REGAINING THE RELIGIOUS SENSE OF MEMORY: A RELIGIO-PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSAL

Gabriel Tochukwu Okafor
Faculty of Philosophy
Pontificia Università Antonianum, Rome.
uniant5780@antonianum.eu, okaforgabriel@gmail.com

Abstract
Memory keeps people abreast of the events around them. Such happenings could be in the past or present. These events somewhat influence their daily choices in the hope of a better future. Generally speaking, this is what memory entails. In the specific sense employed in this work, memory covers a body of the beliefs of adherents (of different religions) sustained through the years by their forebears. Religious experiences form the building blocks of memory. Here the experiences of their ancestors so recalled serve as the basis for present and future practices of the same religion(s). It is what collective memory guarantees. As such, the traditions they left are available in either written or oral forms. Their interpretations and contextualization are evident in the onward religious experiences of their adherents. With hermeneutical method, this paper explores the religious sense of memory. It proposes a faithful retrace to the foundations of different religions to better equip those who live them in keeping the faith alive. On common grounds other works, *it affirms the three things familiar within this area of study: memory has a personal dimension, a collective dimension and is relevant for present-day events which pave the way for the future.* Having clarified what memory could mean, it views religion as some form of memory. The loss of this could result in the loss of the authenticity of religion itself. For without recourse to memory, a great deal of what religion proffers would be lost and questions on religious authority would rise.
Keywords: Ancestors, Experience, History, Memory, Religion

Introduction
Experience is the best teacher, we always say. History is a recount of its lessons. Memory is the record of this same history. By it, we recall past events and their corresponding effects on the present; which in itself is memory-making. A disjoint in any of these easily alters our mode of comportment in ways deep for words. What was in the past, replays in some form in the present. The ability to recall is a human faculty. At this individual level, it is an essential part of our being that we share with minded creatures. It also has a social dimension that serves the common good of a people. This aspect is reserved for humans. Recognition of a person affirms their place of origin. Everyone is described by this affiliation: where one is from. Collective memory is the heritage of a people. Its social dimension is versed and touches on diverse aspects of our

social life. Religion is an aspect of this social dimension that defines people's uniqueness. However, Urbaniak rightly notes this in his *Memories as Religion: What can the broken continuity of tradition bring about?*: "Postmodern societies are less and less capable of maintaining the continuity of memory which used to lie at the very core of their religious identity; that is why they have become less and less religious" (1).

This means that there is a religious dimension of memory. Individual and collective phenomena have a tie in memory: recalling or reliving the past in the present with a specific future-directed goal. Memory and religion are on this precise plane, synonymous. To lose touch with memory is to lose touch with reality. This we can also say of religious beliefs. They bring us to the same fore: reality. What we have now comes as a building block of the experiences of past generations. All forms of detachments of the past are deliberate destructions of memory and the richness within it that has contributed to our immediate situation. In his *Religion and the study of social memory*, Sakaranaho argues that memory "is intersubjectively constituted, and it is, therefore, important to take into account the social dimension of human memory" (139): be they religious or not. Should they be religious, their strength of orthodoxy lies in the proper use of memory.

Therefore, the immediate concern of the first part of this work shall be to understand what memory entails. It will show that there is a link between memory and specific locations. Every place has a history behind it. Place and history give a spatio-temporal review of memory. Given that this spatio-temporal review is not possible without a people, the second part of the work admits of memory as lived experiences of people whose life reads back to the eternal law of God. This bridges the gap between the past and present, plunging the people into the future. In this symphony of relations capturing the different epochs of life consist the religious sense memory holds for a people.

What memory means

The term memory has multiple meanings and applications based on contextual comparative usage. When considered as our abilities as humans, Aquinas sees it as one of the five internal senses: of common sense, phantasy, imagination, estimative sense and memory (1a.78.4). Explaining this, Davies holds that by them, we are able "to coordinate, evaluate, and remember" the impacts the external senses have on us (135). In this same light, Kant sees it as a faculty belonging to sensibility "of deliberately visualizing the past..." such that to "*grasp* something quickly in memory, to *recall* it to mind easily, and to *retain* it for a long time are the formal perfections of memory" (1.182). These seem to look at memory as part of the components of human nature. Probably because Kant was on a move from reason to the practical sphere, Foucault notes this of him: "the study of memory as a simple fact of nature is not only futile, it is

impossible: 'All theoretical speculation about this is a pure waste of time'" (64). Should it be so, then much is demanded to understand it as something non-negligible if this passage to the practical sphere must come to fruition. However, one cannot but affirm with Sutton: "Memory is both a natural and a humankind" (3).

Based on this, Cassirer argues, "If we understand memory as a general function of all organic matter we mean merely that the organism preserves some traces of its former experience and that these traces have a definite influence upon its later reactions" (50). At this natural state, it could be seen as one of the many things we have in common with minded animals. Moreover, its ability to affect later reactions noted above gives a marked significance of memory. It readily avers us the common Dictionary understanding of it "as the power or process of reproducing or recalling what has been learned and retained particularly through associative mechanism" (Merriam Webster). Concerning this, Nkemnkia avers:

> Memory is a faculty of all living beings possessing a mind. That is why it is more precise to define memory as, that faculty of the mind which remembers things known in the past; thus, in a way, it is also a re-cognisance of that which is known, a reiterated knowledge. Memory becomes in this way the centre of sensation, stimulus of the mind and as such it is indispensable for the formation of concepts (179).

This immediately plunges us into other aspects of memory that are not strictly reductive in the senses early considered. The immediate definition opens other possibilities to the understanding of memory. In these, we go beyond the mere perception of memory as something we share with other beings to its active influences in all aspects of our experiences as humans. For Nkemnkia, it "is a faculty without which there is no experience" (178). The experience here is used in the most common usage as a collection of all that has happened, all that happens now and all that will happen. All these are memory. According to Cassirer,

> The mere presence, the sum total of these remnants, cannot account for the phenomenon of memory. Memory implies a process of recognition and identification, an ideational process of a very complex sort. The former impressions must not only be repeated; they must also be ordered and located, and referred to different points in time. Such a location is not possible without conceiving time as a general scheme—as a *serial order* which comprises all the individual events. The awareness of this time necessarily implies the concept of such a serial order corresponding to that other schema which we call space (50-51).

By etymology, the word "memory" is rooted in the Latin *memor, memoria* and the French *memorie*: all meaning 'mindful', 'remembering', 'recall'. From this,

memory would mean 'to bear someone or something in mind', 'to remember someone or something' or 'to recall someone or something'. It is obvious why words like commemoration, recollection, reliving, reminiscence, flash from the past, anamnesis, recognition, store, etc. are common synonyms of memory at different degrees. All of them are of or about someone or something. This suggests that it is a state of the mind that is content full. It is always on or about something. There is nothing like empty memory. It has content: it is necessarily about someone or something in all cases. This is possibly why it is easily linked to consciousness; which is always about someone or something. (Strawson 185-6).

It serves different uses in the sciences, philosophy and religion. What matters the most is the foundation of all it holds with regards to the past, present and the open unending future before. Its religious relevance suffices for our needs here. The *Confessions* of St Augustine is one of the most evident understanding of memory in the religious sense, a sort of a narrative of the past in the present as though the past is being relived with the hope of a lighted future intermittently committed to God in prayers for understanding. Having described memory as "the present of past things" (XI.20), he gives a summary of his usage of psalm recitation to explain the link between the past, present and future in these words:

> What is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each syllable. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part (XI.28).

This is the treasured sense in which memory is to be understood in this work. In his *Religion as memory: How has the continuity of tradition produced collective meanings?,* Urbaniak traces this sort of understanding to Ricouer saying: "memory is to be understood in the broad and dynamic Augustinian sense in which it appears in Ricoeur's reflection when he speaks of 'the tie [or process] by virtue of which the past persists in the present'" (2). This persistence of the past in the present is the building block of memory-making. It is always geared towards an immediate future that soon becomes a memory and on it goes.

Place and memory

There is a link between place and memory. Every memory begins at some specific place. Every place is named by people, whether they still live there or not. A place with a name without an imprint of people is unimaginable. If there were no people at some point, it would not be spoken of at any point in time. To think of a place, even by imagination, comes with corresponding thoughts of the characters that make it. Just like one would not think of a play without its

characters, so it is unimaginable to think of a place without people. Memory serves to give an account of something: in more specific terms, place and people. "This work of remembering", Ricouer suggests, "makes memory a creative activity in a way akin to narrative" (262). It is a retelling of the relationship of people in a specific place and time.

There is no empty memory. To be void is to be without content. It is about people, places and things at a particular time. There are individual and collective memories. They all have the same contents. Individual memory constitutes the tales of individual persons based on their personal experiences of life. Personal narratives are individual stories; such, "narratives do not constitute a religion, but narratives told and enacted by a group" as noted by Sakaranaho (144). In the same light, he observes: "religious communities are examples of what they call 'genuine communities of memory'" (144). In this, what the group keeps as its treasure lives on. It is communal even when the narrative is about individuals. As such, he asserts:

> Genuine or not, communities of memory are constituted by their past and are involved in retelling their story, which is their constitutive narrative (...). Stories of a collective history and of exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is central to a community of memory. From the community's point of view, the stories of exemplary individuals – whether of the founders or others – encapsulate conceptions of character: of what a good person is like, and of virtues that define such character (heroes and heroines) [144].

Memory is always in the making. It is not a closed out phenomenon. "It is our nature to strive to explore everything, alive and dead, present and future" as Dyson observes (290). As people and places evolve so does memory since they are its very subject. It is not of nothing; it has to be of something: whether we have them in mind at that particular time or not. While we might not have it as a whole, its partial imprints are all we need. Those are not void; they are something. In the words of Jonas in his *The phenomenon of life*: "the content is never simultaneously present as a whole, but always in the making, always partial and complete" (136). This is all that serves for every moment.

Memory is history

History is the narration of the past events of a person or people. It is the story of a man to man. By it, a connection is sustained in human relationships. It is the prerogative of a people. According to Coreth, it "exclusively belongs to man: we are not blindly subject to the need for a succession of natural facts" (164). This makes it an essential aspect of human life; permeating all dimensions of social relation. Like history, religion also is exclusive to man. Being so, history can be said to extend to man's religious experiences: the nexus being their exclusivity to man. By this, one can view religion as a recount of

the history of man's relationship with a Supreme Being. Such recount is passed on from generation to generation. This is the aspect that oral tradition perfectly captures: a relay of the religious experiences of a people to their prodigies through successive generations. The continuous flow of such a relation keeps it alive. This 'keeping it alive' is a memory. Drawing particular attention to the necessity of this continuity within the Christian context, Urbaniak posits:

> What deserves particular attention is a necessary continuity between the past and the present which results in the dynamic and trans-historical understanding of both memory and tradition within Christian context. This fundamental continuity of memory transcends history and manifests itself in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future (2).

Without this continuity, there will be a hiatus. Should there be a break; a generation without this treasure would ensue. There would be a gulf between man and God; man and his peers. Memory bridges this gap and sets standards for future projections. This is because every history springs from the past; looked at from a certain position, the present. Memory is also seen in that light as Nkemnkia tries to show: "We can also say that memory, as such, is the recognition of the past and the foundation of the present" (180). It does not stop there: the present is future-directed. This is the hope that religion plunges humanity into, the transcendence beyond the present and the past. Its prowess is without limits; even the natural happiness man seeks is found within this (Aristotle X.VII.1, Spinoza 4.36). To attain it, however, one has to comport himself in some acceptable ways. This sets the moral dimension of religion. Man, in his relationship with God, has the onus on him to live in a morally acceptable way to attain his goals in God.

Memory helps us keep this alive. It centralizes it and keeps us abreast with the implications of not living by it. Each time Israel kept the Laws of the Lord, they prospered. Such Laws were written in their hearts for their observance (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:26, Hebrews 8:10). This is a common belief in Judaism. In successive progression, Christianity grows on this, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the teachings of his immediate followers: all about Christ. The Judeo-Christian God is one that goes in search of his own. In him, there is recourse to the past, his deeds of old, which unchangingly model the present for a future life in him. Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, for instance, is the high point of memory as history that never dies. There was no misuse of words; they were unambiguous. His injunction is of memory: "Do this in memory of me" (Mark, 14:22-25; Luke 22:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). It lays credence to the eternal relevance of the Eucharistic banquet. Each time it is done in memory of him, the mystery he celebrated is re-enacted and re-lived at that moment with a future dimension of reliving the same banquet in eternity. Such is the wealth of memory as history.

This is not limited to the Judeo-Christian religious experience. In different ways, there are common grounds for memory as history in other religions. To sustain the essence of Islam, for example, every Muslim has the Quran first, then the *Sunnah* and the *Hadīth* (deeds and sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad). They set the path for every decision in Islam (Esack 111-115). Religions with founding fathers toe this format: they fall back to the wealth of memory exemplified by the lives of their respective founders. This does not mean that such is not common among religions without known founders. The lives of their adherents are simply modelled on those of their predecessors. Links to the past are maintained as sources of strength for believers. They serve to resurrect the hopes the religion holds. Of this, Miftari and Visoka shade more light:

> This kind of search for the resurrection of epic ash in the letters could not carry the different ethnic and cultural feelings of the people, unless they were linked to the sign of their origin, i.e. by searching for the predecessors of a group who believes in some common values and cultivates them from generation to generation. These ancestors may be different: family members, a religious community, an ethnic community, or members of a religious community that unites the right and memories, or a cultural community that unite some common symbols (151).

Generally speaking, therefore, it is obvious that tales form part of man's nature. His story is his history. Taking a lift from Roquentin's *La nausée* (*Nausea*), Strawson quotes in his *Things that bother me*: "A man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it" (54). This is at the heart of his essence. By memory, we pass on to others our story, our life. What we remember, we share with others. This shows our collective journey. Urbaniak takes this to heart when he writes: "one never remembers alone; to remember, we always need others. We are not original owners of our memories, which does not necessarily mean that we are not an authentic subject of the attribution of memories" (3). That is the nature of our memory, the nature of our history.

Memory as a lived experience

Human daily activities are documentation of memory. What we do is registered at something done at some point, in someplace. This certain locus shows that every moment is a moment lived and an experience that adds to all we had garnered before then. Memory as a lived experience expresses this reality. We make memory as we live. It is our way of life and it captures all that we do; should we recall them or not. In this sense, memory is both a conscious and an unconscious event that takes note of our very existence as a people. What we

had in the past is contemplated upon and relived in the present with foreseen future of a repeat, modification or avoidance of the same experience. Nkemnkia states: experience "is nothing else except the product of memory" (180).

From the foregone, memory could be seen as an event or a collection of events. Be it significant or not, it contributes to the entire lifestyle of a people. Events are recorded either as memorable or not. In the first case, they hold the worth of remembrance. They serve for a specific purpose: be they good or bad. In the latter case, though they are remembered, they do not hold specific significance to those who remember them. Both cases depict memory. Underscoring the relevance of events within the coordination of cause and effect, Coreth affirms:

> Apparently insignificant events in themselves sometimes have a disproportionate effect and model life's historical environment of entire generations. On the contrary, events that seem important in themselves and are capable of giving an orientation can be deprived of their corresponding effects; they have been forgotten, they have gone lost. It follows that the historical importance of an event is not in the fact that it exercises a determinate universal and proportionate causality as a natural process: its importance is of a completely different kind (168).

As events, memory is a recount of the lived experiences of the past and present. The effects they hold on the people depend largely on the consequence of their interpretations at the moment it is done. Some events spring hopeful sentiments. They renew and reposition the life of those who bear them in mind for a future that is full of life and confidence. Such are the effects of their causal relations hold on those who bear them. They can rebuild the think tank of those involved to the attainment of their immediate set goals. This also implies that some events come with cold sentiments of depression and hopelessness. They tend to weaken or strengthen the will of those who bear them in mind. Should they simply be re-lived, they could dampen the spirit of the people. If on the other hand they are interpreted with some sense of optimism, they become stepping stones for those whose experiences they are.

In the religious cycle, memory in this sense is a lived religious experience of a people. It is a collection of their religious phenomena in all their aspects. Every such encounter adds to the body of memory they have for references. These encounters are religious events that could hold both hopeful and depressing sentiments. Such is the power of memory. Of this Sakaranaho opines: "the main events of a religious tradition are not only told or inscribed but also enacted in different rites and rituals. Rites and rituals in turn involve various kinds of bodily practices, which by means of repetition keep up... 'habit-memory'" (144). When they are recalled with high sense of hope, the expression of gratitude ensues as the people are moved to re-enact it. If on the contrary, they are repositioned to learn from it to avert its corresponding recurrence and

influence. Either way, however, there are great chances of turning both into useful ends. They hold great lessons drawn for onward experiences. That too is the strength of memory as a lived experience.

This evident relive of experiences marks a synchronic contextualization of both the past and the present with a precise future goal(s). It is what lived religion does. For Moon and others, "Lived religion concentrates on the lived experience of believers in daily interactions with others and critically examines the interwoven relationship among God, community, and self" (3). It is at the heart of religious experiences and pushes its adherents on with the sole aim of the realization of its projection: the future life. This in itself is a living experience since the immediate present runs into it. While commenting on the prayer of Jesus for his apostles, for instance, Mork writes:

> The apostles and on their example all Christians must be the continuation of the incarnation in the world: the present and active Christ. Their mode of life is that of the one Trinity in the Son, and in him with the Father, by the work of the Spirit (...). The place of Christians in the world is that of the continuers of Christ (175).

Memory by this is the continuation of the works and life of the religious experiences of the founders of particular religions. They also include the religious experiences of their progressive successors, those of a people's forebears or ancestors, in the restricted sense; or in the open sense, of the people's co-shared brethren "of the faith" professed or lived. Sakaranaho rightly understands this as "every religion evolves out of religious traditions preceding them; thus there is no absolute beginning in any religious tradition" (140). It implies that "the absolutely new is inconceivable; all beginnings contain an element of recollection" (140). This makes it a real phenomenon. The real is true. Memory by itself is real. Jonas believes that in memory, only "reality counts and reality knows of no representation" (167). How this is interpreted and relived is what makes the difference the most. It is the evident factor at the base of the relationship between memory and religion. As Sakaranaho puts it, at the base "of our inquiry into religion and social memory lie questions as to 'how religions remember', in other words how religious communities are constructed through remembrance, and how they act in the process of remembering" (150).

The religious sense of Memory... eternal law

Religion is a mode of life. It is not just a concept but a style of living. For Feuerbach, "religion rests on the essential distinction of man from beast; beasts have no religion" (23). This makes it an integral aspect of man. Being so invokes the ethical sphere which rests on man's social nature. Every religion has a particular mode of comportment for its adherents. Generally speaking, the good is appraised and the bad denounced. The rightness or wrongness of human

actions is guided by the codes of conduct of the religion they practice. These preserved codes, oral or written, as we had seen earlier, are fruits of memory shared by different generations. Without them, the ethical imports of religious practices, which give it a place in society in relation with others, within or outside of the group, fail to meet their desired goals. The very essence of religious practices harbours this aspect of interpersonal relationships. Little wonder the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, amidst many definitions, saw it as a "relationship of devotion or fear of God or gods."

While the term is a complex one to define, one might know it in praxis. This is partly because it has undergone transmogrification through time. A random internet search traces it to the ancient French *religion*/*relegion* meaning 'piety', 'devotion', 'religious community'; or the Latin *religionem* from the nominative *religio* used regarding to what is considered sacred: hence, 'respect or reverence for the gods', 'fear for the gods', sense of 'moral obligation or right', 'faith', 'a mode of worship or cult', 'sanctity' or 'holiness, etc. Its root is also traced to the Latin *religare*, which is a combination of two words: *re* (a prefix for something done earlier with particular attention drawn to it once more such as 'again', 'repeat', 'about', 'concerning', 'reference to') and *ligare* (meaning to 'bind', 'tie', 'join', etc together). Based on this etymological ground, Urbaniak makes a metaphorical connection between religion and memory. For him, "*re-ligare* ('to bind', 'to tie together') and *re-memorari* ('to recall to mind') used to serve the common purpose of producing collective meanings" (1). They both have common recourse to the past as one that holds a lot for the present. This is close to another etymological development made famous by Cicero. The root for him is *relegere* which adds the verb *legere* meaning 'to read' to our already known *re*. *Relegere* by this combination would mean 'to re-read', 'read again', etc. Explaining further, he shows how the term came to be institutionalized as distinct from superstition, thought to be the opposite:

> Persons who spent whole days in prayer and sacrifice to ensure that their children should out-live them were termed 'superstitious' (from *superstes*, a survivor), and the word later acquired a wider application. Those on the other hand who carefully re-viewed and so to speak retraced all the lore of ritual were called 'religious' from *relegere* (to retrace or re-read), like 'elegant' from *eligere* (to select), 'diligent' from *diligere* (to care for), 'intelligent 'from *intellegere* (to understand); for all these words contain the same sense of 'picking out' (*legere*) that is present in 'religious'. Hence 'superstitious' and 'religious' came to be terms of censure and approval respectively (193).

Commenting on this, Horvilleur quickly states: "Authentic religion is contrary to superstition and not to rationalism; it is an ability to reread that requires us to revisit our texts, that is, to offer new interpretations and refuse to fix their meaning once and for all" (139). His intention here suggests that rationalism is

not the opposite of religion but superstition in line with Cicero. However, if perchance rationalism, in all its aspects, puts away ideas of the sacred (that which religion reveres) just to show how human reason can thrive without any recourse whatsoever to any divine being, then it excludes that which is re-read. This too could make it an opposite of religion in some unambiguous sense.

This idea of re-reading in this immediate discourse is what memory entails. By this, what is re-read is what is relived. In this, there is a nexus between the past and the present that continuously reads back while advancing into the future. This gives it an eschatological dimension. The memories we make each day culminates in a future guaranteed to those who are faithful to this re-living of the goals of their brethren in faith. It is also a re-enactment of the ideals of the faith. Tapping from this established relationship between memory and religion; one could carefully seek to understand what this recollection holds. It involves one's entire being, nothing is left out. On this, Cassirer insists:

> In man we cannot describe recollection as a simple return of an event, as a faint image or copy of former impressions. It is not simply a repetition but rather a rebirth of the past; it implies a creative and constructive process. It is not enough to pick up isolated data of our past experience; we must really *re-collect* them, we must organize and synthesize them, and assemble them into a focus of thought. It is this kind of recollection which gives us the characteristic human shape of memory, and distinguishes it from all other phenomena in animal or organic life (51).

This is not different from Sakaranaho's insight on what this re-reading deals with. It is hallmark of all that tradition proposes. According to him,

> tradition is not simply a repetition of the past in the present. Rather, the distinctive mark of tradition is that it actualizes the past in the present, thereby restoring to human lives its essential core. Thus tradition cannot be reduced to established fundamental references, such as sacred texts or immovable rituals, set for all time. Tradition evolves in a hermeneutic process, one in which a religious community re-reads its ritual and statutory practices, its own historical narrative and institutions (146).

In this already established connection with religion, the "rebirth of the past" of memory in itself is a build-up for onward passage to other generations. This shows an unending nature of memory as a continuous event. In the religious climes, a contemplation of a supernatural being is evident. This sense of the sacred that religion evokes is that "of the idea of the presence of God, and the same experience of man" as Goetz opines. He continuous:

> This God is a Presence that makes us lift our eyes and raise our minds, to look beyond the things, places or people who provide the occasion for this meeting, like a witness who judges us, like a guardian who

> watches over us and over things, like a friend with whom we find ourselves at home, but who, on occasion, knows how to call us to reason. He is an aspect of reality, grasped in its ordered totality, which does not show itself to the eyes but to the conscience. God is then the form of the world and at the same time the one who gives form to the world (83-4).

Such a presence readily invokes a relationship; man's self-realization. In the words of Feuerbach, "Religion, at least the Christian religion, is the ensemble of man's relations with himself, or rather with his own being, but regarded as *another* being" (36). The notion of one being before 'another' distinct from himself demands mode comportment that is relational. Sakaranaho identifies three elements constituting the definition of religion: "the expression of believing", the memory of continuity" and "the legitimizing reference to an authorized version of such memory" (145-6). In the first, we are drawn to God; in the second, we stay connected to the experience therein; in the third, we hold to what past is our source of authority for living in the present. Kanu conveys these three elements in a slightly different way: belief, cult/worship and morals. For him, religion expresses a belief in "a being who is Supreme; in cult/worship, the dependence of subjects on the Supreme Being is expressed, in morals, the rules and regulations to guide the new relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped are drawn up" (3). His insight is close to Ekwunife's who states that religion is "man's awareness and recognition of his dependent relationship on a Transcendent Being, the Wholly Other, namable or un-namable, personalized or impersonalized, expressible in human society through beliefs, worship and ethical or moral behaviour" (1).

Both descriptions affirm the relational aspect of religion sustained through memory. For this to last, rules of engagement are drawn: "ad intra as a source of identification and consensus, and ad extra as a source of dissociation" (146). Do good, avoid evil; is a central code in religion. It is difficult to imagine religion without it. While the definition of what this good or evil consists of might be relative, it also has an objective dimension nonetheless. This makes it a human thing. The natural law is an example of such behavioural laws within human society, be they religious or not. Understanding this within Christian theology, for instance, this law participates in the eternal laws of God written in our hearts (Davies 215-6). To live them, they must be internalized first. This internalization is memory with a predetermined plan of practice.

Memory is a way of life. This is truer of religious memory. It is the way of life, the experiences lived and relived, of the generations before realized in the present. Being so, it makes for the nexus between the past and the present in the hope of a future. The collective memory of a group is an extension of its life through time. This seems lost the more successful generations leave out essential aspects of the whole. The modifications that follow due to such

interpretations of the available memory would be stored for later generations. This would mean that virtually every generation lives its memory in context, in a way somewhat different from earlier ones. They only fall back to the past to refine their perceptions and re-confirm their authority. The closer they are to the precepts of the past, the more authentic they are said to be to the traditions they live. While relying on Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Urbaniak avers:

> religion is to be seen as a chain of memory, that is, a form of collective memory and imagination based on the sanctity of tradition. What is specific to religious activity is that it is wholly directed to the production, management and distribution of the particular form of believing which draws its legitimacy from reference to a tradition (2).

For religions built around the lives of specific founders, the words and deeds of such figures constitute the tenets they hold dear to. This too is memory: be they oral or written. The Buddhists, for example, would always look at the life and works of Buddha before making their decisions. This could be said of any other religion with a known founder. For none specific founder religions, non-proselytised religions like African religions, the lives of their ancestors play great roles in charting their way of life (Okafor 69-73). Such is the point of reference they hold dear**.** Without these nodes, there are no memories. As such, no religious experience since this is built around the memories of past generations graciously handed on to later ones.

The loss of memory, the loss of the sense of religion

Religious experiences capture what religion proffers. They are living experiences of a people at a particular place and time. This spatiotemporal encapsulation of such experiences validates the claims of religion as something real and not dead; even though it might be an event in the past. The re-living of these brings to life their essences. It is in these acts that memories are made and passed on to later generations. Though they might not be wholly captured in these later generations, their being read backwards brings them alive again. When they are spoken of, the goals for which they existed in the first place are relayed. Should they be written, they serve the same purposes: communication. This is very important though it does not neglect the fact that "Remembering always goes hand in hand with forgetting" (151). For Finlay,

> Communication, in the broadest sense, is what enables relationships to be created and to grow. When communication is lost or denied people become isolated, cut off from their community. God is a God who communicates with us and who desires his children to communicate with him. While the most obvious form of this communication is found in the Bible it is by no means the only way (284).

Before the advent of writing, oral traditions played fundamental roles in the preservation of the life of people. Earlier generations pass on to their forebears

the tales of their ancestors. These are memories. The culture of writing simply codified them. In the religious sense in view, written and oral codes are meant to be remembered with closely the same sentiments. Beyond those too, every injunction is meant to be remembered. This is memory synthesized. The Abrahamic religions are famous for this approach. In them, we find both injunctions meant to guide the lives of their adherents in a particular way, time and place. This also goes for the codification of the ways of life of founders of such religions. In the broadest sense, every religion has a code of conduct and this is transmitted in either oral or written form. The purpose is the same: preservation of memory.

A memory so preserved is a point of reference for the people. It is the source of authority for divergent interpretations of the memory lived (past) and the making of new ones (present and future). The older these written codes are, the greater their strength and orthodoxy; consequently, efficacy in times of doubts on the most acceptable way to act. People generally fall back to them to chart new courses. Those who wish to replicate earlier events find in them the ingredients they need. For those who desire to make modifications based on the changing times, these too make it possible as comparative grounds of departure. One clear fact is: it is impossible to have a whole memory at a glance. Partially available sources are all that serve for every moment. Though partial, they provide aspects of the whole, without which they would not be available in the first place. Kant's subject-object, universal-particular, substance-accidents, etc. distinctions readily come to mind (A414/B441, Strawson 170). Parts are necessary of the whole; the converse is also true.

Written codes/traditions serve as better aids against forgetfulness. This is feasible in every memory. To forget, in this sense, is to lose some chunk of the whole. Complete loss means the entire forgetfulness of the whole. Where this is the case, nothing is left. Religion would have nothing to 'fall back to'; nothing to 're-read'. This 'fall back to', this 're-reading' is the memory that serves as its life wire. Without it, there is a betrayal of an aspect of its meaning. The collective treasure it holds would no longer have present and future glimpses. There would be no communication, in the strictest sense. "Even the simple presence of another", Finlay asserts, "has the potential to communicate i.e. you are not forgotten, I am here with you" (284). That in itself is memory. This suggests "the memory of creation is immediately a promise for the future" and every "new birth recapitulates the first birth; every beginning is a re-beginning" (Ricoeur 167).

It recounts presence in all its ramifications. Invariably, to lose it is to lose the sense of the sacred. It is to lay off all that carries the very essence of belief. Without this, the secularization of all that is sacred ensues uncontrollably. On this, Urbaniak contends:

> Perhaps what constitutes the greatest threat to religion, understood as a chain of memory is the third of the modern agents... that is, institutional differentiation which in many cases is tantamount to factual de-institutionalisation, so characteristic of secularising tendencies in today's societies. Secularisation is seen by many as another name for the crisis of collective memory (3).

It widens with memory loss. As such, all forms of memory losses are a loss of connection with the past: be they private or communal.

Conclusion

We had seen that memory forms an integral part of human existence. Though not only relevant within the religious ambience, its roles are essential for our daily life events. It is our history because it is of our concrete existence. With each passing day, memory is made. To speak of a place is to say something about its people. People make the place the place and all that they do and say make memory: it keeps something of them through time. This makes memory a lived experience, rich with the aroma of the past that serve to establish us in the present and build well position the now for a better future. As such, every day we make and re-make the memories for generations yet unborn. More true, we can make similar affirmations of religions. Both as synonymous in this basic sense call our attention to our connection with God, the Supreme Being, whose eternal law guide and sustain the course of events in the universe.

Care must be taken, therefore, not to throw all these treasures to the wind. A common adage states: "everyone who knows where the rain began could as well know when it stops." Anyone who knows what makes for the foundation of his very existence is not oblivious of his final destination. Though this might not be very clear now, so was the present a bleak at some point to our forebears. There is every need to keep the memories that keep us in fame and view. To lose the sense of these events is to fall short of what religion proposes. Anyone who tenaciously holds this to heart has every reason to keep his hopes high. This, faith fully guarantees (Hebrews 11:1).[1]

[1] All citations taken from non-English texts employed in this work are the author's translations of the original texts.

Works Cited

Aquinas, Thomas. "The Summa Theologica." *New Advent*, www.newadvent.org/summa/1078.htm.

Aristotle. *The Nichomachean ethics*, translated by H. Reckham, Woodsworth Editions, 1999.

Augustine. *Confessions*, translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, 1961.

Cassirer, Ernst. *An essay on man*. Yale University Press, 1944,

Cicero. *De natura deorum academica*, translated by H. Reckham, Harvard University Press, 1951.

Coreth, Emerich. *Antropologia filosofica*, Morcelliana, 1998.

Davies, Brian. *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A guide and commentary*, Oxford Press, 2014.

Dyson, J. Freeman. *Infinite in all directions*, Harper Perennial, 1985.

Ekwunife, Anthony. "Naming the ultimate in African Traditional Religion: A historical perspective." *Issues in African Traditional Religion and Philosophy*, edited by E. O. Ezenweke and A. I. Kanu, Augustinian Publications Nigeria, 2012, pp. 1-39.

Esack, Farid. *The Qur'an: A user's guide*, Oneworld Publications, 2005.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *L'essenza del cristianesimo*, Feltrinelli Editore, 1980.

Finlay, R. Mairi. "Righteousness in the land of forgetfulness." *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 54, 2015, pp. 279-286, doi: 10.1007/s10943-013-9813-z.

Foucault, Michel. *Introduction to Kant's anthropology*, edited by R. Nigro, Semiotexte, 2008.

Goetz, Joseph. *L'esperienza di Dio nei primitivi*, Morcelliana, 1983.

Horvilleur, Delphine. *Nudità e pudore*, Edizioni Qiqajon, 2021.

Jonas, Hans. *The phenomenon of life: Toward a philosophical biology*, Northwestern University Press, 2001.

Kanu, I. Anthony. *A hermeneutical approach to African Traditional Religion, theology and philosophy*, Augustinian Publications Nigeria, 2015.

Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, edited by R. B. Louden, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

——. *Critique of pure reason*, translated by P. Guyer and A. W Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Miftari, Vehbi, and Visoka Avdi. "Myth and memory in medieval literary awareness." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, vol. 7, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 151-156, doi:10.7596/taksad.v7i1.1435.

Moon, Seugho, Ryan Ann Marie and Pigott Terri. "Do this in memory of me: Examining Catholic subjective and teacher education." *Cogent Education*, vol. 6, March 2019, pp. 1-17, doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2019.1592736.

Mork, Wulstan. *Linee di antropologia biblica*, Editrice Esperienza, 1971.

Nkemnkia, N. Martin. *African Vitalogy: A step forward in African thinking*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1999.
Okafor, T. Gabriel. "The Christian (God) of ancestors: A platform for religious dialogue." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2021, pp. 63- 87, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29332.65925.
Ricouer, Paul. *Philosophical anthropology: Writings and lectures*, translated by D. Pellaeur, vol. 3, Polity Press, 2016.
Sakaranaho, Tuula. "Religion and the study of social memory." *Temenos – Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*, vol. 47, no. 2, September 2011, pp. 135-158,
doi: 10.33356/temenos.5151.
Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*, translated by W. H. White, Woodsworth Editions, 2001.
Strawson, Galen. *Real materialism and other essays*, Clarendon Press, 2008.
——. *Things that bother me: Death, freedom, the self, etc.*, NYRB, 2018.
Sutton, John. *Philosophy and memory traces: Descartes to connectionism*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
Urbaniak, Jakub. "Memories as Religion: What can the broken continuity of tradition bring about? Part two." *HTS Teologiese Studies*, vol. 71, no. 3, June 2015, pp. 1-10, *AOSIS OpenJornals*, doi: 10.4102/hts.v71i3.2933.
——. "Religion as memory: How has the continuity of tradition produced collective meanings? Part one." *HTS Teologiese Studies*, vol. 71, no. 3, June 2015, pp. 1-8, *AOSIS OpenJornals*, doi: 10.4102/hts.v71i3.2815.
Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Holman Publishers, 2003.