

Religious Uses of History as Inclusion and Exclusion

Introduction

The purpose of the project *The Shifting Boundaries of Tolerance: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Context of Nordic Church History, 1750–2000*, funded by the Academy of Finland, has been to investigate religious diversity and (in)tolerance in Finnish and Swedish Church History, and to highlight the historical processes and events that have given rise to the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the fields of church and religion. With respect to this, the present article takes a somewhat different approach. Adopting a combination of theories from the *Uses of History*-perspective on the one hand, and the *Cultural Memory*-perspective on the other, the aim is to uncover some characteristics of a *religious* use of history. It will be argued, among other things, that the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are not only to be found *in* the history of the church but, what is more, the use of such history, *in itself*, has the capacity to work by inclusion and exclusion.

As point of departure and as source material for this objective, I will turn to a person called Anders Svedberg. Anders Svedberg (1832–1889) was born and lived all of his life in Munsala (a village in Ostrobothnia, Finland). In addition to having founded the first elementary school in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, he wrote actively in newspapers and also represented the peasants in the Diet of Finland.¹

1 See, for instance, Huldén, J.J. 1932 and Strömborg 1932.

Consequently, all of his work can be said to have had an educating and democratizing quality that focused above all on the Swedish-speaking peasantry of Ostrobothnia.

At this time, religion played an important role in the lives of the common people, especially those living in Ostrobothnia. The Christian faith provided a foundation, a “social cement” or a “Symbolic Universe” through which the peasantry understood, verified, and valued the reality that faced them.² Even though Munsala had been highly influenced by the Pietistic revival in the 1830s and 1840s – and later on became a breeding ground for both the Baptist and the Evangelical movements – the Bible remained *the* universal guiding principle for most inhabitants.³ Thus, ideologically, people were close to one another. This is why I suggest that Munsala, and its surroundings, could be labeled a “Religious Community of Memory” – a concept I will discuss and use later in the text. Briefly, a community of memory is used to describe groups that found their identity and self-image in a common narrative and on certain events in the past. For the people of Munsala, the Bible, but also the Lutheran tradition and the Pietistic revival, can be said to have constituted such formative and normative narratives. This is why Anders Svedberg, in his rhetoric, was able to make use of a religious use of history. He was able to make references, for instance, to the history of the Christian Church, to the Reformation, to the Pietistic revival and to the trials against the Pietistic movement that had taken place in the area. When making use of these historical events, Svedberg was speaking a language that the peasantry understood.

2 Hartikainen 2005, 17; Mikkola 2009, 17, 44, 46–47, 236–238. See also Pleijel 1970, 14.

3 Dahlbacka 1987, 65; Smeds 1928, 2. For the Baptist movement in Swedish Ostrobothnia, see Näsman 1962. The progress of the Evangelical movement in Munsala is documented for instance by Rev. Emeleus. See The Provincial Archives of Turku, Åbo Domkapitels arkiv, E VI 127 Berättelse om Munsala församling ... 1887.

Three Case Studies

The religious uses of history that Svedberg made use of in his communication with the peasantry, and which serves as source material for this article, has been examined by me in three articles that have been peer-reviewed and published, or accepted to be published. The first case study focuses on two quite different history textbooks, written by Svedberg during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴ The first of these books served as a means of assistance for Svedberg in his ambulatory school in Munsala, and is permeated with a Christian vocabulary.⁵ This Christian undertone is played down in the second and more recent book, which constituted Svedberg's competition entry in an open contest to write a national textbook for elementary schools in Finland.⁶ In this second book the Christian undertone has given way to a focus on the national and patriotic. This change of focus – from God to Country – can be said to have been typical of the period.⁷

In my opinion, the former book is used to point out God and God's actions in history, and also to show how the Christian Church has grown and developed: God steers history towards its final destination,

- 4 The article on Svedberg's history schoolbooks, written by Jakob Dahlbacka, is titled "För Gud och fosterland. Religiöst historiebruk i Anders Svedbergs historieskrivning". It is accepted for publication in *Finnish Journal of Theology* 3/2016.
- 5 This schoolbook, titled *Berättelser för Barn ur Finlands Historia eller en kort redogörelse för de viktigaste förändringar Finland såväl uti politiskt som kyrkligt afseende undergått från kristendomens första utbredande till närvarande tid. Sammanskrefne i början af år 1856*, was written in 1856. It is stored in the Municipal Archives of Nykarleby, Anders Svedbergs samling 2.5.1.
- 6 This schoolbook, titled *Finlands Historia för Folkskolan och Hemmet*, was written in 1875. It is stored in Åbo Akademi University Library, Manuscript Unit, J. J. Huldéns samling 61.
- 7 Zander 1997, 104–105. Zander refers to Tingsten 1969 and Sødtring Jensen 1978. See also Andersson 1979, 85, 175.

i.e. heaven, which at the same time becomes the final aim for the history education aswell. The purpose of teaching history to children is therefore to show that God is active and to lead the children to heaven. In all of this, Svedberg refers both to history in general and to Church history. However, he is careful to stress the fact that both are directed by God, which ultimately means that the two are one and the same.

Despite the change of focus, mentioned above, the Christian contribution is not entirely missing in the latter book either. However, in this book, the Christian element is more or less at the service of the nation. God's actions and the growth of the Christian Church are used to illustrate the rise of the Finnish state, a rise which Svedberg claims has gone hand in hand with the spreading of Christianity. One could also say that Svedberg, in his first book, asserts that God has guided the Christian people from the past to the present, whereas the second book demonstrates God guiding the Finnish people throughout history. The addressees are unmistakable: in his first book Svedberg speaks to Christians whereas he, in the second book, speaks to the Finnish people.

The two later case studies bring the discussion down to a more concrete level. The first study examines the historical narratives, used by Anders Svedberg in his struggle to create a wider freedom of religion.⁸ I argue that the question concerning the freedom of religion posed a threat or a problem to the peasants of Ostrobothnia. By means of his historical narratives, Svedberg tried to tackle and answer these problems and questions. In line with his admittedly liberal position, he naturally wanted to include both Pietists and Baptists, and to

8 This article, written by Jakob Dahlbacka, is titled "Med historien som vittne. Anders Svedbergs bruk av historien som argument för religionsfrihet". It is published in *Historiebruk i väckelseforskningen* (ed. Kurt E. Larsen), a conference publication connected to a conference held in Copenhagen in 2013 by NORDVECK (Network of Nordic Researchers and Research on Revivals and Revival Culture).

provide these groups with the right to exercise their belief.⁹ He was more afraid of the schisms that would occur if the Baptists were not granted freedom of religion, than the errors in doctrine that he, as a Lutheran, obviously recognized in other communions.

To express his point of view, Svedberg compared his contemporaries with earlier periods in history, during which religious groups had been oppressed. For instance, he refers to the Catholic persecution of Lutherans after the Reformation and to the trials against the Pietistic movement mentioned above. Such a “critical use of history”, where Svedberg scrutinizes and criticizes previous historical events, leads to an attribution of negative loadings in his historical narrative.¹⁰ This, in its turn, motivates and legitimates a change of course in the present. Furthermore, when Svedberg makes use of events that his target audience recognizes, are familiar with, and are able to relate to, he is able to bring together the past with the present and the future; thus giving present events a continuity and a context and helping his audience to see itself as part of a greater whole.

What is indicated in the second case study, but further developed in the third, is the assumption that Svedberg’s use of history has been handed down and passed on by earlier generations.¹¹ Supported by insights developed within Cultural Memory Studies I argue that, for instance, Svedberg’s anti-Catholicism was part of a so-called “cultural memory” with roots reaching back as far as the Reformation. This memory was part of a pervasive discourse or a collective historical consciousness, and thus something that most people were able

9 See *Jakobstads Tidning* 10.3.1982, *Lantdagsmannen: I kamp för kvinnors och olikränkandes rätt; Österbottniska Posten*, 31.1.1889, Anders Svedberg; Huldén, A. 1932, 12.

10 Rösen 1987, 92; Wiklund 2012, 201–202, 217–220.

11 This article, written by Jakob Dahlbacka, is titled “Inklusion genom exklusion. Anders Svedbergs antikatholicism som exempel på kollektivt historiemedvetande”. It has been published in the *Yearbook of the Finnish Society of Church History* 2014.

to relate to, even if they themselves had never personally made contacts with the Catholic Church.

In one sense, the three case studies touch upon different levels of the Uses of History. Whereas the first one deals with more comprehensive and theoretical matters, the focus of the second and the third case studies are confined to a more concrete and detailed level. In these latter cases, the historical narratives and single words and phrases are examined. Through all three case studies, the connecting thought is the question of how does the religious use of history manifest and function. I will now move on to a discussion on this question.

Religious Uses of History as Legitimacy and Guarantee

What all the three case studies mentioned above have in common is an emphasis on how the use of history is tied to its context – how it is rooted in and marked by the specific historical culture in which it comes into being and in which it is used. With the words of Swedish historian Peter Aronsson, uses of history can be described as “those processes where parts of the historical culture are activated in order to form certain meaning making and orientating entireties”.¹² In other words, what connects the uses of history to a historical culture is the fact that historical cultures determine the shape of the uses of history. To serve its purpose successfully a use of history consequently has to correlate to the surrounding historical culture. German philosopher of history Jörn Rüsen accentuates the fact that uses of history – or more precisely historical narratives, by means of which the uses of history are expressed – have to be characterized by three qualities, or dimensions, in order to have a good effect. These qualities he terms “memory”, “continuity,” and “context”.¹³ Narratives or stories that possess these qualities are easy to relate to, they bind together

12 Aronsson 2004, 17 (my translation).

13 Rüsen 1988, 25–26; Karlsson 2009, 53.

the past, the present, and the future, and they help people to orientate themselves in a larger context. Such narratives subsequently have the potential to be identity-forming and meaning-making.

The three case studies dealing with Anders Svedberg's uses of history show that he was familiar with the Christian peasantry in Ostrobothnia. He knew his target audience and their history. Thus, Svedberg's uses of history in many ways meet the demands that Rüsen makes on successful historical narratives. To some extent, this can probably be explained by the fact that Svedberg himself had grown up in these settings, and that he had adopted and internalized the local customs and practices. Furthermore, due to his esteemed local status as a teacher, journalist, and Member of Parliament, Svedberg had reached a position where he, with the words of Jan Assmann, can be said to have been part of the elite that had the capacity and the authority to interpret and mediate the local history and tradition.¹⁴ In the following, I will use Rüsen's terms "memory", "continuity" and "context" to examine the uses of history that have appeared in Svedberg's writings. By doing so I will try to distinguish what could possibly be seen as characteristic qualities of the religious uses of history.

Svedberg's uses of history meet the demands of "memory" especially when it is founded on a past that lies near at hand and that his target audience has witnessed and can easily relate to. A good example of this is the reference Svedberg makes to the trials against the Pietistic movement in Nykarleby, which had taken place only a few decades earlier, in the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁵ In accordance with Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, one could say that the memory of the trials, at the time when Svedberg referred to these trials, was for many still part of the communicative memory.¹⁶

14 Assmann, J. 2008, 112. Assmann, J. 2011, 38–39.

15 See for instance *Folkvännen* 26.8.1863, Bilder ur folklifvet. Ljus och skuggsidor; *Österbottniska Posten* 28.2.1884, Om religionsfriheten.

16 Assmann, J. 2008, 109–111.

In other words, the addressees had themselves witnessed the trials, or they knew people that had experienced them.

What is important to notice, and what I try to demonstrate, is that the quality of “memory” of a historical narrative is not dependent on a past that the addressees have witnessed and been part of. In the same way that a person’s individual memory is said to be influenced by a social, a collective or a cultural dimension, I argue that one can also speak of a collective historical consciousness that influences a person’s individual historical consciousness.¹⁷ Thus, a person’s frame of reference is not limited to events that take place during his or her own lifetime, but also comprises events that exceed his or her individual memory, and go far beyond his or her own horizon of experience. Swedish historian Kenneth Nordgren describes this unerringly by writing that “the historical consciousness is an individual work of thought but it contains inherited notions”.¹⁸ The anti-Catholicism that Svedberg, from time to time, expresses in his writings is a good example of this. It can be described as a cultural memory according to Assmann, which has been passed on and survived from generation to generation. Svedberg himself had hardly even met a Catholic.¹⁹ This was unquestionably also the case with a solid majority of his audience. It is probable that the anti-Catholicism, which can

17 A person’s historical consciousness is generally defined as a “concept that incorporates the connection between the interpretation of the past, the understanding of the present, and perspectives on the future”, thus reflecting German history didactical researcher Karl-Ernst Jeismann’s original definition. See for instance: Thorp 2014, 20; Karlsson 2010, 56. See also: Jeismann 1979, 42–44.

18 Nordgren 2006, 16 (my translation).

19 One encounter between Svedberg and the Catholic Church is documented. In a letter to his wife Brita Greta, Svedberg reveals that he has visited a Catholic service in Helsinki that he describes as odd. See Åbo Akademi University Library, the Manuscript Unit, J.J. Huldén’s samling 21, Anders Svedberg’s letter to Brita Greta Pesonen May 13 (1877).

be seen in Svedberg's rhetoric, was an inheritance of the seventeenth century Lutheran orthodoxy, or even the Reformation in the sixteenth century.²⁰

In my opinion the quality of "memory" of historical narratives is of particular interest when speaking of the religious uses of history. I claim that this quality might just reach its full potential within a religious use of history that is directed towards a religious group. According to Jan Assmann, the collective memory is an essential part of the identity building and continued existence of practically every collective and group. Such groups, for which memory plays an especially pivotal role, Assmann, referring to Pierre Nora, calls "memory communities".²¹ This is often the case with religious groups, which means that they construct their identity with the help of a continuously retold narrative that is built up of certain specific events in the past. French sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger states that such a narrative, as time goes on, is attributed with a legitimating authority, which gives it credibility and substance.²² According to Canadian historian Allan Megill this canon – or tradition as he calls it – is much more persuasive and meaningful for adherents of a certain tradition than personal and – in Megill's mind – subjective memories are. He writes:

Adherents of a tradition that is confident of its own validity are unlikely to make an appeal to memory: instead, when required to defend the tradition, they characteristically appeal to nonsubjective factors – to a canon, to a set of institutional structure. An identity that solidly exists has little need for an explicit, thematized appeal to memory. When memory approximates to tradition, it approximates to weak tradition. In other words, an appeal to memory – that is,

20 Dahlbacka, J. 2014.

21 Assmann, J. 2011, 16.

22 Hervieu-Léger 2000, 86–88, 97.

an appeal to what is subjective and personal – is likely to arise only when objectively existing supports are felt to be inadequate.²³

As an umbrella term for the narrative, around which memory communities build their identity, Jan and Aleida Assmann have coined the word “cultural text”. Cultural texts are not exclusively limited to writing, but also include places, persons and events. Thanks to their canonical status they have both a normative function (what shall we do) and a formative function (who are we), and as such they possess a particularly strong symbolic value for the group.²⁴ They differ from what Aleida Assmann calls “literary texts”. A literary text is first and foremost directed to the individual reader, whereas the cultural text is directed to the reader as part of a collective.²⁵ The reader thus becomes, as Astrid Erll puts it, certain that “he or she is, through the act of reading, part of a mnemonic community”.²⁶

This is also why the cultural text of a religious memory community is especially powerful when applied in a use of history. In the setting where Svedberg lived and worked, the Bible and the Lutheran tradition, as well as the Pietistic revival, were all part of this cultural text or identity shaping narrative. Referring to these events or texts gave Svedberg’s use of history a distinct quality of “memory”. The target audience, for one thing, was familiar with these events and texts. Secondly, the events and texts gave legitimacy and substance to Svedberg’s argumentation. They were more than simply personal memories – they were part of a common cultural canon or a collective historical consciousness. I propose that these kinds of uses of history,

23 McGill 1998, 45.

24 Assmann, J. 2006, 104. This is made concrete for instance in questions about whom the group members should identify themselves with, and whom they should dissociate themselves from. See Sakaranaho 2011, 145 who refers to Burke 1950.

25 Assmann A. 1995, 241.

26 Erll 2011, 162.

where the cultural texts of a religious memory community are used to strengthen the argument, could be termed “Prophetical Use of History”. Such a use of history serves a twofold purpose. It not only legitimizes predictions and statements about the present time and the future with examples from history but it also guarantees them with an authority that is based on the cultural text. Why I call it prophetical, thus implying that it convincingly predicts future events, has to do with the promises that these kinds of cultural texts of a religious memory community often contain, and that are brought to the fore by references to the past. I will return to this in the next chapter.

Religious Uses of History as a Wake-up Call and Driving Force

Beside the quality of “memory”, Jörn Rusen talks about the “continuity” and the “context” of historical narratives. He claims that historical narratives function as meaning-making if they, on the one hand, manage to weave together the past, the present and the future, and on the other hand if they, by placing their addressees in a wider historical context, manage to help these people to orientate themselves in the present and towards the future.²⁷ The uses of history thus operate with the three tenses: past tense, present tense, and future tense. References to the past give guidance in the present and indicate a way ahead. This is the case, for instance, when Svedberg compares the negative attitudes towards dissenters, which he sees in the present-day church, with similar negative historical events such as the Catholic persecution of Martin Luther, or the victimization of the Pietists in Ostrobothnia.²⁸ The historical references not only criticize the present-day situation and suggest an answer to the problem; they also blueprint a possible future scenario. Another example is when Svedberg, in his first history

27 Rusen 1988, 25–26.

28 See, for instance, *Österbottniska Posten* 16.12.1886, Religionsfriheten i Evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan.

textbook, warns his pupils about not listening to God's voice when He visits them, as people earlier in history have done.²⁹ Svedberg's aim is to help them to avoid God's judgment in the present, but also to make sure that they will receive God's gifts in days to come. The rhetoric places the addressees in a temporal context while simultaneously orienting them towards the future.

As was the case with the quality of "memory", I argue that also the quality of "continuity" of Svedberg's uses of history shows some features that might be characteristic of the religious uses of history. As background to my reasoning, I want to advance a comparison between Jan Assmann's terms "Foundational Memory" and "Contra-Present Memory" and the German political theologian Johann Metz's terms "Pacifying Memories" and "Dangerous Memories". All of these concepts describe similar ways in which a collective memory can have an orientating function for a group.

A "foundational memory" turns the present into something meaningful and necessary, even a godsend. Here history aims ahead and runs like a straight line from the past towards the point where the group is located at the moment. The past thus serves as a foundation for the present and the present as an extension of the past. A "contrapresent memory" however indicates a break between past and present. By pointing at a previous golden age it is implied what has later on gone wrong and what is wrong with the present situation. A memory can be both foundational and contrapresent, depending on current circumstances, but the latter one especially appears during a perceived crisis or when a group is oppressed or wronged. On such occasions the group receives fresh support for its hope for the future from the past. Or, as Jan Assmann puts it: "memory turns into expectation". What he implies is that the memory of an earlier golden age

29 The Municipal Archives of Nykarleby, Anders Svedbergs samling 2.5.1. Anders Svedberg's first history textbook, page 23.

becomes subversive, making the group believe that the golden age can be achieved and brought back to life once again. The past is turned into “a social and political Utopia toward which one can direct one’s life and work”. This theory is, by Assmann, connected with what ethnologists call “messianism” or “millenniarism”, which are movements that anticipate a total change in the future.³⁰

The distinction that Assmann makes between foundational and contrapresent memories, is very similar to the one that Johann Metz makes between “pacifying memories” and “dangerous memories” in his book *Faith in History and Society*. According to Metz, pacifying memories originate from the Enlightenment and its evolutionary time. This means a kind of tunnel vision directed at progression and development that eradicates credence in tradition. Things have their certain order and the status quo is not questioned. History is seen as a series of past and thus unimportant events that do not fill any certain purpose. Pacifying memories are:

[M]emories in which one does not take the relationship to the past very seriously, memories in which the past turns into an untroubled paradise, an asylum from the disillusionments of the present – the past as “the good old days.” Here memory bathes everything in the past in a mild, conciliatory light. ... The past passes through a filter of harmlessness; everything dangerous and haunting, everything challenging has vanished from it; it seems robbed of any future. This is how memory easily turns into a false consciousness of the past, an opium for the present.³¹

Metz calls the second category of memories “dangerous memories”. These memories are dangerous because they draw our attention to human suffering in the past, and therefore wake us from our everyday

30 Assmann, J. 2011, 62–66.

31 Metz 2007, 105.

slumbering, and disturb us in our ingrained evolutionary time, according to which things are going on just as usual.³²

But there is another way to remember: dangerous memories, memories that challenge. These are memories in which earlier experiences flare up and unleash new dangerous insights for the present. ... They break through the canon of the ruling plausibility structures and take on a virtually subversive character. Memories of this sort are like dangerous and uncalculable visitations from the past. They are memories that one has to take into account, memories that have a future content, so to speak.³³

As is the case with Assmann's contrapresent memories, the memories that Metz calls dangerous are also subversive. The difference between the two, as I can see it, is rather that contrapresent memories become subversive as a consequence of external circumstances, whereas dangerous memories have the capacity to function as a wake-up call even in a passive and slumbering environment. This is true especially in Christianity – a religion based upon the memory of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.³⁴ Thus, the remembrance not only calls forth images of a past event but also conjures up a vision of the future – forward memories – that actualizes those promises that God has given for the future. The promises serve as a reminder of the hope, in which members of the religious community of memory have a share.³⁵ This also illustrates the fact that a religious community of memory is a “community of hope”. In other words, communities of memory not only bind their members to the past, but

32 Metz 2007, 170.

33 Metz 2007, 105.

34 Metz 2007, 88–89, 107–108.

35 Metz 2007, 88–89.

also turn them towards the future.³⁶ In this way, both the present situation and the current view on history may be challenged. The status quo is questioned, which has consequences not only on the personal level but also on the political level.³⁷

What I find especially interesting with the two theories described above is that they illustrate how the past can be transformed into a possible and achievable future – a future that might furthermore differ drastically from the present. This is the case in particular with contra-present memories. In addition, the theories show how the memory of the past can be used as a reminder of a previously promised future, and how this in its turn can induce someone to take action. This becomes evident in Metz’s dangerous memories, which deal with the hope and the prophetic nuance that often are included in the cultural texts of religious communities of memory. In Svedberg’s writings this appears when he, in his schoolbook, urges his pupils to pay attention to God’s visits, in order to avoid His punishment and in order to make it to heaven. As a warning example he proffers groups in history and in the Bible that have not taken God’s cautions seriously.³⁸ These examples at the same time bring to the fore the hope for a better future promised by God. It is worth noticing how this shows that the religious uses of history also has a fourth tense at its disposal, in addition to the three tenses previously mentioned. *Past* and *present* are not only connected to the *future* but also to *eternity*. This “tense” is as real and concrete within a religious use of history as the three other tenses, which is why it also possesses a strong driving force. The choices you make in this life therefore have consequences not only for the future but also for eternity. This, if anything, can serve as a strong incentive.

36 Bellah et. al. 1985, 153.

37 Metz 2007, 89, 110–113.

38 The Municipal Archives of Nykarleby, Anders Svedbergs samling 2.5.1. Anders Svedberg’s first history textbook, page 23.

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I have illustrated how a use of history that is based on the cultural texts of a religious community of memory can serve as legitimacy in an argumentation, and as a guarantee for promises that have been made. It can also arouse, in the addressees of the use of history, a hope for the future, and spur them to aim at a certain goal. However, the study of Anders Svedberg has displayed one additional function of the religious uses of history. This function is tightly connected to the dimension of “orientation” that Rösen ascribes to historical narratives. This has much to do with creating a “historical identity”, a term Rösen uses to describe people’s experience of themselves in relation to the course of times, but also in relation to previous and future generations. He writes:

Historical identity is a comprehensive idea synthesizing past, future and present and going beyond the horizon of one’s own time of life. History, in a way, gives men an idea of their own eternity. ... Historical identity combines different generations and stabilizes given forms of life through the change of generations. It is a form of rooting a society in the subjectivity of its members by a diachronic perspective, which furnishes continuity, the idea of duration in the course of time.³⁹

According to the Norwegian historian Ola Svein Stugu, the fact that the past has a decisive impact on a person’s identity, is practically considered to be an axiom among historians.⁴⁰ Stugu here makes no distinction between history, myth, or memory. According to him the question of scientific evidence is not of vital importance when it comes to the past’s ability to have an identity forming function.

39 Rösen 1988, 27.

40 Stugu 2010, 34, 44.

Rather, the crucial question is whether the past is believed or not. A past or a history that is believed, can, just as much as any scientifically demonstrated fact, convey fundamental values, beliefs, and ideas that tell us not only who we are but also who we are not. Such a past can give us an answer to basic existential questions and give meaning to our lives.⁴¹ Another Norwegian, the social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, follows the same line as Stugu. He is of the opinion that myths can “offer an individual a sense of belonging to a larger whole and a metaphorically eternal life through the mythical past he has a party to”.⁴²

The past is a decisive identity shaping force for individuals as well as for collectives. American historian Geoffrey Cubitt points out that there certainly are groups for whom memory serves as the true *raison d'être*, for instance veteran associations. However, he stresses that all sorts of groups are dependent on keeping the past alive. He lists three main purposes that the collective memory serves in a group. First of all, memory, or knowledge of the past, is needed in order to maintain the core activity of the group, whether it is families following patterns of previous birthdays when planning future festivities, or companies dependent on maintaining contact with previous customers in order to carry on with their business. Second of all, memory is pivotal for establishing and maintaining a group identity. Cubitt states that all groups, as time goes by, amass a number of legends, anecdotes, folklore etc. that together form a complicated narrative. This narrative does not first and foremost serve to facilitate the performing of the core activity. Rather, it helps the group members to realize and understand what kind of collective they are members of. To be initiated, and to be in agreement with this narrative, is what keeps the group together and gives its members a sense of belonging.⁴³ This is what Jan Assmann

41 Stugu 2010, 39.

42 Hylland Eriksen 1996, 105 (my translation).

43 Cubitt 2007, 132–135.

calls “Memory Culture” or “Erinnerungskultur”. He states that groups or cultures have a kind of “connective structure” that ties together the past with the present, but also people to other people, through “acts of remembering”.⁴⁴ He writes:

This connective structure is the aspect of culture that underlies myths and histories. Both the normative and the narrative elements of these – mixing instructions with storytelling – create a basis of belonging, of identity, so that the individual can talk of “we”. What binds him to this plural is the connective structure of common knowledge and characteristics – first through adherence to the same laws and values, and second through the memory of a shared past.⁴⁵

Thirdly, Cubitt writes that groups need the past in order to maintain their relations with other groups, or to position themselves in relation to them. He states that a group’s perception of other groups affects its members understanding of the past.⁴⁶ Moreover, the opposite should quite likely be true, namely, that a group’s view of the past affects its perception of other groups. This becomes evident, for instance, when Svedberg bases his view of Catholicism upon historical events and inherited conceptions.⁴⁷ Stugu writes that the word “identity” originates from the Latin word *idem* which means the same of or to be identical with. Identity, therefore, has to do with “self-comprehension” and “self-interpretation”. Who I am is, to some extent, discovered and understood by looking at those who share my thoughts, ideas and characteristics, but equally as much by looking at those who differ from me in the above-mentioned aspects. Thus, the forming of identity has to do with who and what we are, but also with who and

44 Assmann 2011, 2, 16–17; Erll 2011, 33.

45 Assmann 2011, 2–3.

46 Cubitt 2007, 135–136.

47 Dahlbacka, J. 2014.

what we are not. Stugu writes that the development of identity is a prerequisite of an individual's socialization process, which has to do with "I" becoming part of a "We" – that is a community or a collective.⁴⁸

In the same way that the "I" needs an "Other" to understand itself, the "We" needs an "Other" that "does not have 'our' characteristics, and against which it can fix the boundaries." According to Stugu, a group's collective memory – with its ideas of origin, evolution, and past – has proven to possess a strong identity shaping potential. This is why it is often used to fix the boundaries against others.⁴⁹ Swedish historian, Cecilia Trentner, points out that this kind of contrast thinking is a basic quality of all sorts of cultural thinking, and that dichotomies work as tools for sorting out knowledge, but also for creating new knowledge. She writes that the "Other" is not always personal but that it is often stereotyped for the purpose of bringing the story to life. According to her, the source of these stereotypes is the past, of which Svedberg's use of Catholicism is a good example.⁵⁰ Further research could elucidate whether the "Other" appearing in religious settings have certain characteristics, typical for the religious historical culture.⁵¹

To conclude, the past has not only an identity-forming function, but also a connecting function. This becomes evident in the English words "re-membering" and "re-collecting", which indicate "the idea of putting 'members' back together (re-membering and dis-membering) and 're-collecting' things that have been dispersed."⁵²

48 Stugu 2010, 36.

49 Stugu 2010, 36–39 (my translation).

50 Trentner 2002, 293–294.

51 An example that touches upon this issue is Kristina Öhman's research respecting the portrayal of Judas Iscariot in artistic works. See Öhman 2014.

52 Assmann J. 2006, 11.

[J]ust as we can speak of “collective” memory, we can also speak of a “connective” memory. When collectives “remember”, they thereby secure a unifying, “connective” semantics that “holds them inwardly together” and reintegrates their individual members so that they possess a common point of view. Wherever people join together in larger groups they generate a connective semantics, thereby producing forms of memory that are designed to stabilize a common identity and a point of view that span several generations.⁵³

With all of this in mind, it is easy to understand why the past, in its different forms, is used by groups and their leaders with the aim of upholding and strengthening their own identity, by fixing boundaries against “Others”. This has become apparent in history especially when states and nations have tried to legitimize themselves. Social scientist Peter Verovšek writes that: “Paradigmatic works of nationalism generally all maintain that a shared past is a necessary precondition for any form of nationality”,⁵⁴ and Jan Assmann concludes:

If someone wishes to emigrate to a foreign country and acquire its citizenship, he must study the history of that country. ... The past is a decisive resource for the consciousness of national identity. Whoever wishes to belong must share the group memory.⁵⁵

In religious communities of memory the common past appears above all in the cultural and canonical texts. Finnish researcher on religion Tuula Sakaranaho writes: “Endowing a particular memory of continuity with authority over others, a community creates a tradition which can operate as a source of consensus. It also creates boundaries

53 Assmann, J. 2006, 11.

54 Verovšek refers to Hayes 1926; Kohn 1946; Deutsch 1953; Smith 2003. See also: Olick et al. 2011, 10–14.

55 Assmann 2006, 87.

between ‘us’ and ‘them’”.⁵⁶ German literary scholar and cultural scientist Astrid Erll in her turn writes that a person reading, or by other means acquiring the cultural text, is guided by a “certainty that he or she is, through the act of reading, part of a mnemonic community.”⁵⁷ Referring to such texts and memories, therefore, not only gives legitimacy to an argument, but also ties individuals to larger communities on the one hand and, on the other hand, keeps others out. American philosopher W. James Booth therefore, quite appropriately, refers to the Croatian author Dubravka Ugrešić who writes about “the exclusivity of collective memory”.⁵⁸

Anders Svedberg’s references to Christian leaders such as Martin Luther or Gustavus Adolphus the Great or his allusions to Queen Kristina (of Sweden) or other Catholics carry with them a normative function.⁵⁹ These individuals are portrayed and serve as either good or warning examples for the addressees to follow or keep away from. However, simultaneously these references activate a formative mechanism. Martin Luther and Gustavus Adolfus the Great are namely part of a Christian community, with a life span reaching far back in history but also far ahead in the future. When Svedberg, for instance, hopes that his pupils will get to meet Gustavus Adolfus the Great in heaven, he incorporates them into the community of which both Martin Luther and Gustav Adolfus the Great are members.⁶⁰ The pupils feel a certainty that they are part of a larger community of memory. A religious use of memory thus obviously creates a social identification both

56 Sakaranaho 2011, 151.

57 Erll 2011, 162.

58 Booth 2006, 51. Booth refers to Ugrešić’s book *The Culture of Lies*.

59 See, for instance, The Municipal Archives of Nykarleby, Anders Svedbergs samling 2.5.1. Anders Svedberg’s first history textbook, page 23; Åbo Akademi University Library, Manuscript Unit, J. J. Huldéns samling 61, Anders Svedbergs second history textbook, pages 43–46, 51–52.

60 See, for instance, The Municipal Archives of Nykarleby, Anders Svedbergs samling 2.5.1. Anders Svedberg’s first history textbook, page 18–19.

ad intra, as well as *ad extra*, which is needed in order to tie individuals to larger communities.

In this respect the function of the religious uses of history also resembles the “existential use of history”. Swedish historian Ulf Zander describes the existential use of history as “closely related to both individual and collective identities and memories” and as something that is linked to “people’s need to ‘remember’ beyond their own living, in order to anchor themselves in the past and be part of a larger community and context.”⁶¹ What Zander describes as people’s need to “remember past their own living”, and to “be part of a larger community and context”, is something that Rösen, Assmann and Cubitt touch upon in the quotations given above. Cubitt, referring to Irish political scientist Benedict Anderson’s well-known theory of “imagined communities”, writes that groups, as a rule:

[A]re constituted less through immediate personal connections than through assumptions of shared identity and imagined kinship. These assumptions are applied, furthermore, in ways which cut imaginatively across the experimental separation of people who are not each other’s contemporaries: the communities that are imagined are communities not just of the living, but of the living with the dead and (by projection) the yet-to-be-born.⁶²

For members of religious communities of memory, such an experience of kinship with contemporary, previous and future members that “cut[s] imaginatively across the experimental separation of people who are not each other’s contemporaries”, becomes especially powerful and tangible. Danièle Hervieu-Leger, in her book *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, expresses this by defining religion as an all-embracing system that maintains and controls man’s sense of belonging to a chain of

61 Zander 2001, 54.

62 Cubitt 2007, 138. Cubitt refers to Anderson 1991.

belief.⁶³ In short, she means that members of a religion see themselves as part of a tradition, or as links in a chain of common memories, through which the past, the present, and the future can be interpreted and understood. Through their adherence to a religion, human beings feel communion and kinship, not only with contemporary fellow-believers, but also with departed and future ones. Religion, or the chain of memories, is what ties the individual together with the community.⁶⁴ Or, to put it in other words and exposing the consequences for the uses of history: a use of history that alludes to the communion with previous, contemporary, and future fellow-believers, and thereby strengthens a sense of belonging or dis-belonging, creates boundaries. The religious uses of history, in actual fact, work both by inclusion and exclusion.

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