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On the Healing of Memories: An Analysis of the Concept in Papal Documents

Among the many new and often startling initiatives of the recently deceased Pope JOHN PAUL II, there is one phrase that, arguably more than any other, sums up so many of the hopes and goals of his pontificate: the “*healing and purification of memory*.” As the distinguished theologian Bruno FORTE has argued, “John Paul II’s ... own contribution to a ‘purification of memory’ ... [is] an undeniable novelty.”¹

This phrase, *healing and purification of memories*, occurs many times (and not without controversy²) in papal and magisterial documents of various types, but there has not yet been any systematic analysis of the way it has been used or a critical appraisal of that usage.

This phrase is a slogan in need of content, especially a psychological and practical-pastoral content. It is a plan of action, whose action is not plain in the plan; it is a concept with clear psychotherapeutic roots³ parachuted into another context—that of ecumenical relations—without the necessary adaptations or emendations.

This laudable concept and richly suggestive phrase, in other words, requires more thinking and elaboration so that it can function effectively in ecumenical relations and achieve the goal of reconciliation toward which it strains.

So, in the first part, we undertake a systematic and comprehensive search of the various major documents⁴ of this pontificate—some written by Pope JOHN PAUL II himself, others written by the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia⁵—to discover

1 FORTE Bruno, *The Church Confronts the Faults of the Past*. *Communio* 2000/27. 677.

2 GLENDON Mary Ann, *Contrition in the Age of Spin Control*. *First Things* 1997/77. 10–12.

3 GARZON Fernando – BURKETT Lori, *Healing of Memories: Models, Research, Future Directions*. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 2002/21. 42–49.; LINN Matthew – LINN Dennis, *Healing of Memories*. New Jersey, 1974.; LINN Matthew et al., *Healing of Memories: Prayer and Confession*. New York, 1974.; SEAMAND David, *Healing of Memories*. Wheaton, 1985.; JONES L. Gregory, *Healing the Wounds of Memory: Theology and Psychology on Salvation and Sin*. In *Care for the Soul*. Downers Grove, 2001. 241–253.; JONES L. Gregory, *Healing the Wounds of Memory: The Dynamics of Remembering and Forgetting*. *Journal-of-Theology* 1999/103. 35–51. .

4 PALAZZINI Pietro (ed.), *Dictionary of Moral Theology*. Westminster, 1962.; MORRISEY Francis, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the Code of Canon Law*. Ottawa, 1995.

5 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: Latin-English Edition*. Washington, 2001.

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the use, context, and apparent meaning of the (interchangeable) phrases “healing and purification of memories.”

This first and largest part is descriptive and documentary, demonstrating the history and various usages of this phrase as it has entered the lexicon of the Roman Catholic Church over the past quarter-century.

In the second, more critical and analytical part, we suggest the inadequacies of the way the phrase has been used so far in light of some of the relevant psychological literature on the “mechanics” and process of healing of memory.

In a short and integrating third part, we extrapolate from this individual-clinical setting to a wider ecclesial context, tying everything together with a few modest suggestions for practical and liturgical applications in an ecumenical setting, with special reference to Orthodox–Roman Catholic *rapprochement*—that dialogue which has had pride of place in JOHN PAUL’s ecumenical hopes.¹

I. Papal Documents Examined

Pope JOHN PAUL II has made frequent use of his trips around the world in the last quarter-century to ask forgiveness of many people as a necessary concomitant and precursor to the process of purifying and healing the memories of various people and ecclesial communities.²

According to the historian Albert MONTICONE, “In this request for forgiveness we have the ultimate key to the travels of John Paul II.”³ Toward the middle of the 1990s, the papal gaze was firmly fixed on what the Roman Catholic Church celebrated as the Great Jubilee of 2000.

So, the use of the phrase “purification and healing of memory” began to occur much more frequently in papal discourses in a variety of contexts and aimed at a wide array of people (fellow Roman Catholics, other Christians, and the world at large).

The very first instance of this phrase occurs in an ecumenical context and comes not long after JOHN PAUL became the bishop of Rome. According to Luigi ACCATTOLI, the “first formulation” of this phrase was given in an ecumenical gathering in Paris in May 1980.⁴

The phrase “healing and purification of memories” begins to appear with great regularity between 1994 and 2001 in prominent documents of the pope and Roman Curia. In ACCATTOLI’s words, “With the passing years, the concept of a ‘purification of memory’ has become a fundamental password in the pontificate of John Paul II.”⁵

The first major reflection on the process of asking forgiveness and purifying memories comes in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, issued 10 November 1994. This document was intended as a roadmap toward the Great Jubilee of 2000.⁶

1 JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*. Rome, 1995.

2 ACCATTOLI Luigi, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpas of John Paul II*. Boston, 1998.

3 *Ibid.*, xxiii.

4 “First and foremost, and in the dynamics of the movement toward unity, our personal and community memory must be *purified of the memory* of all the conflicts, injustice and hatred of the past. This purification is carried out through mutual forgiveness, from the depths of our hearts, which is the condition of the blossoming of real brotherly charity.” JOHN PAUL II, *Meeting with the Leaders of other Christian Communities*. Paris, 31 May 1980.

5 *Ibid.*

6 “The Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 should be symbolically wider than those of previous Jubilees because humanity,

In early May 1995, the Pope issued *Orientalis Lumen*, a remarkable document on the Roman Catholic Church's relationship to the Orthodox churches. Curiously, it does not treat the topic of healing of memories, but does have an entire section entitled "Between Memory and Expectation," which insists that Christians "must show people the beauty of memory, the power that comes to us from the Spirit and makes us witnesses."¹

Three weeks later the Pope issued his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, a landmark document on Christian unity. Right at the outset, he calls for a "commitment to ecumenism ... based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories."²

Later on, the pope notes that the 1965 lifting of Orthodox–Roman Catholic excommunications "removed from memory and from the midst of the Church" this painful episode through a "solemn act which was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion."³

With his eye now firmly fixed on the Jubilee, and determined to lead the Church through it, this phrase would often be on the pope's lips throughout the late '90s and especially through the millennial celebrations.⁴

In late 1996, in anticipation of the 30th World Day of Peace on 1 January 1997, JOHN PAUL would issue a fulsome message aimed at the global community on the role of forgiveness and reconciliation in the task of building a world of justice and peace. Rather than simply repeating the slogan this time, he amplifies the meaning somewhat.⁵

Such a liberty of forgiveness is "fraught with difficulties," but nonetheless "can be experienced even by a wounded heart, thanks to the healing power of love, which has its first source in God, Who is Love."⁶

By 1998, JOHN PAUL had put the Church into high gear in anticipation of the Jubilee of 2000. In the bull by which he set forth the program for the Jubilee, he gave pride of place to forgiveness and purification of memory.⁷

As he enumerated the traditional hallmarks of a jubilee year, he noted that there is "first of all, the sign of the *purification of memory*; this calls everyone to make an act of courage and humility in recognizing the wrongs done by those who have borne or bear the name of Christian."⁸

1999 would be, of course, the eve of the Great Jubilee and there was an enormous effort expended to prepare the Church. This is nowhere more evident than in the lengthy, very

upon reaching this goal, will leave behind not just a century but a millennium. It is fitting that the Church should make this passage with a clear awareness of what has happened to her during the last ten centuries. She cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without *encouraging her children to purify themselves*, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act." TMA. 33.

1 OL. 8.

2 *Ut Unum Sint*. 2.

3 *Ut Unum Sint*. 52. TAFT Robert, *The Problem of 'Uniatism' and the 'Healing of Memories': Anamnesis, not Amnesia*. Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies, 2000–2001/41–42. 155–196.

4 "May the perspective of the forthcoming Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 bring about in everyone an attitude of humility, capable of effecting "the necessary purification of past memories" through prayer and conversion of heart, so as to help people to ask and give mutual forgiveness for the misunderstandings of centuries past." *Apostolic Letter for the 350th Anniversary of the Union of Uzhorod*. 18 April 1996. 5.

5 In order not to remain a "prisoner of the past," he insists that "individuals and peoples need a sort of 'healing of memories,' so that past evils will not come back again. This does not mean forgetting past events; it means re-examining them with a new attitude and learning precisely from the experience of suffering. ... The deadly cycle of revenge must be replaced by the new-found liberty of forgiveness." 8 December 1996.

6 *Ibid.*, 5.

7 *Incarnationis Mysterium. Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*.

8 *Ibid.*, 11.

carefully prepared document, “Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past,” issued in December 1999 by the International Theological Commission.

This highly unusual document—it bears no printed papal permission for publication, it lacks a cardinalatial signature, and it has no dicasterial “home” within the Curia that would give it some standing as an authoritative document, being issued instead by the Commission, an extraneous body loosely attached to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—was based on two years of work and study by the Commission.

They sought to provide a comprehensive treatment of the topics of memory and forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, and historicity and truthfulness, together with considerable sensitivity to the complex hermeneutic questions the entire process evoked.¹

Thus does the document review Scripture and Tradition before admitting that “in the entire history of the Church there are no precedents for requests for forgiveness by the Magisterium for past wrongs”² and that JOHN PAUL II’s appeal to the Church for this process of forgiveness and purification does “not find an exact parallel in the Bible.”³

Given these lacunæ in the tradition, then, the Commission was extremely conscious of the sheer newness of what was being proposed, proceeding therefore with great caution. Early in the document, the Commission sets basic parameters for the purification, one negative and one positive.

Positively, it notes that “every act of ‘purification of memory’ undertaken by believers ... is [for] the glorification of God,”⁴ while negatively it insists that the “purification of memory can never mean that the Church ceases to proclaim the revealed truth that has been entrusted to her.”⁵

With these general claims out of the way, the document becomes progressively more specific⁶: “the entire process of purification of memory ... needs to be lived by the Church’s daughters and sons not only with the rigor that takes account of the criteria and principles indicated above, but is also accompanied by a continual calling upon the help of the Holy Spirit.”⁷

This calling on the Holy Spirit for help in the purification of memories finally took on much fuller shape in the Great Jubilee of 2000. Notwithstanding controversy from within the Church (from those who thought such an act would undermine confidence in the Church’s authority) and from without, the Pope celebrated a “day of pardon” on the first Sunday of Lent, 12 March 2000.

Its central feature was a Eucharistic liturgy in the Vatican basilica during which a series of petitions for forgiveness from God for various sins committed by Roman Catholics throughout the ages was offered. This act was preceded by a lengthy rationale put out by the Office of Papal Liturgical Celebrations.⁸

1 In a very unusual and therefore striking move for Vatican documents—whose sources are almost always confined to Biblical, patristic, or other magisterial documents—the notes of the document confess an extensive indebtedness to two of the masters in the field of hermeneutics, Bernard LONERGAN (*Method in Theology*) and Hans-Georg CADAMER (*Truth and Method*).

2 *MR.* 1.1.

3 *MR.* 2.4.

4 *MR.* Introduction.

5 *MR.* 1.4.

6 “Purifying the memory means eliminating from personal and collective conscience all forms of resentment or violence left by the inheritance of the past, on the basis of a new and rigorous historical-theological judgment, which becomes the foundation for a renewed way of acting. ... The memory of division and opposition is purified and substituted by a reconciled memory, to which everyone in the Church is invited to be open and to become educated.” *MR.* 5.1.

7 *Ibid.*

8 “By placing the highpoint of the confession of sins within the context of the liturgy, Pope John Paul II wishes to demonstrate that

At the end of the liturgy, the Pope asked “that the purification of memory and the request for forgiveness be translated into a commitment of renewed fidelity to the Gospel on the part of the Church and of each of her members.”¹

Then the Pope preached and again—but only in passing—mentioned that a highpoint of the Jubilee “is what I described as the ‘purification of memory.’”² Later on he would suggest that the Church must be purified not only of the faults she has inflicted on others, but of the memory of those sins and persecution she has herself suffered.³

In the lead-up to the Jubilee, the focus was clearly on the members of the Roman Catholic Church repenting of their own sins, but once the Jubilee had come and gone, the focus again turned more outward, and in the following three years the use of the phrase “healing and purification of memory” was used exclusively in an ecumenical or global context.

The Pope issued an apostolic letter in May on the third centenary of the union of the Greek Catholic Church with the Church of Rome. The letter contained an entire section entitled “Revisiting the Past: The Purification of Memory,”⁴ but did not elaborate on how this should be done.

In January 2001, as the Great Jubilee was coming to a formal close, another letter was issued, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, with two short paragraphs reflecting again on the purification of memory. It sounded a note of nostalgia for the year that was now over and even suggested that the desired purification was over and done with, the mission accomplished.⁵

In May of the following year, Pope JOHN PAUL made one of his most controversial trips that nonetheless provided for a dramatic opportunity to ask forgiveness and seek to begin to purify memories.

He arrived in Athens, Greece, in early May after much protest, including some dramatic scenes of Orthodox clerics in the streets. The protests lasted up to the very moment the Pope set foot on Greek soil. And then he asked for forgiveness.⁶

This fulsome statement, as eloquent in diction as it was dramatic in delivery, had an immediately palpable effect on Greece and her Orthodox citizens, profoundly altering the entire tenor of the visit.

this act has its own inner meaning and aims at the purification of memory and at reconciliation between Christians and between the Church and humanity. Confessing the historical sins of Christians is not, however, aimed solely at the purification of memory: it is also meant to be an occasion for a change.” *First Sunday of Lent ‘Day of Pardon’ Presentation*. 12 March 2000. 1.7.

1 Ibid., II.5.

2 *Homily of the Holy Father ‘Day of Pardon’*. 12 March 2000. 3.

3 “The Church today feels and has always felt obliged to *purify her memory* of those sad events from every feeling of rancour or revenge.” *Ibid.*, 4.

4 *Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II for the Third Centenary of the Union of the Greek Catholic Church of Romania with the Church of Rome*. 9f. 7 May 2000.

5 “How could we forget the *moving Liturgy of 12 March 2000* in Saint Peter’s Basilica, at which, looking upon our Crucified Lord, I asked forgiveness in the name of the Church for the sins of all her children? This “purification of memory” has strengthened our steps for the journey towards the future and has made us more humble and vigilant in our acceptance of the Gospel.” *NMI*. 6.

6 “Certainly, we are burdened by past and present controversies and by enduring misunderstandings. But in a spirit of mutual charity these can and must be overcome, for that is what the Lord asks of us. Clearly there is a need for a liberating process of *purification of memory*. For the occasions past and present, when sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by action or omission against their Orthodox sisters and brothers, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of the Lord. Some memories are especially painful, and some events of the distant past have left deep wounds in the minds and hearts of people to this day. I am thinking of the disastrous sack of the imperial city of Constantinople, which was for so long the bastion of Christianity in the East. It is tragic that the assailants, who had set out to secure free access for Christians to the Holy Land, turned against their own brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret. How can we fail to see here the *mysterium iniquitatis* at work in the human heart? To God alone belongs judgement, and therefore we entrust the heavy burden of the past to God’s endless mercy, imploring God to heal the wounds which still cause suffering to the spirit of the Greek people. Together we must work for this healing if the Europe now emerging is to be true to her identity, which is inseparable from the Christian humanism shared by East and West.” *Address of John Paul II to His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and Primate of Greece*. 4 May 2001.

The Pope, however, was not content to leave it there. Driving home the point later that very same day to the Roman Catholic bishops in Greece, he offered a more extended theological reflection on memory, calling it “too lofty and noble a sanctuary to be defiled by human sin.”

Recognizing that memory can be damaged by sin, the pope insisted that sin “cannot tear it asunder” and that whenever sin does strain the fabric, we must “spare no effort in making it possible for memory once again to illuminate the great things God has done for us” until at last “on high, memory gives way to fullness, and there are no more tears, nor death, because the former things have passed away.”¹

The task of asking and receiving healing for memories would continue throughout 2001, even finding applicability in a political context at the UN Durban conference on racism.²

Three weeks later in an ecumenical pilgrimage, Pope JOHN PAUL would introduce a unique note into this by now frequent refrain. While at an ecumenical service in the Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Yerevan, Armenia, he would, for the first time, allude to the fact that the phrase in question was not uniquely his own.³

From the end of 2001 until late in 2003, the Pope would again turn to political questions. In a diplomatic address to the newly appointed ambassador of Turkey to the Holy See, JOHN PAUL again used this phrase.⁴

In the middle of 2003, on a second trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Pope addressed himself not only to Roman Catholics in his opening address but also to “our sisters and brothers of the Serbian Orthodox Church and of the other Ecclesial Communities, and the followers of Islam and Judaism.”

He then went on to recognize the “long ordeal which you have endured, the burden of suffering which is daily a part of your lives,” but called the people not to despair or to seek revenge.⁵ The Pope again returned to this phrase in the autumn of 2003.⁶

On the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the revolutionary conciliar decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Pope JOHN PAUL, at Vespers, spoke in particular about “spiritual ecumenism” and emphasized that there “is no true ecumenism without inner conversion and the purification of memory, without holiness of life in conformity with the Gospel, and above all, without intense and assiduous prayer that echoes the prayer of Jesus.”⁷

1 *Address of John Paul II to the Catholic Bishops of Greece*, 4 May 2001.

2 “One cannot remain a prisoner of the past: individuals and peoples need a sort of ‘healing of memories’.” “Evidently there can be no such healing without a vigorous recognition of the truth of historical realities. The healing of memory requires that we honestly appraise our personal, community and national history and admit those less noble aspects which have contributed to the marginalization of today.” 3 September 2001.

3 “In his letter to the Byzantine Emperor, Nersès ŠNORHALI set out principles of ecumenical dialogue, which have lost none of their relevance. Among his many insights, he insists that “there is a need for the *healing of memories* in order to overcome past resentments and prejudices. ... The insights of the great Armenian Doctor are the fruit of remarkable pastoral wisdom, and I make them my own among you today.” *Homily of Pope John Paul II*, 26 September 2001.

4 “During the last millennium relations between Turkey and the Holy See were not always untroubled. Happily, the twentieth century saw fresh attempts to build a constructive relationship, based upon the trust and respect which at times require what I have called a *healing of memories*. The need for such healing is everywhere evident, for in so many parts of the world we see that wounds of past grievances continue to fester from generation to generation.” *Address of the Holy Father to the New Ambassador of Turkey to the Holy See*.

5 “If society is to take on a truly human face and everyone is to look to the future with confidence, it is necessary to rebuild humanity from within, healing wounds and achieving a genuine purification of memory through mutual forgiveness. The root of every good and, sadly, of every evil is in the depths of the heart (Mk 7,21–23). It is there that change must occur, making it possible to renew the fabric of society and to establish human relationships which favour cooperation between the vital forces present in the country.” *Address of the Holy Father at the Welcome Ceremony*, 22 June 2003, Banja Luka.

6 . See the news story *Peace Calls for Purification of Memory, John Paul II Says. Urges Historians to Adhere to Truth in Research*, Zenit, 31 October 2003.

7 *Homily of the Holy Father on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Conciliar Decree “Unitatis Redintegratio.”*

At the end of the month, on the occasion of the second visit in six months of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, to Rome, Pope JOHN PAUL referred to it as he handed over relics of Sts. Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom.¹

II. A Critical Analysis

As we have seen, for nearly a quarter of a century Pope JOHN PAUL has called on Christians and others of good will to purify their memories of past sins they have committed or endured.

This phrase has been used in a variety of contexts around the world, addressed to Roman Catholics, to other Christians, and to the global community at large. For JOHN PAUL, the purification of memories was an inescapable step along the Church's path today.

It is necessary not only for the Church's internal integrity of mission, but also as a necessary component of ecumenical reconciliation. These repeated calls, both for forgiveness and purification, have sounded the right note.

We must not begrudge the considerable credit that is due to JOHN PAUL for such sensitivity to the signs of the times.² There are, however, two problems with his approach that need to be addressed in order for the laudable goal of Pope JOHN PAUL to be more fully and fruitfully realized in the years ahead.

First, it has remained largely an idea or a slogan without significant and demonstrable effect upon the vast majority of Roman Catholics—to say nothing of other Christians and, indeed, of everyone else in the world.

The papal phrase, in other words, has remained too academic and too insufficiently substantialized in the life of Christians around the world. It is an abstraction.³ Such a daily reawakening and healing has not happened yet.

Of course, the pope cannot be held responsible for the education of every single member of the nearly billion-strong Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. Notwithstanding his enormous and unprecedented evangelical efforts and widespread global travels, it is inevitable that the works of one person can only go so far.

It may well be that we simply need more time for these calls to sink in and bear fruit. Even if every single Roman Catholic and others in the world heard the phrase, the problem of its *enactment* remains.

The second criticism is that the requested purification of memories has not happened very much because it *cannot* happen in the way that it is presumably envisaged. The entire concept has been borrowed by the pope from the context of individual psychotherapeutic work and transplanted into the widest possible public arenas of intra-ecclesiastical, ecumenical, and even geopolitical relations.

In so doing, the phrase is made to bear burdens it was not meant to bear and quite

1 "In the transferral of such holy relics we find a blessed occasion to *purify our wounded memories* in order to strengthen our journey of reconciliation, to confirm that the faith of these Holy Doctors is the faith of the Churches of East and West." *Letter of John Paul II to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Bartholomew I at the Ecumenical Celebration on the Occasion of the Transferral from Rome to Constantinople of the Relics of Sts. Gregory of Nazianzen and John Chrysostom.*

2 "The 'examination of conscience at the end of the millennium,' proposed by Pope John Paul II, is the mature fruit of his pontificate and his most dynamic heritage. It is of great cultural interest as well and, for that reason, ought to be well received by those outside the Church." ACCATTOLI, xvi.

3 "The collective purification of memory *has to descend to the level of a daily, pedagogical wisdom*. It must awaken in all of us the desire to revisit the history of our own life ... not to stir up bitterness and guilt but, at long last, to be healed of them under the merciful hand of God." SICARI Antonio Maria, *The Purification of Memory: The 'Narrow Gate' of the Jubilee*. Communio 2000/27. 642.

simply cannot bear. There need to be mechanisms in place to allow this healing to take place and yet there are not. This lack of structures and practical means for bringing about the healing of memories has recently been helpfully addressed by the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, to which we turn now.

I. The Roman Catholic–Mennonite Dialogue

In their recent statement, “Called Together to be Peacemakers,” we are given a plan of action that can help us move forward, a program that can help turn the concept of “healing of memories” into a concrete reality, moving it from the realm of academic-ecumenical abstraction to pastoral-psychological application.

This statement enumerates seven major, practical ways in which the healing of memories can take place. The first three we may call the “spiritual-psychological”; the next important practice we may call the “scholarly”; then the “liturgical”; then “common service” and finally the simply “human.”

The first three practices, necessarily first, involve spiritual renewal and psychological healing.¹ Having undertaken to live a spirit of repentance as the first step, the dialogue next recommends that we not allow our memories to concentrate exclusively on what we have done wrong or what continues to divide us, but on what we have in common.²

Moreover, our study and dialogue on what unites us should also allow us to consider how we may do history together³ in order to live our future together.⁴ Our study and healing must all take place in, and lead us toward, greater prayer in common.

Prayer has been recognized on all sides as the very soul of the ecumenical movement. For this reason, a further practical step recommended by the dialogue includes joint prayer and liturgical sharing.⁵

The dialogue also recommends very practical and concrete ways of allowing both communities to grow together,⁶ including “joint study and cooperative service ... peace and justice initiatives, some programs of faith formation among our respective members, and ‘get acquainted’ visits between Catholic and Mennonite communities, locally and more widely.”⁷

1 “The healing of memories involves several aspects. It requires a purification of memories so that both groups can share a picture of the past that is historically accurate. This calls for a spirit of repentance—a penitential spirit—on both sides for the harm that the conflicts have done to the body of Christ, to the proclamation of the Gospel, and to one another. Healing the memories of divided Christians also entails the recognition that, despite conflict, and though still separated, they continue to hold in common much of the Christian faith. In this sense they remain linked to one another. Moreover, a healing of memories involves the openness to move beyond the isolation of the past, and to consider concrete steps toward new relations.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §191.

2 “While recognizing that we hold basic convictions of faith in common, we have also identified significant differences that continue to divide us and thus require further dialogue. Nonetheless, and although we are not in full unity with one another, the substantial amount of the Apostolic faith which we realize today that we share, allows us as members of the Catholic and Mennonite delegations to see one another as sisters and brothers in Christ.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §210.

3 “The healing of memories requires ... facing those difficult events of the past that give rise to divergent interpretations of what happened and why. Past events and their circumstances need to be reconstructed as precisely as possible. We need to understand the mentalities, the conditions, and the living dynamics in which these events took place.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §192.

4 “Theological dialogue can contribute to healing of memories by assisting the dialogue partners to ascertain the degree to which they have continued to share the Christian faith despite centuries of separation.” *Ibid.* §207.

5 “Catholics and Mennonites are convinced that the first responsibility of a Christian is the praise of God and that all aspects of Christian life must be rooted in prayer. Therefore in the course of the five years of this dialogue, we started and ended each day with prayer together. Together we read and reflected on the Scriptures and sang hymns. Each year we worshipped in each other’s churches on Sunday in order to deepen mutual understanding.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §208.

6 “We believe that another fundamental part of the healing of memories is the call to foster new relationships. ... Can we not increase our efforts to create new relationships today, so that future generations may look back to the twenty-first century with positive memories of a time in which Mennonites and Catholics began increasingly to serve Christ together?” *Ibid.* §211.

7 *Ibid.* §214.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated two massive ecumenical debts: the first is owed to the late Pope JOHN PAUL II for placing so firmly and repeatedly on the ecumenical agenda the necessary work of the healing of memories.

The second is owed to the Roman Catholic–Mennonite Dialogue for taking the time to think through, and to come up with eminently practical ways of embodying, that initial papal call for the healing and purification of memories.

In Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches of the East Slavic tradition, it is common at services for the dead to sing “*Vichnya Pamjat*,” asking God that the deceased’s memory be eternal. There can surely be no better way to ensure that JOHN PAUL’s memory is indeed eternal than to persevere in the necessary work of healing our own memories of division and strife, and moving on to the full unity in the Body of Christ for which the late pope prayed and worked so hard. There is much work ahead of us, but with the help of the Spirit, we shall be sure to succeed.

Suggested Reading

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**Adam A. J. DEVILLE: La Guérison des Mémoires:
Une Analyse du Concept dans les Documents apaux à la Lumière de la
Psychothérapie Moderne des Récentes Déclarations Œcuméniques**

Cet article fait un résumé des différentes références à la «guérison ou purification des mémoires» qui a fonctionné comme un leitmotiv dans les rencontres et les écrits œcuméniques du défunt Pape Jean-Paul II. Il entreprend une analyse critique de ceux-ci et suggère que le concept est resté largement un slogan œcuménique inefficace et n'a pas été mis en pratique de façon significative. L'auteur va plus loin et soutient que la façon avec laquelle le concept est évoqué dans les écrits papaux le rend incapable d'être mis en pratique sans dans des amendements significatifs. Ceci afin qu'un concept psychologique individualiste puisse être développé sur un plan ecclésiastique et concret par les communautés chrétiennes à travers le monde. Dans sa troisième et dernière partie, il suggère que de telles actions pratiques peuvent être entreprises suivant les suggestions du récent document du dialogue entre l'Église Catholique Romaine et les Mennonites au niveau international, sous le titre: «Appelés à être des Constructeurs de Paix ensemble».

**Adam A. J. DEVILLE: Sobre la Curación de las Memorias:
Un Análisis del Concepto en Documentos Papales a la Luz de la
Psicoterapia Moderna y las Recientes Declaraciones Ecueménicas**

El artículo resume en un solo lugar las variadas referencias a la “curación o purificación de las memorias” la cual funciona como un leitmotiv en los escritos ecuménicos y los encuentros del fallecido Papa Juan Pablo II. El artículo emprende un análisis crítico de ellos, y sugiere que este concepto de la curación de las memorias ha permanecido por largo tiempo como un slogan ecuménico ineficaz y no ha sido puesto en práctica significativamente. El artículo sugiere mas adelante que la forma en que el concepto se invoca en escritos papales lo devuelve incapaz de ponerse en práctica sin una enmienda significativa para que lo que es por mucho un concepto psicológico individualista pueda practicarse concreta y eclesiásticamente por los fieles cristianos de todo el mundo. La tercera y parte concluyente del artículo sugiere que tal practica concreta puede emprenderse siguiendo las propuestas del reciente documento del dialogo romano católico – menonite internacional “Llamados a Hacer la Paz Juntos”.