
Markus Matthias | Riemer Roukema | Gert van Klinken (Hrsg.)

ERINNERN UND VERGESSEN – REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

ESSAYS ÜBER ZWEI THEOLOGISCHE GRUNDVOLLZÜGE



Erinnern und Vergessen – Remembering and Forgetting

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Essays über zwei theologische Grundvollzüge

Festschrift für Hans-Martin Kirn

Herausgegeben von Markus Matthias,
Riemer Roukema und Gert van Klinken



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Vorwort

Die in diesem Jahr erfolgte Entpflichtung Hans-Martin Kirns – seit 2001 Inhaber des Lehrstuhls für Kirchengeschichte an der *Theologischen Universität Kampen*, seit 2008 an deren Nachfolgerin, der *Protestantischen Theologischen Universität*, zuerst in Leiden, Utrecht und Kampen, seit 2012 in Amsterdam und Groningen – von seinen Aufgaben an der Universität nehmen seine direkten und befreundete Kollegen zum Anlass, ihm einen bunten Strauß von *Erwägungen* zu überreichen, die alle aus dem Nachdenken über die beiden theologischen und historischen Grundvollzüge *Erinnern* und *Vergessen* erwachsen sind.

Die vorliegenden Essays nehmen ihren Ausgang von kleinen – biblischen, poetischen, liturgischen oder theologischen – Texteinheiten und greifen das dort zutagetretende Problem auf, um es ein wenig weiterzuführen, ohne das Thema auch nur annähernd vollständig behandeln zu wollen. Vielmehr soll gezeigt werden, wie aus multidisziplinärer und multinationaler Perspektive die beiden Grundvollzüge theologischen und historischen Denkens bedacht werden können. Dabei bleibt es dem Leser überlassen, daraus einen zusammenhängenden Kranz zu winden.

Mit den hier abgedruckten Erwägungen wollen wir zugleich einen Kirchenhistoriker ehren, für den die Reflexion über die rechte Art, Kirchengeschichte zu betreiben und zu schreiben ebenso wichtig war wie ein gründliches und sorgfältiges Studium der Quellen.

Die Bedeutung der Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte als theologischer Disziplin hat Hans-Martin Kirn programmatisch in seiner Dies-Rede der Protestantischen Theologischen Universität am 8. Dezember 2008 in Leiden dargelegt: *Van theologie naar religious studies? Voorbij het dilemma tussen zelfopheffing en isolement*, 2008; überarbeitet als: *Von der Theologie zu den Religious Studies? Überlegungen zu Glaube und Religion im Wandel universitärer Ausbildung*, in: *Universität, Religion und Kirchen*, hg. von Rainer Christoph Schwinges und Melanie Kellermüller (Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte 11), Basel (2011) 2012, S. 541–559.

In diesem Beitrag hat Hans-Martin Kirn mit Nachdruck auf die Bedeutung einer enzyklopädischen Besinnung über die Theologie hingewiesen. Verschiedene Beiträge haben sich von seinen Überlegungen leiten lassen, und wir

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haben die Hoffnung, dass durch die Beiträge insgesamt ein solcher enzyklopädischer Zusammenhang neben der inneren Differenzierung der Theologie aufscheinen möge.

Die Beiträge werden in chronologischer Reihenfolge der zugrundeliegenden Bezugstexte (Zitate) dargeboten. Die in den eingereichten Texten geäußerten persönlichen Worte an den zu Ehrenden wurden gelegentlich »um der Sache willen« bei der Publikation gekürzt. Sie galten und gelten noch immer einem Kollegen, mit dem zusammenarbeiten uns allen eine angenehme Freude, förderliche Anregung und wertvolle Hilfe bedeutete.

Groningen, am 16. März 2020

Die Herausgeber

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Remembering and forgetting in the book of Judges

1 A messenger of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. He said: »I made you go up from Egypt and I brought you to the land that I swore to your fathers. And I said: I will not break my covenant with you forever. 2 And you, you should not cut a covenant with those who dwell in this land. Their altars you should demolish. But you did not listen to my voice. What have you done? 3 So now I say: I will not drive them out from before your face and they will be a whip on your sides to you and their gods will be a snare to you.« 4 It happened, when the messenger of the Lord had spoken these words to all Israelites, that the people lifted up their voice and wept. 5 They called the name of that place Bochim and they sacrificed there to the Lord.

6 Joshua sent the people off and the Israelites went, a man to his inheritance, to take possession of the land. 7 The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who had prolonged the days after Joshua, who had seen every great deed of the Lord that he had done for Israel. 8 Joshua, son of Nun, servant of the Lord, died, a hundred and ten years old. 9 They buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath Heres on mount Ephraim, north of mount Gaash. 10 Also that entire generation was gathered to its fathers. Another generation came up after them, that did not know the Lord and the deed he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:1–10 (own translation)

»Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.« These words of Winston Churchill (1874–1965), paraphrasing the warning by the philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952) in 1905: »Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it«, will probably be quoted more often in this Festschrift around the theme of commemorating or forgetting. Nevertheless, they are worth mentioning here again, not as a cliché, but as a fitting representation of the message of the book of Judges. Another often used cliché with regard to the book of Judges is »l’histoire se répète«. Although this summarizes much of the contents of the book very well on account of its iterative structure,

it misses the point of these repetitions. Nevertheless, it is useful to start these considerations with a study of the repetitions in Judges.

The first chapter of the book of Judges can be considered to be a variant report of the conquest of the Promised Land as has already been described in the book of Joshua. In a historical-critical approach to the text, it is often assumed that we are dealing with an older version of the story than the more elaborate and positive description in the previous book. The many references to failed attempts by individual tribes to take possession of the land allotted to them in this book would also be more in line with the historical facts. One should not fail to note however, that the differences in the way the taking of the land was described in the book of Joshua are not so big at all. Most of the first chapter of the book of Judges consists of quotations taken from different places in the book of Joshua. The main difference is that the tribe of Judah is given a prominent place in Judges. It is mentioned in 1:2 as the tribe chosen by the Lord to be the first to take the land. Here and also in the final chapters of the book, the tribe of Benjamin is presented as the negative counterpart of Judah. In this way the book of Judges foreshadows the later relationship between the first kings of Israel, with the Benjaminite king Saul and the Judean king David as his opponent.

Also Judges 2 clearly takes up elements from the book of Joshua. Verses 6–9 almost verbatim repeat Joshua 24:29–31. This description of the death and burial of Joshua is followed by the remark that those who saw Joshua's great deeds have served the Lord. Verses 1–5, describing a gathering in Bochim, have a clear parallel in the book of Joshua as well. Many scholars have attempted to explain the double reference of the death of Joshua as due to a complex history of redactional activity, resulting in an incoherent structure of partly contradictory layers. In its present form, however, the first chapters of the book of Judges make sense as a way of relating both books by partly repeating the previous book. The story in Judges 2:1–5 reminds in many ways of Joshua 24, namely in the story of the gathering of the Israelites as told in verses 1–28, which also precede the report of his death. In both stories the Israelites are reminded of the good things done by the Lord for the Israelites and of the covenant between the Lord and Israel. Whereas the Israelites had made a solemn vow to keep the covenant in Joshua 24, they are now confronted with the fact that they have broken this promise. Joshua had warned them of the consequences. A basic difference between the two stories is that this second time it is the messenger of the Lord who has to remind the people of their responsibility. Apparently, a good human leader is lacking. Also the response of the people is different. Whereas the Israelites intended to keep the covenant according to Joshua 24, in the story in Judges 2 the only thing they do is weep at Bochim (Bochim means ›weepers‹). This sets the tone for the rest of the book: there will be an ongoing lack of reliable leaders and in the end the Israelites can only weep at the outcome of the ensuing civil war (Judges 21:2–3).

After the recapitulation of the book of Joshua in Judges 1:1–2:9 the idea of a history that repeats itself is presented more explicitly in a general introduction.

It describes how every new generation makes the same mistake of forgetting the good things the Lord did for his people in the past. Every time again the Lord reacts as announced by punishing them through the hands of foreign enemies. Every time again they are given a new chance when they repent and the Lord sends a deliverer, but every time the new generation makes the same mistake again. This goes on and on. It is suggested in the final chapters that it will end with the coming of a king, through the repetition of the remark that there was no king in those days when all these dreadful things happened.

Every time the Israelites are blamed for forgetting their God, but what about the deliverers and judges sent by the Lord? Should they not have instructed their people better? We are only informed by the author of their actions against the enemy. We do not know what happened after their victory, in the many years of rest following it. The so called ›minor judges‹ did not have to fight enemies at all. They only had to ›judge‹ Israel (10:1–5; 12:8–15). It is not clear what this meant, but apparently their work did not result in the better behaviour of their people. Also after each judge, the Israelites fell back into ›doing what is evil in the eyes of the Lord«. None of these leaders, therefore, can be regarded as a good successor for Joshua, who had clearly instructed his people by reminding them of the good deeds by the Lord in the past, the covenant made with the Lord, and of the consequences for the people of breaking that covenant.

None of the Israelite leaders figuring in the book of Judges is explicitly condemned, with the exception of Abimelek (9:56). He is the example of a bad leader. When it comes to his father, Gideon or Jerubbaal, things are complicated. On the one hand, Gideon's reaction to the offer of establishing a dynasty is praiseworthy. He does not accept it stating that the Lord is the true leader of Israel (8:22–23). On the other hand, his subsequent actions are clearly not in line with his words. He makes the place of his birth a cultic centre, leading his people to idolatry, and he names his son Abimelek, ›my father is king« – he is not referring to the Lord. In the story of his calling in chapter 6 the element of remembering the deeds of the Lord plays a prominent role. Gideon is called to save his people from the Midianites by a messenger of the Lord. Gideon hesitates. He has his doubts about the intervention by the Lord: ›if the Lord is with us, why has all this visited us? Where are all the wonders which our fathers recounted to us, saying: ›Was it not from Egypt that the Lord brought us up?‹ And now the Lord has forsaken us and he has given us into the hand of Midian« (6:13). So Gideon had not forgotten the deeds of the Lord. In the story this is emphasized by the fact that before the appearance of the messenger of the Lord a prophet had reminded the Israelites of the works of the Lord and of the covenant, in the same way as had been done by the messenger of the Lord in Bochim (6:7–10). For Gideon it is not only a matter of remembering, but also a matter of taking it to heart. He was clearly not convinced, not by the prophet and neither by the messenger of the Lord. It would take a number of extra miracles before he would give in.

Gideon gets most of the attention in the book of Judges and can also be regarded as the most successful leader in the period between the conquest and the kingdom. Nevertheless, he is not the leader who walks in the footsteps of Joshua. According to the first verse of the book of Judges this leader should come from the tribe of Judah. Anyone familiar with the history of Israel will realize that this points to David. However, in the period before David seized the throne there is an even better candidate, namely Samuel. He is from the tribe of Ephraim, which caused trouble in opposing both Gideon and Jephthah, but he does fit very well into the profile of the perfect leader for Israel. He successfully combines the functions of military leader, judge, and prophet. In this way he surpasses Gideon. Samuel does what Gideon and the other leaders in the period of the judges failed to do: he reminds the people of the good deeds of the Lord in the past. At the end of his career Samuel delivers a long speech in which he tells again the story of the exodus and of the period of the judges and urges them to obey the Lord (1 Samuel 12). It is precisely in this way that Samuel is demonstrably the successor of Moses and Joshua, who spoke in the same way to the people at the end of their life. When it comes to the future kings of Israel the same can be said only of Solomon, who reminded his people of their history with the Lord and of the covenant (1 Kings 8).

Returning to the book of Judges and looking at it again from the perspective of ideal leadership, it can be noted that there are two people who look like Samuel. The first is Samson. Their birth stories in Judges 13 and 1 Samuel 1 show many similarities and both are devoted to the service of the Lord. They are very different, however, in the way they fulfil their task. Samson does not show any leadership quality at all and only refers to the Lord when the dire straits in which he winds up force him to. Another, and at first sight unexpected, parallel is found in Deborah. She is the only one in the Hebrew Bible who is, like Samuel, both judge and prophet. Like Samuel she lives in Rama (4:5). And like Samuel she reminds her people of the glorious past of the Lord, when she describes him in her song as the mighty one coming from Sinai (5:4–5).

In the history of interpretation of the book of Judges there is much discussion about the question of whether the book regards kingship positively or negatively. The better question, however, is: what does the book of Judges teach us about good leadership? It turns out that one of the most important qualities of a good leader is that he or she does not forget the past and learns from it. The book of Judges also shows that such leaders are rare. Therefore, praise the prophets (and professors) who help us to remember the past and take the appropriate lessons from it.

Marjo Korpel

Prosperity and forgetfulness

When they had fed to the full [...] they forgot me.

Hosea 13:6 (Revised Standard Version)

A short time ago I was involved in the writing process for a research policy report for the *Protestant Theological University* at Groningen and Amsterdam about mediating good life. While discussing the document with my colleagues I asked myself: Is our life in the affluent Western world not too good? Have we forgotten what it means to be bombed, oppressed, persecuted, underprivileged, hungry, thirsty? Here the above quotation from the book of Hosea came to my mind.

We live in an era in which forgetfulness is a rapidly growing phenomenon. Doubtlessly this is in part the consequence of the stressful society in which we have to function, as demonstrated by the clean-up challenge organised by the Dutch daily newspaper *De Volkskrant* in October 2018. One week of October was fully dedicated to what was called »digital hygiene«.

Another reason for forgetting things is the high average age that is attained in developed countries. Forgetting the car keys is quite normal and can be called a typical senior moment. Worrying about memory loss even seems to show that the brains are still working well, but forgetting names of beloved ones and good friends and not realizing this must ring alarm bells of possible »dementia«.

The most important factor for forgetting things, however, doubtlessly is the sheer mass of information that is poured out over us by modern media – a mass we can no longer process all by ourselves. Hence our blind trust in the memories of our computers, smartphones and Internet. Google promises to store them for us on huge servers in the world and by the help of *DeepMind*. Artificial intelligence even teaches computers to conquer the problem of so-called »catastrophic forgetting«.

Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Academia, ResearchGate and more require high attention from our brains, but the result is that the work we planned to do constantly is interrupted by sounds and images, flashing and knocking, whistling and beeping. When we look up something on the Internet other subjects and screens pop up, which seems to be of immediate

importance and interest to us, and if we stay strong and still are not tempted sounds and blinking attract our attention, and in the end we appear to have lost our initial question.

What we do not always realize is that all these disturbing factors presuppose the continuity of the prosperity in the Western developed world. We are all striving after ›the good life‹. Though a lot of work done has been taken over by computers and robots, several other tasks have been added to the working load of human beings, like taking care of disabled parents or children, managing more than one household because of divorces, as well as pressing questions about how to take care of the climate in our private lives, by good food and CO₂-neutral traveling and climate neutral living. Striving for the good for ourselves and all people in the world as well as for nature. In all aspects of our lives we seek the good.

However, ›good‹ is a relative concept. Its true meaning depends on the context in which ›good‹ is used. For a pastor driving fifty kilometres on a Sunday morning for a church service might be helpful for some believers in a pioneering church, but it is bad for all those people living alongside the highway. But on Sunday morning no bus or train will take you to your destination in time. The effectiveness of the welfare economics on which the Western world thrives is dubious. Our average ecological footprint in the Netherlands is that big, that if it had been the same for all other people on the globe, the earth should have been three and a half times bigger in size (as calculated by *World Wildlife Fund* some years ago). Thus we, and other people in the rich West, in fact consume the food of others elsewhere in the world, and our way of life including all new technology consumes the earth, and results in climate change, causing drought and food shortages elsewhere in the world, forcing on their part people to seek their salvation in the West, by trying to get there as stowaways in refrigerated trucks waiting for the ferry.

In biblical times most people were illiterate and analphabetism was rampant. It still is in large parts of the present world. Though there is an improvement of literacy among younger people, in 2017 there were still 750 million illiterate adults, according to the UNESCO e-Atlas of Literacy. Which means that about thirteen percent of all adults in the world are still illiterate, and about two thirds of them are women (some 500 million). What is important to keep in mind, is that all those illiterate people have to rely on their memories. To recall when a delivery had to be made, a bill should be paid, what was the wisdom your parents taught you? Also religious knowledge was passed on orally. Thus, in the 13th century B.C.E. ancient Canaanite myths written on clay tablets in the city of Ugarit (Western Syria) show remarks, that urge the priests to repeat unwritten portions of text that they were supposed to know by heart, as it is said in the Baal-myth: »And (here) repeat the recitation of how the lads were sent«, referring to a standard text describing how the messengers of a god were sent with a message to a human king, and how the king answered. It shows that a large portion of text was left to the improvisation of the priest who recites this text to the

audience in the temple. Therefore, in biblical times, oral tradition and remembrance by heart were just as important as written tradition and could not easily be adjusted or reworked.

Of course, life was short in those times: excavated human remains indicate an average age of only 40 years, and even still in 1960 a child born in that year was expected to reach only an average age of 52.5 years (in 2016 this expectation expanded to 79 years for a baby-boy and 83 years for a baby-girl in the United Kingdom). So oral tradition in fact was short during adult life (about 25 years per person) and was vulnerable and could easily be wiped out by wars and epidemics. That is why writing was invented. However, only a very small number of exceptionally bright youngsters mastered the scribal art. So everybody else had to train his or her brain to remember crucial information, including orally communicated religious knowledge.

Up to the beginning of the 20th century analphabetism was still wide-spread in Europe. Therefore Christians learnt parts of the Bible and the Catechism by heart on the basis of oral instruction. Because everybody had a more or less trained memory at least some members of every community developed a remarkable prowess as lay theologians, as is also documented with regard to the so-called ›Laienprediger‹ and ›Oefenaars‹ by Hans-Martin Kirn in his recent book on the History of Christianity (*Geschichte des Christentums*, IV,1: Konfessionelles Zeitalter, Stuttgart 2016, 174 and 255).

An unexpected consequence of compulsory education in reading and writing was the loss of the capacity to mentally store large quantities of oral information. Nowadays also books cannot contain comprehensive knowledge anymore and we rely on devices to provide us with the short-lived pieces of knowledge we momentarily need (as advertised some years ago on a poster in front of the VU-university building in Amsterdam, with a picture of human brains, a student, the coloured Google logo, and a phrase that runs somewhat like this: Google remembers what you forgot). Inevitably this results in an inability to provide a total picture, a systematically structured theology. Theology has always tried to provide such a picture, but seems to be unable to keep up with the fast pace of our times. Hans-Martin Kirn and I always have enjoyed presenting our yearly course on ›Theology and Spirituality of Martyrdom‹ at our university, but we also observed that the knowledge of the Bible, the dogmas of the Church and the history of Christianity has diminished over the years among newly arriving students.

Deuteronomy 8:11–20 forcefully states that inordinate opulence can easily lead to relegating God and his teaching to oblivion. In Dutch we have a saying ›nood leert bidden‹ (›sorrow and grief make us pray‹). Prosperity may further the opposite. Several scholars have suggested that Hosea's words have played a crucial role in the formulation of Deuteronomy 8. I quote a passage from a commentary on Hosea 13:6:

If knowledge of Yahweh in its theological sense has an ethical dimension and involves instruction and therewith the gracious bestowal of the gifts of justice and kindness, then forgetting of him implies the exact reverse, i.e. that godless anarchy, bloodshed and internecine strife [...] will characterise the life of an Israel whose arrogance has prompted her to such fatal forgetfulness. (Andrew A. Macintosh: Hosea, Edinburgh 1997, 531).

Deuteronomy 8:18 urges Israel to remember the Lord because it is he who gives the power to get wealth. In Israel remembering was not an internal process, it was saying things aloud, honouring and invoking him openly and thus testifying to the world that prosperity is a gift from God (v. 17).



The forever hungry Holle Bolle Gijs in the Efteling park (Kaatsheuvel), preferring paper over real food, shouting ›papier, hier‹ and saying ›thank you‹ for all paper put in his mouth
(picture Wikimedia Commons, taken by Hullie – July 2006).