

ARCHIVING OTHERWISE: SOME REMARKS ON MEMORY AND HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

This essay seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion on memory, historiography and archiving by engaging Jacques Derrida's influential book *Archive fever: A Freudian impression*. The first part of the essay deals with Derrida's reflections on the word 'archive', as well as his discussion of the possibility of the destruction of the archive through the death drive and his argument about the archive and the openness towards the future. The rest of the essay aims, in conversation with Derrida, at reconfiguring archival passion as a passion for the past, a passion for justice and a passion for the future.

1 MEMORY, HISTORY AND THE ARCHIVE

In book X of Augustine's: *The confessions* one finds his famous and influential discussion of memory. Augustine's reflections on memory point to the fact that he is deeply under the impression of the vastness of memory. He writes about "the fields and vast mansions of memory", "the huge depository of memory", "the treasure-house of memory", "the immense spaces of my memory" and "the measureless plains and vaults and caves of my memory". As he passionately exclaims: "This faculty of memory is a great one, O my God, exceedingly great, a vast, infinite recess. Who can plumb its depth?" (Augustine 1998:206).

While it is not the aim of this essay to discuss Augustine's account of memory,¹ his exclamation with regard to the vastness of memory raises important and challenging questions for (church) historians. How do we deal with the treasure house of individual and collective memory? What part of the (Christian) past do we remember and privilege in our recollection through speech, writing and embodiment?

Although the distinction between memory and history, or between remembrance and historiography, needs to be respected and treated with nuance,² one could certainly argue that the task of the church historian or historical theologian consists of remembering the Christian past.³

Despite the vastness and mysterious nature of memory, as well as the limitations and complexities inherent to the historical task, the historian is nevertheless committed to the act of remembering and collecting, recalling and archiving. In this regard, the historian does not only use the archive but also funds the archive. The notion of the archive is therefore closely associated with the historical task. The complexity and elusiveness of this concept requires intensive methodological reflection. On a basic level, the archive is viewed as a place where documents are stored in a meticulous manner, thus constituting a space of memory. But the archive can also be used as a broader metaphor or concept that relates to the body of knowledge produced about the past. It is inevitable that the historian, who shares in the production of knowledge about the past through archiving, privileges certain persons, texts, stories or events while neglecting and repressing others. This essay argues that the processes of remembering, archiving and historiography are intrinsically connected and cannot be separated from questions about ethical responsibility underlying the historical task.

The nature and task of historiography is a topic that regularly features within church history discourses.⁴ This essay seeks to contribute to this ongoing discussion on historiography, memory and archiving by introducing an influential book by Jacques Derrida (1996), with the title, *Archive fever: A Freudian impression* (originally published in French as *Mal d'Archive: une impression freudienne*). *Archive fever* was first delivered in London as a lecture at an international

colloquium on the theme 'Memory: The questions of archives'. At this meeting, held under the auspices of the Société Internationale d'Histoire de la Psychiatrie et de la Psychanalyse, the Freud Museum and the Courtauld Institute of Art, Derrida dealt in a creative and thought-provoking way with the concept of the archive.

Derrida's *Archive fever* offers some important perspectives that challenge our thinking about archiving, memory and the historical task. This book has resulted in intensive conversation among archivists, philosophers, historians and social scientists about the archive and the related questions of memory and historiography.⁵ In this essay, I will focus on Derrida's probing reflections on the word 'archive', as well as on two other aspects of this intricate text, namely his discussion of the possibility of the destruction of the archive through the death drive, and his argument about the archive and the openness towards the future. After a brief discussion of these themes, the rest of the essay will offer some further reflections on the act of archiving, remembering and historical responsibility.

2 DERRIDA AND THE ARCHIVE

2.1 Archiving the word 'archive'

Derrida begins his reflections in *Archive fever* with the word 'archive', and particularly with the archive of this familiar word. He calls attention to the fact that *arkhē* at once names the commencement and the commandment. Therefore it apparently combines two principles, namely the principle according to nature or history (there where things commence) and the principle according to the law or the nomological principle (there where men and gods command). Derrida summarises this double meaning well when he writes: "In a way, the term indeed refers ... to the *arkhē* in the physical, historical, or ontological sense, which is to say the original, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and even earlier, 'archive' refers to the *arkhē* in the nomological sense, to the *arkhē* of the commandment" (Derrida 1996:2).

Derrida further notes that the concept of the archive shelters within itself the memory of this double meaning of *arkhē*, but it also shelters itself from this memory, which means, it forgets it.

Derrida does not merely signify the word 'archive' in terms of *arkhē*, but also in terms of the Greek word *arkheion*. An *arkheion* is "initially a house, a domicile, and address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (Derrida 1996:2). It was at this place of recognised authority that official documents were filed. The *archons* are not only responsible for the physical safety of that what is deposited, but they are also accorded the hermeneutical right and competence to interpret the archives. These documents (which are not always just discursive writings) speak the law, and as such they need both a guardian and a place. It requires the law and domiciliation. The archive is thus not merely to be equated with living memory. It also has to do with consigning, with inscribing a trace of the past in some external space. This 'placing' is important since there is no archive without the exteriority of place, without an outside. In this regard, Derrida uses the term toponymology to refer to this combination of localisation and the law.

The archive as place or dwelling marks the institutional passage from the private to the public sphere according to a particular privileged topology. At work is a certain *archontic* principle (linked to the position and power of the *archons*, the masters of the house and keepers of the law). This archontic principle relates to the power to unify, identify and classify, as well as to the power of consignation. Consignation is not only the act of assigning residence or to put things in reserve. It also refers to the gathering together of signs in such a way that there is a system or synchrony in which the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.

Something of the reasoning behind Derrida's argument in *Archive fever* relates to the interrogation, or deconstruction, of this archontic principle, the inherent archic or patriarchic principle of power at work within the concept of the archive. One can say that Derrida implies that the archive is not the *arkhē* but the trace or vestige of the origin. Evil reigns when there is confusion between the archive and the origin. As John Caputo (1997) rightly observes in his book *The prayer*

and tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without religion. “The illness, the disorder, the crisis, the evil (*le mal*) that besets a culture that depends on archives ... is for Derrida always a *mal d’archive*, always a function of the disorder in the relations between the *arche* and the archive, a failure to remember the distance between the original and the trace” (Caputo 1997:264).

In his archiving of the word ‘archive’, Derrida thus challenges attempts to compound the *arkhē* and the archive. He also aims to interrupt discourse on the archive by exposing the way in which the concept of the archive is inescapably linked to archontic power. This reminds us that archives are monuments to the way in which power is reconfigured. It not merely stores and includes, but also testifies to a narrative of exclusion. There is an intimate relationship between the archive and the *archons*, between archiving and a certain archontic principle. Discourses about memory, historiography and archiving that are not sensitive to these configurations need to be ruptured and interrupted.

2.2 The possibility of the destruction of the archive

Derrida’s *Archive fever* is subtitled *A Freudian impression*. We have already noted that this book resulted from a lecture given at the Freud Museum in London. Derrida mentions in a footnote that he was conscious of the fact that Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, a famous Jewish historian, would attend this lecture on memory and psychoanalysis.⁶ In a sense *Archive fever* is a conscious dialogue with him, responding especially to Yerushalmi’s book *Freud’s Moses: Judaism terminable and interminable*. While all the detail of Derrida’s engagement with Yerushalmi (and with Freud) does not directly concern us here (although we will return to Derrida’s interaction with Yerushalmi in the next section), it is important to attend to the way in which Derrida utilises the Freudian notion of the death drive in his argument on the nature of the archive.

The death drive, writes Derrida, has the silent vocation to destroy the archive. It is an aggression and a destruction that incites forgetfulness, amnesia and the annihilation of memory. It aims, furthermore, not only at the destruction of memory as spontaneous

experience, but also at the effacement of the archive as place of consignment. The death drive's calling is "to burn the archive and to incite amnesia ... aiming to ruin the archive as accumulation and capitalisation of memory on some substrate and in an exterior place" (Derrida 1996:12). It destroys every archival desire. As Derrida argues during a visit to South Africa, it is the possibility of "burning into ashes the very trace of the past" (Hamilton *et al* 2002:42). There is thus a battle between the death drive, which is archive destroying, and the archive-conserving drive.

Derrida comments on the fact that a certain limitation is imposed on the archive drive (or the conservation drive) in the light of radical finitude. But the passion for the archive is inflicted not merely due to the fact that we know that traces can be lost by accident or because space or time is finite, but because something in us, something in the psychological apparatus, is driven to destroy the trace. Without the aggression and destructive nature of the threatening death drive there is no archive fever, no passion for the archive.

These remarks of Derrida on the conflict between the archive drive and the death drive remind us that memory and the archive are vulnerable. Memories can be suppressed. Documents can be lost. Archives can be destroyed. There is a drive to destroy the trace of the past in such a way that there are no reminders left, not even ashes. This reality incites a passion for memory and archiving, but it also confronts one with the reality of forces that aim to destroy these processes, challenging naïve and romanticised notions of remembering and archiving. The story of memory, historiography and archiving is therefore also a story of selective remembering and (conscious or unconscious) forgetting.

False assumptions about the so-called neutrality of the archive also sustain naïve notions of archiving. The archive is not only a place for storing and conserving an archivable content of the past. The technical structure of the archive also determines the structure of the archivable content: "The archivization produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida 1996:17).⁷

Derrida also speculates about the impact of telephonic credit cards, portable tape recorders, computers, printers, faxes, televisions, teleconferences and above all email, on the psychoanalytic archive. Indeed it seems as if the new technology posits important challenges for thinking about the archive and archiving today. While Derrida affirms the indisputable importance of classical modes of archiving, he also points to the importance of not closing our eyes to the boundless upheaval under way in archival technology, something that must also be accompanied by juridical and political transformations. This change has considerable implications for the future, because “what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way” (Derrida 1996:18).

2.3 The archive and the openness towards the future

It is stating the obvious that the concept of the archive has everything to do with the past. Derrida admits that the notion of the archive refers to the signs of consigned memory and recalls faithfulness to tradition. But he also states: “As much and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future” (Derrida 1996:34, 35). The archive is thus not merely a question of the past: “It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (Derrida 1996:36).

In his discussion on the archive as a question of the future, Derrida returns to a notion that he has utilised before in his work, namely the notion of messianicity.⁸ In the concept of the archive a spectral messianicity is at work that ties the archive (like religion, history and science) to a very singular experience of the promise. One should note that messianicity for Derrida is not to be equated with what he calls messianism. It is not reducible to the figure of the Messiah in Jewish, Christian or Islam traditions. For Derrida the relationship to the messianic is simply the relationship to the future. It is the openness to the idea that anything might happen or anyone may arrive. With regard to the archive this means that it is always possible to re-interpret and re(con)figure the archive. The archive can never be closed. It is exactly this future orientation of the archive that,

according to Derrida, confronts us with ethical and political responsibility.

Derrida illuminates this messianic hypothesis in conversation with Yerushalmi's fictional monologue with Freud in a chapter towards the end of his book. Derrida refers in this discussion to Yerushalmi's distinction between Judaism and Jewishness. Judaism (as religion, culture and tradition) can be finite and 'terminable', but Jewishness is interminable. Yerushalmi would give up everything in Judaism except its Jewishness. This 'Jewishness' is not primarily about religion, belief in God or tradition, but is about the constitutional reference to the past and the unique relation to the future. This is also the belief that Yerushalmi wants Freud to sign, or countersign, in their fictional conversation. It is especially with regard to this question of the future, with regard to the notion of hope and hopelessness, where Freud is, according to Yerushalmi, most 'un-Jewish'.

Derrida is prepared to subscribe to Yerushalmi's affirmation of the future to come. But there is a speck of anxiety in Derrida's mind about Yerushalmi's thoughts on Jewishness and the openness to the future, and especially about the specific nature of this hope. Derrida turns to Yerushalmi's discussion of memory in his book *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (1982), to explain this uneasiness. In several citations there is the attribution that the injunction to memory falls to Israel and Israel alone. There is thus for Jews an absolute uniqueness in the experience of the promise (with regard to the future), as well as in the injunction to remember (with regard to the past). Derrida recalls Yerushalmi's statement from this book that "only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people" (Derrida 1996:76). It is as if God has inscribed one thing into the memory of a single people and of an entire people, namely the injunction: in the future, remember to remember the future. Derrida trembles before this claim of uniqueness. He comments: "Because if it is just to remember the future and the injunction to remember ... it is no less just to remember the others, the other others and others in oneself, and that the others can say the same thing" (Derrida 1996:77).⁹

Derrida wants to deconstruct the language of 'One' and of the 'Unique'. Therefore Derrida's (1996:77, 78) statement: "The gathering into itself of the One is never without violence, nor is the self-affirmation of the Unique, the law of the archontic, the law of consignation which orders the archive." The moment there is the One and the Unique there is murder, wounding and trauma. The One protects itself from the other in a movement of jealous violence. The One forgets to remember itself to itself. It claims for itself uniqueness and privilege. Derrida wants to guard against what he sees as Yerushalmi's attempt to make Israel a privileged archive. Although affirming the messianic, the openness to the future, as well as memory and repetition, Derrida wants, at the same time, to say 'no' to the death drive. This 'no' is, as Caputo notes, a 'no' to "the archival, patriarchical, nationalist, racist, sexist tendencies that irrupt whenever a house (*arkheion*) is filled with *archons*" (Caputo 1997:272).

3 RECONFIGURING ARCHIVAL PASSION

Derrida's *Archive fever* serves as reminder of the need to remember the past, to burn with a passion for the past, while at the same time remembering the future that is to come. This means that the archive is not closed, but always marked by the openness to the future. The rest of this essay probes this notion further by (de)positing three theses, or passions, with regard to memory, historiography and the archive.

3.1 A passion for the past

In his autobiography *All rivers run to the sea: Memoirs volume 1, 1928-1969*, Elie Wiesel, the holocaust-survivor and winner of the Nobel Prize for peace, writes: "Memory is a power no less powerful and pervasive than love. What does it mean to remember? It is to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it. To remember is to revive fragments of existence, to rescue lost beings, to cast harsh light on faces and events, to drive back the sands of time that covers the surface of

things, to combat oblivion and reject death” (Wiesel 1996:150). Together with memory, or as part thereof, archives and archiving are important sources and practices to challenge oblivion and death. This seems especially important in times when our historical consciousness is threatened by totalising forces that thrive on abstraction and mythologising. Often this mindset is accompanied by the strategy of either romanticising or demonising the past. Both these strategies, ironically, serve to enhance a climate of amnesia. Historical complexity and ambiguity are ignored in favor of simplistic schemes. In the process the past is domesticated and hence loses the ability to speak in a convincing and challenging manner to the present. The past becomes mute. Responsible remembering, historiography and archiving, aim at dealing with the past in such a way that the past retains the power to illuminate the present and the future.

In *Archive fever*, Derrida also confirms the importance of the role of the archive and archiving. His deconstruction of the archive, one must note, is not aimed at a destruction of the archive. Derrida comments that while nothing is less reliable and clear than the concept archived in the word ‘archive’, we are nevertheless in need of archives. To have archive fever can also be something more than suffering from a sickness. Derrida (1996:91) writes: “It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, for searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there is too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a home-sickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.”

One can argue that such a desire for the archive is connected with a passion for (re)collecting, gathering, writing down, recording and storing. This passion for the past is important in the fight against the wilful denial of many horrific episodes in the history of humankind and the erasure of the stories of the vulnerable and the victimised. These ‘revisionist’ histories, like those that deny the existence of extermination camps, must be challenged. What are needed are communities and institutions that sustain faithful memory, and

consequently, historians to archive the past and keep memories alive - something that Paul Ricoeur refers to as faithful testimony. This notion of faithful testimony serves as a helpful expression of the pathos of the archivist and the historian. It is an attempt to try and reconstruct the best story that one can.

In an interesting interview with Richard Kearney, included in the book: *Questioning ethics: Contemporary debates in philosophy* (Kearney & Dooley 1999), Ricoeur emphasises the fact that a sense of what 'really happened' must keep concerning us. Questions of historical representation and reference to the past are complex indeed, but for ethical as well as epistemological reasons, the truth claim must not be eliminated. Therefore historical memory needs to be supplemented by documentary and archival evidence. In this interview, Kearney rightly raises the question whether testimonies cannot also be manipulated and distorted in order to serve particular interests. Ricoeur (1999:16) responds: "The fundamental objective of the good historian is to enlarge the sphere of archives, that is, the conscientious historian must open up the archive by retrieving the traces which the dominant ideological forces attempted to suppress." By archiving and narrating otherwise the historian aims at giving expression to the voices of the abused and excluded. The historian does not merely oppose the manipulation and distortion of testimonies by telling the story differently, but also provides the space for the confrontation between opposing testimonies. This idea of providing a hospitable space is vital for fostering faithful testimony. This, however, is not a romanticised space in which opposing testimonies are forced into false harmony. And the historian is by no means a neutral observer in this process. He or she is an actor in the plot and also embedded in history.

In summary we can say that to burn with a passion for the past, a passion for the archive, is to aim for faithful testimony. Theologically speaking one can say that the (church) historian must burn with a passion for truth, provided that we qualify the notion of truth in a way that adequately challenges positivistic assumptions. It also implies that the attempt at faithful testimony is not to be separated from justice.

3.2 A passion for justice

The faithfulness to the past, faithful testimony, is not without implications for the present (and the future). As Robert Gibbs so poignantly states in a chapter entitled 'Why remember?' in his book *Why ethics? Signs of responsibilities*: "Remembrance is not about recalling the past or about preserving it, but is needed to disrupt the present" (Gibbs 2000:354). The historian seeks to enlarge the archive, to collect, to gather, to re-consign, to narrate. But there is also the need for the awareness that the archive is embedded in a politics of power. The archive is indeed, as Derrida calls it in *Archive fever*, the *arkheion*. Derrida reminds us of the way the archive is involved in a politics of power when he makes the following remark in a footnote: "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (Derrida 1996:4).¹⁰

Given this interrelatedness of the archive and power, the task of the historian is also subversive, that is, to challenge the hegemony of certain constructions of the past. The failure to interrupt and disrupt the present can easily lead to a mere affirmation of the status quo. One should note that a feverish interruption in the name of new ideologies could also serve the status quo and help to keep oppressive power structures in place. The historian needs to be mindful of this risk. Nevertheless, it is a real risk that the study of history will not result in a challenge to the present, but only serve as justification of the past. This may have the effect that only the stories of the winners are transmitted - a point highlighted by church historians in Africa. For instance, in his inaugural lecture as professor in Church history at the University of Stellenbosch, titled 'Kerkgeskiedskrywing in Suid-Afrika: 'n Kritiese evaluasie' (Historiography in South Africa: a Critical Evaluation), Hannes Adonis (2000), seeks to challenge an understanding of history that privileges the victors. Towards the end of this lecture, he confirms the importance of oral sources for historiography.¹¹ These sources help with access to previously hidden experiences of people and social groups whose stories have not been incorporated into the official documented history. This is the history of oppressed groups, women

and the poor. Adonis (2000:11) sees this development to write “a history from below” as congruent with the African proverb that says: “Until the lions have their historians, tales of history will always glorify the hunter.” It is indeed the case that the church historian’s responsibility is to tell the story of the lions, albeit with the realisation that the lions are also victors when history is viewed in yet another way.

To archive otherwise, to read and write history otherwise, is to challenge the story of the victor and the way in which it has been successfully transmitted. It is to ‘brush history against the grain’.¹² In the process we need to be mindful that the historian is most often descended from the victors and that the critique of the victors is a critique of oneself. As Gibbs (2000:368) rightly reminds us: “My world is thus stolen from nameless others, even at the moment of my mere existence. Historiography, therefore, juxtaposes the past and present, not merely to learn something new of the present, but to interrogate my present, and to address my responsibility for others’ suffering from which I have directly benefited.”

In her book *An ethics of remembering: History, heterology, and the nameless others* (1998), Edith Wyschogrod asks the crucial question whether the conveyance of history does not require a double passion: “an eros for the past and an ardor for the others in whose name there is felt an urgency to speak?” (Wyschogrod 1998:xi). To be a historian is not merely to write, photograph, film and televise. It is also binding oneself by a promise to the dead to tell the truth about the past. She writes: “The historian’s responsibility is mandated by another who is absent, cannot speak for herself, one whose actual face the historian may never see, yet to whom ‘giving countenance’ becomes a task” (Wyschogrod 1998:xii). Wyschogrod refers in this regard to the role of what she calls the heterological historian. This is the historian who is driven by an eros for the dead and the urgency of ethics. In short, it is to burn with a passion for justice.

To archive otherwise, in the midst of archontic power, is to be driven by a passion for justice; it is to have what Bonhoeffer (1971) calls in a famous fragment, “a view from below.”¹³ This sensitivity does not necessarily safeguard one against ideological constructs (it is

probably not possible to give theoretical safeguards). It is, however, difficult to see how just archiving and just memory is possible without this ethical optics. As Ricoeur writes in an essay entitled *Memory and forgetting*: “To memorise the victims of history - the sufferers, the humiliated, the forgotten - should be a task for all” (Kearney & Dooley 1999:10, 11). This task cannot, however, be separated from lamenting the painful injustices suffered by the victims and the bondage experienced by the oppressors. This also requires lamenting our inadequacy to remember and recall the past justly. Therefore the work of the historian is also a work of mourning.

3.3 A passion for the future

As already noted, Derrida shares in his intriguing interaction with Yerushalmi the affirmation of the future to come.¹⁴ The archive opens out to the future. It is never closed. This affirmation of the future to come is the condition of all promises, of all hope and expectation. With regard to this affirmation of the future to come, Derrida emphasises the fact that the archive is an irreducible experience of the future. As Caputo (1997:278) comments on Derrida’s argument: “In the end the archive should be an open book, an opening to the future, the depository of a promise, it is to burn with a passion for the impossible. It is to be marked by a promise of something to come.”

According to Derrida the archive should call into question the coming of the future. Derrida refers to a spectral messianicity at work that ties the archive to an experience of the promise. From a Christian perspective one can ask whether we can follow Derrida all the way on this path. Kearney (2001:98) rightly notes in his book *The God who may be: A hermeneutics of religion* that Derrida “is more concerned with the everyday (every moment) incoming of events than in the truth of some divine advent”. Derrida seems to prefer the spectral to the revealed structure of such incoming. Although Kearney makes it clear that he cannot follow Derrida, he also points to the indispensable lessons that deconstruction teaches about vigilance, patience and humility (Kearney 2001:99).

Christian historians and theologians will most probably construct the archive’s openness to the future in a different way than that of

Derrida. However, *Archive fever* reminds us that the question of the archive is not to be separated from the question of the future. Among other things, this points to a certain *temporality* at work within the historical task. In his conversation with Yerushalmi about the future to come, Derrida recalls Walter Benjamin's famous essay *Theses on the philosophy of history*. In this essay Benjamin (1969:261) writes: "History is the subject of a structure whose time is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now." Hence the historian establishes a conception of the presence (as the time of the now) "which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (Benjamin 1969:263). This is a temporality that sees every second of time as "the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin 1969:264).¹⁵

While Christian and Jewish thinkers may construe differently their understanding of a temporality that critiques homogenous, empty time, there is a shared assumption regarding the importance of the incoming of the future for the understanding of the present and the past. This implies that remembering, historiography and archiving are not to be separated from the responsibility for tomorrow and the expectation of the future to come. One can speak, therefore, not only of the presence of the past, but also of the presence of the future. As Wyschogrod (1998:248) writes about the historian's 'ethics of remembering': "In speaking of the dead others, the historian enters into a temporal zone that is neither past, present or future. The tense in which her promise is inscribed is that of the future present, an impossible new time in which the future as promise cannot lose its sense of presence".

4 CONCLUSION

Derrida's *Archive fever* certainly invites further critique, concretisation and contextualisation. It rightfully reminds us, however, of the archive's openness towards the future as well as its archontic power in history. With regard to the latter, the complex relationship between archives and the power of the state immediately comes to mind. In the words of Achille Mbembe: "There is no state without archives - without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state" (Hamilton *et al* 2002:23). The intricate relationship between the archive and power is not merely limited to state power, but also finds expression in other configurations that have a stake in the memory and reconstruction of the past. Church historical discourse is similarly not exempted from the subtle archontic temptations at work in the archiving process. It is therefore vital for church historians to retain a sensitive approach throughout the act of writing and interpreting history.

Such sensitivity is funded, among other things, by a hermeneutic of doing church history in communion. This reiterates the importance of an ecumenical and interdisciplinary approach to church history. In addition, it points to the importance of taking into consideration those lives, groups and communities often neglected, including ordinary

church members, minority groups, women and children.¹⁶ It implies, furthermore, resistance to hagiographical accounts of persons and communities that sanitise memory and cloud faithful testimony. Theological perspectives on church history offer important resources to challenge the hegemony of archontic power, to archive otherwise, and to remember differently.

The introduction of this essay referred to Augustine's understanding of the haunting vastness of memory. In his book *Saint Augustine's memory*, Garry Wills challenges a static understanding of Augustine's description of memory. He writes: "This memory is dynamic, constructive, predictive, constitutive of identity, the meeting place with other humans, and the pathway to God" (Wills 2002:4). Wills's depiction of memory can rightly be applied to the church historical task, reminding us of the open, dynamic and transformative nature of remembering the Christian past.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 With regard to the sizable list of literature in this regard, see Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine's Memory* (2002) and the article by Roland Teske (2001 'Augustine's philosophy of memory' in Stump, E & Kretzmann, N, *The Cambridge companion to Augustine*, 148-158. Augustine's discussion of memory in *The confessions* also forms an important subtext in Umberto Eco's recent novel *The mysterious flame of Queen Loana* (2005), a story about a rare book dealer from Milan who suffers from severe amnesia but remembers everything that he has read.
 - 2 Some scholars refer to history and memory as two contradictory ways of dealing with the past, while others view history as a special case of social and cultural memory. For a thorough discussion of the relation between history and memory (and oblivion), see Paul Ricoeur's monumental work *Memory, history and forgetting* (2004).
 - 3 This phrase is taken from Robert Wilken's book, *Remembering the Christian past*. In the last chapter of this book, dealing with memory and the Christian intellectual life, Wilken writes: "The Christian intellectual tradition, then, is inescapably historical. Without memory, our intellectual life is impoverished, barren, ephemeral, subject to the whims of the moment ... there can be no Christian life without reference to the writings of the prophets and evangelists, the doctrines of the church fathers, the conceptual niceties of the scholastics, the language of the liturgy, the songs of the poets and hymn writers, the exploits of the martyrs, and the holy tales of the saints" (Wilkin 1995:179, 180).
 - 4 These questions have been discussed extensively among South African church historians as well, for example in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. For bibliographical references to the many articles on historiography in this journal (until 2001), see P Denis, 'Three decades of church history' in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* (2001). Under the rubric of historiography, Denis refers to articles by Becken, H-J, Brown, E, Claassen, J W, Cook, C W, Denis, P, Elphick, R, Goedhals, M M, Hanekom, T N, Hofmyer, J W, Landman, C, Millard, J, Odendaal, B J, Southey, N D, Stoop, J A & Whitelaw, D P (2001:241). See also Gundani (2004), Duncan (2005) and Plaatjies & Landman (2005). The plea is also often made for an ecumenical perspective on church historiography. In this regard, see, for instance, Kalu (ed) (1988) and Wengert & Brockwell (eds) (1995).
 - 5 See, for instance, Marlene Manoff's overview article 'Theories of the archive from across the disciplines' (2004). Manoff refers to the British journal *History of the human sciences* that devoted two special issues to the concept of the archive in 1989 and 1999. In fifteen articles, scholars from a wide array of disciplines reflected on the meaning and role of archives by pondering questions like the role of archives in the formation and development of national and democratic consciousness, the role of archives in totalitarian societies as a weapon in ethnic struggle, the contribution of the archival metaphor to anthropology, classics, history, literature and the visual arts, and the role of the archival metaphor in our conceptualisation of digital collections and the internet. She refers to the fact that ten of these fifteen articles built on, or cited, Derrida's *Archive fever* (Manoff 2004:10). See also the extensive project 'Refiguring the Archive' hosted by the Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of the Witwatersrand (in conjunction with other archival institutions) in 1998. Derrida, who spoke at one of these meetings, had a major influence on this project that aimed at creating space for post-positivist critique of the archive in South Africa. See also the book that resulted from this project (edited by Hamilton, C et al), *Refiguring the archive* (2002). In this book questions about the archive are often brought into conversation with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For a discussion of the question of memory and reconciliation, see also Vosloo (2001).

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- 6 Derrida refers to the fact that Yerushalmi was to have been at his lecture, but was sick and could not attend. Someone else read his contribution the next day. See Derrida 1998:21, as well as Hamilton, C et al 2002:38,40.
 - 7 Derrida adds the provocative remark: "This is also our political experience of the so-called news media" (1998:17).
 - 8 For Derrida's discussion of 'the messianic', see especially his articles 'Faith and knowledge' and 'The force of law' (both included in Derrida, J, *Acts of religion*, 2002) and his book *Specters of Marx* (1993). See also Caputo 1997:117-159.
 - 9 In a dialogue with Elizabeth Roudinesco, Derrida reiterates his understanding and critique of Yerushalmi's position: "Yerushalmi seems ready to abandon Judaism. Not out of infidelity to Judaism, but out of fidelity to Jewishness, which, from his point of view, is marked by two fundamental vocations: the experience of the promise (the future) and the injunction of memory (the past). This was troubling to me ... Every culture, every non-Jewish community, would claim these two fundamental traits" (Derrida & Roudinesco 2004:188-189).
 - 10 One is well aware of the feverish control that institutional authority, like the state and the market, exercises over archival materials. It is driven by the desire to make one's own archive authoritative and normative and to exercise control over the archive of the other. Caputo (1997:265) writes that this, "lies at the basis of every feverish racism, nationalism, fundamentalism, or messianism, at the root of every 'identitarianism'".
 - 11 Several church historians and theologians have reflected intensively on the importance of oral sources for the historical task (Adonis refers specifically to Oosthuizen & Claassen). One also needs to be mindful of the remark by the editors in the introduction to *Refiguring the archive*: "The oral record is not the only alternative to public documentary archives. Literature, landscape, dance and a host of other forms offer archival possibilities capable of releasing different kinds of information of the past, shaped by different record-keeping processes" (Adonis: 2002:10).
 - 12 As Gibbs (2000:335) writes, with reference to Walter Benjamin: "The task of historiography is to brush history against the grain, to make lost possibilities of the past register in disrupting our present."
 - 13 Bonhoeffer (1971:17) writes: "There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short from the perspective of those who suffer."
 - 14 Derrida (1996:68) prefers to use in French the word *avenir* (to-come), rather than *futur*, in order "to point towards the coming of an event rather than toward some future present".
 - 15 For a theological discussion of Benjamin's *Theses on the philosophy of history*, see Moltmann 1996:38-41.
 - 16 For the importance of this for the practice of church history in the South African context, see Hofmyer 1995:36-43.