

## *The religious genres of collective memory – an attempt at typology*

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### 1. Memory genre

Collective memory is defined as “the ideas held by members of a community about its past, as recorded in works of culture” (Wójcicka 2015: 68). It contains a contemporary interpretation of images of the past. These images change along with the needs and world-views of the social group that serves as their depositary (cf. Czachur 2018: 11). Past images are transmitted through communication at its various levels (interpersonal, group, institutional and mass). “Memory lives in, and thanks to, communication. [...] We only remember what we communicate and contextualize within the framework of social memory references” (Assmann 2008: 52–53). This communication-based character of collective memory means that it can take on various forms – verbal and non-verbal. Scholars who study collective memory have emphasised the special role of language, which 1) creates the image of the past; 2) shapes that image, and 3) interprets (the linguistic image of the past) (for more, see Wójcicka 2018a, 2018b).

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How images of the past are shaped and communicated is determined, among others, by speech genre. The literature-specialist term *speech genre* has been coined by Mikhail Bakhtin. The term became an inspiration for Jeffrey Olick,<sup>1</sup> who has translated Bakhtin's claims into the field of memory studies. Any interpretation of the past is shaped and, at the same time, limited by the speech genre.

Memory genres are specific patterns of speaking [about something], structured as a set of conventions against which or within which those utterances are produced and read (Olick 2007). In Jeffrey Olick's concept, memory genres are historical/social/cultural constructs. They reproduce memory in new contexts and change it (Olick 2007: 107).

Olick's concept has been extended by Astrid Erll, who has argued that genre and memory are connected on many levels, that is:

– genres, such as historical novel, comedy and romance, can be considered to constitute **generators, media or products of cultural memory**;

– for rules of the genre to be satisfied, **readers' memory** is required. We can speak of a genre only when the author and the readers form the same memory community and share some knowledge of genre conventions;

– genres, such as biography, comedy and tragedy, provide conventional patterns. They govern the ways in which specific **versions of the past** should be **recorded**;

– genres [...] **embody specific values, standards and world-views** (Erll 2018: 125–126).

Therefore, memory genre can be considered to constitute a way of thinking about, conceptualising, and expressing the past (cf. Łozowski, Wójcicka 2018). A genre is a 'repository' of cultural memory (Erll 2018: 115).

A memory genre is "a specific type of expression that is relatively fixed in thematic and stylistic (and also axiological and cognitive – MW) terms" (Bakhtin 1986: 354). It communicates memory and amnesia (both individual and collective). A genre is also one of the factors to shape collective memory and amnesia. It contains specific models of memory and amnesia (Wójcicka 2014: 289).

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<sup>1</sup> In Poland, see Grzegorz Grochowski (2018)

A genre, as a text pattern, is used to memorise (shape) and remember (communicate) images of the past. It reproduces the image, or rather images, of the past, since these differ depending on the genre convention.

To sum up, a memory genre

a) is a form of memory/ a pattern/ a basis for expressing new experiences of the past;

b) constitutes the content of memory – is communicated through and functions within, collective memory. As argued by Jeffrey Olick, “a genre lives in the present but it always remembers its past, its beginning. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development” (Olick 2018: 461);

c) is a collective memory code – it creates images of the past and responds to them (Olick 2018: 469). What is recorded inside is an image of the past;

d) is a vehicle for values, standards, and world-views of a social group (for more, see Wójcicka, in print).

## 2. Religious genres of communicative and cultural memory

Memory genres can be divided on the basis of a set of criteria proposed by Jan Assmann, or using the criterion of intention. This article makes an attempt to reconcile J. Assmann’s findings with the concept of memory genre and to identify religious memory genres. I define religious genres of speech as textual patterns that are distinguished by themes (*sarcum*) and prayer intentions (pleading, thanking, worshiping, etc.) (see: Makuchowska 2014).

Jan Assmann has identified two types of memory – communicative and cultural. In doing so, he took into consideration their form, content, media, temporal structure and vehicles. These criteria concern two aspects of investigating memory genres:

- structural/semantic (form and content, and also media), and
- pragmatic (temporal structure, i.e. when a memory medium is used, and vehicles).

The syntactic/semantic aspect can be explored through the immanent analysis of a memory genre, while the pragmatic one – through the external-text analysis.

**Cultural memory genres** are texts with stable text patterns. They include:

1) an artistic, ceremonial, fixed and reproducible form (structure), which contains traditional and symbolic verbal (and non-verbal – an image, a gesture, etc.) means, and

2) some content describing events from the distant (mythical) past.

These are genres which function without time constraints, and are communicated through specialised tradition promoters.

The religious genres of cultural memory can include, e.g., the **liturgical prayer**. It constitutes a fixed text, contained in such liturgical books as *The Missal* and *The Ritual*. The liturgical prayer must be uttered exactly as prescribed, without even the slightest change. “This is because these prayers constitute *locus theologicus*, sources of theological truths, and as such have received special protection to preserve doctrinal integrity and purity” (Makuchowska 2013: 493). Therefore, this genre is characterised by ritualization and hieratic nature. Ritualization concerns both the form of the genre and the way it functions. The hieratic character is understood as “loftiness, solemnity, and celebratory manner of speech” (Makuchowska 2013: 494). This is expressed through lexical, morphological and syntactic archaisms and old-fashioned forms, traditional biblicisms, and literary, official lexicon and constructions (Makuchowska 2013: 494).

Another cultural memory genre is the **fixed prayer**.<sup>2</sup> What is characteristic of it is “routine (formulaic) character, model standardisation, and stereotypical phrasing of its many components. The lexical composition and repeatability of the words (meaning their frequent recurrence in different texts) make hieratic character another structurally-motivated feature” (Wojtak 2000: 135).

Both types of prayer (liturgical and “private”) are formulatory, which makes it possible to use someone else’s words as their own. Thus, these prayers are an example of the genre of cultural memory, because “believers use texts that are the property of the entire religious community. These are texts that the user does not create when he wants to make contact with the supernatural recipient, but which already existed before, which he finds – he reads, listens to or plays from memory” (Makuchowska 2014: 97).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about fixed prayers, see further in the paper.

Similarly, **communicative memory genres** are texts characterised by

- 1) a natural, non-fixed form, and
- 2) content that portrays the past experienced by an individual during their life.

These are texts that survive 80–100 years (3–4 generations) at the most, that is as long as their promoters – non-specialised witnesses of the past – are alive.

Communicative memory genres include the **universal prayer**,<sup>3</sup> also known as the prayer of the faithful. It has “a basic canon of intentions and their fixed order, defined by the Second Vatican Council

- 1) for the needs of the Church – for the unity of the Church, for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, for missions, for the Pope, for bishops, priests, catechumens, etc.,

- 2) for state authorities and for the salvation of the whole world: for peace, for social problems and conflicts to be solved, for governments, for people in power, etc.

- 3) for people who are at a difficult moment in their life,

- 4) for the local and parish communities, and prayer groups, etc. (Mikołajczak 2004: 87).

The universal prayer is, therefore, based on current (meaning personally experienced by the faithful at a given time) events. It addresses those specifically. “The universal prayer addresses constant, but also urgent, problems, which are faced by the Church and humanity in general, across their different national, religious, social, or other strata. Such a prayer builds on the Liturgy of the Word, and current events in the liturgical year and the cult of saints” (Mikołajczak 2004: 88), e.g.

Let us offer to God, in a humble prayer, the most urgent needs of the Church and the people, and our own concerns, trusting that if we pray to Him fervently, He shall answer our prayers.

or

Families with many children often have to show exceptional courage; let us pray that they are always treated with kindness by the people around them. Throughout its history, the Church has had members of outstanding courage; let us pray that today, too, there be no shortage of brave and ardent Catholics.

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<sup>3</sup> Even though the universal prayer tends to be treated as a fixed prayer, I treat it, following Stanisław Mikołajczak, as “a separate genre (subgenre) in the prayer hypergenre” (Mikołajczak 2004: 94).

The (personally) experienced past does not have to be addressed explicitly in the prayer of the faithful. The prayer can make indirect references to such experiences to actualise them in the individual memory of each member of the community, whether a religious or a social/cultural one.

Another communicative memory genre is a **parish announcement**. Such announcements are non-fixed and generally refer not only to the recent past, but also to the near future.

At first glance, the pattern followed by parish announcements could suggest that they constitute a cultural memory genre. Indeed, their first two segments refer to the absolute past, and include

1) a heading, which clearly describes the time according to the liturgical calendar, e.g. “4th Sunday of Easter” or “the Sunday within the octave of Christmas – The Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph”;

2) an introduction which makes a reference to the current period in the life of the Church. This identifies a specific point in sacral time and explains its meaning, e.g. “Today is the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth – Jesus, Mary and Joseph” (as cited in Majewska-Tworek, Zaśko-Zielińska 2004: 83).

These segments **recall** some important events from the absolute past, as cherished by the Church, e.g. “Tomorrow is the New Year, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God [...]. It is a holy day of obligation, which means that you are expected to attend Mass.” “On Thursday, June 11th, we will be celebrating the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (the Feast of Corpus Cristi). On that day, we express our faith in the presence of Christ and thank Him for the gift of Eucharist.”

But reminders of those events only serve as a framework for what is personally experienced by the Church community, e.g. “On Wednesday, February 13th, we will be commemorating the 11th anniversary of the death of the late Fr. Lech Sutryk. We will pray on his behalf during the Mass at 6 p.m.” “During the last week, our brother in faith, **Stanisław Jackiewicz**, 93, of 3 Muzyczna St., passed away; he was buried in the cemetery at Lipowa St. The Mass to be offered one month after his death, as a gift from those who attended the funeral, will be celebrated on March 9th at 6 p.m.”

Therefore, parish announcements remind people about

- the events from the early days of Christianity,
- the rituals associated with a specific solemnity, e.g. “On Thursday, we will be celebrating the Feast of St. Blaise, and consecrating apples and

candles. On Saturday, we will be celebrating the Feast of St. Agatha, and consecrating bread and water”;

– the people and events from recent past, who might have been personally known or experienced by the parishioners; and

– the appropriate Christian behaviour, e.g. “Next Sunday, we are starting a retreat in our parish. **Please remember** to thank the priest for his sermon by saying ‘God bless you’; also, **please remember** that the church is the House of God so please be respectful in the way you dress. We would not like to reprove anyone personally.”

Parish announcements can be treated as a communicative memory genre because of their plain, yet somehow fixed form. And given their oral form, they can be regarded as combining certain conventionality (specific order of segments, from general to more detailed, from Church-wide to local, parish-related matters) and spontaneity associated with interaction. They create a link between the absolute past and the personally experienced past, even though these two do not overlap. The absolute past embraced by the initial segments of the announcements serves as a frame of reference to anchor the personally experienced past in. But it does not constitute a framework of interpretation, meaning that the personally experienced past is not explained by reference to the absolute past, as is the case with the next type of memory genres.

### 3. Religious genres of inter-cultural memory

Genres of inter-cultural memory are a combination of different types of memory – not only, as I wrote in 2014, communicative and cultural memory, but also, e.g., cultural and individual memory. Inter-cultural memory is intertextual in nature as it draws from various available works of culture. In a way, it opens an intergenerational dialogue between the texts of cultural memory. It translates the elements of one culture (e.g. traditional) into another culture (e.g. contemporary) to bridge the gap between them. To some extent, such translation renders old cultural products and meanings in their contemporary versions to make them more accessible (cf. Golka 2010: 195) (for more information, see Wójcicka 2014: 187).

An example of inter-cultural memory is the **examination of conscience**, which needs to be considered in some context, as part of a ritual and an element of the Sacrament of Penance (Wojtak 2007: 292).

In the Sacrament of Penance, which includes five parts, there are two that refer specifically to the examination of conscience as a genre, namely the second (of catechistic/explanatory nature) and the fourth (examination of conscience).

The second part is a **reminder** of the essence of the Sacrament of Penance, and in particular

– of the establishment of the Sacrament of Penance by Christ, as found in the catechism explication: “In the Sacrament of Penance, Jesus Christ absolves man, through the priest, from sins, reconciles them with God and the People of God, and blesses them with a good life”;

– of the conditions of how to properly receive the Sacrament of Penance, and

– of the definition and rules of the examination of conscience.

This part also provides some guidance to not only refer to one’s individual past, but also to the commandments cherished in the collective memory: “The examination of conscience is about **reflecting upon your** sins [...] It should be accurate and impartial [...] To make the examination of conscience easier for yourself, **contemplate God’s Commandments, Precepts of the Church, and obligations specific to your membership status.**” It also includes a reference to the explication of sin: “No destiny or Satan or property of the human body is the direct cause of sin, since no one can take away your free will” (as cited in Wojtak 2007: 292).

This part alone shows that the examination of conscience is a genre that connects cultural memory (it is based on constant Commandments and Precepts, as cherished by the Church) and individual memory (reflecting on one’s sins from recent past).

The examination of conscience itself (step four within the structure of the Sacrament of Penance) “belongs among the religious expressions that follow a normative, meaning fixed and imposed, pattern, which does not preclude the existence of specific variants, or even individual approaches” (Wojtak 2007: 293). This normative pattern is also the manifestation of cultural memory, communicated through ‘specialised tradition promoters’, who, in this case, are the Church and religious publications. Such variants, which are audience-specific, constitute an example of how traditional religious rules and commandments can be adapted to the contemporary experience of children, teenagers, spouses, consecrated persons, etc. Local variability within



the genre model of the examination of conscience manifests itself in diverse versions of the set of questions associated with each Commandment (Wojtak 2007: 294), e.g.: – Commandment 4: Children in relation to adults, Parents in relation to children, Responsibilities of spouses, Siblings, Professional duties, Attitude to the Church;

– Commandment 3: ‘Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.’ ‘Have I missed the Mass on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation through my own fault?’ ‘Have I been late to the Mass through my own fault?’ ‘Have I participated in the Mass in a mindless and inattentive way?’;

– Commandments 6 and 9 require that you control your sexual drive. They require celibacy prior to marriage, and in marriage command people to have intercourse in accordance with the natural law and Catholic morality: ‘Have I read immoral books?’ ‘Have I watched shows or films that might be bad for me?’ ‘Have I used foul language or repeated dirty jokes?’ ‘Do you remember that God is your Father?’ ‘Do you thank God for all the good?’ ‘Do you receive the Holy Communion often?’ ‘Do other people see you as the child of God when they look at you?’

The above-mentioned examples (as cited in Maria Wojtak 2007), show that, every time, the examination of conscience connects cultural memory content (the past concerning the origins of Christianity, the foundations of faith, such as the Ten Commandments and the official Church interpretations of specific Commandments (see the relevant examples above and the questions that are intended to open up the individual memory of the individual).

The examination of conscience, whose primary goal is to help you *reflect on your sins* (Wojtak 2007: 292) has to be based on cultural memory content, as it provides a social and cultural framework (cf. Halbwachs 2008), as well as an interpretative one, for those sins committed in recent past, experienced by each promoter of the past as part of their individual experience.

A memory genre that seems to provide an interface between the timeless past and the recent past is also a **pastoral letter**.

On the one hand, it brings back the memory of the truths of faith rooted in the cultural memory communicated by the Church (as a specialised promoter). This is achieved, e.g., by explaining specific situations in the spirit of the Gospel:

Parents who neglect their responsibility to continuously take care of their children’s religious attitudes should remember the very harsh words the Holy Spirit inspired one of

the Apostles to say – “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

and in the blessing at the end of the letter:

I trust that our Heavenly Father, who has thus guided our diocese, will continue to be exceedingly generous to it, and I give you all my heartfelt blessing in His name and in the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Wojtak 2003: 196).

On the other hand, a pastoral letter focuses on the current situation, which means the recent past, e.g.:

Catholic young people of the holy Podlasie, combat your sins, discover and start loving Christ, cherish his grace in your heart, plan your life with God and according to His laws! Dare to oppose immorality in your life with determination and be not afraid to fight for sobriety, because you are standing up for the happiness of your children and, more importantly, for the right image of your Christianity. (Wojtak 2003: 193);

or

Whether you are living nearby or far away, I am asking you, Dear Parents, to consider helping your children come to our parish church, as they are preparing [for this important day – translator’s note], by arranging transport among yourselves (Wojtak 2003: 189).

Inter-cultural genres combine the absolute past with the one experienced in the form of non-fixed, individual utterances. The absolute past provides an interpretative framework for the personally experienced past. That non-distant past is interpreted and explained by reference to the cultural memory cherished by the Church (the Bible, the Commandments, teaching of the Church). So, the inter-cultural memory genre is an intermediary between the communicative memory (the form and partially the content) and the cultural memory (the sermon style and partially the content), the collective one and the individual one. Their form and content are the products of individual expression and experience, based on the religious style and absolute content.

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The memory genre is like a casting mould that gives the (absolute or personally experienced) past some (linguistic) shape, (cultural) dimension, and structure. The content of memory fills this genre, or casting mould, to be communicated in the form prescribed by the genre. Therefore, the content of memory takes the shape and structure of the specific memory genre. Some

genres, such as the liturgical prayer, are cherished, or stored, in the collective memory in full and should be associated mainly with remembering, as one of the four stages of memory. Then they constitute genres of cultural memory. Other genres are connected with recalling (examination of conscience, pastoral letter, parish announcements) and are genres of communicative or inter-cultural memory.

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### *The religious genres of collective memory – an attempt at typology*

The memory genre as a model of text serves to memorize (shape) and remember (pass on) images of the past, which reproduces the picture of the past. The article is an attempt at providing typology of religious memory genres. In the first part of the article, the concept of the memory genre is presented and an attempt is made at typology of religious memory genres, making use of the conceptions of Jan Assmann who distinguished communicative and cultural kinds within collective memory. According to the author, the religious genres of cultural memory include the liturgical prayer and the fixed prayer. On the other hand, instances of the religious genres of communicative memory are the universal prayer and parish announcements. Beside these two types, the author indicates also religious genres of inter-cultural memory, which constitute a connection of different types of memory: communicative and

cultural or cultural and individual. Examples of this genre are the examination of conscience and a pastoral letter. Certain genres (e.g. the liturgical prayer) are stored in collective memory in full and should be tied to, primarily, remembering – one of the four phases of memory. Then they make genres of cultural memory. Others are connected with recalling (examination of conscience, a pastoral letter, parish announcement) and are genres of communicative or inter-cultural memory.

**Key words:** *memory (communicative, cultural, intercultural), memory genre, prayer (liturgical, established, common), parish announcement, examination of conscience, pastoral letter*