

## Foreword

The twentieth century is now but a memory, existing in the minds, souls, and seared flesh of those who survived it and we who write and read the words that become our past. Theology—whether Jewish or Christian—is embedded in the past and the command to remember, or to forget. But remembering or forgetting are both unstable and unreliable. We remember and we forget but in part, as individuals and as communities. We remember things that we would prefer to forget, or seek to blot out those things which make life intolerable or are an offense. Alana Vincent's book returns us to the past in memorials of words and stone, to memories that remain close to us in individual bodies and their collective identities, and that are made meaningful in the ancient words of Scripture and sacred traditions. Her book begins in the memorials of war and the possibility of any theology after the Holocaust, linking the violent history of the twentieth century with the internal contradictions both to remember and to forget Amalek (Deut 25:17–19): to remember what Amalek did to the Israelites on their journey from Egypt, and then not to forget to “blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” We must remember to forget.

A central text in this discussion, and not from Scripture, is read in two versions: the *Antigone* of Sophocles and of Jean Anouilh, the latter written during the Second World War. Thus we move across the millennia of human history in the contesting over the dead body of Polynices, from the ancient history of Israel, to ancient Greece as early as the fifth century BCE, up to the history of our own times in Europe and the Western world, bound together in grief for those whose lives end violently and who abide in our memories, both individual and national. They are memorialized in stone, but even more often in words, and at the heart of this book lie the works of novelists and writers who remember through works of the imagination.

The violence of war and genocide tears into our narratives and our worldviews even as it haunts our memories. Unable to forget and finally unable to forgive, we strive to stabilize and anchor the memories which

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haunt us in forms and texts which spill over the boundaries of religious forms of consolation and theological utterance, and in its exploration of “liturgical moment” this book finds them in forms of memorial which do not seek to replace any formal liturgy, but are, rather, “moments and interactions in which the functional concerns of formal liturgy are attended to.”

A book such as this cannot be easy to read or absorb as it gives attention to things of the deepest importance. It defies over-simple categories, and the danger of any attempt to settle things in their terms—profoundly religious, but beyond religion, deeply committed to ways of Jewish and Christian thinking and practice, but finally lodged in spaces of humanity that are both and neither. It draws us to give attention to public memorials which we too often see and reflect on too little, as well as the literary texts which seek to give expression to hauntings of the mind and spirit that are beyond words. The reader of this book should expect to be unsettled and moved, called to remember things that we would often prefer to forget when forgetting is impossible. In its varieties of texts it seeks the reconciliation of the promises of theology and faith with the disruptions and ruptures within the human chaos of history within which all of us are lodged as both its victims and its perpetrators. It reminds us of the crucial importance of literature and art as they unpick easy resolutions, yet continue to offer, in their utterances, the possibility of our continued existence in spite of the violence and in the face of death itself.

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