

Maurice Halbwachs' "Collective Memory" and Contemporary Approaches to Theology

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Abstract: *This article discusses Lieven Boeve's theology of particularity which is based upon the concept of interruption. Boeve considers the category of interruption as an alternative theological method which can enhance the openness of the Christian tradition, without dismissing its particularity. The theological foundations of interruption rest upon the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the latter warrants the openness, the former is seen as the embodiment of Christian particularity. This article argues that the focus on incarnation and resurrection is logical and indeed unavoidable. However, it falls short in recognizing the "perichoresis" of Revelation, Faith and Tradition. This tripartite "perichoresis" can be localized in memory which is the very place where Revelation, Faith and Tradition come together. In this regard Maurice Halbwachs' concept of "Collective Memory" can be very helpful. For that reason theology must be done from the Trinitarian perspective.*

Keywords: Lieven Boeve, Maurice Halbwachs, Interruption, Particularity, Incarnation, Trinity, Resurrection, Revelation, Faith Tradition, Memory.

INTRODUCTION

The debate about the nature and methods of theology is never ending. While many would agree with Anselm's definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding,"¹ the search for a comprehensive theological method is still unaccomplished. Stimulated by the optimism of positive historical science at the very beginning of the twentieth century, protestant theologians in Germany have made attempts to explain in a comprehensive and universal manner the essence of Christianity. Pioneering in this field was the Protestant historian and theologian Adolf von Harnack, who was followed by the Catholic Michael Schmaus.² As time passed, and with it changes of social and cultural paradigms, theologians became more modest. From 1960 onwards they sought to clarify only the "basics" or the "foundations" of Christian faith based upon the Apostolic Creed.³ However, since the Second Vatican Council, new forms and theological methods have

¹ D. L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding. An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

² M. Delgado (ed.), *Das Christentum der Theologen im 20. Jahrhundert. Vom "Wesen des Christentums" zu den Kurzformeln des Glaubens* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000).

³ J. Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum. Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis* (München: Kösel, 1968).

emerged.⁴ Stephen Bevans summed up well the theological evolution since 1965: “There is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology: feminist theology, black theology, liberation theology, Filipino theology, Asian-American theology, African theology, and so forth. Doing theology contextually is not an option ... is really a theological imperative.”⁵ While Lieven Boeve recognizes the value of contextual theology for the intra-Christian evangelization, he nevertheless questions its practicality on the level of religious plurality. According to him each faith tradition is particular and stands on its own. Consequently in the context of religious plurality Christian faith ought to be considered only one alternative choice among many other possibilities.⁶ Therefore the traditional concept of theology as the explanation of salvation history is only valid, and can only be understood, within the Christian context. From this angle theology can solely be done from the framework of particularity. Such a theology cannot claim universal validity over all other faith traditions. The awareness that the Christian faith is a religion with a particular context and framework leads to an openness towards other faiths. To ensure this particularity and openness Boeve has introduced the category of interruption. For him interruption is *the* theological imperative deriving, on the one hand, from the incarnational-eschatological dimension of Christian faith, and on the other hand from the encounter with the otherness of multiple religions.

I accept that interruption is an important theological category. Nevertheless, I will argue that Maurice Halbwachs’ notion of “Collective Memory” can move beyond the duality of particularity and universality. This will mean taking issue with Boeve’s influential idea (especially in Australia) of “interruption”. After all, theology is dealing with the transcendent mystery of God. Nonetheless, Boeve’s category of interruption is too narrow, given the properly catholic scope and range of theological discourse. The manner in which Halbwachs relates social frameworks and collective memory provides a more fertile and realistic foundation for theological reflection and faith formation.

But first, let us look at the theology of interruption, and then move onto Halbwachs’ discourse of collective memory and its theological applications.⁷

THEOLOGY OF INTERRUPTION

Contemporary social philosophy reminds theologians of the risk and danger involved when qualifying theological ideas as universal or collective. Theological ideology may lead to a distorted interpretation of the Gospels resulting in a negative rationalism which may produce various forms of oppression.⁸

⁴ G. Baum, *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview* (New York: Orbis, 1999).

⁵ S. B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2008).

⁶ L. Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition. An essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, (Louvain: Peeters, 2003) 56.

⁷ I would like to thank Professor A. J. Kelly for his valuable comments on the draft of this article. Likewise I also would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr. M. Ghosn to the progress of this essay.

⁸ See the various contributions in the volume edited by G. Baum (ed.), *The Twentieth Century. A Theological Overview* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999).

In psychological and socio-political terms, the word “collective” has a pejorative meaning. It may suggest an “idealized collective” which regulates and decides the fate of individual lives. Individual freedom is thereby sacrificed in favour of the collective.

For modern theologians, however, the word “collective” may allude to the Freudian myth, a product of human projections, an “Über-Ich”. The creation of a “Super-ego” is often interpreted as the collective memory which traumatized the memory of victims.⁹ Hence the collective echoes platonic violence directed against individuality. In this context Martin Heidegger accused Western philosophy that along with Plato it had forgotten completely forgotten the category of being (“Sein”).¹⁰

In dismantling the violence of the metaphysical structure of collective memory, and thus safeguarding the meaning of “being”, Jacques Derrida interprets memory not as an instance which dictates the present, but rather as an accusation and thus as a radical otherness which liberates the present to itself. In this context memory is seen here as an irreversible caesura which gives the present to itself, “An interval must separate the present from what is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject.”¹¹

According to Derrida memory not only interrupts itself from the present in order to allow the present to be itself, but also recognizes itself as non-totality or as a fundamental difference which denies any appearance as such. Memory of the historical past therefore is for itself, simply because there is nothing which can alter its particularity. An interval as caesura interrupts the chain of univocal continuity which aims at sameness. In this point we can expand Bevan’s saying, “that there no such thing as theology” to the maxim that “there is no such thing as identity.”

Many contemporary theologians have followed Derrida in this direction.¹² His philosophical analysis has become the theological framework for many contemporary theologians. This application of the Derridan ideas into theology also modifies the concept of personhood.

If identity is defined as a personal self, and if the self is not perceived as sameness, then the search for personal identity cannot be anything else than an open enterprise. Postmodernists agree unanimously on the conjecture that identity is not universally given and that there is no single form which could be considered globally as the foundation of other identities. Identities are epistemologies and are shaped by particular cultures. Identity is gained only through a process of an unceasing re-contextualisation via re-

⁹ See M. Volf, *The End of Memory. Remembering Rightly In A Violent World* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2006).

¹⁰ T. Sheehan, ‘Martin Heidegger’, in *A Companion to the Philosophers*, edited by Robert L. Arrington (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 288-297.

¹¹ J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (New York: Harvester, 1984), 14.

¹² See S. Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2009); also Michael J. Scanlon, ‘The Postmodern Debate’, in *The Twentieth Century*, 228-237.

interpretation. In this context postmodern theologians speak cautiously not from a given, but rather from a possibility of identity. If this position is taken for granted, Christian identity consequently becomes only one alternative among many other possible identities or selves. Charles Taylor characterizes the postmodern age in which people have a wide range of possible choices or alternatives, as secular.¹³ The secularity of choices has various impacts upon theological method. One consequence is the revision of the theology of correlation.

1.1) *Excursus: De-traditionalization and Pluralization of Religion in Europe*

According to Boeve theologies of correlation do not enhance the particularity of Christian identity. On the contrary, they would only accelerate the process of secularization, if culture becomes too easily an uncritical ally of theology. Instead Boeve suggests a theology of interruption which goes even beyond the correlative approach.¹⁴ Christian identity cannot be gained by an uncritical alliance with the world, but it is rather the awareness of a particular context which interrupts a naïve correlation between God's word and culture. This process brings to consciousness the incompatibility of its particularity with the dominant culture. Identity is thus not gained by a "fake" dialectic which leads to an identity of sameness through differentiation, as in the case of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit"¹⁵ but is to be gained through a process of conscious incongruity of its uniqueness. For Boeve this particularity does not need to be understood as a weakness. Rather it can show the strength of Christian faith because the awareness of its own particularity invites Christians to be open towards other narratives; or in other words, the attentiveness to one's own limitation is the other part of the eschatological openness which refuses "the construction of a sort of common denominator (an all-encompassing consensus)."¹⁶

In this sense Boeve has applied the *Derridan* neologism of *differance* (a combination of verbs to "differ" and to "defer") to his theology. Thus for him theology must be done from the perspective of a combination of incarnation and resurrection¹⁷. While the former enhances particularity, the latter prevents the isolation of a particularity by pointing to its eschatological-relational dimension. Thus eschatology would help to avoid a *particularism* which can become a totalitarian ideology. There is an interaction between both – an interaction which serves to safeguard historical particularity on the one hand and its openness on the other. Therefore Christian particularity is interrupted by the incarnation which refers to a concrete embodiment of its framework or faith tradition. Furthermore Christian faith is likewise interrupted by the resurrection which enhances its openness towards other narratives.

Here Boeve has combined philosophical conjecture with theological speculation, one which refuses any universal or collective idea, in favour of an open particularity.

¹³ C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); in a recent interview Cardinal C. Schönborn said that Christianity is an 'alternative lifestyle in a secular world', see *Tablet* Nr. 22 May 2010, 33.

¹⁴ L. Boeve, 'The Sacramental Interruption of Rituals of Life', *Heythrop Journal* 44 (2003), 401-417.

¹⁵ H. Kerber, *Zum Begriff der Differenz bei Hegel, Derrida und Deleuze* (Colloquium held on February 10th 2000); see <http://web.fu-berlin.de/postmoderne-psych/colloquium/kerber.htm> - accessed August 6th 2011.

¹⁶ Boeve, *Interrupting*, 109.

¹⁷ L. Boeve et al., 'Resurrection – Incarnation – Transformation: Incarnation as Hermeneutical Strategy – A Symposium', *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 777-815.

Boeve's idea of interruption is based upon his analysis of the post-secular situation in Europe, in particular in Belgium which has one of the highest rates in baptism, but the lowest Sunday Mass attendance in Europe.¹⁸ Drawing on Yves Lambert's work *A Turning Point in Religious Evolution in Europe*,¹⁹ Boeve argues that Europe is not secular, but post-secular in the sense that among the younger generation (18-29 year olds) there is an increase in "believing without belonging."²⁰ Consequently, Europe is not becoming more secular, if secularity is understood as the disappearance of religion. Rather Europeans are experiencing a transformation of religion. This transformation, however, does not necessarily lead Europe into a deeper Christian commitment in local faith communities, but rather to a de-traditionalization of Christian practice and faith, "Detraditionalization as a term hints at the socio-cultural interruption of traditions (religious as well as class, gender ... traditions), which are no longer able to pass themselves from one generation to the next. The latter definitively applies to the Christian tradition in which the transmission process has been seriously hampered."²¹

In post-secular Europe the dislocation of faith may lead to the relativisation of one's particular faith as it does not consider itself above other faith claims. Therefore the process of detraditionalization is also fuelled by the pluralization of religious faith in Europe. The encounter with the existence of religious otherness leads Christians to "a reflection on their own religious identity and truth claims, which often seems to result in a theological-pluralist position of theological truth."²² Within the co-existence of multiple religious truth claims Christian tradition can be seen only as one particular manifestation. Christianity can therefore consider itself only as an alternative truth with respect to other truths.

In the conclusion of his book, Boeve points out one particular consequence for this understanding of Christian identity. He believes that detraditionalization leads to the individualization of faith. Christian faith is an option for which one decides. However, this personal decision is also further relativised by religious pluralization. Thus detraditionalization goes hand in hand with pluralization. For this reason the classical theology of correlation is insufficient as "such a method only plausibly and relevantly works when there is still a substantial factual overlap between (secularizing) culture and Christianity, constituting the horizon in which Christian faith is correlated with modern, secular culture."²³ One consequence of this non-existence of the overlapping of horizons is the fact that the translation of Christian faith into current paradigms is hampered by plural non-conformist language. In this context Boeve calls for an adjustment in analysis, reflection and a strategic approach to post-secular culture which does not evacuate the particularity of Christian tradition, while making it open towards other truth claims.

¹⁸ While from 2005-2009 more than 70% children were baptized, the mass attendance oscillates between 5% and 7%.

¹⁹ Y. Lambert, *A Turning Point in Religious Evolution in Europe*, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14 (2004): 29-45.

²⁰ Boeve, *Detraditionalization*, 101.

²¹ Boeve, *Detraditionalization*, 104.

²² Boeve, *Detraditionalization*, 106.

²³ Boeve, *Detraditionalization*, 113.

Boeve believes that the category of interruption can fulfil this task. According to him, the linguistic incommunicability of the particularity of Christian tradition on the one hand makes Christians more attentive to the irreducibility of their own tradition; and on the other hand this irreducible particularity cannot set itself above the otherness of other religious truths. It always remains a particular manifestation alongside other manifestations. Therefore Christian tradition is internally (incarnation) and externally (resurrection) interrupted. Nevertheless, as a partner to other religions it is also interrupting other religious truth claims from becoming a “meta-tradition.” Here Boeve relates the category of interruption to the theological understanding of incarnation, “Hence, it follows that a fully accepted particularity of the Christian discourse is not a refutation of the truth, but rather the very condition of possibility for it. It is only through the Incarnation that God becomes fully revealed. This implies at the same time that each Christian narrative stands under God’s judgement and can only bear witness to God in a radical-hermeneutical manner.”²⁴

The category of interruption therefore does not dissolve Christian particularity. At the same time it prevents Christian tradition from becoming hegemonic.

Boeve’s theological concept is highly creative. Interruption from inside and outside enables a critical dialogue among religions without mutual fear. Being open towards others does not necessary lead to an evacuation of one’s own identity. Therefore Boeve’s approach to interreligious dialogue avoids the “violence of universalisation.”²⁵ Furthermore, it leaves behind the naivety of an uncritical correlation of theological discourse to post-secular society. For Boeve, dialogue always includes a tension – one that enhances respect for the otherness. The category of interruption therefore rejects a metaphysical hermeneutic.

However, my difficulty lies in the connection Boeve makes between tradition and narrative. For him tradition is based on an explicit narrative concept. Exclusive narrative is precisely the key which interrupts otherness which, however, is at least as bold as any particularity can possibly be. How can a dialogue be promising, if a narrative or particularity is regarded as an irreducible otherness, while pluralisation moves forward? Would it not be a “fake” dialogue if one is not permitted to discuss and to question the truth claim made by the other partner or partners? If the position of one’s own tradition is irreducible, can dialogue still be conducted as a real dialogue?

I will argue that tradition is transmitted not only linguistically or in customs and rituals. Rather it occurs also at the psychological or subconscious level. For that reason I am convinced that memory, be it called communicative, connective, collective or cultural, can mediate better between tradition and context, than the category of interruption. As Jan Assmann has pointed out, in memory psyche, consciousness, society and culture interact with each other.²⁶ If Christian faith which is transmitted culturally, historically, liturgically, practically and doctrinally from one generation to another, is the memory of

²⁴ Boeve, *Detraditionalization*, 121.

²⁵ M. Saracino, ‘Part Four – Response to Anthony Godzieba and Lieven Boeve’, in A. Godzieba, L. Boeve and M. Saracino, ‘Resurrection – Interruption – Transformation: Incarnation as Hermeneutical Strategy’, *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 777-815, at 813.

²⁶ J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 9.

Christianity, then it is evident that the act of faith already includes and correlates all these factors with each other in order to form a coherent concept which can be understood by others as well. For Halbwachs individual experience is only meaningful if it is correlated to collective memory.

Let us examine his theory by investigating the crucial role memory plays within the construction process of Christian identity. We refer in particular to Halbwachs because he is considered as the founder of the theory of “collective memory”, although his position has recently undergone some important revisions. However, the core thoughts of Halbwachs are shared by a number of sociologists and neuroscientists.²⁷

MAURICE HALBWACHS' THEORY ON “COLLECTIVE MEMORY”

a) *Life and Influences*

Maurice Halbwachs was born 1877 in Reims and he died in 1945 in the Nazi concentration camp in Buchenwald. As a young student he studied philosophy under the guidance of Henri Bergson, who taught at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris. It is important to note that in 1886 Bergson published an article *On Unconscious Simulation in States of Hypnosis* in which he outlined the role of unconscious memories within the process of recognition. According to Bergson the creativity of the human mind is not rooted primarily in the intellect, but rather in subjective intuition. According to Lewis Coser this encounter with the philosophy of Bergson had preserved Halbwachs, “from the excesses of a number of Durkheimians.”²⁸ Nevertheless, it was Émile Durkheim whose ideas on the impact a society exercised on memory that greatly influenced Halbwachs' academic career. In opposition to Bergson, Durkheim refused the subjectivist approach to recognition, ascribing greater importance to the objective role of society. Durkheim maintained that social force with its institutional regulations binds individuals together as it endows them externally with a structural identity. Society then is not subjective, but operates objectively in the individual. However, as in the case with Bergson, Halbwachs was not dogmatic with regard to Durkheim's theory. In Strasbourg where he was professor of sociology his interaction with colleagues from other disciplines, such as historical science, psychology and jurisprudence, broadened his perspective and left room for critics of Durkheim's radicalism. The results of this interdisciplinary interaction were collected in his work, “The Social Frameworks of Memory” which was originally published in *Les Travaux de L'Année Sociologique*, Paris, 1925. After minor revisions, his work, now renamed *On Collective Memory*, was printed posthumously in Paris by the *Presses Universitaires de France* in 1952.

While Halbwachs' theory of collective memory has been taken up by biblical exegetes, in particular those interested in the sociological interpretation of the historical

²⁷ See J. Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis* (München: C. H. Beck, 2000); K. Popper & J. C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain* (London: Rutledge & Keagan Paul, 1972).

²⁸ M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Edited, Translated, and with an Introduction by Lewis E. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

Jesus²⁹ and also by historians,³⁰ Halbwachs' ideas still remain unknown to most systematic theologians.

Collective Memory

The importance of memory in everyday life is confirmed not only by poets,³¹ orators,³² historians³³ and philosophers, but also by our daily behaviour.³⁴ For Augustine memory is theological because God makes it God's dwelling place in human beings. Memory also contains analogies of the Trinitarian *perichoresis*. In his work *De Trinitate* 10:18 he wrote, "Accordingly these three, memory, understanding, and will are not three lives, but one life; not three minds but one mind; hence they are not three substances but one substance. When one speaks of memory as life, mind, and substance, this is said with respect to itself. And when one speaks of it simply as memory, this is said of it in relation to something else. The same may be said of the understanding and the will, for they are called understanding and the will, for they are called understanding and will with relation to something else, but in respect to itself each is life, mind, and essence ... This is why these three are one in that they are one life, one mind, and one essence."³⁵

Memory, according to the bishop of Hippo, is therefore relational. Memory is an indispensable aid which enables us to survive and to fulfil our daily responsibilities.³⁶ Furthermore, memory is an element which constitutes us as social beings because it renders us accountable. According to the great English philosophers John Locke³⁷ and David Hume³⁸ memory is the foundation of personal identity or the self. However, neither Locke nor Hume focussed much attention on the question of how memory is shaped or structured or how it is transmitted to the next generation. Maurice Halbwachs, who took an interdisciplinary approach to studying the phenomenon of memory, may offer something valuable to theology in this respect.

The heart of his work is to explain that memory is in its essence a social phenomenon. In following his teacher Émile Durkheim, Halbwachs maintained that "collective memory" is the heart of any group. Without collective memory society would cease to be. In this context an individual gains identity or meaning through participation in

²⁹ A. Kirk, and T. Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

³⁰ E. A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2004.

³¹ R. M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (New York: W.W. Norton, 1934), 187: 'And even if you were in some prison, the walls of which let none of the sounds of the world come to your senses - would you not then still have your childhood, that precious, kingly possession, that treasure-house of memories?'

³² F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

³³ J. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (London: Quercus, 2008).

³⁴ S. Magnussen & T. Helstrup (eds.), *Everyday Memory* (New York: Psychology Press, 2007). Memory is crucial for example in the process of crime investigation.

³⁵ Citation taken from J. A. Mourant, *Saint Augustin on Memory* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1980), 45f.

³⁶ Alzheimer can demonstrate the negative effects of the lost memory; see also D. Keck, *Forgetting Whose We Are: Alzheimer's Disease and the Love of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

³⁷ J. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, 27.

³⁸ D. Hume, *The Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, 4, 6.

a social framework. Individual stories are meaningful only when they are interpreted from collective memory, which provides a social framework for a meaningful interpretation of individual experiences. In order to demonstrate his point Halbwachs undertook an analysis of individual dreams. According to him, dreams are often fragmented and are therefore too “inexactly and incompletely reported to allow one to make sense of them.”³⁹ Removed from social framework, dreamers are left only with “raw material, incapable of entering into all sorts of combination.” For that reason dreams are often bizarre and confused. The communication of dreams is a hard task. In Halbwachs’ view dreamers are those who exclude themselves from social life. Thus dreamers are too embedded in their particularities. As a consequence they become disconnected from their environment.

Next Halbwachs distinguishes between dream and recollection, “The dream is based only upon itself, whereas our recollection depends on those of all our fellows, and on the great frameworks of the memory of society.”⁴⁰ If social memory provides the hermeneutical framework for meaningful communication, then it presupposes the existence of memory prior to the formation of a social framework. Consequently collective memory influences the contents of contemporary social framework. In the case of religious memory of a group, say the Christian memory, it is divine revelation which precedes and establishes memory. In this sense religious memory claims to be fixed once for all, although its verbal transmission can be enriched and renewed by cultural forms. However, the social framework of the past is not preserved but *reconstructed* on the basis of the present. Thus memory retains only frameworks which are important for the survival of the group. The gravity of the frameworks depends on the current interests of the group. With reference to liturgical celebrations, Halbwachs observes correctly, “an entire set of other ideas concerning present-day society and its members enters into the idea one has about the mass, the sacraments, and the festivities.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, these ideas that could nourish and revive the collective memory do not change or destroy collective memory in its originality.⁴² In this sense social frameworks are not constructed by adding together the various individual recollections, nor are they empty forms to be filled with recollections from elsewhere (the Platonist view of imprinting ideas). Social frameworks, such as institutions, memorial statutes, festivities etc. function at the same time as *instruments* for the use of the reconstruction of the past. For that reason social frameworks are flexible and dynamic, “One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself (herself) in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories.”⁴³

³⁹ M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated, and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 42. In the following we will refer to this work as *OCM*.

⁴⁰ *OCM*, 42.

⁴¹ *OCM*, 95.

⁴² Thus the language turn does not affect the Ur-Truth (original truth) of the biblical message. In his article Boeve considers the shift from the patriarchal terms of the Bible to a more inclusive language as a sign of re-contextualization. However, he is mistaken in concluding that tradition is likewise changed by this cultural shift; see Boeve, *Detraditionalization*, 117. It should be noted here, that the core message of God’s truth does not change at all, because God still remains as the God whose *parental* care sustains his people. No linguistic turn can swipe off this core truth.

⁴³ *OCM*, 40.

We can therefore conclude that Maurice Halbwachs differentiated between collective memory which is fixed, and its visible expression in terms of social frameworks which are revived and reconstructed according to the interests of the group. Hence collective remembrances preserved in texts or established in ceremonies are already results of correlation to the social environment. Halbwachs' concept of collective memory and social frameworks will have various implications for Boeve's theology of interruption.

Boeve's theology of particularity neglects the fact that human memory always operates in relation to social frameworks of a concrete time. Memory does not find itself in a vacuum. It cannot be otherwise, as faith received through living memory demands obedience from the hearer who lives in a concrete culture and history. For that reason faith is not completely an isolated or unmediated phenomenon as Rahner observed, "the revelation event is also the historical mediation, the objective, explicit expression of the supernaturally transcendental experience. It occurs in history and, taken in its totality, constitutes the whole of history; the individual's own particular theological reflection belongs to it, though it does not constitute its primary basis or determine it."⁴⁴ Unlike dreams, the Christian tradition is a conscious action which in the course of time retains only things which were important for the survival of a group. It is precisely this selection which renders a tradition particular. Boeve falls short in differentiating between revelation, faith and tradition which is the result of the divine self-communication. This communication is transmitted through the chain of living memories, so that Christian tradition, which is particular as memory, is at the same time operating selectively within the overall scheme.

The strength of Boeve's theology is his focus on the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, it also has weaknesses as his Christo-centrism closes him up from arriving at the Trinitarian communion which precisely enhances particular salvific events in Jesus of Nazareth's mission. Boeve's strong concentration on Jesus Christ has led him unavoidably to a view which emphasizes the particularity of Christian tradition. This framework regards truth as historical truth, with the consequence that "Christians are invited ... to situate themselves within the plural religious context."⁴⁵

In the next section of this article I will argue that an inclusive Trinitarian reading in which Christology plays a significant role can open up the pathway which leads beyond the dichotomy of universality and particularity. In fact a Trinitarian focus can reconcile both.

M. Halbwachs' theory and theology

In their attempt to justify the imperative of contextual theology, contemporary theologians often refer to the historical-critical method of exegesis which presumes at its base a discrepancy between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith tradition.⁴⁶ It implies that the historical-critical method can unveil the historical Jesus, or to rephrase it,

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, 'Observations on the Concept of Revelation', in K. Rahner & J. Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 14.

⁴⁵ Boeve, *Interrupting*, 164.

⁴⁶ See G. Lüdemann, *What Jesus Didn't Say* (Salem: Polebridge Press, 2011); also M. Hayter, *The New Eve in Christ: the Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Debate about Women in the Church* (London: SPCK, 1987).

that it can disclose the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth (his Jewish culture and from there his experience of God's action etc). In this context, theology must refer to his experience of particularity and be undertaken contextually. It thus presumes that the retrieval of the origin of Jesus' faith and life is possible. As the outcome of this historical positivism, Christian faith tradition is demythologized and particularized. As such the Person Jesus is cut off from his Trinitarian context.

In taking up Halbwachs' theory of memory, biblical scholars today are more cautious when attempting to retrace the historicity of Jesus. Despite considerable progress in historical research, exegetes remain sceptical and believe that a complete picture of Jesus' historicity would seem to be impossible as religious memory and historical imagination/recollection of Jesus, overlap continually.⁴⁷

In his critique of the phenomenological method of E. Husserl, Jacques Derrida gives evidence that the belief in a comprehensive retrieval of the origin of a phenomenon is only a "myth" because a pure repetition of an origin is impossible. According to him there is an "untamed genesis" ("*une genèse sauvage*") at any origin⁴⁸.

This savage birth is due to the reality that Christian identity is a result of a memory in which social frameworks or historical traditions ceaselessly interact with theological interests of the group, "Jesus' followers never obsessed over his particular [Jesus] sayings; they embraced his life and the sacred history in which that life was embedded."⁴⁹

We have to live with the fact that the details of Jesus' ministry and words are always selected and interpreted from social frameworks which also interact with the collective memory of the believers. We can say that Jesus' particularity happens against the background of theological frameworks which express and retain the significance and meaning of Jesus' proclamation and deeds. It is not the incarnation which leads to the understanding of the resurrection. It is rather the particularity of the resurrection,⁵⁰ including the expectation of a salvation beyond Israel, which explicates the significance of the incarnation.⁵¹ That is the reason why the Fathers of the early Church developed a theology of social redemption based upon the Pauline notion of the social implication of sins.⁵² The theory of recapitulation through Christ makes sense only from the perspective of the resurrection. Sociologists identify this process as "keying" the present by

⁴⁷ G. Theisen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus. A Comprehensive Guide* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 13: 'Everything must be measured by these sources, and every thought subject to them. Therefore any scholarly description of Jesus must begin by presenting the sources on the historical Jesus.' However, the sources contain the cultural and social memories of the authors which are invisible and which frame the presentation of the facts.

⁴⁸ S. Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology*, 21f.

⁴⁹ B. Schwartz, 'Jesus in First-Century Memory – A Response', in *Memory, Tradition, and Text. Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, edited by Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 252.

⁵⁰ Jesus' resurrection is particular because the incarnate God intervened in human history at a particular time and place in a way that was unique to that time and space, never having happened before and never to be repeated; see R. Le Poidevin, 'The Scandal of Particularity', in *The Metaphysics of Incarnation*, edited by A. Marmodoro and J. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 228.

⁵¹ Here Boeve is correct when charactering the incarnation as a 'saving particularity'.

⁵² See M. Seybold, *Sozialtheologische Aspekte der Sünde bei Augustinus* (Regensburg: Pustet Verlag, 1963).

articulating its relationship to the past, e.g. the relationship between Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and the death of Jesus on the cross:

The social memory of Jesus was, like any form of understanding, an act of recognition, a pairing in which an object (or an event, act, or emotion) is identified by placing it against the background of an appropriate symbol. Keying makes present scenes meaningful by articulating their relationship to the past. Abraham's answering God's call to sacrifice his son, for example, is a symbolic event that defines the crucifixion's significance. Keying the crucifixion to Abraham's sacrifice, in turn, makes memory a cultural system because it matches present trauma to a publicly accessible – that is, cultural – frame of historical reference.⁵³

The process of "keying"⁵⁴ Jesus symbolically to the Jewish past intends to demonstrate not only the Jewish particularity of Jesus, but also the social bond and memory between both groups, Judaism and Christianity. Overall, it is the memory of the resurrection which preserved the faith in Jesus' claim to be the world's Messiah – a claim which Christians believed, while the Jews are still waiting for the manifestation of the Messiah. Jesus became the redeemer for the early Christians because he lived and symbolized truly the values, not only those of his disciples, but also those of Judaism and all humanity. If Jesus had lived only a particular value, his disciples would not have understood him. It is rather that in Jesus, a social framework of faith is particularly manifested. For Christians faith in the Trinity provides the framework for the understanding of Jesus' particular way of acting. Faith which establishes collective memory originates from the fact that loss of life is the condition for receiving new life. Christians remember that Jesus did not die for himself, but that he died in the belief that his Father, will raise him, together with all his sisters and brothers, to a new life. It is this perspective which encourages St. Paul to say with firm conviction that it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him (Gal 2:20). According to the Pauline theology this new life is sustained and endures through the operation of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ We also know well that the Holy Spirit is perceived by the Gospel of John (15:26) as the "reminder (μάρτυρησι) of the Christ." The Holy Spirit does not work by its own, "for he will speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit therefore can be seen as the memory of the truth which derives from the depth of the communion between the Father and the Son, "But when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (John 15:26). Through the operation of the Holy Spirit the disciples can know the truth about Jesus and thus can become his witnesses. What matters here is the fact that the Holy Spirit establishes a cosmological dimension to the Christological events which occurred in periphery to the Roman Empire. According to Karl Rahner the particularity of the salvation history is grounded in the mystery of God who is:

⁵³ Schwartz, *Jesus in First-Century Memory*, 250.

⁵⁴ I will later argue that the process of 'keying' is affected by the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁵ Rom 8:9-10: 'But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, ... , the Spirit is life because of righteousness'; Gal 4:6: 'And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba!' "Father!"

in his incomprehensible primordially, God in his real capacity to enter man's transcendence and his history, Father, Spirit and Son. Inasmuch as history mediates transcendence, the Son sends the Spirit; inasmuch as transcendence makes history, the Spirit effects the incarnation of the Logos; inasmuch as appearance in history signifies the manifestation of reality, the incarnate Logos is revealed as the self-utterance of the Father in truth; inasmuch as God's coming among us in the centre of our personal life signifies his love and ours, the Pneuma is revealed in his own proper self as Love.⁵⁶

Pneumatology completes the doctrine about Jesus the Christ and assures the ongoing presence of the Risen Lord in the world – a presence which safeguards particularities from the perspective of an integral meaning and purpose. From the pneumatological aspect, theology therefore has to start from a universal perspective.⁵⁷ Maurice Halbwachs called this perspective “collective memory”.

Christian memory connects Christology with Pneumatology and safeguards not only the distinctiveness, but also the universality of the salvific significance of Jesus Christ. To rely only on incarnation would limit the scope of theology. The significance of Jesus Christ lies precisely in his Trinitarian “perichoresis” which presumes the fullness of dialogue without disavowing the particularities of the divine persons.

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⁵⁶ Rahner, *Observations*, 15.

⁵⁷ W. Kasper, *That They May All Be One. The Call to Unity Today* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), 163.