Towards an Anamnestic Culture

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A contribution to a theology 'after Auschwitz and the Gulag Archipelago.'

Towards an Anamnestic Culture:

A Contribution to a Theology After Auschwitz and the Gulag Archipelago from a Political Theological Perspective

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First I would like to tell you a little bit about my theological background: I belong to a special school of Catholic theology which is called Political Theology. It was developed by the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz in the sixties. Political theology feels seriously challenged by history and society and defines theology as speaking of God in our time. Speaking of God in our time, always, means to give a diagnosis of our time, to find out what is going on in history and society. From this perspective speaking of God means to always speak about the so-called "signs of our time" and the signs, without which no one should speak of God today, are Auschwitz and the Gulag. But how could we speak of God facing these catastrophies?

The following paper includes three parts:

1. Critical reflections on documents about National Socialism published by the Catholic Church after 1945.
2. Political Theology as a Theology after Auschwitz.
3. Memory of Suffering - A theological contribution to a world after Auschwitz and the Gulag.

1. Documents published by the Catholic Church concerning National Socialism after 1945[1]

Firstly it is remarkable that until now there have only been two documents about Auschwitz, and these were published only recently: in 1995 by the German bishops and in 1997 by the French bishops! The other documents merely concern the relationship between Chistianity and Judaism. The most important documents concerning National Socialism were published a long time after the end of World War II – may be too long. Of course, there are documents, published beforehand, which speak of and demand a new relationship between Catholics and Jews. For example, the conciliar decree of the Second Vatican Council "Nostra aetate" needs to be mentioned which is indeed unique within the Catholic Church in terms of its view of Judaism. In the intervening years many regional groups of Catholic bishops have issued statements following the outline of this document. In the famous article 4 we can read:

"It is true that the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what was an act of passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, alive at that time, or the Jews of today. Although the church is the new People of God, the Jews should not be represented as being rejected by God or accused, as if this was stated in the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work and in the preaching of the word of

God, nothing is taught save what confirms the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in its rejection of any persecution against any man; the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and led not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, manifestations of anti-Semitism, against Jews at any time and by anyone."

Probably no other accusation against the Jews by the church is responsible for more Jewish suffering throughout history than the deicide charge. Thus we have the first insight into a formulation of a theology after Auschwitz:

The conciliar decree makes it quite clear that any collective accusation against the Jews, then or now, for the death of Jesus is contrary to Christian teaching![2]

But the last sentence of the fourth article indicates the weak content of the declaration as it does not even mention Auschwitz. This leads to a second insight into a formulation of a theology after Auschwitz:

To speak of persecutions in a general way is a coverup of injustice and suffering.

On 29th of August 1962 the German bishopric published a declaration which includes words of pity, but not of sorrow. Instead of mentioning the annihilation of the Jews it quotes Psalm 130: "If thou, ? Lord, shouldst work iniquities, Lord, who should stand? But on your side is forgiveness."

The German bishops did not seem to be aware that it might be a problem to speak of forgiveness in such an abstract way. Having stood on the side of the perpetrators and bystanders during the period of National Socialism, is this Church allowed to speak of forgiveness without acknowledging what the victims have to say? This question leads us to a third theological consequence: in a world where forgiveness becomes omnipotent, the world itself becomes inhuman.

A remarkable document was published in 1973 by the French bishopric. It adds another dimension because the way it talks about Judaism is much more concrete. Of course, it doesn't face up to the catastrophe either, but it looks at the situation regarding the Jews of today. Thus the French bishops write:

"Beyond the legitimate divergence of political options, the conscience of the world community cannot refuse Jewish people, who had to submit to so many vicissitudes in the course of their history, the right and means for a political existence among the nations." But they continue: "At the same time, this right and the opportunities for existence cannot be refused to those who, in the course of. local conflict resulting from this return, are now victims of grave injustice;"

This document gives us another important theological insight:

To speak about the horrors of the past means, not only facing the Jews who were murdered and who suvived, but to also take into account the problems of present Jewry.

The document "Unsere Hoffnung", published by the German bishops in 1975, is exceptional in many ways. It might be interesting to add the same document, by the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz, which very much influenced this paper. It seems to me necessary to quote a longer part from it:

"Our country's recent political history is darkened by the systematic attempt to wipe out the Jewish people. Apart from some admirable efforts by individuals and groups, most of us during the time of National Socialism formed a church community preoccupied with the threat to our own institutions.

We turned our backs to this persecuted Jewish people and were silent about the crimes perpetrated on Jews and Judaism. (..;) We Germans, in particular, must not deny or oversimplify the redemptive link between the people of the Old Covenant and that of the New, as interpreted and acknowledged by the Apostle Paul. For it was in that sense, too, that we became debtors of the Jewish people. Our speaking of the 'God of hope' in the presence of the hopeless horrors of Auschwitz, gains credibility only by the fact that inumerable persons, Jews and Christians, spoke of and called upon God, even while living in that hell and after escaping from it."

So let me put forth a fitfth insight into a theology after Auschwitz articulated very strongly by Johann Baptist Metz:

We can speak of God after Auschwitz because people prayed to God in Auschwitz. This means that todays Christians owe their faith to the Jews who suffered in Auschwitz.[3]

Let us now take a short and fragmented view of some documents of the German bishops in order to analyse reasons for evading the catastrophe and the guilt of the Catholic Church. Due to the film "Holocaust" the German bishops, on 31st of January 1979, published a declaration, entitled: "Die Katholische Kirche und der Nationalsozialismus", which shows the typical strategies of fleeing the catastrophe. The document "Erinnerung und Verantwortung" published in 1983 belongs to this kind of category as well. In view of time I will just mention a few problems of both documents:

- National Socialism is viewed as a totalitarian dictatorship.
- It is wrong to talk about collective guilt because in a totalitarian state only the individual can decide what one should do.
- The situation of the church during this period is regarded, without exception, as a question of survival.
- The demand to historisize the history of National Socialism, means to write history from a point of view not knowing its effects, or to put it in other words: to write the history of National Socialism without taking into account the catastrophe of Auschwitz:

Briefly, by way of a summary let me argue against these points: [4]

New conclusions based on historical research, teach us that to talk about National Socialism as a totalitarian dictatorship is a myth, which acts as a way to minimilize the responsibilites of the German people and the Catholic Church. What needs to be done is to face the catastrophe in its uniqueness.

The attempt to refute collective guilt without exception functions as a way to deny guilt in general.

To characterize the situation of the church during the time of National Socialism very generally as a struggle for life is to negate the actions of Catholics who colaborated with the Nazis. Of course, not every Catholic and Christian was a Nazi, but every Nazi was a Christian, maybe a bad one, but a Christian.

To refuse to look at history without recognizing its effects, means to give up the advantage of the knowledge of the historian and to change understanding into a cognitive collaboration with the perpetrators. Historiography asks for the reasons of history but without effects we are not able to speak of reasons. There are no reasons without effects; the impact in the future indicates the historical reason.

Let me close this short overview of the documents with two recently published papers:

On 27th of January 1995, 50 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the German Episcopate

published a short, but remarkable, declaration which repeats the important passages of the above mentioned paper "Unsere Hoffnung", and speaks very strongly about the guilt of the Catholics and characterizes Auschwitz as a unique crime. In 1997 the French Episopate accused itself in a public act of contrition over the failure and guilt towards French Jews during the Nazi occupation in France.[5]

Jews feel – as Rabbi David Blumenthal has pointed out – "that in view of the century-long history of Catholic-Jewish tensions the forthcoming document (on Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust) should be issued at the highest level possible which would be encyclical.[6] We must admit that there has been a slow but steady increase in the Christian study of Judaism and in Christian-Jewish dialogue, especially at a grass root level. This does not mean that the various declarations have wiped out anti-Judaism. Today looking at German Catholic Theology we must acknowledge that there is a strong influence of 19th century philosophy and transcendental theology which is irritating, especially when we have a situation, as in my country, in which the New Right and the Neo Nazi movement increases.

2. Political Theology as a Theology after Auschwitz

According to the philosopher Søren Kierkegård we could state: "In order to experience and understand what it means to be a Christian, it is always necessary to recognize a definite historical situation."[7] Since Vatican II the Catholic Church has spoken a lot about the so-called "signs of our times" which are known in the light of faith and "worked out" in the power of hope. But to speak about these signs means to develop a political theology – that means a theology which is unable to distance itself successfully from the suffering of people in society and history and the harm it has caused. A political theology develops from the question of theodicy. The oblivion of this question in the field of Christian theology led us to forget the messianic tradition which could be described as a falling behind Judaism.

Since the resurrection of Christ, salvation seems to be automatically given. Christianity did not expect anything. It has forgotten that the history of salvation is not a history beyond this history or above this history, but it is this history. If the German philosophers Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer are right, this forgetting is one of the main reasons for antisemitism. In their famous philosophical book "Dialectic of the Enlightenment" which they wrote in 1944, they argue that the Christians persuaded themselves with a heavy conscience that Christianity was their own sure possession, they "had to affirm then eternal salvation as against the wordly damnation of all those who did not make a dun sacrifice of reason. This is the religious origin of antisemitism. The adherents of the religion of the Father are hated by those who support the religion of the Son – hated as those who know better. It is the hostility to spirit, grown stubborn in the conviction of salvation. For Christian antisemites truth is the stumbling-block, truth which resists evil without rationalizing it, and clings to the idea of undeserved salvation against all the rules of life and salvation which are supposed to ensure that blessed state. Antisemitmism is meant to confirm that the ritual of faith and history is right by executing it on those who deny its justice."[8]

Christianity should "work out" salvation as a hope which is threatened!:

Political theology leads to history and society, but in order to understand history, we must hear the testimonies of the victims. To view the catastrophe in its impact we must perceive the catastrophe radically – because not having an awareness of history and society and attempting to live outside awareness means, above all, not evading history's disasters. And from an epistimological and moral point of view it also means that there is at least one authority that we should never reject or despise – the authority of those who suffered and suffer in these disasters.[9] But instead of listening carefully to the voices of the victims, the Catholic Church practises confidence in historical science without realizing the dialectic of the enlightenment. Every scientific method implies violence and

"there are hardly any easier ways to dehumanize the dead after their murder than by unconsciously imitating the Nazis and turning them into objects again – this time objects of historical, sociological, or other research."[10]

Auschwitz is the biggest camp of annihilation in human history. It is a symbol for National Socialism because it was the center of it. Auschwitz is not a notion, it is a name of a place imcomparable with other places. Auschwitz is unique. Again and again Jewish victims witness the uniqueness and incomprehensibility of this catastrophe knowing that language is not able to describe it. Therefore Elie Wiesel says: "The more – and the more carefully – people listen to us, the more we realize that our words are not 'getting through'; what we try to say is not what you think you have heard."[11]

But to talk of uniqueness bears a lot of historical and philosophical questions. To deal with these more abstract questions means not to evade the catastrophe because it shows us its aporetical character. The following remarks should show the complexity of the interruption caused by this disaster.

A basic philosophical preliminary of historical research is that every event of history is unique and that therefore in a general way every event is, in terms of its uniqueness, incomprehensible. For example: "If I were to try to describe in every detail, without omitting anything, what happened in the last five minutes, it would take me an infinity of time to do so."[12] But the question is: What distinguishes the last five minutes from Auschwitz? Both events are unique, but Auschwitz is significantly unique and not only this. Auschwitz is a precedent. Further it is a caesura in universal history, an event that changed everything or – like Fackenheim calls it – an "epoch-making event". In order to distinguish Auschwitz linguistically from other historical events which might also be significantly unique, we could speak of, as does the theologian Roy Eckhardt, a "uniquely unique" event.[13] As you can see, talking of uniqueness has vast implications. So talking about Auschwitz is not just a historical problem, it is a philosophical one, too, and not at least a vast theological problem.

Auschwitz is not only unique in the framework of Jewish existence. It is unique outside of this framework too. Never before did a national state represented in its elected leader, decide on and carry out the murder of an entire group of people, including women, the old, children, and babies using every way possible. They killed the people in an industrial way – Auschwitz was a factory.

The Nazis decided that every Jew had to be murdered. This is precedential and also incomprehensible. It is not a rational decision at all. For example: "It's a rational decision for Caesar to try to take over the Roman Empire, but is it a rational decision for Hitler to decide that even if Germany goes down, every Jew has to be murdered?" And could we assume that the answer is that Hitler really believed it? Could this be taken at face value? The Canadian philosopher Emil Fackenheim said: "If Hitler was crazy, how come they let him run a whole country? Almost conquer the world? Or were they all crazy? That doesn't answer anything."[15] Auschwitz is unique because it is incomprehensible. Only the economic and technical precautions are comprehensible, for example the technical improvement of capacities. But the meaning of this annihilation, the annihalation for the sake of the annihilation, is not comprehensible. Maybe, if we were able to comprehend we would become crazy – that's why Elie Wiesel says that the impossibility to comprehend might be caused by God's mercy because it saves us from becoming insane. "For were not Paul Celan, Thadeus Borowski, and Nelly Sachs, among others – all born to make poetry as few others have been – destroyed by the sheer unutterability of that which took place at Auschwitz and the need for it somehow still to be uttered in language?"[16] The philosopher Steven T. Katz writes: "The Holocaust remains always 'beyond comprehension', an event as much has been revealed as remains mysterious, even though we must insist that it be open to scholarly investigation and ordinary rules of historical and philosophical enquiry. By contrast, the Gulag generates rage and dread, anger and sorrow, but no mythification. One is prepared, alas, to find it

all too believeable."[17]

But to speak of the uniqueness of Auschwitz does not mean to say that the victims of Auschwitz suffered more than, for example, the victims of the Gulag. Every suffering is unique. Speaking of uniqueness means that there is a difference which makes Auschwitz a precedent.

Facing the differences is the only possible way to face the catastrophes. Negating the differences leads to indifference!

There are two theories, often used in an evasive way, which are especially important when talking about this catastrophe. The theory of totalitarianism and the theory of fascism. Both are – to use the terminology of Max Weber – ideal-typical concepts and two-sided notions – on the one hand, they are historical and sociological concepts, on the other hand they are political notions. As such they are not sufficient to come to terms with its uniqueness, for example the theory of totalitarianism investigates the condition for the possibility of totalitarianism and the structures of dictatorships, but it doesn't ask why Auschwitz has been possible. Concerning the theory of fascism we must notice that the annihilation of the Jews is a novum despite all antisemitic hate included in other fascist movements. The main points of both theories had already been developed before Auschwitz ever happened. While looking for similarities, it is impossible to face the catastrophe. Both are of course heuristically valueable, but only if we acknowledge their limits.

In looking at the singularity, the uniqueness of Auschwitz, we become aware that National Socialism bears deep theological, philosophico-methodological, politico-ideological and moral problems which make this event an abnormal historical occurance. Another problem of the historiography of National Socialism is that all historical research is rooted in some kind of longing for continuity and identity. Some historians, for example, view history as a way to build up a national identity and it is obvious that a historiography grounded in longing for an unbroken, positive identity is incapable of viewing a negative catastrophe as this would be a counterpart to such a longing, it would contradict and interrupt it. It is impossible to build up a positive identity in the face of Auschwitz. Another reason for not recognizing Auschwitz is the so-called egocentric inevibility, the inability to face the world through the eyes of the other, to view history from the pesrpective of the victims.

Despite these arguments and facts, the uniqueness is often critized. However the critics are mostly unaware that their compulsion to comprehend is grounded at a scientific level, they are unable to overcome the blind spot of its epistemology, because if this event is indeed unique our methods might not be sufficient to reach the heart of the matter. Maybe some day we will be able to explain how it happened – but will we ever be able to explain why it happened? Fackenheim gives three reasons for the negation of uniqueness:

"Firstly, it is hard to believe that a unique event of catastrophic importance should have happened in one's own lifetime .... Secondly, if nevertheless the event must be confronted by thought, then an appropriate category – ... – seems sufficient to reach an understanding; the ingrained habit of thought must resist the insight that, in case the event is in fact unique, these categories, simply because they are categories, are not sufficient to reach an understanding but are actually a means to escape from it. Thirdly, there is the well-known philosophical problem of whether 'the unique' – the unique of any kind – can be thought at all."[18] And Fackenheim closes this passage with the question: "But what if the Holocaust is unique?"[19]

The dead of Auschwitz should have brought upon us a total transformation, nothing should have been allowed to remain as it was, neither among our people nor in our churches. Yet, what has happened to us, as citizens of Germany, and as Catholic Christians? Auschwitz was not a turning point at alL After 1945 there has been no sorrow for the victims only sorrow for our own losses,

such as our national identity. The restoration of our society and the survival of the church as an institution are celebrated as heroic acts. After 1989, the year of the unification of Germany, Auschwitz is threatening to become only a fact of history. The critique of Adorno has fallen silent. Anticipating this evolution he wrote already in 1944:

"The idea that after this war life will continue 'normally' or even that culture might be 'rebuilt' – as if the rebuilding of culture was not really its negation – is idiotic. Millions of Jews have been murdered, and this is to be seen as an interlude and not the catastrophe itself. What more is this culture waiting for?"[20]

To resist these developments Christianity needs to be an anamnestic culture which keeps track of the forgotten – the victims. My church has above all preserved its memory in liturgy. But is hasn't cultivated it publicly. As an anamnestic culture the church would be able to concern itself with the catastrophe because this kind of anamnestic culture which is indicated here is rooted in biblical remembrance. Biblical remembrance is an inability to distance oneself successfully from the terror and abyss of reality through mythologization or idealization. Johann Baptist Metz calls this mentality "poor in spirit". Biblical remembrance is *memoria passionis* – memory of suffering. This memory is dangerous, because practising theology in the face of danger means that mysticism returns to logic, praxis returns to theory, the experience of resistance and suffering returns to the experience of grace and spirit. Such a memory is practical and apocalyptical. It does not by any means take its cue from counterentightenment, for it discloses the traditions that gave rise to interest in freedom. An anamnestic reason is grounded in the following theorem:

"The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition to all truth." (Adorno)

Only anamnestic reason enables enlightenment to enlighten itself again concerning the harm it has caused. *Memoria passionis*, memory of suffering, evokes responsibility – a responsibility which binds knowledge inevitably to the victims.[21] A culture which is rooted in such a remembrance opposes any development which creates an evolutionary coloured history that presupposes that what is past is past and that no longer considers such a development as a challenge which must be interrupted.

The task of a theology after Auschwitz and after the Gulag is to protect remembering and retelling from suspicion of reductionism and homogenization and to develop then communicative value. According to such a point of view theologians have three primary duties:

- to protect the naratives,
- to critize every act of distancing oneself from the suffering of others,
- bearing hope for the sake of the hopeless.

Biblical remembrance is an expression of a conscience unable to take into account the true interests of others. First, this means facing and remembering the suffering of others. As such it is – rooted in dangerous memory – dangerous memory because it interrupts our "high-order-interest" in self-determination and self-preservation and our view of the world. To express it very briefly, in epistemological terms: Immanuel Kant was concerned with *a priori* conditions of knowledge: the *a priori* of time and space. An anamnestic reason views another *a priori* – the *a priori* of compassion. *Memoria passionis* is aware that the need to lend a voice to suffering is the condition of all truth and justice. This means: There is no understanding without compassion.

The concept of an anamnestic reason is rooted in a theory-practice-dialectic, with primary emphasis on practise. Its epsitemological principle is not the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), it is: "You suffer therefore I am!". Or to formulate it in another way: Becoming a subject in history and society means being responsible for the other. Being responsible means

becoming aware of the non-identity of the other and of the object of knowledge – facing an unintentional truth.

Therefore, the concept of an anamnestic rationality doesn't allow the distinction between theoretical and practical reason. Its theory is to act in a practical way. A rationality with *memoria passionis* as its main category is not interested in a formal universal concept of morality because it is context-bound. An anamnestic reason is not afraid of relativism because its corresponding anamnestic ethic always has to do with breaking away from the universal. Compassion is the link between the individual and the universal. As much as an anamnestic ethic is rooted in emotions and therefore in the non-rational, it is not, however, counter-rational because it is a consequence of the realisation of rationality's limits. An anamnestic ethic is a morality of suffering. But in Christianity we have often created a morality of sin which does not include the ability to be sensitive towards others.

In order to develop a concept of an anamnestic ethic as a foundation of a theology after Auschwitz and maybe also of a theology after the Gulag, we have to realize the following: Biblical remembrance is remembering without mythologization – a memory carrying the burden of questions without giving answers. Biblical remembrance is connected with epoch-making events (Fackenheim) which are generally incomprehensible and incomparable. Biblical remembrance makes us aware that uniqueness can not be defined in the language of the discourse, because facing uniqueness means to tell a story, and because the narrative expression is able to speak of uniqueness without rationalizing it. As such, telling a story is a guarantee not to forget, because it is a never ending process.

In facing Auschwitz, we indeed see that the question of how to remember Auschwitz is a question of a morality after Auschwitz, and vice versa. Remembering Auschwitz from a Biblical perspective means to remember for the sake of the victims. It brings about the danger of forcing the victims into objects again, this time objects of our research and our point of meaning. It is a way of calling forth a responsibility based on an asymmetrical relationship supported by the other, the victim, whose otherness is rooted in *his* experience, in his suffering. This memory resists acts of instrumentalization, because it is the other who demands that his sufferring is remembered. Memory thus carries a responsibility which leads to a response. Its responsibility provokes an emotional response. Such a remembrance stands in continuity with the *memoria passionis*, the memory of suffering in Biblical tradition. Due to its one-sidedness it is a radical form of responsibility. Its motion could be compared with burying someone because to bury someone is to act without expectation of any tangible reward.[22] With regard to the dead of Auschwitz memory might also be a kind of "substitute" because the dead have no graves, they lie deep in our memory. A religion defined as an anamnestic culture is grounded in an anamnestic ethic which fights against the powers putting millions of suffering, oppressed people in a faceless mass. Anamnestic ethic bears an anamnestic solidarity which tries to reverse the Nazis' destructions of individual identity. In order to underline this solidarity one might keep in mind the following episode:

"Adolf Eichmann was talking to several SS officers of equal rank as himself. One of them asked how many Jews had been killed. Eichmann answered: 'About five million.' Then another SS leader, who no longer had any illusions about the forthcoming end of the war and its outcome, asked: 'What will happen when the world asks about these millions of dead?' Eichmann apparently snapped back: 'One hundred dead are a catastrophe, one million dead are nothing but a statistic.'"[23]

Anamnestic solidarity is aware of what Walter Benjamin stated: "...even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious."[24]

3. Memory of Suffering - A Theological Contribution to a World after

Auschwitz and the Gulag

I am not very much familiar with the history of the Gulag nor with the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. I am here to learn from you about *this* catastrophe and about the people who suffered. So I must apologize in advance for the last part of my paper.

Nevertheless I will try to speak about Akhmatova because from my perspective her poems might serve as a link between a theology after Auschwitz and a theology after the Gulag. Why? Because in her poems she transforms the horrors of history into remembrance.[25] That's why she is called the poet of death and disaster.[26] She had had to survive so many deaths of her generation that for her the burden of history was overwhelming. In the following I would lik? to explain to you this overwhelming burden in her poem "Requiem".[27]

As you may know Akhmatova wrote her poem Requiem between 1935 and 1940 but it was only recently published in its complete form in the former Soviet Union: in 1987. Instead of writing a preface she added a few sentences in 1957 describing how she stood in line during the imprisonment of her son. She wrote:

In the fearful years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months in prison queues in Leningrad. One day somebody 'identified' me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers): 'Can you describe this?' And I said: "Yes, I can'. And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.[28]

For me the description of this scene makes it clear that her poem is a testimonfy, a testimony demanded by others and for others. Her memory articulated through her poems is an expression of solidarity. She has not just to testify her own suffering but she has to remember the suffering of the others, too. In her poem "Poem without Hero" she speaks of the demanding past. The shadows of the distant past seem to speak to her. And maybe, so she says, this is the last opportunity to evade the happiness which the people call forgetting. Concerning the memory of Auschwitz the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, too, wrote: "Forgetfulness is the law, happiness and condition of life. But here life is wrong."[29]

In her dedication, talking about her experiences in life, she says that not even nature is capable of carrying the burden of such suffering and mourning. Roods of tears rain down on the earth. In mentioning floods of tears you have to keep in mind that Akhmatova belongs to the "Generation without Tears" – a term created by Nadezhda Mandelstam. Longing for tears is the result of a generation which was forced to show hardness. To cry is not a sign of weakness. Longing for tears is a symbol of solidarity with the dead. Tears are the highest expression of mourning, because they show the injustice publicly. But tears are also dangerous because due to its solidarity the crying person is threatened to experience the same fate than the victims.[30] Mourning is the main theme of the following introduction. But the burden of this *memoria passionis* is too heavy for her, so she prays to forget:

No, it is not I, it is someone else who is suffering.

I could not have borne it.

And this thing which has happened.

Let them cover it with black cloths.

And take away the lanterns...

(«Night»).

She doesn't know how to survive with this memory. First of all it seems that forgetfulness is her only means of survival.

For seventeen months I've called you

To come home, I've pleaded

O my son, my terror! – grovelled

At the hangman's feet.

All is confused eternally –

So much, I can't say who's

Man, who's beast any more, nor even,

How long till execution.

Simply the flowers of dust,

Censers ringing, tracks from a far

Settlement to nowhere's ice.

And everywhere the glad

Eye of a huge star's

Still tightening vice.

And she concludes:

"I don't comprehend what I saw!"

In the next part this movement gets stronger and stronger:

Need to kill and kill again

My memory, turn my heart to stone, as

Well as practise skills gone rusty, such

As to live, for instance...

The part "To death" follows.

Death is a persistently recurring topic in her poems. Her biography is penetrated by deaths.[31] She is not afraid of death. Because memory makes her aware that death is not the greatest catastrophe in the world. Remembering means fearing more than death. Thus she wants to die:

You will come in any case, so why not now?

She is not afraid of her own death but of the death of others. She virutally longs for death knowing the bitter truth that her enemy has not ceased to be victorious. The following part is titled: "The Crucifixion". It starts by quoting the 11th song of the Russian Orthodox liturgy of Good Saturday: "Weine nicht um mich, Mutter, im Grabe sehe ich." Despite the fact that she describes herself in her later life as "outside the walls of the church" it is necessary to see how she is fascinated by the Old and New Testament.[32] In "Requiem" she compares her situation with that of Mary Magdalen, standing beside Jesus at Golgotha. But the poem does not finish with the resurrection. There is no resurrection because her position is not that of Eastern tradition but of Good Friday and Good Saturday! So she closes her poem with an epilogue which I would like to quote completely.

And I pray not only for myself,

But also for all those who stood there In bitter cold, or in the July heat,

Under that red blind prison-wall.

And the ships sail slowly down the Neva. She starts praying. Praying and remembering the suffering are connected in a very deep sense. That's why Elie Wiesel, for example, demands to

make prayers out of his stories and not history! Walter Benjamin, too, writes that prayers teach us to remember. Prayers do not lead to solitude because they are expressions of a solidarity with those who suffer today and with those who suffered in the past. For me one of the most interesting things in that poem is that the beginning of the prayer is again the beginning of remembrance:

Again the hands of the clock are nearing

The unforgettable hour.

I see, hear, touch

All of you:

She hears an echo – an echo of the dead, an echo of the past which interrupts the present. Akhmatova often speaks very directly to the dead. According to Brodsky it is the only way to stop speaking from becoming ever-lasting crying. She expresses her wish to name all victims, but she is not able to do so because the perpetrators have stolen the list of the names, so she weaves a cloth of words she has heard, swearing not to leave them anymore. But what will happen when the witnesses are also dead?

And if ever in this country should want

to build me a monument

I consent to that honour,

But only on condition that they

Erect it not on the sea-shore where I was born:

My last Iimbs there were broken long ago,

Nor by the stump in the Gardens,

Where an inconsolable young shade is seeking me,

But here, where I stood for three hundred hours

And where they never, never opened the doors, for me.

Lest in blessed death I should forget

The grinding scream of the Black Marias,

The hideous clanging gate, the old

Woman wailing like a wounded beast.

And may the melting snow drop like tears

From my motionless bronze eyelids,

And the prison pigeons coo above me.

From a theological point of view we could say, that, as N. Mandelstam has pointed out, Akhmatova stings heaven accusing it of being empty.[33] According Brodsky the ability to be compassionate, which we find in the poems of Akhmatova, is only explicable if we look at her Orthodox faith.[34]

A victim has no home; he will remain in exile.[35] The theology which will face the suffering must be a theology of the exodus. A theology of exodus is a theology for orphans, for those who are alone and hopeless.

Conclusion

Human beings are not just storytellers, they are story dwellers. Only by living in the story can we become human. As important as the project of modernity might be we must know that modernity without stories will become inhuman. Stories are the best way to communicate ethical values and lessons. If modernity would be the story to end all stories, if modernitiy would tell us that we no longer need stories – only universal human reason – then the post-traditional character of modernity would become violent. But how could we decide which story is true? Stanley Hauerwas tries to answer this question as follows:

"A true story must be one that helps me to go on, for, as Wittgenstein suggested, to understand is exactly to know how to go on. For when we do not understand, we are afraid, and we tell ourselves stories that protect ourselves from the unknown and the foreign. (...) Thus a true story is one that helps me to uncover the true path that is also for me through the unknown and the foreign- (...) A story which is true must (...) demand that we be true and will provide us with the skills to pull ourselves out of our self-deception, the main one being that we wish to know the truth."[36]

The central ethical criterion is that a true story shapes actual lives and actual communities and results in truthful lives and lives open to the foreign – to strangers and their stories. So Hauerwas concludes: "In welcoming the stranger, we are welcoming God." For him the church ought to be a

form of community in which we "learn to make the history of others our own."[37]

We have to critize Hauerwas in that point because I, for example, as a Catholic and a German should never make the stories of the victims my own story. Instead of being allowed to make the stories of others my own, I should make the true interests of others my own. My story is firstly the story of the perpetrators and the bystanders but this does not mean that I do not remember the stories of the victims. It is through the memory of the stories of the victims that we should view our own story! And then we will see if our story is indeed able to face the stories of the others. Therefore, according to Fasching, we have to realize that the first test of each story remains its openness to questions and questioning. "The second requirement is that the story must permit one to follow the questions wherever they lead, even if that is beyond one's own story."[38] The danger of the stories of the victims of Auschwitz is indicated by the following statement of Elie Wiesel:

"The thoughtful Christian knows, that the Jewish People did not die in Auschwitz but in Christianity."

From this perspective being faithful does not mean putting an end to questions but it should guide us to a new outlook where we will ask more useful questions, as such faith is a faith which seeks understanding. Our own story has to call us into question. Fasching writes: "A master story that does not permit itself to be called into question is ultimately demonic."[39]

Listening to the stories of others leads to questions: But in our theology, we make the answers more important than the questions, we make the finite more important than the infinite, and we end in idolatry – according to Fasching: "We make an idol of our answers."[40]

A Christology that could emerge from Christianity as an anamnestic culture requires not the mentality of Easter but of Good Saturday[41] - which means living between hopelesness and hope. In such an eschatological situation theology has to formulate hope at first not for the bourgois Christians but for the hopeless.

We have to fight for an alliance of the historian and the theologian because there is no understanding of a catastrophe without the soul-searching stories and poems of those who experienced them. Or to put it in other words: We have to argue for an affiance of the Chronicler with Job, as a way of approaching the problems of Auschwitz and the Gulag.[42] Of course the so-called objectivity is essential but as it is understood by most, it is lethal.[43]

If the memorization of foreign suffering is the core of theology, then this theology is not a theodicy but a theology which expresses the hidden face of God, this allows us to speak about a trace of God in the god-loneliness of the face of the victim. The absence of God in the horror on the face of others unconditionally demands me to help them in the situation. The Biblical religions could not for the sake of themselves be divorced from praxis. There is a connection between my responsibility and the presence of God. We theologians often know more about God than about our neighbor, but one cannot serve God without serving others! God is not something above history. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant theologian, who suffered torture and death during National Socialism, the transcendence we are talking about is demonstrated in existing for others.

Notes

1. For the mentioned decrees and documents see my article: J. Manemann, Die Katholische Kirche nach Auschwitz – Zur Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nationalsozialismus nach 1945, in: TRUMAH 5. Zeitschrift für jüdische Studien, Berlin 1996, p. 69-92.
2. See the very informative overview: J. T. Pawlikowski, *What are they saying about Christian-*

Jewish relations?, New York 1980.

3. See: J.B. Metz, Christen und Juden nach Auschwitz. Auch eine Betrachtung über das Ende bürgerlicher Religion, in: J. B. Metz, Jenseits bürgerlicher Religion. Reden über die Zukunft des Christentums, Mainz 1984, p. 29-50.
4. See: J. Manemann, "Weil es nicht nur Geschichte ist". Die Begründung der Notwendigkeit einer fragmentarischen Historiographie des Nationalsozialismus aus politisch-theologjscher Sicht.
   J. Manemann, Zivilisationsbruch und Geschichtswissenschaft: Zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945, in: Orientierung 17 (1995), S. 184-187; Teil 2: in: Orientierung 18 (1995), S. 198-201.
   J. Manemam, Geschichte und Gedächtnis. Plädoyer für eine anamnetische Kultur nach Auschwitz, in: Geldbach, E. (Hrsg.), Vom Vorurteil zur Vernichtung? "Erinnern für morgen", Hamburg/Münster 1995, S. 264-280.
5. See: N. Klein, Drancy im Herbst 1997, in: Orientierung 20 (1997), 213-215.
6. See: D. R. Blumenthal, Letter from Rome, in: *Cross Currents* (Fall 1980), 388-393, p. 389.
7. See: J.B. Metz, Im Angesichte der Juden. Christliche Theologie nach Auschwitz, in: Concilium 5/1984, 382-389, p. 382.
8. M. Horkheimer/Th. W. Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragemente, Frankfurt 1986, p. 161.
9. See Johann Baptist Metz, Christians and Jews after Auschwitz, in: Hya Levkov (Ed.), *Bitburg and Beyond. Encounters in American, German and Jewish History*, New York 1987, p. 309.
10. Y. Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, New York/Seattle 1980, 46.
11. Elie Wiesel, Foreword, in: Peck; A. J. (Ed.), *Jews and Christians after the Holocaust*, Philadelphia 1982, p. X.
12. See for the next passages: Emil Fackenheim, in: Harry James Crags (Ed.), *Voices from the Holocaust*, Kentucky 1993, p: 131-156. Here: p. 132.
13. "When St. Augustine told the pagans of the dying and rising God, they said, 'We knew this all along. Gods are dying and rising all the time'. And he said, 'No, Christ having risen, will die no more.' Now that's an event which is supposed to be 'uniquely unique,' as Roy Eckardt would put it." (See Fackenheim, p. 133).
14. E. Fackenheim, p. 135.
15. See E. Fackenheim, p., 137. "Hannah Arendt has an easy time saying Eichmann is banal. Arendt was a philosopher, so I followed her idea through in her wrtitings – but she never followed it through to its logical end herself, because to my knowledge she never said Hilter was banal, never. So it comes to the old thing, only Hitler runs everybody, and everybody else is banal. As for Hitler, he's crazy. So how come a crazy man practically runs the world? We run around in circles." (139)
16. Johann Baptist Metz, p. 310.
17. St. T. Katz, Auschwitz and the Gulag: Discontinuities and Dissimilarities, in: St.T. Katz, *Historicism, The Holocaust, and Zionism. Critical Studies in Modem Jewish Thought and History,* New York/London 1992,138-161, p. 142.
18. E. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, New York 1989, p. 10.
19. E. Fackenheim, p. 10.
20. Theodor W. Adomo, *Minima Moralia*.
21. See: J. Manemann, Wider das Vergessen. Entwurf einer Kritischen Theorie des Eingedenkens aus politisch-theologischer Sicht, in: R. Boschki/F.-M. Konrad (Ed), Ist die Vergangenheit noch ein Argument? Aspekte einer Erziehung nach Auschwitz, Tübingen 1997, p. 88-118.
22. See: D. R. Blumenthal, *The Place of Faith and Grace in Judaism*, Ohio 1985, p. 18.
23. S. Wiesenthal, *Every Day Remembrance Day. A Chronicle of Jewish Martyrdom*, New York 1987, p.28/29.
24. W. Benjamin, Über den Begriff der Geschichte, in: W. Benjamin, Illuminationen.

Ausgewählte Schriften, Frankfurt 1977,251-261, p. 253.

25. See: F. Mierau, Gedächmisse, in: Anna Achmatowa, Poem ohne Held. Späte Gedichte, edited by F. Mierau, Leipzig 6 1993, 263r-271, p. 263.
26. See: Th. Holtewert, Der Tod in Achmatovas "Venok mertvym", (not published manuscript) Marburg 1992, p. 63.
27. For the following quotations from "Requiem" see: Anna Achmatowa, Poem ohne Held Späte Gedichte, edited by F. Mierau, Leipzig 6 1993, 25-39.
28. See: Anna Achmatowa, Poem ohne Held in: Anna Achmatowa, Poem ohne Held. Späte Gedichte, edited by F. Mierau, Leipzig 6 1993.
29. E. Levinas, *Difficult freedom. Essays on Judaism*, Baltimore 1990, p. 149.
30. See the very interesting interpretation: Th. Holtewert, Der Tod in Achmatovas "Venok mertvym", (not published manuscript) Marburg 1992, p. 39. See also: N. Mandelstam, Generation ohne Tränen. Erinnerungen, Frankfurt 1975, p. 124.
31. See: F. Mierau, Gedächmisse, in: Anna Achmatowa, Poem ohne Held. Späte Gedichte, edited by F. Mierau, Leipzig 6 1993, 263-271, p. 266.
32. Vgl. B. Eichmann-Leutenegger, Die reine Inkarnation der Poesie. Erinnerungen an die russische Dichterin Anna Achmatowa, in: Orientierung (31.10.92), 217-219, p. 218.
33. See: Th. Holtewert, Der Tod in Achmatovas "Venok mertvym", (not published manuscript) Marburg 1992, p. 68.
34. See: Th. Holtewert, Der Tod in Achmatovas "Venok mertvym", (not published manuscript) Marburg 1992, p. 60.
35. Concerning Achmatowa see: K. Tschukowski, Anna Achmatowa, in: Anna Achmatowa, Poem ohne Held. Späte Gedichte, edited by F. Mierau, Leipzig 6 1993, 234-262.
36. St. Hauerwas/R. Bondi/D.B. Burell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy. Further Investigations into Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame 21985, p. 80.
37. Concerning this interpretation of Hauerwas see: D. J. Fasching, Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics, Minneapolis 1992.
38. D. J. Fasching, Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics, Minneapolis 1992, p. 118.
39. D. J. Fasching, Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics, Minneapolis 1992, p. 120.
40. D. J. Fasching, Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics, Minneapolis 1992, p. 123.
41. See. J. B. Metz, in: E. Schuster/R. Boschert-Kimmig (Ed.), Trotzdem hoffen. Mit Johann Baptist Metz und Elie Wiesel im Gespräch, Mainz 1993, p. 51.
42. See for example: Y. Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, New York/Seattle 1980, p. 49.
43. J. Manemann, Die Gottesfrage – eine Anfrage an ein Projekt historischer Sinnbildung?, in Rttsen, J./Mttller, K. (Hisg.), Historische Sinnbildung, Reinbek 1997,373-387.
    See also my book: J. Manemann, "Weil es nicht nur Geschichte ist". Die Begründung der Notwendigkeit einer fragmentarischen Historiographie des Nationalsozialismus aus politisch-theologischer Sicht, Hamburg/Münster 1995.

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