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M. Shawn Copeland
Boston College

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The Risk of Memory, The Cost of Forgetting¹

Dr. M. Shawn Copeland
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

*Not everything that is faced can be changed,
 but nothing can be changed until it is faced.*
 James Baldwin

If we can truly remember, they will not forget.
 Miller Williams, "Of History and Hope"

Abstract: This article focuses on the risk of memory and the cost of forgetting. Memory, and the act of remembering both individually and collectively as a society, involves risk to a society's present, past, and future. Forgetting comes at a price exacted by the past, but paid in the present for the future, even as nations sometimes choose to forget. This thesis is developed in three parts – common meaning and memory as grounding a community; the cost of forgetting so as to erase memory of wrongdoing; and the terrible implications of the cost of forgetting in the context of the shooting at Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church on June 17, 2015 in South Carolina. When we risk memory, we collectively take responsibility to embody ethical responsibility for the past, in the present, and for the future.

Keywords: Memory, forgetting, forgiveness, reconciliation, shooting

Memory makes us who we are; it provides fixed points by which to take our bearings, to steer our lives. To lose memory is to look with indifference on those whom we have cherished and loved, to misplace treasured possessions, to disregard valuable experience. In the *Philebus*, Socrates says to Protarchus, "If you had no memory you could not even remember that you ever did enjoy pleasure, and no recollection whatever of present pleasure could remain with you" (Plato, *Philebus* 21c). Without memory, time present, time future, and time past fuse. Without memory, a spouse or lover, friend or relative, daughter or son is simply a face, an interesting face, perhaps, but strange and unknown.

¹ This is a revision of the Raymund Schwager, S.J., Memorial Lecture, given at the Colloquium on Religion and Violence, July 10, 2015, Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.

To lose memory is to lose, in large measure, capacities to understand, to make sense out of what is happening, to make meaning. Amnesia or Alzheimer's disease sadden and frighten us, because memory is tied so closely to identity. To lose memory is to lose oneself.

Yet, the power of memory may not always be so salutary or benign. Memories of war or genocide, of interrogation or torture, of physical or sexual assault induce anxious, confused, and conflicting responses. Perhaps, a necessary suppression of memory functions to safeguard psychic health, for when traumatic memories swim up into consciousness, dreams bleed into nightmares often inducing "literal return" of the event against the will of the suffering individual.²

Memory, individual or personal as well as common or shared, is an intentional and selective act. It sorts and categorizes, erases and embellishes, conceals and reveals. And, "While memory requires time to become what it is, time also hinders memory."³ Memory may fade, may be filtered or altered or manipulated. Forgetting is the opposite of memory. Forgetting includes *both* unintentional failures to notice something or someone *and* intentional acts of erasure or deletion of what once was known.⁴ Perhaps, unintentional forgetting holds some practical utility, preventing us from an overload of minutiae or distractions that could prove detrimental to well being. On the other hand, forgetting as an intentional and active "strategy of avoidance, evasion, [or] flight entails the same sort of responsibility as that imputed to acts of negligence, omission, imprudence, [and] lack of foresight."⁵

For religion and politics, memory and forgetting raise serious, even, ontological questions. Within these two powerful spheres of

² Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," 200, in *Theories of Memory: A Reader*. Eds. Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); see also, Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* 2nd ed (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), xiii. "The 'return of the repressed' in symptoms and dreams is itself opaque in its significance; the why of their appearance is mysterious and hence calls for active interpretation. The highly encrypted character of what returns signifies that it is riddled with forgetting; the façade of symptom or dream is oblivious to its origins," xiii.

³ Gerhard Richter, "Acts of Memory and Mourning: Derrida and the Fictions of Anteriority," 150, in *Memory, History, Theories, and Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

⁴ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 145.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 449.

human life, common memory possesses an ethical function: the *mnemonic* act must be undertaken seriously and rigorously, must be open to past and future, to reverence and lament, to punishment and reparation—and above all, in religion, to transcendence. The *mnemonic* act binds as well as releases, strengthens as well as debilitates, deconstructs as well as reconstructs.

By clarifying the practical-political (and mystical) implications of *anamnesis*, of the *dangerous memory* of the passion and death of the Crucified Jewish Jesus for the practice of Christian faith, Johann Baptist Metz confronted the covert corrosive intermingling of politics and religion. He uncovered the fateful memory of German complicity and cooperation at individual, communal, cultural, social, and religious levels with the Nazi attempt to destroy the Jewish people. At the same time, Metz pointed up technical rationality's obsession with short-term goals and refusal to reflect upon the long-term implications of its decisions. Metz showed that what is at stake in the competition of the furtive, fast, and furious is the casual *forgetfulness* of the Body of Jesus of Nazareth, *forgetfulness* of the bodies "piled up"⁶ by force and expropriation, coercion and cruelty. The Christian exercise of memory purports to be radically different: Christian memory seeks to challenge and transform the perspectives and *praxis* of believers, for at the heart of Christian memory lies the broken body of Christ; Christian discipleship requires imitation of Him.

My overall concerns here are the social implications of common or shared memory.⁷ My thesis argues that memory (remembering) involves risk to a society's present, past, and future, *and* that forgetting comes at a price exacted by the past, but paid in the present for the future. Still, memory may pose so burdensome a risk that a nation *chooses to forget*; yet, that very *forgetting* presents a formidable obstacle to healing and reconciliation, and, thereby, jeopardizes that nation's present and future. I will elaborate this in *three parts*: The *first part* considers common meaning and common memory as grounding community in support of creating a nation, then, develops *collective taking*

⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (1992; New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 101.

⁷ The terms collective memory, common or shared memory may convey different, even conflicting, meanings as these are posed by different theorists. I use these terms here to my own purpose, but my basic understanding and use of the notion of common memory draws on the work of philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan in *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972).

responsibility as a central risk in bringing collective or national wrongdoing to the foreground of common memory. The *second part* probes the *cost of forgetting* as a nation wrestles with attempts to erase memory of wrongdoing. The *third part* gestures toward the most heartbreaking implications of the risk of *common memory* and the *cost of forgetting* as these converge in the horrific shooting of Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, DePayne Middleton Doctor, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel Simmons, and Myra Thompson at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church on June 17, 2015 in Charleston, South Carolina.⁸ My focus on the deaths of these nine women and men ought not to be taken that imply that I am unconcerned or unmoved by the deaths of black and brown women and men in police custody or at the hands of police or of their designated associates as in the cases of Trayvon Martin and Eric Harris.⁹ Certainly, the deaths of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland, Sandra Bland in Waller County, Texas, Aiyana Stanley-Jones in Detroit, Reika Boyd in Chicago, Andy Lopez in Santa Rosa, California, Akai Gurley in Brooklyn, New York, John Crawford III in Beavercreek, Ohio, Ezell Ford in Los Angeles, California, *must never be forgotten*. These deaths denote loss of human life, the murder of human persons—a spouse, a daughter or son, a grandchild or grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a niece or nephew, a cousin or friend. These deaths manifest a most egregious breakdown of humane values in our culture and the collapse of the system of criminal

⁸ The Reverend Norvel Goff, a presiding elder of the 7th District AME Church in South Carolina, was reported as saying, “The blood of the ‘Mother Emmanuel 9’ requires us to work until not only justice in this case, but for those who are still living in the margin of life, those who are less fortunate than ourselves.” <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/charleston-shooting-emanuel-african-methodist-episcopal-church-hosts-first-sunday-services-since>. Although it well may be too soon to write dispassionately and adequately about this terrible event, as a practicing Christian and a theologian, for me to pass over this event would be *immoral*; as an African American woman, surely the descendant of enslaved Africans, to do so would be *impious*; as a citizen of the United States of America, it would be *irresponsible*; as a scholar, it would be *cowardly*.

⁹ Trayvon Martin was shot to death on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida, by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch captain for the gated community in which Martin was visiting. Zimmerman was charged with and tried for second-degree murder, but was acquitted on all counts. Eric Harris was shot to death on April 2, 2015 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, by Reserve Deputy Robert Bates, who allegedly reached for his taser but instead pulled out a gun. Bates was charged with second-degree manslaughter involving culpable negligence.

justice in the United States.¹⁰ *These women and men and youth must never be forgotten.*

THE RISK OF COMMON MEMORY

All memories, Maurice Halbwachs maintains, are communal. Individuals do not remember *alone*, but rather “as members of a group.”¹¹ It is within families, friendships, and associations, within communities, within societies “that people normally acquire their memories” and here, too, women and men “recall, recognize, and localize their memories.”¹² Common or shared memory requires and grounds community, and while shared geography may be important, it is not the formal determinant of community—*common meaning is*. Community is achievement of common meaning: Common meaning entails shared or analogous, even, plural experience, common and complementary understanding, judgment, decision, and action. Common meaning is realized in communal choices and decisions, in embrace of common values, goals, policies, commitments, and loves. “Community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgment, common commitments begin and end.”¹³

¹⁰ See William J. Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011) and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

¹¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper-Colophon Books, 1950), 48. There is considerable debate over the role of individual agency in Halbwachs’ notion of collective memory. Paul Ricoeur observes, “it was in the personal act of recollection that the mark of the social was initially sought and found,” (*Memory, History, Forgetting*: 123). Further he points out that Halbwachs’ belief that collective memory is inflected by the individual’s relationship with different groups opens up the very possibility for individual agency, because Halbwachs provides “every consciousness with the power to place itself within the viewpoint of the group and, in addition, to move from one group to another” (*Ibid*). Jan Assmann is critical of Halbwachs’ distinction between history and memory in not seeming to take into systematic account of those collective memories that extend beyond the span or range of a lifetime. Assmann distinguishes between ‘communicative memory’ and ‘cultural memory’ noting the latter’s concern for the distant past and dependence upon specialized practice of transmission.

¹² Halbwachs, “The Social Frameworks of Memory,” in his *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38, 52-53, 171-173.

¹³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 79.

Because a world of different and differentiated experiences and their meanings ranges well beyond any individual's immediate or personal experience, a community and a nation cultivates common memory—sifting, collating, and making available differing and differentiated experiences, expressions, products, and memories of individual and collective understanding, judgment, and action. Common memory conserves and communicates a common past; nurtures a common present, and fashions a common future. Yet, achievement, preservation, and transmission of common memory are neither simple, nor simplistic; in this endeavor, historical memory and critical history are indispensable.

What does it mean to remember—to remember collective or group or social trauma? In recent decades, we have come to understand memory of traumatic experience, particularly, collective or group experience, such as slavery, genocide, internment, ethnic cleansing, hate crimes, femicide, torture, disappearance, and mass atrocities as a political act. Mari Ruti argues, “an excess of memory may be paralyzing, impeding the emergence of new modalities of life, of new passions, possibilities, and preoccupations.”¹⁴ What does it mean to remember—to remember collective or group wrongdoing and how should such wrongdoing be remembered? Public acts of grieving, official apologies, reparations as well as commemorative efforts through museums, monuments, and artistic interventions remain morally and ethically necessary.¹⁵ And, although repression of facts of wrongdoing and violent events may provoke imitation in subsequent generations, immersion in or fascination with narratives of victimization could lead to repetition of those acts or corrosive bitterness or self-wounding.

A nation that remembers wrongs it has committed against subjugated groups or peoples or even oppression wielded against its own citizens in the past, *risks responsibility*. Indeed, for a nation to risk the *collective taking responsibility* for past wrongs stands as a daunting task and cannot be undertaken grudgingly or half-heartedly or under threat. Certainly, collective taking responsibility for past wrongs cannot undo the harm or minimize the gravity, but undertaking such action,

¹⁴ Mari Ruti, “Is Autonomy Unethical? Trauma and the Politics of Responsibility,” 51, in *The Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting: Essays on Trauma, History, and Memory*, ed. Michael O’Loughlin (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

¹⁵ Ruti, “Is Autonomy Unethical? Trauma and the Politics of Responsibility,” 51, in *The Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting*, 51.

Jeffrey Blustein insists, does effect, "a retroactive change in the significance of the past wrongdoing."¹⁶ The wrongdoing now is invested with different meaning "because it is acknowledged *as* wrong and responsibility is taken for it."¹⁷ To quote Blustein again:

by accepting the burden of making amends, the responsible group demonstrates its willingness to accept some pain and humiliation for the sake of the victims and, in do doing, symbolically asserts what was previously denied, namely the moral standing of the victims."¹⁸

Collective taking responsibility for collective wrongs involves three interrelated and socially significant imperatives—*cognitive, affective, and moral*. The *cognitive demand* requires much more than some vague awareness of past wrong, but rather critical and sympathetic inquiry, learning, and understanding. Certainly, this entails an apprenticeship to history as a guide in "discerning and telling the truth about certain events and people in the past."¹⁹ The *affective* calls for engagement with and reorientation of the emotions, for historical explanation alone cannot overcome fear or alienation or shame at wrongdoing or at having been wronged. Through interpersonal encounter, conversation, structured group dialogues, and heightened attention to intersubjectivity hearts may be opened and changed. The *moral imperative* moves a nation's people to action. *Collective taking responsibility* involves moral encounter with festering wounds and foreclosed grievances—neither to appease a wronged group, nor simply mourn these wrongs and render them static, "but to militate on behalf of them."²⁰ To risk responsibility is to risk *action for change*; merely calling to mind evil committed will not remedy evil.

THE COST OF FORGETTING

After the collapse of destructive and violent regimes, Germany, Spain, Chile, Argentina, and South Africa, Paul Connerton suggests,

¹⁶ Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 142-143

¹⁷ Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* 142-143

¹⁸ Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory*, 142-143.

¹⁹ Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory*, 212.

²⁰ Sara Kaplan, "Souls at the Crossroads, Africans on the Water: The Politics of Diasporic Melancholia," *Callaloo*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring 2007): 511-526 at 521.

"needed to take up some explicit position with regard to that past."²¹ Publications of personal testimonies about experiences of torture and oppression carried out under these totalitarian regimes have given rise to the notion of an "ethics of memory."²² Although, forgetting may not necessarily be unethical, forgetting "forced upon human beings against their will or interest"²³ *most certainly is*. Let us consider two types of coerced forgetting: *repressive erasure* and *structural amnesia*.

States, governments, or ruling parties utilize *repressive erasure* to deny historical events or facts, crucial ruptures or breaks.²⁴ Turkish denial and dismissal of the Armenian charge of genocide provides one example of this type of forgetting. The lack of an apology from the United States federal government to the indigenous peoples for expropriation of land and violation of treaties presents still another.

Repressive erasure also may be covert. Through "spatial script[ing]"²⁵ and editing, curators of museums and galleries, designers and architects of public spaces establish "iconographic programmes" that highlight what is or is not of political and aesthetic significance. "In exhibiting a master narrative, the museum's spatial script is overt in its acts of celebratory remembrance, covert in acts of editing out and erasure."²⁶ Consider Richmond, Virginia's Monument Avenue with its statues of Confederate Generals Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jeb Stuart; Confederate Naval Officer Matthew Maury, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis;²⁷ contrast this with the asphalt parking lot that has covered over the historic "Burial Ground for Negroes."²⁸ Achille Mbembe points us toward the "sinister significations" of such

²¹ Paul Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33. Connerton wonders whether forgetting is necessarily a failing. He distinguishes three types of forgetting that "establish and enhance social bonds: forgetting as prescriptive, as constitutive in formation of new identity, and as annulment.

²² Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning* 34; some such testimonies come from Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Jacobo Timerman, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

²³ Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning*, 40.

²⁴ Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning*, 41.

²⁵ Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning*, 41.

²⁶ Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning*, 41.

²⁷ Reportedly a statue to the late Virginia native and tennis great Arthur Ashe has been erected on Monument Avenue. But consider the *weight* of such a commemorative statue in relation to the social and cultural power of white racist supremacy.

²⁸ Michael Kranish, "Remembrance of Crimes Past," *The Boston Sunday Globe*, July 5, 2015, A7.

monuments."²⁹ For those white men and women who embrace the dominative whiteness of US culture such "commemorative" monuments not only participate in but also sustain "heroic narratives of domination" and literally reinscribe and reinforce ongoing white supremacy and arbitrary power.³⁰

John Barnes employed the phrase *structural amnesia* in his genealogical studies to explain the suppression of suspect matrilineal lines in mapping the British peerage,³¹ but it resonates with the notion of *structural embarrassment*. Coined by historian of religions Charles H. Long, *structural embarrassment* constitutes one way to describe the relationship of the descendants of the enslaved Africans to the U. S. population. Certainly, a segment of our population can claim descent from the seventeenth century European (British and French, in particular) settlers; a large and increasing larger group identifies their descent from political refugees or immigrants and, indeed, are global immigrants themselves; and a small number of people may claim indigenous status. Then, there are the 'dark others;' from whence do they come?

How is a courageous and thoughtful, fractious and slaveholding group of men (and women) who, inspired by European Enlightenment ideals, revolted from a tyrannical colonizing power in order to gain political and economic freedom, committed their lives and sacred honor to uphold certain inalienable rights of life, liberty, and untrammelled pursuit of happiness, to pass on through history to their political descendants these values—despite the subjugation of a people, despite the legalization of black *unfreedom*? How is a nation so conceived and so dedicated to liberty and to equality to *acknowledge* and *confess* to a history of slaveholding—*on its own territory*? Its people *turn away from the offending knowledge; gloss over and fudge historical fact; conceal and hide from the very truths they conceal.*

Slavery is the "tough stuff of American memory."³² We conspire to forget, we repress or edit; we delete our knowledge. Scholarly and

²⁹ Cited in Elaine Coburn, "Critique de la raison Nègre: A Review," in *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 3, No. 2 (2014): 185.

³⁰ Cited in Elaine Coburn, "Critique de la Raison Nègre: A Review," in *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 3, No. 2 (2014): 185.

³¹ Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning*, 44.

³² James Oliver and Lois E. Horton, eds. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); see Thomas McCarthy, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery," *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No.5 (October 2002): 623-648.

popular interest in slavery is of recent vintage, notes historian Ira Berlin, and dates from the last years of the twentieth century and the initial years of the twenty-first.³³ Americans are neither exceptional, nor alone in the effort to repress national exploitation, violence, and evil. William Stanner coined the term 'The Great Australian Silence' to critique the persistent refusals of the Australian government to apologize to the aboriginal people for a century (1869-1969) of forcible removal of their children from their families.³⁴

Repressive erasure does not mean that there are no individual members of a dominant culture or group who lack remorse or feel the wrench of conscience when contemplating the damage and destruction done to indigenous peoples or descendants of enslaved or marginalized and minoritized peoples. Rather, this form of forgetting progressively and systematically erases the achievements or contributions or experiences of these groups from common and national memory.

What does a community, a nation *forfeit* when it repressively erases memory of the very presence and condition of those whom they have dishonored, when it overlooks and humiliates those groups into silence and invisibility? Remembering *is* terrifying, especially when the perpetrators of wrong are no longer available, when death and decades disrupt the possibility of apology or direct reparations to survivors. How does a nation restore to a subjugated and oppressed people their languages and ceremonies, their lands and cultures, their hopes and dreams?

No reparations can suffice. But James Baldwin contends, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Traumatic wrongs like genocide and slavery wield a body blow to "social life and damages the bonds linking people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community."³⁵ *By forgetting* its past, a nation relinquishes *social integrity* as well as *authentic moral integrity*

³³ Ira Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First Century America," 1, in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American History*.

³⁴ See William Edward Hanley Stanner, *After the Dreaming* (19601, 1968). Robert Manne, "The Sorry History of Australia's Apology" <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/26/sorry-history-australia-apology-indigenous/> On February 12, 2008, the Australian Parliament issued a formal apology to the Aboriginal people; on the following day, in a formal, public ceremony Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologized.

³⁵ Ricardo C. Ainslie, "Trauma, Community, and Contemporary Racial Violence: Reflections on the Architecture of Memory," 313, in *The Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting*.

and *authority*. Moreover, *by forgetting* its past, a nation risks its unity or cohesion, its very moral existence.

FORGIVENESS

This third and final section reflects briefly on forgiveness in relation to the shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in June 2015. That nine black women and men were shot to death *because of their race*, and that the shooter would express himself in terms of white supremacy reminds us (to adapt a phrase by Michael Ignatieff) the past continues to trouble us because it is *not* past.³⁶ For René Girard collective persecutions denote “acts of violence committed directly by a mob of murderers such as the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death;” collective resonances refer to “acts of violence, such as witch-hunts, that are legal in form but stimulated by the extremes of public opinion.”³⁷ In the United States, the lynching of blacks meets the criteria of collective persecution;³⁸ arguably, the shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church approximates the intent and meaning of collective resonances of persecution. The shooting was an act of violence, *illegal* under the laws of the State of South Carolina and the laws of the United States of America. This shooting registers as a hate crime.³⁹ But, even more alarmingly, this hate crime was enacted within a cultural horizon that honors and postures the putative legitimacy of white supremacy; the political dimension of this violence was enhanced by the perpetrator’s explicit adherence to the insolent memorial and ensign of sedition, the Confederate flag.

³⁶ Michael Ignatieff, “The Elusive Goal of War Trials,” *Harper’s*, March 1996, reprinted in “Articles of Faith, Index on Censorship,” *Harper’s*, September/October 1997, 15, 16-17. Cited in Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 13.

³⁷ René Girard, *The Scapgoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 12.

³⁸ Lynching was a capricious instrument of terror exercised by Northern and Southern whites. Between the end of the Civil War and 1968, ordinary white men and women, tacitly or actively, legitimated the lynching of more than five thousand black men and women. The alleged reasons for lynching blacks included homicide, assault, robbery and theft; but the grounding reasons for lynching were insult to whites, rape, and attempted rape. Most basically, however, lynching sought to maintain white dominance or supremacy, to monitor and control the boundaries of racial caste and class.

³⁹ Legally defined a hate crime is a crime motivated by racial, religious, gender, sexual orientation, or other prejudice.

The Confederate battle flag endures as one of the most persistent and provocative memorial-symbols of the slaveholding South. South Carolinians, both black and white, have protested since it was raised over the state house in 1962 in defiance of desegregation. In 2002 the flag was removed from atop the state house to a pole set up in front of it—still protests continued. After the shooting, photographs of Dylann Roof made public depicted him holding the Confederate battle flag.

After the murders, protests to remove the flag increased and sharpened. On June 22, 2015, South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley called the South Carolina Legislature to take up removal of the flag. On June, 27, 2015, Bree Newsome climbed the flagpole and took down the flag; immediately, she was arrested. During a rally in the wake of the shooting, Michaela Pilar Brown, a Columbia artist said, "We know what that flag symbolizes. We know the hate. We know the danger. It says 'stop.' It says 'you are not welcome here.' It says 'fear for your life.' Take down the flag."⁴⁰ The South Carolina legislature voted to remove the flag and it was taken down with conspicuous ceremony on July 10, 2015.

Dylann Roof sought out white supremacists, whether virtually or actually, who packaged and sold hatred and its symbols as heritage, as tradition, as common memory of white supremacy. In defense of that heritage, tradition, and memory, Roof aimed to ignite a race war between blacks and whites, to purge his community of so-called impure and corrupting elements.⁴¹

That his vicious act failed to accomplish its evil purpose (violent contagion) may be attributed surely to the *Black Christian Principle*: that is, the unwavering belief treasured, taught, and reiterated by *all* black Christian churches—that *all* human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, that *all* human beings are creatures of inestimable

⁴⁰ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/charleston-shooting-emanuel-african-methodist-episcopal-church-hosts-first-sunday-services-since/> The South Carolina legislature voted to remove the flag and it was taken down on July 10, 2015.

⁴¹ Roof wrote in an alleged manifesto, "I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country," <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/charleston-shooting-emanuel-african-methodist-episcopal-church-hosts-first-sunday-services-since/>. About the Confederate Flag, Michaela Pilar Brown, a Columbia artist said at a protest rally "We know what that flag symbolizes. We know the hate. We know the danger. It says 'stop.' It says 'you are not welcome here.' It says 'fear for your life.' Take down the flag" <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/charleston-shooting-emanuel-african-methodist-episcopal-church-hosts-first-sunday-services-since/>

dignity and worth, and that life is precious and sacred. Family members of the murdered women and men offered the murderer *forgiveness*. This gratuitous act attests to active cooperation with divine grace—manifesting faith, hope, and love—in their lived Christian lives.

The slaughter of those nine black women and men was motivated by festering memories of supremacy and control; it reverberated with America's original sin of racism.⁴² But Roof's brutal act was met with forgiveness, love and repudiation of hate, even as family members acknowledged anger and urged his repentance and change of life. *The Washington Post* published expressions of forgiveness made by the victims' families:

The daughter of Ethel Lance said, "I will never be able to hold her ever again, but I forgive you."

Anthony Thompson, whose wife Myra died in the shooting, said, "I forgive you. My family forgives you. We would like you to take this opportunity to repent."

Alana Simmons, granddaughter of Daniel Simmons said: "Although my grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate ... everyone's plea for your soul, is proof they lived in love and their legacies will live in love. So hate won't win."

The sister of DePayne Doctor Middleton said, "I'm a work in progress and I acknowledge that I am very angry. But ... we are the family that love built. We have no room for hate, so we have to forgive."⁴³

How quick we were *as a nation* to embrace their gratuitous act as *our* own! What ambiguous relief we felt! But thoughtful and serious Christians ought not to allow the nation to confuse forgiveness with justice. Nor should thoughtful and serious Christians allow this horrific event to be swallowed up and lost to common memory in the mind-

⁴² Jim Wallis well may be the first to have used this term ("America's Original Sin," *Sojourners*, November 1987; and "Racism: America's Original Sin," *Sojourners*, July 29, 2013) <https://sojo.net/articles/remembering-trayvon/racism-americas-original-sin>. Theologian James Cone has given it wide and pertinent currency, see his "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, no. 3-4 (2001): 1-14.

⁴³ Elahe Izadi, "The Powerful Words of Forgiveness Delivered to Dylann Roof by Victim's Relatives," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/hate-wont-win-the-powerful-words-delivered-to-dylann-roof-by-victims-relatives/>

numbing surfeit of information delivered by various forms of media. Forgiveness neither disregards, nor preempts justice; neither exempts wrongdoing from punishment, nor "sacrifices justice in a foreshortened effort to move on."⁴⁴

The act of offering forgiveness discloses what is but the conclusion of a profound existential and spiritual process, often years in the making, through which individuals or groups come to terms with and *freely respond in love and hope* to those who perpetrate grave wrongs against them. For Christian believers, the injunction of the *New Testament* rejects revenge: "*Do not resist evil. ... Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you*" (Matthew 5:38-48). In Christian terms, the ground of forgiveness is the cross of the Crucified Jewish Jesus; there we discern the wisdom and power of God made manifest. Theologically, this denotes a basic law governing the economy of salvation: God does *not* do away with evil through power, but transforms evil into good. Bernard Lonergan names this 'the Law of the Cross.'⁴⁵ The cross and death of Jesus constitute an awakening: "an enlargement of the present and a new promise for the future."⁴⁶ The crucified Jesus enfleshes *for all of us* the very meaning of being human, of being a person who embraces and lives out God's gracious gift of freedom in love and hope.

The Law of the Cross is the Law of Love: the love of an unreservedly loving God opens us *in freedom to reorient our affect*, draws us out of self-regarding self-concern, releases us from blinding bigotry, scapegoating, and hatred to find beauty and intelligence, goodness and truth in the 'other.' The love of this loving God opens us *in freedom to hope*. Hope commits us not to passive waiting, but to engaged and active trust. Even when the good is denied, frustrated, and delayed, hope strengthens our resolve to act against the radical unintelligibility of sin. Hope sustains us as we relinquish personal securities and advantage for the sake of accomplishing the human good—*together*.

⁴⁴ Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, 15.

⁴⁵ Lonergan writes: "Divine wisdom had ordained and divine goodness has willed, not to do away with the evils of the human race through power, but to convert those evils into a supreme good according to the just and mysterious Law of the Cross" (DVI, 17, art. 23).

⁴⁶ Sebastian Moore, *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger* (New York/ Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1977), 75.

The Law of the Cross is the Law of Love: Love opposes revenge: It may be difficult to withhold vengeance on those who harm us, but it is *not* impossible. The families of the women and men murdered in Mother Emanuel AME Church demonstrate this clearly. It is the very nature of love to resist harming others, to transcend vengeance. And because of such transcendent love, it is possible to move beyond revenge to forgiveness, and beyond forgiveness to reconciliation.

The journey toward reconciliation is neither simple, nor easy to make; daily living by the Law of the Cross is both difficult and hard. In the context of a society or a nation, such reconciliation is even more difficult, harder. Certainly, reconciliation calls for re-education and disciplining of personal, communal, and national imagination, for envisioning something quite new even as it requires preparation for what is unexpected, without foreclosing surprise. This entails individual, communal, and national examination of conscience, concerted 'letting-go' of bigotry, hatred, and false pride. Reconciliation concretely puts hope into action: In other words, reconciliation must be embodied cognitively and affectively: For the new to come about, participation is crucial: we cannot participate as robotic entities, gathering together stubbornly or grudgingly or arrogantly. Commemoration assumes interpersonal interaction. If we are to participate fully, to engage one another appropriately, then we must retrain *affect*. We must overcome indifference and learned social obstacles to spontaneous intersubjectivity. Moreover, commemoration compels us to overcome ignorance of one another. To acquire even rudimentary knowledge of the discrete ethnic-racial, cultural groups of this nation is a large undertaking, but commemorating guides us *from* individual and group to common memory.

According to Edward Casey, the act of commemorating

creates new forms of sociality, new modes of interconnection: between past and present, self and other, one group and another ... constituting a shared identity more lasting and more significant than would be possible in an uncommemorated existence. ... Rather than looking back only, commemoration concerns itself with "what, lasting, comes toward us."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Casey, *Remembering*, 251.

On a Christian account the *only* act of commemoration that lasts, the *only* act of commemoration that transcends and transvalues temporality is the Eucharistic act. Christ comes toward us with the lasting offer of his body and blood and around the table he sets *all are—all must be—*welcome.

The vicious events of centuries of slavery cannot be undone, cannot be erased. Time cannot be reversed, cannot be unraveled. The losses of slavery and the losses that slavery signifies can be neither restored nor redressed. Such losses are irreparable and, Jamaica Kincaid declares, "can be assuaged only by the impossible."⁴⁸ Eucharist *is* the impossible—not stoic forgetfulness, not romantic "glimmerings of a prelapsarian wholeness."⁴⁹ Eucharist radically challenges the *significance* time past exerts over our present and interrupts slavery's 'haunting' of that present. At the same time, Eucharist leads us to uncover and to face up to the lingering conflicts presented by slavery's past and our present. For as Saidiya Hartman reminds us, we too live in the time of slavery: By this she means, we live in the time slavery created. Eucharist draws us together in searching scrutiny of our most fundamental commitments to God and to one another.

CONCLUSION

I have been reflecting on the risk of memory and the cost of forgetting. Forgiveness and reconciliation are ever in our hearts, but falter on our lips, for those words as originating and grounding *can never be cheap*. In risking memory, overcoming forgetfulness, collectively taking responsibility, commemorating, we lovingly embody ethical responsibility for the past in the present for the future. The love of an unreservedly loving God will hold and support us in our risk, will not allow us to forget, and will feed us with bread and wine that lasts.

⁴⁸ Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Fall 2002): 772.

⁴⁹ Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Fall 2002): 775.

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