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Remembering the role of the Reformed Churches in the struggle for justice in South Africa (1960-1990): some remarks on the promise and pitfalls of memory and historiography¹

ABSTRACT

The period 1960-1990 represents a dramatic – and also traumatic – period in South African church and theological history. The story of the Reformed churches during this period is inextricably interwoven with the theological support of the ideology of apartheid *as well as* the story of the theological struggle against the injustices of apartheid. With this in mind this essay addresses the question: “How should we remember the role of the Reformed churches in South Africa in the struggle for justice between 1960 and 1990?” The essay attends to various aspects of this question, offering some clarification and qualification in the process. The article argues, in addition, that an engagement with the role of the Reformed churches in South Africa in the struggle for justice requires an awareness of the promise as well as the pitfalls associated with the attempt to remember and to represent the past.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I offer some remarks on the question: “How should we remember the role of the Reformed churches in South Africa in the struggle for justice between 1960 and 1990?” The various sections of this essay address different segments of this broad question. Firstly, I attend to the last part of the question, with its reference to the period 1960-1990. Then in a somewhat longer section, I make a few remarks about the conceptually rich notion of “remembering”, followed by some brief observations about the equivocal phrases “the Reformed churches in South Africa” and “the struggle for justice” respectively. I conclude by underlining the importance of the question: “How should we remember?”

REMEMBERING 1960 – 1990

Both 1960 and 1990 are dates associated with dramatic events in South Africa, and as such they serve as important historical markers. In 1960, the Sharpeville massacre took place – an event that sent shock waves through the country and also caused an international outcry.² And in 1990, the State President at the time, F.W. de Klerk, gave his famous speech in which he unbanned several political parties, including the ANC, and announced the release of some political prisoners, most prominently Nelson Mandela, thus ushering in a period of transition

1 A slightly longer version of this paper was read as the opening address at the conference “The Reformed Churches and the Struggle for Justice in South Africa: Remembering 1960-1990”, 14-16 May 2012.

2 See Lodge, T. 2011. *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

which led to the first democratic elections in 1994.³ In South African church history, too, 1960 and 1990 serve as important historical markers. In 1960, an important and controversial ecumenical consultation took place at Cottesloe Residence (in Johannesburg), and in 1990 another eventful consultation was held near Rustenburg. The decades between 1960 and 1990 were, without doubt, a dramatic and also traumatic period in South African church history as churches, ecumenical bodies, church leaders and theologians responded in their different ways to the realities of apartheid South Africa. One can argue that these various responses not only signalled a struggle to justify or critique apartheid, but also reflected a struggle or contest for Reformed identity.

On the one hand, it is therefore quite easy to make a good case for attending to the period between 1960 and 1990. On the other hand, we should also note, as historians and church historians often remind us, that periodisation is a tricky matter. It is, for instance, impossible to speak of Sharpeville and Cottesloe without speaking of the “volkskongresse” (national congresses, or congresses of the *volk*), protest campaigns and ecumenical conferences of the 1950s. In the process, it is not easy to resist the temptation to go further and further back into history, since events preceding 1960 cast an illuminating light on the decades which followed. In a similar way, one can also ask: Why stop at 1990 and not, say, at 1994? Although there are some good reasons for the focus on 1960-1990, demarcations such as these are in some way also arbitrary and therefore not to be cast in stone. The pre-1960 and post-1990 periods in South African (Reformed) church history also invite and necessitate thorough further reflection.

There is another reason which should prompt at least some hesitation on our part as we venture to describe and to interpret the role of the Reformed churches in South Africa between 1960 and 1990. In 2012, I attended a thought-provoking talk in Pretoria (in a café just across Church Square) by Charles van Onselen, one of South Africa’s foremost historians, who is well known for highly acclaimed works such as *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985* (published in 1997) and, more recently, *Irish Banditry in Southern Africa: 1880-1889* (published in 2010). In his talk, Van Onselen spoke on what he called his “house rules” for doing history in South Africa. One of these house rules stated, or at least that is how I remember it: “Do not study anything after 1945, since this will be ‘a version of journalism.’” We should keep this remark in mind, since there is indeed much to say for the argument that good historiography requires at least some chronological – and perhaps also emotional – distance. In many ways, we are still too close to the period, and later generations of historians and theologians will be able to see things which are obstructed from our view now. This said, one can also argue – again with good reasons – that a certain closeness to, and even participation in, events (with the accompanying vivid memories and eyewitness experiences) can also generate valuable historiographical documents. Perhaps one may say that both distance and participation have something to offer for responsible historiography, and that one can benefit from both (relative) historical distance and participatory memory.

REMEMBERING 1960 – 1990

If one attends to the questions related to the role which Reformed churches played in the struggle for justice in South(ern) Africa between 1960 and 1990, one is fortunate to have

³ For a publication with a chapter on 2 February 1990, see Esterhuysen, W. 2012. *Endgame: Secret Talks and the End of Apartheid*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, especially 243-255.

access to many people who still have vivid memories of this period; some of them even played an active and leading role in this history. These memories are an important resource for a historical engagement with the period. History, one can argue, is inextricably tied to memory. Memory is rightly described as the womb or the matrix of history. It is, as the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur noted in his monumental work *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the soil in which historiography is rooted.⁴ We should therefore affirm the close link between memory and history, albeit that we should also acknowledge that both memory and history are fluid conceptual categories with multiple senses and complex genealogies.⁵

Throughout the ages, people have marvelled at our capacity to remember things, as Augustine famously did in Book X of his *Confessions*,⁶ and we also have fascinating descriptions of how the “art of memory” has functioned from, for instance, the time of the ancient Greeks until the Renaissance (as captivately chronicled by Francis Yates).⁷ Together with the remarkable capabilities associated with memory, however, we should also register what can be called the vulnerability of memory. We not only experience – often to our surprise – how certain memories suddenly appear in our minds as from nowhere, or that we are able to share recollections from the past, but we are often perplexed and frustrated by our inability to summon memories from their seemingly deep hiding places. Furthermore, for many complex reasons, we remember selectively and we are often downright mistaken in our recollection of events. Something of this is illustrated in the introduction to Karl Sabbagh’s book *Remembering our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us* (2009):

“When I was a child, my mother would recite one of her favourite poems. I remember it like this:

Three ducks on a pond,

And the green grass beyond.

What a thing to remember for years.

To remember with tears.

Recently, I was looking for a commonplace book which I found in a second-hand bookshop. It was handwritten, and there was a poem or passage for each day. On the page for 19 April was written:

Four ducks on a pond,

A grass bank beyond,

4 Ricoeur, P. 2004. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 69.

5 For a reflection on the dialectical relationship between memory and history, see Vosloo, R. R. 2012. *Memory, History, and Justice: In Search of Conceptual Clarity*, NGTT 53, (Supplement 3), 215-227.

6 Saint Augustine 1997. *The Confessions*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 237-283. Augustine writes, for instance, about the “vast mansions of memory, where are treasured innumerable images” (1997, 244), as well as about the ability of memory to bring things to the surface when they are summoned: “The huge repository of the memory, with its secret and unimaginable caverns, welcomes and keeps all these things, to be recalled and brought out for use when needed” (1997, 245). Therefore, Augustine marvels: “This faculty of memory is a great one, O my God, exceedingly great, a vast, infinite recess. Who can plumb its depth?” (1997, 246).

7 Yates, F. A. 1992. *The Art of Memory*. London: Pimlico.

A blue sky of spring,

White clouds on the wing:

What a little thing

To remember for years,

To remember with tears!

Not three ducks, four. Not green grass but a green bank. And two or three extra lines ...
This experience raised in a small way the pitfalls of memory.⁸

Many of us will be able to evoke incidents similar to Sabbagh's example, and much can indeed be said about the pitfalls and problems of memory. Our memory often fails us. Even a committed advocate for memory such as Yosef Yerushalmi writes at the start of his justly acclaimed book *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*: "Memory is always problematic, usually deceptive, sometimes treacherous ... We ourselves are periodically aware that memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties."⁹ Yerushalmi's remark reminds us that we should not sing unqualified songs of praise to memory, but that we should also be attentive to the vulnerability and possible abuses of memory. Thus, when we seek to remember the role of the Reformed churches in South Africa in the struggle for justice between 1960 and 1990, we should also be mindful of the deficiencies and vulnerability of memory. Let me make two brief comments in this regard.

A first comment or set of comments concerns the close relationship between memory and identity. What and how we remember does not merely say something about the past, but it also reveals much about the one who remembers, about who she or he is or wants to be (as well as about the identity of the communities which shape them). The use (and abuse) of memory therefore forms an integral part of our quest or demand for identity constructions, often vis-à-vis others whom we experience as a threat. The fact that memory and identity are so inextricably intertwined raises some important questions for responsible historiography as well: Why are we remembering certain figures and events from the past and others not? Why are we choosing a specific narrative form to represent the past? What are the power configurations which possibly influence our historical recollections? Why were certain events from the past celebrated and commemorated? Why were some rituals and practices perceived as meaningful? Why were the lives, work and legacies of theologians such as John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gustavo Guitérrez and James Cone (to name a few theologians who exerted a strong influence) remembered and represented during this period, often in conflicting ways? More critical questions can be added, following from this emphasis on the close relationship between identity, memory and the representation of the past, but suffice it to say that together with the emphasis on the positive power of memory for the construction of personal and collective identity, as well as for group mobilisation, we should also guard against its ideological capacity. And along with the way in which the acknowledgement of the close link between memory and identity invites a hermeneutic of

8 Sabbagh, K. 2009. *Remembering our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1.

9 Yerushalmi, Y. H. 1982. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 5.

suspicion regarding our own acts of remembering and representation, it can also contribute important insights towards a deeper understanding of the identity of Reformed churches between 1960 and 1990.

A second remark that I would like to highlight concerns the relationship between memory and trauma. Traumatic events previously experienced can create wounds or scars which influence our willingness and ability to engage with the past. In lives and communities scarred by violence and injustice, wounded memory (also on a symbolic level in our collective memory) is something that needs to be worked through, something in need of healing.¹⁰ Some Reformed Christians and churches have entered into spaces which facilitate these processes, while others have shied away from them. In whatever way we engage with our painful past, the fact remains that the reality of blocked or wounded memory should be acknowledged. Given this reality, it is not surprising that the emphasis on memory is often combined – also in the discourse on the role of Reformed churches and our apartheid past – with references to important ethical and theological categories such as “confession of guilt”, “forgiveness”, “reconciliation” and “restitution”. Attempts at historical representation of the past via memory do not occur in an ethical, political or theological vacuum, and we should be sensitive to the way in which this reality enriches but also often disrupts our discourse and practice.

Much more can be said about the use and abuse of memory, but even these two brief and general remarks give us a sense of the fact that memory is at once fragile and powerful. This ambivalent potential of memory – also for contexts such as South Africa, which are associated with the public legitimisation and critique of historical injustice – should be noted; for, as W. James Booth perceptively observes in his book *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*: “Memory has fuelled merciless violent strife, and it has been at the core of reconciliation and reconstruction. It has been used to justify great crimes, and yet it is central to the pursuit of justice.”¹¹

We should therefore acknowledge both the capability and vulnerability of memory in our attempts at representing the past responsibly. Oral history projects play (and can further play) an important role to preserve some traces of the past through the recording and interpretation of narratives and testimonies. Here lies a huge challenge and opportunity for church historical research. In the process, we should certainly be aware of the limitations of memory, since our memories often betray us, but this does not take away the ability of memory to portray what is

10 For some important perspectives engaging South African contexts, see the essays by an interdisciplinary team of scholars collected in Gobodo-Madikizela, P. and Van der Merwe, C. 2009. *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. As the “Preface” notes, this collection “explores the relation between trauma and memory, and the complex, interconnected issues of trauma and narrative (testimonial and literary). It examines transgenerational trauma, memory as the basis for dialogue and reconciliation in divided societies, memorialisation and the changing role of memory in the aftermath of mass trauma, mourning and the potential of forgiveness to heal the enduring effects of mass trauma” (xi). For a valuable earlier collection of essays which includes some theological and ethical perspectives, see Botman, H. R. and Petersen, R. M. (eds) 1996. *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau. On the relationship between trauma, memory and historical representation, see also LaCapra, D. 2001. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, as well as Assmann, A. 2006. *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 93-98.

11 Booth, W. J. 2006. *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ix.

significant and meaningful. Hence we should not let the deficiencies of memory deter us from celebrating the remarkable capabilities of memory to represent the past as well as to sustain identity. Earlier, I referred to the book by Karl Sabbagh, which opens with the way in which a document corrected his childhood memory. Notwithstanding this emphasis, he closes his book by saying:

“But regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of memory, it is clear that our memories are much more intertwined with our identities than had previously been thought ... we sculpt our memories to fit within the outline of who we are, or just as often, who we would like to be. It wasn't the number of ducks on the pond or whether they were on the green grass or the green bank that mattered, but that I had a mother who recited the poem to me while I sat on her knee.”¹²

The ability of memory to represent things from the past which are significant should thus also be acknowledged, as well as – I can add – the way in which memories are carried by ritual and performances.

But our emphasis on the importance of memory (and the concomitant need for oral history projects) should also be combined with an emphasis on the importance of written documents and other artefacts which preserve traces of the past. These sources also provide an important window into the past and can have a valuable critical and corrective function, given some of the limitations of memory.¹³ It can easily happen in our representation of the past that we work with generalisations and stereotypes which are then also transmitted uncritically as a result of ignorance or careless engagement with sources. The emphasis on the need to consult primary sources and to do thorough archival research should therefore be maintained. The quality of church historical research depends largely on the documents which are preserved and archived. We shall be much poorer if we do not preserve or consult primary documents with the necessary archival knowledge and passion. Often, our work with primary sources challenges many of our preconceived ideas and helps us to speak in a more nuanced way about the past.

Along with the emphasis on the importance of primary sources, however, we should remain vigilant against the fallacy that we can move from the sources to (literary) historical representation without interpretation. Access to archives and primary sources does not absolve us from the task of *interpreting* the sources and placing them within meaningful interpretive frameworks and narrative configurations. This implies that, in our engagement with our (Reformed) past, we should not separate the emphasis on the importance of primary sources from hermeneutical concerns. One point of critique against Reformed historiography in the past has been that it lacked the necessary hermeneutical sensibility.¹⁴

12 Sabbagh, *Remembering our Childhood*, 194.

13 The following remark by Alan Megill in his important work *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, comes to mind in this regard: “When history becomes simply what people remember or commemorate, this amounts to a reduction of history to the present thought and action. Memory tells us as much about the present consciousness of the rememberer as it does about the past. Memory is an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present. It is thus itself subjective; it may be irrational, inconsistent, deceptive and self-serving. It has long been clear that, without independent corroboration, memory cannot serve as a reliable marker of the historical past” (2007, 35).

14 See, for instance, Lategan, B. C. 2002. Nuwere ontwikkelinge op die gebied van die geskiedskrywing – ’n geleentheid vir herbesinning na 350 jaar van gereformeerdeheid (Newer developments in the field of

REMEMBERING THE ROLE OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Given the question: “How should we remember the role of the Reformed churches in South Africa in the struggle for justice between 1960 and 1990?”, some remarks on the phrase “the Reformed churches in South Africa” are also called for. To speak of the Reformed churches in South (or Southern) Africa, and more specifically their role in the South African socio-political landscape in the past, is certainly a tricky matter. At the start we should note that the idea of “South Africa” is not an unproblematic construct, and some historians have rightly warned against a too narrow focus on geographical borders when discussing historical events. In addition, we should keep reminding ourselves that something like the Reformed church in South Africa does not exist; we only have different – albeit interconnected – Reformed churches with their own histories and legacies, their own social contexts, practices and also dominant languages. Regarding Reformed theology in South Africa, we can also not speak of one homogeneous Reformed story, but should rather speak – as Dirkie Smit has argued convincingly in a series of important articles – of “a story of many stories.”¹⁵ Yet we should also recognise the fact that notwithstanding the reality of perceived or real isolation, our histories are in many ways entangled with one another. This suggests that we can understand our own complex histories better in conversation with others and through an openness to each other’s histories. Moreover, we should also remember in the process that we are ourselves “othered” in the histories of others. An understanding of the interwovenness of our memories and histories therefore requires that we resist the temptation to think in isolation about what we regard as *our* past and *our* history. Therefore hospitality is also a virtue which is valuable in our attempt to deal with the past in a responsible way. The plea for a methodology of shared historiography also needs to be sensitive to the fragile nature of such an undertaking. We need to be aware of how what we view as founding moments, turning points or events worthy of celebration, may represent a low point, indeed a wound or a scar, in the memory of another.¹⁶

And we should also remind ourselves that the story of the Reformed churches’ role in the struggle for justice is not to be limited to intra- and interdenominational discourses, but that this “story of many stories” cannot be told without incorporating the role of ecumenical encounters and the role of the ecumenical movement. The story of the Reformed churches also invites comparisons with other contexts in which churches grappled with questions of reconciliation and justice.

When we speak about the role of the Reformed churches in the struggle for justice, one should consider official theological documents, declarations and church orders. The role of the institutional churches should not be neglected, and the role of church leaders and pastors

historiography – an opportunity for reconsideration after 350 years of being reformed). In Coertzen, P. (ed.), *350 Jaar Gereformeerd/350 Years Reformed 1652-2002*. Bloemfontein: CLF, 269-276.

15 Cf. Smit, D. J. 1992. Reformed Theology in South Africa: A Story of Many Stories, *Acta Theologica* 12, (No. 1), 88-110; as well as Smit, D. J. 2004. On Adventures and Misfortunes: More Stories about Reformed Theology in South Africa. In Harinck, G. and Van Keulen, D. (eds), *Vicissitudes of Reformed Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Studies in Reformed Theology, Vol. 9). Zoetermeer: Meinema, 208-235. Compare also Smit, D. J. 2008. What does it mean to live in South Africa and to be Reformed?. *Reformed World* 58, (No. 4), 263-283. These three articles can also be found in Smit, D. J. 2009. *Essays on Being Reformed: Collected Essays 3* (edited by Robert R. Vosloo). Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 201-258.

16 As Paul Ricoeur remarked: “What we celebrate under the heading of founding events are, essentially, violent acts legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right ... The same events are thus found to signify glory for some, humiliation for others.” See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 82.

should be kept alive in our memory. However, we should also note that a strong current in recent church historical work emphasises what is often referred to as “people’s history” or “a history from below.”¹⁷ Such an approach suggests that we do not view the church first and foremost as a hierarchical-institutional-bureaucratic corporation, but rather focus on the religious lives and pious practices of the laity and the ordinary faithful. An engagement with the role of the Reformed churches in the struggle for justice between 1960 and 1990 should be mindful of this important emphasis.

It is certainly true that we cannot tell the story of the Reformed churches without reference to pivotal figures. While it is certainly important to remember these key figures, we should also ask whether we do not need a stronger sensitivity for the important role played by the voiceless or the ordinary faithful.¹⁸ The story of the Reformed churches (as a “story of many stories”) in South Africa is also a story of many forgotten stories, many untold stories, many stories yet to be told.

THE REFORMED CHURCHES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

The legacy of Reformed churches in South Africa is in many ways ambivalent. On the one hand, apartheid was justified on biblical grounds and its logic became deeply entrenched in the process, often conflating Reformed identity with Afrikaner identity. On the other hand, there were also important counter-voices which drew on the Bible and the Reformed tradition to critique apartheid in what was experienced as a struggle for human dignity and justice. The role of the Reformed churches therefore forms an interesting part of “the church struggle in South Africa” (to use the title of John de Gruchy’s influential book), and like the broader history of the church struggle it invites continual re-engagement. I have already mentioned the close link between memory and identity, and this means, among other things, that the memory of past struggles for justice has an important bearing on our present struggles. In the foreword to *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Desmond Tutu provides a helpful comment in this regard:

“The struggle of the Church in South Africa was fundamentally how to bring about a more just society ... Although apartheid as a system and ideology is now happily buried, we still live with its legacy, and we also face new problems that have to be addressed, not least the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We still have to keep a watchful eye on those in power even though we celebrate and affirm all that has now been achieved by our new government.

17 An interesting project in this regard is the seven-volume series *A People’s History of Christianity* (with Denis Janz as general editor). The seven volumes in this series, all published by Fortress Press (Minneapolis), are: Horsley, R. (ed.), *Christian Origins* (2005); Burrus, V. (ed.), *Late Ancient Christianity* (2005); Krueger, D. (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity* (2006); Bornstein, D. E. (ed.), *Medieval Christianity* (2009); Matheson, P. (ed.), *Reformation Christianity* (2007); Porterfield, A. (ed.), *Modern Christianity to 1900* (2007); Bednarowski, M. F. (ed.), *Twentieth Century Global Christianity* (2008).

18 In an important postscript to the third edition of John de Gruchy’s *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, which locates this book in the wider historiography of the church in South Africa, Steve de Gruchy refers to the thousands of micro-narratives which make up the story of the church struggle, including “the ambiguities of those caught in the middle, the voices of the silent and silenced (such as women and the rural poor), the contribution of the laity – those who really are the ‘church’ – the failure of witness, the incredible sacrifices of ordinary people, the personality clashes, the financial and sexual scandals, the acts of compassion and integrity, the textures and sights and sounds that are uppermost in the minds of those who happened ‘to be there’.” See De Gruchy, J. and De Gruchy, S. 2004, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition*. London: SCM Press, xxix.

So the church struggle continues, even though in a new way and moment in history.”¹⁹

And in the last chapter of the same book, Steve de Gruchy writes about the shift from one church struggle to many church struggles, and in the process he points out “four significant and interlocking challenges that have emerged for the church in South Africa at the start of the 21st century: the livelihoods of the poor; human sexuality and gender justice; the impact of pluralism; and the effects of globalization.”²⁰ As we face new struggles, important lessons can indeed be learned from attending to past struggles.

HOW SHOULD WE REMEMBER THE PAST?

In the last part of this article, I want to remind us that it is not only important to ask: “What should we remember?”, but also to ask the related question: “How should we remember the past?” In this regard, we could pause for a moment and first entertain the question: Should we remember the past? And if so: Why should we remember 1960-1990? Is it not better to forget this painful part of our history, also of our Reformed history, and rather concentrate on the present and our future? Is part of our problem not that there is too much memory? And does our age not require that we emphasise less the art of memory (*ars memoriae*) and cultivate more the art of forgetting (*ars oblivionis*)?²¹ One can even ask whether we are not suffering from a type of “apartheid fatigue” in our discourse, also in our church and theological discourse. One should also consider the fact that much in our consumer culture as well as in some identity discourses contributes to a dangerous culture of historical amnesia or harmfully selective memory. So the problem might be not that there is too much memory, but too much memory of the wrong sort. Therefore, the language celebrating “forgetting” is only responsible at the other side of a critique of forgetting, after one has done the necessary work of memory and mourning, and within the context of an emphasis on remembering the past justly and responsibly. In addition, we should remind ourselves that certain forms of obligated memory can put the past in a straitjacket by providing mono-causal explanations of events. Perhaps part of the challenge for Reformed memory and historiography will be to continually look at the past with new questions and through new lenses, since yesterday can still surprise us.

How should we remember the role of the Reformed churches in the struggle for justice between 1960-1990? This question poses a challenge to us. Much needs to be said in this regard, but I want to conclude with a remark on the importance of what some scholars have called “future-orientated memory.”²² When we remember the past, we should also emphasise the strangeness and mystery of the past. As L. P. Hartley rightly noted in the opening lines of his novel *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.”²³ Yet we should not equate history and fiction, hence the need to engage with the reality of

19 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, ix-x.

20 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 229.

21 For a wonderful history of forgetting, see Weinrich, H. 1997. *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessen*.

Munich: C. H. Beck. This book has also been published in English. See Weinrich, H. 2004. *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

22 On this idea of “future-orientated memory” see the introduction to Diawara, M., Lategan, B. and Rösen, J. 2010. *Historical Memory in Africa: Dealing with the past, reaching for the future in an intercultural context*. New York: Berghahn Books. This book is the result of a research project jointly sponsored by the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS) and the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Nordrhein-Westfalen (KWI) under the title “Dealing with the Past, Reaching for the Future.”

23 Hartley, L P 1953. *The Go-Between*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 7.

our historical past in a responsible way, doing as much justice to the past in all its messiness as possible. But I think we should also affirm that we are not merely interested in the past for antiquarian purposes, but also because we have certain present concerns and future hopes. Therefore we are also challenged to ask ourselves: “With what future in mind are we remembering the past?” Do we have a hopeful vision of a just and shared future as Reformed churches and are our memories orientated towards this future? Perhaps we should also remember words from Chapter 5 of Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, where the Queen remarks: “It is a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.”²⁴

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KEY WORDS

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²⁴ Quoted as one of the epigraphs in Wood, H. H. and Byatt, A. S. 2008, *Memory: An Anthology*. London: Chatto and Windus.

TREFWOORDE

Herinnering
Gereformeerde kerke
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