selves', not only by remembering, but also by interpreting events and experiences. He goes on to suggest that as well as interpreting events and experiences we also reinterpret them, and he argues that to reinterpret these events and experiences rewrites the self. This defines the self in terms of how we experience it ourselves and is considered above in the chapter on Personal Identity. Freeman seeks to show how the self is rewritten by reinterpreting experiences by looking with his reader at some lives which have undergone a reinterpretation and subsequent rewriting, and at the processes involved. This he does by using the autobiographical writings of his subjects as well as the fictional writing of novelists. One of Freeman's subjects is Augustine for whom the writing of *Confessions*, "Marks an important turn in the meaning of selfhood... Seeing the recounting of one's life as an appropriate and necessary vehicle for the development of self-understanding."<sup>87</sup> Another is Helen Keller, who as she looked from young adulthood back to her childhood, was unsure where fact ended and fantasy began<sup>88</sup>. "When I try to clarify my earlier impressions I find that fact and fancy look alike across the years that link the past with the present." writes Keller.<sup>89</sup> Being deaf-blind, many of Helen's sensations were second hand, as described by others and she, at times when looking back, was unable to distinguish between the two. She is clear, however, that her world is not second hand from the descriptions of others but is a product of her own imagination. It is this imagination that made it possible for her to describe outdoor scenes in such graphic detail. "The opening was filled with ferns which completely covered the beds of limestone and in places hid the streams. The rest of the mountain was thickly wooded. Here were great oaks and splendid evergreens with trunks like mossy pillars, from the

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<sup>87</sup> Freeman, 1993: 26

<sup>88</sup> Freeman, 1993: 50

<sup>89</sup> Keller, 1903: 3

branches of which hung garlands of ivy and mistletoe, and persimmon trees, the odour of which pervaded every nook and corner of the wood.”<sup>90</sup>

Such a description from a blind person clearly depends to some extent on what others describe to her but in recreating the scene for her reader, she is not merely repeating what she has been told. She describes the scene as she sees it in her imagination. It is a scene built up from her knowledge of what the bark of an oak tree or moss feels like beneath her fingers or the shape of an ivy leaf or a fern in her hand. She would recognise the smell of the moss and the persimmon trees and the moist atmosphere caused by the presence of the stream. Thinking back to Martin and Deutscher’s classification of three kinds of memory, we could say that Helen’s remembrance of this scene drew on her facts memory. She knew, for example, what an ivy leaf felt like because one had previously been placed in her hand and as she traced its outline with her finger, the word ‘IVY’ would be spelt out on her hand. But it was much more than that. It also drew on her events memory. She had been there in the midst of the scene she describes. She knew how it smelt, how it felt and, when someone described to her the mountains, the stream, the limestone, she knew how it looked for she could ‘see’ it in her imagination. That is why she is able to insist that the memory is her own, born in her imagination. Freeman suggests that Helen’s experience is more common than we may realise, that we all think as we do - and so remember what we do - because of social forces and influences<sup>91</sup>.

Freeman’s conclusions are that we cannot separate ourselves from our past. He notes that present experience relies not only on memory but also on our interpretation of what is remembered<sup>92</sup>. He goes as far as to say that we do not actually remember bald facts from the past but what we interpret or imagine the facts to have been. Freeman cites Philip Roth, saying, “Memories of the past are not memories of facts but of your imaginings of the

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<sup>90</sup> Keller, 1903: 50f

<sup>91</sup> Freeman, 1993: 63ff

<sup>92</sup> Freeman, 1993: 52f

facts.”<sup>93</sup> This is something about which Aristotle is uncertain. He asks if what we remember is the original object or our image of it<sup>94</sup>. Hauerwas makes a similar observation to Freeman noting that at times we take what is and what has been and interpret it to shape our characters and inform our decisions<sup>95</sup>.

I introduced this section by noting, from Jones, that many factors cause our memory of events and conversations to differ from the original event or conversation (which, as indicated, is also subject to interpretation as it is experienced). While this is certainly true and is something we must bear in mind we do not do ourselves and one another the best service if we overemphasise it for our memory of our past and of one another is, as we have considered, one of the most precious things we possess, even although – or perhaps because – events as we remember them may differ from events as they actually were. “There is little doubt,” writes Henri Nouwen, “that memory can distort, falsify and cause selective perception. But that is only one side of memory. Memory also clarifies, purifies, brings into focus and calls into the foreground hidden gifts.”<sup>96</sup> Nouwen argues that our relationships with others are enhanced through memory for we are not distracted by the idiosyncrasies, and perhaps the irritating habits of the other<sup>97</sup>. For example, I might have a happy memory of a pleasant evening spent with friends, the memory being enriched by having filtered out details such as the friend who used my name as if it was a punctuation mark, or the one who incessantly tapped a pen against the chair arm all evening. Giving no place in the memory to such irksome trivialities enhances our relationships with others. It might be argued that from our memories we rewrite our perception of others in much the same way as Freeman describes rewriting the self.

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<sup>93</sup> Cited in Freeman, 1992: 117

<sup>94</sup> Sorabji, 1972: 50

<sup>95</sup> Hauerwas, 1984: 36

<sup>96</sup> Nouwen, undated: 40

<sup>97</sup> Nouwen, undated: 40

## **2.6 Interpreting The Past**

For Freeman we rewrite the past as we attach new meanings to it and it is his observation that the past is never the same once it is rewritten<sup>98</sup>. It must be emphasised, however, that it is not possible to rewrite the past as such. What has been has been and cannot be changed or undone. It is our interpretation of the past that is rewritten, not the past. Our interpretations can be, and frequently are, rewritten, thus changing our perception of what has been and consequently of who we are. For example, the child who has suffered neglect may grow up believing herself or himself<sup>99</sup> to be unimportant or worthless. She may continue to hold this negative self-image for many years or even for the rest of her life, and it will adversely affect her ability to form healthy relationships for she will not believe that she has anything of value to give to another person. If she later comes to recognise her own value and worth she will not alter the fact that she was neglected as a child but will reinterpret it. It did not happen because of any failure or inadequacy on her part but because of failure or inadequacy on the part of her carer. It is important to recognise here that the person who reinterprets the past in this way is not denying the past or attempting to rewrite history but is learning to see the past in a new light, changing its meaning and how it affects her or his life in the present. The person who attempts to rewrite memory is very different from the person who attempts to rewrite history. To rewrite memory is to reinterpret the meaning of events as they influence our sense of self. It is not to attempt to deny that events took place. To attempt to rewrite history, on the other hand, is to attempt to change facts, such as David Irving's attempt to deny the fact of the holocaust. Irving is reported as saying that, "the infamous gas chambers...did not exist."<sup>100</sup>

It is not only our perception of the past that is open to interpretation but also our present perception and experience. If, for example, we are unaware that our friend or colleague is feeling unwell or is anxious about something we

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<sup>98</sup> Freeman, 1993: 163, 207

<sup>99</sup> For the sake of simplicity here I will use third person feminine pronouns.

<sup>100</sup> Stauber (www)



may misinterpret his grim expression or surliness to mean that he is, for some reason, displeased with us.

The potentially damaging influence of some memories and the need to address them in order to change the meaning they have on the present is indicated in Bauckham and Hart who state, "Memories can crush and bind as well as empower and release us...the presence of the past...exercises a debilitating and enervating influence on our present unless and until we face and redeem it."<sup>101</sup> Seamands says of this, "We cannot change the facts we remember but we can change their meanings and the power they have over our present way of living."<sup>102</sup> This belief surely is at the very heart of the Christian Gospel and is the presupposition of counselling, both Christian and secular. Elliot tells us that memory dictates how we shape the world and that we would shape it differently if we lived in the hope of 'divine transformation'.<sup>103</sup> If we believe that such a change in the meaning and power of the past in the present is possible during our lifetime then it is surely not illogical to believe that a more complete transformation will take place at the eschaton.

In looking at the place of memory in writing and rewriting the self, Freeman does not seem to take account of the fact that our identity is, in part, attributed to us by others based on their experience of us, their memories of their experience, and of course, their interpretation of those experiences and memories. Perhaps the fact that the memories of others also pass through the filter of interpretation - of their individual interpretation - together with the fact that we present different facets of the self to different 'others' depending on the status of our relationship with them - for example, my parent, pastor and professor will all see me differently - accounts for the variation of perception different 'others' have of the same 'self'. As we present a different facet of the self to different others in this way, so the different others respond to the self whom they encounter. This in turn, gives us a message about how

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<sup>101</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 2000: 59

<sup>102</sup> Seamands, 1986: 188

<sup>103</sup> Elliot, 1995: 218

our self is experienced by others, which contributes to our sense of who we are.<sup>104</sup> The interpretative filter through which we pass our memories is not static, which means given the right trigger we are able to recall something today of which we had no conscious memory yesterday, or tomorrow will remember something clearly which is vague and hazy today.

The film, *Eve's Bayou* tells the story of a small town black doctor from Louisiana, Louis Batiste, and his family in the 1960s. The story is told from the perspective of the middle child, Eve. Having considered and responded to a major incident which had irreversible tragic consequences, as remembered and related to her by her older sister, Eve discovers that her father's interpretation of events was somewhat different. Reflecting on this, Eve draws the following conclusion, "The truth changes colour depending on the light and tomorrow can be clearer than today. Memory is a selection of images; some illusive, others printed indelibly on the brain. Each image is like a thread, each thread is woven together to make a tapestry of intricate texture, and the tapestry tells a story, and the story is our past<sup>105</sup>." Eve Batiste's sister, Cicely, is traumatised by the major incident and later confesses that she cannot remember what actually took place.

Cicely's experience is not unusual. Painful and traumatic memories are often filtered out through denial or suppression. The painful or traumatic event, the memory of which is denied or suppressed, may have an adverse effect on other areas of the life of the individual, robbing her or him of the opportunity to be all she or he can be as a person. Before giving him his commission, Jesus confronted Peter with his painful past. The memory of his denial of his Lord, together with his Lord's forgiveness which brought healing would continue to provide the incentive for Peter to remain faithful<sup>106</sup>. Being confronted with his pain and failure, being forced to face up to it, enabled Peter to remain faithful to his high calling and to fulfil his potential. Had he not been helped to face his past head on, it would have undermined his work,

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<sup>104</sup> See chapter on personal identity for a fuller discussion of how the self, or our sense of self, is formed and reformed in relation.

<sup>105</sup> Eve in *Eve's Bayou* Trimark Pictures Inc. 1997

<sup>106</sup> Kraft, 1993: 19

limited his ability and adversely affected his relationship with his Lord for the rest of his life. Volf, it seems, would disagree with this for he makes the point that without forgetting a forgiven sinner is still a past sinner<sup>107</sup>. Might it not be the case, however, that with or without forgetting forgiven sinners are eternally **past** sinners? This should not be a cause for despair and hopelessness for the forgiven sinner is a past sinner, a former sinner and in the eyes of God the forgiven-ness and pastness of the sin is eternal. God's concern is no longer with the forgiven sin. He non-remembers our forgiven sin. His concern is with the forgiven sinner whom he eternally remembers, and remembers as forgiven.

Just as new experiences and new relationships do not negate previous ones; just as the 'self' I am today is not a replacement but a development of the 'self' I was ten years ago, so recent memory does not replace old memory but acts as a filter through which old memories are passed. Just as Peter would continue to remember his painful failure in the light of his Lord's forgiveness and restoration, so too we remember old memories in the light of the new. Peter's forgiveness and restoration after past failure does not erase or negate the past but serves as the "Foundation for a new and extended identity."<sup>108</sup> Not only do we remember old memories in the light of the new, in many situations we also need the old memories to make sense of the new. The two interpret one another. For example, how much sense would Peter's memory of being forgiven and restored have made to him had the memory of his past failure been simultaneously obliterated? Grace can only be experienced as such when the need of it is kept in mind. Without an awareness of the need we lose awareness of the grace. David Keck illustrates the way old and new interpret and give meaning to one another by reference to the Old and New Covenants. The Old is viewed in the light of the New<sup>109</sup>, and oftentimes the New can only be properly understood with reference to the Old. Again, in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ we see the dependence of old and new on one another. Just as the crucifixion

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<sup>107</sup> Volf, 1996: 132

<sup>108</sup> Peter Williams cited in Volf, 1996: 136

<sup>109</sup> Keck, 1996: 70

would have been meaningless without the resurrection, so too the meaning of the resurrection would have been different without the sacrificial death on the cross that preceded it. The meaning would have been different if, for example, the death had occurred as a result of illness or accident or if it had been suicide.

## **2.7 Lest We Forget**

We have just seen that it is not possible to fully comprehend the new (the present) apart from the old (the past) and how the old give meaning to the new. We cannot make sense of ourselves without memory of the past. David Keck notes that, "It is impossible for us to distinguish between ourselves and our memories.... We are our memories and without them we have but a physical resemblance to that person we suppose to be."<sup>110</sup> Luis Buñuel also states this, indicating that it is often only as people lose their memories that they come to appreciate them. "You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all.... Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it we are nothing."<sup>111</sup>

How, then, will individual identities be retained if, as Volf suggests, memory and experiences which are so much a part of our identity are erased at the eschaton? Volf does not address in his book the question of how individual identity is retained if the memory of formative experiences is erased but poses the related, yet opposite, question of why identity would not be retained even if memories were cancelled out? He makes the point that many experiences, of which we have no conscious memory, form and reform our identities throughout life. He does not acknowledge that in many instances a very small trigger is all that would be needed to revive these seemingly forgotten memories. Far from existing memory being erased at

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<sup>110</sup> Keck, 1996: 43

<sup>111</sup> Cited in Sacks, 1986: 22

the eschaton as Volf suggests, I suggest that the opposite is true, that lost memory will be restored.

Volf, however, does anticipate the objection that identity is threatened if memory is lost, and argues that what has happened to us in our lives is formative whether or not we consciously remember it. "Our history forms part of our identity notwithstanding. For clearly we remember now neither everything that has happened to us nor everything we once remembered as having happened to us, and yet we are, arguably, ourselves. Indeed we are who we are precisely *because* we do not remember everything, but remember this or that and remember it in this way or that way. Why, then, would we not be able to be ourselves if the memory of wrongdoing and evil we suffered receded into oblivion? True, our identity would be reconstituted with such non remembrance, but it is *our* identity that would be thus reconstituted, much like it is being reconstituted daily."<sup>112</sup>

There can be no denying the truth of Volf's claim that we do not remember everything that has happened to us or even everything we once remembered. Our senses are bombarded every moment of every day throughout our lives with sights, sounds, smells, with touch and taste, and these sensations are accompanied by feelings of peace, pain, pleasure, fear and any number of other emotional responses. Many fade and are lost almost as soon as they happen, and have no bearing on who we are. I, for example, have no need to remember the bird that flew past my window while I was writing this (and it is extremely unlikely that I would have if I had not written about it) nor the sound of drilling and hammering emanating from my neighbours' house. But if the drill developed a fault which caused an electrical fire razing both houses to the ground, the drilling would take on a new significance and would be very much more likely to be remembered. In considering our non-remembering of daily detail Hume writes, "For how few of our past actions are there of which we have any memory? Who can tell me, for instance what his thoughts and actions were on the first of January

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<sup>112</sup> Volf, 1996: 136n.

1715, the eleventh of March 1719, and the third of August 1733? Or will he affirm, because he has entirely forgot the incidents of these days, that the present self is not the same person with the self of that time; and by that means overturn all the most established notions of 'personal identity'?"<sup>113</sup>

Both Hugh Kerr and Frances Yates consider this, arriving at the same conclusion. Kerr notes that, "We seem to remember the unusual rather than the normal, the oddity rather than the routine, the amusing rather than the solemn, the mythology rather than the chronicle."<sup>114</sup> Similarly Yates points out that we remember the unusual rather than the everyday. For example, we do not remember the daily sunrise and sunset but we will remember the solar eclipse because it is unusual. She concludes, "But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time."<sup>115</sup> So, had the bird passing my window been a colourful parrot or kingfisher it would have been remembered without being noted above. Although the sighting of foxes in the city is a more common experience than it was a few years ago we are still more likely to remember where and when we saw a fox while driving than where and when we saw a dog or a cat.

There are, however, in all of our lives certain key experiences that are so formative that to forget them would surely make us different people than we are. Let us return, once more, to Peter. Without the memory of his forgiveness after the resurrection, Peter may have been powerless in the years to come. Similarly, without memory of his denial, the words of forgiveness would have been meaningless. Peter was, we might suggest, the person he was *because* he remembered his failure and his restoration. They gave depth to the relationship he had with his Risen Lord and strengthened his resolve to faithfulness and loyalty. Without the experiences and the memory of the experiences he would have been the same impetuous

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<sup>113</sup> Hume, 2000: 170 (1.4.6.20)

<sup>114</sup> Kerr, 1975: 130

<sup>115</sup> Yates, 1992: 25

Peter he was before, forever impeded by a sense of his own failure and inadequacy.

Different people have different reasons for attempting to suppress memory. The most obvious reason is that the memory is particularly painful and recalling it causes continued suffering but memories that do not fit with our current sense of self or with public memory or norms may also be suppressed or reinterpreted in order to make ourselves more comfortable with who we are now and in order to give ourselves a sense of congruence<sup>116</sup>. Thomson writes, "Memory is a battlefield. We fight within ourselves to make a particular memory of our experiences and to repress alternative memories."<sup>117</sup>

Nouwen also discusses this and, unlike Thomson, he goes on to consider why not remembering can actually be more damaging than remembering. "We want to forget the pains of the past.... But by not remembering them we allow the forgotten memories to become independent forces that can exert a crippling effect on our functioning as human beings."<sup>118</sup> He goes on to explain that refusing to acknowledge or remember painful memories prevents us from changing and growing. It is only when we let wounded memories be available that they can be healed. He states, "Forgetting the past is like turning our most intimate teacher against us."<sup>119</sup> Making a similar point Allender says, "Hiding the past always involves denial; denial of the past is always a denial of God. To forget your personal history is tantamount to trying to forget yourself and the journey that God has called you to."<sup>120</sup> In his attempt to explain why he believes people sometimes try to forget and hide the past, Allender seems to suggest that denial of the past is a form of theodicy. If we deny or trivialise painful memories, he explains, we do not have to ask the prickly question of why God does not intervene. He continues, "The unbelieving world is willing to see the damage of abuse,

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<sup>116</sup> Thomson, 1990: 78

<sup>117</sup> Thomson, 1990: 73

<sup>118</sup> Nouwen, undated: 21

<sup>119</sup> Nouwen, undated: 22

<sup>120</sup> Allender, 1995: 13

because it feels no need to defend the God who could have intervened to stop it. The Christian community, however, feels disposed to deny any data that casts doubt on God's presence or willingness to act for the sake of his children."<sup>121</sup>

Although in *Exclusion And Embrace* Volf speaks of eschatological forgetting, he has acknowledged elsewhere that what he actually was thinking about was more a volitional 'not calling to mind'.<sup>122</sup> This is a biblical concept<sup>123</sup> and is the same as non-remembering, the term he employed earlier in his discussion. Non-remembering, or not calling to mind suggests that the memory is still available to us should we choose to recall it, while forgetting indicates more that it is completely and permanently lost.

If negative and painful memories are non-remembered and not erased at the eschaton could there be a risk of them suddenly coming to mind and marring eternity? Geoffrey Grogan suggests that we will be so caught up in the wonder of who Christ is that we will hardly be aware of ourselves, much less painful and destructive memories from the past. "We see that the Christ who offers himself to us is God and Lord.... He will be the centre of the redeemed universe throughout all eternity and, by his grace and only by that grace, we shall take our places among the worshippers. Perhaps in heaven we may hardly be aware that we exist. What will dominate everything is the fact that he exists, and that he is all-holy, all-wise, all-loving."<sup>124</sup> In conversation with Grogan about this comment, he drew comparison with the experience of listening to a favourite piece of music. The music alone commands our full attention. It is *as if* all else ceases to exist. We do not think other thoughts or concentrate on other concerns when we are lost in the music. Likewise, he suggests, when in heaven we are caught up in the worship of God it will be *as if* all other thoughts and concerns had ceased to exist. It is not that they will have been erased, but they will not have any more significance. Perhaps the hymn-writer had a similar thought in mind when he wrote the words, "Till

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<sup>121</sup> Allender, 1995: 14

<sup>122</sup> Personal letter, February 2000 (see appendix 2)

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, Isaiah 43: 25; 65: 17

<sup>124</sup> Grogan, 1998: 283



in heaven we take our place...lost in wonder, love and praise."<sup>125</sup> We must be careful, however, not to press Grogan's illustration too far or we would be at risk of losing all sight of the self. It is *our* lives, *our* selves that are the object of redemption. It is *we* who will, as the hymn-writer says, 'take our place' and *we* who will 'wonder, love and praise'. This is clearer in Bauckham and Hart's similar statement. "In the worship whose only purpose is to please God and to enjoy God, we shall eternally lose ourselves in the beauty and love of God and eternally enjoy the surprise of finding ourselves in God."<sup>126</sup>

## **2.8 Memory and Identity**

As we have seen, the memory of certain significant events and experiences is crucial in retaining a person's sense of continuity, their narrative identity, over time. The memory of what has been has a role in making sense of what is. The same is true of cultural, social and national identity. Alan Falconer states that, "The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory." Which is why communities and people groups have traditions, cultures, stories, songs, religion and literature for recall.<sup>127</sup>

Similarly Peter Stevenson makes the observation that the community who refuses to remember the past is in danger of losing its identity and history<sup>128</sup>. The same could surely be said of individuals; the person who refuses to remember her or his past is in danger of losing her or his sense of identity. The fact that someone loses his or her sense of identity does not mean that his or her identity is totally lost for it can be preserved in the memory of others as Jill Robinson discovered when she lost her memory and, with it, her sense of who she was<sup>129</sup>. From a theological perspective, in the event that

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<sup>125</sup> Charles Wesley, *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

<sup>126</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 159

<sup>127</sup> Falconer, 1988: 1

<sup>128</sup> Stevenson (www)

<sup>129</sup> Robinson, 2000

no-one remembers on another's behalf the person's identity is still not lost because God remembers us <sup>130</sup>.

God remembers us. He remembers our name,<sup>131</sup> and, as we considered in the previous chapter, "a name symbolises identity."<sup>132</sup> In the Old Testament, "For the sake of my name" and "For the sake of your name" are frequently recurring phrases<sup>133</sup> and refer to God's identity or reputation. Most people when asked who they are will, in the first instance, give their name as considered in the previous chapter. It is one of the first words an infant recognises and is usually the last memory to fade in dementia sufferers<sup>134</sup>, and as we also saw in chapter 1, Primo Levi felt in concentration camp, that if he could hold on to his name he was holding onto himself. "They have even taken away our name...behind the name something of us, of us as we were, still remains."<sup>135</sup>

During the Balkan conflict in the early 1990s Serbian forces sought to wipe out all evidence that the town of Vukovar in the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia, and its people, had ever existed. Not only did they slaughter the people and destroy homes but they also burned down the public records office. The logic behind this action is the thought that if there was no recorded memory of the people's existence then they could not ever have existed. But the people of Croatia did not let this happen, they refused to forget and gave Vukovar a stronger identity than it ever had before. In reality the aggressive action of the Serb forces had the opposite of the desired effect. The town of Vukovar and its inhabitants have been firmly placed in the memory of their fellow country-folk both in literature and in song. 'Zapamtitej Vukovar', exhorts one popular song, 'Remember Vukovar'. In 1997 The Croatian Mint, in co-operation with the Croatian National Bank, produced commemorative gold and silver coins bearing Vukovar's image and some years earlier the Croatian postal service printed postage stamps

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<sup>130</sup> Isaiah 49:15f; Isaiah 44: 21

<sup>131</sup> Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5

<sup>132</sup> Bauckham, 2002: 40

<sup>133</sup> Psalm 25:11; 31:3; Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22

<sup>134</sup> Bell & Troxel, 2001: 36

<sup>135</sup> Levi, 1987: 33

portraying Vukovar, stamps which would be sent around the world on mail, thus drawing Vukovar to the attention of many who had never previously heard of it. The town featured in a BBC documentary, *Two Hours From London*, fixing it in the memories of a great many people outwith Croatia who had previously never heard of Vukovar. Through documentary, song, story, stamps and coins millions of people in Croatia and beyond continue to remember the town of Vukovar today - the opposite of what enemy forces sought to do.

Vukovar's own memory was destroyed - lost - through the destruction of the public records office and yet the fact of its existence remains in the memories of others because they care about the town and about what happened to it. Similarly when, due to Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia, an individual's memory is lost or destroyed the fact of that person's identity remains in the memories of others who care about that person and, as indicated above, God continues to hold us in his eternal memory. Memory is vital in sustaining, not only the sense of self but also relationship and, as we see here, relationship has value not only in constituting self as discussed in the previous chapter, but also for sustaining identity.

David Keck touches on the importance and relevance of the memory of others to an individual's identity in his study of Alzheimer's disease. He tells us that while our memories inform us who we are, we are also what others remember of us and what God remembers, even although we may forget Godself<sup>136</sup>. Keck calls dementia, whether the result of Alzheimer's or some other illness or injury, 'the theological illness' because sufferers undergo what appears to be a disintegration of the human 'person', thus presenting a challenge to our perception of human being and purpose<sup>137</sup>. The observation of a person suffering from dementia would certainly present a profound challenge to the Cartesian dictum which equates being with thinking and rationality and thus has serious ethical and pastoral implications.

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<sup>136</sup> Keck, 1996: 43, 45

<sup>137</sup> Keck, 1996: 15f

It is important to insist that a person's life does not lose significance because memory is lost. This was stated by Leonard Shelby, the main character from the film, *Memento*, whom we have already encountered. Shelby suffered from amnesia following his wife's murder. He could not remember conversations or experiences from one day to the next, or even from one hour to the next. He stated that just because he could not remember what he had done did not mean that his actions were unimportant<sup>138</sup>. So too the actions of a person suffering from dementia, and of course the person himself, do not become unimportant just because he is unable to remember. As Bell and Troxel state, "There is still a person beneath the cloak of dementia, a person with remaining strength and abilities."<sup>139</sup> They caution that to lose sight of this, "It can become easy to negate the person, resulting in poor care or even abuse."<sup>140</sup>

The reason suggested by Falconer why the first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory is that, "The cohesiveness and sense of direction of a community is nourished by its memories."<sup>141</sup> This, I suggest, also applies to individuals - the person's sense of self over time, my sense of 'who I am today', is nourished and sustained by memories of yesterday and yesteryear.

Mark Santer considers this same issue, that memory has a crucial role in our sense of identity and says that amnesiacs would no longer have an identity but for the memories of others. He observes that memories are mostly social - that is, experienced in relation to others.<sup>142</sup> Loss of certain memories, then are corrosive of relationships as ongoing relationships depend on memory for continuity. Robert Wilkin also notes this, saying, "Memory locates us in the corporate and the particular. There is no memory that is not rooted in communal experience."<sup>143</sup> He states that all memory - even individual memory - is rooted in communal experience<sup>144</sup>. This would explain,

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<sup>138</sup> *Memento*, Newmarket Films, 2001

<sup>139</sup> Bell & Troxel, 2001: 32

<sup>140</sup> Bell & Troxel, 2001: 32

<sup>141</sup> Falconer, 1988: 1

<sup>142</sup> Santer, 1988: 128

<sup>143</sup> Wilkin, 1995: 179

<sup>144</sup> Wilkin, 1995: 14

perhaps, why Jill Robinson felt shared memories are more costly to lose than solitary ones. "Worse will be when it's a memory of a time shared with someone and I don't have it, so in a way they'll miss it too.... Solitary memories aren't as troubling. If you don't have them you don't know."<sup>145</sup> It could be argued that the opposite of this is true because if the memory is shared and lost it can be given back by the person with whom it was shared but if no-one shared it, it is completely lost forever and, as Jill Robinson observes, we do not even know.

A novelist, Robinson suffered total amnesia in 1992 following a massive epileptic seizure which left her in a coma. *Past Forgetting* is her account of her attempt to reclaim her past, to rediscover who she was. It is her personal journey from forgetting to non-forgetting, from anonymity to identity, a journey in which she describes herself as a time traveller from 1946.

When she awakens from the coma Robinson realises that the unfamiliar room in which she finds herself is a hospital room and surmises that the stranger beside her is a doctor. He is, in fact, her husband, something he has to retell her every time he visits. She 'remembers' that she is American, that she has never left America or been on an aeroplane and that she is the mother of two young children. In reality, however, her two children are grown up with children of their own and she was in hospital in England having lived in London with her English husband for several years. She was right about her nationality. Frequently throughout the book Robinson draws attention to the fact that her husband was a stranger to her by referring to him as, "the Englishman"<sup>146</sup>. Occasionally, in the early days, Robinson would have glimpses of trivial memories from her past. This annoyed her because she was unable to remember important things and felt that the trivia cluttered her mind. "Pieces of memory I do not need come through like dive-bombers dropping old flyers."<sup>147</sup> The temporal remoteness of the memories was also a source of frustration for her. "LA in 1944 is not particularly helpful if you're

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<sup>145</sup> Robinson, 2000: 5

<sup>146</sup> Robinson, 2000: 7,8,9,10,12,13,14,20,23,28,29,38,143,275

<sup>147</sup> Robinson, 2000, 7

living in London in 1980-something," she complains to her doctor who responds, "Especially as it's 1992."<sup>148</sup>

Her frustration as she struggled to remember about her own tastes and preferences as well as her feeling of insecurity and isolation when she was on her own with no-one to remind her is obvious in the following statement. "When I'm on my own like this, I feel I'm on a windy roof. Nothing to hold onto.... Will things I used to like to eat be distasteful? Will I love the music I used to hate? Will everything be a brand-new choice?.... Who did this needlepoint?.... Did I run a company?.... How many of these questions did I ask yesterday, and how many have already been answered?"<sup>149</sup>

It seems that Robinson's greatest loss was of events-memories. She could remember the names of film stars but not those of her own husband and immediate friends and she makes frequent reference to the world of films. She complains, "It's only my life I seem to be missing."<sup>150</sup> She could also remember skills she had previously learned - the fact that she had not lost the ability to cook, even although she could not remember the taste of things, puzzled her somewhat<sup>151</sup>.

Robinson had to piece together her past life and her present identity from fragments. She had to salvage a series of images from the past which, alongside fantasy images, would flip through her mind when she was having a *petit mal*<sup>152</sup>. That these fragments of memory overlapped one another, creating different patterns each time, is evident from her descriptive use of the term 'kaleidoscope' for the various thoughts and images she had in her head<sup>153</sup>. Just as the fragments of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope are in different positions each time they are seen, giving a seemingly infinite variety of images and patterns, so the fragments of memory overlapped in her mind in different configurations, giving different images and variations of her 'self'.

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<sup>148</sup> Robinson, 2000: 62

<sup>149</sup> Robinson, 2000: 49f

<sup>150</sup> Robinson, 2000: 14

<sup>151</sup> Robinson, 2000: 6, 21

<sup>152</sup> Robinson, 2000: 98

<sup>153</sup> Robinson, 2000: 38

According to Sacks, empirical research indicates that epileptic hallucinations such as Robinson experienced and describes are never merely imaginary fantasies but are always precise and vivid memories<sup>154</sup>. As this differs somewhat from Robinson's experience perhaps the images she describes as fantasy were in fact memory images of a past that was so remote that she did not recognise it, or images of the solitary memories, which she says were lost forever. On the other hand, it could be that the empirical research is incomplete and she was correct in her diagnosis of fantasy.

Oliver Sacks tells of an elderly patient, Mrs O'C., who late in life developed what Sacks calls 'musical epilepsy'. This 'musical epilepsy' caused her to 'hear' music inside her head as clearly as if a radio had been left on. (Mrs O'C. was deaf so would have been unable to hear the radio.) The songs Mrs O'C. 'heard' were memories retrieved from early childhood, memories that had been lost to her for 85 years. It had always saddened her that she was unable to remember her early years before her mother died and, having regained something long since lost to her, wanted no treatment for the brain disturbance that caused it. After it had righted itself she stated with satisfaction, "There's a sort of completeness I never had before."<sup>155</sup>

Robinson used several aides-memoires - books, photographs, letters, her husband Stuart's journals, 'memory partners', visual aids and frequent repetition<sup>156</sup> and, as a result, was able gradually to create what she called the 'film' of her past life by splicing together odd scenes<sup>157</sup>. The frequent reference to the world of film both in her remembrances and in the vocabulary she uses is in itself a reference to her early life for her father was a film producer and owned a film studio.

In her attempt to understand memory Robinson read books which handled memory of the past in different ways - she looked at works of architecture,

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<sup>154</sup> Sacks, 1986: 130

<sup>155</sup> Sacks, 1986: 136ff

<sup>156</sup> Robinson, 2000: 21, 102, 108

<sup>157</sup> Robinson, 2000: 45

ancient philosophy and psychology. She also created her own 'memory theatre' using photographs of significant persons in her life to remind her about them<sup>158</sup>.

As a writer Robinson had learned at a young age the importance of separating memory from storytelling<sup>159</sup>. Now, as a woman in her late fifties, she found herself having to recreate her past - her memories - from the stories others would tell her. Although she was learning about her own life, her own past, she was learning that she was a grandmother, that her father had died ten years before, that she was married to this Englishman, that she had had a problem with addiction in her past, in much the same way as we considered one might learn that the Scots and the English fought a bloody battle at Culloden in 1746. It was factual memory of events, as remembered by other people, not events memory as she had experienced them she was creating. This distinction was not lost on Robinson who writes, "Don't... confuse information with memory. The real memories are the emotional connections."<sup>160</sup> For example, we probably do not eat curry (or avoid eating it) because we remember the taste for it is not easy, in the absence of olfactory cues, to recapture the flavour in the imagination. Rather, I suggest, we eat curry (or avoid eating it) because we remember that we enjoy the taste (or not). But if we catch a whiff as we walk past our favourite restaurant we find our mouth watering for the olfactory cue enables the imagination to remember the flavour and make the emotional connection. Our memories contain the same emotional and spiritual charge and the same moral element as do the original experiences. Memory of an event cannot be separated from its accompanying emotion. If it is, it is only a partial memory.

Robinson voiced her concern that she was reinventing rather than recollecting memory to Steven Rose, professor of neurochemistry with the Open University. Rose responded that in a sense we do this every time we relate some remembered event. "Every act of memory is a reinvention, isn't

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<sup>158</sup> Robinson, 2000: 166ff

<sup>159</sup> Robinson, 2000: 121

<sup>160</sup> Robinson, 2000: 108



it?" he says, "When you tell a story, or have an experience, the memory shifts as the tale is a little different next time it is told. Its character also changes depending upon who you tell it to."<sup>161</sup> For example, to ask someone for a memory from childhood they would recall it as it was last recalled, bearing in mind that it changes each time it is retold<sup>162</sup>. This happens because we do not simply look back at past events but pass them through the filter of interpretation as we saw when we considered Mark Freeman.

In her effort to recreate her past Robinson discovered that she had more difficulty in remembering some facts and some people than others and noted that we often forget people quite simply because we are not interested in them<sup>163</sup>. The same could be said of some places and some events. In considering why, at a time when she was able to retain other information, she had to be told repeatedly that her father had died some ten years before, she asks, "I wonder if I remember less if it's something I don't want to know."<sup>164</sup> Because the human mind has a tendency at times to forget or deny some memories that are too awful to remember, Robinson's friend, John Lahr expressed concern that by seeking to retrieve what was forgotten she was making herself vulnerable<sup>165</sup>. Lahr does the opposite. With varying degrees of success he wills himself to forget painful memories or even memories of happier times which would cause him pain<sup>166</sup>. Despite his concern, however, Lahr was aware that it was important to Robinson's sense of personal identity that she did make every effort to retrieve memories. He was aware because of his own experience with his mother when she lost her memory. Speaking of his experience of that time Lahr says, "Without memory, you lose a sense of who you are, a sense of self, because really the self is only a collection of associations and memories of things done and done to you and where you've been - and without that, it's very hard to get any definition of who you are....

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<sup>161</sup> Robinson, 2000: 178

<sup>162</sup> Robinson, 2000: 179

<sup>163</sup> Robinson, 2000: 108

<sup>164</sup> Robinson, 2000: 35

<sup>165</sup> Robinson, 2000: 188

<sup>166</sup> Robinson, 2000: 186

But the experience of being with her when she lost her memory - there was nothing to share - she'd lost her identity."<sup>167</sup>

This was also Robinson's experience of herself when she lost her memory. Having lost her memory she had no sense of her identity, hence her journey to recapture the past and recreate her own identity. Despite much encouragement and support from her husband and friends who retained a sense of her identity when she lost it, it was a lonely journey, fraught with confusion, frustration and painful discoveries yet it was interlaced with special times, tender moments and exciting flashes of insight. It was a long, slow process but her efforts were rewarded. Going to Los Angeles for work was a breakthrough time for her<sup>168</sup>. It brought back many memories from the time when she had lived there some thirty years earlier. After reminiscing about people, places and work situations she eventually realised that the person from the past she had recreated herself into from the fragments of memory and imagination was different from reality and states, "I never was this girl I am looking for now."<sup>169</sup>

Through repeatedly asking questions about her past life and listening as others related stories from her life Robinson was able to weave the stories together to construct her personal narrative and make sense of who she was and is. Robinson's experience illustrates Warnock's thesis that we value memory so highly because it contributes to our sense of identity over time. As we have considered, it enables us to see our lives as a pattern and to make sense of our lives. In a few years Robinson went from being a woman with no past that she could recall and no sense of her own identity, from being a novelist unable to write because she could remember neither what she had written the previous day nor the plot she might have had in mind, to being able to write her autobiography and share her past, as well as the person she now knows herself to be, with her readers, even although that past and sense of self have been reconstructed from the fragments given to

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<sup>167</sup> Robinson, 2000: 188

<sup>168</sup> Robinson, 2000: 214ff

<sup>169</sup> Robinson, 2000: 226

her by the stories told to her by others. Robinson was literally enabled, through reconstructing memories to see the pattern of her life and make sense of herself. This reconstruction was possible only through the help of those with whom she was in relationship who remembered for her.

## **2.9 The Place of Story-telling**

For Anderson and Foley the telling of stories and weaving stories together to construct narratives is a basic human function. They look at the way we shape our stories and, perhaps more significantly, how our stories shape us. They look too at how we are able to connect to others through both telling them our story and hearing theirs, and incorporating theirs into ours. They consider the vital role of narrative in enabling us to make sense of what has happened to us in the past, who we are now and our hopes for the future. "We tell stories of a life in order to establish meaning and to integrate our remembered past with what we perceive to be happening in the present and what we anticipate for the future."<sup>170</sup>

This, as Wells notes, is also true of the Christian story, narrative enables us to understand God's progressive revelation of himself over time, and that which is to come – the New Creation – is an important part of that story. "It is the sense of an end to the story that makes it possible to speak of story at all.... Eschatology brings a shape to Christian theology.... By providing an end to the story it shows that the Christian narrative *is* indeed a story, not an endless sequence of events."<sup>171</sup>

This statement from Barbara Hardy helps us understand the ubiquity of narrative in our daily lives. "We dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative."<sup>172</sup> Bauckham and Hart cite Hardy to show that despite the antinarrativity of post modernism, narrative is an ever-present

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<sup>170</sup> Anderson & Foley, 1998: 5

<sup>171</sup> Wells, 1998: 150

<sup>172</sup> Cited in Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 31

part of our lives and is here to stay. They further support this with reference to many popular genres that employ narrative – film, drama, novel, biography, comic strip, and soap opera.<sup>173</sup>

Anderson and Foley tell of the healing experience of Rwandan women in a refugee camp in Tanzania from recalling, telling and retelling their stories. Even although they were in a safe place many of the women were unable to sleep and so the camp authorities brought in a psychologist to help with this problem. Through conversation with the women, the psychologist discovered that on arrival at the camp the women were instructed by camp officials not to bring the horrors and atrocities of war, which they had experienced, into the camp by talking about them. The psychologist created a 'safe place' under a tree for the women to come and tell their stories. This continued for several weeks at the end of which the women were able to sleep<sup>174</sup>. This experience illustrates that painful memories which are suppressed, denied or ignored will continue to be destructive to the functioning of the individual but that healing can begin once the painful memories are acknowledged and addressed. In his forward to a book on reconciliation Desmond Tutu quotes Ellen Kuzwayo, a South African writer and journalist, saying, "We need more stories never mind how painful the exercise might be. This is how we will learn to love one another. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and see things through someone else's eyes."<sup>175</sup> The use of story in understanding and forgiving others will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Bosch also considers the importance of telling and listening to stories. For her, storytelling is a powerful tool in breaking down barriers between people because it allows understanding to develop. She also makes the interesting observation which is all too easy to miss - that storytelling is as necessary for perpetrators as for their victims<sup>176</sup>. But storytelling does not go far enough, it is only a start in the healing process. "Telling your story," she says, "is a liberating experience, but without faith in Jesus Christ it will remain a mere

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<sup>173</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 31f

<sup>174</sup> Anderson & Foley, 1998: 3

<sup>175</sup> Botman & Peterson, 1996: 7

<sup>176</sup> Bosch (www)

shadow of that deeper reconciliation the Gospel tells us about."<sup>177</sup> In considering why stories are used and their place in theology, Hauerwas cites Sallie TeSelle who writes, "We love stories, then, because our lives are stories.... For the Christian, the story of Jesus is *the* story par excellence. That God should be with us in the story of a human life would be seen as...God's way of always being with human beings *as they are*, as the concrete, temporal beings who have a beginning and an end – who are, in other words, stories themselves."<sup>178</sup>

Stories not only have to be told, they have to be listened to and heard. It is through both telling our own stories and listening to the stories of others that we are enabled to accept and perhaps begin to understand the reality of the past<sup>179</sup>. As we have been considering, hurts that are swept under the carpet and denied instead of being told as part of our story fester in much the same way as an open flesh wound that is left untreated and uncleaned would do. As a result of being left to fester these hurts can have an adverse affect on our lives for many years. "Genuine Christian healing and peace can only be achieved when old wounds are opened and cleaned,"<sup>180</sup> and this can only happen when they are remembered, acknowledged and told.

Stroup notes that social scientists suggest narrative is the appropriate genre for recounting experience<sup>181</sup> and asks if there is, "something intrinsic in the structure of human experience that makes narrative...the most appropriate, if not necessary, form of expression."<sup>182</sup> Stories enable us to identify with others by telling us something about them and by giving us points of contact. This was recognised by Dag Hammarskjöld. Two years before his appointment to Secretary General of the United Nations, he wrote in his diary, "*What* you are can be of interest to (others) not *that* you are."<sup>183</sup> Henri Nouwen draws our attention to the related distinction between events of our

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<sup>177</sup> Bosch (www)

<sup>178</sup> Hauerwas, 1977: 72 (original emphasis)

<sup>179</sup> Bosch (www)

<sup>180</sup> Bosch (www)

<sup>181</sup> Stroup, 1975: 136

<sup>182</sup> Stroup: 1975: 135

<sup>183</sup> Cited in McClendon, 1974: 46 (original emphasis)

life and how these events affect us as persons. "The events of our lives are probably less important than the form they take in the totality of our story...much of their sense of self derives less from what happened than from how they remember what happened, how they have placed the past events into their own personal history."<sup>184</sup>

Stanley Hauerwas explains the difference between theory and story. Theory explains and informs while story involves both storyteller and listener in a way of life. "A theory is meant to help you know the world without changing the world yourself; a story is to help you deal with the world by changing it through changing yourself."<sup>185</sup> In other words, story enables and incites our identification and involvement with one another.

Storytelling not only reminds us of what has been, it gives us hope for what will be. "As long as we have stories to tell each other there is hope. As long as we can remind each other of the manifest there is reason to move forward to a new land in which new stories are hidden."<sup>186</sup> As we will consider in the chapter on Forgiveness, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa discovered the value of story-telling for both victims and perpetrators if forgiveness and reconciliation are to take place.

## **2.10 Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Chapter three looks in detail at forgiveness. In this section I will look specifically at the reconfiguring of memory through forgiveness.

Father Michael Lapsley, who went to live in South Africa from New Zealand in the 1970s was exiled from the country for some years. During his exile, which he spent in Zimbabwe, he was informed that he was on a South African Government hit list. In April 1990, just over two months after Mandela's release from prison, Lapsley received a letter bomb from South

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<sup>184</sup> Nouwen, undated: 21

<sup>185</sup> Hauerwas, 1977: 73

<sup>186</sup> Nouwen, undated: 66

Africa. The blast blew off both his hands, blinded one eye and injured the other. He writes, "If we try to ignore or bury the past it will haunt us and may even destroy us... we cannot be healed until we acknowledge our sickness."<sup>187</sup> Lapsley returned to South Africa where he worked as a chaplain to a Trauma Centre in Capetown. He notes that the one thing many of the Trauma Centre's clients have in common is that they are seeking healing of their memories<sup>188</sup>.

In considering situations such as those of Father Lapsley, the people with whom he worked at the Trauma Centre and the Rwandan women who were unable to sleep until they were given the opportunity to tell their story, Anderson and Foley conclude by quoting R Schreiter, "In forgiving we do not forget; we remember in a different way. We cannot forget what has happened to us. *To erase part of our memory is to erase part of our very identity as persons....* We remember in a way that does not carry rancour for what has been. We remember now from God's perspective, thanks to the grace of reconciliation."<sup>189</sup> This is what it is to 'remember well'.

David Seamands also shows that it is only through acknowledging and addressing painful memories that healing can begin. Memory healing is not about forgetting the past, in fact it may involve hard work recalling long-buried memories. It is rather about deliverance from past hurts and the redeeming of painful memories. For Seamands this kind of healing takes place by revisiting in the imagination painful events and experiences from the past. He writes, "It is then through the use of our sanctified imaginations, that we pray as if we were actually there at the time it took place, allowing God to minister to us in the manner we needed at that time."<sup>190</sup> I would suggest that if it is possible for painful memories to be healed and redeemed in this way during our lifetime while we continue to live in a world which is fallen then we will undoubtedly be able to live with our painful memories in God's New Creation without these memories causing debilitating pain or suffering. We

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<sup>187</sup> Cited in Botman & Peterson, 1996: 23

<sup>188</sup> Cited in Botman & Peterson, 1996: 7

<sup>189</sup> Anderson & Foley, 1998, 172 (emphasis added)

<sup>190</sup> Seamands, 1986: 33

can anticipate a New Creation without suffering where God will "wipe every tear from our eyes" - permanently<sup>191</sup>!

Learning to forgive others and to accept the forgiveness of others and of God is a crucial factor in remembering well. Lewis Smedes sees forgiveness as the key that unlocks the painful prison of our memories. "When you forgive," writes Smedes, "you must often be content with the editing of your own memory. It is the editing of your memory that is your salvation... If you cannot... You enslave yourself to your own painful past and by fastening yourself to the past you let your hate become your future. You can reverse your future only by releasing other people from their pasts."<sup>192</sup> This is an important point for it places an emphasis on releasing others from their past through forgiveness while forgiveness is often seen only in terms of what we do for ourselves.

Of equal importance to the necessity of learning to forgive others is the necessity of learning to accept forgiveness. "At the heart of our learning to remember well is learning to be forgiven by God."<sup>193</sup> God redeems the past. He does not erase it. It was God who said, "The truth will set you free." (John 8:31). Truth is not concerned with suppression, denial and hiddenness. It has, rather, to do with openness, honesty, knowledge and understanding.

Forgiveness and being forgiven are possible if and only if that which requires forgiveness is remembered. Unacknowledged and denied issues are unresolved issues. Writing of the Northern Ireland situation Stevenson expresses his concern that to gloss over the atrocities in the name of 'forgive and forget' is to deny the reality of the atrocities and subsequent feelings of the victims. "If we cover up past wrongs with a veneer of forgiving forgetfulness this does not deal with the deep-seated need to keep faith with those who have suffered and died."<sup>194</sup> Although writing about Northern Ireland these words can quite easily apply to any number of other atrocities -

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<sup>191</sup> Revelation 7:17

<sup>192</sup> Cited in Botman & Peterson, 1996: 10

<sup>193</sup> Jones, 2001: 267

<sup>194</sup> Stevenson (www)



the Holocaust, apartheid in South Africa, the Balkan crisis, the Dunblane massacre, terrorist bombings in New York and Washington, or even – from the perspective of some - the American bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq to name but a few. The difference between forgiving and condoning or denying (which is what forgetting would amount to) will be discussed in the following chapter.

In our non-forgetting we take our example from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. As Abraham Heschel writes, "Much of what the Bible demands can be comprised in one word, 'Remember'."<sup>195</sup> There are many instances, particularly in the Old Testament Scriptures, of the command to remember. Craig Dysktra lists for us examples of what we are to remember:

- Freedom from Egypt
- The wilderness and Canaan
- All God's commands
- God's judgement and mercy
- God.

Of the children of Israel he says, "They remember in times of trouble and affliction. They remember as they seek understanding and a way to live. They remember while in bondage. They remember in order to interpret what is going on in the world and what it means, and they remember in giving thanks and praise."<sup>196</sup>

From this we can see, as Nouwen also discusses, that remembering is more than looking back. It is bringing past events into today. In the Old and New Testaments remembrance is participation.<sup>197</sup> Nouwen cites Brevard Childs who states, "The act of remembering serves to actualise the past for a generation removed in time from those former events in order that they themselves can have an intimate encounter with the great acts of redemption.... Although separated in time and space from the sphere of God's revelation in the past, through memory the gulf is spanned and the

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<sup>195</sup> Cited in Nouwen, undated: 13

<sup>196</sup> Dysktra, 1987: 159

<sup>197</sup> Nouwen, undated: 38

exiled people share again in redemption history."<sup>198</sup> This is, in a way, what Jill Robinson was doing as she attempted to make the memories of others her own. It is also something Ricoeur discusses. He suggests that our ancestors' memories of time before our birth can become part of our own memory by being passed on to us – a kind of 'apostolic succession' of memories. "My grandfather might have told me during my youth of events concerning people whom I could never have known. Here the frontier that separates the historical past from individual memory is porous.... An ancestor's memory partly intersects with his descendents' memories.... In this way, a bridge is constructed between the historical past and memory by the ancestral narrative that serves as a relay station for memory directed to the historical past, conceived of as the time of people now dead and the time before my own birth."<sup>199</sup> In his discussion of how Jewish identity relies on memory going back to the time of the patriarchs, Elie Wiesel also notes, in interview with Carol Rittner, that, "Everyone has a memory before his or her own."<sup>200</sup>

The following poem by Timothy Dudley-Smith further illustrates that remembering is not for the sake of remembrance alone. Not only do we remember in order to have an encounter with the redemptive acts from the past but also for the sake of others who themselves may have forgotten these acts. We remember, in part, to enable others to make our memories theirs.

So much of our identity depends on memory:  
the who-I-am-now made up from  
what-I-have-been, from that's-how-it-was,  
from all the formative experience of life.  
But my real identity – as a child of God  
and in the sight of heaven –  
means remembering you, Lord.  
    all you have done for me,  
    all you command me, promise me, provide for me,  
    all that you are.

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<sup>198</sup> Cited in Nouwen, undated: 38

<sup>199</sup> Ricoeur, 1990: 114

<sup>200</sup> Cited in Rittner, 1990: 31

Much is indeed written on my heart;  
much taught to my children  
(which now I learn again from them).  
I have my tokens of remembrance,  
words spoken, blessings given,  
prayers answered, Bible promises,  
bread and wine.  
Living as I do in a world  
where too many  
have simply forgotten God,  
help me to be in my small way  
a reminder  
that our lives are not our own,  
that we are only tenants of earth,  
strangers and pilgrims,  
who must one day give account.<sup>201</sup>

As well as encouraging and commanding us to remember, Scripture also frequently 'remembers' the suffering of Christ. And Christ's resurrection body bears the scars of the crucifixion as an eternal reminder. For God to forget forgiven sin would mean forgetting Christ's suffering, therefore God "remembers our sin no more,"<sup>202</sup> he non-remembers our sin. Similarly, if we did not remember the depth of our forgiven sin then we would run the risk of trivialising the enormity of God's forgiveness and his all-embracing power to redeem the damage our sin causes<sup>203</sup>. Just as with Peter the forgiveness and restoration we receive from God would mean little to us if we had no memory of that which had been forgiven. This surely is why there is frequent biblical exhortation to remember. For example, the apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to remember that from which they had been forgiven. He reminds them both of their past and their present states. "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived... All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of the flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God... Even when we were dead through our trespasses made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved... Remember that you were at that time without Christ... Having no hope and without God in the

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<sup>201</sup> Dudley-Smith, 1994: 14f

<sup>202</sup> Jeremiah 31:34

<sup>203</sup> Stevenson (www)

world."<sup>204</sup> "Whilst the past cannot and shall not easily be forgotten," writes Stevenson, "within the grace of God it can be redeemed and the memory of it can be healed."<sup>205</sup>

The biblical injunction to remember, Ricoeur tells us, is not the same as historiography. For many years Jews 'remembered' and had no need of historiography. The beginning of historical research was a result of their assimilating gentile culture<sup>206</sup>. Ricoeur explains that the difference between memory and history is that memory is continuous while history is discontinuous.<sup>207</sup> Memory grows, develops and takes on new meaning over time in the ways and for the reasons we have already considered. Memory is personal and has meaning and relevance only as long as it is meaningful and relevant to the one whose memory it is. History, on the other hand, remains fixed – nothing can change the historical fact that the Battle of Culloden was fought in 1745 and no amount of reinterpretation can transfer victory to the defeated Scots. History is shared and can continue to have relevance and meaning in a nation's life long after the participants are gone. Like Ricoeur, Gillian Banner draws attention to the difference between history and memory, noting that history presents the facts of the past as past while memory is current, and also that, "Memory, whilst it inhabits territory which is coterminous with history, concerns itself with something other than historical accuracy."<sup>208</sup> History, she tells us, often seems to sanitise facts where memory does not. For example, reports from soldiers liberating concentration camps contained phrases like "allegedly used as a lethal gas chamber" and, "stains which appear to be caused by blood"<sup>209</sup>. No-one who was incarcerated in the camps would use such phraseology in their remembrance. The facts would not be sanitised with words like 'allegedly' or 'appears to be'.

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<sup>204</sup> Ephesians 2:1-12

<sup>205</sup> Stevenson (www)

<sup>206</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerusalmi, cited in Ricoeur, 1990: 320, n.5

<sup>207</sup> Ricoeur, 1990: 303

<sup>208</sup> Banner, 2000: 11

<sup>209</sup> Banner, 2000: 12

The difference between history and memory is also portrayed in Charles Powers' novel, *In The Memory Of The Forest*. The novel is set in a Polish village in the 1980s. We are told that before the Second World War, eighty percent of the village population were Jewish, now there are no Jews in the village. The village has secrets - most of which the reader is not told but left to guess - dating back to wartime and largely related to the Jews. The village also suffers from ongoing corruption among village leaders and business people. Both the secrets and the corruption are causing unrest among the villagers. One of the parish priests, Father Jerzy, together with a group of men from the village, is engaged in an effort to expose present corruption. The senior priest, Father Taduesz who, himself is secretly trying, from old parish records and maps to ascertain what happened in the past, in particular with regard to the Jews, disapproves of his colleague's political activities and reminds him,

"But we're religious men."

Father Jerzy replies, "We're men with a religious vocation living in the real world. We have duties, one of them is to truth."

"Or truthful memory," Father Taduesz says,

"Memory?" asks Jerzy.

"That's what it is, isn't it?" Taduesz continues, "A remembered version of truth."<sup>210</sup>

Later, when they were arguing about it again, Father Jerzy said angrily to Father Taduesz, "They'll take your willingness to forget, and they'll turn it to (their) advantage."<sup>211</sup>

Banner gives the following illustration of the difference between history and memory. The pathway with reproduction Jewish headstones at the entrance to the camp at Plaszów was created for Stephen Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List*. It is not historically factual, but it represents truth, and as such has meaning for many, and is visited by many<sup>212</sup>.

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<sup>210</sup> Powers, 1998: 317

<sup>211</sup> Powers, 1998: 418

<sup>212</sup> Banner, 2000: 16

Reconciliation, then, which does not involve remembering the offence - albeit the forgiven offence - is, for Stevenson, based on something other than the cross of Christ. Reconciliation is impossible without remembering for how can we be reconciled one to the other unless we remember what caused the need for reconciliation in the first place? Similarly Bosch comments that to forget or deny the past is to destroy truth and deny the power of Christ's death and resurrection. She goes on to say that remembering will always be painful without reconciliation<sup>213</sup>. Our need for reconciliation is as important to our emotional and spiritual health and well-being as is remembering.

Although his focus is not on reconciliation during our lifetime, Volf would agree with both Bosch and Stevenson about our need for reconciliation with one another and with God.<sup>214</sup> Taking as his starting point Barth's challenge that in heaven we will be reunited not only with those we have loved in this life but also those whom we have not loved, Volf looks at the social aspect of reconciliation at the eschaton. His thesis is that those whom we do not love will have to be transformed into those whom we love and the unloving will have to become loving in order to inhabit what Jonathan Edwards calls, 'a world of love'. He then seeks to address the question of how this is to be possible, how not only individuals but also the relationships between them will be eternally healed and transformed. This healing and transformation of relationships will take place between people, not as something that is imposed on them<sup>215</sup>. Forgiveness and reconciliation, says Volf, cannot be imposed on people against their will but is always volitional.

If relationships between individuals, as well as the individuals themselves, are not restored Volf argues that there will not be a New World but just more of the same. If God's New World were a wholly newly created world, judgement and resurrection would be sufficient rites of passage. But this is not the case, rather God will recreate the present world, transforming and completing it. "While we may properly wish to insist that this 'new' creation

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<sup>213</sup> Bosch (www)

<sup>214</sup> Volf, 2000: 91ff

<sup>215</sup> Volf, 2000: 93

will (unlike its original counterpart) not be *ab initio* (not a *novel* creation) but precisely a re-creation of the fallen order, nonetheless it is vital to recognise that such identity and continuity as may ultimately prove to exist between the two will be set within the context of such a radical newness.<sup>216</sup>

Volf suggests that only those who had already been fully transformed in this life would be able to enter God's New World unless this eschatological transformation and newness includes reconciliation, not only between God and human beings but also between human beings<sup>217</sup>. That this will be something that happens between people by their effort and not imposed on them from outside seems to be suggested by the prophet Isaiah, "*They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.*"<sup>218</sup> A similar theme, embracing all creation, not just human beings is also found in Isaiah. "*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*"<sup>219</sup>

Such reconciliation between people involves both the grace of God and an act of the will of those involved in much the same way as the love of human beings for God is an act of the will made possible by the grace and mercy of God working in them. Volf stresses the point that the cleansing of sin by an outside agency alone (God) is insufficient for relationships to be healed but that the persons involved in these relationships have to be included in the process. He argues that to suggest otherwise is to undermine identity by divorcing it from the person. Identity is shaped and harmed, formed and deformed, in relationships and for this reason Volf suggests that the healing

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<sup>216</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 80

<sup>217</sup> Volf, 2000: 93

<sup>218</sup> Isaiah 2:4 (emphasis added)

<sup>219</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9

should also be a social event<sup>220</sup>. If the integrity of personal identity is to be retained then the past cannot be changed. It must be redeemed so that it can be made possible for victims and perpetrators to be given a new future together. A new past is not possible. Volf sees as thoroughly inadequate any doctrine of reconciliation between persons that advocates reconciliation as something happening to rather than between them. The grace of God, together with the participation of human beings, he says, transforms life and individuals into an eternal community of love<sup>221</sup>. Volf's requirement for post-mortem reconciliation between people seems to be a move away from his earlier contention of eschatological forgetting for if we were to forget the hurts caused by others, it seems that there would be no need for reconciliation. We surely would relate to them as if nothing had ever happened to fracture our relationship. If the suffering caused by a wrong done to me by another is permanently erased from my memory as Volf suggests, then I would not be aware of having anything to hold against the other. Reconciliation between persons is necessary when their relationship is damaged. If I were to forget the actions of the other that at one time caused pain as Volf's 'eschatological forgetting' indicates, I would not be aware that our relationship had been damaged therefore have no need to be reconciled.

If, on the other hand, my painful memories were reconfigured because, through the grace of God, I have been enabled to remember well, a further act of reconciliation would be superfluous. I suggest that there is no place for post-mortem reconciliation as Volf suggests. Reconciliation which is a necessary part of relationships in a broken world has no place in God's New Creation where, as we will consider in chapter 4, all negative and painful memories will be healed and redeemed.

### **2.11 Healing The Past**

Responding to Volf's notion of eschatological forgetting, Jones takes as his starting point the time honoured cliché that 'time heals all things'. He

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<sup>220</sup> Volf, 2000: 94, 100

<sup>221</sup> Volf, 2000: 94, 107f



challenges the cliché's veracity. Whether we are thinking about physical or emotional wounds it simply is not true to suggest that time and time alone can heal all things. Some things will heal with time alone but other things need careful attention if they are to heal and not spread causing further damage. Jones points out that if time alone could heal there would be no need for physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists or even drugs<sup>222</sup>. He suggests that perhaps we say time heals all things to enable us to hope that one day we can say, 'forgive and forget' but, he suggests it is eternity, not time that heals<sup>223</sup>. Time on its own is no more a causative factor in healing than it is in the distortion of memories or in the growth and development of a child, as considered above.

To forget, he tells us, has the same effect as to deny or to neglect - the wound does not receive attention so festers and spreads. This is illustrated in Barbara Neil's *A History of Silence*, the fictional story of Laura and Robbie, two adult sisters with unspoken secrets from their childhood, secrets which continue to affect life in the present, to impair their functioning as persons and adversely affect their relationships with one another and with others because of their silence, because of their refusal either to acknowledge or tell their story, or to listen to the story of the other. Time alone did not heal the wounds of their past. The younger woman, Robbie, is unable to allow herself to form close relationships with others, while her sister Laura appears on the surface more able to form relationships but frequently self-harms and at one period in her life engaged in promiscuous behaviour. In reflecting about her inability to form relationships Robbie states, "Something hinders me from being close to people, the same thing that drives Laura right up to them, I suppose."<sup>224</sup>

Henri Nouwen also comments on the fact that healing is not possible when memory is denied or hidden. He writes, "Feelings of alienation, loneliness, separation; feelings of anxiety, fear, suspicion; and related symptoms such

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<sup>222</sup> Jones, 2001:241

<sup>223</sup> Jones, 2001: 242

<sup>224</sup> Neil, 1998: 166

as nervousness, sleeplessness, nail-biting – these are all part of the forms which certain memories have taken. These memories wound because they are often deeply hidden in the centre of our being and very hard to reach...painful memories tend to remain hidden in the corner of our forgetfulness...they escape healing and cause so much harm.”<sup>225</sup>

To say that time alone does not heal is not to deny that healing involves time or that it can take a long time to forgive. Jones mentions CS Lewis who on one occasion took thirty years to realise he had forgiven someone who had wronged him. Jones asks, “If it takes so long to discover forgiveness in some situations or relationships, how much more might be the burden of memory, formed, and nurtured over at least that long a time?”<sup>226</sup>

Returning to *In The Memory Of The Forest*, Mr Maleszewski, grandfather of the main character, Leszek had been telling his grandson about a distressing wartime experience. Some time before, he and his friend, Górski, had made an agreement with one another that if either of them was injured and unable to escape being captured by the Germans the other would kill him in order to prevent the injured one being tortured. Górski was shot and badly injured as they were running from enemy soldiers and was unable to keep up with the rest of his group so, true to his word, Maleszewski shot him in the back of the head. Even as he spoke to Leszek about it over forty years later he could visualise the scene and said, “I have to remember it. I forgot it for years, and then it came back...I didn’t ask to remember it. Something made me remember it. Now I *want* to remember it.” Leszek asked him why and the old man replied, “Because it’s the truth. It’s my life. It was one moment, but it was part of my life. Not *all* my life but my life. No one else’s. When I go, it goes with me.”<sup>227</sup>

Mr Maleszewski’s memory, which had apparently been forgotten for many years, returned to him as an old man. Much as the memory distressed him

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<sup>225</sup> Nouwen, undated: 21

<sup>226</sup> Jones, 2001: 242

<sup>227</sup> Powers, 1998: 337f (original emphasis)

he recognised that he was more complete with it than without it and, given the choice would not bury it. He knew that years of 'forgetting' had not healed the memory and that he had to face it and work with it in order to find completeness and healing.

"Truthfulness demands that we admit and face the past as it really was... denying or ignoring it doesn't heal it... makes things worse... God heals by facing and working *through* problems, not by circumventing them."<sup>228</sup> In order to be healed the individual, like Peter, has to remember, face and tackle past experiences. Without doing so, without confronting past pain and trauma, healing cannot begin. Memory healing is not about forgetting the past, it is, rather, deliverance from past hurts. This is only possible if, like we saw with Peter, the past is confronted and remembered. Healing of memories not only can free the individual to live life in all its richness and fullness today and to face the future with confident hope, it can also improve the self-image.

Eve Batiste's sister Cicely refused initially to acknowledge her trauma. She became withdrawn, not talking to anyone, and her behaviour became irrational. She even denied herself the love and support of her best friend and sister, Eve. In so doing Cicely went from being a loving and playful child to a withdrawn, silent child with unpredictable and irrational behaviour. The language her family and friends could have used in describing her behaviour would be to say that she was acting 'out of character'. It could perhaps be argued that the trauma alone caused these changes in her, that her refusal to deal with it had nothing to do with it, had she not connected with Eve once more when, with Eve's forceful encouragement and loving confrontation, she acknowledged her painful memory.

A similar pattern can be seen, for example, in victims of child abuse who may carry the consequences of such violation well into adult life, if not for the rest of their lives if they are not encouraged and enabled to remember the past in

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<sup>228</sup> Kraft, 1993: 193

order that it can then be left behind. McFadyen writes, "Childhood sexual abuse often has severe long-term traumatic consequences that affect a person's basic pattern and direction of dynamic life-intentionality."<sup>229</sup> If the victim of child abuse is to be able to move on, if she is to be able to interact with and respond to others in relationships of mutual trust and of mutual benefit, if she is to move on from being a 'victim' to being a 'survivor', she must, through the sensitive help of others, come to a place where she acknowledges the ugly memories with which she is living, takes control of her own life and takes responsibility for her actions. She has to learn to 'remember well'. Then, and then only, is she able to leave the past behind, embrace the present and move forward and into the future.

Charles Elliot states that we are what we are because of conscious and unconscious memory of our personal narrative and our largely unconscious memory of childhood trauma, and argues that, "We need to be in touch with counter-memories that can encourage and enable us to rewrite our narratives."<sup>230</sup> He argues that this is what salvation offers – memories are healed by bringing the memory to the 'conscious light of reason' (a phrase he borrows from Freud) of Christ's life, death and resurrection<sup>231</sup>. In so doing the memories do not lose their reality but lose power to determine how we live and act<sup>232</sup>. Elliot argues further that to attempt to tackle unhealed memory apart from the counter-memories of the Christ-narrative "is to invite seven more devils, more evil than the first, to move into the vacuum left by the healing of the original memory."<sup>233</sup>

Thinking of the issue of suffering and memory, Volf suggests that to forget suffering is better than to remember it because to forget it brings wholeness while to remember it brings continued suffering. He suggests that to lose the memory of an unredeemed past is to be free of the past, thus for the past to

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<sup>229</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 14

<sup>230</sup> Elliot, 1995: 193

<sup>231</sup> Elliot, 1995: 194

<sup>232</sup> Elliot, 1995: 203

<sup>233</sup> Elliot, 1995: 194

be redeemed<sup>234</sup>. This argument seems to be open to question theologically and psychologically. Thinking back to Peter, would his past have been redeemed if he had not remembered it? Did it not have to be remembered in order that it would be forgiven, thus future remembering of his failure being in the light of the memory of his forgiveness? In counselling, people are urged to remember the past in order that they can be freed from it. Sometimes the very fact that something is deeply buried and apparently forgotten results in serious psychological problems as well as physical ailments. It has to be recalled in order that it can be left behind. The work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud is based on his experience that, "Especially powerful or traumatic experiences in our memories may be repressed but still influence us on an unconscious level."<sup>235</sup>

The following poem by Holocaust survivor, Alexander Kimel, shows how, in many ways he longs to forget his experiences but knows that he cannot and indeed must not.

**The Action In The Ghetto Of Rohatyn, March 1942.**

Do I want to remember?  
The peaceful ghetto, before the raid:  
Children shaking like leaves in the wind.  
Mothers searching for a piece of bread.  
Shadows, on swollen legs, moving with fear.  
No, I don't want to remember, but how can I forget?

Do I want to remember, the creation of hell?  
The shouts of the Raiders, enjoying the hunt.  
Cries of the wounded, begging for life.  
Faces of mothers carved with pain.  
Hiding Children, dripping with fear.  
No, I don't want to remember, but how can I forget?

Do I want to remember, my fearful return?  
Families vanished in the midst of the day.  
The mass grave steaming with vapor of blood.  
Mothers searching for children in vain.  
The pain of the ghetto, cuts like a knife.  
No, I don't want to remember, but how can I forget?

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<sup>234</sup> Volf, 1996: 138f

<sup>235</sup> Ralston, 1999 (www)

Do I want to remember, the wailing of the night?  
The doors kicked ajar, ripped feathers floating the air.  
The night scented with snow-melting blood.  
While the compassionate moon, is showing the way.  
For the faceless shadows, searching for kin.  
No, I don't want to remember, but I cannot forget.

Do I want to remember this world upside down?  
Where the departed are blessed with an instant death.  
While the living condemned to a short wretched life,  
And a long tortuous journey into unnamed place,  
Converting Living Souls, into ashes and gas.  
No. I Have to Remember and Never Let You Forget.<sup>236</sup>

## **2.12 Remembering Well**

Just as Kimel yearned to forget the horrors of his holocaust experience but knew he must not, so Jones questions the validity, the rightness, of forgetting the sins - whether our own or other people's - that separate us from God and from one another. He asks whether forgetting our own forgiven sins and the forgiven sins of others might lead us to worship an uncrucified Christ, just as for God to forget forgiven sins would mean his forgetting Christ's suffering. He writes, "I fear that linking forgiveness with forgetting tempts us to worship an uncrucified Christ rather than Christ who was crucified."<sup>237</sup>

By posing questions, such as, "Can we find ways to forget things that have happened without unhealthily repressing the memories?" or "Does forgetting betray the victims and their loved ones?" Jones implies that it is not possible to forget in a healing way, that only repression is possible and further, that it is not moral to forget because forgetting betrays victims (and presumably exonerates perpetrators). The alternative, he suggests, is 'remembering well'<sup>238</sup>. We will only remember well when we are willing to forget. It is an indication of our forgiveness and reconciliation with God and others<sup>239</sup>.

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<sup>236</sup> <http://www.remember.org/witness/kimel2.html>

<sup>237</sup> Jones, 2001: 242

<sup>238</sup> Jones, 2001: 242f

<sup>239</sup> Jones, 2001: 249

Memory of the past can be a burden and Jones suggests that forgiveness can enable us to remember differently<sup>240</sup>. In day-to-day living, however, we often find that we forget what we want to remember and remember what we would rather forget. He states that we are physiologically unequipped to remember everything but gives no evidence in support of this claim. His claim contradicts that of Canadian neurologist, Wilder Penfield who, based on his own empirical research in the 1950s, states that the brain stores every detail of everything we experience - as well as the accompanying emotions - even although we have no conscious awareness of many of the events and incidents at any given time<sup>241</sup>. Similarly, Mary Stott also notes that even when people think they do not remember much from their childhood, the act of thinking back (she refers to people thinking back for the purpose of writing their autobiography) generally stirs memory<sup>242</sup>. For Penfield the problem is not so much one of retention as one of retrieval and he claims that if the appropriate part of the brain were stimulated then the forgotten memory would be retrieved. Perhaps then we should say instead that we are psychologically unable to remember everything. George Steiner observes that we could go mad if we remembered everything - "To remember is to risk despair."<sup>243</sup> - and he is very probably correct. Remembering everything was the problem of Luria's mnemonist, 'S', whose memory, Luria noted "had no distinct limits"<sup>244</sup>. S's problem was that he had to learn to forget the images that he did not need because he had so much information retained that facts began to interfere with each other. After trying different methods he eventually discovered that he could volitionally forget - if he did not want something to appear in his mind it would not<sup>245</sup>. This ability must be as rare as his remarkable memory.

There are, of course, both advantages and disadvantages of our inability to remember everything. An obvious major advantage is that it prevents sensory overload and a disadvantage is the frustration that at times results

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<sup>240</sup> Jones, 2001: 243

<sup>241</sup> Seamands, 1996: 124f

<sup>242</sup> Stott, 1975: 7

<sup>243</sup> Steiner, 1992: 31

<sup>244</sup> Luria, 1969: 11

<sup>245</sup> Luria, 1969: 71

from our failure to remember something<sup>246</sup>. Thinking of this positive function of forgetting - or, perhaps more accurately, non-remembering - Underwood reminds us that just as processes of growth and decay are found in nature so too in our intellects we have processes of growth (learning and memory) and of decay (forgetting). For example, he says, nature produces a beautiful tree which is then destroyed by a tornado. But, he continues, forgetting is not as negative as that. (He would perhaps find the growth and decay of the changing seasons a more helpful analogy from nature than his tree and tornado analogy for the decay of autumn has a positive function in the life of the organism in the way that a tornado does not.) Forgetting, he tells us is a release mechanism and prevents sensory overload<sup>247</sup>. In the light of our previous discussion, however, it might be better to say that it is non-remembering that is a release-mechanism. Without such non-remembering we would, like Luria's mnemonist, need to discover ways to discriminate between what once was relevant but no longer is and what is relevant now<sup>248</sup>. For example, I may be able to remember the telephone numbers of the houses in which I lived twenty and thirty years ago but need to be able to discriminate between these numbers which are no longer relevant and my current telephone number which is relevant to my life now.

Rowan Williams asks, "What if the past that is returned or recovered is a record of guilt, hurt and diminution? The memory I have to recover is that of my particular, unalterable past; and if that is a memory whose recollecting is unbearably painful... How is it liberating?" He answers, "If forgiveness is liberation, it is also a recovery of the past in hope, a return of memory, in which what is potentially threatening, destructive, despair-inducing, in the past is transfigured into the ground of hope."<sup>249</sup>

The potential problems of revisiting particularly painful memories is also considered by Charles Elliot who argues that in doing such 'memory work' we need to be in touch with 'counter-memories'. These counter-memories, as

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<sup>246</sup> Jones, 2001: 243

<sup>247</sup> Underwood, 1983: 3

<sup>248</sup> Underwood, 1983: 5f

<sup>249</sup> Cited in Jones, 2001: 247



we have already touched on, are to be found in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. They make it possible for us to rewrite our narratives thus enable us to see the incompleteness, partiality and oftentimes illusionary nature of our memories and free us from subsequent compulsion and error<sup>250</sup>. The destructive power of our memories is lessened, Elliot argues, when we view them through the lens of the counter-memory of the Jesus narrative. This gives us clarity and sharpness of vision, and a perspective not otherwise possible. Some might argue, however, that to view past events through a lens gives artificiality to our vision, blurring and distorting it. The responses to this argument are first that oftentimes vision that is blurred and distorted is corrected and clarified by lenses, and second that the past is always passed through an interpretative filter. The choice is, to some extent, ours whether we view the past through a constructive, perspective-giving filter or through a negative, destructive one. Forgiveness and salvation, then, transform the meaning of our past because we are enabled to view our past through the constructive, perspective-giving lens of counter-memories.

Relativising memories by placing them alongside the counter-memory of Jesus' life, death and resurrection enables us to gain perspective. It does not undermine, negate or deny the memories, neither does it deny the pain caused by them. Elliot states, "They begin to lose their compulsive power. Such a process does not deny the sense of injustice or hurt or the reality of past and present suffering. But it undermines the ultimacy of these emotions, denying them the absolute value that they easily acquire - and which is essential if they are to be maintained over any length of time."<sup>251</sup> In other words, to confront the destructive memories from which we need to be liberated with the consciousness and light of reason of the counter-memories of the life, death and resurrection of Christ is to 'remember well'.

Jones also makes this point, noting that as Christians we have no need to hide the truth from ourselves - no need to forget - because we are enveloped in God's grace. "We locate our lives, our memories and our forgiveness in

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<sup>250</sup> Elliot, 1995: 163f

<sup>251</sup> Elliot, 1995: 238

the grace of the crucified and risen Christ.... Forgiveness ought to be linked far more closely to 'remembering well' than to forgetting."<sup>252</sup>

We need to be clear what motivates our desire to remember. Remembering well, as we have seen, is a sign of our forgiven-ness and of our reconciliation with God and with others, so we will remember well when we are *willing* to forget. If we are to remember well, and not simply remember, we have to be clear whether our remembering is to be the basis of reconciliation or if we are holding onto something because we want to let our wounds fester in order to make a moral or political point<sup>253</sup>.

Memories of gross injustice and suffering inflicted by others; the kind of cankerous memories, in other words, with which Volf is concerned are the kind of memories which, as I have attempted to show, only fester and become worse if suppressed and denied. Henri Nouwen suggests that it may be worse to forget sins (our own and those of others) than for them to have been committed. "Because what is forgotten cannot be healed and that which cannot be healed easily becomes the cause of greater evil.... By cutting off our past we paralyse our future: forgetting the evil behind us we evoke the evil in front of us."<sup>254</sup> Just as cutting off our past paralyses the future, so too to heal the wounded past opens up a new future<sup>255</sup>, it gives us a future and a hope.

### **2.13 Summary and Conclusion**

The chapter began by distinguishing between our own memories of events we have experienced, places we have been and people we have met from the memory of facts or skills we have learned. The type of memories with which we are concerned here is the former – memories, that is, of people, places and events we have experienced.

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<sup>252</sup> Jones, 2001: 248f

<sup>253</sup> Jones, 2001: 249

<sup>254</sup> Nouwen, undated: 17f

<sup>255</sup> Nouwen, undated: 18

We saw that memory – which is an activity of the imagination – enables us to see life as a pattern, thus enabling us to make sense of our lives. It contributes to our sense of continuity over time, thus our sense of a congruent self. For this reason we place a high value on memory. This was illustrated later in the chapter through the autobiographical work of Jill Robinson who, when she lost her memory, was unable to make sense of her own life. We have seen that memory has a crucial function in making us who we are and putting us in touch, through the imagination, with the people, places and events that have contributed to the formation of our identity. “Memory is a profound shaping force which grants us our identity. It is memory which reminds us of our personal heritage, bearing into our presence (often unbidden) people, events, places which define the shape of our personal story to good or ill effect.”<sup>256</sup>

Having considered that memory enables us to make sense of self we then saw that studies of patients with Korsakov’s syndrome have shown that with loss of memory goes a loss of sense of identity. We saw too that people with dementia who are past the stage of communicating with others are often seen to commune with God in worship. People who show little obvious response to other stimuli have been observed to respond to familiar hymns. I suggested that this may be because in worship we reach out to God who communicates with us in our spirit and enables response.

We looked at some of the factors that distort memory and considered that each time we rerun a scene from the past through our minds it is slightly different from each other time. This does not mean that our memories are invalid or that they are not valuable. It happens because experiences as they occur and memory as we look back are passed through the filter of interpretation. Old and new memories interpret and give meaning to one another in much the same way as Old and New Testament interpret and give meaning to one another.

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<sup>256</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 2000: 58

We considered the fact that day in, day out we are bombarded with numerous sensual stimuli. We cannot retain them all. Many day-to-day events are not consciously retained in our memories but we do retain those which have significance for us or which strike us as unusual. Key experiences, however, are formative and to forget them would change us. To attempt to forget painful memories, then, is not healthy. Non-remembering, on the other hand, differs from forgetting in that the memory is not erased but is dealt with and does not need to be called to mind. Remembering well is different again. An event that is remembered well does not need to be volitionally non-remembered as it no longer constitutes any threat to the well-being of the self.

We saw that to lose significant memory is to lose sense of who we are. Identity, however, is not lost because others who know us remember and God remembers eternally. Loss of memory does not equate with loss of significance as a person. We also saw that loss of memory affects relationships because both time spent with other people and the other people themselves can be forgotten. It is not unusual for people with dementia to forget the very people whose memory sustains their identity.

Stories, we saw, help us connect with others and also give meaning to our own lives. Telling stories and hearing stories being told can help us accept the past. We considered the role of story-telling in integrating what we remember from the past with what we perceive to be happening in the present and our future hopes.

As forgiveness will be considered in some detail in chapter 3, we looked only briefly at forgiveness in relation to memory and saw that forgiving enables us to remember differently – to remember well. It enables us to reconfigure memories and give them new meaning. Memory healing, we said, is not about forgetting the painful past but about learning to remember well. If we are to forgive and to be forgiven then we need to remember well.

We looked briefly at the difference between memory and history and saw that memory is concerned with more than historical accuracy. History, we said, sanitises facts because it is distant from them. Memory does not.

We saw that just as a neglected physical wound festers and spreads, so too a neglected emotional wound. Healing, then, cannot take place in the absence of remembering. We said that we only remember well when we are willing to forget. To remember well is to remember differently and this is made possible by giving and receiving forgiveness. Placing memories alongside what Charles Elliot describes as the 'counter-memory' of Jesus' life, death and resurrection enables us to gain perspective. As such we have no need as Christians to hide the truth from ourselves because we are, as Jones points out, enveloped in God's grace. "We locate our lives, our memories and our forgiveness in the grace of the crucified and risen Christ."<sup>257</sup>

We have seen in this chapter that memory has a crucial function in making us who we are and of putting us in touch, through the use of imagination, with the people, places and events that have informed our identity. I started the chapter with Volf's thesis that, because of their potential to diminish the joy and perfection of the New Creation, memories of horrendous suffering will be forgotten<sup>258</sup>. Reference is made later in the chapter to his suggestion that to forget suffering is better than to remember it because forgetting brings wholeness while remembering brings continued suffering<sup>259</sup>. I indicated that his argument is open to question theologically and psychologically. That Volf's argument is open to question theologically and psychologically is, I believe, adequately demonstrated throughout the chapter.

I cited Keck who states, "We are our memories and without them we have but a physical resemblance to that person we suppose to be."<sup>260</sup> And, "Life

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<sup>257</sup> Jones, 2001: 249

<sup>258</sup> Volf, 1996: 132f

<sup>259</sup> Volf, 1996: 138f

<sup>260</sup> Keck, 1996: 70

without memory is no life at all."<sup>261</sup> If this is true, and if in the New Creation it is our selves who are redeemed and recreated; and if we are to have an awareness of being ourselves, then the significant, formative memory has to be retained and that which has been lost restored.

The following chapter focuses on forgiveness which, as we have said, enables us to gain perspective on our past and to remember well.

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<sup>261</sup> Keck, 1996: 43

## Chapter 3

### FORGIVENESS AS REMEMBERING WELL

“Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future.” (Lewis Smedes<sup>1</sup>)

“Forgiveness has nothing to do with forgetting... A wounded person cannot - indeed, should not - think that a faded memory can provide an expiation of the past. To forgive, one must remember the past, put it into perspective, and move beyond it. Without remembrance, no wound can be transcended.” (B Flanigan<sup>2</sup>)

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous two chapters have attempted to show, by looking at what memory is and its centrality to who we are, why the notion of eschatological forgetting is unacceptable. This chapter, by way of offering an alternative to forgetting – remembering well made possible by forgiveness – will show that eschatological forgetting is not only unacceptable but is also unnecessary. To forgive is not to forget but is a specific way of remembering. As we considered in the previous chapter, suffering, perhaps especially the suffering inflicted on us by others, can result in bitter memories which themselves continue to cause suffering for many years, undermining our sense of identity and self-worth, preventing us from reaching our potential and holding our future hopes to ransom. If our future hopes and our experience of the New Creation are not to be marred by painful memories as Volf suggests could happen, and if, as I have argued, this will not be avoided through the permanent erasure of such memories, then we need to learn, in Jones' words, to *remember well*.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/q132879.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/q132880.html>

When we looked at remembering well in the previous chapter, we said that if something is remembered well it no longer poses a threat to the well-being of the one who remembers. Traumatic and painful experiences can be called to mind without causing suffering and distress. This, of course, is what we hope for in the New Creation but is also something towards which we can strive now. In many situations where the suffering was caused by another person we will not be free to remember well and move on until we are able to forgive perpetrators or, when we are the perpetrator of someone else's suffering, until the one whom we have harmed is able to forgive us, for unforgiveness binds both perpetrator and victim. It binds them in an unhelpful, destructive way to one another and binds both to their individual, unresolved past. "And so" writes Volf, "both victim and perpetrator are imprisoned in the automatism of mutual exclusion, unable to forgive or repent and united in a perverse communion of mutual hate."<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, to forgiveness that I turn my attention in this chapter.

Unlike personal identity and memory, forgiveness is a central theological theme, so, while the first two chapters have largely drawn on sources from the social sciences with some contribution from theology, this chapter will draw mainly from theology with some contribution from the social sciences.

Writing of the doctrine of sin, McFadyen says, "Eclipsing any functioning reference to God shears sin-talk of its essential, functional characteristic and mark of distinctiveness, eliding the difference between speaking of sin in theological and in any other terms. Why use the empty terminology of sin if, stripped of its essential and distinctive theological frame of reference, it conforms itself precisely and without remainder to the contours offered by, say, secular psychology, psychiatry, sociology or ethics.... Sin-talk cannot survive testing unless it continues to function as a distinctive theological language."<sup>4</sup> Exactly the same could be said of the doctrine of forgiveness. There is no doubt that secular discourse has something to contribute to the discussion but the doctrine of forgiveness is essentially theological, therefore,

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<sup>3</sup> Volf, 1996: 120

<sup>4</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 5



'eclipsing any functioning reference to God' will strip forgiveness of 'its essential functional characteristic and mark of distinctiveness'. McFadyen goes on to make the following statement which, again, applies equally to the doctrine of forgiveness. "It must be admitted from the outset that, if God-talk merely appends itself to an analysis already in place.... It adds precisely nothing at the level of explanation and understanding to baptise and bless conclusions arrived at by secular means for secular reasons. Only if Christian faith possesses a specifically theological understanding of what sin is and how it functions might it have something to offer secular diagnosis and therapy."<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness – or rather, some vague idea of what forgiveness might be – appears to be in vogue. In a recent Gallup Poll, ninety four percent of Americans said it was important to forgive<sup>6</sup>. Seibold states that in the 1980s and 1990s there was a threefold increase in the number of articles in psychology journals dealing with some aspect of forgiveness<sup>7</sup>. A quick search on the 'World Wide Web' reveals several websites wholly devoted to the notion of forgiveness. A glance at the names of some of the organisations responsible for these websites highlights something of the extent of this trend: 'International Forgiveness Institute', 'The Forgiveness Web', 'Campaign for Forgiveness Research' and 'Forgiveness Forum', to name but a few. Too often, however, organisations such as these tend to deal with forgiveness lightly and, it might be argued, to attach the label 'forgiveness' to something which is not truly forgiveness at all. Sometimes condonation, excuse, mercy or pardon is meant when the word 'forgiveness' is used. At other times what is meant is a somewhat tawdry sham masquerading as forgiveness. To use the word 'forgiveness' in these ways cheapens true forgiveness. It makes forgiveness, which is profoundly difficult, sound easy.

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<sup>5</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 11

<sup>6</sup> [www.forgiving.org/campaign/power.html](http://www.forgiving.org/campaign/power.html)

<sup>7</sup> Seibold, 2001: 297

The concern of this pseudo-forgiveness that is popularly peddled is more the 'feel-good factor' of the victim than any kind of reconciliation or restoration. There is much emphasis on forgiving for the sake of the victim, whether or not the perpetrator desires to be forgiven or is even aware that such forgiveness has taken place. That there are situations in which this is appropriate will be touched on below but it should probably be the exception rather than the rule. Doc Childre suggests that the knowledge that we do more for ourselves than for the perpetrator when we forgive actually gives incentive to forgive and he suggests this is valid because we cannot address the needs of others until we address our own needs<sup>8</sup>. There is no doubt that forgiveness brings healing to victims and liberates them, nor that there is a direct link between forgiveness, and mental, physical and spiritual health. On the other hand, the inability or refusal to forgive is known to result in depression, anxiety and stress disorders as well as physical ailments. This is because as psychologist Dan Shoulz states, "We are designed by God not to hold onto anger, revenge, bitterness and resentment, when we do it's destructive to our being, leading to a slow and insidious breakdown of the entire system."<sup>9</sup> Forgiving others does heal the self but to forgive the other only in order to heal the self, release the self from rage and bitterness and to give the self a more peaceful life redefines forgiveness. It "changes forgiveness from an expression of love to a self-centred act of self-protection."<sup>10</sup>

### **3.2 Distinguishing Forgiveness From Its Counterfeits**

Words acquire meaning from the ways in which they are popularly used - think, for example of the radically altered meaning of the word 'gay' during the latter half of the last century. Thinking of meaning of language, Wittgenstein writes, "To insist...that the literal referential meaning of a word is its one and only meaning is to end with all kinds of nonsense...the meaning

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<sup>8</sup> Childre (www)

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Kitchen, 2000 (www)

<sup>10</sup> Jackson (www)

of a word is its use in language."<sup>11</sup> For example, Haymes says that for him to declare, 'My love is like a red, red rose' is not to suggest that his wife should be sprayed with insect repellent. He states, "To assume such a limited use and meaning of language is simply a failure in intelligence."<sup>12</sup>

In his philosophical discussion of forgiveness, Joram Haber observes that forgiveness takes on different meanings depending on what people intend when they use the word. "What forgiveness is at any one time depends then on what one means when granting it."<sup>13</sup> For this reason, it has been suggested that because people commonly say 'forgive' when they are excusing or condoning minor offences against themselves then the meaning of 'forgive' embraces condoning and excusing<sup>14</sup>. As Haber goes on to show, however, it is not in fact his belief that the word 'forgiveness' takes its meaning from the way it is popularly used. He believes that in being used to mean different things the word is being misunderstood and misused by those using it. This is reinforced by his later discussion of what forgiveness is not. It is not condonation, pardon, mercy or modifying one's moral judgement. Let us look briefly at these in turn.

(a) Forgiveness is not condonation. To condone is to overlook an injury<sup>15</sup>. As with forgiveness, when condoning someone we acknowledge that the person has done something wrong for which she or he is morally responsible. Some think that to condone indicates that the one condoning has been injured but Haber disagrees. He says that we do not condone injury to ourselves, but to others, and not necessarily others with whom we identify. For Haber, the fact of forgiveness presupposes the presence of resentment. Condonation, on the other hand, does not<sup>16</sup>.

Unlike Haber, Downie seems to be of the opinion that we do condone injuries to ourselves. He suggests that it is often seen as an easier option than

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Haymes, 2000: 180

<sup>12</sup> Haymes, 2000: 180

<sup>13</sup> Haber, 1991: 25

<sup>14</sup> Neblett, 1974: 272

<sup>15</sup> Collins English Dictionary

<sup>16</sup> Haber, 1991: 59

forgiveness. "In many cases," he says, "it is easier to play down the extent of the injury and ignore the nature of the moral offence, and so condone, than it is to face up to the injury and make the effort to forgive."<sup>17</sup> Patton notes, however, that to take this easy way out devalues the victim for it ignores the wrong, saying, in effect, that the moral offence does not matter when, in reality, it does<sup>18</sup>.

(b) Forgiveness is not pardon. To pardon is to release from punishment for an offence<sup>19</sup>. In pardoning we let perpetrators off what they are seen to deserve. People in whom authority to do so has been vested pardon, while it is those who have been injured by the offences, who forgive. Forgiveness is personal because injury is personal. It is non-transferable. I cannot forgive a wrong done to another person any more than another person can forgive wrong done to me. We pardon what is done against the normative order and forgive what is done against the moral order<sup>20</sup>, or, as Downie puts it, injuries are forgiven and offences are pardoned. "Thus" says Haber, "we pardon as officials in social roles, but forgive as persons qua persons."<sup>21</sup> If to condone is to overlook an injury and to pardon is to release from punishment, it seems that pardon contains condonation. Downie makes this point when he notes that to pardon is to condone but to forgive is not<sup>22</sup>.

To illustrate the difference between forgiveness and pardon, Judson Cornwall tells the story of a servant caught stealing from the queen. Brought to the queen for sentencing the servant girl threw herself at the queen's feet, begging forgiveness and pledging future trustworthiness. The queen said she forgave the girl and added that she never wanted to see her again, instructing her to leave the palace and find another job. The servant girl argued that this was pardon, not forgiveness. She stated that she wanted to be forgiven and to be able to remain in the queen's employment. Taken aback at the servant's depth of understanding on the matter, the queen

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<sup>17</sup> Downie, 1965: 131

<sup>18</sup> Patton, 1987: 118

<sup>19</sup> Collins English Dictionary

<sup>20</sup> Haber, 1991: 61

<sup>21</sup> Haber, 1991: 61

<sup>22</sup> Downie, 1965: 131f

agreed and told her to return to her duties as if nothing had happened because she had already declared the servant forgiven<sup>23</sup>.

(c) The next thing Haber tells us that forgiveness is not is mercy<sup>24</sup>. The dictionary defines mercy as, "compassionate treatment of or attitude towards an offender, adversary, etc"<sup>25</sup>. Haber tells us that mercy is giving a lesser punishment than the one deserved<sup>26</sup>. This is where mercy differs from pardon – mercy is imposing a lesser sentence than the one deserved, pardon is letting the perpetrator off without punishment. "The essence of mercy lies in the waiving of a right that we could in justice assert...for reasons having to do with pity or compassion."<sup>27</sup> Haber suggests that mercy is, in effect, unjust to other wrongdoers who do not receive a lesser punishment than the one deserved<sup>28</sup>. The same, perhaps, could be argued about pardon.

For Murphy, the difference between mercy and forgiveness is that to show mercy is to treat a person less harshly than one has a right to, whereas forgiveness is not about how a person is treated but how we are disposed towards that person. He notes that we may believe we have forgiven someone for injuring us but later realise we have not when old resentments surface again. If, however, mercy has been shown to the perpetrator, it has been done once and for all and is not negated by a change in our feelings and emotional responses towards the perpetrator<sup>29</sup>. He goes on to suggest that we can forgive without showing mercy. For example, he says he might forgive an injury done to him by the embezzling of his funds but still demand recompense<sup>30</sup>. The fact that he demands recompense does not negate or undermine his forgiveness of the embezzler. Forgiveness is not incompatible with letting justice take its course.

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<sup>23</sup> Cornwall, 1978: 81

<sup>24</sup> Haber, 1991: 62

<sup>25</sup> Collins English Dictionary

<sup>26</sup> Haber, 1991: 63

<sup>27</sup> Haber, 1991: 64f

<sup>28</sup> Haber, 1991: 63

<sup>29</sup> Murphy & Hampton, 1988: 20f

<sup>30</sup> Murphy & Hampton, 1988: 21

It could be argued, on the other hand, that while mercy is not the same as forgiveness, forgiveness is in fact merciful; that without mercy, forgiveness would not be possible, inasmuch as forgiveness cannot, by definition, be deserved, and the concern of mercy is with the undeserved. This is implied by Herbert Morris who argues that forgiveness requires grace and mercy to be applied to our efforts and willingness. He illustrates this by comparing the act of forgiveness as being like growing flowers. The gardener, he says, prepares the ground and sows the seeds but other agencies such as sunshine and rain are required to bring them to bloom<sup>31</sup>.

(d) Forgiveness is not a matter of modifying one's moral judgement of an action<sup>32</sup>. If we were to modify our moral judgement of an action, it could be argued that there would be nothing to forgive. Haber cites an example given by Anne Minas. The parents of an eloping couple may harshly censure the young couple's action but later come to realise that their judgement about the elopement was too severe, so modify or abandon their judgement and so forgive the couple. Haber points out, however, that it is illogical to say we forgive something that we come to see as not wrong. "The expression of forgiveness in the absence of real wrongdoing cannot be countenanced as forgiveness at all."<sup>33</sup> Hampton makes a related point in saying that forgiveness does not condone wrong actions as it is the wrongdoer, not the wrong actions themselves, towards whom we change our feelings<sup>34</sup>.

Sartre thinks differently. He says that in asking for forgiveness we are asking not to be seen as blameworthy<sup>35</sup>. Is it not the case, however, that we ask to be forgiven because we are, and see ourselves to be, blameworthy, that is, it is precisely because we are blameworthy that we need forgiveness? Haber makes the point that forgiveness does not absolve the perpetrator of blame. He or she is still blameworthy<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Haber, 1991: 8

<sup>32</sup> Haber, 1991: 12

<sup>33</sup> Haber, 1991:12

<sup>34</sup> Murphy & Hampton, 1988: 84f

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Haber, 1991: 24

<sup>36</sup> Haber, 1991: 38

Hampton speaks of forgiving a person as coming to see that person in a new light and understanding her or him to be more than, or other than bad character traits. This sounds similar to Sartre's ceasing to see the person as blameworthy, although perhaps such an attitude would be motivated by the desire to be seen by those whom we might offend as something other than and more than our offensive behaviour. "Forgiveness is...the decision to see a wrongdoer in a new, more favourable light.... The forgiver never gives up her opposition to the wrongdoer's action, nor does she even give up her opposition to the wrongdoer's bad character traits. Instead, she revises her judgement on the person himself – where the person is understood to be something other than or more than the character traits of which she does not approve."<sup>37</sup> Haber challenges this view by asking, "In precisely what sense can a wrongdoer be understood as something more than the actions or character traits of which we disapprove without committing ourselves to a dubious ontology?"<sup>38</sup> He further asks how we can decide to see a wrongdoer in a new, more favourable light as Hampton suggests – to see a person as other than we know him or her to be – without deceiving ourselves<sup>39</sup>. It is surely not possible for us to see someone as something other than what we know that person to be.

Anne Minas, in her discussion of how it is logically impossible for a divine being to forgive, expresses the view that prior to being forgiven a person has done wrong but after being forgiven she or he has not<sup>40</sup>. Forgiveness, however, does not say, 'You have done no wrong'. It says, 'You have done wrong and I forgive you for it'. We do not come away from having been forgiven with a sense that we have done no wrong – this would surely be a form of denial and self-justification – but hopefully we come away with the knowledge that although we have done wrong our wrongdoing is forgiven and will not be held against us. It is we, not our wrongdoing, who are made right, and, in Christian terms, where God is concerned, sin is always wrong and cannot be made right by God or anyone else. God does not make sin

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<sup>37</sup> Murphy & Hampton, 1998: 84f

<sup>38</sup> Haber, 1991: 14

<sup>39</sup> Haber, 1991: 14

<sup>40</sup> Minas, 1975: 149

and wrongdoing right but he does forgive the wrongdoer for the wrongdoing and redeem the wrong.

(e) Forgiveness is also often confused with excusing though Haber does not discuss this. To excuse is to free a person from blame or guilt or to overlook an offence. This is closely related to, but different from, modifying one's moral judgement of an action. If we modify our moral judgement and come to see an action as not wrong, there is nothing to overlook; there is no blame or guilt from which to free the person. Lewis clarifies what he sees as the distinction between forgiving someone and excusing her or him. To forgive, he tells us, is to acknowledge that the pain-inflicting incident happened but not to bear a grudge against the perpetrator for it, even though he or she is fully responsible, as is the case, for example, in 'diminished responsibility'. To excuse, on the other hand, is to say that it did not really happen or that it was not really the fault of the perpetrator. If something is excused, there is no need to ask for forgiveness<sup>41</sup>. "Forgiveness is addressed to those whom we do not excuse because we understand that they are in some way responsible for the injury we have experienced."<sup>42</sup>

Forgiveness is different from excusing, pardoning, justifying, accepting or understanding; we forgive the inexcusable, the unpardonable, the unjustifiable, the unacceptable, and the non-understandable<sup>43</sup>. Lewis admits that he sometimes asks God for forgiveness when what he is really asking God to do is excuse him, to let him off<sup>44</sup>. "Real forgiveness," he tells us, "means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuses, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it."<sup>45</sup> This, Lewis reminds us, is the nature of God's forgiveness.

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<sup>41</sup> Lewis, 1975: 40

<sup>42</sup> Studzinski, 1986: 16

<sup>43</sup> Showalter, 1997 (www)

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, 1975: 40

<sup>45</sup> Lewis, 1975: 42



If this is the nature of God's forgiveness then it is the model of forgiveness towards which we, as human beings made in God's image, are obliged to strive. Alan Torrance says, "If the forgiveness of God is integral and essential to his love, which is unconditional, then it must also be so for man created in the image of God.... Accordingly there can be no conception of forgiveness that is not true to its absolute (logical) priority in all contexts. Conditional forgiveness in the secular socio-political world is no more true forgiveness here than it would be in God if predicated of him while understood in these terms."<sup>46</sup> In other words, if the message of the Gospel – the message of forgiveness - does not ring true in the market place then it is quite simply not true. As Alistair McFadyen says, "The business of Christian theology...is to understand both God and reality from the perspective of God's creative presence and activity in the world and in relation to our concretely lived experiences of being in the world."<sup>47</sup>

To forgive someone is not to excuse them, it does not mean that we trust them next time and give them another opportunity to hurt us. What it does mean is trying to rid ourselves of resentment towards those who do us harm and not wishing them harm. Augsburg states, "Forgiveness... is not forgetting, not condoning, not pardoning.... Forgetting drops the act down the memory hole; condoning accepts it within the memory collection, while denying the significance. Pardoning recognises its significance but cancels the consequences (no recollection, no significance, no consequences). Forgiveness deals with all three."<sup>48</sup> Forgiveness, as we have considered, enables us to remember well – the act is not, to use Augsburg's phrase, 'dropped down the memory hole', it is not trivialised by denying its significance and consequences are not cancelled for, as indicated above, forgiveness is compatible with letting justice take its course.

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<sup>46</sup> Torrance, 1986: 55

<sup>47</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 44

<sup>48</sup> Augsburg, 1996: 123

Having considered what forgiveness is often mistaken to be but is not, it will be useful before we proceed further to look at something of what forgiveness is.

### **3.3 Forgiveness As Utterance And Attitude**

There is some discussion in the literature regarding the nature of forgiveness. On the one side of the debate are those who would argue that forgiveness is a 'performance act' or 'performance utterance' which comes about simply by saying the words, 'I forgive you'<sup>49</sup>. David Augsburger defines what is meant by 'performance utterance'. "A performance utterance offers (1) a conventional procedure (2) with a ritual effect (3) through certain words (4) by certain appropriate persons (5) in certain appropriate and particular circumstances; (6) the procedure is executed by all participants correctly and (7) completely, (8) with congruent and sincere thoughts and feelings (9) resulting in their so conducting themselves subsequently. Such performance utterances include rituals from 'I take this woman to be...' to 'I bet ten thousand on...'.<sup>50</sup> Neblett takes the view that saying 'I forgive you' constitutes forgiveness even if the forgiver still resents the perpetrator. He says, "To grant forgiveness while resentment still exists is not uncommon at all."<sup>51</sup> Resentment is a theme to which I will return.

On the other side of the debate are those who maintain that it is not enough to say, 'I forgive you'. The words have to be backed up by the appropriate attitude. As Downie says, "To say 'I forgive you'.... The forgiver is merely signalling that he has the appropriate attitude and that the person being forgiven can expect the appropriate behaviour."<sup>52</sup>

Patton also indicates initially that forgiveness is both an action and an attitude but then goes on to suggest that it is in fact neither, but that it is discovery. He says the discovery that the person who hurt me is more like

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<sup>49</sup> Swinburne, 1989: 85

<sup>50</sup> Augsburger, 1996: 12

<sup>51</sup> Neblett, 1974: 270

<sup>52</sup> Downie, 1965: 132

me than different helps me to forgive<sup>53</sup>. Brian Keenan experienced this in his Lebanese jail. On one occasion he witnessed Said, a guard who had previously beaten him and violated him and who he loathed as a result, being overcome by raw, painful emotion. "I felt, as I never had before, great pity for this man and felt if I could I would reach out and touch him. I knew instinctively some of the pain and loss and longing that he suddenly found himself overwhelmed by. The weeping Said became fleshy and human for me. Here was a man truly stressed. His tears now wrenched a great wellspring of compassion from me.... Said's violence against us was a symptom of his need of us. Here was a man whose mind was forever locked in that desert wilderness that I had known during my worst moments in isolation."<sup>54</sup> Augsburgers likewise recognises a correlation between the ability to accept our own shortcomings and the ability to forgive others. "Genuine forgiveness," he says, "requires an internal capacity for empathy with parts of oneself that are less than perfect, and an external empathy that accepts one's commonality with the imperfections of others.... These are essential components of forgiveness: to see the other as a distinct self; to expand the self to include the other as human, as a co-traveller, as a fellow sufferer, and to affirm, confirm and understand our human coexistence in community."<sup>55</sup>

This discovery that the person who hurt me is more like me than different seems to be behind this thought-provoking statement from Volf. "For the followers of the Crucified Messiah, the main message of the imprecatory Psalms is this: rage belongs before God – not in the reflectively managed and manicured form of a confession, but as a pre-reflective outburst from the soul...by placing the unjust enemy and our own vengeful self face to face with a God who loves us and does justice."<sup>56</sup> He argues that being in the presence of God in this way enables us to come to see perpetrators as human and ourselves as sinful. We thus come to see ourselves as sinful and in need of forgiveness from others and from God. This knowledge that we too are in need of forgiveness enables us – or should enable us - to forgive

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<sup>53</sup> Patton, 1987: 145

<sup>54</sup> Keenan, 1992: 223f

<sup>55</sup> Augsburgers, 1996: 80

<sup>56</sup> Volf, 1996: 124

others. For Seibold, it is the knowledge of God's forgiveness of us that motivates our forgiveness of others. "As we meditate on the glory of God and the riches in Christ that are available to us, we can begin to appreciate how miserly it would be not to extend forgiveness to those who have harmed us. We offer forgiveness then out of a profound sense of the treasure we have found in eternal life, and out of a generosity that naturally flows from that realisation."<sup>57</sup>

Deborah Hunsinger notes, however, that if a victim is to overcome emotional trauma, it is important she does not blame herself for the actions of the perpetrator. While the victim needs to separate her status of victim from her status of sinner she also needs to come, through the process, to the stage of acknowledging her own sin, thus see herself as "more like the victim than different". The victim, says Hunsinger, needs to, "Distinguish her status of victim from her status of sinner, the woman is from a theological perspective, both a sinner in her relationship to God and a victim in her psychological reality."<sup>58</sup>

Haber sets himself apart from what he perceives as the mainstream of philosophers who see forgiveness as something more than a 'performance utterance', from those who say that resentment has to be overcome before forgiveness can be said to have taken place. For him the words 'I forgive you' can mean that all resentment has been overcome or it can mean that the one who utters them is working on overcoming resentment<sup>59</sup>. So, to say that we have not entirely forgiven someone for something can mean that we have not forgiven at all or that we are in the process of it<sup>60</sup>. Haber goes on to state that saying, 'I forgive you' is not the only way to forgive but that we can do so in our attitude and behaviour towards the perpetrator. He compares marriage, saying that couples can be married by saying, 'I do' or, under common law, by habit and repute over a number of years<sup>61</sup>. This, however,

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<sup>57</sup> Seibold, 2001: 306

<sup>58</sup> Hunsinger, 1995: 100

<sup>59</sup> Haber, 1991: 6f

<sup>60</sup> Haber, 1991: 21

<sup>61</sup> Haber, 1991: 40

does not add weight to his argument for so-called common law marriage is not legally – and, some might add, morally – seen as marriage, and some could argue that this indicates that unexpressed forgiveness is not real forgiveness. Regardless of the fact, however, that Haber’s illustration does not add weight to his argument, unexpressed forgiveness can be valid forgiveness.

Neblett is of the view that in some situations we are morally obliged to forgive while in others forgiveness is supererogatory, “Unquestioningly” he states, “there are some contexts at least, particularly contexts in which forgiveness is ‘asked for’ and the offence ‘made up for’, where granting forgiveness is not only morally desirable, but also morally prescribed. (Just as there are contexts where being forgiving is ‘above and beyond the call of duty’ and indicative of an *especial* goodness of heart.)”<sup>62</sup> But surely if forgiveness were ever a moral obligation it would be something other than forgiveness; something less than forgiveness. No-one can be placed under a moral obligation to forgive another person any more than to love or to trust or to respect that person. Hunsinger says of this that, “True forgiveness and reconciliation do not happen as the response to a moral demand.... To conceive of forgiveness...as a moral demand is to misconceive it.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, to describe forgiveness as a moral obligation would make victims morally obligated to those who harm them, thus increasing the power of perpetrators and further victimising and oppressing their victims. Haber hints at this when he says, “No-one has a perfect right to be forgiven imposing on others a perfect duty to forgive.”<sup>64</sup>

We saw above that Neblett believes it is possible to forgive while still harbouring resentment. Jeffrie Murphy, on the other hand, tells us, “Forgiveness is the forswearing of resentment – where resentment is a negative feeling (anger, hatred) towards another who has done one moral

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<sup>62</sup> Neblett, 1974: 273

<sup>63</sup> Hunsinger, 1995:102

<sup>64</sup> Haber, 1991: 103

wrong."<sup>65</sup> While acknowledging that this is a useful definition because it makes a distinction between forgiving someone and forgiving only what someone did, and also because of the attention drawn to the deliberate controlling of an emotion which explains why forgiveness can be so difficult, Richards rejects Murphy's definition. His objection is that it precludes forgiving someone we have not resented. He argues that we can feel contempt, hurt or sadness at what another has done without resenting the other but according to Murphy's definition it is not possible to forgive in the absence of resentment<sup>66</sup>.

Resentment should not be confused with vindictiveness which includes the desire to get even. Rather, "Resentment is anger that one may *properly* feel on being personally injured."<sup>67</sup> James McClendon describes resentment as, "God's good gift, protecting us in an injurious world from greater harms and inciting us to secure justice we might otherwise be too placid or too compassionate to enforce."<sup>68</sup>

Resentment, for Richards, is not a necessary response every time we are hurt by another but only to protect the self against certain people. He challenges the view that says to refuse forgiveness is to burn with resentment and be consumed by bitterness<sup>69</sup>. From his earlier argument, we can conclude that he would argue that to refuse forgiveness might result in no more than the victim continuing to feel contempt or hurt or sad and, by contrast, that to forgive is not only the forswearing of resentment as Murphy states, but is also the forswearing of all feelings of contempt, hurt or sadness. He writes, "To forgive someone for having wronged one is not merely to reduce the intensity of one's hard feelings but to abandon such feelings altogether (insofar as they are based on the incident in question)."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cited in Richards, 1988:77

<sup>66</sup> Richards, 1988: 77f

<sup>67</sup> Haber, 1991: 71

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Augsburg, 1996: 88

<sup>69</sup> Richards, 1988: 82

<sup>70</sup> Richards, 1988: 84

Haber disagrees with Richards about the absence of resentment. Resentment, he says, follows when our self-respect is challenged by the actions of another while indignation is felt when others are injured and our self-respect is not threatened<sup>71</sup>. He believes that not to resent the person who has hurt the self indicates that the one who has been hurt has no sense of her or her own rights or importance. The victim who has low self-esteem will not resent injury for she or he will not believe the self to be worthy of more dignified behaviour from others<sup>72</sup>.

Resentment, then, is both occasioned and warranted by the perpetrator's behaviour<sup>73</sup>. Failure to feel the resentment occasioned and warranted by moral injury against the self is, for Murphy, itself a moral failure. He writes, "If I count morally as much as anyone else (as surely I do) a failure to resent moral injuries done to me is a failure to care about my own person...and thus a failure to care about the very rules of morality."<sup>74</sup>

### **3.4 Forgiveness As Costly**

True forgiveness is not an easy 'quick fix' for the forgiver. It can be very costly and difficult because it is undeserved, unfair and unmerited<sup>75</sup>. Those struggling to forgive may be helped by remembering that they are not attempting to forgive innocent people, the very fact that they are victims who have been hurt or harmed in some way, means that someone else – the one whom they are attempting to forgive – is a victimiser. As Lewis says, to forgive enemies is not to imply that they are pleasant people<sup>76</sup>. And Phillip Yancey says, "Forgiveness is achingly difficult, and long after you've forgiven the wound... lives on in the memory."<sup>77</sup> In expressing just how difficult true

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<sup>71</sup> Haber, 1991: 48

<sup>72</sup> Haber, 1991: 7 & 38

<sup>73</sup> Haber, 1991: 37

<sup>74</sup> Murphy and Hampton, 1988: 18

<sup>75</sup> Yancey, 1997: 88

<sup>76</sup> Lewis, 1952: 92

<sup>77</sup> Yancey, 1997: p.84

forgiveness is, Nouwen writes, "Forgiveness from the heart is very difficult. It is next to impossible."<sup>78</sup>

One way in which forgiveness is costly is that the healing resulting from forgiving the other brings with it responsibility. The victim gradually ceases to be a victim in need of support, help and sympathy and becomes responsible for her or his own life and behaviour<sup>79</sup>. While this is clearly positive and empowering, it may be daunting and even off-putting for someone who has been in the victim role for a long time. Some may have thrived for many years on the attention they receive because they are victims and to give up the role of victim and become a survivor is to lose that level of attention.

Forgiveness is also costly in terms of the time it can take to forgive, particularly when the victim has suffered greatly. As Seibold notes, "When there has been deep wounding, forgiveness is a process, a journey, often down a very long road."<sup>80</sup>

Another cost of forgiveness is the negative reaction with which it may at times be met. Kroll notes that, in some cases, we may expect forgiveness to be rejected or even for situations to be aggravated through offering forgiveness. She cites the reaction of the Pharisees to the healing of Lazarus in John 11 as a demonstration of the increased hatred that is occasionally incited by an encounter with goodness and holiness, although it does not actually concern forgiveness<sup>81</sup>. Forgiving presumes the action being forgiven was wrong. To forgive someone for something the person being forgiven did not see as wrong can be misconstrued as offensive or patronising or insulting.<sup>82</sup> Even when the perpetrator is in no doubt about the wrongness of his or her actions, he or she may feel indignant at being offered forgiveness which has not been sought<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Nouwen, 1994: 122

<sup>79</sup> Kroll, 2000: 19

<sup>80</sup> Seibold, 2001: 295

<sup>81</sup> Kroll, 2000: 20

<sup>82</sup> Murphy & Hampton, 1988: 41

<sup>83</sup> Haber, 1991: 107



Having considered, however, how difficult and costly forgiveness can be for victims, Yancey is clear that it is worth the effort and cost involved and makes the challenging statement, "The only thing harder than forgiveness is its alternative."<sup>84</sup> He considers the impact of refusing to forgive on the self as victim and on the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, stating, "Not to forgive imprisons me in the past and locks out all potential for change. I thus yield myself to another, my enemy, and doom myself to suffer the consequences of the wrong."<sup>85</sup> (He fails to acknowledge, however, that victims may be doomed to suffer the consequences of the wrong even if they do forgive.) He warns that where there is no forgiveness there is no end to the 'cycle of unforgiveness' and the wounds inflicted grow more horrific with each act of retaliation. Taking the Balkan conflict of the 1990's as an example, Yancey notes that during the Second World War the Croats were the main aggressors and the Serbs their victims. The Serbs remembered and did not forgive, and in turn, some forty-five or fifty years later, committed unthinkable atrocities against their old enemy, including the slaughter of tens of thousands of Croats<sup>86</sup>.

Katerina<sup>87</sup>, a widow in her sixties, lived in a Croatian town that was invaded by Serb forces. In the ensuing conflict she lost her home, her family business, 14 members of her extended family and, as a result of multiple rape, her dignity. Soldiers also threatened to kill her but she was saved by the actions of a Serbian woman whom she had never seen before. This woman stepped forward and pleaded with the soldiers not to kill her 'grandmother'. For three months after her experiences Katerina was unable to speak, eat or sleep, spending the night crouched in the middle of the floor. But Katerina was able to forgive her enemies and when she did the horrors in her memory lost their power over her, and she was able to speak, eat and sleep once more.

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<sup>84</sup> Yancey, 1997: p. 100

<sup>85</sup> Yancey, 1997: p. 99

<sup>86</sup> Yancey, 1997: p. 115

<sup>87</sup> I knew Katerina when I lived in Croatia. Her name has been changed

Sometimes we forget experiences because they are so trivial and insignificant, other times because they are too painful for the mind to continue to hold. In the work of forgiveness, Smedes notes, the pain has to be faced because we cannot forgive what we cannot remember or what we deny<sup>88</sup>. The offence and the hurt associated with it need to be remembered and acknowledged if the work of forgiveness is to begin. The pain of this remembering is another part of the cost of forgiveness.

At one time CS Lewis wondered why the statement, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" was included in the creeds of the church. He thought it should go without saying that Christians would believe in the forgiveness of sins but eventually came to appreciate that it was an appropriate inclusion when he realised just how difficult forgiveness can be<sup>89</sup>. Thinking of the Lord's Prayer he writes, "He doesn't say that we are to forgive other people's sins provided they are not too frightful, or provided there are extenuating circumstances, or anything of that sort. We are to forgive them all, however spiteful, however mean, however often they are repeated. If we don't, we shall be forgiven none of our own."<sup>90</sup> Also referring to the Lord's Prayer, Bonhoeffer writes, "But God will only forgive them if they forgive one another with readiness and brotherly affection."<sup>91</sup> Still speaking of the Christian duty to forgive others, Bonhoeffer says, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2). As Christ bears our burdens so we ought to bear the burden of our fellow-men.... My brother's burden which I must bear is...his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross.... Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which is the Christian's duty to bear."<sup>92</sup>

In reading the New Testament, however, it is not immediately clear whether God's forgiveness of individual persons precedes our forgiveness of one another or whether our forgiveness of one another precedes God's

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<sup>88</sup> Smedes, 1988: 7

<sup>89</sup> Lewis, 1975: 39

<sup>90</sup> Lewis, 1975: 39f

<sup>91</sup> Bonhoeffer, 1959: 149f

<sup>92</sup> Bonhoeffer, 1959: 80

forgiveness of us, as some passages seem to suggest one and others the other. In his commentary on Colossians and Philemon, Robert Wall states, "In Matthew the disciple is exhorted to forgive in order to be forgiven; we secure God's forgiveness by forgiving others (Mt 6:12, 14-15; 18:35; compare Lk 11:4). Paul gives the same exhortation but roots it in the community's experience of already being forgiven. Rather than a condition of God's forgiveness as in Matthew, forgiveness for Paul is a response to God: we forgive because we are already forgiven."<sup>93</sup> I would venture to suggest that our understanding and ability to forgive is severely restricted if we have no prior experience of being forgiven. According to Westlock, God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others. "We will not be forgiven if we do not forgive others."<sup>94</sup> This, however, is not everyone's interpretation. An anonymous author writes, "Accepting forgiveness increases our ability to forgive others, and forgiving others increases our ability to accept forgiveness.... The more you really believe that God has forgiven you, the more you forgive others. And the more you forgive others, the more you will experience the forgiving love of God."<sup>95</sup> In Mark 11:25 ("And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.") forgiving others sounds like a precondition of being forgiven by God. In Matthew 6:12 (the section of the Lord's Prayer referred to by Lewis and Bonhoeffer - "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors") forgiving others again sounds like a precondition of, or perhaps even a concomitant of, being forgiven by God. While in Colossians 3:13 ("Forgive as the Lord forgave you.") God's forgiveness comes first. Douglas Hare in his commentary on Matthew says, "Determination not to forgive another is a form of impenitence that blocks the flow of divine forgiveness."<sup>96</sup>

For Patton, we forgive others in response to God's forgiveness of us and also as a preparation to receive God's forgiveness and it is made possible by

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<sup>93</sup> Wall, *www*

<sup>94</sup> Westlock, *www*

<sup>95</sup> *www, As We Forgive Others*

<sup>96</sup> Hare, 1993: 69

God's forgiveness<sup>97</sup>. We have already considered the cycle of unforgiveness. The process of forgiveness is also a cycle or, as George Soares-Prabhu describes it, a spiral – we forgive others in response to God's forgiveness of us. As we do we become more aware of the cost of God's forgiveness and so forgive more which makes us more aware of the cost, and so on. Our forgiveness, he suggests, is both a condition and a consequence of God's forgiveness of us. He suggests that refusing or failing to forgive others results in us no longer experiencing God's forgiveness, not because God stops forgiving – that would be against God's nature – but because our own unforgiving attitude cuts us off from it and makes it impossible for us to receive forgiveness<sup>98</sup>. Patton states, "To the degree to which we are unable to release others from their indebtedness to us we are also unable to know the depth of our forgiveness by God."<sup>99</sup>

To deal lightly with forgiveness and ignore the cost, trivialises both the sufferer and the suffering. While clear that forgiveness is both desirable and necessary, Kroll warns that we should be on our guard against rushing into forgiveness. "Premature attempts to get people, be they victims, relatives or bystanders, 'to forgive and forget' may destroy the creative drive towards justice that should be generated by creative anger."<sup>100</sup> In the wake of world war two, Christians outraged Jews and other victims by declaring that the Nazis were forgiven. "Softness'... seems to trivialise the suffering of victims. Christians have too often supported forgiveness, love and forbearance, while failing to acknowledge the moral force of anger, hatred and vengeance."<sup>101</sup> Seibold expresses concern that the Christian church is often guilty of overlooking the fact that forgiveness is a process and a journey and that it can take a long time. "Rather than offering compassion and concern to deeply wounded persons, the church often generates more distress for these individuals by making harsh demands for rapid forgiveness of the

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<sup>97</sup> Patton, 1987: 163

<sup>98</sup> Soares-Prabhu, 1986: 60

<sup>99</sup> Patton, 1987: 145

<sup>100</sup> Kroll, 2000: 26f

<sup>101</sup> Jones, 1995: 224

offender...but in many cases of deep wounding forgiveness can be considerably more complex and laborious than some Christians proclaim."<sup>102</sup>

We hear the sense of injustice and moral outrage at this uncompassionate attitude of 'quick forgiveness' reverberating behind these words of Jewish Holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal, "But ere long priests, philanthropists and philosophers implored the world to forgive the Nazis. Most of these altruists had probably never even had their ears boxed, but nevertheless found compassion for the murderers of innocent victims."<sup>103</sup> In post-war Germany, priests were telling the people that it was valid to dispense with earthly judgement for the Nazi war criminals because they would have to face the Divine Judge. Wiesenthal points out, however, that this attitude played into the hands of the Nazis because, as atheists, they had no fear of divine justice, only of earthly justice and retribution<sup>104</sup>.

Another way in which suffering is often trivialised is by proclaiming a general and abstract forgiveness. God's forgiveness may be universal in its scope but, as Jones notes, it is specific and individual, not general and abstract, in its application <sup>105</sup>. Just as sin and suffering is concrete and specific so too must forgiveness be concrete and specific. "The formulation, 'Repent and believe'," writes Williams, "stresses that God's forgiveness cannot be abstract and general."<sup>106</sup> He continues, "God does not come to 'humanity' in the abstract, forgiveness engages with a *particular* past."<sup>107</sup> Bonhoeffer was also concerned about this, warning that if the church underplays the reality – and, we might add, the specificity – of sin then it loses credibility when it speaks of forgiveness<sup>108</sup>.

Although costly, Jones insists that, because human beings are created for communion with others, and with God as the ultimate other, forgiveness is

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<sup>102</sup> Seibold, 2001: 295

<sup>103</sup> Wiesenthal, 1998: 85

<sup>104</sup> Wiesenthal, 1998: 85

<sup>105</sup> Jones, 1995: 135, 228

<sup>106</sup> Williams, 1982: 19f

<sup>107</sup> Williams, 1982: 43 (emphasis added)

<sup>108</sup> Cited in Jones, 1995: 11

necessary to restore communion between Godself and humankind, and between human persons<sup>109</sup>. The cost of forgiveness is too high for some, although there are others for whom it can never be high enough because it can never be effective. This, Jones says, is because, "It is assumed that forgiveness cannot effectively respond to the pervasive darkness that characterises the world."<sup>110</sup> To hold to this assumption that forgiveness is worthless and useless is in itself costly as it results in diminished, lost and damaged selves, in respect of both victims and perpetrators<sup>111</sup>. In order not to lose hope in the face of such darkness we need to remember that although forgiveness does not remove all darkness from the world, nor does the darkness eclipse forgiveness<sup>112</sup>.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived in a dark world where force and violence, not forgiveness, were seen and believed to be effective. Bonhoeffer, who as Jones reminds us was willing to pay the ultimate high cost of forgiveness – his life – "sought to affirm the theological possibility of forgiveness in a world where God's grace had *seemingly* been eclipsed."<sup>113</sup>

For Bonhoeffer, non-specific, generalised forgiveness was a symptom of cheap grace. "Cheap grace," he writes, "...means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth.... An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sin without the justification of the sinner.... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross."<sup>114</sup> This cheap grace, explains Jones, requires no effort, no commitment and no embodiment. "Perhaps most destructively cheap grace anaesthetised people so that they were no longer capable of embodying forgiveness through discipleship; they could not even discern how forgiveness might require of us our death."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Jones, 1995: 6

<sup>110</sup> Jones, 1995: 6

<sup>111</sup> Jones, 1995: 7

<sup>112</sup> Jones, 1995: 113

<sup>113</sup> Jones, 1995: 8 (emphasis added)

<sup>114</sup> Bonhoeffer, 1959: 36f

<sup>115</sup> Jones, 1995: 14

Bonhoeffer's response to the cheap grace that he saw all around him in the churches of his day was to emphasise costly forgiveness. He "sought to reclaim the gospel's eschatological focus on a forgiveness that is not simply a word to be spoken but a way of life to be embodied in fidelity to God's inbreaking Kingdom."<sup>116</sup> Peter Bolt also draws attention to the eschatological focus of forgiveness in his study of forgiveness in Mark's Gospel. Looking at the link between healing and forgiveness (for example in 2:5) he says, "The forgiveness of sins also entailed the removal of consequences upon the lives of individual Israelites. As such, the servant's ministry was a foretaste and a pledge of the coming kingdom of God, when all would be set right in Eden-like splendour."<sup>117</sup> Hunsinger also considers the relationship between forgiveness and healing in the same passage in Mark's Gospel, noting that healing is the sign and forgiveness is what the sign signifies. "Healing and forgiveness...are not identical, yet they cannot in this instance be separated from each other."<sup>118</sup> Quoting Barth on this, Hunsinger continues, "The forgiveness of sins is manifestly the thing signified, while the healing is the sign, quite inseparable from, but significantly related to this thing signified, yet neither identical with it nor a condition of it."<sup>119</sup> She makes the important point that while only God can forgive sin, human effort may bring about healing. She notes that in reality forgiveness and healing can be so closely intertwined that to force them apart does violence to the inseparable unity of the person who needs both forgiveness from sin and healing of emotional wounds.<sup>120</sup>

I said at the outset that the idea of forgiveness is in fashion and cited a Gallup Poll in which ninety four percent of Americans said they thought it was important to forgive. The actual number of respondents in the same poll who said they had actually ever tried to forgive someone else, is just over half of

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<sup>116</sup> Jones, 1995: 32

<sup>117</sup> Bolt, 1998: 66

<sup>118</sup> Hunsinger, 1995: 66

<sup>119</sup> Hunsinger, 1995: 66

<sup>120</sup> Hunsinger, 1995: 71ff

this – forty eight percent of the total<sup>121</sup>. Lewis showed his awareness of this gulf between people's opinions and experiences of forgiveness when he wrote his oft-cited words, "Everyone says that forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive."<sup>122</sup> It is easier to admire from a distance the noble ideals driving Nelson Mandela to forgive his jailors or the Pope to forgive his would-be assassin than to apply them to our own lives<sup>123</sup>.

As indicated there are many for whom the cost of forgiveness, or more specifically the cost of Christian forgiveness, is too high. Jones states that when the cost of Christian forgiveness is too high for people they seek a cheap therapeutic alternative. This is the (relatively) easy, feel-good factor 'forgiveness' mentioned above which, as we have seen, is not in fact forgiveness. It is excusing or condoning, not forgiving. While acknowledging that counselling can play an important and valid part in the lives of individual Christians, Jones expresses his concern about the way he perceives that it has cheapened and distorted forgiveness through being accepted and adopted unquestioningly. "Christians have allowed...a therapeutic mindset to overtake Christian claims and Christian practices. As a result, Christians have failed to appropriate psychological insights *critically* all too often adopting distorting and reductionist practices and beliefs that trivialise those central Christian claims and practices."<sup>124</sup> We note from his emphasis that his concern is not the adoption of the practices but their *uncritical* adoption.

Yancey also makes reference to the concern that the Christian church has permitted its claims and practices to be distorted and trivialised when he notes that in the 1950s and 60s mainline denominations in America moved away from preaching the gospel and towards purely secular political issues. People, he notes, need a message of forgiveness and when this shift in emphasis took place attendance at church services dwindled and membership halved<sup>125</sup>. Yancey's concern is not with political and social

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<sup>121</sup> [www.forgiving.org/campaign/power.html](http://www.forgiving.org/campaign/power.html) (29/11/01)

<sup>122</sup> Lewis, 1952: 191

<sup>123</sup> Pope, 2000 (www)

<sup>124</sup> Jones, 1995: 36 (original emphasis)

<sup>125</sup> Yancey, 1997: 230



awareness or involvement within the church. Far from it, Yancey is very socially aware. His concern, rather, is when purely secular matters eclipse the Gospel as the central concern and message of the church. In considering the same issue, TF Torrance says, "It is distinctive of moral inversion that it carries with it a strong sense of righteousness and moral superiority, evident in passionate moral indignation against prevailing evils, social injustice, racial discrimination, overpopulation, etc. These are all of course very right and highly laudable causes, but the inflamed moral passion for social betterment that lies behind this, appears to go hand in hand with a guilty detachment from an objective and divine source of moral obligation and a replacement of a personal religious ethic with a naturalistic ethic of self-determination in which man assumes absolute responsibility for himself.... The uprooting of moral passion from its creative source in Christian faith and therefore its lack of Holy Spirit, makes it quite helpless unless it can secure centres of power, from which it can move and change society.... I would not like to be misunderstood, for I am not asking for the slightest curtailment of concern for any genuine human, moral or social need anywhere in the world. But I am more and more staggered at... the growing contradiction that the Western Churches exhibit to Jesus' total rejection of every value-system of power... together with a failure to remember that Jesus was crucified by contemporaries who bitterly resented his refusal to have anything whatsoever to do with their political theology."<sup>126</sup>

Jones criticises Lewis Smedes for writing as a Christian theologian, yet approaching forgiveness from a therapeutic standpoint and ignoring the central themes of Christian forgiveness<sup>127</sup>. For example, Smedes makes the statement that forgiveness is necessary for "coming to terms with a world in which, despite their best intentions, people are unfair to each other and hurt each other deeply."<sup>128</sup> Jones argues that it is not usually 'despite their best intentions' and states that, "such a description significantly underplays the Christian claim that forgiveness is necessary because of our *culpable*

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<sup>126</sup> Torrance, 1996: 276ff

<sup>127</sup> Jones, 1995: 48f

<sup>128</sup> Smedes, 1988: xif

complicity both in specific breaches of relationship...and in a percussive reality of always-already brokenness and diminution." Smedes ignores the issues of culpability, sin and repentance<sup>129</sup> and gives the impression that the world is made up of thoroughly innocent victims who have never sinned and thoroughly guilty perpetrators who are rotten to the core and have never been victims themselves.

Jones expresses his concern that the emphasis on individual autonomy found in today's western society has marginalized the place of forgiveness<sup>130</sup>. Another factor that he perceives has contributed to this marginalisation is the secularisation of language. Sin and grace, for example, become 'accepting you're accepted'<sup>131</sup>. As an example of how the marginalisation of forgiveness works in practice, Jones notes that clergy 'found guilty' of sexual or financial misconduct are typically sent for counselling, not encouraged to repent and seek forgiveness and reconciliation<sup>132</sup>. This concerns Jones because, "Costly practices of forgiveness and reconciliation whose aim is the restoration of communion with God and with one another are significantly different from those counselling techniques that focus on an individual's ability to cope with his or her feelings or to alter his or her behaviour to conform to unexamined standards."<sup>133</sup> It is interesting to note that despite his concern that the secularisation of language and the focus on individual integrity belittle sin and undermine forgiveness, Jones falls into the trap of using euphemistic secular language for sin, referring instead to 'sexual and financial misconduct'.

Jones argues that if we are to reclaim the significance of forgiveness in Christian life and theology then we need to give up the therapeutic mindset under whose spell we have fallen. "An eschatological account of forgiveness situated in the doctrine of the Triune God," he tells us, "stands in direct contrast to a therapeutic culture that sees forgiveness as an internalised

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<sup>129</sup> Jones, 1995: 49

<sup>130</sup> Jones, 1995: 37

<sup>131</sup> Jones, 1995: 38

<sup>132</sup> Jones, 1995: 41

<sup>133</sup> Jones, 1995: 42

process of healing ourselves of hate.... Only by reclaiming the centrality of God's already-established but yet-to-come Kingdom will we be able to understand Christian forgiveness properly and, more importantly, to practice Christian forgiveness properly."<sup>134</sup> Forgiveness, he tells us, needs to become a way of life<sup>135</sup>. "Christian forgiveness is not so much a word to be spoken as a way of life to be lived in fidelity to the Triune God."<sup>136</sup>

### **3.5 Forgiveness as a way of life**

"Forgiveness," says Martin Luther King Junior, "is not just an occasional act: it is a permanent attitude."<sup>137</sup> In other words, it is a way of life. The central recurring thesis of Gregory Jones' *Embodying Forgiveness*, which undergirds the entire book, is the need to adopt forgiveness as way of life, the need for forgiveness, as King says, to become a permanent attitude. Right from the opening pages of his book, Jones introduces us to the idea that forgiveness is an embodied way of life that takes a lifetime to learn and we learn it by being a part of the body of Christ<sup>138</sup>. Embodying forgiveness, for Jones, means that we know what it is to be forgiven by God and then respond by forgiving others. Those who have been forgiven by God, he argues, ought to live a life of repentance and forgiveness, and to pursue holiness<sup>139</sup>. "From the Christian perspective...forgiveness is not primarily a word that is spoken or an action that is performed or a feeling that is felt. It is a way of life appropriate to friendship with the Triune God." But, he continues, while forgiveness is not simply words, actions and feelings, it does include them<sup>140</sup>.

The Christian Scriptures, he argues, show that God's forgiveness is logically and theologically prior to human forgiveness<sup>141</sup>. Jesus, he tells us, offered forgiveness that did not demand prior repentance, for example in his meeting

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<sup>134</sup> Jones, 1995: 64

<sup>135</sup> Jones, 1995: 66

<sup>136</sup> Jones, 1995: 67

<sup>137</sup> Cited in Yancey, 1997: 137

<sup>138</sup> Jones, 1995: xlii, 4

<sup>139</sup> Jones, 1995: 155

<sup>140</sup> Jones, 1995: 218

<sup>141</sup> Jones, 1995: 153

with Zacchaeus, although this did not eliminate the need for repentance<sup>142</sup>. What this means in practice is that we are forgiven in order that we can enter a life of repentance and forgiveness. Jones states, "While repentance and confession are not *conditions* of receiving God's forgiveness, they are indispensable means of acknowledging our *need* for forgiveness and hence embody that forgiveness in our relations with others."<sup>143</sup>

Similarly, Alan Torrance states that repentance follows forgiveness, making the point that if forgiveness depended on repentance the Gospel story, both the parables and Jesus' encounters with people, would be radically different. He makes the observation that the prodigal showed no repentance in returning to his father but was, rather, seeking to use his father further. The father, however, showed his unconditional and unconditioned love towards his son by running to him and embracing him<sup>144</sup>. Also considering the parable of the Prodigal Son, Nouwen suggests that 'repentance of sorts' was present in the son, "but not a repentance in the light of the immense love of a forgiving God." He calls it a 'self-serving repentance' for the purpose of survival<sup>145</sup>.

Jones cites von Balthasar who writes, "God forgives through free grace and not on the basis of acts of penance but...this forgiveness cannot become effective unless there is an act of expiatory conversion of the person."<sup>146</sup> Nouwen also observes that God's readiness to forgive is independent of our response or repentance<sup>147</sup>. Jones argues that we do not change in order that we might be forgiven but as an act of gratitude in response to receiving forgiveness. It is the way of living out, or embodying, forgiveness<sup>148</sup>. The woman in Luke 7 (37ff), for example, showed extravagant love because she

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<sup>142</sup> Jones, 1995: 110

<sup>143</sup> Jones, 1995: 195

<sup>144</sup> Torrance, awaiting publication

<sup>145</sup> Nouwen, 1994: 52

<sup>146</sup> Jones, 1995: 146

<sup>147</sup> Nouwen, 1994: 78

<sup>148</sup> Jones, 1995: 184

received extravagant forgiveness, not the other way around. She was not forgiven on account of her act of love<sup>149</sup>.

Embodying forgiveness is a slow, painful process. Jones suggests that the reason for this is that we are living in what Barth calls the 'puzzling interval'. That is, the time between the first and second advents, a time analogous to Easter Saturday in that it is between God's two great acts of grace<sup>150</sup>. Barth suggests that we find forgiveness to the extent we that practice it. Jones responds to this suggestion by asking, "Could it be that one of the reasons Christians see so little authentic forgiveness in the world is that, because our own lives are too marked by cheap grace or bitterness and violence (or both) we have had our vision eclipsed by our own failures?" He observes that the world is often quicker than the church to assimilate and embody (and presumably see) practices of forgiveness<sup>151</sup>.

Jones goes on to consider forgiveness as a craft, a craft that takes a lifetime to learn and perfect. Crafts, he observes, are learned by doing alongside those who are experienced and proficient, not only by reading about them. This is not being alongside simply as observers, but as apprentices who observe and practice. Jones gives the example of the craft of medicine not learned from textbooks alone but from working alongside experienced doctors and learning from them, and observes that even among senior practitioners there is no end to the learning<sup>152</sup>. He could just as easily have cited the professional training of nurses, teachers, social workers or many others. Learning the craft of forgiveness, he tells us, is much the same. Forgiveness, he suggests, is learned by being alongside those who are experienced and proficient but the learning is never finished. Learning the craft of forgiveness involves learning what needs to be transformed in ourselves to make us holy as well as how to apply it in the many different situations which we come across in our daily lives<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> Jones, 1995: 162

<sup>150</sup> Jones, 1995: 128

<sup>151</sup> Jones, 1995: 222

<sup>152</sup> Jones, 1995: 226f

<sup>153</sup> Jones, 1995: 227

Jones states that the Christian forgiveness we are called to embody has both vertical and horizontal aspects. The vertical involves unlearning sinful habits while the horizontal involves working towards reconciliation with others in specific broken situations<sup>154</sup>. This principal of Christian forgiveness having vertical and horizontal aspects was echoed by the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, in his address at the Memorial service in Westminster Abbey for the victims of the terrorist attacks in America on 11 September 2001, when he said, "The Christian answer is cross-shaped." In other words, it is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we are forgiven by God and through an appreciation of the cost of our forgiveness that we begin to forgive others. We are able to reach out to others because God first reaches out to us. In a review on Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, Stephen Williams states, "The cross can never offer us an authentic vertical Christianity if its horizontal significance is denied.... But we do not, in fact, understand it, if we do not grasp it as a cross which is for the sake of horizontal reconciliation and the inclusive embrace of the other."<sup>155</sup> Elizondo also suggests that it is only through the cross that we learn about healing broken relationships. He suggests that while such varying practices as counselling, hard work, vacations, rest, medication and group therapy all may help, they do not rehabilitate victims to inner peace and freedom. The cross, he argues, shows that forgiveness is the only way to rehabilitate and liberate victims. "Mercy and forgiveness are the only ways to put a blunt end to the cancerous spread of sin and violence. There is no other way."<sup>156</sup>

Forgiveness as a way of life is also the central concern of James Emerson's *The Dynamics of Forgiveness*. Emerson distinguishes between what he terms the 'context' and the 'instrument' of forgiveness, emphasising that both are necessary for, "Without the context the instrument is useless and without the instrument the context never comes alive."<sup>157</sup> Each gives meaning, perspective and reality to the other. The context makes forgiveness possible,

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<sup>154</sup> Jones, 1995: 230

<sup>155</sup> Williams, www

<sup>156</sup> Elizondo, 1986: 71 & 74

<sup>157</sup> Emerson, 1964: 82

while the instrument makes it real. In Christian forgiveness, then, the context is Jesus Christ, while the instrument – that which makes our forgiveness real to us – is to be found, more than anything else, in forgiving others<sup>158</sup>. He emphasises that it is not the fact that we forgive another that frees us to face God's judgement and receive his forgiveness but the other way around. It is receiving God's forgiveness that judges us and frees us to forgive others<sup>159</sup>.

Like Jones, Emerson expresses some concern about the influence of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis on Christian theology. While acknowledging that each has a valid role to play in the life of modern society he is very clear that his role in pastoral care is not that of a therapist. Acceptance, he tells us, which is often the key in therapy, is different from forgiveness and when the emphasis is on acceptance instead of forgiveness then forgiveness is reduced to no more than an instrument that releases people from guilt<sup>160</sup>. This is not to say that releasing people from guilt is not one function of forgiveness. "Forgiveness," states Pattison, "lies in recognising and acknowledging the offence and making realistic reparation in an appropriate way where that is possible. At this point the guilty feeling should depart."<sup>161</sup> While wrongdoers may be released from feelings of guilt through being forgiven, they may well retain a deep sense of shame. Guilt and shame are often confused. Shame might be described as dysfunctional guilt. "Guilt...is a less global and devastating emotion than shame. Guilt arises from a negative evaluation of specific behaviour...(which) is found to be immoral, lacking or otherwise defective...because a behaviour – not the self – is the object of approbation, the self remains mobilised and ready to take reparative action the extent that circumstances allow."<sup>162</sup>

Guilt has a constructive function. Feeling guilty about certain behaviour ought to lead us to repentance and to seek forgiveness. Receiving forgiveness should dispense with the need to feel guilty about the forgiven

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<sup>158</sup> Emerson, 1964: 77ff

<sup>159</sup> Emerson, 1964: 78

<sup>160</sup> Emerson, 1964: 108f

<sup>161</sup> Pattison, 2000: 7

<sup>162</sup> Price Tangney, Grugggraf & Wagner cited in Pattison, 2000: 126

behaviour. Not so shame. The focus of shame is on the self, rather than the behaviour; it is thus the self rather than the behaviour that is seen as despicable. Shame is unhealthy guilt. It defeats and destroys people's sense of worth and sense of self. Chronic shame isolates as it causes the shame-prone person to hide the true self from others for fear of rejection. Pattison states, "One is trapped in the self without words and without other people...as the person turns inward, loses a real sense of self. The functioning self is lost in shame. It is a lonely alienating experience."<sup>163</sup>

Chronic shame causes feelings of dread and discomfort that are not alleviated by repentance and forgiveness. Stephen Pattison feels that *The Angel of Judgement* from Rogert Van der Weyden's polyptych, *The Last Judgement* is a representation of his own shame-producing self-surveillance, and in his book on shame he shares the following poem, which his encounter with the Angel stimulated. The poem reveals some of the feelings of pain, dread, discomfort and of exposure to the gaze of others engendered by shame.

### **The Angel of Judgement at Beaune**

He is lovely.

Stepping out from beneath Christ's rainbow throne of judgement, this curly-haired youth is the most beautiful of the sons of the morning, all decked in white, glittering cope, wings of peacock eyes.

Around him naked people are beckoned into bliss or hurled into hell. This he knows – the balance of justice is in his own right hand.

Slowly, stately he advances, his sweet face impassive, his progress inexorable.

There is no stopping him.

To him all hearts are open.  
From him no secrets are hid.  
No hiding place from his gaze.  
Onwards, ever onwards he comes.

He is not angry.  
Nor does he condemn.  
In his perfection, he does not notice the fate of humankind.

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<sup>163</sup> Pattison, 2000:74



Naked souls are weighed in his balance.  
They find themselves shamefully, sordidly wanting.

The angel has been walking my way for ever.  
I am in his path.  
I cannot flee his all-seeing eye.  
No door can resist him, no screen can block the windows of the heart.  
His entrance is automatic  
The lofty spirit of judgement is already within.

Will I ever see the back of him?<sup>164</sup>

Luther and Calvin, to use Emerson's terminology, saw the church as both the context and the instrument of forgiveness. The context would be the preaching of the Word, while the instrument, which makes it real, would be baptism, the Lord's Supper and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The outgrowth of the context is the confession of sin; the outgrowth of the instrument is the confession of faith<sup>165</sup>. For Calvin, we become aware of the nature and extent of our sin after receiving God's forgiveness; while for Luther we need to be aware of sin before receiving God's forgiveness<sup>166</sup>. Emerson agrees with Calvin, arguing that we can only understand our sin in the context of God's forgiveness<sup>167</sup>.

### **3.6 Forgiveness and Remembrance**

Not only do we have to remember what we are going to forgive, we also do not forget that which has been forgiven. Even when a victim forgives a perpetrator's actions, the victim or perpetrator, or both, may have to continue to live with the consequences of the actions. Smedes urges us to, "Remember, you cannot erase the past, you can only heal the pain it has left behind. When you are wronged, that wrong becomes an indestructible reality in your life. When you forgive...you do not change the facts, and you do not

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<sup>164</sup> Pattison, 2000: 312

<sup>165</sup> Emerson, 1964: 145ff

<sup>166</sup> Emerson, 1964: 148ff

<sup>167</sup> Emerson, 1964: 151

undo all of the consequences. The dead are still dead; the wounded are often crippled still."<sup>168</sup>

God forgives human beings for the wrongs that they do, so that they can know themselves accepted by him, not to remove sin's consequences. He removes the guilt and shame but not the scars<sup>169</sup>. Similarly, when people forgive one another the scars may remain as a constant, and at times uncomfortable, reminder. In the following poem Amy Carmichael not only reminds us that Christ's resurrection body bore the scars of the crucifixion, she also recognises the inevitability of scars for all humanity and seeks to emphasise them as things of beauty rather than of shame and disgrace.

### **No Scar?**

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?  
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,  
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,  
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,  
Leaned Me against a tree to die, and rent  
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned;  
Hast thou no scar?

No wound, no scar?

Yet, as Master shall the servant be,  
And, pierced are the feet that follow Me;  
But thine are whole; can he have followed far  
Who has no wound or scar?<sup>170</sup>

Jackson defines forgiveness as, "the loving, voluntary cancelling of a debt."<sup>171</sup> This, however, suggests that forgiveness removes an action's consequences which as we are considering, it does not necessarily do; some consequences are permanent, or leave permanent scars. We will return to consider the eternal permanence of scars in chapter four.

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<sup>168</sup> Smedes, 1988: 108

<sup>169</sup> Jackson (www)

<sup>170</sup> Cited in Wright, 1985: 170

<sup>171</sup> Jackson (www)

In his discussion of whether we can forgive a child molester, Stephen Pope notes that part of forgiving criminals is desiring for them to accept responsibility for their actions. It has nothing to do with absolving them of punishment<sup>172</sup>. With or without forgiveness actions still carry consequences. For example, when Pope John Paul II visited his would-be assassin in prison as a public demonstration of his forgiveness he did not open prison doors and set the offender free. That would have been to pardon the offender and would have been inappropriate and unacceptable. The offender still had to accept the consequences of his actions and the public still had to be protected. "Christian love demands forgiveness, but it also demands making sure the criminal does not harm another person."<sup>173</sup> Forgiveness and punishment, then, are not mutually exclusive.

It is the injury caused by the offence, not the offence itself, which is forgiven. As we have seen, injuries are forgiven; offences are pardoned. We forgive as persons who have been injured in some way and pardon as 'officials' in social roles. Any person who has been injured in any way has authority to forgive, but only a person with the authority which is conferred because they hold a particular role such as monarch, judge, or even club official, may pardon<sup>174</sup>. Thus, the Pope had authority to forgive his assailant but not to pardon him. Of course, there are situations in which we can occupy both offices at once – thinking back to Murphy's example, just as he could forgive the person who embezzled his funds and still demand recompense, so he could have forgiven the embezzler and also pardoned the debt.

There are those who believe that forgiveness and punishment are mutually exclusive. Kroll, for example, says that to forgive is to release the perpetrator from the deserved punishment<sup>175</sup>. I would suggest that what Kroll has in mind here is excusing or pardoning, not forgiving. To excuse or condone the wrongdoing is effectively to say it did not matter. To pardon, as we have seen, is the act of an official remitting appropriate punishment.

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<sup>172</sup> Pope, 2000 (www)

<sup>173</sup> Pope, 2000 (www)

<sup>174</sup> Downie, 1965: 131f

<sup>175</sup> Kroll, 2000: 84

'Forgive and forget' is a popular cliché. On a superficial level, it may sound highly desirable but on closer examination, we realise that it offers nothing positive to the physical, psychological or spiritual well-being of victims or, indeed, perpetrators. In his study of reconciliation, Robert Schreiter makes a similar point about trivialising the victim's memory undermining and trivialising the identity of the victim. "By calling on those who have suffered to forget or overlook their suffering, the would-be reconcilers are in fact continuing the oppressive situation by saying, in effect, that the experiences of those who suffered are not important – and therefore they themselves are unimportant to the process."<sup>176</sup> To forget what has been forgiven could cause the victim to place herself or himself in a vulnerable position, at risk of further suffering. The former Dachau concentration camp is now a grisly museum where visitors may pass through the gas chamber and the crematoria, as well as look at photographs of the victims of torture. Over the entrance is a sign bearing the legend, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."<sup>177</sup>

Thinking of the importance of remembering to our sense of identity, Seibold quotes John Lee, saying, "To remember is the opposite of dismember." And continues, "We need all parts of our history to be fully ourselves. To shut out some part of ourselves in the name of forgiveness is to fragment ourselves rather than to bring healing."<sup>178</sup> Seibold later adds, "Forgiveness is letting go of the past, but not in the sense of forgetting what happened or disconnecting myself from the pain. Forgiveness is refusing to allow the past to be the sole determinant of my life's course. It is being open to allowing the past to be redeemed so that my story can still be good and fulfilling. Forgiveness is a radical statement to the world that there is more to the story that the ending has yet to be told."<sup>179</sup>

God does not forget forgiven sin. God forgave Moses, Abraham, David, Paul, Peter and the thief on the cross, among countless others, but he did not

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<sup>176</sup> Schreiter, 1992: 19

<sup>177</sup> Tutu, 1999: 32

<sup>178</sup> Seibold, 2001: 299

<sup>179</sup> Seibold, 2001: 307

erase their sins from his memory. He caused their deeds to be recorded in the pages of scripture for all time<sup>180</sup>. In the story of the Prodigal Son, the father forgave his son but he did not divide his estate a second time because he remembered<sup>181</sup>. As Volf points out, the father's words to the older son, "all I have is yours" indicate that the inheritance will not be redivided<sup>182</sup>. In saying that God does not remember our sins, the Bible is saying that he does not remember them against us, not that he forgets them. Forgiveness, as we have already said and will consider below, enables us to remember well.

Smedes suggests that to remember the wrongdoing of others against ourselves carries potentially as great a risk as to forget them. "Forgetting invites repetition" he tells us, while, "remembering incites perpetuation."<sup>183</sup> It is not difficult to see the truth in this statement, to perceive the risk that to remember wrongs inflicted by another can give rise to bitterness and resentment on the part of the victim, thus keeping the victim a victim. For this reason we need to discover what Smedes calls 'redemptive remembering', which is essentially the same as what Jones calls 'remembering well'. Jones says, "Appropriating Christ's forgiveness by the power of the Spirit...invites us not to forget the past, but to *remember it well* so that we can envision and embody a future different from the past. In that sense we need the Spirit both to return to us our memories and also to enliven our imaginations."<sup>184</sup> We are reminded here of what was said in the previous chapter about the imagination's roles of creation and recreation in reconfiguring memory. Forgiveness enables us to reconfigure memory – to remember events differently, to remember events well.

The act of forgiveness is deliberately reconfiguring the memory through imagination with the result that the memory in question no longer has the power it did have. This happens when we let go of resentment, when we learn to dispense with our shame, when we gain a new perspective, thus

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<sup>180</sup> Jackson (www)

<sup>181</sup> Showalter, 1997 (www)

<sup>182</sup> Volf, 1996: 163

<sup>183</sup> Smedes, 1988: 135

<sup>184</sup> Jones, 1995: 149 (emphasis added)

renarrate the incident. It happens when we learn to see our lives and the events and experiences in them against an eternal, eschatological canvas. "Forgiveness," says Volf, "breaks the power of the remembered past and transcends the claims of the affirmed justice and so makes the spiral of vengeance grind to a halt."<sup>185</sup>

Forgiveness, then, gives a new perspective on the past that makes it possible for us to cope when remembering it. It enables us, not just to remember differently, but to remember better, to remember well. To remember well gives us hope for the future thus enables us to move on<sup>186</sup>. In forgiving those who have harmed us we have no need to forget the wounds they have inflicted because forgiving involves renarrating the past in the context of God's eschatological future. That is the essence of remembering well<sup>187</sup>. Remembering well loosens people from the fetters that bind them to a painful past and that hold them back, giving them the freedom to move on.

### **3.7 Freedom, Creativity and Moving On**

The Greek word used in the New Testament for forgiveness (*Aphesis*) is made up of words meaning 'from' and 'to send'. Literally, then, the word means to send from or let go. This letting go, or freeing the self, of something, says Hurding, is intrinsic to the concept of forgiveness<sup>188</sup>. It is true of Christ's forgiveness of us, which confronts us with the truth about ourselves and frees us for a new life in him<sup>189</sup>. It is also true about the forgiveness we receive from others and about our forgiveness of others.

The early church Fathers used the word 'freedom' when referring to forgiveness and James Emerson reports that in his tape-recorded interviews with people about forgiveness, he found that what they generally said they

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<sup>185</sup> Volf, 1996: 121

<sup>186</sup> Jones, 1995: 167

<sup>187</sup> Jones, 1995: 237

<sup>188</sup> Hurding, 1992: 132

<sup>189</sup> Jones, 1995: 11

were seeking was 'freedom'<sup>190</sup>. This theme of freedom is also found in Volf who speaks of 'slavery of revenge' and 'freedom of forgiveness'<sup>191</sup>. He cites Moltmann saying, "To forgive those who have wronged one is an act of highest sovereignty and great inner freedom. In forgiving and reconciling, the victims are superior to the perpetrators and free themselves from the compulsion to evil deeds."<sup>192</sup>

In considering the question of whether people feel more need to be free of dependence than to be forgiven, Jan Peters asks, "And is the craving of freedom in our age not stronger than the need for forgiveness? When freedom is understood as individual autonomy, then the opening to admit forgiveness from an individual and above all from a group is contracted to a narrow gate."<sup>193</sup> He asks further whether the relinquishment of offering and receiving forgiveness is a step towards individual autonomy of every person and every society<sup>194</sup>. Having considered these questions, he suggests that perhaps forgiveness does not in fact make people dependent but frees them to 'move up to a higher level' towards friendship, goodwill and cooperation. Forgiveness, he concludes, affirms the person as a person. "By the experience of forgiveness, people are encouraged and enabled to be themselves, to become autonomous in critical freedom."<sup>195</sup>

Forgiveness gives freedom *from* something in the past and freedom *to* and *for* something in the future. "Forgiveness," says Emerson, "...allows a person a sense of freedom with regard to the chains of the past. It also allows freedom to be creative in regard to relationships of the future."<sup>196</sup> Freedom from the past includes freedom from our own destructive behaviour. Jones also tells us that the forgiveness we receive from God and others also frees us to remember the past well. "We are enabled by God to remember

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<sup>190</sup> Emerson, 1964: 38

<sup>191</sup> Volf, 1996: 122

<sup>192</sup> Cited in Volf, 1996: 122

<sup>193</sup> Peters, 1986: 6

<sup>194</sup> Peters, 1986: 7

<sup>195</sup> Peters, 1986: 8

<sup>196</sup> Emerson, 1964: 61

the past so that we can be freed for new life."<sup>197</sup> So, through forgiveness, we are freed *from* the chains of the past that bind us and hold us back, we are freed *to* be creative in our future relationships with others and we are freed *for* new life.

Forgiving others also frees the victim from self-destructive bitterness and feelings of revenge. Forgiveness, Showalter tells us, is "the elimination of all desire for revenge and personal ill towards those who deeply wrong or betray us. This elimination usually brings an inner peace of heart and the freedom of not having our lives dominated by the injuries we have suffered."<sup>198</sup> As a test of this, and an illustration of how difficult it is in reality, Tim Jackson challenges us to, "Imagine that you are given the choice to: (a) torment for all eternity those who have harmed you the most (the one who sexually abused you, your unfaithful spouse, the date rapist, the drunk driver who killed your child, your abusive parent), or (b) see them brought in brokenness before the God who has been so kind to you. Which would you choose?"<sup>199</sup>

Hampton also touches on the freedom to be found in forgiveness, indicating that it benefits both forgiver and forgiven because it enables renewed relationships. The forgiver is no longer trapped as victim and the forgiven is no longer a sinner indebted to the victim. Her emphasis seems to be more on liberation of perpetrators than of victims as can be seen in the following citation. "But perhaps the greatest good forgiveness can bring is the liberation of the wrongdoer from the effects of victims' moral hatred...of himself...so that he comes to believe that there is nothing good or decent in him.... It may enable wrongdoers to forgive themselves by showing that there is still enough decency in them to warrant renewed association with them. It may free them from the hell of self-loathing."<sup>200</sup>

It should be noted here that Hampton is not suggesting there is any decency in the action for which the perpetrator is being forgiven. As we have

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<sup>197</sup> Jones, 1995: 184

<sup>198</sup> Showalter, 1997 (www)

<sup>199</sup> Jackson (www)

<sup>200</sup> Murphy and Hampton, 1988: 86f



considered, forgiveness is only relevant in relation to the indecent, the inexcusable, the unjustifiable, the unpardonable, the unacceptable, the non-understandable. The 'decency' lies within the perpetrator. In forgiving, the victim is acknowledging that she or he places value on the perpetrator in spite of the injury. What this value is will vary. For some it will be the perpetrator as a person or the relationship between perpetrator and victim as it was before the injury that is valued. For others it will be a belief in the intrinsic value of human beings.

Forgiveness has also been described as being a creative act. "When we forgive we come as close as any human being can to the essentially divine act of creation.... We create healing for the future by changing a past that had no possibility in it for anything but sickness and death."<sup>201</sup> Of course, it is not the past that is changed but the power of the past over the present and the future. Raymond Studzinski also links both freedom and creativity with forgiveness. "Forgiveness frees an individual from the grip of irreversible history.... It is an immensely creative act that changes us from prisoners of the past to liberated individuals who are at peace with the memories of our past."<sup>202</sup> This same idea of releasing the power of the past over the individual by changing its meaning was also considered in the previous chapter.

Kroll tells the story of a minister in Zimbabwe who was held for 22 years without trial. Following his release he encountered two of his former gaolers in a restaurant. One of them came over and greeted the minister, placing a hand on his shoulder. When asked later how he felt about the incident he replied, "If I had not forgiven that man he would still be my gaoler."<sup>203</sup> Similarly, Nelson Mandela, a prisoner for 27 years, invited his white gaoler to be guest of honour at his presidential inauguration thus showing that he was no longer emotionally captive. What these anecdotes illustrate for us is the fact that if we are to be able to move on then we need to forgive, otherwise

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<sup>201</sup> Smedes, 1988: 152

<sup>202</sup> Studzinski, 1986: 12

<sup>203</sup> Kroll, 2000: 93

the one who perpetrated our suffering will continue to have power over us and to hold us captive. Forgiveness frees not only the forgiver but also the forgiven<sup>204</sup>. This benefit is mutual and is different from the priority given to the victim by forgiving the perpetrator as suggested by Doc Childre.

In order to be able to let go of the past and move on in this way, we also need to have hope that things can, and will, be different. "You will learn to let go of what happened in the past by creating a clear mental picture of where you are headed now."<sup>205</sup> Rowan Williams also indicates the association between moving on as a result of forgiveness, and hope. "If forgiveness is liberation, it is also a recovery of the past in hope, a return of memory, in which what is potentially threatening, destructive, despair-inducing, in the past is transformed into the ground of hope."<sup>206</sup>

In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu describes the work of the Truth and Justice Commission set up to deal with the injustices and cruelty of South Africa under apartheid. Their question was not *whether* to deal with the past but *how* to deal with it. The past could not be swept under the carpet for national amnesia would have further victimised apartheid's victims by denying their experiences; experiences which are a vital part of their identity<sup>207</sup>. The work of the Commission was not to sit in judgement but to listen to and record stories from both victims and perpetrators. Marginalized victims had their humanity and individuality acknowledged through recounting their stories. We have already looked in previous chapters at storytelling and its value in understanding the self over time and with regard to memory. We look here at the value of storytelling with regard to forgiveness.

The Truth and Justice Commission found that the recounting of stories was empowering, not just for individuals, but also for communities for, as Tutu points out, because of belonging there is a sense in which one person's story

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<sup>204</sup> Studzinski, 1986: 13

<sup>205</sup> Scruggs, 2001 (www)

<sup>206</sup> Williams, 1982: 32

<sup>207</sup> Tutu, 1999: 31f

is another's story too<sup>208</sup>. David Augsburger also considers the role of narrative in forgiveness, noting that for forgiveness to be possible, "We need a story greater, larger, longer than our own little narratives, a story that is capable of offering us content for our moral lives and context for our ethical decisions.... It is a faith story.... Only such a story can reconcile us to ourselves, to each other, and to God, who is the author of all reconciliation."<sup>209</sup> In similar vein, Seibold writes, "In the midst of our pain autobiography can be an invitation to God to be present with us, to remind us of the Resurrection and the Hope. In short, telling our stories is not incompatible with forgiveness...affirming our story is a vital component in the journey to forgiveness."<sup>210</sup> If the telling of one's story is so important for victims then there have to be those who will listen. This is considered by Schreiter, who says, "Victims of violence and suffering must tell their story over and over again.... As they recount their own narrative, little by little they begin to construct a new narrative of truth that can include the experiences to overwhelm it.... The ministry of reconciliation at this stage is a ministry of listening."<sup>211</sup>

In the South African situation, perpetrators also had to tell their story, for if the process of forgiveness and reconciliation is to be successful perpetrators must be willing to acknowledge the truth. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not simply pretending things are different for as Tutu says, "Spurious reconciliation can only bring about spurious healing."<sup>212</sup> The Commission took the following approach. Amnesty was granted to individual perpetrators for a full disclosure of their crimes while non-disclosure resulted in prosecution and possible prison sentence<sup>213</sup>. Remorse was not a condition for amnesty for this would have involved passing judgement on the genuineness and depth of remorse shown or experienced. Despite this,

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<sup>208</sup> Tutu, 1999: 33, 127

<sup>209</sup> Augsburger, 1996: 121

<sup>210</sup> Seibold, 2001: 299

<sup>211</sup> Schreiter, 1992: 71

<sup>212</sup> Tutu, 1999: 216

<sup>213</sup> Tutu, 1999: 34

however, - or perhaps because of it – the Commission found that most perpetrators expressed remorse and asked for forgiveness<sup>214</sup>.

Tutu comments that both the public story-telling, which for many story-tellers and listeners alike was a harrowing ordeal, and the amnesty for perpetrators was a high price to pay for freedom but he believes it resulted in the great stability they have known since. He contrasts their experience with the ongoing upheaval in the former Soviet Union and the carnage in the former Yugoslavia<sup>215</sup>. This cost and benefit is hinted at in the slogan used on the Commission's leaflets and posters, "The Truth Hurts, But Silence Kills"<sup>216</sup>.

It was not only facing and acknowledging truth and listening to the gruesome details unfolding that was a difficult exercise but also seeking and giving forgiveness. As Tutu stated at a hearing of the Commission, "It isn't easy as we all know to ask for forgiveness and it's also not easy to forgive, but we are a people who know that *when someone cannot be forgiven there is no future.*"<sup>217</sup> He goes on later to say, "When you embark on the business of asking for and giving forgiveness you are taking a risk. If you ask another person for forgiveness you may be spurned; the one you have injured may refuse to forgive you. The risk is even greater if you are the injured party waiting to offer forgiveness. The culprit may be arrogant, obdurate or blind: not ready or willing to apologise or to ask for forgiveness in their turn. He or she thus cannot receive the forgiveness they are offered."<sup>218</sup> Also thinking about the difficulty of asking for forgiveness from those we have harmed Volf states, "Genuine repentance may be one of the most difficult acts for a person, let alone a community to perform." This, he suggests is because we do not like being wrong and because the other is not necessarily completely right<sup>219</sup>. The work of the Truth and Justice Commission not only shows that there is no future without forgiveness (as indicated by the title or Tutu's book) but also that there is no forgiveness without truth.

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<sup>214</sup> Tutu, 1999: 48

<sup>215</sup> Tutu, 1999: 52

<sup>216</sup> Tutu, 1999: 51

<sup>217</sup> Tutu, 1999: 117 (emphasis added)

<sup>218</sup> Tutu, 1999: 216f

<sup>219</sup> Volf, 1996: 119

### 3.8 Repentance

We considered earlier in this chapter the Christian belief that while God's forgiveness is universal in its scope, it is specific in its application. In other words, forgiveness is available to all but forgiven-ness is forced on none. As we considered in chapter one, God gives human beings the choice about whether or not to become what McFadyen calls his dialogue partners<sup>220</sup>. He gives them the choice, that is, about being in relationship with him. While God's forgiveness is available to all, he leaves us free to choose whether or not to avail ourselves of that forgiveness and become his dialogue partners. Swinburne states that for God to forgive all sin without us associating ourselves with the death of Christ – without our involvement – would fail to take us, or our sin, seriously.<sup>221</sup> "For," he continues, "if...God forgives men before men seek him, God would not be taking men seriously, he would be treating with contempt the chosen hostility to himself of free agents."<sup>222</sup>

While there is a sense in which it is correct to say that God does not forgive without our repentance, is it not the case that there is also a sense in which God does offer us his forgiveness prior to our repentance, before we are even aware of our need of forgiveness? While God does not impose forgiven-ness on individuals against their will, without their repentance, his forgiveness is prior to that repentance. It is available to all and it is this forgiveness that makes repentance possible. We might say that repentance transforms inert forgiveness into active forgiven-ness.

Calvin says of this, "When God offers forgiveness of sins, he usually requires repentance of us in turn, implying that his mercy ought to be a cause for men to repent.... 'Turn again, and repent, that your sins may be blotted out.' (Acts 3:19) Yet we must note that this condition is not so laid down as if our repentance were the basis of our deserving pardon, but rather, because the Lord has determined to have pity on men to the end that they may repent."<sup>223</sup> "Both repentance and forgiveness," he tells us, "...are conferred on us by

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<sup>220</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 119f.

<sup>221</sup> Swinburne, 1989: 87

<sup>222</sup> Swinburne, 1989: 153

<sup>223</sup> Calvin, 1981: 614

Christ, and both are attained by us through faith."<sup>224</sup> For forgiveness to be the result of repentance would make forgiveness works-based, would make it something we could earn rather than, as Calvin says, it being conferred on us by Christ and attained by us through faith.

Although we have to repent before we can receive forgiveness, the forgiveness is theologically prior to the repentance. As Volf says, "Forgiveness must already be at work before repentance can take place."<sup>225</sup> We see this illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Without waiting for the son's words of apology, "The father pre-empts his son's begging by spontaneous forgiveness...without asking questions."<sup>226</sup> Also thinking of the Prodigal Son, Holloway writes, "His coming to his senses was no act of repentance, but a characteristically opportunistic move that was designed to save his own skin."<sup>227</sup> He goes on to say that in running to meet his son, the father violated a social convention that said the greater a person's dignity the slower he moved, but the father, says Holloway, had no need for pomposity. He had no interest in his own dignity or status. "It is this abandonment of code and conditionality that is the scandalous heart of the story... the father's outpouring of love caused a true change in the son, so that we might say that the forgiveness that was unconditionally given actually caused the repentance that followed it, an exact reversal of the order that is followed in the usual system of conditional forgiveness."<sup>228</sup>

The father, we notice, did not go and seek the son out while he was still in the far country to offer the forgiveness which awaited his return, rather, he waited until he saw his son making his way home. The father's forgiveness of the son was prior to the son's return to the father but did not become forgiven-ness until the son was willing to leave the far country and return to his father's home, even although what he had in mind when he set out on his

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<sup>224</sup> Calvin, 1981: 592

<sup>225</sup> Volf, 1996: 120n

<sup>226</sup> Nouwen, 1994: 111

<sup>227</sup> Holloway, 2002: 81

<sup>228</sup> Holloway, 2002: 81f

journey was less than the full forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation that took place.

In the Christian Scriptures there is a definite link between repentance and forgiveness. For example, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name." (Luke 24:47) "The Lord is...not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:4) "God's kindness leads you to repentance." (Romans 7:4) "Restore me and I will return." (Jeremiah 31:18). It is not the case, however, that forgiveness is conditional on repentance. For, as indicated above, this would make repentance a work and forgiveness works-based. It is, rather, that in repenting we are accepting the gift of forgiveness God offers.

These same principles might be applied to interpersonal relationships. Swinburne notes that for a victim to overlook a serious wrong without any repentance or apology from the perpetrator trivialises both victim and perpetrator, and also their relationship<sup>229</sup>. Forgiveness of wrong done against us in the absence of repentance not only trivialises victim and perpetrator as Swinburne points out, but can also make the victim vulnerable to being hurt further. For these reasons, Haber argues, repentance is the only good reason to forgive<sup>230</sup>. He feels, "that repentance is a uniquely appropriate reason to forgive," and that it is not a challenge to the self-respect of victims to forgive if the perpetrator repents. In fact, he suggests that to withhold forgiveness may undermine the repentant perpetrator<sup>231</sup>.

Richards agrees with Haber that the perpetrator's repentance makes forgiveness reasonable but adds the caveat that although repentance makes forgiveness morally permissible it does not make it mandatory. He feels that while repentance makes forgiveness reasonable it is insufficient because it carries no guarantee that the perpetrator will not revert to the previous

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<sup>229</sup> Swinburne, 1989: 85

<sup>230</sup> Haber, 1991: 109

<sup>231</sup> Haber, 1991: 101

harmful behaviour<sup>232</sup>. I suggest that repentance is sufficient reason for a victim to embark on the process of forgiving a perpetrator's wrongdoing, although it may not be sufficient reason for reconciliation to take place. We see here a significant difference between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of one another. God's forgiveness, as we have discussed is always prior to our repentance. Our forgiveness of one another may, at times, be prior to the perpetrator's repentance. There are, on the other hand, situations when it will not occur to victims to forgive until the perpetrator repents.

Another significant difference between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of one another is that whereas God's forgiveness of us always results in restored relationship between us and God, this is not necessarily so of interpersonal relationships. There will always be situations even following forgiveness when, as Volf says, "A clear line will separate 'them' from 'us'. They will remain 'they' and we will remain 'we' and we will never include 'them' when we speak of 'us'."<sup>233</sup>

What, then, is repentance? According to Richards, the awareness that one's behaviour is unacceptable and later to regret of it does not in itself constitute repentance. Repentance, he says, involves a change in one's moral views and coming to disapprove of what was previously thought to be permissible<sup>234</sup>. This definition, however, does not address the situation where the perpetrator was always aware that the action was wrong. To return to the theological context for a moment, how often do we seek God's forgiveness for something we knew to be wrong even before we did it? In asking his father for his inheritance the Prodigal Son was, in effect saying that he wished his father was dead. His actions were not just acts of disrespect but of betrayal. He not only had a desire to see the world but to break with the world of his family<sup>235</sup>. In squandering his money, health, self-

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<sup>232</sup> Richards, 1988: 87

<sup>233</sup> Volf, 1996: 124

<sup>234</sup> Richards: 1988: 88

<sup>235</sup> Nouwen, 1994: 35f



respect, reputation and honour, it seems unlikely that the prodigal ever thought his behaviour anything but wrong.

Repentance is both backward-looking (looking back at the past offence) and forward-looking (looking towards a future that will be different). Haber tells us that it is both emotional (feeling regret over wrongdoing) and volitional (promising to refrain from such wrongdoing in the future) and that it must be sincere<sup>236</sup>. He does not explain, however, how he considers the sincerity of repentance should be measured or by whom, whether by the repentant perpetrator, the forgiving victim or some neutral third person. Writing of apology, which could be seen as an expression of repentance, Augsburgers writes, "In its most responsible, authentic and hence vulnerable expression, it constitutes a form of self-punishment that cuts deeply because we are obliged to retell, relive and seek forgiveness for sorrowful events.... The act is arduous and painful, the gesture reiterates the reality of the offence while superseding it, and the remorseful admission of wrongdoing is converted into a gift that is accepted and reciprocated by forgiveness."<sup>237</sup>

Kant, Haber tells us, suggests that by repenting the wrongdoer can undergo a moral rebirth, become a new person, and this new person stands against the person who did the wrong and resents it. If repentance means that the perpetrator is a new person, he suggests the victim can forgive the perpetrator without any challenge or threat to self-respect<sup>238</sup>. It could be argued, however, that if the repentant perpetrator is a 'new person', a different person, the need for forgiveness is negated. Although Haber attributes the idea of repentance leading to new birth to Kant, we should note that it is in fact a New Testament concept. In the New Testament, however, it is not our act of repentance that brings about new birth (although it follows repentance). It is, rather, an act of God's grace. ("I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." John 3:5f)

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<sup>236</sup> Haber, 1991: 90f

<sup>237</sup> Augsburgers, 1996: 40

<sup>238</sup> Haber, 1991: 96f

Having stated that the New Testament does not speak of regeneration of individual persons but only of the regeneration of fallen humanity brought about by the incarnation, and the final transformation at the eschaton when all things will be made new, TF Torrance tells the following story. During his first week as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, he was asked if and when he had been born again. "I told him that I had been born again when Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and rose again from the virgin tomb, the first-born from the dead. When he asked me to explain I said: 'this Tom Torrance you see is full of corruption but the real Tom Torrance is hid with Christ in God and will be revealed only when Jesus Christ comes again. He took my corrupt humanity in his incarnation, sanctified, cleansed and redeemed it, giving it new birth in his death and resurrection.'<sup>239</sup>

For Richards, on the other hand, repentance is less than rebirth. It is a change in moral views. Haber prefers this way of thinking as the Kantian 'new person' theory raises questions for him about personal identity<sup>240</sup>. He suggests that if forgiveness is of a person for an offence, then it should be sufficient that she or he has a changed moral view towards the action. He goes on to say that the fact of a perpetrator's repentance indicates that he or she acknowledges that the victim is right to feel resentment<sup>241</sup>. Even although the perpetrator repents and acknowledges the victim's right to feel resentment, forgiveness is still difficult and costly for the victim who has been hurt.

### **3.9 Forgiveness Unlimited?**

Whether or not it brings about reconciliation, forgiveness is a complete act. It does not necessarily depend on the perpetrator's repentance<sup>242</sup>. Kroll states that we are not responsible for the actions of others and neither asking for

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<sup>239</sup> Torrance, 1983: 95f

<sup>240</sup> Haber, 1991: 97

<sup>241</sup> Haber, 1991: 97, 99

<sup>242</sup> Showalter, 1997 (www)

nor offering forgiveness presupposes a response on the part of the other<sup>243</sup> although clearly one looks for and hopes for it. As Tutu points out, if we could only forgive when perpetrators showed contrition, victims would ever be prisoners of the whim of perpetrators and would forever be victims<sup>244</sup>. Haber, however, disagrees, stating that the only situation in which forgiveness is appropriate is when resentment is negated, and that comes about only through the perpetrator's repentance. In fact, he goes as far as to say that if the perpetrator does not repent then it is immoral to forgive for that would undermine the self-respect of the victim<sup>245</sup>.

Kroll gives an illustration of a situation where a victim's attitude of forgiveness would not have led to reconciliation as the perpetrators were unlikely to be aware of the forgiveness extended towards them by their victim while the victim was alive. A scrap of paper was found in the possession of a dead child in Ravensbrück concentration camp bearing the following words, "O, Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have brought, thanks to this suffering – our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to judgement, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness."<sup>246</sup>

Jones asks if there are limits to forgiveness, if there are those who are unforgivable. We can all think of those towards whom hatred, anger and vengeance seem more appropriate than forgiveness – Adolf Hitler, Slobodan Milosović, Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein as well as those who perpetrate horrors against individuals and remain impenitent – rapists, murderers, child abusers<sup>247</sup>. Similarly, Torrance asks how we can talk of forgiveness in situations like Bosnia, Rwanda and the holocaust, "where survivors are stalked by unthinkable but, for them, unforgettable memories."

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<sup>243</sup> Kroll, 2000: 58

<sup>244</sup> Tutu, 1999: 220

<sup>245</sup> Haber, 1991: 90 & 103

<sup>246</sup> Kroll, 2000: 100

<sup>247</sup> Jones, 1995: 243f

He replies that Christians are more inclined to talk about 'justice and liberation' than 'reconciliation and forgiveness' in situations such as these<sup>248</sup>. Holloway states, "There are some deeds so monstrous it will drive us mad if we do not forgive them, because no proportional retribution is possible.... We cannot press a button to rewind history, to reverse the events of September 11, to get the planes back on the tarmac in Boston.... Those horrifying events cannot be undone. The dead cannot return, the deed cannot be undone...nor can it be appropriately avenged or made sense of. Only unconditional impossible forgiveness can switch off the engine of madness and revenge and invite us...to move on into the future. Until we can do that we are exiled in the horror of the past."<sup>249</sup> Similarly, Smedes states that to say some offenders are monsters who do not deserve forgiveness is to afford to them a power they do not deserve. It sentences the victims to a lifetime of suffering and renders the offenders unaccountable. "We give them power to condemn their victims to live forever with the hurting memory of their painful pasts."<sup>250</sup>

Derrida responds to the question. 'Is there such a thing as the unforgivable?' this way, "Yes, there is the unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive? The only thing that calls for forgiveness?...there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable."<sup>251</sup> He says that if we are prepared to forgive only what appears forgivable – so-called 'venal sin' then the very notion of forgiveness disappears. It is, he says, 'mortal sin' – unforgivable harm – we have to forgive<sup>252</sup>. We have already said that we forgive the inexcusable, the unpardonable, the unjustifiable, the unacceptable, and the non-understandable. Perhaps we could summarise this list by saying, with Derrida, that we forgive the unforgivable.

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<sup>248</sup> Torrance, awaiting publication

<sup>249</sup> Holloway, 2002: 86

<sup>250</sup> Smedes, 1988: 79

<sup>251</sup> Cited in Holloway, 2002: 11

<sup>252</sup> Adiprasetya, www

Reynolds responds to Derrida's statement of forgiving the unforgivable saying, "This particular paradox revolves around the premise that if one forgives something that is actually forgivable, then one simply engages in calculative reasoning and hence does not really forgive... according to its own internal logic, genuine forgiving must involve the impossible: that is, the forgiving of an 'unforgivable' transgression."<sup>253</sup> In a study on reconciliation, Brennan writes, "If one had to forgive only what is forgivable, even excusable, venial, as one says, or insignificant, then one would not forgive.... If, in the process of any given transformation, the fault, the evil, the crime are attenuated or extenuated to the point of veniality, if the effects of the wound were less hurting...there is no need of forgiveness. The forgiveness of the forgivable does not forgive anything: it is not forgiveness &. (one must forgive) the unforgivable that resists any process of transformation of me or of the other."<sup>254</sup>

Torrance argues that to deny unconditional love and forgiveness is to dehumanise both self and others and, as such, is acting contrary to the will of God. He states, "To operate from a Christian epistemic base (and to be a Christian is to do precisely that) is to recognise and affirm no purpose for humanity that does not stem from that one Word to humanity which defines what it is to be human. To be human in truth is to love not only one's friends but one's enemies – and to do so unconditionally. And to love unconditionally is to forgive unconditionally.... The unconditional forgiveness of one's enemies is the only orientation towards them that is in accordance with the only will of God we know, God's only Word to humankind."<sup>255</sup> Clarifying what unconditional forgiveness means, Rodney Hunter says, "(Forgiveness) is unconditional not in the sense that no conditions are in force, but in the sense that the conditions which are in force are nevertheless ultimately not allowed to alienate and destroy the relationship they are intended to secure."<sup>256</sup> Writing about unconditional forgiveness, Holloway cites Derrida who says, "It is a madness of the impossible." and responds, "It

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<sup>253</sup> Reynolds, www

<sup>254</sup> Brennan, www

<sup>255</sup> Torrance, awaiting publication

<sup>256</sup> Cited in Patton, 1987: 135

is a madness of the impossible but when it occurs it can create a profound qualitative change in people and events.... In theological language, it is a mixture of pure unmerited grace, given out of uncalculating love."<sup>257</sup>

Haber, on the other hand, indicates that there are indeed limitations to forgiveness when he says that in certain circumstances it is wrong to forgive. He says that there are times when to forgive rather than resent is not right and is a moral defect or vice rather than a virtue<sup>258</sup>. He says, for example, that a concentration camp inmate ought not to forgive injuries inflicted<sup>259</sup>. We find this debate about whether forgiveness should always be given unconditionally or whether it is sometimes right to withhold forgiveness in Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* considered below. Haber suggests that because we have to preserve our self-respect we should look for a reason to forgive, asking, 'Why should I forgive?'. If we can find no answer to that question, then he concludes that we should not forgive<sup>260</sup>. Is Haber correct? Is it the case that, "Sometimes there is a strength and grandeur in the refusal to forgive."? Can it be true, as Holloway suggests, that, "The refusal to forgive can be the righteous thing to do, the thing that commands justice."<sup>261</sup>?

Haber's contention that there are times when righteousness demands withholding forgiveness seems to contradict his earlier assertion that to withhold forgiveness may undermine the repentant perpetrator. It is contrary to the teaching of Christian theology and to the experience and example of Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II, and of the Zimbabwe minister already mentioned. It is also contrary to the experience and example of Corrie ten Boom in her famous forgiveness of one of her former concentration camp guards. The guard, one of the most cruel in the camp, had been in a meeting where she had been speaking about her wartime experiences and about forgiveness. After the meeting he came forward and introduced himself. He told her that in the interim he had become a Christian. He knew God had

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<sup>257</sup> Holloway, 2002: 85 (original emphasis)

<sup>258</sup> Haber, 1991: 69f

<sup>259</sup> Haber, 1991: 89

<sup>260</sup> Haber, 1991: 89

<sup>261</sup> Holloway, 2002: 55

forgiven his cruelty and, extending his hand, asked for her forgiveness for his offences against her. Corrie could remember the man clearly and, as he stood before her, could visualise him in his Gestapo uniform. Initially she hesitated as she looked at him, and remembered him and his cruelty towards her and the other women. But she was able to shake his hand and grant the forgiveness for which he had asked<sup>262</sup>. If we are honest with ourselves we will always find an answer to Haber's question 'why should I forgive?' for each of us frequently finds ourselves in need of forgiveness from others and from God.

Haber's presupposition is that resentment is not wrong. It is a negative but proper response and is, as we have seen, different from vindictiveness which includes the desire to get even. "Resentment is anger that one may *properly* feel on being personally injured."<sup>263</sup> Schreiter also considers the appropriateness of anger as a response to being hurt. "Anger is an acknowledgement of the depth of pain and the breadth of the threat that has been made to our well-being. Not to express anger that arises from violence is not to acknowledge the suffering. And unless we do acknowledge it, a new narrative cannot be constructed."<sup>264</sup>

Murphy's suggestion that 'old times sake' is a reason to forgive is forgiving not who the perpetrator is but who the perpetrator once was<sup>265</sup> but Haber asks what that has to do with forgiveness *of a person for an action*. He cites Norvin Richards who asks, "Why should your having 'been a good and loyal friend to me in the past' be a reason to forgive you for wrongdoing rather than something that deepens the hurt."<sup>266</sup> The bitter words in Psalm 55, which we considered in an earlier chapter - "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of

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<sup>262</sup> ten Boom, 1971: 55ff

<sup>263</sup> Haber, 1991: 71

<sup>264</sup> Schreiter, 1992: 44

<sup>265</sup> Murphy and Hampton, 1988: 29

<sup>266</sup> Cited in Haber, 1991: 196

God.”<sup>267</sup> - indicate that the pain inflicted by someone who has been a loyal and good friend at one time is far deeper than the hurt caused by a stranger. This would perhaps make forgiveness more difficult rather than easier than Murphy seems to suggest.

Unlike Haber, Holloway sees forgiveness as being of a person, not a deed and for this reason he says we should focus on the person rather than the deed. He states, “We cannot ever forgive a murder or a theft, but we might learn to forgive a murderer or a thief.”<sup>268</sup> In the Lord’s Prayer, however, we are not taught to ask forgiveness because we are sinners but to ask, “Forgive us our sins.”<sup>269</sup> It is surely not the case that the person divorced from the wrongdoing, nor the wrongdoing in isolation from the person who committed it that is forgiven, but rather, as we have already considered, the person who has done wrong is forgiven for the wrongdoing committed. Our concern, however, is not only with who or what is forgiven but also with who is entitled to forgive and it is to that question we now turn our attention.

### **3.10 Who is entitled to forgive?**

Simon Wiesenthal tells the story that as a young Jewish concentration camp inmate he was taken to the room of Karl, a dying SS officer. Karl had asked that a Jew, ‘any Jew’, be brought to him in order that he might confess the atrocities in which he had participated and die in peace. Despite his feelings of revulsion and horror, Wiesenthal remained and listened to Karl’s confession. He listened while Karl told of the time when, acting under orders, he set fire to a petrol-doused house filled with Jews and shot those who tried to escape. Wiesenthal offered no words of consolation or forgiveness to the dying man, but neither did he utter words of condemnation or accusation. He left the room in silence. Wiesenthal was haunted by his own silence from that day on, and in the weeks and years that followed, he sought affirmation from others that he had done the right thing. He recorded his experience in

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<sup>267</sup> Psalm 55:12-14

<sup>268</sup> Holloway, 2002: 36

<sup>269</sup> Luke 11:4



*The Sunflower: On The Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, concluding with the challenge, "You, who have just read this sad and tragic episode in my life, can mentally change places with me and ask yourself the crucial question, 'What would I have done?'"<sup>270</sup> Of the fifty-three respondents in the symposium that follows, very few answer Wiesenthal's question. Most instead address the unwritten question of whether or not they believe him to have done the correct thing. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that few of the respondents feel qualified to state what they would do for none of them had been in Wiesenthal's situation. Perhaps they find it impossible to mentally change places with him as he suggests, for we like to think that the horrors of concentration camp are beyond the imagination of civilised and educated human beings.

In Jewish thought only the victim may forgive a wrong, no-one else, not even God, can do so on the victim's behalf. Perpetrators are required to seek forgiveness from their victims three times. If forgiveness is refused three times the perpetrator is released from her or his obligations. Jesus, however, offered forgiveness that did not require the perpetrator's prior repentance and, following the resurrection, gave his disciples authority to do the same ("If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." John 20:23)<sup>271</sup>. There is also no mention of repentance when Jesus tells his disciples they are to forgive their brother seventy times seven. Jesus appears to be telling his followers that their forgiveness has to be as unlimited as God's forgiveness, regardless of the attitude of the perpetrator. These differences between Jewish and Christian thought are reflected in the kind of responses given to Wiesenthal. By and large, Jews respond that Wiesenthal could only have done what he did as no-one other than the victims, who in Karl's case were dead, had any right to forgive<sup>272</sup>. Christians tend more towards the suggestion that Wiesenthal could have told Karl that he should seek God's forgiveness or make

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<sup>270</sup> Wiesenthal, 1998: 98 (emphasis added)

<sup>271</sup> Jones, 1995: 104ff

<sup>272</sup> For example, Joshua Rubenstein says, "The Nazi had committed mass murder. Simon was merciful enough with him. For Simon to grant him forgiveness, as well, would have been a betrayal of his and his family's suffering, and all the suffering around him." (Wiesenthal 1998: 240)

confession to a priest<sup>273</sup>. The two Buddhist respondents state unequivocally that Karl should have been offered forgiveness<sup>274</sup>.

Neblett challenges the view that says only victims may forgive. He suggests that one member of an injured group can forgive on behalf of the whole group<sup>275</sup>. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that one person may express forgiveness on behalf of the whole group with the group's consent, but not forgive on behalf of the whole group. He considers that the social roles of some – for example judges and priests – allow them to forgive what is done to others<sup>276</sup>. Judges, however, do not forgive. They may pardon but as we have considered this is distinct from forgiveness. Priests express forgiveness on behalf of God; they do not forgive on God's behalf. He also considers the scenario of A injuring B, which may also indirectly injure C who is close to B. In this situation, he claims, C may challenge B's right to forgive<sup>277</sup>. This seems to contradict his previous thought that one person may forgive on behalf of an injured group.

Haber, on the other hand, indicates that we can forgive what is done to a third party when, because of our relationship with the third party, we are injured by their injury<sup>278</sup>. He emphasises, however, that such forgiveness is only appropriate when we are close to the injured party, not when the third party is a stranger. "So one cannot forgive what is an injury to a stranger because one cannot resent such an injury, resentment being linked to self-respect."<sup>279</sup> I suggest that no-one has a right to forgive what is done to another, no matter how close our relationship with the injured party. Forgiveness belongs only to the one who is injured and to God.

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<sup>273</sup> Robert McAfee Brown is one of the few who says what he would do. He writes, "I think I would have urged the young man to address his plea directly to God and throw himself on the possibility of Divine mercy, something I am not permitted to adjudicate one way or the other." (Wiesenthal 1998: 123)

<sup>274</sup> Buddhist monk, Matthieu Ricard, for example, states, "For a Buddhist, forgiveness is always possible and one should always forgive." (Wiesenthal 1998: 235)

<sup>275</sup> Neblett, 1974: 270

<sup>276</sup> Neblett, 1974: 270

<sup>277</sup> Neblett, 1974: 271

<sup>278</sup> Haber, 1991: 46f

<sup>279</sup> Haber, 1991: 48

Alan Torrance, however, suggests that Christ's vicarious humanity and the Holy Spirit makes forgiveness for and on behalf of others possible. He says that in the incarnation Christ becomes the victim so could say, 'In as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me' (Matthew 24). Christ does not just stand in solidarity with the victim. He is the victim. Christ's identification is with people as individuals. "The incarnate Son identifies with the particular pain and suffering of the particular victim."<sup>280</sup> His identification is not with humanity in some kind of general or universal way. He goes on to say that Christ forgives our perpetrators, or as he prefers to call them, 'victimisers', and invites us to participate in his forgiveness. We, who have received God's forgiveness through Christ, are permitted and commanded to forgive<sup>281</sup>. Or, as Jones would say, we are permitted and indeed commanded to embody forgiveness.

### **3.11 Summary and Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter I cited what McFadyen says about the doctrine of sin, "Why use the empty terminology of sin, if stripped of its essential and distinctive theological frame of reference, it conforms itself precisely and without remainder to the contours offered by, say secular psychology, psychiatry, sociology or ethics?"<sup>282</sup> And again, "Sin-talk cannot survive testing unless it continues to function as a distinctive theological language, speaking of concrete theologies in relation to God.... If sin-talk attempts to meet the challenge by evacuating itself of all functioning reference to God, conforming itself to the standards or references afforded by non-theological discourses, then it defeats itself in the process."<sup>283</sup> The same, I suggested, could be said about forgiveness. If the message of forgiveness is central to the Christian Gospel then Christian theology must have something unique and vivifying to say about forgiveness not found in the secular disciplines.

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<sup>280</sup> Torrance, awaiting publication

<sup>281</sup> Torrance, awaiting publication

<sup>282</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 5

<sup>283</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 5f

Forgiveness, we saw, is more than a 'performance utterance'. The words 'I forgive you' have to be accompanied by the appropriate attitude and behaviour towards the one being forgiven. I have suggested (with Patton) that the *discovery* that the person who hurt me is more like me than different helps me to forgive. We forgive because we know ourselves, like the perpetrator, to be sinful and in need of forgiveness from others and from God. William Neblett states that forgiveness can be a moral obligation or can be supererogatory. I suggest that it is always supererogatory. For forgiveness to be a moral obligation would make victims morally obligated to those who harmed them, further empowering perpetrators and further disempowering victims. Forgiveness is always undeserved. Indeed, if it were deserved there would be no need for forgiveness at all.

We looked at several counterfeits of forgiveness – things with which it is often confused but which are not, in fact, forgiveness. These are condonation, pardon, mercy, modifying one's moral judgement and excusing. Forgiveness and punishment, we said, are not mutually exclusive. There is, at times, an assumption that forgiveness is coterminous with pardon. It is not. It is not the offence but the injury caused by the offence that is forgiven by the injured person. The offence, we said, is pardoned by one in whom such authority has been vested.

We considered resentment. The term 'resentment' tends to have negative connotations in the thinking of most people. The dictionary defines to resent as 'to take badly or to consider as an injury or affront'. If, as Haber says, not to resent is an indication of low (or no) self-esteem and no sense of one's own rights or importance, then it is in fact a positive and healthy response to being injured by another, so long as it becomes a catalyst for action and is not allowed to fester and further damage the self.

With regard to repentance there are three main views represented. (1) Repentance is a necessary and sufficient reason to forgive. (2) Repentance is unnecessary for forgiveness. (3) Repentance is insufficient as a reason to forgive. It is perhaps this more than anything else that distinguishes our

forgiveness of one another and God's forgiveness of us. God forgives without our prior repentance although it is by repentance that we make it our own. In most interpersonal forgiveness, to forgive without any indication of the perpetrator's remorse, regret or repentance risks giving the impression of excusing or even condoning the perpetrator's behaviour and placing the victim at risk of further injury. I suggest that in most interpersonal situations repentance is a necessary reason to forgive. This does not necessarily mean that victim and perpetrator will be reconciled.

Forgiveness, which is unnatural and often difficult for us, is, according to Christian theology, natural for God. It is in God's nature to forgive - and to forgive completely - because God's nature is love (1 John 4:8) and love forgives. We can, therefore, be entirely confident that God forgives our wrongdoing and can have the assurance that we are forgiven. He will not reject or refuse anyone who seeks his forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."<sup>284</sup> Confidence that we will be forgiven and assurance of being forgiven are often missing in interpersonal situations. Another difference between God's forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness is that, unlike human persons, God will never cast up what has been forgiven. In God's economy, what is dealt with is dealt with. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."<sup>285</sup>

As considered above, human forgiveness does not always result in reconciliation. God's forgiveness of humankind, however, always results in restored relationship. But God's forgiveness is about more than restoring what was there before, it is about something new. God says in Isaiah 43:19, "See, I am doing a new thing." "The forgiveness Jesus describes and lives out is profoundly radical.... Jesus does not forgive as a means of returning people to the *status quo*. His actions are directed at transforming them, at breaking them out of the limited vision of culture and idol so that they catch a

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<sup>284</sup> 1 John 1:9

<sup>285</sup> Psalm 103:12

glimpse of the true God beyond culture and the culture's moral system (who is right and who is wrong)."<sup>286</sup>

In the discussion of whether our forgiveness of others or God's forgiveness of us is prior, I suggested that our ability to forgive would be limited if we had not first experienced forgiveness. Soares-Prabhu suggests that we forgive others in response to God's forgiveness. This gives us a greater appreciation of God's forgiveness, which in turn enables us to forgive more and so on. We saw too that forgiveness is a process. It is a journey which is often long and painful.

We have considered that forgiveness is costly because it is undeserved, unfair and unmerited, because it may mean giving up the 'victim role' and because of the pain of remembering. This was contrasted with the cost of not forgiving. To ignore or deny the cost of forgiveness trivialises both sufferer and suffering.

We considered that like sin and suffering, forgiveness is concrete and specific, not abstract and general. Non-specific, generalised forgiveness is a symptom of cheap grace. Concrete, specific forgiveness is costly for both forgiver and forgiven.

In the discussion regarding whether repentance brings about God's forgiveness or God's forgiveness brings about our repentance, my conclusion is that God's forgiveness is prior to our repentance. I cited Jones saying, we are forgiven in order that we can enter a life of repentance and forgiveness. He states, "While repentance and confession are not *conditions* of receiving God's forgiveness, they are indispensable means of acknowledging our *need* for forgiveness and hence embody that forgiveness in our relations with others."<sup>287</sup> For it to be otherwise – for God's forgiveness to be dependent on our repentance – makes forgiveness something we can earn. To be effective

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<sup>286</sup> Hinkle cited in Augsburg, 1996:22

<sup>287</sup> Jones, 1995: 195

a gift has to be received. Forgiveness is a gift of God's grace. In repentance we are effectively receiving God's gift of forgiveness.

Haber, we saw, contends that there are circumstances in which, even if the perpetrator expresses regret, remorse and repentance, it is not right to forgive. Attractive as this may, at times, appear, it is not what is taught or modelled in the Christian Scriptures. Nor is it in the best interest of victims to harbour resentment and bitterness. Even if no answer relating to the perpetrator can be found to Haber's question, 'Why should I forgive?', the victim will always be able to find answers relating to him or herself. 'I too am in need of forgiveness' or 'I have received forgiveness from God and from others' or even, 'Harbouring resentment against others has an adverse effect on my well-being and on my ability to remember well.' As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, while the benefit to the self may be the catalyst that encourages us to forgive, if it was always the prime motivating factor then forgiveness is redefined from an act of love to an act of self-centredness.

Emerson cites Tillich when he says, "One could say that the courage to be is the courage to accept oneself in spite of being unacceptable." and, "The courage to be...is the courage to accept the forgiveness of sins, not as an abstract assertion but as the fundamental experience in the encounter with God." In other words, courage comes first and involves forgiveness. Emerson suggests that the opposite is the correct order; that forgiveness of sins comes first and that gives one the courage to be. He states, "It is realised forgiveness that makes one free to have the courage to be."<sup>288</sup>

Once we have experienced forgiveness, we are called upon to forgive others. This is why we need courage. Forgiveness, as we have considered, is not easy. It is to become a way of life and, in some situations, will take a lifetime. "Because of the pervasiveness of sin, healing brokenness and unlearning sinful habits is an unfinished and unfinishable task."<sup>289</sup> "Forgiveness has many layers, many seasons.... The important part of forgiveness is to begin

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<sup>288</sup> Emerson, 1964: 176f

<sup>289</sup> Jones, 1995: 63

and to continue. The finishing of it all is a life work."<sup>290</sup> Why is it so important to begin? It is important because, as Bishop Desmond Tutu says, "There's no future without forgiveness."<sup>291</sup> This surely is as true of individuals as it is of communities.

There is surely a temptation to embrace Haber's contention that even when they repent of their wrongdoing, there are some perpetrators who should not be forgiven. The Christian theologian, however, must be true to the example and teaching of the New Testament and that means to 'forgive as we have been forgiven' (Matthew 6:12). And how are we forgiven? We are forgiven following our repentance (or, rather, the forgiveness that precedes our repentance becomes forgiven-ness), we are forgiven completely, we are forgiven limitlessly (seventy times seven) and we are forgiven without condition. That is how we are to forgive others. It is, Volf states, a misunderstanding of the sacrament of the Eucharist if we see it as simply a reminder of Christ's sacrifice for us and God's embrace of us. "Inscribed on the very heart of God's grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents. *What happens to us must be done by us.*"<sup>292</sup> So it is with forgiveness.

This is not to suggest, however, that we are to forgive indiscriminately. Just as God's forgiveness is universal in its scope but not in its application, so too we would be unwise to attempt to forgive indiscriminately. For example, the victim who offered forgiveness to a perpetrator while that perpetrator continued to wield abusive power and inflict harm on the victim, be it physical, emotional or spiritual harm, would condone the abusive behaviour, undermine the self-worth of the victim and increase the victim's vulnerability. The Japanese have a proverb that highlights the futility of forgiving in the absence of repentance. It says, "Forgiving the unrepentant is like drawing pictures in water."<sup>293</sup> David Augsburger also considers that forgiveness is not

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<sup>290</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés, cited in Kroll, 2000: 111

<sup>291</sup> Wiesenthal, 1998: 268 (*No Future Without Forgiveness* is also the title of Tutu's book about the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa)

<sup>292</sup> Volf, 1996: 129 (emphasis added)

<sup>293</sup> Cited in Augsburger, 1996: 29



always the most appropriate response. "But," he says, "forgiveness may not be the morally responsible way to respond to a particular unjust injury. It may be better to resent responsibly than to forgive irresponsibly, to resent in love of principle, of self, of other or of moral community rather than forgive in negation of one or all of these."<sup>294</sup>

Forgiveness, as considered in this chapter, is different from excuse, pardon, justification, acceptance or understanding. If, as I have noted, an injury could be pardoned, justified, accepted, or excused there would be nothing to forgive. It is the inexcusable, the unpardonable, the unjustifiable, the unacceptable and the non-understandable – we might even say the unforgivable – that we forgive. Put simply, what we are doing when we forgive another is ridding the self of resentment against that person and not wishing him or her harm. Forgiveness releases perpetrator and victim from the chains that bind them to one another and to their individual, unresolved pasts in an unhelpful, destructive way and sets them free to realise their potential. "Forgiveness," says Willmer, "is a change in the relations, circumstances and possibilities of sinners...such that while sin is truthfully recognised for what it is, it does not have the power to determine the future or final worth and being of the sinner. This change does not consist in overlooking the wrong or treating it as trivial or tolerable. To be forgiven is not to be freed of responsibility but is a way of taking responsibility with hope for good rather than despair."<sup>295</sup>

In his study of forgiveness in Mark's Gospel, Peter Bolt looks at the connection between healing and forgiveness of sins in the Gospels (for example Mark 2:5). He says, "The forgiveness of sins also entailed the removal of its consequences upon the lives of individual Israelites. As such the Servant's ministry was a foretaste and a pledge of the coming kingdom of God, when all would be set right in Eden-like splendour."<sup>296</sup> While this may be true in certain respects it would be unwise to declare it as a general truth

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<sup>294</sup> Augsburg, 1996: 87

<sup>295</sup> Willmer, 2001: 26

<sup>296</sup> Bolt, 1998: 66

for, as considered above, often when wounds are healed, scars remain as a permanent reminder of the wound. "The dead are still dead."<sup>297</sup>

There is, then, a considerable gulf between God's forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness but surely God's forgiveness should serve as a model for us if we are to 'forgive as we are forgiven'. As McFadyen points out, and we have already briefly mentioned, theology has to interact with the secular and has to have meaning in the marketplace if it is to be true to itself. "The business of Christian theology...is to understand God and reality from the perspective of God's concrete presence and activity in the world, and in relation to our concretely lived experiences of being in the world."<sup>298</sup> John Patton also draws attention to the gulf between God's forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness when he writes, "If we are forgiven, then we *should* be forgiving. This may be true – and in many ways I believe it is – but human beings have significant capacity for avoiding that truth. They simply are not what they ought to be, nor do they do what they should in spite of impressive religious announcements and expectations."<sup>299</sup>

I have considered in this chapter that forgiveness – both forgiving others and being forgiven – frees us from the chains of the past that bind us to others in unhelpful and destructive ways and frees us for new life. Forgiveness, we saw, is a 'recovery of the past in hope' and through forgiving and being forgiven hitherto painful and potentially damaging memories lose their destructive power and we are enabled to *remember well*. To remember, that is, in such a way as to present no threat to the one who remembers. To remember well, I said, is not simply to remember differently (different need not equate with better). Nor does it mean to remember falsely. It was, as we saw, the experience of the Truth And Justice Commission in South Africa, that in order for victims and perpetrators, and indeed for the entire community, to move on, the truth of the past had to be told, however

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<sup>297</sup> Smedes, 1988:108

<sup>298</sup> McFadyen, 2000: 44

<sup>299</sup> Patton, 1987: 72 (emphasis added)

harrowing the telling and hearing of that truth may have been. To remember well is to remember truthfully and with integrity.

I also said that the freedom from the past forgiveness brings is transformed into hope. In chapters one and two I touched on the link between memory and hope, saying that the memory of what has been in the past (thinking in particular of God's faithfulness but also looking at relationships with others) is the foundation on which future hopes and expectations are built. For God to erase memory at the eschaton, therefore, as Volf suggests, would leave us without a solid foundation. Even if only certain memories were erased the foundation would have gaps. With the erasure of certain memories, I have argued, our personal narrative, and with it our sense of self, would also have gaps. If, as I have suggested, forgiveness enables us to remember well - enables us to live comfortably with the memories that once caused suffering - then, I suggest that Volf's eschatological forgetting, as well as being problematic, is unnecessary.

I have already indicated why it is reasonable to suppose our memories will not be erased in the eschaton but that they will be redeemed and healed, therefore will present no further threat of suffering. They will, in other words, be remembered well. It is then, to the eschaton that I now turn my attention.

**Chapter 4**  
**Eschatological Remembering and Being**

“Would you know my name  
If I saw you in heaven?  
Would it be the same  
If I saw you in heaven?”  
(Eric Clapton, *Tears In Heaven*)

“The word ‘Hope’ the learned say  
is derived from the shorter one ‘Hop’  
and leads one into ‘Leap’  
Plato, in his turn, says that the leaping  
of young creatures is the essence of play -  
so be it!

To hope, then, means to take a playful leap  
into the future – to dare to spring from firm ground –  
to play trustingly – invest energy, laughter;  
And one good leap encourages another –  
on then with the dance.”<sup>1</sup>(Joan Erikson)

**4.1 Introduction**

In earlier chapters I have shown that our sense of personal identity is, at least in part, constituted by our experiences, both pleasant and painful, and the memory of these experiences. I have argued that, because of the part our memories play in our sense of who we are, the erasure of certain memories puts our sense of identity at risk. In this chapter I will argue that if in God’s New Creation, personal identity (and our sense of it) is retained in all its richness, then it is necessary to suppose that even our darkest memories will be retained and not, as Volf suggests, forgotten. Furthermore, I suggest that if in the New Creation who and what we are will be completed and perfected, forgotten memories will be restored. I will consider that in the New Creation there will be elements of both discontinuity with life now and of continuity. While Volf supposes that our memories fall under the rubric of discontinuity, I argue the opposite.

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Capps, 1995: 176

Lester expresses concern that social and behavioural scientists ignore the impact on personal identity of the future in general and in particular of the Christian hope of the New Creation but, he tells us, we are shaped as much by the 'not yet' as by the 'now' and the past. He tells us that we need to combine a sense of identity rooted in past experience with self-transcendence which is future-oriented to be happy, hopeful and balanced<sup>2</sup>. Brunner makes the same point when he says, "I am never without my past and I am never without my future. Even today I am he who I once was...without the knowledge of my past and the persistence of my past in me, I am not a man; the presence and responsibility for my past gives to my being its human character. Even so it is in regard to the future...for only in reference to the future do I experience my freedom. Just as I am my past I am also my future."<sup>3</sup> In both Brunner's 'freedom' and Lester's 'self-transcendence' we see a hint that the possession of future hope has the potential to keep us from being fettered to the past, enabling us to rise above our present circumstances. The influence of the future and the hope we have for the future on the way we live and make sense of life now will be considered in this chapter.

Important as the past and the influences of the past on our sense of who we are may be, it is the future and our hopes for the future that determine and shape our present most fully. "Instead of being constrained by the prolongation of what has been and what is we act in ways that are genuinely open to surprise.... We live, in other words, in a present which is shaped by the future rather than the past, in the power of what we might call the future-made-present."<sup>4</sup> This is highly significant, for the events which caused suffering lie in the past, but the future holds the promise and hope of healed and redeemed memories and of liberation from pain and suffering.

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<sup>2</sup> Lester, 1995: 24, 77

<sup>3</sup> Brunner, 1954: 45

<sup>4</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 198

Wells makes the potentially liberating suggestion that the present is not about working through the consequences of the past but is about striving towards future transformation<sup>5</sup>. Bauckham and Hart, however, caution that while we can influence the future, our influence is only partial. We cannot control it. Christian hope, as we shall consider, motivates us to action but it does not attempt to do what only God can do. "We can influence our future, but far from completely or predictably.... Christian hope...neither attempts what can only come from God nor neglects what is humanly possible."<sup>6</sup>

I will proceed by next looking briefly at the wider structure of hope and at hopelessness before turning to look at the distinctive shape of Christian eschatological hope in particular. I will consider the resurrection on which the Christian's hope is based and the New Creation toward which it is finally directed. I will also consider what difference hope in the New Creation, where suffering is no more and, as I suggest, memories are transformed and redeemed, should make in our lives, looking at it in relation to present suffering, and the difference possessing such hope should make to our behaviour now. In other words, I will look at how our beliefs concerning the future inform our praxis. I will seek to show that, "Even in pain and fear, community with the crucified Christ brings into life *sparks of trust and candles of hope.*"<sup>7</sup>

As Christian eschatological hope is finally directed toward the New Creation, where, as I have just indicated, memories are transformed and redeemed and suffering is no more, and because who we are and what we do now is shaped by these hopes, the final two sections of the chapter will consider different aspects of the New Creation. What goes before explains in both secular and Christian terms what hope is and its importance to our very being. It also shows how our eschatological hopes and beliefs should and must influence our behaviour now. The sections on New Creation (sections 4.5 and 4.6) show the richness and greatness awaiting the Christian.

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<sup>5</sup> Wells, 1998: 149

<sup>6</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 43

<sup>7</sup> Moltmann, 1996: 338 (emphasis added)

Without an adequate picture of the New Creation's richness and greatness we could be excused for thinking that anything temporal – be it sin or suffering – could mar it. But first, let us look at the wider patterns of human hopefulness.

## **4.2 Wider Accounts of Human Hope And Hopelessness**

### **4.2.i Secular Accounts of Hope**

Sociologist Henri Desroche tells us that 'hope is a rope' which seems, in many ways to be an appropriate description. By way of explanation Desroche considers the classic rope trick in which a rope that is, or seems somehow to be, anchored to nothing hangs on its own and can bear the weight of a person. "The officiant...throws a rope like a lasso in the air. The rope rises higher and higher 'in the air'. It should fall down. But...has mysteriously anchored itself somewhere, and to prove it, he or his disciple climbs up the rope. The rope does not give way. It *holds*. And it carries the weight of the man as he climbs."<sup>8</sup> In order to cope with the strains and burdens of life, Desroche tells us, people find for themselves 'a rope' which, like the rope in the rope trick, seems to be 'in the air' but it holds and pulls the person up above the circumstances of life. Hope, he says, is that 'rope'.

Much everyday hope, like Desroche's rope is, to a greater or lesser degree, 'in the air', but not all. Hope is essential to life and well-being. Lynch points out that all our actions are precipitated by hope – hope that a chair will hold us, hope of finishing a sentence when we start it, hope that there is ink in the pen, coffee in the tin or fuel in the car's tank. Even suicide, he says, carries the hope that it will solve some problem<sup>9</sup>. Ultimately, however, our everyday hopes, whether realistic or fanciful, are fixed on things that are unable to deliver us from sin's power, from eternal suffering and from separation from God, and from that viewpoint is in the air no matter how firmly anchored in reality it may be. A wish that the world could be other than it is or a desire for health, wealth or happiness are valid hopes but when these hopes are

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<sup>8</sup> Desroche, 1979: 1 (original emphasis)

<sup>9</sup> Lynch, 1965: 33f

unfulfilled the hopeer is disappointed<sup>10</sup>. Very often, however, the emotions are deeper than disappointment. The person whose hopes for health, wealth, happiness or change are unfulfilled may suffer disillusionment, despair and a sense of hopelessness. Perhaps this is why Desroche thinks in terms, not of fulfilled hope and unfulfilled empty hope but of peaks and troughs of hope<sup>11</sup>.

It would be unfair to equate everyday human hope with false hope but the fact remains that much human hope is false and even when it is positive, it contains a certain degree of uncertainty<sup>12</sup>. Thiselton highlights this uncertainty when he refers to the "illusory optimism of modernity"<sup>13</sup>.

Everyday hope could also be said to be transient and fleeting as illustrated in this statement from a character in a novel, "Once or twice though I did allow a minnow of optimism to flash into my chest.... But the minnow always swam away again instantly."<sup>14</sup> These are the words of Helena, a woman in her early 30s who is planning suicide because everything on which her hopes were pinned has let her down. Her best friend died of cancer. She is facially disfigured and partially blinded as the result of an accident. Her career as a singer-songwriter is over as the pop world rejected her in favour of younger up-and-comings. Her boyfriend is a disappointment. Helena is lonely, has no job prospects and is acutely aware of her facial injuries. She feels she has nothing left in which she can hope and, as such, no reason to live. The reason for Helena's abject hopelessness was her apparent feeling of nihilism occasioned by her losses. There is nothing wrong with any of her objects of hope – friendships, relationships, career, health. To have hopes such as these is a normal, healthy, even necessary, part of human life. Indeed, as we will consider, the absence of hope from our daily lives stunts our development (whether personal or professional) and saps our vitality.

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<sup>10</sup> Colwell, 2000: ix

<sup>11</sup> Desroche, 1979: 9

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, 1999: 298

<sup>13</sup> Thiselton, 1996: 129

<sup>14</sup> Voss, 2002: 24



Hope that is hollow, however, is no real comfort to the one who hopes and is, as indicated above, transient. So potentially damaging is hollow false hope that Leslie Farber states it is better to have no hope than false hope because false hope entraps and ensnares that hoper<sup>15</sup>. Sophocles shows his lack of sympathy for the person who hangs on to false empty hope when he writes, "I have nothing but scorn for the mortal who comforts himself with hollow hope."<sup>16</sup>

Sophocles is not the only philosopher who writes negatively and with disdain of hope. Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza all write hope off as illusionary, disruptive and dubious<sup>17</sup>. "False hope," writes Desroche, "entraps and leaves us...where we began."<sup>18</sup> Comparing false hope with real hope, Bauckham and Hart make a similar statement. "Real hope liberates and moves us forward. False hope entraps and leaves us, listless, essentially where we began."<sup>19</sup> I suggest, however, that false hope does not simply leave us where we began but leaves us worse off than before, having had to endure the disappointment of thwarted or unfulfilled hope. Of course there are many factors influencing whether or not, and how much, false hope has a negative effect on the hoper. These factors relate to the subject and the object of hope – the importance of the object of hope, the intensity of the hope, the past experience of failure or disappointment and the emotional reserves of the person hoping, to name a few.

If hope is to be real rather than false it has to be realistic. The supporters of second division football team Queens Park may hope that the team will win their league and be promoted but to hope that they will win the Scottish cup is fantasy. It is not realistically possible (even although, I am told, they won it around 100 years ago!). As Lynch says, "Hope is indeed an arduous search for a future good of some kind that is realistically possible but not yet

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<sup>15</sup> Leslie H Farber in foreword to Lynch, 1965: 7

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Desroche, 1979: 26

<sup>17</sup> Doyle, 1999: 300

<sup>18</sup> Desroche, 1979: 64

<sup>19</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 64

visible."<sup>20</sup>(like Queen's Park winning their league). He later says that it is essential to learn that some things are impossible<sup>21</sup>. To hope for the impossible is false hope. It is hope-less.

Bloch also distinguishes between the possible and the impossible when he says, "The thus determined imagination of utopian function is distinguished from mere fantasizing precisely by the fact that only the former has in its favour a Not-Yet being of an expectable kind...anticipates a Real-Possible."<sup>22</sup> Unfulfilled hope, false hope and lack of hope can all give rise to a sense of hopeless and despair. Brian Keenan, while incarcerated in Lebanon, was aware that unless he carefully reined in his hopes they would become fantasy, become the kind of false hope that would then give way to crushing despair. He writes, "We began to think that somewhere in the very near future our captivity would come to an end. But my ultimate conclusion was always. 'Hope for everything, but expect nothing.'.... Hope should always be restrained by objectivity lest it leads one off on a dance into fairyland, which is the final delusion. If that hope is somehow shattered then the level of despair becomes unbearable."<sup>23</sup> It is to hopelessness that we now turn our attention.

#### **4.2.ii Hopelessness**

Both Leslie Farber and William Lynch<sup>24</sup> note the irony that when we say of someone that she or he 'has hope' it usually means that the person is in some kind of trouble with little, if anything, other than hope (if indeed they even have true hope at all). Lynch writes, "As we use language, when we say that a man has hope we mean that he is in serious trouble. When we say that someone has hope, we usually imply that he has nothing else, and that he is close to despair."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lynch, 1965: 23

<sup>21</sup> Lynch, 1965: 61

<sup>22</sup> Bloch, 1986: 144

<sup>23</sup> Keenan 1992: 109

<sup>24</sup> Foreword to Lynch, 1965: 8 & Lynch, 1965: 22

<sup>25</sup> Lynch, 1965: 22

Donald Capps identifies despair, apathy and shame as the three major threats to hope with despair being the most serious of the three<sup>26</sup>. Etymologically, apathy means negation of feeling. Despair, on the other hand, is characterised by the presence of negative feelings of hopelessness. The disabling effect of shame was touched on in chapter 3, and the antidote to apathy will be considered later in this chapter. Our concern here is with despair.

Our word 'despair' comes from the Latin word, *desparare*, which is made up of two words: *De* meaning 'absence', and *Spes* meaning 'of hope'.<sup>27</sup> In reality and experience, however, it means more. To despair is to be devoid of promise, hope, vitality and meaning in life<sup>28</sup>. For Bringle, to despair is, in religious terms, to show doubt in the providence of God, thus showing that we are sinners<sup>29</sup>. Others have also linked sin with despair in their thinking. For Kierkegaard, for example, "One who despairs...abandons God."<sup>30</sup> Despair has been described as, "The sin of freely abandoning hope which relies on God's faithfulness, help and mercy in all our jeopardy and distress."<sup>31</sup> Luther goes further, seeing despair, not just as a sin or as the root of sin but as sin itself<sup>32</sup>. And Moltmann describes it as sin against hope<sup>33</sup>.

"Life without hope," says Paul Cedar, "is like a beautiful flower cut off from the stem. Like a precious child who has nothing to eat. We cannot live very well or very long without hope. Without it we shrivel and die."<sup>34</sup> This same idea of hope being so essential to our very existence that without it we would shrivel and die is found in Moltmann, who says that as water is to fish so hope is to humankind<sup>35</sup>, and in Brunner, who says hope is as essential to the

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<sup>26</sup> Capps, 1995: 98f

<sup>27</sup> Bringle, 1990: 20

<sup>28</sup> Bringle, 1990: 21

<sup>29</sup> Bringle, 1990: 106

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Bringle, 1990: 100f

<sup>31</sup> Rahner & Vorgrimler, cited in Bringle, 1990: 146

<sup>32</sup> Bringle, 1990: 80

<sup>33</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 22

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Kilbourne, 1995: 311

<sup>35</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 21

continuity of humanity as water or oxygen to the survival of human beings. So essential does Brunner see hope being to human life that he writes, "What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of life. Take oxygen away and death occurs through suffocation, take hope away and humanity is constricted through lack of breath.... As the fate of the human organism is dependent on the supply of oxygen, so the fate of humanity is dependent on its supply of hope."<sup>36</sup> Swindoll also uses similar illustrations in an attempt to highlight just how basic hope is to life. He draws parallels with water to a fish, electricity to a light bulb and air to an aeroplane<sup>37</sup>.

Kilbourne, from her work with children of war, suggests that the worst of all experiences for children is the loss of hope, worse than loss of parents or loss of home, worse than rape or being maimed<sup>38</sup>. This was seen during the Iraq war in 2003 in the much publicised story of twelve year old Baghdad boy, Ali Ismaeel Abbas. Ali was orphaned and lost his siblings when a missile devastated his home. He was badly burned in the blast and lost both his arms. It was neither the loss of home nor of parents and siblings that caused Ali to despair, but the loss of his arms which he felt threatened his future hopes of studying medicine and becoming a doctor. He is reported as saying. "If I don't get a pair of hands I will commit suicide.... I want to become a doctor, but how can I? I don't have any hands."<sup>39</sup>

Viktor Frankl writes in a similar vein of hopelessness in adults. While incarcerated in concentration camp during World War Two, Frankl witnessed fellow-prisoners dying because they lost hope. "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – his future – was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future he also...became subject to mental and physical decay.... I once had a dramatic demonstration of the close link between the loss of faith in the future and this dangerous giving up." He then narrates the story of a fellow-prisoner who told him of his dream in which he was told they would be liberated on 30<sup>th</sup> March. The day before, on 29<sup>th</sup> March, when there was no

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<sup>36</sup> Brunner, 1954: 7

<sup>37</sup> Swindoll, 1995: 3

<sup>38</sup> Kilbourne, 1995: 311

<sup>39</sup> Nakhoul & Judah, 2003: 3

sign that liberation might be near, the man became ill, the next day which was his 'liberation date' he lost consciousness and, on 31<sup>st</sup> March he died<sup>40</sup>. Frankl witnessed similar occurrences between Christmas 1944 and New Year 1945 when higher than usual numbers of prisoners died. Hopes had apparently run high in the camp of being home for Christmas. When this did not happen many prisoners lost courage, became unable to resist disease, and died. "The sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect."<sup>41</sup> Frankl also observed the opposite to be the case, those who believed that someone, or some task, was waiting were able to survive against the odds. In considering this phenomenon, he cites Nietzsche who says, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*."<sup>42</sup>

In similar circumstances to Frankl, Primo Levi was encouraged to look beyond the pain and horror around him for something better through the goodness of his fellow-prisoner Lorenzo. This, he believes, saved his life. "I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today...for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole...something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving.... Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man."<sup>43</sup> Levi later urgently exhorted his fellow-patients in the camp hospital to look beyond their dire circumstances in order to survive. "I was thinking life outside was beautiful and would be beautiful again, and that it would really be a pity to let ourselves be overcome now. I woke up the patients who were dozing and when I was sure they were all listening I told them...that they must all begin to think of returning home now."<sup>44</sup>

Winston Smith who, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* proposes a toast 'To the past' records a more detailed version of his toast in his secret

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<sup>40</sup> Frankl, 1962: 74f

<sup>41</sup> Frankl, 1962: 75f

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Frankl, 1962: 76 (original emphasis)

<sup>43</sup> Levi, 2001: 127

<sup>44</sup> Levi, 2001: 170

diary. The fuller version of his toast reveals that he too is seeking to survive an oppressive regime by remembering that things have not always been as they are now and hoping that in the future they might be better once more. "To the future of the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone."<sup>45</sup>

Moltmann also notes that when they lack hope people often give up and die even when there is no obvious physical cause. Alternatively, he notes, they may turn to crime<sup>46</sup>. Experience tells us that as well as turning to crime, those who live in the darkness of hopelessness and despair may also become involved in substance abuse, abusive relationships or self-harming more readily than those with hope<sup>47</sup>. For Moltmann, "Both death from expired hope and criminality from hopelessness, show that man, as a temporal creature, is directed towards the future and that this is a direction which alone corresponds to hope."<sup>48</sup>

It seems likely that this was Dostoevsky's observation when, writing of prisoners, he says, "Totally without hope one cannot live. Without some goal and some effort to reach it, no man can live. When he has lost all hope and object in life, man often becomes a monster in his misery."<sup>49</sup> Moltmann states, "To live without hope is to cease to live. Hell is hopelessness," and he observes that Dante's inscription above the entrance to hell is no accident, "Leave behind (or abandon) all hope you who enter here."<sup>50</sup>

Not only can hopelessness have such negative, and in some cases devastating, effects on a person's life as we have just considered – death, crime, substance abuse, abusive relationships, self-harming – it can also result in the relinquishing of the positive, creative elements in a person's life. People stop making the effort in all aspects of their day-to-day lives. "Without

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Volf, 1996: 233

<sup>46</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 22

<sup>47</sup> From the writer's observation in her experience as a social worker.

<sup>48</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 22

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Moltmann, 1975: 89

<sup>50</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 89

hope prisoners of war languish and die. Without it students get discouraged and drop out of school. Without it athletic teams fall into a slump and continue to lose... fledgling writers, longing to be published, run out of determination... addicts return to their habit... marriage partners decide to divorce... writers, artists, entertainers, even preachers, lose their creativity."<sup>51</sup> Of course, loss is not always the result of hopelessness and despair, it may also be the cause. The suffering of bereavement, broken relationships, loss of employment and so on can cause despair because, as Lynch notes, preoccupation with a specific event or situation causes imagination to cease and, because as we will discuss later, hope is a function of imagination, this brings an end to hope<sup>52</sup>. As Bauckham and Hart put it, "Hopelessness... imprisons us within the tyranny of an absolute present."<sup>53</sup>

It is easy to sympathise with those who thus imprisoned by such tyranny wish for the memory of their suffering to be erased, and with Volf's supposition that 'paradise' will entail such erasure. Erasure of painful memories, however, I suggest, as well as posing significant difficulties for our thinking about the identity of the sufferer in such an imagined future, is not the best the Christian Gospel has to offer. Christian hope is not for an eternal present, for more of the same, but for eternal newness and transformation. It is for a future where memories, together with those whose memories they are, have been healed and transformed, as argued below.

While hope enables the hoper to view the future with a sense of positive anticipation, hopelessness or despair is accompanied by negative thoughts about the future. Lester states, "Hope is positively oriented towards the future while hopelessness views the future with suspicion, anxiety or apathy" or, he also adds, dread<sup>54</sup>. Dread, he explains, tells the despairing person that the future will bring a repetition of a painful or negative past. Suspicion says the future is untrustworthy, anxiety that it is dangerous, and apathy that it is meaningless. Hope, like dread, fear, anxiety and suspicion, has

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<sup>51</sup> Swindoll, 1995: xii

<sup>52</sup> Lynch, 1965: 78

<sup>53</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 56

<sup>54</sup> Lester, 1995: 88

imagination and dreams dreams of what will be. While the images hope imagines are positive, constructive and liberating, those born of dread, fear, suspicion and anxiety are negative, destructive and imprisoning. Likewise, despair and hopelessness cannot dream apart from the negative and perhaps frightening dreams born of dread, suspicion and anxiety. In despair, then, the future is a cul-de-sac, it is a road to nowhere<sup>55</sup>.

Lester looks at the difference, between despair and depression. Despair, he explains, is an emotion, and depression an illness. In depression there may be no sense of future, while in despair the future is threatening or meaningless and makes no sense. He also considers the overlap between the two, observing that despair may push a person to depression and severe depression may leave the person with a sense of despair<sup>56</sup>. A despairing person may also suffer from depression; a depressed person may also be in despair.

Hope, says Lynch, wishes and imagines. Hopelessness does neither. In hopelessness, therefore, Lynch tells us that we need to take time to examine what is preventing us from being able to wish and hope for a goal<sup>57</sup>. That means if we are to escape from the hopelessness of the immediate then we have to move beyond it. To deliberately move beyond the limitations of the present in this way is precisely to hope<sup>58</sup>. Let us look, then at what hope, and in particular, what Christian hope is invested in because as Mary Bringle states, "Despair does not deserve the final word."<sup>59</sup>.

### **4.3 Christian Eschatological Hope**

"In an age where despair, discouragement and disappointment are the predominant emotional dynamics, it becomes increasingly necessary for the

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<sup>55</sup> Lester: 1995: 89ff

<sup>56</sup> Lester, 1995: 73f

<sup>57</sup> Lynch, 1965: 50, 134

<sup>58</sup> Lynch cited in Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 54

<sup>59</sup> Bringle, 1990: 175



Christian faith to unmask, refurbish and communicate its belief in hope.”<sup>60</sup> In the earlier part of this chapter we considered false hope and everyday hope. We turn here to look at Christian eschatological hope.

We considered the rope trick and said that, like the rope, the hope on which people depend to hold them up is often anchored ‘in the air’. This is not true of Christian eschatological hope, which is anchored, not in the air but in the promises of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Of course, many people would argue that Christian hope is ‘anchored in the air’ and remain unconvinced – and unconvincible – that it could be otherwise. The apostle Paul, who clearly encountered similar sceptics, states, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly those who are sceptical about the promises of God will continue to see Christian hope as folly but to those who believe God’s promises are a source of hope and strength.

There are many factors that make Christian hope unique and distinctive, separating it from all other hope. We can see this in the way ‘hope’ is defined within Christian theology. McKim, for example, defines Christian hope as, “The Christian anticipation of the future as the fulfilment of God’s purposes based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ as known by the work of the Holy Spirit in the church.”<sup>62</sup> Macquarrie, on the other hand, expresses the opinion that Christian hope is related to wider patterns of human hoping and thus that it is not entirely set apart. He says that, “Christian hope is total hope, and it touches on all aspects of human life, both individual and social...a truly total hope is so large and many-sided that we impoverish and misrepresent it if we lay all the stress on its supernatural and other-worldly aspects. It is in the first instance a hope arising in the history of this world and having relevance for our life in this world.”<sup>63</sup> Having said that, however, he then indicates that he does not totally reject the views of other theologians

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Lester & Wayne Oates in Lester, 1995: 1f

<sup>61</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18

<sup>62</sup> McKim, 1996: 113

<sup>63</sup> Macquarrie, 1978: 1f

who would seek to set Christian hope apart as something unique. While continuing to see it closer to everyday hope than other Christian theologians who want to emphasise the transcendence of Christian eschatological hope might be comfortable with, he concedes that to deny the specialness of Christian hope is to impoverish and disempower it. "Let me at once concede that...there are new dimensions in Christian hope that cannot be derived from consideration of the general human experience of hope...we shall be in danger of presenting a defective and impoverished interpretation of Christian hope, one in which it has been deprived of its distinctive power."<sup>64</sup>

As well as the basis and object of Christian hope being distinct, as we will consider below, there is also an element of assurance, which separates the tenor of Christian hope from secular, everyday hope. When used of day-to-day hope, or secular hope, the word 'hope' means wish or desire. It refers to expectation that is rooted in a degree of probability. For example, it seems probable that the traveller who hopes for sunshine in Spain in June is likely to see his hopes fulfilled. It is not assured, however, and occasionally travellers report two weeks of rain, cloud and thunder in their southern coastal resort. When used of Christian hope, on the other hand, 'to hope' means to have knowledge and confidence<sup>65</sup>. For Hart, the quality distinguishing Christian hope from other hope is assurance<sup>66</sup>. Williams points out that when hope is used theologically it is not hope as contrasted with knowledge but as contrasted with sight. "Hope can be a kind of assurance, not a kind of uncertainty as one usually gets in ordinary language."<sup>67</sup> Dunn considers the difference between biblical, or Christian, hope that is confident and trustful hope, having its confidence in God, and the popular usage of the word hope. In saying, for example, 'I hope it does not rain', Dunn points out, I am not confident that it will not<sup>68</sup>. As Christians we can have confidence and assurance that in the New Creation our existence will not be marked by the suffering so characteristic of our lives in this world. This is not just fanciful

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<sup>64</sup> Macquarrie, 1978: 2

<sup>65</sup> Gay, 1988: 75

<sup>66</sup> Hart, Trevor, 1999b: 69

<sup>67</sup> Williams, 1990:25

<sup>68</sup> Dunn, 2000: 52

wishful thinking like the hope that it will not rain. It is based on God's promise that he will 'make all things new' (Revelation 21:5). It is because Christian hope goes beyond day-to-day hope, because we have confidence beyond our desires, Lester suggests that we do not – or perhaps we might say we need not – fall into despair when day-to-day hope is thwarted<sup>69</sup>.

The Christian's hope in the New Creation is rooted in the faithfulness of God as revealed in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and in particular in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. In chapter 1 we saw from John Macmurray's work that the infant is able to hope for his mother's return when she is absent, based on his experience of the mother's past actions – her pattern of withdrawing from and returning to the infant. In a similar way, the ground of our hope is the past actions of God: we believe he will act in certain ways because he has acted in certain ways in the past. As Moltmann points out, in our speaking of God we remember and draw attention to historical persons and events in the language used. 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. 'The God who raised Jesus from the dead'. When these sayings, or sayings like them, are used in Christian scripture they are used to remind the reader or listener of the power and faithfulness of God; they are used to demonstrate that it is not futile to hope in God. The former is found in several places in both the Old and New Testaments (Genesis 50:24, Exodus 4:5, Matthew 22:32) and the latter in several of the New Testament epistles (Galatians 1:1, Romans 4:24, 1 Peter 1:21). "The hermeneutical starting point of Christian theology is therefore the concrete history witnessed to in both the Old and New Testaments," Moltmann tells us<sup>70</sup>. The same point is made by Craig Gay who states that the basis of Christian hope is the tridactic formula, "Christ has come, Christ has risen, Christ will come again."<sup>71</sup> Because we can be certain of God's faithfulness to his promises we ought to say, writes Thiselton, "Christ will come; live accordingly." not, "Live as if Christ will come."<sup>72</sup> Christ's coming and what that will mean for our

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<sup>69</sup> Lester, 1995: 67

<sup>70</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 372

<sup>71</sup> Gay, 1988: 73

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Travis, 1980: 72

fulfilment and redemption is, in other words, something in which we can hope with knowledge, confidence and assurance.

Moltmann goes on to say, "As the anticipation of the future of God, Christ becomes the ground of hope.... Eschatological hope can be 'hope against hope' only if it is born out of the redeeming and freeing efficacy of the cross of Christ."<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere Moltmann states that Christian eschatology must have a christological base. By this, he explains, we do not mean that it has to be grounded on prophecies made by Christ but that it is based on Christ's coming, death and resurrection. "The fact that Christ came into this world and appeared in Jesus, the crucified and risen one, is the eschatological presupposition of the whole Christian faith."<sup>74</sup> The same point is made by Bauckham when he says, "Just as all eschatological statements must be grounded in Christology, so all christological statements are statements of hope and promise with eschatological implications."<sup>75</sup> Barth leaves no room for doubt when he draws attention to the necessary overlap between our belief in Christ and our eschatological belief. He writes, "Christianity that is not entirely and altogether eschatological has entirely and altogether nothing to do with Christ."<sup>76</sup>

Moltmann points to the cross of Christ as the heart of Christian hope. "The cross of Christ is the sign of God's hope on earth for all those who live here in the shadow of the cross. Theology of hope is at its hard core theology of the cross.... In the crucified Christ we view the future of God. Everything else is dreams, fantasies and mere wish images. Hope born out of the cross of Christ distinguishes Christian faith from superstition as well as from disbelief.... There is no true *theology of hope* which is not first of all a *theology of the cross*."<sup>77</sup> Alves, however, points out that it is important that our hope is grounded on Christ's cross *and* resurrection and not in the cross alone for without the resurrection the cross is, in fact, a sign of hopelessness.

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<sup>73</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 381

<sup>74</sup> Moltmann, 1996: 194

<sup>75</sup> Bauckham, 1999: 3

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Doyle, 1999: 4

<sup>77</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 57f, 72

"The cross stands, thus, for death, for the end, for a situation with no possibilities whatsoever, for the end of the future and the end of hope."<sup>78</sup> The resurrection transforms the meaning of the crucifixion and gives us hope that our crosses – our painful and shameful memories – will likewise also be transformed.

Milne suggests that at the heart of Christian hope is not the resurrection but the cross. He writes, "In itself the resurrection as an event does no more than demonstrate the possibility of life after death in some form. The true epicentre of that glorious hope...is the cross, where sin was overcome and with it the divine judgement which is the reason for our dying."<sup>79</sup> Milne sees the resurrection as the *proclamation* of Christ's victory but surely the resurrection is more than a proclamation of victory but *is* victory over death. Without resurrection there would have been no victory to proclaim and no basis for our hope. Without the resurrection the cross with its shame and suffering would have the last word, its horror would not be transformed and we could have no basis for saying our painful memories will be transformed and redeemed.

Although, as indicated above, Moltmann points to the centrality of the cross, elsewhere he too points to the resurrection of the crucified one as the final ground for our hope. "Freedom is born from his suffering, life from his death, the exaltation of the man of God from the self-humiliation of God. Resurrection faith is faith in the crucified one, and hope which overcomes the world, which can hope against hope, is born in the community of the crucified one."<sup>80</sup>

Moltmann does not look to the cross without the resurrection, nor to the resurrection without the cross, but to both together. He makes the point that to separate the crucified and resurrected Christ or for the one to be subsumed or negated by the other, gives rise to various heresies such as

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<sup>78</sup> Alves, 1975: 61

<sup>79</sup> Milne, 2000: 162

<sup>80</sup> Moltmann, 1971a: 44

Docetism, Ebionism and Modalism. Christ's identity is in the cross *and* resurrection. "In that case," he writes, "the contradictions between the cross and resurrection are an inherent part of his identity.... It is formally a question of a dialectical identity which exists only through the contradiction and a dialectic which exists in the identity."<sup>81</sup> We may never be able to understand the paradox and contradiction of the dialectic of cross and resurrection but we need to learn to live with the tension for, as Moltmann indicates, the identity of Christ lies in both. So too, our post-resurrection identities will be in ourselves as we are now, together with our resurrected selves. We will be new, enriched, completed selves but we will be *our* selves. In Chapter 1, we considered the distinction in Ricoeur between numerical or quantitative identity and qualitative identity<sup>82</sup>. We might say, then, that our post-resurrection identities will be quantitatively identical with our present identities, but that they will be radically qualitatively different. To hope that our most painful memories will be healed and redeemed is indeed to hope for radical qualitative newness and difference.

Since earliest times Christians have seen Christ's resurrection as the guarantee that they too would live, seen it as the promise of what was to come<sup>83</sup>. Indeed, that hope of resurrected life was promised by Christ when, before the crucifixion, he spoke to his disciples of what was to come ("Because I live, you also will live." John 14:19), and was the substance of the first Christian sermon ever preached, when Peter addressed the crowd on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 14ff). The raising of a divine Son, however, gives no hope of resurrection to human people – our hope of resurrection, therefore, is in Christ's humanity, crucified and raised from the mortality which otherwise holds it captive<sup>84</sup>.

Not only does the resurrection promise new life, it also promises to transform and give new meaning to the past, as it does the cross. Christ's resurrection has been described as a pledge of our resurrection and of the New Creation.

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<sup>81</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 199f

<sup>82</sup> Ricoeur, 1992: 117

<sup>83</sup> Caird, 1979: 16

<sup>84</sup> Caird, 1979: 11

"That upon which Christian hope rests is precisely the action of this same God in summoning life forth out of death in the resurrection of Jesus, an anticipation and a pledge of the ultimate resurrection and renewal of all things."<sup>85</sup>

Writing at a time of religious wars and political revolutions, post-reformation theologians reminded Christians that their hope was founded in the resurrection of Christ, not in political stability or even religious freedom. "They summoned their readers – theologians and, through them, congregations – back from escapism...and confronted them with God acting to judge and redeem.... They did not simply react to the challenges of their time but gave an account for the hope which according to 1 Peter (3:15) is 'in you', because Christians are 'born anew into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (I Peter 1:3)'"<sup>86</sup>

From his supernatural conception and throughout his earthly life, the Christ event broke the mould of the ordinary and familiar but the most disturbing event of all is surely the resurrection<sup>87</sup>. The New Testament uses death as the end of a person's life (and indeed, the end of the life of animals and of vegetation) as an illustration of universal atrophy. "Thus the resurrection of Jesus from death is, more than any other single event or combination of events in his life, a breach of the 'orderliness' of this world which scandalises and turns our views of the whole of reality upside down."<sup>88</sup> We find an echo of this in Brunner who writes, "The resurrection is an incomprehensible event because it represents the inbreak of God into our temporal sphere...it is the cancellation of space-time existence."<sup>89</sup>

"I am the resurrection and the life," says Jesus (John 11:25). Moltmann notes that because Jesus *is* the resurrection, he is our future, and to wait for

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<sup>85</sup> Hart, 1999b: 67

<sup>86</sup> Sauter, 1996: 140

<sup>87</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 101ff

<sup>88</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 103

<sup>89</sup> Brunner, 1954: 144

our future is to wait for his future<sup>90</sup>. "The Christian hope for the future comes of observing a specific, unique event – that of the resurrection and appearing of Jesus Christ. Therefore to recognise the resurrection of Christ means to recognise in this event the future of God for the world which man finds in this God and his acts.... Thus Christianity is to be understood as the community of those who on the ground of the resurrection wait for the Kingdom of God and whose life is determined by this expectation."<sup>91</sup>

#### **4.4 Other Worldly Hope And This-Worldly Experience**

Some have expressed an objection that such otherworldly hope detracts from our ability to enjoy now. Moltmann spells out the essence of their concern. "Is it not always in the present alone that man is truly existent, real, contemporary with himself, acquiescent and certain? Memory binds him to the past that no longer is. Hope casts him upon the future that is not yet. He remembers living, but does not live.... He hopes to live, but he does not live. He expects to be happy one day and this expectation causes him to pass over the happiness of the present. He is never, in memory and hope, wholly himself and wholly in his present.... They rob him of his present."<sup>92</sup> In this section, I hope to show that concerns of this nature are ill-founded.

As Walter Capps observes, those leading the hope movement were oppressed (Moltmann and Metz were prisoners of war, and Bonhoeffer who was also influential was executed in prison.). He then suggests that to embrace hope we must also embrace suffering. He supports his suggestion by noting that there is ultimately no basis for hope apart from the crucifixion<sup>93</sup>.

From his historical perspective of Christian eschatology, Doyle indicates that throughout church history times of suffering, persecution and oppression have heightened the interest in eschatology. This is because when the

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<sup>90</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 82f

<sup>91</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 194, 326

<sup>92</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 26

<sup>93</sup> Capps, 1970: 37, 45



present world has nothing to offer but trouble and estrangement, the future world is the only source of hope. This is still true in the twenty first century of Christians living in areas where the Christian church is persecuted, as Schlossberg indicates in his book on the suffering church. Speaking of eschatological hope he writes, "It is an antidote to both self-pity and the curse of apparent meaninglessness."<sup>94</sup>

The opposite is also true – when life in the here and now is comfortable and unthreatening Christians generally have less of an interest in eschatology. For example, because the church's sense of security following the conversion of Constantine and because the world in which they lived was less threatening than in the past, Greek theologians of the mid fourth century, Daly tells us, paid little attention to eschatology<sup>95</sup>. It is not only true of the actions and writings of the church, but is also found in the writings of the Bible itself. Bauckham and Hart show that many of the eschatological writings in the Bible were written at times of persecution and exile. This is because as I have just indicated, "Eschatology is above all a source of hope and liberation.... The more other-worldly the focus, it seems, the more this-worldly its relevance. The more we are able to trust God finally to transform the situation, the more we are lifted out of the mire of despair."<sup>96</sup>

Writing of his experience as a prisoner of war, Moltmann says hope in the midst of suffering is not born of a yearning to go home but an acceptance of the situation. By so accepting the situation and hoping in the midst of it, he says, we discover the real person within both self and others. "For more than three years I was in Prisoner-of-War camp and I understood something of the language of prisoners, the loneliness and the dreams of the unhappy.... If I remember rightly, it was during that time among the prisoners that the motifs of the 'theology of hope' came into being. These impulses did not grow out of the yearning to be released and finally to 'go home'. Rather hope came to

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<sup>94</sup> Schlossberg, 1991: 126

<sup>95</sup> Daly, 1991: 76

<sup>96</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 193

life as the prisoner accepted his imprisonment, affirmed the barbed wire, and in this situation discovered the real human being in himself and others.”<sup>97</sup>

Moltmann was inspired during this time by the writing of Dostoevsky. He cites him, “That is why every convict in Russia, whatever prison he may be in, grows restless in the spring with the first kindly rays of sunshine. Though by no means everyone plans to run away...yet they dream at least of how they might escape and comfort their hearts with the very desire, with the very imagination of its being possible.”<sup>98</sup> Hope makes the suffering of the prison – whatever our own personal ‘prison’ may be – more tolerable. Still thinking of hope born of suffering, Moltmann writes, “The practice of hope becomes concretely stronger in suffering.”<sup>99</sup> This is reminiscent of the apostle Paul, himself no stranger to suffering, who writes, “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us.” (Romans 5:2ff)

Elsewhere Moltmann declares that a hopeful future not born out of suffering is ideological and that, “Genuine future always focuses on negativity of the present.”<sup>100</sup> This being so then, we can see that rather than detracting from the enjoyment of the present, as some feel may be the case, hope can inject enjoyment into a joyless present. Far from robbing us of the happiness of the present, Moltmann declares hope to be the happiness of the present because, as we have just considered, hope enables us to cope with the difficulties and suffering – the ‘prison’ or, as Moltmann suggests, the cross – of life today. “Expectation makes life good,” writes Moltmann, “for in its expectation man can accept his whole present and find joy not only in its joy but also in its sorrow, happiness not only in its happiness but also in its pain.”<sup>101</sup> Hope, Moltmann tells us, should give people the courage to look forward and keep going. It should keep them from being depressed and

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<sup>97</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 85

<sup>98</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, cited in Moltmann, 1975: 89

<sup>99</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 189

<sup>100</sup> Moltmann, 1973b: 91

<sup>101</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 32

despondent over their circumstances<sup>102</sup>. So, if those for whom suffering is so horrendous that its memory continues to cause suffering were given the hope that one day their memories will be healed and redeemed, that hope could have the power to change their suffering now.

Lynch makes the claim that if we have hope we suffer less because we are less preoccupied with the present moment<sup>103</sup>. Perhaps it is more true to say, however, that if we have hope we suffer differently. It enables us to know joy even in the midst of suffering because it removes the bitterness, or what Moltmann would call 'the suffering of suffering'<sup>104</sup>. This surely echoes something of what Paul must have had in mind when he wrote, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"<sup>105</sup> And, in telling the Thessalonian church that they, as Christians, would not grieve as those without hope, he did not tell them that they would not grieve at all<sup>106</sup>. Another way of saying this would be to say that to hold a vision of future hope takes the power out of suffering<sup>107</sup>. Suffering is relieved, it is transformed, by possessing eschatological hope, not because the suffering itself is removed but because the bitterness, or suffering, and the power are removed from it.

Christian hope is not a denial of suffering, but should be an impassioned acknowledgement of suffering. We hope for a future free from suffering, and that hope has the potential to disempower the suffering of the present for the one who hopes. James exhorts his readers to be joyful in suffering as they look beyond the suffering of the present to a future of completeness and wholeness<sup>108</sup>. This does not mean, however, that we do not take seriously or that we deny the suffering of the present. "In the meantime," write Bauckham and Hart, "the Christian story is open to all the cries and protests of those who suffer. It does not silence them or explain them away, but allows them to keep the theodicy question agonizingly alive and open.... Christian

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<sup>102</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 15

<sup>103</sup> Lynch, 1965: 37

<sup>104</sup> Moltmann, 1972: 46

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55

<sup>106</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:14

<sup>107</sup> Hart, 1999b: 53

<sup>108</sup> James 1:2ff

eschatology sustains our outrage against innocent and meaningless suffering.<sup>109</sup>

As well as future hope having the potential to remove the bitterness, or the 'suffering' from present suffering as we have considered, and providing the impetus to work to change the present, as we have touched on and will consider below, it also has the capacity to disturb the present and to make us dissatisfied with the status quo. This is something to which Moltmann draws attention at different times. "Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience, it does not calm the unquiet heart but is itself the unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but also begin to suffer under it, to contradict it...for the good of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."<sup>110</sup>

Moltmann highlights the paradox that without hope difficult situations (our 'prisons') become intolerable but the hope that makes the difficult situations tolerable itself causes unrest and discontent. "Hope...relentlessly makes them aware of their intolerable situation. It turns their suffering into pain and their imprisonment into agony.... The prisoner must hope in order to survive, but the hope is what really makes him a prisoner, letting him know that he is imprisoned."<sup>111</sup> He again draws on Dostoevsky who says that imprisonment and hope intensify one another<sup>112</sup>. This, of course, is not just true of literal prisoners but of all humankind whatever circumstances imprison or oppress them. The realisation that 'the grass is greener on the other side of the fence', turns our less green grass into straw and dust in our perception.

Considering Moltmann's contention that hope makes us aware of the pain of the present, Rubem Alves briefly explores the opposite perspective, that hope is born of negation – we hope because we are seeking a remedy to the negativity of the present. Having thus considered the debate, however, he

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<sup>109</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 41

<sup>110</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 21 (see also Moltmann, 1975: 89)

<sup>111</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 90

<sup>112</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 89

concurr with Moltmann saying, "The promised future gives birth to the crisis of the present. It is not the crisis of the present that gives birth to hope for a promising future."<sup>113</sup>

Although it is hope that enables us to endure otherwise intolerable suffering, without it we would be more content with the present and less fearful. Our hope that circumstances will one day be better than they are draws attention to the ugliness and privation of the present and arouses fear that perhaps our hope will not come to fruition, that life will eternally be as it is now. This ought not to be so of Christian hope for, as Barth states, "The Christian expectation of the future cannot be uncertain, nor unsettled, nor sceptical, but only assured and patient and cheerful expectation."<sup>114</sup> It is because we are more content with the present and less fearful without hope that hope is listed among the evils found in Pandora's Box<sup>115</sup>.

Similarly Carl Braaten, in considering that the significance of the future is in its relation to the present, notes that the future lacks the bad news that we have in the here and now, "So that the symbols of eternal life and the hereafter, or of the beyond, the transcendent, or of heaven and the Kingdom of God, speak eloquent messages concerning the lack in the present and generate the energies of hope and courage to work for change.... The prospect of nothing has no power to generate hope."<sup>116</sup> In the same way, "There can be no hope when there is no longer any future."<sup>117</sup>

Not only does the hope that things will not always be as they are now have the capacity to relieve present suffering in this way, it also motivates action to change the present. There is, as I have already mentioned, a school of thought which says hope of heaven diverts energy from seeking to right wrongs and injustices now; and says that if people are 'too heavenly minded

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<sup>113</sup> Alves, 1975: 59f

<sup>114</sup> Cited in Doyle, 1999: 266

<sup>115</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 16; 1971: 182

<sup>116</sup> Braaten, 1973: 42

<sup>117</sup> Blocher, 1992: 308

they are no earthly use', but it should, in fact have the opposite effect<sup>118</sup>. As Lewis states, "Hope...means...a continual looking forward to the eternal world. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next...It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither."<sup>119</sup> Hebblethwaite expands on this saying, "The sense of man's eternal destiny has inspired Christians of all ages to charitable action, missionary outreach and the creation of community life under God.... Christian eschatology, far from diverting attention to the hereafter, has again and again inspired on the one hand a theology of social power and on the other an ethic of work for the realisation of God's Kingdom in the historical future."<sup>120</sup> That is why, throughout history, Christians have been involved in social action and in mission.

Stephen Williams, on the other hand, argues that because, for the non-universalist, there is not hope for all humankind, hope is not a basis for mission and social action. But, he continues, we are called to love all even if we cannot hope for all. "The scope of love is universal, the scope of hope is not."<sup>121</sup> Social action, he argues, should be seen as a labour of love rather than a labour of hope.<sup>122</sup>

In response to Williams, Volf insists that, "Christian hope gives not only inspiration but also direction to cultural and ecological involvement."<sup>123</sup> He says that to base social action on love as Williams suggests we have first to separate love and hope but, Volf argues, this is something we cannot do for, "The practice of love is an integral part of the content of this-worldly

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<sup>118</sup> Hebblethwaite, 1984: 1202

<sup>119</sup> Lewis, 1952: 116

<sup>120</sup> Hebblethwaite, 1984: 124f

<sup>121</sup> Williams, 1990: 25

<sup>122</sup> Williams, 1990: 27

<sup>123</sup> Volf, 1990: 31

eschatological hope; and the object of eschatological hope is the fulfilment of the dreams of love."<sup>124</sup>

When the suffering of the present is relieved through the possession of hope for the future this is passive change. It is change that happens *to* us as a result of our future focus. In the remainder of this section I will look at change that happens *by* us - active change. I will argue that, because of our future vision, we endeavour to bring about change.

Grenz indicates that ultimately it is unimportant whether one holds pre-, post- or a-millennialist beliefs, the believer's hope is in the reign of God's Kingdom, chronology of events is not important<sup>125</sup>. He states, "Believers who understand God's future intentions for the world both hear and proclaim God's Word in the present, for they realise that God's future has implications for life now.... Eschatology is the attempt to employ the truth concerning the future consummation in order to issue God's call (the Word of God) in the present."<sup>126</sup> A similar point is made by Althaus who states, "The most important theological justification of chiliasm is that it points to the necessary this-worldly character of Christian hope."<sup>127</sup>

Alves cautions that we must be careful not to see God *only* as the God of the future and not of the past and present. "The pure futuricity of God," he warns, "is a new form of Docetism in which God loses the present dimension and therefore becomes ahistorical. The messianic possibilities of history for both the Old and the New Testaments depend on the fact that God has a present. For the Old Testament one can hope because 'the Lord your God is in the midst of you' (Deut 8: 21); for the New, hope is derived from the historicity, the incarnation of God.... God was thus experienced as present determined toward the future."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Volf, 1990: 31

<sup>125</sup> Grenz, 1992: 197f

<sup>126</sup> Grenz, 1992: 201f

<sup>127</sup> Cited in Moltmann, 1996: 152f

<sup>128</sup> Alves, 1975: 94

To live life in God's time and according to God's will, Alves tells us, "is thus to participate in a present that determines itself for the creation of a new tomorrow.... Therefore, every present must be experienced as time-toward-the-new-tomorrow. The new tomorrow is thus the sole determination of the present."<sup>129</sup> It would, perhaps, be better were this to read, 'The new tomorrow *ought* to be the sole determination of the present' for a great many people's presents are determined and overshadowed by their pasts. The one who is tormented by the memory of past suffering lives in a present determined by the past. How much more easily the present would be borne if lived in the light of the hope of memory redeemed and transformed. Such hope, as we have seen, can remove the 'suffering from suffering' and thus disempower it.

We will consider below that the future for which we wait is promised and anticipated, that it is what Moltmann calls 'word-present'. If that is the case then we are compelled to act, inaction is not an option, because, as Moltmann tells us, "No-one will see the land of fulfilment if he does not start seeking it."<sup>130</sup> The future is not remote and distant because the God of the future is not remote and distant but is also the God of the here and now. The future, therefore, influences the present. "By future ('advent') we do not mean a faraway condition, but a power that already qualifies the present of new possibilities. As the power of the future, God reaches into the present.... As the coming God, he is not only the future but also the future of the past."<sup>131</sup> This belief should give hope to the one who suffers that she or he need not wait until the future for the work of healing and transformation of her or his painful memory to begin. Healing and transformation – remembering well – can begin in the here and now.

In helping us to understand how the future influences the present rather than the other way round, Moltmann reminds us that it is Christmas that influences advent, not advent that influences Christmas. Advent is what it is because of

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<sup>129</sup> Alves, 1975: 93f

<sup>130</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 378

<sup>131</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 376f



what Christmas will be. He says, "We do not *extrapolate* the future out of the present, rather we *anticipate* the future out of the present. We do not have the feeling that we must plan the future, but rather we must be responsible for the present in face of the future."<sup>132</sup>

Peters emphasises that present activity against injustice is motivated by future hope by noting that instead of being past oriented, our thinking should be future oriented. This, he suggests should be reflected in our language so, instead of using terms like 're-volution', 're-turn' and 're-newal', we should be using words like 'pro-phesy', 'pro-claiming', pro-pogating and 'pro-fessing'.<sup>133</sup> He cites Moltmann, saying, "In provolution, the human dream turned forward combined with the new possibility of the future and begins consciously to direct the course of human history as well as the evolution of nature."<sup>134</sup>

As we have seen, the possession of eschatological hope has been accused of robbing us of power for life now but if the eternal future overlaps with present time as discussed above, then surely, far from robbing us of power it sharpens our focus and imbues us with power. After quoting from Augustine's description of the New Creation as a time-place where "We shall rest and we shall see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what shall be in the end and shall not end." Mascall points out that 'hope of glory' is not escapist because it sharpens our behaviour now<sup>135</sup>. If, for example, it is our hope that God will not destroy this world but will recreate it then we are more likely to care for it. Similarly, if we have hope in eternal life, we are more likely to respect the integrity of life at all stages now and to share that hope with others.

As Moltmann states, "The eschatological hope shows that which is possible and transformable in the world to be meaningful, and the practical mission embraces that which is now within the bounds of possibility in the world.... It seeks that which is really objectively possible in this world, in order to grasp

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<sup>132</sup> Moltmann, 1975: 52 (original emphasis)

<sup>133</sup> Peters, 1980: 115

<sup>134</sup> Cited in Peters, 1980: 114

<sup>135</sup> Mascall, 1975: 13f

and realise it in the direction of the promised future of righteousness, the life and the kingdom of God."<sup>136</sup> And again, "We can only trust that even the end of the world hides a new beginning if we trust the God who calls into being the things that are not and out of death creates new life.... Life out of this hope then means already acting here and today in accordance with that world of justice and righteousness and peace, contrary to appearances, and contrary to all historical chances of success.... It means an unconditional Yes to life in the face of the inescapable death of all the living."<sup>137</sup>

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that apathy is one of the enemies of hope identified by Capps. If the Christian's hope is as it should be then it motivates action in the here and now, counteracting any tendency toward apathy. Perhaps, then, it is not apathy that precipitates hopelessness so much as the absence of hope precipitating apathy for, as Brunner says, "The picture of the future sets in motion the power of the present."<sup>138</sup>

So sure is Haymes of the relationship between the eschatological hope and activity to change the present that he asks if a belief in the life to come makes no difference to the practice of Christian living whether it can be said to be a religious belief at all. Citing Wittgenstein, he writes, "Suppose someone made this guidance for this life: believing in the last judgement...how are we to know whether to say he believes this will happen or not...it will show, not by reasoning, or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in this life."<sup>139</sup>

In response to Moltmann's assertion that action is the only possible response to suffering, Volf draws on Ricoeur who states that action is insufficient to stem the flow of questions arising from suffering – questions such as, 'Why me?' or 'Why?'<sup>140</sup>. He does not say, however, why he feels it is necessary to stem the flow of questions. Questioning in the face of suffering is surely

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<sup>136</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 288f

<sup>137</sup> Moltmann, 1996: 234f

<sup>138</sup> Brunner, 1954: 12

<sup>139</sup> Haymes, 2000: 1880f

<sup>140</sup> Volf, 1996: 134f

healthy – Christ asked ‘Why?’ in the midst of his suffering on the cross. Rather than such questioning being a problem, I suggest that it is an indication that the sufferer believes that things need not be as they are, that there is a preferable alternative. A lack of questions may be an indication of fatalistic determinism. Fifteen-year-old Paul<sup>141</sup>, whose older brothers and father were all serving prison sentences, demonstrated this kind of fatalistic determinism when asked by a Children’s Panel member<sup>142</sup> where he saw himself in ten years time. Paul looked at the Panel member with something like contempt – perhaps because of her apparent lack of insight, perhaps her apparent lack of understanding, or perhaps because he felt she was patronising him asking what looked to him such an obvious question, and replied, “In the Bar-L.”<sup>143</sup>. Paul, it would seem, had not questioned why all the men in his family spent more time in prison than out of it, nor how it could be any different for him. Instead, he saw his future as determined and outwith his control. Surely then it is not only acceptable but also desirable to ask questions in the face of suffering.

Volf’s apparent discomfort with questioning illustrates that point made by Allender to which I referred in chapter 2, that if we deny or trivialise painful memories we do not have to ask the prickly question of why God does not intervene<sup>144</sup>.

Volf also points out that action only addresses today’s suffering. It does nothing about the suffering of the past. He makes a valid point when he says, “Only non-remembering can end the lament over suffering which no thought can think away and no action undo.”<sup>145</sup> Although, as Volf indicates, action cannot undo past suffering, it can do something to reduce suffering in the present and the future and that surely includes the suffering caused by the memory of past suffering. Christian hope must not and cannot be content with the situation as it is for many people, but must work to improve it.

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<sup>141</sup> The anecdote that follows is drawn from the writer’s experience as a social worker. Name has been changed.

<sup>142</sup> The Children’s Panel System is the Scottish Juvenile Justice System.

<sup>143</sup> ‘The Bar-L’ is the local nickname in Glasgow for HM Prison Barlinnie.

<sup>144</sup> Allender, 1995: 14

<sup>145</sup> Volf, 1996: 135

Radical social activity is a valid and appropriate response to our hopes and beliefs. As Doyle stresses, it is not a way of coming to know God and his promises but is an expression of our knowing him<sup>146</sup>. We find reference to this close relationship between work and hope in Paul where he writes, "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 1:3) Likewise in James we read, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him...so faith without deeds is dead." (James 2:14,26) Whether this is prescriptive or descriptive is unimportant. What is important is that we find in Scripture an expectation that our eschatological hope will stimulate action in the present. Surely we acknowledge something of this every time we pray the words of Christ, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10)

Referring to the Christian's eschatological hope, Moltmann writes, "Christianity stands with all its powers in the dawn of the future and must therefore bring the 'power of the future world' into the troubled spots of the present, personally, socially and politically."<sup>147</sup> Elsewhere he indicates the coexistence of heaven and earth he makes the point that Christian hope is not only for the end-times but is also for now. This, he says, is why it has the power to transform the present. "From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionising and transforming the present."<sup>148</sup> This happens because, as considered above, hope unsettles us. Hope is the source of our restlessness with the present. If hope does not stir us to work for change there is something missing and our hope is unbalanced and meaningless. Hope, Moltmann tells us, must influence the way we think and thought must influence hope, "As long as hope does not embrace and

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<sup>146</sup> Doyle, 1999: 283f

<sup>147</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 371

<sup>148</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 16

transform the thought and action of men, it remains topsy-turvy and ineffective.”<sup>149</sup>

Moltmann later illustrates this point, “If the promise of the Kingdom of God shows a universal eschatological future horizon spanning all things – ‘that God may be all in all’ – then it is impossible for the man of hope to adopt an attitude of religious and cultic resignation from the world. On the contrary he is compelled to accept the world in all its meekness...(to be) homeless with the homeless... restless with the restless...rightless with the rightless.... Thus Christianity is to be understood as the community of those who on the ground of the resurrection of Christ wait for the Kingdom of God and whose life is determined by this expectation.”<sup>150</sup>

It is not possible to retain our vision of the New Creation and simultaneously to feel despair. It is not possible to hope for a New Creation where the injustice, suffering and oppression that prevails in the here and now will be no more and to be content with the injustice, suffering and oppression of the present. And it is not possible to believe the words of Peter, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - *kept in heaven for you*”<sup>151</sup> and do nothing about those who know nothing of that ‘great mercy’ nor of the inheritance ‘kept in heaven’ for them. Thus, what we believe about God’s promised future, in concrete and practical ways, shapes our present and, as we saw in Mascall, sharpens our present behaviour.

As we considered above, just as we do not understand Christmas in the light of advent but advent in the light of Christmas, so we do not understand the future in the light of the present but understand the present in the light of the future. “What is can only be fully understood in the light of what will be,” write Bauckham and Hart, “and thus God’s future reaches back into the present

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<sup>149</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 33

<sup>150</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 224f

<sup>151</sup> 1 Peter 1:3f (emphasis added)

and bathes it in a quite distinctive light, transfiguring it and generating alternative ways of being in it. To be a Christian, a person of faith, we might suggest, is precisely to live as a person for whom God's future shapes the present."<sup>152</sup>

Hope, Lynch tells us, imagines continually<sup>153</sup>. Bauckham and Hart describe hope as, "...the capacity to imagine otherwise, to transcend the boundaries of the present in a quest for something more, something better than the present affords."<sup>154</sup> This capacity to be able to continually imagine otherwise and to transcend what is, is vital if we are to be able to make a difference to the present. As Hart points out, it is not only imagination that is necessary but imagination that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. "The power of the future to transform the present lies chiefly in the capacity of God's Spirit to capture our imagination and to open up for us a new vision of God's promise.... Imagination is thus a vital category in eschatology as in theology more generally."<sup>155</sup>

Mere change, however, is not enough. Macquarrie makes the important observation that hope does not only seek change but seeks improvement.<sup>156</sup> If the future we anticipated was to be different from the present but no better than it, or indeed if our anticipation was of a future where circumstances were worse than they are now, we would not anticipate it with hope. Rather, we should have a feeling of hopelessness or even despair or dread as we looked forward. Such a future would have no power to change the present for the better and may even have a negative impact. It would offer nothing to the one who suffers, apart from further suffering. It would not offer a future where painful memories were transformed and redeemed. As Grenz states, however, "People of faith are rightfully people of hope."<sup>157</sup> This is because the future we anticipate under God, because the future God has promised us, is not change without improvement, not change for the worse but is a future

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<sup>152</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 83

<sup>153</sup> Lynch, 1965: 23

<sup>154</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 72

<sup>155</sup> Hart, 1999b: 75

<sup>156</sup> Macquarrie, 1978: 12

<sup>157</sup> Grenz, 1992:201

that is, in every way, better than we can even begin to anticipate. "*Hope stands alongside the knowledge that matters could be quite different.*" writes Sauter<sup>158</sup>.

Ultimately, just as Christian hope is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, its focus, the unprecedented change for which it waits, is his return in glory as touched on briefly at the beginning of this chapter. "Therefore hope can have no other object than he who...will come again in glory.... Faith in Jesus Christ without the expectation of the Parousia is a voucher that is never redeemed, a promise that is not seriously meant. A Christian faith without expectation of the Parousia is like a ladder which leads nowhere but ends in a void."<sup>159</sup> Bauckham also points to the Parousia as the central event of eschatology. The Jesus who is now unseen will appear. The Jesus who is hidden will be revealed. The Jesus who is absent will come physically. He will come to bring believers to resurrection and to eliminate evil from the world<sup>160</sup>. And also elsewhere, "The 'coming'...of Jesus Christ at the end of history...is a focal image in the New Testament. All else depends on it.... The coming of Jesus Christ is the focus of Christian hope because his future is our future and that of all creation."<sup>161</sup> Just as the incarnation and resurrection of Christ both heralded something new and previously unimaginable, so too will his Parousia. The Parousia of Jesus Christ will usher in the New Era when all will be made new, when suffering will be no more, when brokenness will be restored, wounds healed and all will be made whole. That is the hope we have to offer broken and suffering people.

#### **4.5 New Creation, Transcendence and Discontinuity**

In the resurrection of Christ, which, as we have been considering, prefigures the general resurrection, we can see both continuity and discontinuity with his

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<sup>158</sup> Sauter, 1996: 147 (original emphasis)

<sup>159</sup> Brunner, 1954: 138f

<sup>160</sup> Bauckham, 1998: 101f

<sup>161</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 117f

earthly life, which in turn provides a pattern for wider eschatological expectation. As indicated in the dissertation's introduction, the Christian claim of discontinuity and the equally strong claim of continuity are not contradictory, the one does not cancel out the other. Bauckham and Hart state, "The discontinuity between creation here and now and creation renewed and transformed does not cancel the continuity between them."<sup>162</sup>

As in the resurrected body of Christ we see continuity with his temporal body, so too in the resurrection accounts there are clear indications of discontinuity. His physical presence was in some way different from before – transfigured – for we see in the Gospels accounts of him meeting friends who, at least in the first instance, failed to recognise him<sup>163</sup>. The discontinuity of the New Creation is not a result of brokenness or fragmentariness but is because of newness and completeness. The New Creation is more than the first.

It could be argued that because reference to Christ's resurrection body relates to the period prior to the ascension it has no relevance to the eschaton. There is no indication in Scripture, however, that Christ does not have a post-ascension body and strong indication that he does, and that he is recognisable. For example, Acts 1:11 states, "This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him to into heaven." It has been suggested, though, that Christ's body underwent further transformation when he ascended<sup>164</sup>. Just as his resurrection body was his own body but in some way transfigured, so too, however further he has changed, it seems likely that he continues to be recognisable as himself.

Bauckham and Hart suggest that, "Humanity's loss of Eden was more the loss of a possibility than of an actuality...not so much from what they had as what they might have had."<sup>165</sup> In the New Creation possibility is not only restored, it is actualised. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were able not to sin but also able to sin. In the New Creation, on the other hand, we,

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<sup>162</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 138

<sup>163</sup> John 20:15f, Luke 24:13-35

<sup>164</sup> Erickson, 1987: 777

<sup>165</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 149



who because of the Fall are unable not to sin, will be unable to sin<sup>166</sup>. Potential will be actualised at last!

In Isaiah 43 we read these words, "Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing." (18f). Of course, as Bauckham and Hart point out, we will not forget the former things but they will pale into insignificance because the 'new thing' God will do will so surpass the old<sup>167</sup>. This thought is found in Paul. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."<sup>168</sup> Although we will not forget, neither will we have any cause to remember. We might better understand the difference by considering the following illustration. A person may, as the result of a freak accident, sustain an injury that heals completely, leaving no disability or distressing disfigurement, no indication apart from a small scar that it ever happened. Once the injury is healed, regardless of how debilitating it was at the time and regardless of the remaining scar, it need not affect their daily living. Even although the fact of having had the injury is not forgotten, there is no need for it to be remembered in the day-to-day activities of life. It is, therefore, non-remembered or remembered well. If, on the other hand, the same person sustains an injury that leaves a weakness, which means they are susceptible to further injury then it has to be remembered in every-day living in order that potentially harmful actions can be avoided. Non-remembering and remembering well have been considered more fully in previous chapters. We can only remember well when we are willing to forget. We saw that a non-remembered incident is one that is not forgotten but can be left alone because it has been dealt with, there is no further reason to call it to mind. Non-remembering is volitional and distinct from memory which has been lost and forgotten. As we saw in chapter 2, to confront the destructive memories from which we need to be liberated with the consciousness and light of reason of the counter-memories of the life, death and resurrection of Christ is to 'remember well'.

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<sup>166</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 222

<sup>167</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 78

<sup>168</sup> Romans 8:18

To offer a suffering person a future characterised by the erasure of the memory of their suffering trivialises both the suffering and the sufferer. To offer them a glory such as Paul refers to above, a glory so great that present suffering cannot be compared with it, on the other hand, is to offer them a future where their pain will be replaced with joy and wonder. Not only that. It also affirms them as people of value and worth to God and acknowledges the enormity of their painful experience. It promises them the 'new' which surpasses the old without denying or erasing it.

The book of Revelation, says Hoch, is shot through with newness – New Name (2:17; 3:12), New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2), New Song (5:9; 13:3), New Heaven (21:1), New Earth (21:2), Everything New (21:5). "The climax of newness is God making all things new! This is a most exciting thought for Christians."<sup>169</sup>

'New' can mean another of the same – quantitatively new – a new pen, a new car, new shoes, or it can refer to radical, qualitative newness, a newness that transcends the old. The new we are considering here is, "the qualitatively new, the unprecedented, the new which utterly surpasses the old."<sup>170</sup> This newness is not something that comes about as the natural course of events but is a newness brought about by a creative act of God. As Bauckham and Hart state, "All things will not *become* new through some natural process or human programme of works, but must be *made* new by God who made them in the beginning.... Thus this is a genuine newness which wholly transcends the state of the here and now with its tragic limits, yet which does not collapse into a novelty in which creation is no longer the object of God's concern and action, having effectively been abandoned and replaced by another."<sup>171</sup>

Moltmann also lists some of the 'new things' of God found in scripture. From the Old Testament he lists New Exodus, New Conquest, New Zion, New

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<sup>169</sup> Hoch, 1995: 187

<sup>170</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 77

<sup>171</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 69 (Original emphasis)

Heaven, New Earth, and from the New Testament, New Life, New Covenant, New Commandment. He says, "The new is there when the impossible becomes possible, when the unthinkable is thought, when the undiscovered is found and discovered.... Hope is always born from the emergence of the new. Hope sees the advent of the future and reaches out for it in open expectation."<sup>172</sup>

Citing Moltmann, Doyle states that the eschaton and parousia are from beyond our experience<sup>173</sup>. It is certainly an irrefutable fact that future events, whether temporal or eternal, are beyond our experience for they have not yet taken place. They are not, however, entirely beyond our expectation. We make definite, confident statements about future events – "You will be...", "I will do...", "We will go...". We make plans, and such is our anticipation that what we plan will come to pass that people commonly use present tense when referring to future events. 'I am in Edinburgh next week' and 'I am working tomorrow' are typical examples of commonly heard expressions.

As Christians we have certain expectations about the New Creation because, although beyond our experience, it is not entirely beyond our belief or our expectation for it is not beyond the promises of God or God's revelation of himself in scripture and in Christ. For example, although Christ's resurrection is unique because Christ is unique and there are radical differences between his resurrection and the general Resurrection (for example, we do not anticipate being physically present in this world in our resurrection bodies, interacting with people we knew as he did) but we can anticipate that we will be recognisable to others and to ourselves in the Resurrection by looking at what scripture shows us about the Risen Jesus. We find further indication of post-mortem recognition in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus<sup>174</sup>.

1 Corinthians 15 considers the question of the Christian's resurrection body. "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (35).

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<sup>172</sup> Moltmann, 1971a: 181ff

<sup>173</sup> Doyle, 1999: 36f

<sup>174</sup> Luke 16:19ff

Paul states that these are foolish questions and indicates some kind of discontinuity between our earthly bodies and our resurrection bodies (36f). The New Creation is of a different order from present creation; therefore our resurrection bodies will be in some way different from bodies as we understand them in this life. Paul illustrates the difference by drawing analogies with the difference between the bodies of humans, animals, birds and fish (39) (all very different from one another but all clearly recognised as 'bodies'), and the difference between sun, moon and stars (41).

Christ's resurrection body was of a different order from the body he had before – he walked through closed doors (John 20: 19,26) – but it was a body bearing the scars of the crucifixion, a body that ate food with friends. This, I suggest, gives us sufficient reason to suppose that although in some way different from the bodies we have now we shall have bodies in some way bearing the scars of our present lives and will be recognisably ourselves.

Although, as I am arguing, the eschatological future is not entirely beyond what we know, we do not and cannot know in full for, as McDannell and Lang point out, even our biblical descriptions of the New Creation are limited because the writers' understanding and experience is limited. As with all talk about God and the things of God, eternity transcends human language. The biblical writers were seeking to understand and express the infinite within the confines of finite human thought and language. This clearly imposes serious limitations on their understanding and ours. As Bauckham and Hart point out, much of the biblical language concerning End Times is figurative – it uses image rather than description. "Eschatological language is irreducibly imaginative."<sup>175</sup> Even the apostle John with his heavenly vision in Revelation was limited by human language, relying on image to convey what he saw. McDannell and Lang illustrate how limited experience and understanding affects the biblical writers' ability to convey the New Creation by asking how an Eskimo might describe pineapple, even if he were to see and taste one – 'sweet juicy blubber'<sup>176</sup>? No matter how much he has read about pineapples

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<sup>175</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 140, 146

<sup>176</sup> McDannell & Lang, 1988: 388

and even if he saw one, it would still remain outwith his sphere of understanding. We find a further illustration of our limited ability to understand the things of God, and in particular the Parousia, in Lewis. Writing of the symbolic and analogical language used he says, "All details are derived from our present experience: therefore all details are wholly and equally symbolical. But suppose a dog were trying to form a conception of human life. All the details in its pictures would be derived from canine experience. Therefore all that the dog imagined could, at best, be only analogically true of human life."<sup>177</sup>

Although much of it is beyond our understanding because it is beyond our experience; beyond our cognition because it is beyond our recognition, the New Creation is not left entirely to guesswork and prediction. Douglas Adams states, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "Trying to predict the future is a mug's game. But...we need to have some sort of idea what the future's actually going to be like because we are all going to have to live there, probably next week."<sup>178</sup> It is not, however, the job of Christian theologians to attempt to predict the future but to create for the man and woman in the pew and in the street, a picture of the future based on God's rich and imaginative revelation in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

It is perhaps this tension between what is revealed in scripture and what we cannot yet know that has caused Luther to be misquoted as saying that Christian hope knows that it hopes but does not know for what it hopes. What he actually says, according to Sauter, is that "Hope inserts the hoping one into that which is hoped for but that which is hoped for is not apparent."<sup>179</sup> He continues, quoting from Luther, that hope leads the one who hopes, "Into the unknown and hidden, into inner darkness so that it does not know what it hopes and yet does know what it does not hope for."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Lewis, 1975: 123

<sup>178</sup> Adams, 2003: 102

<sup>179</sup> Sauter, 1996: 175

<sup>180</sup> Cited in Sauter, 1996: 175

Christian hope is not merely speculative. "Eschatology...does not involve mere speculation about what might lie hidden in the mists beyond the end of history, but rather it essays the articulation of what is the coherent ground of present hope."<sup>181</sup> Unlike the kind of stab-in-the-dark predicting the future to which Adams refers, Moltmann asserts, as I do, that Christian hope is not speculation and theorising. The starting point has to be what we know and, for Moltmann, its transformation. "Pure theorising about the future is, obviously, *pure* theorising and thus abstract...the future of God and the future of the humanity of man begin in the transforming thought of the present.... A future which does not begin in the transformation of the present is for me no genuine future."<sup>182</sup> For Moltmann, then, it seems that the starting point of the eschatological future is the transformation of these memories that are formative of our very selves but which in their untransformed state continue to cause suffering; and that transformation begins in the present.

Unlike Moltmann Stephen Travis expresses the belief that Christian hope is speculative because it concerns faith about the future and faith is not proof<sup>183</sup>. To say, however, that hope is speculative because it is based on the promises of God and experience of God could sound to the sceptic that Christian hope is a shot in the dark, or that God cannot be trusted to be faithful to himself and his Word. It would, perhaps be better to say that Christian hope is suppositional or allusive, or even expectant. Christian hope, Doyle tells us, does not blow hot and cold. It is, "the expectation that God *will keep all his promises*."<sup>184</sup>

That this is Travis' intention is clear when he later states, "Eschatological hope is in any case not capable of empirical demonstration but is essentially a matter of extrapolation from present experience of God and trustful acceptance of what the God thus experienced is believed to have revealed through Christ and his apostles."<sup>185</sup> It is here we see the overlap between

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<sup>181</sup> Polkinghorne, 1994: 174

<sup>182</sup> Moltmann, 1973a: 55ff

<sup>183</sup> Travis, 1980: 13

<sup>184</sup> Doyle, 1999: 266 (original emphasis)

<sup>185</sup> Travis, 1980: 138 (This was also cited in the introduction.)

faith and hope. So dependent are they on one another that we might describe them as two sides of the same coin. "Christian faith is closely bound up with the Christian hope of the future that faith and hope can be regarded as two aspects of the same thing.... Faith is the foundation of hope, hope is that which gives content to faith. Both faith and hope are rooted in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ."<sup>186</sup>

Moltmann also highlights the interdependence of faith and hope, saying, "Without faith, hope cannot laugh and without hope, faith cannot live."<sup>187</sup> He calls hope faith's 'inseparable companion', saying that without it faith would die, and continues, "Faith is the foundation on which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith...faith in Christ gives hope its assurance...hope gives faith in Christ breadth.... Thus in the Christian life faith has priority but hope has the primacy"<sup>188</sup>. In this description of faith giving hope its assurance, we hear an echo of the writer to the Hebrews who says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."<sup>189</sup>

Elsewhere Moltmann shows the interconnection, not only between faith and hope but between faith, hope and love in the following poem from Charles Péguy.

"Hope leads everything  
For faith only sees what is  
But hope sees what will be  
Charity only loves what is  
But hope loves what will be —  
In time and for all eternity."<sup>190</sup>

This faith-hope-love motif is found in several places in Paul's letters<sup>191</sup>, perhaps the best known being, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."<sup>192</sup> Doyle picks up on the popular New

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<sup>186</sup> Brunner, 1954: 28

<sup>187</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 386

<sup>188</sup> Moltmann, 1965: 20

<sup>189</sup> Hebrews 11:1

<sup>190</sup> Cited in Moltmann, 1975: 189

<sup>191</sup> Colossians 1:5, 1 Thessalonians 1:31; 5:8

<sup>192</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13

Testament motif of faith, hope and love, noting that the focus of faith is the past, the focus of love is the present and the focus of hope is the future. He states, however, that the three have a parallel rather than chronological relationship. There is, he says, no Christian faith that does not hope and love, no Christian love that does not have faith and hope and no Christian hope that does not love and have faith<sup>193</sup>. If, as he says, the focus of faith is the past, the focus of love is the present and the focus of hope is the future, he is saying here that there is no Christian faith that does not also look to the present and the future, there is no Christian love that does not also look to the past and the future and there is no Christian hope that does not also look to the present and the past. John Colwell makes a similar observation when he says that Christian faith is loving and hopeful, Christian love is hopeful and faithful and Christian hope is faithful and loving. He says that faith, hope and love need one another and that if one is missing the others are unable to function properly<sup>194</sup>.

While, as we have been saying, we cannot know everything about the New Creation and cannot prove anything, we can imagine and hope based on what we are told in scripture with the knowledge that what will be will be even greater. As Scroggie states, "We cannot possibly exaggerate the blessedness of heaven, nor can our imagination stretch to the full measure of its wonder."<sup>195</sup> A similar observation is made by Bauckham and Hart who write, "Corresponding to the principle of theology that God is always greater than we can imagine is the principle of eschatology that the fulfilment God gives will always be better than we can imagine."<sup>196</sup> Perhaps because it is difficult to conceive of how we can retain hitherto painful memories without them causing pain that the best we can imagine is forgetting. Surely to remember without pain is greater, even if we have difficulty imagining it. And, as we are saying, the fulfilment God gives is always better than the best we can imagine.

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<sup>193</sup> Doyle, 1999: 302

<sup>194</sup> Colwell, 2000: x

<sup>195</sup> Scroggie, undated: 133f

<sup>196</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 150



As touched on briefly above, hope, like memory, is an activity of the imagination. It is the capacity to imagine otherwise and better. Just as in memory the imagination enables us to make present people, places and events that are no longer physically present, so it enables us to reach forward toward the future. In both cases making present that which is not present. The present, for Sartre, would barely exist without the presence of what is not present – the presence of past and future. “What is present *is* – in contrast to the future which is not yet and the past which is no longer. But on the other hand, a rigorous analysis which would attempt to rid the present of all which is not it – i.e., of the past and of the immediate future – would find that nothing remained but an infinitesimal instant.”<sup>197</sup> The present, then, consists of the memory of what has been and the hope of what will be, as well as the infinitesimal instant that is now. As indicated in chapter 2, imagination is concerned with what is real, not with fantasy as in imaginary<sup>198</sup>. It is important to be clear about that when discussing hope or we will, like Aristotle, see hope as no more than, “The dream of a wakened man.”<sup>199</sup> The Christian theologian must be able to argue that hope is something other than a mere daydream. “Our memories of what has been are always incomplete and often carefully edited to produce a particular ‘spin’, rose tinted or otherwise. Our imagining of the proximate future, meanwhile can only ever be the imagining of one among many futures and, as such, may turn out to be reasonably accurate or quite false. But in both cases...the imagined product is anything but a matter of illusion or wanton daydreaming.”<sup>200</sup>

If our imagined future, our hope for the future, is no more than illusion or wanton daydream then religion is no more than “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the opium of the people” that Marx proclaims it to be<sup>201</sup>. While our hopes for the future, then, must not be vague and dream-like, nor must they be too specific. As Oppenheimer discusses, to invent too specific an image

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<sup>197</sup> Sartre, 1986: 120

<sup>198</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 83

<sup>199</sup> Desroche, 1979: 12

<sup>200</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 85

<sup>201</sup> Cited in Macquarrie, 1978: 1

of heaven is somewhat akin to making God in our own image. It is "prescribing to God the kind of heaven he must provide for us if we are to welcome the prospect of it."<sup>202</sup> So, while we can imagine that *somehow* our memories will be healed and redeemed because we believe it is necessary that they are retained and not eternally lost, we cannot begin to imagine *how* this might happen. What we can know with certainty about the New Creation is, to use the words of Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well."<sup>203</sup>

Although we cannot know everything and, for the reason highlighted by Oppenheimer, ought not invent too specific an image of what the New Creation will be like, we would be without a focus and thus without hope if we did not have some image beyond our temporal existence for, as Paul says, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Corinthians 15:19) There are many clues throughout the Old and New Testaments about what we might hope for in the New Creation. There is, however, much debate among biblical scholars about the intention of references to the New Jerusalem, whether New Jerusalem refers to the people of God or an actual place. Some see it as a literal city, others do not, and others see it as both place and people<sup>204</sup>. For Bauckham it is people, place, *and* the presence of God – it is a place where the people of God will live in his immediate presence. He notes, "The description of the New Jerusalem is a remarkable weaving together of many strands of Old Testament tradition into a coherent and richly evocative image of a *place* in which *people* live in the immediate *presence* of God."<sup>205</sup>

Samuel Wells also writes of heaven, saying that it is not just a place where God reigns but is God's dynamic, transforming reign together with the obedience, service and joy of his subjects. He cites Hauwerwas saying, "The ultimate eschatological hope then is not that individuals will go to heaven but

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<sup>202</sup> John Burnaby cited in Oppenheimer, 1983: 167

<sup>203</sup> Cited in Oppenheimer, 1983: 172

<sup>204</sup> Hoch, 1995: 191f

<sup>205</sup> Bauckham, 1993: 132 (emphasis added)

that heaven will fully and finally pervade earth."<sup>206</sup> If the Incarnation is 'Immanuel – God with us', perhaps we might say that the Eschaton is, 'Immanuel – us with God', for just as in the incarnation he became as we are, so in the eschaton we will in a sense become as he is. That is not to suggest that we will become divine but refers to the Christian belief that we will live eternally and will be without sin. Our humanness will be complete and perfected as Christ's humanity was complete and perfect.

Having considered some of the debate between whether the city of God – the New Jerusalem – is the place where God's people are or the community of God's people as such, Carl Hoch concludes, "Whether the New Jerusalem is just people or people and place, it certainly exceeds all previous places, including the Garden of Eden. The glory and joy characteristic of it will make all current arguments over its identity or location seem silly and misplaced. And all focus will be centred on the One who made it possible - the triune God."<sup>207</sup> According to Polkinghorne, whatever else we can and cannot say with certainty about the New Creation, we can say that it is not boring! He states, "The life of heaven will involve the endless, dynamic exploration of the inexhaustible riches of the divine nature."<sup>208</sup> If all focus is, as Hoch suggests, on the triune God and our occupation will be, as Polkinghorne indicates, the endless exploration of that God's inexhaustible riches then we cannot simultaneously be occupied by or focussed on the memories that cause suffering. The memories will not have been erased but will not be the focus of our attention, but they will not simply be non-remembered, for there is always something of a risk that which is non-remembered will become present to the mind and cause distress. They will be '*remembered well*'.

The newness of the New Creation is, as we have said, a qualitative newness. As Polkinghorne says, the New Creation is not a second attempt by God to get it right. The old creation, he explains, was created *ex nihilo*, the new will be *ex vetere*. Creation *ex vetere* points to God as both creator and redeemer

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<sup>206</sup> Wells, 1998: 146

<sup>207</sup> Hoch, 1995: 194

<sup>208</sup> Polkinghorne, 1994: 170

and is, for Polkinghorne, the only possible answer to the theodicy question<sup>209</sup>. The old is not wiped out but is redeemed and transformed. From this we can deduce that the suffering of the old will not be negated but will be redeemed and transformed. God, we are told, will wipe away all tears (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17. 21:4). This presents to those who suffer a beautiful image of a compassionate God dealing tenderly with them, taking their pain seriously and healing their suffering.

Bauckham and Hart also make this point, noting that God's creative act in the New Creation will be just as much an act of origination as is found in the Genesis creation narratives, an act of origination which will preserve the identity of the old creation while at the same time transforming it. Creation will be fulfilled and transformed as God recreates it to make it what he has always planned it to be<sup>210</sup>. "The new creation is...a fresh creative act of the transcendent God.... The new creation is the wholly new – eschatologically new – future which God will give his creation, and which could not be expected other than as the transcendent act of the transcendent God. It is an act in which creation will be both fulfilled and transformed."<sup>211</sup> If our memories are part of what we are, as considered in the chapters on memory and personal identity, and if we are part of creation, then our memories are part of the creation that will be transformed by God. They will, by a creative act of God, be fulfilled and transformed. That which is lost will be restored and that which is painful will be healed and redeemed. We will, in the New Creation, be enabled to remember all things well. Thinking of this Scroggie writes, "We cannot believe that those who are in the Lord's presence can ever again be sad, but this does not mean that in order to be joyful they must be ignorant...the joy of our loved ones is not diminished because they have much knowledge and keen memory, for now they see everything from Christ's standpoint."<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Polkinghorne, 1994: 167ff

<sup>210</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 128f

<sup>211</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 130

<sup>212</sup> Scroggie, undated: 76

In a study of the New Creation, NT Wright makes the point that heaven is not just a future state but is also God's dimension of present reality. So, when Peter in 1 Peter 1:4 says our inheritance is 'kept in heaven for you' he is saying it exists now, that it is present reality. Wright illustrates the point by saying that when a parent tells his child that her Christmas gift is 'safe in the cupboard for you', he does not mean that when Christmas comes the child has to go and live in the cupboard to enjoy the gift. What the parent means is that when the time comes the gift – which is a present reality, albeit a present reality with future potential – will be brought out for the child to enjoy. The gift will enrich the child's life and world, not the world inside the cupboard<sup>213</sup>. So, when the book of Revelation describes heaven, it is describing God's dimension of present reality – albeit, like the gift in the cupboard, present reality with, for us, future potential - it is not giving a preview of what heaven will be like when one day we find ourselves there. "Heaven is God's dimension of present reality... Heaven and earth are not distant spheres, separated by a great geographical or ontological distance, but actually overlap and interlock, supremely in Jesus but thereafter in the Eucharist."<sup>214</sup> McDannell and Lang indicate this overlap between time and eternity when they refer to eternal life starting in time. "Life after death continued what had already begun in this life: existence under the impact and guidance of the divine."<sup>215</sup>

Wright states that the physical layout of the Eastern Orthodox Church demonstrates an understanding of this co-existence between heaven and earth. A screen, he tells us, divides the building. One side of the screen, the east side, where the liturgy takes place, symbolises heaven. The west side, where the people are, symbolises earth<sup>216</sup>. The screen, in which there are three doors, may be made of wood, metal or marble and is called the *ikonostasis*: so called because it is heavily decorated with icons and images of the saints, designed to give the worshipper a sense of saints and congregation worshipping together, a sense of participating in the

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<sup>213</sup> Wright, 2000: 35

<sup>214</sup> Wright, 2000: 41f

<sup>215</sup> McDannell & Lang, 1988: 34f

<sup>216</sup> Wright, 2000: 41

communion of the saints. The central door is called the Royal or Holy door. As English woman, CE Padwick observed on a visit to an Orthodox church, "The Royal Doors at once reveal and conceal the actions of that other world."<sup>217</sup> The Royal door is sometimes closed, preventing access to the sanctuary and concealing what is behind – the altar, Throne and priests – and at other times is open, revealing what is behind and allowing the worshipper access to the sanctuary and to participation in the Eucharist<sup>218</sup>. "The Orthodox temples represent heaven and earth joined in glorious union. The sanctuary divided from the rest by the screen is heaven with its holiness and mystery; it is always there yet inaccessible to sinful man so long as he remains in isolation; therefore the doors leading into the sanctuary are closed except during the service. They are open wide however when Christians are gathered together in obedience to Christ's commandment and in faith, love and fear, begin to celebrate the Eucharist. Then heaven illuminates the earth and God meets his creation."<sup>219</sup>

The co-existence of the eternal with the temporal is also found in Haymes who notes that when John's Gospel speaks of eternal life sometimes it has a present focus, for example, "Whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life...he *has* crossed over from death to life."(John 5:24) Other times it has a future focus, as in, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him *shall have* eternal life, and I *will* raise him up at *the last day*."(John 6:40) Haymes writes, "Resurrection, eternal life, judgement, all these eschatological themes have a strong present sense in John's Gospel. To live in God's salvation is not for the future but is a present gift and calling."<sup>220</sup>

If, as we are saying, there is a present focus to our eternal life, then there is surely an eternal focus to our present life. As Wells indicates, to see the eschaton as a replacement of all that now is undermines all that now is,

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<sup>217</sup> Cited in Zernov, 1961: 244

<sup>218</sup> Zernov, 1961: 238

<sup>219</sup> Zernov, 1961: 261

<sup>220</sup> Haymes, 2000: 185

including creation and salvation<sup>221</sup>. Bauckham and Hart also point out that for all its newness, the New Creation is not a replacement of but a fulfilment of this world<sup>222</sup>. There is a hint of the same in Hoch where he says, "The eschatological hope of the Bible is not for deliverance from the earth but from sin and the redemption of creatures includes the redemption of creation."<sup>223</sup> Citing from John Newport, Hoch later indicates that for the resurrection body to be non-physical would mean victory for the devil. He explains – it would mean that God was compelled to destroy the physical because, as in Greek thought, matter was intrinsically evil, "But matter is not evil: it is part of God's good creation."<sup>224</sup> "God saw all that he had made and it was *very good*."<sup>225</sup> McDannell and Lang note that, "Because of their appreciation of the world, the reformers tempered their theocentric heaven with an eternal life that recognised the importance of the earth. Luther, for example, hoped for a heaven where humans will be strong, animals will co-exist, flowers and grass are lush, rivers flow with jewels and trees hang with silver leaves and golden fruit<sup>226</sup>.

This said, however, temporal life is but the palest shadow of eternity. As TF Torrance says, "To look at the earthly church and say. 'There is the mirror of the New Jerusalem' is to confuse the seed with the plant which grows from it, and that only after the seed has died."<sup>227</sup> Scripture shows a certain continuity between the end time and the Christian's present experience, as indicated above, but there is also "a quantum leap of unfathomable proportions" from the one to the other<sup>228</sup>. Alongside the continuity between the world now and the new Creation, there are, as we are considering, fundamental differences between the two. For example, the fact that A = B now does not mean that it will in the New Creation, or because Y in the new Creation, it does not necessarily follow that Y now. Continuity and discontinuity co-exist.

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<sup>221</sup> Wells, 1998: 169

<sup>222</sup> Bauckham & Hart, 1999: 137

<sup>223</sup> Hoch, 1995: 193

<sup>224</sup> Cited in Hoch, 1995: 199

<sup>225</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>226</sup> McDannell & Lang, 1988: 152f

<sup>227</sup> Cited in Doyle, 1999: 159

<sup>228</sup> Doyle, 1999: 159

Hebblethwaite states that, "For Luther, eschatological hope is determined and controlled by a man's experience, in faith, of God's justifying grace in Jesus Christ.... The eschatological moment is the moment when a man accepts what God has done for him in Christ."<sup>229</sup> This sounds like realised eschatology but Hebblethwaite goes on to refer to the tension of the 'now and not yet' nature of the kingdom of God.

For Moltmann, if the future is promised it is 'word-present'<sup>230</sup>. In other words, that which is promised by God for the future is as certain as present reality. For Moltmann, the eschatological future is the coming of God but, he explains, this should not be confused with Process theology's becoming of God. There is, he says, a difference between the 'becoming of God' of Process theology and the 'coming of God' of eschatology<sup>231</sup>. "God's being is in his COMING, not in his BECOMING."<sup>232</sup> If something is 'becoming' it is not yet and it will cease to be. It is in the process of coming into being. 'Coming', on the other hand, speaks of the drawing near of that which is.

The belief that our hope for the future will one day be our present experience, that things will not always be as they are now but will be redeemed and transformed has the power to lift us from despair and motivate us to action. "By projecting a future, hope alters the present."<sup>233</sup> Far from the memory of having suffered marring the joy of God's New Creation, as Volf suggests, the hope that in the New Creation memory will be redeemed and transformed as we have just considered, has the potential to lessen the suffering of painful memory now. Caird suggests not only are we to be pitied if our hope in Christ is for this life only, as we have already mentioned (1 Corinthians 15:19) but we are also to be pitied if our hope is only other-worldly<sup>234</sup>. It needs to address both.

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<sup>229</sup> Hebblethwaite, 1984: 76f

<sup>230</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 378; 1975: 52

<sup>231</sup> Moltmann, 1968: 377; 1975: 53

<sup>232</sup> Moltmann, 1996: 23

<sup>233</sup> Capps, 1995: 70

<sup>234</sup> Caird, 1970: 21



#### **4.6 New Creation, Continuity and Personal Identity**

The resurrected Christ bore – and bears - the scars of the crucifixion. It has been suggested that Christ's scars could have been removed in the resurrection for how small a thing that would have been for the God who raised the dead and created *ex nihilo*, but Christ kept them, "to wear as an everlasting trophy of his victory."<sup>235</sup> There was no cover-up, or pretence that the crucifixion had not taken place. The resurrection does not efface or deny the crucifixion. The scars remain on Christ's resurrection body precisely as a reminder of his suffering, as symbols of his victory and as identifying marks. The risen Jesus showed his scars to his followers and friends as proof of his identity<sup>236</sup>.

If, as we have suggested, Christ's resurrection prefigures ours, and he, in his resurrected state bears the scars of former wounds, then we too can reasonably expect to bear the scars of former wounds in the Resurrection. Scars, however, are not wounds. Wounds are raw and painful; scars bear witness to past wounds, now healed. Scar tissue is not always entirely free of discomfort initially. It may itch or feel tight or even, at times, be painful but the pain from scar tissue is seldom more than a whisper compared with the shouting and screaming pain of the original wound. Furthermore, the presence of a disfiguring scar, particularly if it is facially disfiguring, can cause deep emotional pain long after the physical wound has healed. Just as in his resurrection body, Jesus bore scars where once he had wounds so too in our resurrection bodies our emotional and physical wounds will be scars, indicating that healing has taken place.

"God's healing does not eliminate past tragedies; rather the past is outshone as the present is transfigured."<sup>237</sup> This, I suggest, applies to those whose suffering is so all-embracing that the memory of having suffered continues to cause intense suffering. The raw, painful wounds will be healed leaving, not oblivion but scars; scars which, like the scars of the Risen Jesus, speak of

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<sup>235</sup> Bede, cited in [www.newadvent.org/summa/405404.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/summa/405404.htm)

<sup>236</sup> Luke 24:40, John 20:25ff

<sup>237</sup> Nolan (www)

past suffering, of victory over suffering, and are identifying marks. The past tragedies of those for whom Volf expresses concern – a profound concern that evokes his thesis of eschatological forgetting – will not, I suggest, be eliminated but will be transfigured and outshone in this same sense.

“The scar is a body’s permanent memory of its breaching, a mark of violation and yet also an enduring mark of transformation...a never-disappearing symbol of one’s sacrifice.”<sup>238</sup> Of course, not all suffering is physical. Emotional and psychological wounds also leave scars in the one who has suffered. Scars of this nature are similarly a permanent reminder of breaching and violation and an indelible mark of transformation.

In twenty-first century popular culture, schoolboy Harry Potter is instantly recognisable from his lightning-shaped scar, a scar which occasionally causes him some discomfort but never reverts to an open wound. Harry’s scar both identifies him and speaks of his injury at the hands of, and victory over, the evil Voldemort. “It is the essence of who he is.... The scarred face of Harry Potter is much, much more than a mere mark on his forehead.”<sup>239</sup> So too our scars, whether visible, physical scars or invisible psychological scars, reveal more than a mere mark. They speak of past wounds, past suffering, even past victories. They identify us. They may even, like Harry Potter’s, be the essence of who we are.

The crucifixion scars on the body of the risen Christ show us the importance of his temporal life in what he had become. What his temporal life had made him was not destroyed or rejected but was an important part of what he now was. The implication of this for us is that in the Resurrection we too will be what our temporal lives have made us as part of what we will become. Moltmann writes,

“(T)he eternal life that comes into being out of transformation carries the scars of mortality, because it is this frail, impaired and mortal life which is transformed into eternal life. Everything that

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<sup>238</sup> Macary (www)

<sup>239</sup> Macary (www)

has put its mark on this life remains eternally. *Otherwise we should be unable to recognise ourselves in eternal life...* In the end all things will have worked together for good (Romans 8:28), even things which have made us inconsolable and which we shall never understand. The risen Christ should be recognised by the marks of the nails belonging to his death on the cross. And we too will still be recognisable from the reconfiguration of our truly lived life, a reconfiguration which will be continuous with its present configuration. Just as his crucified body was transfigured in the glory of God through his resurrection from the dead, so too the Gestalt of our truly lived lives will be brought back, transfigured and redeemed for God's kingdom.<sup>240</sup>

Thinking about this question of continuity between our resurrected selves and ourselves now, Hick, as we considered briefly in chapter 1, proposes a theory of 'replication'. He states that if a replica has memory and believes her or himself to be the same person, and the person's family and friends believe the same thing, then it is the same person<sup>241</sup>. He goes on to suggest that resurrection is, in effect, God replicating us, which means our resurrected self is the same person as our present, temporal self. Polkinghorne states that the Christian's hope for resurrection after death is not for a continued post-mortem existence but for recreation. Recreation is, as the word suggests, a creative act. This means that resurrection is not the same as mere resuscitation. It is re-creation. God, he says, will remember individuals and will recreate them<sup>242</sup>. God remembering and recreating persons is not threatening to the continuity of personal identity because, as Moltmann notes, in the memory of God nothing is ever lost. Everything is preserved for eternity<sup>243</sup>. As we saw in the chapter on personal identity, "For the earthly matter of which mortal's flesh is created is never lost to God...it returns in a moment of time to that human soul which in the first place made it

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<sup>240</sup> Moltmann, 1996: 84f (emphasis added)

<sup>241</sup> Hick, 1979: 279ff

<sup>242</sup> Polkinghorne, 1994: 163

<sup>243</sup> Moltmann, 1996: 331

animate.”<sup>244</sup> God will recreate us in the New Creation. He will not create beings that resemble us or are partially us, but beings that are wholly us.

If the resurrected or replicated self were the same person, Hick claims she or he would have no doubt about her or his identity and would be able to recognise others with confidence. There is an argument that resurrected persons cannot remember the past because they are existing in a different time-world, therefore life here is not a past event, and so they have no memory of it. Hick counters this by suggesting that the ‘replica’ remembers dying, therefore it *is* a past event<sup>245</sup>. More concrete than Hick’s thesis, which seems to be based on conjecture, however, is the evidence from the New Testament that the resurrected Christ could remember people and places from his temporal life. It might be argued that because Christ’s resurrection experience is unique in as much as he, in his resurrection body, returned to the same temporal world while we will only experience resurrection in the New Creation, that we cannot anticipate remembering simply because he remembered. If, however, we believe that we will exist in the New Creation and if we believe, as discussed in previous chapters, that both relationship and memory are constitutive of personal identity, then we can see that our resurrected selves will, of necessity, both be with others and will have memory. “It is not possible to imagine a soul preserving consciousness...without admitting that it possesses also the faculty of remembrance; to deny it this would be to rob it of much of that which makes consciousness worth having.”<sup>246</sup> Considering the question of post-mortem memory, Graham Scroggie cites New Testament texts which speak of accountability and judgement (Matthew 12: 36, Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10) and states, “These, and other passages, plainly imply memory developed and quickened into fullest energy...we must conclude that the power of clear recollection here implied is a faculty of the departed.”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Augustine, cited in Fiddes, 2000: 79f

<sup>245</sup> Hick, 1979: 285ff

<sup>246</sup> Luckock, cited in Scroggie, undated: 73

<sup>247</sup> Scroggie, undated: 74

The belief that we will remember is found in Russell who says that we will love all and recognise all, even those we knew only by reputation or not at all. "The good shall know the good in heaven as the evil will know the evil in hell."<sup>248</sup> That the disciples recognised Moses and Elijah who they knew only by reputation on the Mount of Transfiguration<sup>249</sup> seems to point to this.

McDannell and Lang suggest that the widespread contemporary belief that, in the New Creation, we will be reunited with loved ones is more popular than theological<sup>250</sup>. Yet there is nothing in Scripture to contradict this belief and some indication that it may be more theologically based than McDannell and Lang indicate. Jesus' words to the thief on the cross, for example, indicate reunion and recognition. "Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43) Likewise his words to the disciples, "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3) God's promises, we are told are, "For you and for your children." (Acts 2:39) As we saw in chapter 1, in asserting that there will be continuity of identity in the New Creation, Paul Fiddes states, "The faithfulness of God is not clear if divine promises are to be fulfilled to a different person from the one to whom they were made."<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, hope is not only for self but for all creation. All creation includes human beings, both those we know and those we do not. Just as we saw in chapter 1, and I alluded to above, that personhood is being-in-relation to others, so too the resurrected self is self-in-relation. Furthermore, I suggest, because we are what McFadyen calls a sedimentation of our significant relations<sup>252</sup> we could not be the same person in any meaningful sense if these relationships are erased. "But the renewed self of God's promised future involves the personal experience of sociality." says Moltmann<sup>253</sup>. Polkinghorne states if we believe that God will not allow anything good to be lost and that interpersonal relationships are good – albeit

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<sup>248</sup> Russell, 1997: 97

<sup>249</sup> Matthew 17:2

<sup>250</sup> McDannell & Lang, 1988: 309ff

<sup>251</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 84

<sup>252</sup> McFadyen, 1990: 40

<sup>253</sup> Cited in Thiselton, 1996: 130

in need of redemptive healing – then we can expect relationships to be restored at the eschaton<sup>254</sup>.

In his discussion of post-mortem reconciliation (considered in chapter 2) Volf's starting point is the presupposition that we will indeed be reunited in the New Creation with those we have known in this life<sup>255</sup>. Paul Fiddes also believes that there will be no loss of identity or of interpersonal relationships which, he says will be at a deeper level than we can now know<sup>256</sup>. Our resurrected selves, he says, will be, "unforeseeable in its newness of relationships and yet faithful to the relationships that have been in the past."<sup>257</sup>

According to Zizioulas, eternal life means continuing to love and be loved. He writes, "Life and love are identified in the person: the person does not die only because it is loved and loves; outside the communion of love the person loses its uniqueness and becomes a being like other beings, a 'thing' without an absolute 'identity' and 'name', without a face. Death for a person means ceasing to love and to be loved, ceasing to be unique and unrepeatable, whereas life for the person means the survival of its hypostasis, which is affirmed and maintained by love."<sup>258</sup> We might add that death, using Zizioulas's terminology, means ceasing to remember and to know ourselves whereas the survival of our hypostasis means knowledge of self and of what has been, and furthermore that fullness of life means remembering well. Zizioulas continues, "The significance of the person rests in the fact that he represents two things simultaneously which are at first sight in contradiction: particularity and communion...for a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within his relationships.... The mystery of being a person lies in the fact that here otherness and communion are not in contradiction but coincide."<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Polkinghorne, 1994: 172

<sup>255</sup> Volf, 2000: 91ff

<sup>256</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 88, 98

<sup>257</sup> Fiddes, 2000: 100

<sup>258</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 49

<sup>259</sup> Zizioulas, 1985: 105f

From this we can see that in the New Creation, although we will experience radical newness as considered in the previous section, we will at the same time be continuous with the selves that we know ourselves to be in this life – we will remember people, places and events from this life and, as now, will be selves-in-relation. The eschatological forgetting proposed by Volf is more suggestive of discontinuity.

#### **4.7 Summary & Conclusion**

In this chapter I have considered that our present, while informed by the past, is largely determined and shaped by our hopes for the future. Like memory, hope is an activity of the imagination. I said that hope is as essential to human existence as water to a fish or electricity to a light bulb. We saw, however, that often people's hopes are anchored to nothing concrete and are delusionary. When this is the case hopes are unfulfilled or thwarted, and unfulfilled or thwarted hope often results in feelings of hopelessness or despair. Despair, we saw, is a major threat to hope and is even described by Moltmann as sin against hope.

We saw that Christian eschatological hope is separated from our everyday hope by assurance. This is because, unlike so much other hope, eschatological hope is not speculative. It is rooted in the cross and resurrection of Christ and in the faithfulness of God. The central focus of Christian hope is the Parousia. It is this that gives concreteness to our hopes. The possession of eschatological hope, I said, has the power to transform present suffering. Hope is born of suffering but also draws attention to the suffering of the present. Hope for the future motivates action in the present. This is true of both eschatological hope and everyday hope.

The New Creation, I said, is both discontinuous and continuous with the present creation. Just as Christ in his resurrection body bore the scars of his crucifixion, so we in our resurrection bodies which, as part of the New Creation that will have elements of continuity and discontinuity, will be both continuous and discontinuous with our earthly bodies, will have physical and

emotional scars which will bear witness to past suffering and will identify us. Volf, in suggesting that painful memories will be erased at the eschaton, classifies memory as discontinuous. I suggest, because it is so essential to our sense of identity, that memory in the New Creation will be continuous with memory in life now. There is also an element of discontinuity however – the pain and suffering caused by certain memories.

Scripture tells us that God will “do a new thing”. He will recreate, not destroy and replace his present creation. Heaven, we saw, is not only a future state but is God’s dimension of present reality.

In looking at the New Creation I extrapolated from our experience of life now and from what we read in Christian Scripture images which help us piece together an image of what we can reasonably expect in the New Creation. Biblical language, for reasons already discussed, does not give us a complete picture of the New Creation but it gives us a starting point. Dealing with concepts far beyond our comprehension and imagination, biblical language is heavy with imagery that give us a picture of great opulence and splendour. A land flowing with milk and honey, streets paved with gold, gates made from single pearls, walls of jasper with foundations of many varieties of precious stones, white robes and crowns, and the marriage supper all speak of plenty, of extravagance, of beauty. If we revisit the Prodigal Son with whom we spent some time in a previous chapter, do we not have a glimpse of that same extravagance and beauty in the father’s forgiveness of his son? He lavished his son with the very best he had – not just a robe but the best robe, not just a ring, but doubtless one made of the finest gold, and no simple fare but a banquet. A plain, rough robe and a mess of potage would have been extravagant for even that was more than the son deserved. Such then, are the treasures of the inheritance ‘kept in heaven for you’ to which Peter refers and for which the believer can hope.

At the heart of the Christian gospel is a message of hope; hope of a future without suffering. We considered that the Apostle Paul says that, “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be



revealed in us." (Romans 8:18) This is a far cry from Volf's concern that the painful memory of having suffered will mar the joy of the New Creation. Just as water dripped on the hotplate of an iron or hob evaporates completely and instantly without lessening the intensity of the heat of the hotplate, so all earthly suffering will evaporate completely and instantly without lessening the intensity of the beauty and perfection of the New Creation.

To say that the joy and the splendour of the New Creation could be marred by the memory of suffering, as Volf suggests, is to say that the joy of the resurrection is marred if we remember the crucifixion. It is like saying that a four year old's joy and excitement when surrounded by gifts on Christmas morning with his favourite food coming later in the day is marred by the memory of the sorrow he felt when his grandmother died six months earlier. It is like saying that the goodness of God could be lessened or sullied by taking on the sin of the world. Nothing can mar the greatness of the New Creation for which we wait in hope; the New Creation God has promised. The risen Christ, we are told, is the 'yes' and 'amen' of God's promises, assuring us that the promises of the New Creation are ours if we claim them. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20

## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing thesis I have considered Volf's concern that some people's suffering in this life is so enormous that left as it is it would continue to cause suffering and mar the joy of the New Creation. I suggested that Volf's proposed remedy – eschatological forgetting – is problematic chiefly because of the importance of memory in our sense of who we are as distinct persons. In addressing that first stage of my argument I looked in some depth at notions of personal identity and at the centrality of memory to our ways of making sense of 'self'. The next stage of my argument says that not only is Volf's proposal problematic, it is also unnecessary because, through forgiveness it is possible to learn to remember well.

The first chapter considered what personal identity is and how it is constituted, looking in particular at relationality and temporality. The following chapter, in considering various aspects of memory saw how memory of what has been enables us to make sense of what is and indeed what is to come; to make sense of what we have been, what we are and what we may yet become. It also claimed that where the memory is lost through illness or injury, personal identity is not lost for it may be preserved through the memory of others and of God even although the person's sense of identity may be lost.

In chapter 3 I looked at both the experience of being forgiven and that of forgiving others. I considered how forgiving others and being forgiven by others can transform our memory and our perception of ourselves. We do not forget that which has been forgiven but come to see it through the lens of and in the light of forgiveness. I used the example of the apostle Peter. Peter's experience of being forgiven did not cause him to forget his denial but it enabled him to view his denial through the lens of forgiveness. It enabled him to see himself as strong and having potential, rather than a weak character and an utter failure. Thus he was set free from the potential bondage of this event in his past and enabled to grow and to become a strong leader in the early church.

The chapter on the New Creation (chapter 4) was a chapter of contrasts; contrasting non-hope with hope, day-to-day hope with Christian eschatological hope, new with old, discontinuity with continuity. Its purpose was to show that the radical newness of the New Creation transforms and redeems the old. I suggested that Christians have reason to suppose that new and old, things discontinuous and things continuous with this world will co-exist in the New Creation. As we are healed and renewed so our pasts are redeemed. The New, of course, does not undo the past but it does undo the chains binding us to the past. It does not change the past but it changes the meaning of the past. Our memory of what is past is not erased by the coming of the New but is healed and redeemed. In the New we will not forget the old but will remember it well.

When something is non-remembered, we said, it is not forgotten but is not called to mind because it has no need to be. It is non-remembered. Something that is remembered well, on the other hand can be recalled without any threat to the well-being of the one who remembers because it has been dealt with. We can only 'remember well' when we are willing to forget.

In the introduction I posed the following question. Is the discontinuity indicated by the Christian claim that human suffering, loss and transience will be redeemed in God's New Creation compatible with the equally strong claim that human beings will be recognisable to themselves, to others and to God in the New Creation because in some meaningful sense they will indeed be 'the same person'? I have, I believe, shown that the two claims are entirely compatible. I would suggest, in fact, that it is precisely because of the transformation and redemption that take place that the integrity of personal identity is protected and preserved and we are able to know ourselves and one another in the New Creation.

My starting place was Volf's contentious thesis that unless the most horrendous of memories are forgotten in the New Creation they will mar the perfection and newness of the New Creation by continuing to cause

suffering. It is my belief, however, that such erasure of formative memories poses a threat to the integrity of personal identity. If, as I have argued, we will be fully ourselves in the New Creation, that has to be ourselves complete with our memories; memories which, as we have said will be healed and redeemed.

That anything could mar the perfection of the New Creation, as Volf suggests, I also indicated is open to question. I have suggested that far from sin and suffering marring the perfection of the New Creation, the white-hot perfection of the New Creation will transform the ugliness and imperfection of the old to beauty and perfection.

If, as indicated in chapter 4, heaven is not a future state but is God's dimension of present reality then I would suggest that the person whose life is lived in cooperation with God need not wait for the New Creation in order to experience the healing and transformation of painful memories. They can begin now to learn to remember well. As Haymes states, "To live in God's salvation is not for the future but is a present gift and calling."<sup>1</sup> Such healing and transformation are more likely to be a process like sanctification than instantaneous. As with forgiveness, however, it is costly – too costly for some – for it involves honestly facing the memory in all its horror and then having the courage to let it go and move on.

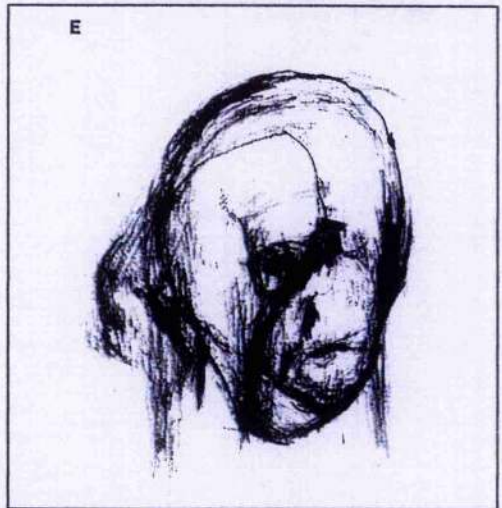
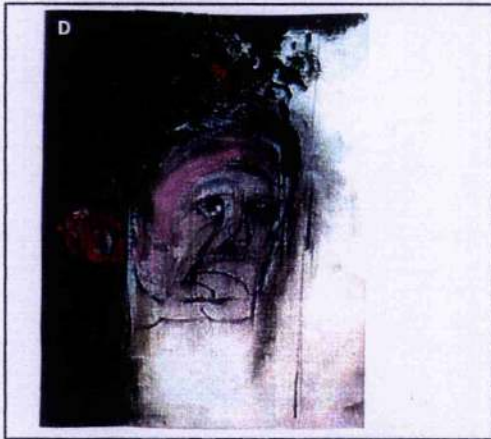
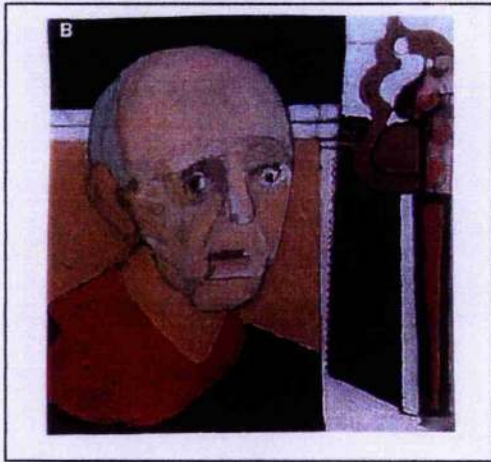
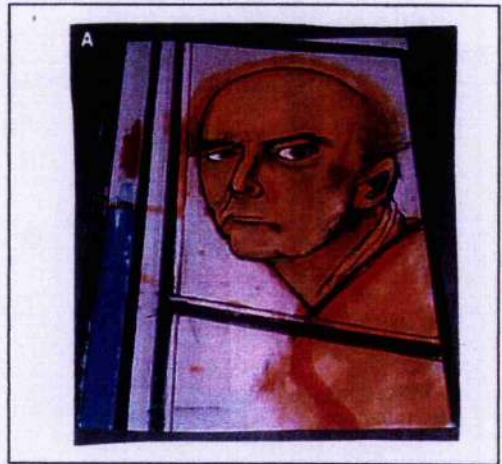
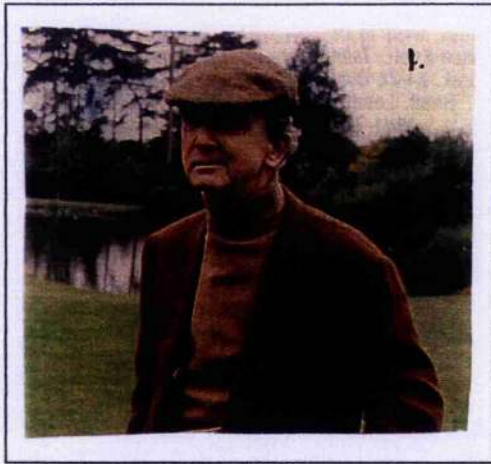
I stated at the beginning that Volf's thesis of eschatological forgetting is attractive but, I believe, flawed. Attractive as it is, however, the message that formative memories will be erased is not a message of hope for those who suffer for it presents a threat to the integrity of the self. How much more hopeful is the promise that they can be complete and whole persons with transformed, healed and redeemed memories. God will transform our memories, restoring those that have been lost and healing and redeeming those that cause suffering. He will give us, "A crown of beauty instead of

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<sup>1</sup> Haymes, 2000: 37

ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." (Isaiah 61:3)

**Appendix 1. William Uttermohlen's Photograph and Self Portraits**



1. William Uttermohlen  
(source unknown)  
a. Self-portrait, age 60  
b. Self-portrait, age 62  
c. Self-portrait, age 63  
d. Self-portrait, age 64  
e. Self-portrait, age 66  
f. Self-portrait, age 65  
(*The Lancet*. Vol. 357, June 30,  
2001, p.2131)

## Appendix 2. Letter from Miroslav Volf



YALE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

Miroslav Volf  
Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology

409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, Connecticut 06511-2167  
203 432-5332 FAX 203 432-5356  
E-MAIL [miroslav.volf@yale.edu](mailto:miroslav.volf@yale.edu)

February 11, 2000

Jane McArthur  
748 Mossspark Drive  
Cardonald  
Glasgow G52 3AX  
Scotland

Dear Jane,

My apologies for not responding to your letter sooner, especially since you took trouble and wrote so well in Croatian—at least part of the letter. I'd love to discuss with you the issues you raise. I am engaged with them now since I am working (slowly) on a manuscript on memory and conflict. Here just a few sketches of a response.

Let me state from the outset that I think that my use of the "forgetting" was unfortunate. The best term for what I am after seems to me now to be "not coming to mind" (also a biblical term, describing eschatological fulfillment). Put differently, if you wanted to remember past suffering—past suffering, that is, of the kind that cannot be integrated in the vision of a good life—you could do so. But the crucial question why would you want to remember (I am talking, of course, about horrendous events that caused and continue to cause great pain, not everything that happened to us; for memory in general, which consists of a differentiated process of remembering and non-remembering, is fundamental).

1. I don't think past pain is a precondition of enjoyment. For instance, I enjoy looking at a beauty of a painting even though prior to the event I have not been immersed in ugliness. We appreciate goodness, beauty, and truth for their own sakes, and not simply as resolution to prior evil, ugliness, and deception.
2. Some of the most formative experiences in terms of our identity take place in our childhood. Many of them we don't remember. Nonetheless, that does not subvert our identity but in fact constitutes it. It is helpful to distinguish between different senses of identity when one addresses this question. In one sense we are the same person all throughout our lives and in another sense we are a radically different person.
3. What would it mean to say that the (event that caused) suffering will be transformed? I don't know how to transform it without distorting it, which would be a forgetting of sorts. The alternatives are to say of a horrendous event (such as Auschwitz) (1) "Oh, it was not bad after all (when you look at it from a distance)" or (2) "It served some good and is justifiable in terms of that good" or (3) to affirm eternality of tragedy and therefore to deny heaven as heaven.
4. Christ's suffering is in many ways a special case and it would take a long time to respond to your last question. I don't believe in the eternal wound in the heart of God caused by the cross, partly because that would take tragedy again into the midst of heaven. But that would take a long time to explicate and defend.

Let me also add that many theologians in the tradition had no problem with the idea of forgetting in association with forgiving wrong endured or committed (e.g. Gregory of Nyssa). The same is true of some significant philosophers (e.g. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard). I'd be very much interested in your eschatological reflections as your work progresses. Keep in touch ([miroslav.volf@yale.edu](mailto:miroslav.volf@yale.edu)).

All the best,

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