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IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE AS RELIGIOUS CATEGORIES: THINKING THEOLOGICALLY WITH RUSMIR MAHMUTĆEHAJIĆ ON ONE AND THE MANY[1]

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'The same silence reigned, but invisible forces were at work'

- Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands*, 1903[2]

The first time I met Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, in Sarajevo in 2004, we walked together down Ferhadija, past the Clock Tower and on towards Saraci and the Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque. As we walked Rusmir told me about Bosnia's recent history, the tragedies of conflicts between religions, and what might offer hope for the future. And he said something that I have always remembered, and struggled with, and believed even as I struggled.

Rusmir said: to truly understand each other, to truly know one another and to be at true peace and oneness with each other, we must love what the other loves. For a Muslim, like Rusmir, that means loving Jesus Christ as I, a Christian, love Jesus Christ. For a Christian, like me, that means loving The Prophet as he, Rusmir, loves The Prophet. Only when we find our way to that shared love, said Rusmir, could we truly be at peace and oneness with each other: when we truly loved what each other loved, more than anything else in the world that might divide us.

I have thought about Rusmir's confession of faith most weeks these last twenty years. It is a confession I have found deep in all his writings, one which lies at the heart of everything faithful people should want to say about who we are – identity – and who we are not – difference. In this essay, therefore, I will try to think through this confession and these ideas, both as a Christian theologian thinking about my own tradition, which is shared with Islam, and as a Christian trying to love what my Muslim friend loves more than anything. I thereby hope to be guided, by my Muslim friend, to a deeper understanding of my Christian faith.[3]

There is a late story by Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Other', in his collection *The Book of Sand*, in which Borges imagines meeting a younger version of himself on a park bench in Cambridge, Massachusetts.[4] The encounter flows along like a lazy river, slow yet deep: as with everything Borges wrote, 'The Other' is more a conversation about ideas and images swirling round and within one another, than it is a story with a singular resolution. In a commentary between dialogues, however, Borges writes:

> Except in the austere pages of history, memorable events go unaccompanied by memorable phrases. A man about to die tries to recall a print that he glimpsed in his childhood; soldiers about to go into battle talk about the mud or their sergeant. Our situation was unique and, frankly, we were unprepared. We talked, inevitably, about literature; I fear I said no more than I customarily say to journalists. My *alter ego* believed in the imagination, in creation – in the discovery of new metaphors; I myself believed in those that correspond to close and widely acknowledged likenesses, those our imagination has already accepted: old age and death, dreams and life, the flow of time and water. I informed the young man of this opinion, which he himself was to express in a book, years later.[5]

These thoughts, which seem preoccupied with difference and how we comprehend its impact upon us, elaborate a space, a moment in tension if not time, that I want to explore. It is a space which, Borges acknowledges, is uncomfortable: 'We were too different, yet too alike. We could not deceive one another, and that makes conversation hard. Each of us was almost a caricature of the other.'[6] Yet in this encounter identity and difference, like memory and imagination, wrapped themselves around two individuals who constituted – perhaps – one reality. This notion in Borges is close to the religious and therefore truthful unity that Mahmutcehajic writes about in his book *On the Other, A Muslim View:*

> Only God is unlike anything, and only He cannot be compared with anything. No condition of the human will is severable from consciousness. When consciousness is informed by witness to Unity, it shapes the will. It makes us intolerant of the denial or covering over of Unity. *But both are human possibilities, like remembrance and forgetting.* [my emphasis][7]

Thinking about identity, then, is a choice, a source or denial of personal reflection for most people, so I will share something about myself as a way into these themes.

Some of my earliest memories are of walking up steps with my mother and entering an hotel. I was small, about three years-old, uncomfortable in a formal coat. The weather was cold. I remember the steps were high. I had trouble climbing them.

I stood in the hotel entrance as my mother talked to a woman. I can recall big glass windows, trees outside, a grey sky. There were other women. One of them brought me a cake. I ate it. A man came and my mother went with him. The other women watched over me whilst she was away.

I once asked my mother about these memories. It didn't happen, she said. Well, *it happened*, she acknowledged. The hotel was real. The visit was real. But we just went to visit with an old school friend. There was no man. There were no women. There was no meaning, remembered or forgotten. All that, though, was a lie, a silencing. I know now that this man was my mother's lover, erased in her answer and since long dead, but alive these near sixty years in my imagination.

My memories beg several questions. Do I really remember a 'formal' coat, or simply an unfamiliar one? Who was the man, if he even existed? And who was he if he did *not* exist, as my mother claimed? Did some women watch over me, or did I imagine them? These questions, and others, might have objective answers. Were the hotel steps so high? What happened to that coat? Is it true that I ate a cake? Was I hungry? As in any situation, there must be a certain number of simple answers: "what actually happened", one might say.

On the other hand, how I felt, who met whom, why was I alone, and so on: these questions are more matters of recollection and interpretation. I can revisit the hotel and check out those steps: they might still be there. I cannot revisit the emotions of a little boy, no matter how hard I might try, and that inability intrigues and saddens me now; for there is no-one

left alive who was there on that day and might help me remember more, or more meaningfully. I am now 61 years-old: that little boy is alone in the world, with everyone else long gone. Whatever really happened, however I truly felt, lives on today solely in my own mind. In the purest sense, these memories must be *imagined* to be known: they cannot be recovered like data from a hard drive, and in that respect "what actually happened" does not exist at all. Did I really eat a cake? I will never know. What I know is how I imagine the memory of my mother leaving me made me feel back then. Or perhaps it is more how it makes me feel now. Perhaps it is both.

These memories have some unsettling implications if one applies them more widely to questions of identity and difference. There are many events that happened to each of us in that thing we call the past – at school, in the home, our first friends, our first losses – which shape our identities and how we understand ourselves and what, for want of a better word, we call our 'growth'.[8] These events live on or with us only as memories: if we grow in age or wisdom or strength or experience, the events that cause that growth are available to us only as we imagine them. We live, as Kierkegaard wrote, in an ever-present moment, shaped by memories and events from the past, and moved by desires for the future, over which we may exercise little control.[9]

If this claim is true for our partial senses of identity and difference, then for our *religious* senses of identity and difference it follows that this ever-present moment is filled with God, by His presence and by His will. This interpretation corresponds to Mahmutcehajic's interpretation of the Hour, and his sense of our experience of the Hour informs what we can say about the other and the different. Mahmutcehajic writes, in *On the Other*:

> Humanity is an authentic whole…. Humanity as such is shaped by its innermost nature or consciousness of the Creator's Unity. All of creation is an expression or utterance of the Creator. *So is human being.* [my emphasis][10]

What is this being if it is not identity, where identity is being *named* by God *as* God's? What is difference if it does not find its own character in a greater whole? We never speak religiously of separation, Mahmutcehajic reasons, because it makes no theological sense: God does not create separate beings, nor does He separate Himself from His Creation. Identity and difference, *as* God language, can only find their authentic meanings within God, therefore, because there is nothing beyond God

that has any authenticity. We may fear the other because we are human and we mistake difference for separation. But genuine knowledge can only ever be knowledge of God: 'The highest human knowledge is therefore consciousness of the unknowability of God, even though nothing except Him is real and so nothing other than Him may be known'.[11]

One can push a little deeper into how these religious concepts function if one thinks harder about how our interpretation of past events shape our present lives. In what sense are these memories, thoughts, and discussion, something one might call our 'history'? The German language has two words for 'history'. *Historie* is the recitation of facts or data, which may be confirmed by empirical research. *Geschichte*, on the other hand – which is also the German word for 'story' – is the narrative of interpretation, of what one may identify as the significance and meaning of memories and imagination. The distinction between the two is important.[12]

In the memories I described from my childhood, clearly there is *Historie* behind what I recall; facts as part of something that took place. Those facts, however, are inaccessible to me: I can verify nothing empirically, for nothing is now available to me in any objective sense. Even if I return to that same hotel and walk up those same steps, I will climb them with the stride of an older man, not a little boy. The little boy, the *facts* involving that little boy's experiences, are lost – "in history".[13]

By contrast, this same event as *Geschichte* is the subject of my remembering and how I imagine those memories in thinking about its meaning for my identity. What I remember, and what I believe (desire?) that remembering tells me about who I am, exists in a complex of difference from the others in the same memories: my mother, the man, the women who cared for me. Each image in my mind's eye, which must always be *geschichtlich*, not *historisch*, is viewed in tension with one other, like the flickering reel of an old cinefilm. Our minds edit these old cinefilms, calling them memories, but they are truly constructions of our imagination – which itself is open to so many influences and formations.[14]

That question-mark placed against desire in the last paragraph, of course, is absolutely and entirely wrong. As Mahmutcehajic demonstrates, the experience of desire and longing is where human beings discover

everything they can know about identity and difference; i.e., in loving and being loved. He writes, in *On Love*:

> When love is revealed as the attraction between the lover and the beloved, in which its real aim cannot be determined, the form toward which the lover is directed, in order for the will to be expressed as the content of love, must be specified and unrecognisable. But, what the will is directed toward cannot be the determinable aim of love. *It is just one of the stops on the limitless path of drawing near to oneness*. [my emphasis][15]

This argument is why Christians believe that the sacrament of marriage has to be established in an understanding of God's being, a teaching that finds clear parallels in both Muslim and Jewish traditions. I think one can also argue that what we mean by "church" and "mosque" (and "synagogue") can be defined as those places where we go to find love – in, for, and with God.[16] We must learn to love what others love in order to love them, and the starting-point of that learning is to go and find them.

A seminary or madrasah, therefore, comes alive in its *Geschichte*, a life that I would characterise more fully as the many searches for meaning by its students. Some of those searches emerge from the individual spiritual journeys that bring people to study. Some more have continuities and discontinuities with the journeys of their wider religious communities, as expressed through liturgies and practices and traditions, handed on within the institution itself.[17] Still more emerge from the study of the Book that forms a key part of formation training. Most important, however, are the searches that students undertake during their own lives, journeys that are taken with God in which their identities as ministers, and their relations with others, are made meaningful in their struggles to understand the stories that God is writing about them.[18]

Those struggles are their *Geschichten:* their stories in God's company, together with the wider community. One of the reasons why spiritual discernment needs time is because those same stories must be written and worked out within the relationships that we characterise by such words as 'religious', spiritual', 'pastoral', 'congregational', and so on. They cannot be recovered empirically, however much some students may desire to discover such *Historie* in their lives. Vocation is a constructed and deconstructed identity. Discovering one's vocation, and testing it together with God, is circular not linear: in reflection we go round and round together, students and teachers, learning more about our callings and our God as we learn to love Him within our complex, shared,

memories and imagination.[19]

Going round and round in circles is a good thing, in stories as in real life, and in spiritual growth it has the benefit of allowing time and space for a student's individuality to come to the surface. This circularity is something one recognises in Jesus' ministry and in the Gospels, where narratives of healing, teaching, eschatological miracles, friendship and encounter, all repeat and deepen our experience of witnessing to the truth. In this sense the distinction between the apparent objectivity of *Historie* – which is universal because past – and the particularity of a postulant's own *Geschichte* is something both profoundly Biblical and entirely Incarnational, because that is what it means to meet and know Jesus as God's Christ. [20]

This characteristic is also an important distinction between Borges' Other and my seminary students. A feature of Borges' short story is the alarm, even fear, that the younger man experiences when he realises that he is speaking with the old man he will become. Borges writes:

> "This, all this, is a miracle," he managed to say. "And the miraculous inspires fear. Those who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus must have been terrified."
>
> We haven't changed a bit, I thought. Always referring back to books.[21]

We who live with God also read books, and one Book in particular.[22] We even think about Lazarus, in varying ways, depending upon how we experience our complex relations with him (and Him). And it would be an odd student who did not sometimes find that an unsettling and even a fearful imagining. But the fear does not remain with us. It is replaced by love, because of God's desire for us and our desire for Him. Testing one's vocation is about how we learn to love He who loves us, and the realisation of the life we will share with Him. That realisation will be unsettling, but it is an experience that is central to spending time with God and working through vocations.[23] Again, we must learn to love what others love in order to love them.

Unlike Lazarus, therefore, Jesus's resurrection fills us with joy not fear, and for several reasons.[24] Lazarus is not resurrected, in the sense of being raised to new and eternal life in Christ after mortal death. Lazarus is resuscitated: he is brought back to life from death but there is no sense in John's Gospel that Lazarus will now live forever, never dying.[25] On the contrary, and in line with Jesus's other miraculous resuscitations,

bringing Lazarus back to life is the revelation of Jesus's eschatological mission and power, the revelation of Jesus's eternal identity as the Risen Lord. Raising Lazarus may fill Martha and Mary with a happiness that overcomes their earlier misery, but it is quite different from the abiding joy they feel in the presence of Christ: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.'[26] The distinction is absolute because never dying is life as it was always intended by God. It is the ordered and provided life of Eden, the beginning of all life in God.[27]

This distinction is important for spiritual growth and development, and I always discuss it in that way with my students. Why do we remember Lazarus? Or better, why does John make the Lazarus story (*Geschichte*) the pivot around which his Gospel turns? It cannot simply be because Jesus performs a miracle or sign, however extraordinary it may be. The story's true power, rather, seems to be indicated in the belief with which Mary approaches Jesus: 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'[28] This statement is not one of clinical judgement; i.e., Lazarus would have simply recovered if Jesus had been present. Rather, it is a confession that death is impossible in Christ: that Christ is the Word in Whom all things are made, and thereby the restoration of God's rule in creation. Just as death is unthinkable in Eden before the advent of sin, so death is unthinkable in the sinless Christ, who 'make[s] all things new'.[29] Making all things new is not simply Christ's new history. It is the world's *true* identity.

We discuss this point in Christianity as a theology of two gardens, the Garden of Gethsemane and the Garden of Eden. Just as Jesus's own death and resurrection moves from betrayal to resurrection, death to life, so the world moves from judgement to restoration, from humanity's death to the eternal life of God's Creation. And as Christ's own journey moves from standing in the Garden of Gethsemane to walking once again in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden – where Christ always walks - so every Christian must make that same journey as Jesus's companions. One may recognise this dynamic in the liturgies of Holy Week: we remember Jesus's journey to imagine our own being in the Body of Christ, as we follow the Stations of the Cross or walk the Via Dolorosa.[30]

This sense of following is entirely characteristic of both Judaism – following the Law – and Islam, surrendering oneself to God. Mahmutcehajic writes, in *On Love*:

> Since Praise is always God's, all connection with Him is also receiving from the Praiser or "following him".[31]

To follow God, God's Christ or God's Messenger or God's Law, is to turn one's entire identity towards the Other, so that there is no difference from the One Who calls us to follow Him. Or better: all differences are overtaken, and identity affirmed, within the act of following. There is no other relationship for the religious believer. There is no other identity, argues Mahmutcehajic, because there is no other identity that can ever be desired by the true believer.

Clearly this understanding of history is a long way from the *Historie* that seeks to establish "what really happened" to Lazarus (particularly in his second, mortal life). Such an attempted history, however – knowing the outcome of Lazarus's resuscitated life, where it took place, its consequences and so on – would be fundamentally impenetrable: we could no more participate in those consequences than we could join in Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.[32] In its most important sense, it is such participation that characterises *Geschichte* – our capacity to make an event's meaning part of *our* identity. Remembering, we imagine so that we might become – which is also the essence of liturgy or, more simply, prayer.[33]

As well as encouraging in students a thorough knowledge of Book and Church, therefore, seminaries are places where we give them opportunities to remember and imagine participating in Christ's eschatological history: to stand before the Risen Lord.[34] That stand, that relationship, is not an aesthetic imagining, nor even solely a spiritual experience for the individual. It is the very essence of being a Christian. Human beings remember who they are. Christians remember who they are in Christ. Postulants remember who they are in Christ as a deliberate, practised feature of their formation training. It is something that every Christian can become better at, so that practising standing before Christ is something we should desire, just as we desire to walk with Christ in the cool of Eden's evening.[35]

In my work in the seminary, every aspect of formation training begins with this understanding of its historical character: not as the learning of information but rather as the imagining of how we live amid an eternal history that can only be properly understood as God's Creation. We do not comprehend that history because we seek to acquire information about it, therefore. We participate *in* that history as we imagine our being in Christ and, imagining that relationship, remember the Gospel

of what he has done for us in his ministry, death, and resurrection. History, as memory and imagination, is not part of that training. It is *all* of it. History, remembering and imagining our worldly and eternal lives in the Incarnate Christ, is the beginning of wisdom.[36] History is not curriculum. It is eternal life. Mahmutcehajic writes, in *On Love*:

> *To love the Living, which means to testify that there is no living apart from Him, is to deny the contingent for the sake of the Complete.* [my emphasis][37]

This insight is critical to everything Mahmutcehajic has ever written, because being together is *always* being together with God, for him the beginning of life eternal.

I am not sure many believers truly understand this point to quite the degree one finds it in Mahmutcehajic's work, which in one sense does not matter. What matters is that they glimpse it and keep returning together to practise being better at remembering and imagining, with teachers who *do* understand the point. For a Christian seminary, this genuine understanding of our sharing in Christ's history is a key reason for spending time with God in worship, study, and fellowship. A seminary is a laboratory for sharing Christ's history, and everything we do therein needs to be understood and imagined as part of our becoming who we truly are. The parallel is acute, indeed all-encompassing: as in life we remember who we are by imagining our identities, so in seminary we train to remember who we are in Christ. If history is eternal life, not curriculum, it is also something we must learn to embrace and receive as the gift of who we truly are.[38]

This understanding is what lies behind Jesus's question to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, recorded in Mark 8:29: 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter's answer – 'You are the Christ' – is a remembering of the history of God's covenant with creation, as well as Jesus's identity as the Messiah. It is also an imagining, however: an imagining not only of the true meaning of Jesus's ministry, his proclamation of the Gospel, but also Peter's own identity as Christ's companion in that ministry and as the Rock on which Christ will establish the Church – an identity that Peter would spend the rest of his life learning and practising, as attested by the Gospels, his own Letter, and the history of the early Church.[39] It is why Jesus's rebuke to Peter immediately after his confession, and Jesus's subsequent revelation that Peter would betray him, is itself so revelatory of the character of "Two Gardens" theology. Jesus's rebuke, just as Peter's denial, are not events that give us insight into factual occurrences.

Rather, they are windows into the true history of Peter's membership of Christ's Body, as Peter himself writes:

> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you….[40]

This tension between loyalty and betrayal, companionship and abandonment, light and darkness, faith and temptation – 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' is a *geschichtlich* moment, and a very real one– is pivotal to Jesus's relationship with Peter.[41] In less intense ways, perhaps, it is also pivotal to *every* relationship with Christ: we are all called to remember and imagine ourselves as Peter, the first confessor and betrayer of Jesus's ministry.[42] It is as much a part of Peter's own *episcope* as the first Bishop as it is that of every bishop, and every priest who shares in the *episcope* of her bishop. We are always accompanying and betraying Christ: it is who we are. Godly history is to recognise that truth and accept it into our hearts, so that we might be forgiven and thereby be at peace. Mahmutcehajic, in *On the Other*, says it better than anyone:

> Every human being is a relationship to Peace, as a seeker of Peace or person-of-peace. Being-at-peace is the relationship of the person-of-peace to Peace as the divine presence in us. We realize ourselves in Mercy and closeness to the Principle. This relationship may be presented in an infinite number of linguistic, symbolic, and semantic systems without betraying its essence. *Being-at-peace is humanity, and vice-versa.* [my emphasis][43]

Such an understanding of history takes us a long way from *Historie*, from a knowledge of the facts of what occurred in the past; but that is only a concern if one thinks of *Historie* reductively, as the end rather than the beginning of living historically. We can find more of a sense of what this insight means if we think about the character of betrayal, which is so intimately connected to tradition, to handing over something that we have received. Early Christian theology, for example in John's Gospel, depends upon this tension between Jesus being handed *over* to Rome for execution, and handed *on* to the Church as Resurrected (and shared) Body. As Kingsley Barrett argued, the theology of John's representation of Christ as Passover Lamb depends upon the ambivalence of exactly this point, just as our Eucharistic theology still depends upon that same

Johannine theology.[44]

An act of betrayal is never solely a handing over, however. It is always a handing *away*, an abandonment or rejection of something that has already been received. Peter is abandoning or rejecting his own earlier confession in Mark 8 when he tells Jesus that he will never permit Jesus to be killed, which is why Jesus so angrily rejects his outburst – Peter's betrayal of God's will exceeding many times over Jesus's (temporary) betrayal of Peter's friendship. Similarly, the disciples' abandonment of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane only makes sense in the context of their reception, and comprehension, of Jesus's Messiahship. Rejection is solely rejection when there is no prior acceptance of the gift: betrayal is always betrayal of the giver far more than of the gift.[45]

This dynamic, again, is something that we constantly celebrate in church, including in my seminary Ming Hua in Hong Kong, where our weekly College Eucharist contains our acknowledgement of and participation in Jesus's betrayal by Judas Iscariot just as much as the reception of the gift of Christ's Body.[46] Our *ownership* of that process[47] is as historical as the original events that precipitated Christ's sacrifice into the world's experience. Our rejection of that ownership, the inevitable consequence of our further sinning, is yet again betrayal, as it must be for us to receive forgiveness and be redeemed. The fact that most Christians never think about these truths does not empty them of their historical significance: the truth of the Incarnation depends upon them, even if most Christians would find the notion of their betrayal of Christ as being personally offensive as Peter once did.[48]

It is particularly important for Christian postulants to grasp this theology since their future presidency of the Eucharist depends upon their embodying of both gift and betrayal. Giving and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is so often reduced to the level of a respectful ceremony, when historically it can never be either respectful or ceremonial. Solely *observing* the ceremony, even if we think we are participating, remains an act of betrayal *because* it treats the Eucharist-as-gift as appearance or representation. This betrayal prevails irrespective of whether one believes or not in a theology of memorial (Zwingli) or transubstantiation (Luther): for what is betrayed is our own presence in God's Christ, not his presence in our minds or stomachs.[49]

This idea is very difficult for Christians, Muslims, and Jews, because the instinct for clericalism - the reification of and obedience to an objective understanding of God's instructions - is such a powerful habit

once it is acquired. The tragedy of clericalism is that it drives out the relational understanding of following and being with God, whether through Christ, The Prophet, or The Law – which following and being is what clericalism seeks but obliterates in its slavish devotion to the circumstantial. To be clerical in religious belief and practice is to place unloved and faithless barriers between us and God, in the mistaken belief that such barriers somehow mediate the divine to us. But that is never true, as Mahmutcehajic writes in *On Love*:

> Praise is revealed as the direct presence of the Praised in phenomena, it is not mediated, just as life is not either. And that direct presence of the Praised and the Living in space and time is revealed as Love, or unity with the Complete.[50]

If we seek to be present with God and to teach others the same, we need to recognise God's *immediate* presence in our lives not only as Book but also as the Other, which is to say, *as one another*. This life-affirming understanding of relationship is found most movingly in the book of Ruth, which seems to me to summarise perfectly what I find in Mahmutcehajic's thought on this question:

> But Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.' And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. (Ruth 1:16-19)

An important and distressing analogy for this theological point can be drawn from modern history. The murder of the Spanish poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca in 1936, in the first weeks of the Spanish Civil War, brings together these several themes, as Lorca himself unwittingly wrote in an earlier poem:

You and I –

neither ready

to meet.

You…you know why.

I loved her so much!

Down this little path.

Nail holes

in my hands.

Don't you see

my blood draining?

Never look behind you,

walk slowly away

and like me pray

To Saint Cayetano

for you and I,

neither's ready

to meet.[51]

Lorca was born in Fuente Vaqueros, near Granada, in 1898, his family moving to the city in 1909. Lorca had a privileged upbringing and lifestyle, including studies at the University of Granada and later in Madrid. Lorca's early poetry displays an extraordinary range of modernist flair and linguistic inventiveness, combined with profound artistic and spiritual themes. His plays at this time, though largely unsuccessful commercially, reveal the beginning of his more political concerns, ones that would appear more clearly in the socialist consciousness that one finds in *Blood Wedding, Yerma,* and *The House of Bernarda Alba.* It was this consciousness that scandalised right-wing and traditional Catholic opinion in Granada in 1934, which in turn led to nationalists and fascists identifying Lorca with the Republican Government. That identification proved fatal: Lorca was seized by troops loyal to Franco in August 1936, soon after they occupied Granada, and was murdered a few days later, shot along with others near the *Colonia* outside Viznar and buried in an unmarked grave besides the road at Fuente Grande. Lorca's remains

have not yet been discovered.[52]

Franco quickly recognised the catastrophe of murdering someone regarded as Spain's national poet, beginning a campaign to "resurrect" Lorca as a poet of the Right and advocate of traditional values.[53] Despite recognition of that campaign's hypocrisy, Franco's partially successful determination to steal Lorca's memory from the Left illustrates a key feature of betrayal's character. It is insufficient to cast away the authentic gift and replace it with a false narrative. One must also erase the originating memory, thereby making genuine imagination so much more difficult. One might even argue that the entire ideology of Franco's leadership of Spain, from 1939 to 1975, is the betrayal of originating memories and the defiance of any novelty in Spanish social and political imagination (as it was also in Tito's Yugoslavia). The erasure of those originating memories, and their replacement with a false narrative of origin and authenticity, is the essence of Francoism. Lorca's struggle against that false narrative and its erasures, his imagination of a higher responsibility due to humanity, not ideology, is the gift Franco betrayed for nearly forty years.[54]

It is relatively straightforward to recognise the same economy at work in inadequate celebrations of the Eucharist, and I have mentioned some of them already here: the failure to comprehend the genuine nature of our participation in Christ's betrayal; the reduction of the celebration itself to ceremony and what Bonhoeffer called 'cheap grace'; the denial of historical memory and theological imagination: these things can be seen every week in churches around the world, perpetrated by priests and congregations with the best of intentions. One of the central features of this failure – perhaps *the* failure – is the false closure and completeness that those same priests and congregations bring to their celebrations: the notion that, in the presence of the Bread and Blood, salvation is granted without the joy of ongoing witness and confession, indeed, of future *life*. By evacuating the Eucharist of historical memory and denying the need for the imagination to live and die in Christ, well-meaning Christians efface Jesus as surely as Franco effaced Lorca.[55]

The parallels here with the Serbian and Croatian wars against Bosnia are visceral and bitter memories for those who still recall the victims and who seek to realise a return to true identity for all the living peoples of that country. The greatest danger – one that the West collapses into constantly – is to memorialise the dead as monuments to cruelty and murder, rather than as living beings within our own being.[56] But that

is the same effacement that Franco inflicted on Lorca; i.e., reducing living beings to objects, evacuating them of identity, replacing their identities with captions on totems. That is how the West today thinks of Srebrenica: as a large cemetery in an obscure corner of Bosnia, *not* as thousands of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, murdered when they should be living, torn from life when they should be one with God *still in their families and homes*.[57]

The ongoing effort to identify Lorca's remains points to this same fundamental human need for embrace rather than closure and completeness.[58] That argument might seem strange at first, since every moment that would accompany the positive identification of Lorca's remains – DNA analysis, celebration, political discussion, state reinternment – is nearly always associated with closure. Lorca's murder and the disappearance of his remains, however, denied people not solely the opportunities to know what happened to him, but also the opportunities to hold onto the man as well as his work; to embrace Lorca, and sustain that embrace historically.[59] A life that is so entirely erased, where even the remaining echoes of the individual's history disappear, leaves a void that is far more significant than closure. Closure is *Historie*. Embrace is *Geschichte* – but we still need *someone* to embrace: we need to love him in the sense of being with him, even when – especially when – Lorca is gone. If our identities are always communicated, to ourselves as well as others, by remembering and imagining our lives, a life deprived of its final story has no place to echo: its voice simply fades away – again, something that Franco understood very well indeed.[60]

There is a tragic comparison here with the death of Malcolm X, murdered in the Audubon Ballroom on the afternoon of Sunday 21st February 1965. Malcolm's death, like that of Martin Luther King jr. and the Kennedy brothers, was documented in film in its final seconds, so that we cannot say we are entirely disconnected from the images of those moments. Indeed, the evidence of Malcolm's murder – "what really happened" –appeared so overwhelming that three young men were quickly arrested, charged, and jailed: Talmadge Hayer, Norman 3X Butler, Thomas 15X Johnson. As has become clear over the years, though, the real killers were not imprisoned in 1965. On the contrary, and with the full or partial knowledge of many people in and around The Nation of Islam in Newark the man who fired the shotgun that killed Malcolm, William Bradley, remained free and became a successful and respected member of local society, even as that same society knew his guilt.[61]

The travesty here is not solely the obvious miscarriage of justice, with the New York Police Department and the FBI both implicated in failures to protect Malcolm X (if not also complicit in his killing).[62] It is more that Malcolm X was deprived not only of his life, but also of a truthful remembering of his death. If Lorca's death faded away into the nothingness of no memories, Malcolm's is cut short by the state sanctioned lies of false memories, of untruthful stories. Both nothingness and lies assault the opportunity to tell historical truth and to bring to life narratives that can be remembered and imagined. Both nothingness and lies create false identities that deny people more than solely knowledge of what took place. They deny history itself – as though the confected punctuation of time by some men took away others' ability to bear witness, to keep on telling better stories, more truthful stories about people who were not limited to the circumstances of their deaths.[63] While one might acknowledge or even accept betrayal as an aspect of a deeper tradition – the Christian hermeneutic – the denial of truth, the denial of meaning, should always be rejected; an ethos best expressed in Dylan Thomas's great poem, *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London:*

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bread
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's

death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave
truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the
breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's
daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of
her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.

After the first death, there is no other.[64]

The deaths of Lorca and Malcolm X, and even more the broken families of Srebrenica and many other places in Bosnia, take us to a place where the distinction between *Historie und Geschichte* becomes opaque, inevitably perhaps: though there are significant arguments for the association of the latter with theories of myth and legend, the weight of connecting these two terms is that *Historie* remains somehow present to what I want to think about identity and difference in theological discussions of history.[65] Something, not nothing, is being remembered. The historical origins of Christianity, specifically the tension between distinct narratives of the empty tomb and Jesus's resurrection from the dead, indicate clearly that writers like Saint Paul and the Evangelists were entirely mindful of this problem.[66]

Malcolm X's murder also brings us close to a comparison with Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, not simply in the sense of the difficulties of false narratives about Malcolm's death that corrupt authentic memory

and imagination, but also the deeper question of how we should truthfully embrace the man's identity and being. It is true certainly that there is a connection between Lorca's unmarked yet occupied grave and Jesus's empty tomb, but there is also a fundamental distinction: whereas Lorca's story disappears into nothingness *because* of that unknown grave, Jesus's story is proclaimed *despite* the empty tomb. There is no mystery to the fact that the Church has always been preoccupied with embracing the history of the resurrection: as Saint Paul understood, it is the resurrection, not the tomb, that must be remembered and imagined, since it is the resurrection upon which Jesus's identity depends. The empty tomb may be a diverting quest for Victorian generals, but it is hard to see how that emptiness can be remembered, let alone imagined, theologically or otherwise.[67]

I would note here that this profound failure in the West also lies at the heart of its betrayal of Palestinians in its rush to support and endorse Israel's attack on Gaza and Israel's Zionist erasure of the land and rights of those same Palestinians. Even as we in the West recognise the criminality of Hamas's attacks on 7th October and Israel's right to defend itself, we perpetuate a bogus view of those attacks as "Muslim" violence and Iran's support for Hamas, whatever it may be, as foundational evidence of that same "Muslim" violence and Iran's evil intentions. We entirely fail to comprehend the distinctions within Islam of, for example, Shi and Sunni traditions, and in so doing unwittingly – appallingly, ridiculously – erase any possibility of truly understanding the underlying conditions of oppression and injustice in the Middle East that underpin every conflict. Our ignorance of those histories, our failure even to attempt to comprehend what it is like to live with such egregious violence, means we are reduced to repeating the same empty slogans about "Muslim" violence that we have been trumpeting since the foundation of the State of Israel.[68]

This point illuminates what for me has always been one of the deepest and most challenging aspects of formation training, and that training's relationship with the study of history and theology. It is not so much the popular notion that people need closure in their thinking as well as their lives to do well, to learn and be successful. It is more the great temptation to attempt to identify facts or certainties upon which we can then construct not so much false narratives, as inadequate ones. Being a Christian, and formation training within that identity, depends upon becoming vulnerable with Christ so that we may work out what His companionship means for our lives. That is why we remember and

imagine and it is the same in Islam and Judaism, a point that is constantly significant for Mahmutcehajic. We cannot journey into vulnerability, however, if our remembering and imagining always keep us restricted in a world that is reduced to certain fixed points of information. This distinction is fundamental: we must let go of the fixed points to make the journey, as the ship must cast off from the harbour to travel to the ocean. The difficulty is that so much of our church experience militates against this working towards vulnerability, both for priests and for congregations. The priest who constantly calls her congregation to become more vulnerable with God, without any concessions to the consolations that people seek in their certainties, is a priest who will soon be looking for a new job.[69]

The deeper realisation finally is that people cannot make such journeys constantly and without relief: we can see that in the disciples' experiences as recorded in each of the Gospels.[70] We can deconstruct postulants through CPE, Bible study, parish placements, theology and pastoral experience, challenging them to remember and imagine their vocations as they spend time with God and journey towards a new life and ministry with Christ. That is a genuine understanding of being a Christian and a proper emphasis in formation and theological education. If the Son of Man takes us out into the Far Country, however, then to paraphrase Karl Barth, the Son of God must also bring us back home and celebrate our presence in the companionship of The Lord.[71] That journey is too hard for anyone to make, without the nourishment of occasional relief from constant travelling. That is why we go regularly to church, mosque, and synagogue: to receive nourishment not only from God, but from one another.[72]

It is easy enough to end with a helpful word like 'balance', and to segue from that into calming discussions about theologies of reconciliation. And even though I do not think Jesus is as interested in reconciliation as we sometimes believe – or at least, not in the indisputable ways that we imagine – I am happy enough to find some compromise and harmony for the students who must explore these questions and experiences in their studies. Navigating ways forward, both individual and ecclesial, must always be a negotiated settlement, and it is important to recognise that reconciliation is a feature of such negotiation rather than a solution. The vital thing is not to compromise the Gospel in the ways that one seeks to affirm, and enter, reconciliation: a reconciliation that is not first and always a natural expression of God's ordered and provided Creation, is first and always compromise, not faith.

This sense of sharing an embodied history was on our minds when in 2020 the postulants and I studied Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*, after the protests of 2019 and during the developing Covid-19 crisis. We were all moved by the character of faith, hope, and love with which Bonhoeffer confronted not only the signs of the times in the mid-1930s, but also the trials of establishing and running a theological college in a world which does not understand their purpose. The same should be said for all religious places of study, whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish. That is the only way forward from the present political crisis of identity and difference that has erupted out of our forgetting and ignorance of one another. It is the only way forward because it is God's way forward.

Following Bonhoeffer is an almost impossible challenge, though we should try. Spending time with Bonhoeffer, however – remembering and imagining - and with his students, whose notes are critical to the reconstruction of the text of *Discipleship*, is a fitting way to learn to grasp that to become true believers we must sometimes forget the Church for a while and find a deeper, earlier, Creation. Or better, as Bonhoeffer himself recognised: we must balance becoming part of the Church by remaining always part of the world. We must remember costly grace, in some place and time, if we are to love more than solely ourselves. I think Rusmir Mahmutcehajic would agree with that injunction, and show us ways to realise its importance in our own lives and our encounters with others.

Endnotes

1 Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, 'The One and the Many', in: *On the Other: A Muslim View*, New York 2011, pp.7-12. Special thanks to Desmond Maurer for his outstanding translation of this and others works by Mahmutcehajic.

2 Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service*, London 2011, p.89

3 There are important philosophical questions here, not least in the work of Heidegger and Derrida and their relationship to the character of lived experience. I will not go into those questions in any depth since my focus here is thinking through Rusmir Mahmutcehajic's influence explicitly *religious* questions, but I will note in passing where I think there is scope for further research.

4 'The Other', pp.3-11, in: J.L. Borges, *The Book of Sand* and *Shakespeare's Memory*, London 2001

5 ibid, p.8

6 ibid, p.9

7 op.cit., p.8

8 I am using here the idea of past, present, future in a straightforwardly chronological sense (as does Mahmutcehajic, generally): I understand the deeper point about internal time consciousness vis-à-vis material change but there is no space here to go into that question; see, however: Hugh Mellor, *Real Time II*, London 2002.

9 Cf. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton 1985, p.18: 'And now, the moment. A moment such as this is unique. To be sure, it is short and temporal, as the moment is; it is passing, as the moment is, past, as the moment is in the next moment, and yet it is decisive, and yet it is filled with the eternal. A moment such as this must have a special name. Let us call it: *the fullness of time*'. On this same philosophical question in Nietzsche, see Alexander Nehamas, 'This Life – Your Eternal Life', in: A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge Mass. 1985, pp.141-69. Nietzsche's work on the distinction between *Historie* and
Geschichte is important here: his complex understanding of history is part of the intellectual background to what I want to talk about in this essay.

10 op.cit., p.66

11 ibid, p.41

12 See also Paul Veyne, 'History Does Not Exist', in: *Writing History*, Middleton 1984, pp.15-30, for a more postmodern take on this quintessentially modern question. Christology – the interpretation of the doctrines of Christ – functions in modernity as a discourse about *Historie* and *Ge schichte* as they make sense of different aspects of reflection upon Jesus's ministry and its meaning; i.e., the circumstantial and the eschatological.

13 This notion of the lost debris of history is central to Walter Benjamin's later criticism; see famously Gershom Scholem, 'Walter Benjamin and His Angel', in: Gary Smith (ed.), *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, Cambridge 1988, pp.51-89.

14 These old cinefilms are also edited by our subconscious (Freud), and perhaps even a collective unconscious (Jung): at the very least, as Borges recognizes, they are intimately related to our experience of dreams, and perhaps also their reality; see op. cit., p.11. I am not entirely certain that there is any formal or philosophical distinction between thinking and dreaming, at least in the strict sense of the logical structures of *how* we think and dream. The psychological hermeneutic, however, returns theology to questions of desire in Christian belief and practice, something well-known in medieval Christianity, and indeed far earlier in Christian history.

15 Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, *On Love in the Muslim Tradition*, New York 2007, p.24

16 I think this point is one of the key origins for Mahmutcehajic's book, *The Mosque: The Heart of Submission*, New York 2006; cf. esp. pp.1-4.

17 I am thinking here of the multiple senses behind the Latin *traduce*, which in different contexts can mean handed over, betray, translate, move, confess, etc. See below on the theological sense of this ambiguity in Book and theology and the discontinuities it may provoke.

18 The most important point is that such searches or journeys are *desired* and *desirable*, not

least to God: no matter how much we resist His call we still eventually answer, like Isaiah, because we desire to answer.

19 This circular or helical form of discussion is particularly suited to most religious discussions, where the more forensic notion of linear, dialectical argument can appear arbitrary and even violent, or at least abrasive. Certainly, I have found a more helical teaching method to be foundational to good formation training in Hong Kong. On these and other questions in Christian formation, cf. Charles R Foster, Lisa E Dahill, Lawrence A Golemon, Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, Stanford CA 2006.

20 The Incarnation – and consequently the Eucharist – being the presiding Mystery where *Historie und Geschichte* meet. See below generally for a discussion of the parallels in Muslim thought and practice as interpreted in Mahmutcehajic's work.

21 op. cit., p.10

22 See Mahmutcehajic, *The Other*, op. cit., p.45, quoting *Qu'ran* 5:68: 'People of the Book, you do not stand on anything, until you perform the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to you from the Lord.'

23 Or not: One of the benefits of such a circular model of formation training is that it allows greater time and space for the *absence* of vocation to emerge for postulants. One of the hardest pastoral assignments is to work with people who believe they experience a vocation where none is discernible – for which there is no easy solution.

24 Leaving aside for one moment here the ending of St. Mark's Gospel; Mark 16:8.

25 Sadly, Lazarus will have to die twice – a fate shared by several individuals in the Synoptic Gospels. His specific resuscitation story culminates in John 11:44, with Jesus simply directing: 'Unbind him, and let him go.' The only subsequent reference to Lazarus comes in John 12:2, where Lazarus sits at table with Jesus as Mary serves Him. I will not go into any discussion of Lazarus being the Beloved Disciple, which exercises some commentators, or the more important question of a comparison of Jesus's resuscitation of Lazarus compared to His miraculous resuscitations in the Synoptic Gospels.

26 John 11:25-26

27 This understanding is the sense I take not only from the Hebrew name for the text Christians call 'Genesis' – *Bereshit*, 'In the beginning' – but also the wider theology of God creating a *provided and ordered* place (Eden) in which He may walk with His companions – the story of Genesis 3, but more generally the divine purpose of fashioning a *good* (completed) Creation. The greater theme I find in the text is the centrality of God's *desire* for companionship with us, this desire being the motivation for what He creates and how He creates. On this question see also Mahmutcehajic, *On Love*, op.cit., pp.104-6.

28 John 11:21

29 Revelation 21:5

30 Ming Hua's Holy Week retreat is the centre of the College year so that we may embody that journey of imagining and remembering not only in thought and prayer, but in companionship. I cannot really envisage formation training without Holy Week at its centre.

31 op.cit., p.101

32 Tolstoy may be the only writer who could create a *geschichtlich* text like *War and Peace* which is simultaneously the most *historisch* thing ever written about said retreat. I am not Tolstoy. On this question, however, I still think one of the best things to read is Richard Rorty, 'Is There a Problem about Fictional Discourse?', in: R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton 1982, pp.110-38.

33 See generally, Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London 2015 (2nd revised edition).

34 That, of course, is a deeply Protestant formulation: as a good Anglican I should add, 'and eat the Body and Blood of Christ'; which I do, here, though my heart lies more with the Reformed than the Catholic on this question (no doubt informed by writing a doctorate on Rudolf Bultmann).

More generally, remembering and imagining is what we mean by 'celebrating' being a Christian.

35 I think ultimately this might be my definition of theological training more generally; i.e., learning to love justice, and do mercy, and walk humbly with God' (Micah 6:8) - in the heat of the day and the cool of the evening. I believe it is also a way of understanding following God that makes good sense of Islamic training.

36 Proverbs 9:10

37 op.cit., p.102

38 The beginnings of this theology of gift are present in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, connected in Book X with the question of time and memory; see Augustine, trans. by Henry Chadwick, *Confessions*, Oxford 1991.

39 As I become older, I can see fewer and fewer reasons to doubt the Christian tradition that places Peter in Rome in the 60s AD and makes him the first Bishop of the city's church. On this question I am guided by Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, Eugene 2003.

40 I Peter 4:12-14. This text is often taken to be a reference to *historisch* martyrdoms being endured by the early Church in Rome in the 60s, but I find here also an echo of Peter's own, *geschichtlich* memories of suffering with and against Christ during His ministry.

41 Mark 8:33

42 *Traduce* again: Peter hands over Christ to us as our first Bishop, as he once handed over (betrayed) Jesus in the courtyard of the High Priest's house; cf. John 18:13-27 and parallels.

43 op.cit., pp.34-5

44 John 19:14: see C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, London 1978, p.545; cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary,* Philadelphia 1971, pp.664-5. Barrett emphasizes the liturgical-dogmatic character of John's argument; Bultmann, the eschatological. Mahmutcehajic, who is very fond of quoting John's Gospel, is in the eschatological camp; cf. *On Love*, op.cit., p.101

45 The *calling* of the disciples, at least as it is represented in the Gospels, raises the same question of betrayal – though in this case it is the disciples' betrayal of their families, as they abandon them to follow Jesus. I am less concerned with whether such abandonments literally took place during the ministry of Jesus, than I am with the presence of this profoundly uncomfortable theology in the Gospel texts. One can recognize the same uncomfortable theology in the several family sayings in Luke; e.g., 9:57-62, 12:49-53, 18:29-30. Luke's reports of Jesus's views on family are very different from Matthew's.

46 Christians almost universally forget that two men die at the heart of the Gospel: Jesus… and Judas Iscariot. Both deaths are present in Eucharistic theology, and both must be remembered. On Judas as the hidden name of God, see J.L. Borges, 'Three Versions of Judas', in: *Fictions*, London 1998, pp.132-7.

47 Or trial – for which the German is 'Prozess'. The themes here are worked out far more profoundly in Kafka's *The Trial* – F. Kafka, *The Trial: A New Translation Based on the Restored Text*, New York 1999.

48 The great danger here is certainty – of both faith and knowledge – and it is dangerous because it is a category mistake that encourages people to live their lives based upon religious information rather than theological and therefore human experience. The nature of the danger can be recognized if one considers contemporary evangelicalism in the USA, where tribal certainties are having profound political implications upon crucial social questions (e.g., women's rights).

49 Zwingli probably understands this point better than Luther. Cranmer, of course, reasoned beyond the horns of the dilemma by including both theologies in the Eucharistic Prayer of *The Book of Common Prayer* – thereby ensuring that Reformed and Catholic believers may both belong to the same English congregation, at the cost of never being understood to this day by German Evangelical Christians.

50 op. cit., p.102

51 Federico Garcia Lorca, 'Meeting', in: *Selected Poems*, Oxford 2007, p.65.

52 On the general background here see Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge*, London 2006. On Lorca, Ian Gibson's biography is admirable and incisive: Ian Gibson, *Federico Garcia Lorca*, London 1989, but see also more recently, Stephen Roberts, *Deep Song: The Life and Work of Federico Garcia Lorca*, London 2021. On Lorca's death, see Ian Gibson,

The Assassination of Federico Garcia Lorca, London 1983. For Lorca's later plays, see *Lorca: Blood Wedding, Yerma, The House of Bernarda Alba*, London 2017.

53 See Preston, op. cit., pp.301-17; and particularly Gibson, *Assassination*, op. cit., pp. 183-210.

54 The deeper theme here is that every manifestation of fascism in the twentieth century, from Mussolini and Hitler to Franco and Salazar and (latterly) Serbian nationalism, rested upon false but complex historical narratives of national identity, each replete with a wide range of myths and pathologies. Such narratives were not unique, of course, and similar ones had been seen in previous eras (not least in nineteenth-century British imperialism). But the *industrialization* of false identity narratives remains a novel development of the last one hundred years and arguably the most persistent toxin of modern political societies.

55 On grace, cheap and costly, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, New York 2003, pp.43ff.

56 See Michael A Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Bosnia 1996, remains to my mind the greatest exposure of the inherent wickedness and pointlessness of this quintessentially western position.

57 See Mahmutcehajic, *Sarajevo Essays: Politics, Ideology, and Tradition*, New York 2003, p.132

58 Archaeologists have tried to excavate Lorca's grave site as recently as 2016-17, with their work being discussed in newspapers like *El Pais* right up to the present day.

59 This same point is made by relatives of the missing, murdered, or simply disappeared for years, by fascist regimes from Franco's Spain to Pinochet's Chile and the dead of Srebrenica, murdered by Mladic and Karadzic. Closure is never about ending. It is always about holding.

60 See Gibson, *Assassination*, op. cit., pp.186-7: Franco, like many others in differing cultures, understood very well the power and presence of hungry ghosts.

61 Butler and Johnson were cleared by Hayer whilst all three were still in prison, though they served their sentences until parole. William Bradley, who changed his name to Al-Mustafa Shabazz later in life and became a well-loved community leader, died in 2018. His role in Malcolm X's murder is now being investigated by authorities in New York. On all these details, see: Les Payne & Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X*, London 2020, pp.457-515.

62 ibid

63 Something of this historical question depends upon what people leave behind after death. Malcolm X, like John F Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, left relatively little in terms of written legacy, meaning that their memories (and mythologies) became over-populated with political rhetoric and image: the crudest example being Jackie Kennedy's post-mortem description of her late husband's presidency as 'Camelot'. That process was inevitable to some degree, certainly; but it was always better informed when, as with Martin Luther King Jr, there were also substantial texts to interpret. Text and myth can never be straightforwardly differentiated in these processes, however – witness the life and work of Billie Holiday, who died in 1959 and who is known today not only through her recording legacy, but her (often inaccurate, ironically) autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*, published first in 1956; cf. *Lady Sings the Blues*, written with William Dufty, London 2018. Holiday's right to remember and imagine her life in such ways should not be compromised by questions of accuracy; it simply makes the critic's task harder.

64 *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*, London 1971. One might need an entire book to interpret the layers of Thomas's text, but suffice it to say that, at the very least, his Refusal speaks also to God's refusal to compromise the integrity of His creation – even by murder; cf. God's response to Cain's murder of Abel, Genesis 4:1-16.

65 The question, to what degree myth and legend are also historical, would be central to any further development of my argument. On this question, see Jonathan Z Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago 1988.

66 On which question, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man*, London 1968. Pannenberg is the only modern theologian who has developed a systematic theology based on the *historisch* empty tomb.

67 The allusion is to General Gordon and the "discovery" of the garden tomb. Why anyone should wish to stand in an empty tomb has always escaped me, as indeed it escaped Luke's very

rational angels: 'Why do you seek the living among the dead?' (Luke 24:5)

68 It is arguably even worse than that: see Walter L Hixson, *Architects of Repression: How Israel and its Lobby Put Racism, Violence and Injustice at the center of US Middle East Policy*, Washington DC 2021.

69 This reasoning leads to priests becoming managers of declining resource – a situation the Church of England in recent years has institutionalized as a kind of "McKinsey" theology. The Episcopal Church, and indeed the wider Anglican Communion, has not entirely avoided this rabbit hole, sadly.

70 Traditionally, we are taught to regard the disciples as simpletons, foils for Jesus's wit; cf. particularly their representation in Mark's Gospel. Increasingly I conclude that they were more often simply exhausted.

71 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV-1, Edinburgh 1961.

72 Cf. Mahmutcehajic, *The Mosque*, op.cit., esp. pp.25-8. The need for postulants' rest and recuperation should always be a central consideration of formation training, but sadly it is something overlooked by bishops and theological colleges. I imagine the exhaustion of the prodigal son on his journey home from the far country – certainly a historical truth and a subject for theological reflection.