

MEMORY AND RESPONSIBILITY

DISCUSSION

Chairman: Prof. Nicholas Bratsiotis

Rabbi David Lincoln: The Bishop from Serbia spoke about the problems in his country. I think many of us can understand the historic memory of the Serbian people, certainly during World War II, as far as the Croats are concerned. But what is bothering the world today is not necessarily the problems of Croatia and Serbia, but rather what is known as the ethnic cleansing and also the raping of Bosnian women. I'm not sure what that has to do with the memory of the Serbian people. And this disturbs us greatly and I wonder why he did not address himself at all to the problems of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Prof. Elias Oikonomou: I would like to refer to what Prof. Halpérin said about memory and responsibility and ask whether he sees and understands memory as a psychological fact only, or in the biblical sense where memory is synonymous with faith: either as a genitive objective faith of God — we must remember God — or as a genitive subjective as God remembers. And you know very well how this “remember,” as a commandment to the biblical Israel, recommences again and again and becomes a kind of warning not to forget God. Let me refer to the example in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy where you can find the evaluation of the march in the desert — because if we consider the biblical sense then we have a question of faith and a question of unfaithfulness. Here memory is the same as faith, forgetting how God dealt with Israel in the desert is the same as not having faith, and if this is the case with the biblical idea, in what context are the historical events with respect to responsibility? To whom is the respon-

sibility? Or if we speak about our memory of man instead of our memory of God, then we have other related meanings — do we remember what man did to us, whether good or bad, so that we can thank him and be grateful or have revenge against him, or do we remember facts as a kind of self-criticism? These three possibilities exist in a kind of self-criticism in our human behavior.

In the first category, the biblical, it seems that the sense of vengeance with the sense of execution by man who has been injured is excluded, since I remember the following passage, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19, echoing Deut. 32:35). This means also readiness to grant forgiveness to the transgressors, where in the last analysis I would classify forgiveness in the triangle of fasting, prayer and charity as the means of seeking mercy for the transgressor. On this point I would like to hear an answer whether it is an approach in the biblical theological sense of whether we stood correctly before God or not, or a social approach in which we remember what another did and we possibly give him the same in return.

I think the subject is a vital one for Judaism and Christianity, because memory and forgetfulness are powerful theological terms. He who remembers accepts that which he remembers, and he who forgets erases out of his existence that which he forgets, and therefore this existence does not influence his thought and action. So if people, like the American visitors of Bishop Ireneos, tell us to forget the past, then perhaps we should forget people in general, not only those who transgressed against us but also those who did good and to thank those who are generous — remembering them is also a biblical notion. I am not making any recommendation for either orientation, but simply pointing out where a certain general approach of an academic nature would lead.

This is why I think it necessary at depth to understand in what way we use the memory of man, on a sociological or theological level. In the last analysis, these two levels cannot be separated. He who remembers God will act accordingly. For example in Deuteronomy (8:17-19) it says: “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth; that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as at this day. And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish.” I think there is a certain message for humanity, independent of religion, in the orientation not to forget God.

Prof. Raphael Sabethay: I would like to stress very emphatically the efforts of some academic people in foreign universities to falsify history and obliterate the memory of the genocide of the Jews. Bishop Ireneos

developed and analyzed very well the theme of memory. However, what should be the reaction to the unfortunate efforts of many academic teachers to give a false interpretation and even annihilate the tragic phenomenon of the genocide of the Second World War?

Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Peristerion: I did not understand the position of Prof. Halpérin with respect to the positions taken by Soloviev, because there are some exaggerations as to the role of Israel and Jews without taking into consideration the role of other nations and peoples in the same geographic area. Soloviev gives a great importance to the genocide of Jews. But there is no good or bad genocide. As Jews and as Christians we have the duty to condemn every kind of genocide because it turns against man who is in the image of God, and because genocide has the sole aim of destroying minorities. That is why I wish to make a special mention of the genocide in the Orient through which Christianity has been eradicated from the churches of the Apocalypse.

Another question is the role of economy. Bishop Irineos mentioned the concern of the modern world with economic well-being. This is a theory that is heard in the West and in America, but this does not imply the spiritual dimension of economy to which the Old Testament refers especially. The Old Testament says that nothing belongs to man. Whatever exists in the world belongs to God and man simply administers, and therefore must administer all the good things for his spiritual reconstruction.

Another question is in reference to what was said about Evdokimov. I did not understand very well. Evdokimov implies that in the liturgical practice of some Orthodox churches certain liturgical texts were removed which were of an anti-Judaic character? According to my opinion no liturgical reformulation has been done in the corpus of the Orthodox Church, at least in an official way.

We already discussed the question concerning the dynamic sense of tradition — that tradition is not something static but something dynamic. I would like to ask Prof. Halpérin: If the Jews accept the dynamic character of tradition, such that tradition does not refer to the past only but is formed in the present, what obstacle is there to considering the New Testament as an expression and an enlargement of this tradition?

My last point is that we need real memory and not forgetfulness because the world directs itself again on a dangerous road, and it seems it has not learned anything from the mistakes of the past. Man has not been corrected as man and individual. I refer especially to the letter of His Beatitude Patriarch Pavlou of Serbia who precisely says that the Church condemns all crimes without distinction, all crimes that have been committed against women. History is the best teacher and the best experience in this matter. Christians and Jews, people of God, must

build a society in which there is greater happiness and peace.

Rabbi Dr. Jordan Pearlson: Prof. Halpérin, in your *Histoire et Mémoire*, the colloquy that you have helped to guide so brilliantly, I believe you draw the distinction between history and memory, that history is the approximate scientific recording of the facts of past times, but memory is the shaping of historical encounters into configurations which have enormous personal, moral and communal significance. This, it strikes me, ties in to what you said in your introduction: when the term to remember is used biblically, it is anchored in a factual situation, a historic situation, as the launching point for the shaping of that memory and where it leads. That being the case, would you then say that history should be used by moralists in much the same way to validate or non-validate precisely the kind of community and communal memory that was spoken about in Croatia?

Rabbi Prof. Walter S. Wurzburger: Memory by nature has to be selective. And there is a question, what do we want to remember? And there is also a question of what we can actually learn from history, because history itself has no message. It is the question of how to interpret history. It is the question whether a specific historical event speaks to us in one form or another, and this ultimately has to be determined by our own value judgments which, from my religious perspective, ought to be derived from Scripture and from our tradition. In other words, we have to be very careful about invoking history, or even memory, because the mere fact that an event happened may lead us to wrong conclusions.

Yes, the Bible, time and again, reminds us of certain historical events, and Prof. Halpérin was correct in pointing out that references to memory abound in it. But ultimately those historic events that we are asked to remember — be they the revelation at Sinai, or what Amalek has done to us, or the exodus from Egypt — are not simply facts, but they are historic facts which to us incorporate a certain dimension of meaning and religious purpose. For example, when we are reminded to remember “Amalek,” it is not simply for the purpose of commemorating an event, but rather we must resist evil in such a manner as is compatible with the over-all direction of our religious imperatives.

I would also like to clarify a point which was perhaps misunderstood in my own presentation. I did not mean to suggest that our old tradition is completely in flux. There is a dialectical tension between a number of various specific traditions which are part and parcel of our religious heritage and which are modes of interpreting the Scripture. But, at the same time, I indicated that there is also another aspect, that not everything is dynamic. There are merely certain dynamic features within the tradition. And that is why obviously as Jews, we are unable to accept the New Testament because from our point of view, the Gospels are not an

interpretation that we can recognize as being part and parcel of our own faith and commitment. Therefore, there are limits to the fluidity of our tradition. There are even limits with respect to how any particular law can be interpreted.

All I meant to suggest was that there are parts of the many hermeneutical principles that are utilized dynamically within the Jewish tradition. There are also one or two which make it possible at times to recognize changing conditions. And as to the result of changing conditions, there is an impact upon the development of our religious teachings. But I certainly did not want to be misinterpreted as having stated or maintained that the Jewish religion is simply dynamic. There is a dialectical tension between that which is permanent, that which is abiding, and that which is fluid and dynamic.

Rabbi A. James Rudin: I want to ask Bishop Irineos two questions. One: You have diagnosed a problem for us from your perspective; what is the prescription, what is it that you ask of us who are Jews and of us who are Orthodox Christians to do in the situation which is so tragic and which you have outlined for us? I think all of us who believe that God intervenes in history and all of us who try to act to fashion a better world, as Prof. Halpérin has said, would like to know what it is that you would ask us to do now, in our various roles, after you have laid out a very sad and depressing picture that we are quite familiar with.

The second question: You have talked a good deal from your perspective about Croatia and Serbia. I would be interested in your views on the Muslims who are very much in the news, at least in my country; these are the Bosnians who are also part of the tragedy that's unfolding. What is it that you expect men and women of faith to do, and from your own perspective as you see it, about the third tragic partner — the Bosnian Muslims?

Prof. Nicholas Bratsiotis: Allow me to make a chairman's request: let us not forget our topic. Let us understand the spirit in which Bishop Irineos spoke, in order to draw our own conclusions, but we must not bring in dimensions which are different from those already developed by the speakers.

Mr. Mikhail A. Tchlenov: The problem of memory is not only an important problem but also a delicate and dangerous problem. And I don't think it's accidental that the main antisemitic movement in my country has acquired precisely the name "memory" which in Russian is called *pamiat*. I would say that memory in the meaning of *zakhor* is of primary importance, as I was deeply moved listening to Bishop Irineos' analysis of this point in former Yugoslavia now in Serbia. We should remember that the borders which divide the peoples and religions and republics of what has once been Yugoslavia are in effect the borders

which came into existence during the Roman Empire. Actually it's a border between the West and the East established some 2000 years ago.

While speaking about memory and trying to understand what it actually means in the context of a dialogue, I would say that in terms of a historical dialogue between Orthodoxy and Judaism, we should distinguish between different kinds of memory. Memory has many layers and many forums. There is the historical memory which has been discussed here quite intensely. I would say there is religious memory, I mean the memory of those basic foundations which lie actually under both religions. Both sides started with this kind of memory which really brings them together. There are also stereotypes of memories, because memory, like history, is not just a scientific or pseudo-scientific list of facts. It is a kind of contemporary retrospective realization of what happened in a very stereotypic way.

I would say in my country Orthodoxy and Judaism have been in a constant situation of dialogue from the beginning of Christianity in Russia. I think Bishop Ilarion's polemic dialogue with Judaism in the tenth century shows us that this dialogue started at the very beginning and is continuing until now. Certainly Orthodoxy gained a lot from this dialogue. And after that, it certainly enriched spiritually the life of the Christians in Russia in the larger sense. But here I think it's very important to try and find ways of mutual understanding, at least to find those stereotypes where we really can come together — mutual enrichment, mutual help, mutual support, mutual sharing of tragedies, mutual sharing of good events. All this took place in Russian history, both in Christianity and in Judaism.

I don't think that the dialogue should be a direct continuation of medieval disputations between a rabbi and a priest, which normally both sides interpret to their advantage. I think probably in terms of practical things here, what we really can try to find, at least, are the positive stereotypes. That is the only way of memory which really can help. Otherwise, again, I can't help feeling that what happens now in my country is that the antisemitic movements are fighting not actually the Jews, but ghosts, some kind of mysterious evil beings who are not their neighbors, who are not their co-citizens, who are not of the religion from which once Christianity emerged.

Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder: We have heard about the conflicting value of memory which, on the one hand, is the basis of much of our love and our belief, and, on the other hand, is the basis of much continuing hatred and prejudice. Let me give an example in the light of what is happening in the Jewish world today, and especially in the United States. At the university or college level there have grown up hundreds of departments of Jewish studies. And the most sought-after courses in these

departments of Jewish studies are the so-called "Holocaust Studies." This is where the young Jews very often find their Jewish identity, in other words in the story of the *Shoah*, in the background of antisemitism. But often they get a negative Jewish identity, instead of looking for the positive aspects of the values of Judaism.

In the rabbinical tradition, in the Jewish hermeneutics about which we were talking today, the rabbis point out that in the two versions of the Ten Commandments, one of them (Deut. 5:12) says, "Observe the Sabbath day," and the other (Ex. 20:8) says, "Remember the Sabbath day." This is combined in a Sabbath evening hymn (*Lekhab Dodi*) made by a kabbalistic poet of Greek origin who says, "The Only God made us hear 'observe' and 'remember' in one utterance." This is the message that we are trying to get to the young Jews today, that it is not enough just to remember on its own, because memory on its own can have a completely negative impact, as we have heard from our friend from Serbia. It has to be combined with the positive aspect of the observance.

Rev. Prof. Theodore Stylianopoulos: I am deeply grateful to both speakers, not only for their presentation of the significance of memory and responsibility, but also for mentioning the *Shoah* as well as the genocide of the Serbs by the Croats during the Second World War. With due respect to Prof. Bratsiotis, our chairman, our academic meeting has to do with issues of life and has practical implications. We need to listen to the pain of one another. We need to recognize that naturally our pain confronts us first, and we want to impress the other side with our pain.

I was slightly, to be honest, disturbed by Rabbi Lincoln, who seemingly passed over the genocide of the Serbs quickly and went on to ask about the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia. Of course our memory, if it serves us well and we go back, also includes Muslims; we all know that there has been a lot of cleansing of Christians from Muslim lands for centuries. Christianity in northern Egypt, Christianity in the Middle East, Christianity in Asia Minor. So, we have long memories in these matters. We don't need to compare who has suffered most. But we do need to recognize that we do have these pains and try to talk about them, in the spirit of memory and responsibility that the speakers spoke about. And especially as Prof. Oikonomou said, remembering above all the Lord God. But we should listen to our pain, and allow room for that and draw the appropriate implications of memory and responsibility.

Rabbi Mark L. Winer: The title of this session is "Memory and Responsibility," which implies that there is a dialectical relationship between the two, and that indeed the memory, however painful it might be, has no limit. I was very moved by the Bishop's portrayal of the pain of Serbia. And I understand of course, that we may very often get a distorted picture of what's going on in your tortured land.

What I would be interested in hearing from you as a religious leader talking to all of us as religious leaders in our various lands, is how the Serbian churches react by translating the memory of its tragic past into responsibility in a terribly troubled time and terribly troubled circumstances. All of us share the background of the prophetic tradition which calls upon all of us to muster the courage to speak up when we feel that our covenant with God is being violated, even by those who are our co-religionists or our co-nationalists. We all know from our various experiences the dangers of ultra-nationalism.

What I heard the Bishop say essentially was to offer a justification of Serbian nationalism in the name of the memory of his country. I know that's just a partial explanation of what is going on. I would be interested to hear how he and his church respond to the troubles, in terms of expressing religious responsibility to shape the outcome of what is going on right now toward more just ends.

Prof. Nicholas Bratsiotis: Our speakers now have the opportunity to respond to your comments.

Bishop Irineos of Batska: I will try to be short in my answers to all the questions which have been addressed to me.

My dear Rabbi Lincoln asked concerning the theme of Bosnia. I would like to mention that I did not want to analyze the problems of Bosnia, or of Croatia or of ex-Yugoslavia, but, through my direct personal experience, to show what the subject of memory and responsibility means — it means that our responsibility here and now depends upon how we live and how we consider the subject of memory. If we must repeat it, I think that, not for tactical reasons, but for personal witness, I spoke the most severe words about my own people and stressed that without memory — not only historical memory, which Prof. Oikonomou mentioned, but also ontological, biblical memory — my people have failed their responsibility and allowed themselves to be found in a world which does not belong them.

In this context I am grateful to Mr. Tchlenov for saying that the present region of Yugoslavia has a need for long-ago memories where a thousand years separated West and East, which has not been considered in recent history. Consequently I referred to all, Serbs, Croats and Muslims, and said that all of them — some of them because of irresponsible loss of memory, others because of a lack of the sense of responsibility, etc. — all have been in the same situation of pain and tragedy to one degree or another.

As to the question concerning violence against women, the attitude of the Church is clear. All crimes, especially this kind which is one of the most disgusting, are equally condemned. Those among the Serbs who have done such crimes are equally inhuman. With the criteria of

memory and responsibility, their crimes must be written down not only for history but particularly because of our faith in the divine justice. In any case, I wish to stress now in parentheses that our friends from America and other countries must not rely on the false information and propaganda which have been made against the Serbs. The evil happens in the midst of all fighting parties. From the questions which have been heard I draw the conclusion that there is the impression that only Serbs are fighting and committing cruelties and violent things and not others. This is not the case. Certainly, unfortunately, everyone does the same — who does more or who does less, this will be judged by the God of justice. His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostomos has already answered this question, by referring to the letter of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Serbia.

Another very important question is the one asked by Prof. Sabethay in reference to those who want to pass over in silence or minimize the tragic event of the genocide of the Jews during our century. My opinion is, and I think I express the opinion of those who share the same faith with me, that the person who tries to hide the memory of a terrible crime such as a genocide or, even worse, to relieve the responsibility from those who have perpetrated this crime, is himself a participant in this crime in a greater degree and form, because he commits genocide on the same sacred memory of the victims. Those who kill in an inhuman way so many human beings are perhaps less criminal than those who want to erase the memory of the victims. This of course is the case of the Holocaust of the Jewish people, but also for all the holocausts which Prof. Stylianopoulos mentioned: the genocide of the Christians, that is of the Greeks of Asia Minor and of the Middle East.

I think I was quite clear about the tragedy which the Serbian people have lived. Certainly, as Rabbi Winer stressed, it is not permitted in any way to us to interpret the memory of these calamities of the past as permitting an unethical or irresponsible act of the present. I fully agree with this. Only the spiritual, essential ontological dimension of memory, beyond history and psychology, within our faith and tradition, can save us from the temptation to find an alibi for our inhuman behavior from within the hardships of our ancestors or from our past. Allow me to remind you that this temptation is a danger for all of us if we are not spiritually awake. We Christians and Jews must resist the temptation with the criteria of the biblical and traditional sense of memory, and from which stems responsibility as it was examined and developed here.

With respect to the question asked by Rabbi Pearlson, my humility expects from all of us, Christians and Jews, with respect to the tragedy in my country, exactly a healthy cultivation of memory and responsibility as a priority. Today, the worst weapon is false information, abuse or ir-

responsible use of the mass media. Is it possible each time for the creators of a new order of things — Hitler already called his system a new order — to satanize whomever they like, and as they like, especially with the irresponsible and immoral abuse of today's modern technology and mass media? Yesterday, someone could — even today in some environments — present the Jews as the bearers of evil on our planet.

I think that at this moment in the Western world faces have been turned against the Serbs because they cannot enter in some place and schemes of things. Therefore, they are shown as the bearers of evil in a similar way which the Jewish people painfully experienced. Tomorrow it could be some other people who have this same fate. That which we all must stand up for is the basic criteria which were examined here: real memory and responsibility. The same also prevails for all Muslims who are suffering alike in Bosnia, however, without any justification for ethnic cleansing. We must not forget that this is not only applicable to the three fighting parties in Bosnia, but unfortunately in all wars from the first one between Abel and Cain to our present-day wars on the earth. There were only two brothers and the one destroyed the other because the earth was not enough for them: this was the first cleansing! Therefore even until today ethnic cleansing is practiced in all wars. I wish to remark only without any malice that the Americans cleansed the population of North America. This of course does not mean that someone else today has the right to plan something analogous against the Americans. So that these ethnic cleansings are not repeated — the unholiness of this history of wars — what is needed is holy memory, memory of God, memory of salvation, but also the analogous responsibility.

Prof. Jean Halpérin: Really, I must confess that I am overwhelmed. I thought that by setting the topic for this session, "Memory and Responsibility," we would state the obvious, and I am happy to see, judging from the numerous and important questions that were raised in the discussion, that so much will remain to be said on this subject. Maybe, Metropolitan Damaskinos, you should start to think of a special consultation, in some time from now, with one topic on the agenda, "Memory and Responsibility."

Having said this, I am of course not able to pick up each and every question which has been asked, but I would like to reply to Prof. Oikonomou that I find it difficult to delineate memory into categories. You want to know whether I was referring to psychological memory, or religious memory, or objective memory, or ontological memory and so on. Well, the moment I start to utter the word memory, I think it is an obvious combination of all these dimensions and possibly even many others.

I was moved to hear Prof. Stylianopoulos explaining our need to listen to each other's pain. It is what a Hassidic story had already taught me, "that a man who doesn't know what pains his friend, cannot call him his friend." Friendship rests on the knowledge of the pain of the other, and therefore we must go one step further. And here I refer to one of my friends and teachers Emmanuel Levinas, who very beautifully tells us not to rely on God to act in our stead. Each of us is fully responsible for what he does or does not do and for the way in which he absorbs the lessons of history which he has been given. Levinas, in fact, would tell us that in order to be fully worthy of the condition of the human being, one is condemned to sleeplessness, insomnia, because we don't have one single minute to waste to be sure to take care of each and every one.

I would like to remind you, and again Prof. Oikonomou, I am not trying to be facetious by quoting another verse of Scripture, but if you read carefully the beginning of chapter 18 of Genesis, Abraham is sitting in front of his tent, the day is warm, God appears to him. And he looks up and he sees three men standing next to him. Decades ago, Franz Rosenzweig, Maurice Blanchot, and others, have stressed this very simple and very beautiful encounter in the desert where Abraham welcomes these strangers without knowing them. By this very gesture he testifies to the presence of God and God Himself is seen in the way in which I relate to the other. Therefore, the next step, when speaking of memory, is that we have been taught either by our faith or by our experience or by history that indifference in any case is no longer allowed. Because we have seen, as I said earlier, with our own eyes where indifference or negligence or self-complacency could lead. We shall never be able to explain the *Shoah*, but we have been taught by that tremendous event that everything must be done never to forget what happened, not only for the sake of remembering, but to make sure that it doesn't happen ever again.

This, therefore, brings me to another reply to a question asked by Prof. Oikonomou about forgetting. Indeed, we should not confuse memory with vengeance, as you said. I think that forgetfulness can depend on the degree of the event. What I tried to say, and I was very happy to feel very close to Bishop Irineos in this respect, is that amnesia is in itself loss of identity and of responsibility. Memory therefore is a factor of fidelity, of faithfulness and a permanent on-going teaching and lesson. Therefore, and here I would beg to differ from my friend Rabbi Wurzbarger, I don't think that we can easily accept the idea that every memory is bound to be selective. Where we must be careful, however, is to know why we select certain events rather than others. And this is why we must be careful when speaking of memory, not to let it be instrumental-

ized so as to manipulate it, as it were, in our own interests or for our own sake.

Metropolitan Chrysostomos raised a question of the dynamic character of tradition and asked me whether I would not therefore agree with him that the New Testament is an enlargement or development of the First Testament. Well, I don't think this is a proper place to engage in a debate on that particular subject. But I want you to realize that whenever I read your Scriptures, I am struck to see that so much of the advice they contain comes directly from my Scriptures. And therefore, I don't want to arbitrate between the quality of the two books, of the two traditions, but I don't think we should over-emphasize the difference in nature between the one and the other.

I would like to close by quoting a very famous dialogue between a Russian Jew and an Orthodox Russian. I am referring to the dialogue between Lev Kazavin and Aaron Steinberg. Both of them were men of great quality, of great truth, and there is a memorable exchange of letters between them where each tells the other what it means to be a Russian Jew in Russia and what the Orthodox Christian expects of the Jew.

Prof. Nicholas Bratsiotis: I would like to thank the two speakers who had the kindness to respond to the questions, and I apologize to those whom I didn't permit to speak due to limited time. Thank you.

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