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The Sermon as Discursive Frame for the Nazi Past: Preaching about the German History Exhibition “Neue Anfänge nach 1945?”

This essay engages with a set of speeches that had a narrow ambit—spatially, temporally, and socially—but a rich cultural content. At roughly fifty protestant church services in northern Germany, in the years 2016-19, Lutheran pastors used their sermons to respond to a local history exhibition about the aftermath of National Socialism, titled “Neue Anfänge nach 1945? Wie die Landeskirchen Nordelbiens mit ihrer NS-Vergangenheit umgingen” (New Beginnings after 1945? How the Regional Churches of North Elbia Dealt with their Nazi Past—hereafter, “Neue Anfänge?”). Despite the apparent obscurity of the source texts and their limited public reach, the rhetoric of these sermons belongs to a broad and exhaustively researched field of discourse, namely *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* or coming to terms with Germany’s twentieth-century dictatorships. Moral philosopher Susan Neiman uses this very term (in a less common variant, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*) as the basis for a call for U.S. racial justice in *Learning from the Germans: Confronting Race and the Memory of Evil* (Neiman 2019).[1] Neiman makes an argument for Germany’s suitability as a role model, acknowledging that, from the point of view of liberal Germans, the process of coming to terms with Germany’s two dictatorships has been “slow and fitful,” “too little, too late, and above all incomplete” (Neiman, 25). It is precisely the flaws in German attempts to confront a shameful past, argues Neiman, that might help the United States to reconfigure national identity so that it acknowledges the evils of slavery and segregation and their ongoing legacies in Black Americans’ lives today without any expectation of quick and perfect solutions.

Scholars who work directly on cultural memory in Germany and Europe are generally less optimistic than Neiman about the lessons that can be drawn from German *Aufarbeitung*. In 2021, historian A. Dirk Moses condemned German elites for strictly policing a wrong-headed orthodoxy about the National Socialist past and for threatening with "public banishment" anybody who does not subscribe to certain "articles of faith" about Holocaust memory (Moses 2021). Though his argument focused on the issue of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Moses was not the first to criticize the standardization of German memory practices (see, for instance, Jureit 2010), nor to argue that once serviceable commemorative practices have outlived their usefulness in multi-cultural Germany (for instance, Assmann 2013).

Casting its net rather wider, an EU-funded research collaboration titled "Unsettling Remembering and Social Cohesion in Transnational Europe," or UNREST, which ran from 2016-19, started from the premise that the EU's "cosmopolitan" memory paradigm, which made memory of the Holocaust the foundation of European unity, had in fact fanned the flames of populism and nationalism. UNREST set out to discover whether a more agonistic approach to public memory could lead the EU out of a perceived memory impasse. Memory professionals, the UNREST team argued, needed to create a forum for debate that would include "the socially and politically marginalized, the increasingly angry yet powerless groups who across Europe have found collective agency in movements that scapegoat migrants and minorities" (Cento Bull et al., 620). Summing up the project at its close, two of the researchers found the initial optimism about agonism to have been somewhat misplaced: once tested out in memory scholarship and public engagement, agonism seemed only to be effective when set on a foundation of standard cosmopolitan memory, with its baseline of agreed human values (Berger and Kansteiner 2021). The terminology of the UNREST scholars nonetheless remains useful to the present study and the work of UNREST confirms

that the German *Aufarbeitung* project is beset by rather more than just the liberal self-doubt that Neiman observes in her conversations in Germany.

In analyzing the German Lutheran Church's development and deployment of *Aufarbeitung*, this essay navigates a course between the viewpoints outlined above. My wider work (Paver 2022) is concerned with what I term Germany's "memory mainstream," that is, the routinized aspects of commemorating the Nazi dictatorship that go largely unregarded because they have become so normalized. These are precisely the practices that scholars regard with suspicion, characterizing them variously as hegemonic, ossified, policed, and normative. And yet the norms of these practices need to be well understood even if scholars would wish for new norms or for altogether less normativity. In what follows, I argue that the corpus of "Neue Anfänge?" sermons not only reveals key rhetorical norms in German memory of the Nazi past (seen in genres, narratives, vocabulary, tropes, and commonplaces), it also offers a window onto tensions within German memory, showing where popular views and simplifications pull against the academic historiography that underpins the exhibition. While some of the memories invoked in the sermons have an emotional component, it would be hard to speak of an agonistic memory in the sense in which the UNREST project initially conceives of it; there is little room for the feelings of "anger and powerlessness" that cause some Germans to vote for the populist, anti-immigration AfD party. Nonetheless, negative emotions are aired or imagined that would be undesirable in the wider German public sphere.

The exhibition "Neue Anfänge?" ("New Beginnings?") toured northern Germany from 2016 to 2019. It exposed the various ways in which the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (EKD, or German Lutheran Church) failed to make amends after 1945 for its complicity with Nazism and to adequately respond to the pastoral and political challenges of the postwar era. Research for the exhibition was commissioned by the Nordkirche, the northern region of the EKD, under the leadership of historian Stephan Linck (published as

Linck 2013 and Linck 2016). Exhibition texts were distilled from this research by an academic team led by Stefanie Endlich. A complete set of exhibition texts and images was published in a catalogue (*Evangelische Akademie der Nordkirche* 2017).

"Neue Anfänge?" was the sequel to an exhibition that traveled during 2001-2007 about the role of the Lutheran Church in the years 1933-45. As the question mark in "New Beginnings?" implies, the exhibition focuses on the ways in which the German Lutheran Church failed to learn the lessons of the Nazi era, resulting in the persistence of egregious practices past the supposed watershed of 1945. Antisemitic theological views were allowed to continue unchallenged and churchmen who had been openly anti-Jewish continued in office or were promoted. The Church threw itself into helping Christian ethnic German refugees from the East but gave little or no help to the surviving primary victims of National Socialism, Jews and forced laborers. Indeed, the Church continued to discriminate against laypeople and pastors of Jewish heritage. During the Cold War, the EKD engaged in forms of anticommunist rhetoric that were not free from the anti-bolshevist stereotypes of the Nazi era, and the church hierarchy was hostile to peace activists within its parishes.

In exposing the shameful failures of postwar *Aufarbeitung* of the Nazi past, the exhibition aimed to perform *Aufarbeitung* anew—and this time correctly. This made it subject to the standardization of German memory practices criticized by Moses, Jureit, and others. In four important respects, "Neue Anfänge?" was fully norm-compliant. First, whenever a history exhibition about National Socialism is opened in Germany, civic dignitaries are invited to speak words of endorsement at an opening ceremony. This practice (analyzed in Paver 2022) was replicated at "Neue Anfänge?" Secondly, as Endlich notes, the Lutheran Church is just one of many public institutions in Germany that have commissioned professional historians to research their Nazi past (Endlich 2016). The historians are generally invited to investigate the institution's "second shame": the failure to conduct a

proper reckoning with the past after 1945. For the institutions concerned (universities, ministries, etc.), locating a resulting exhibition inside its buildings is key to owning the past (Paver 2009, 238-41). Accordingly, "Neue Anfänge?" was placed not just inside the church building but in the space used for worship. Third, "Neue Anfänge?" supplemented its core exhibition boards with local information at each venue, in the form of a "lokales Fenster" (local window). This widespread practice reflects the fact that taking responsibility for local behavior under National Socialism (and in its wake) is a civic imperative in centrist politics in Germany (Paver 2009, 237). Even the fact that a local window at Bad Segeberg showed Nazi armbands found hidden in the church is standard: such hidden and discovered items serve as a metaphor for the years in which memory of Nazism was unsuccessfully repressed (Paver 2018, 192-99). Finally, in 2022, after four years of touring small towns in northern Germany and after a break during the Coronavirus pandemic, the exhibition was shown at the Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand (Memorial to German Resistance) in Berlin. This conforms to a pattern whereby successful local history exhibitions receive national endorsement when they graduate for a short time to a venue in the capital Berlin. In Germany, local soul-searching about the Nazi past is nationally valued.

While the exhibition was therefore thoroughly standard in its format and performance, this essay examines the rhetoric of sermons and speeches about the exhibition for conformity to, as well as deviations from, norms. While a few of the examples I examine here come from more general speeches given at churches, most are taken from the Sunday sermons that were preached at each church where the touring exhibition stopped. (I use "sermon" in what follows as a practical shorthand for all the texts I examine.) These sermons related that week's lessons from the Old and New Testaments to the topic of the exhibition, and this particular homiletic norm offered preachers in some cases occasion to depart from the memory mainstream.

The first section of this article sets the “Neue Anfänge?” sermons in their twin rhetorical traditions, homiletics and *Aufarbeitung*, and considers how they are shaped by this confluence of discourses. In some ways, the two work in concert and in others they pull in different directions. The main body of the article applies this understanding to individual sermons. First, points of tension are identified in the sermons’ discussion of Jewish-Christian relations—which have a theological tradition but are also central to post-Holocaust reconciliation—and in their evocation of the German family, both as theological metaphor and as social fact. Second, the homiletic practice of empathizing with others’ views is shown to enable the articulation of a wider range of perspectives than would be possible in a speech given in a civic setting. Finally, preachers are shown to assume an audience that is already familiar with the discourses used, which can have the effect of limiting critical thinking. In its conclusion, the article steps back from the sermons and, returning to the scholarship about *Aufarbeitung*, attempts to identify some of the mechanisms at work in this long-running and self-referential German discourse.

The Exhibition “Neue Anfänge?”: Where Homiletics Meets *Aufarbeitung*

The “Neue Anfänge?” sermons can be understood as the products of twin rhetorical traditions: homiletics and *Aufarbeitung*. In a standard German reference work on rhetoric, Gert Ueding and Bernd Steinbrink suggest that the Christian sermon became entwined with classical rhetoric as early as the fourth or fifth century. While some twentieth-century theoreticians tried to dissociate the sermon from the supposedly empty art of rhetoric, stronger arguments were made that the preacher needs skills of speaking to preach effectively (Ueding and Steinbrink 2011, 71, 189-91). Indeed, theology students in Germany today can take modules in homiletics and those training for the Lutheran priesthood must deliver a sermon to a church congregation as part of their practical examination (Evangelisch-

Lutherische Kirche in Norddeutschland no date). In a study of Early Modern sermons, Cornelia Niekus Moore stresses their formulaic nature: their use of a "grid" or a "fill-in-the-blanks" pro forma that makes "necessary references" to expected tropes (Niekus Moore 2006 59, 63). By contrast, a modern German guide to sermon-writing considers the key to a successful sermon to be the *reformulation* of received wisdom: "Im besten Fall verzichtet die Predigtperson darauf, tradierte Weisheiten einfach zu *wiederholen*, sondern sie interpretiert und reformuliert überlieferte Worte und Einsichten in zugleich respektvoller und kreativer Weise." (Ideally, the preacher avoids simply *repeating* wisdom that has been passed down. Instead, they interpret and reformulate words and insights from past speakers, in a way that is both respectful and creative) (Müller 2014, 153-54, 55). In practice, the preachers offering the "Neue Anfänge?" sermons follow this advice, combining formulae with creativity. However, more than a matter of adhering to contemporary norms of sermonizing, such creativity is necessary to the social practice of *Aufarbeitung*, which requires that each speaker finds new ways of expressing the same sentiments about the Nazi past (Paver 2022, 681).

Indeed, on the face of it there is little conflict between homiletic rhetoric and the rhetoric of *Aufarbeitung*. In another study (Paver 2022), I read speeches that endorse history exhibitions about National Socialism as a modern-day example of the ancient epideictic mode of rhetoric, in which, as Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca explain it, the orator "made a speech, which no one opposed, on topics which were apparently uncontroversial" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 48). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are confident that the epideictic mode of speech-making has a role to play in modern democracies, where even generally accepted or tolerated values need to be reinforced through repetition. When a history exhibition is shown in a non-church setting in Germany, orators—who range in status from district councillors to the Federal President—engage in just this kind of consensus-

building, addressing an audience that is already fully persuaded of the shared values articulated by the speaker and in ready possession of most of the facts enumerated.

As pastors, the speakers studied here are trained in homiletics, but as members of the professional classes they are also well-versed in the language of *Aufarbeitung*. This proficiency manifests itself in their messages and in their lexical choices: a condemnation of postwar “Schweigen” (silence), “Vertuschung” (covering up) and “Bagatellisierung” (trivialization);[2] the use of time adverbs such as “erst” (not until) to regret how long it took to come to terms with the past;[3] warnings against far-right thinking in Germany today (e.g. Ulrich 2016, Rink 2018); and appeals to the authority of former Federal President of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, whose seminal speech to the Bundestag on 8 May 1985 acts as the originary text for all recent speeches on Germany’s responsibility for National Socialism (even as Olick [1999, 395-97] has shown that Weizsäcker’s speech itself drew on earlier rhetoric). Accordingly, both civic and church speakers cite the same passage from von Weizsäcker when speaking about the exhibition (Köhnke 2016, Holbach 2016, and Lubeck 2018). Operating confidently in the memory mainstream in this way arguably helps the EKD to maintain its claim to a significant role in the *social* mainstream, despite dwindling congregations.[4]

At the same time, this reliance on rhetorical norms in German discourses about National Socialism is often criticized, albeit sometimes to little effect. In 2010, Ulrike Jureit regretted the existence of a “normiertes Erinnern” (standardized commemoration) in Germany, one which has “strikte Regeln des Sagbaren” (strict rules governing what can be said) (Jureit 2010, 30-31, 33). However, she does not analyze the various “norms”—inscriptions on memorials, ceremonial speeches, and ceremonial music—to which she alludes (Jureit, 30, 46-47). She appears to assume that since her readers will readily recognize these practices as examples of the kind of standardization she rejects, they need no further

attention. By contrast, Jennifer M. Kapczynski takes the "predictable set of discursive maneuvers" employed by civic actors when speaking of Germany's Nazi past as a starting point for a more probing analysis of how ideological assumptions and purposes can hide themselves away in routine and inconspicuous language (Kapczynski 2016, 23). She problematizes the widespread assumption that the relationship between Germany's present and its National Socialist past is already so fully understood that it can be adumbrated with words as vague as "es" (it) and "die Vergangenheit" ("the past"). Such words, she argues, may notionally include the Holocaust (which is of course a part of the German past), but the statements in which they appear often marginalize it (Kapczynski, 19-23). Even where these words refer unambiguously to the Nazi era and the Holocaust they can become a "surrogate" for engagement with the details of history and with the legacies of that history in an evolving present (Kapczynski, 23). In his study of the work of tour guides at memorial sites, Christian Gudehus notes similar instances of lexical indeterminacy, particularly the use of indefinite pronouns such as "man" and "sie" ("people" and "them") to denote Nazi perpetrators (Gudehus 2006, 108). In what follows, I align myself with Gudehus and Kapczynski, interrogating words and phrases that draw little attention to themselves precisely because the author assumes an audience who, being already on the same wavelength, licenses the author to dispense with precision and definition. This lack of definition, I will argue, elides significant aspects of the exhibition "Neue Anfänge?".

Indeed, while preachers are equipped by education and inclination to move easily between the conventional norms of Church rhetoric and the rhetoric of contrition for German historical crimes, homily and *Aufarbeitung*, the remainder of the essay complicates this picture, taking a closer look at what happens when ecclesiastical practices meet civic practices and when the genre of *Aufarbeitung* meets the much longer genre memory of the Lutheran sermon. The sources of the complexity are of two kinds, generic and historical.

First, there are various ways in which ecclesial and civic discourses are incommensurate. In his study of the political rhetoric of commemorative speeches about the National Socialist past, Jeffrey K. Olick makes the case that genres (including the various memory genres) have their own memory. To construct his concept of “genre memory”, he draws on Bakhtin’s definition of “genre” not as an ideal form but as a set of “historical accretions,” offering speakers or authors “a horizon of terms, positions, and general precedents” on which they may or may not draw but with which they are inevitably in dialogue (Olick 1999, 383, 391). Generically speaking, the horizons are different in ecclesial and civic discourses. In discussing the relationship between churches and museums, for example, François Mairesse notes that churches and museums combine “practices that are sometimes surprisingly similar,” yet with starkly divergent “perspectives on the Real” (Mairesse 2019, 16). Christianity’s biblical “perspective on the Real” means that preachers must explicate Bible texts that were not written for the modern, rationalist world—a challenge to reasoning that is different from those faced by politicians and civic leaders speaking in other public settings. Moreover, homilists have at their disposal a different repertoire of and role for analogies, as they are expected to draw comparisons between the Bible texts and contemporary history. As Müller notes in her guide to preaching, the preacher is to move from *explicatio* to *applicatio*, from exegesis of the Bible text to application of the lesson to the present day (Müller 2014, 59)—analogy in the sermon is therefore practical as well as literary. Finally, in a spirit of tolerance preachers are often expected to empathize with the views of others in order to grapple with them morally and intellectually. This can lead to a more open exploration of thoughts and emotions than in the tightly controlled civic speeches in official spaces like history museums or civic ceremonies.[5]

But there is a second, more particular source of the complex relationship between homily and *Aufarbeitung* in the context of the German Lutheran Church. The church also

differs from museums—even those that disgraced themselves during the National Socialist era—because it has to grapple with the antisemitic traditions in its theology, a challenge heightened by the fact that the *Perikopenordnung*, the lectionary that prescribes the Sunday Bible readings, confronts preachers on a weekly basis with texts that are central to Judaism. The relationship between Jews and Christians therefore emerges as a key discussion point. The Church's involvement in National Socialism and its failure to deal with that past calls for preachers to attempt to rhetorically reconcile historically changeable Christian actions with the supposedly unchanging principles of the church's creed.

Feeling One's Way In (and Out)

Gothart Magaard's sermon (Magaard 2016), which can serve as an introduction to the corpus, began conventionally enough by restating key arguments from the exhibition. Such content summaries are a standard way of filling in what Niekus Moore calls the "grid" of a sermon and Magaard's summary was distinguished only by its pithiness. After 1945, he says, "Schuld wurde gedeckt, Auseinandersetzungen gemieden, eigene Verantwortung weithin nicht benannt" (Guilt was covered up, discussions avoided, individual responsibility rarely articulated). The very concision of the three parallel main clauses, including the elision of the finite verb "wurde" in clauses two and three and the use of a passive to evoke a generalized state of affairs, speaks to the familiarity of the issues for the congregation. There is no indication of which particular "Schuld," which "Auseinandersetzungen," or which "Verantwortung" are meant, nor of the contextual meanings of "decken," "meiden," and "nicht benennen." If there are recent immigrants from outside Europe in the audience, then even those with good German would understand little, but Magaard is evidently confident that the long-term German residents in his congregation possess the competence to decode these statements.

Kapczynski has taken issue with precisely such "mushiness" in German discourses about the Nazi past, where words are used "as though they are both self-evident and all-inclusive." (2016, 20) The words at issue for Kapczynski, namely "es" (it) and "das" (that), are even more general and Kapczynski's worry is that they are used to elide guilt and victimhood. In the case of Magaard's sermon, it would make little sense to call the word "Schuld" (guilt) mushy given that the preacher has picked it up from the Stuttgarter Schulderklärung (Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt), issued in 1945 to acknowledge the EKD's share of responsibility for the Holocaust. Magaard quotes its key statement at the beginning of three separate paragraphs in the opening of his sermon. Nonetheless, his rhetorical framing both narrows and generalizes the meaning of "Schuld": it denotes guilt for the crimes and immorality of 1933-45, a guilt which is then, as he says, covered up after 1945. By the 2010s, these failings had been confessed, acknowledged, and atoned for across society in multiple settings and formats, making any restatement of them largely ritual. Having argued elsewhere for the value of such ritual restatements (Paver 2022), I am not criticizing them here. Indeed, Magaard himself concedes that only someone with absolutely no knowledge of history and politics would not know what went on during the Nazi dictatorship. Nonetheless, this rhetorical gesture of "We-all-know-what-happened-back-then-so-let's-not-go-over-it" risks closing off access to the exhibition's more novel criticisms of the EKD's policies and practices from the 1960s to 1980s, which are not mentioned by Magaard, including a continued mission to convert Jews and church cooperation with the *Verfassungsschutz* (Germany's domestic intelligence agency) to compile dossiers on the activities of leftists and peace protesters in its own ranks. These are almost certainly unfamiliar to Magaard's parishioners and are not evoked by general reference to a "guilt" which is already known and understood.

By citing both the Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis and a 2001 declaration by the national church synod to the effect that Christians acknowledge God's loyalty to the Jews, Magaard—like other preachers in the series—refers to the key stages in the evolution of the EKD's thinking about its own antisemitism (Hauger 2017, 227-28). Unlike other preachers in this series, however, Magaard is preaching on Israel Sunday, when the church conventionally reflects on the relationship between Jews and Christians. Accordingly, he turns to the reading, Romans 9, in which Paul talks of his heartache that "meine Brüder und Schwestern […] meine Landsleute, mein eigenes Fleisch und Blut" (my brothers and sisters […] my compatriots, my own flesh and blood) are excluded from community with Christ.[6] The apparent awkwardness of this text for the occasion of Israel Sunday will go on to resolve itself when Paul reaffirms the Jews' special relationship with God. But rather than skip straight to that resolution, Magaard first dwells on Paul's pain. Like other preachers he adopts the perspective of the Biblical figure, putting himself in Paul's historical shoes as a man who has split from mainstream Judaism. From this position, he praises Paul for feeling sorrow about his fellow Jews rather than rejecting them. Using this pivot of sorrow for those who have made the wrong choice, Magaard turns to German Christians under National Socialism. In parallel with Paul's Israelite brothers and sisters (but in the reverse order preferred in the feminist age), they become "Schwestern und Brüder in Geschichte" (sisters and brothers in history). Their failings between 1933 and 1945 are once more listed, in conformity with Germany memory norms. What Magaard takes from Paul is "Ein Leiden am Nächsten, im Wissen um die nicht zu lösende Verbundenheit" (a suffering on account of what one's fellow has done, in the knowledge that one is indissolubly bound to them.) The clear implication is that today's Christians cannot simply cut themselves off from the Christians of the 1930s and 1940s who either supported Nazism or remained passive in the face of its inhumanity. Magaard goes on to remind the congregation not to judge. If God does not condemn "Täter,"

he says, then the assembled congregation has no right to judge them. While “Täter” has a general sense of “miscreants, wrongdoers,” it is also the word used for “perpetrators” in the context of the Nazi era, so that its semantic fluidity assists in drawing a parallel between the Bible text and the current day.

However unconvincing Magaard’s analogy between Paul’s contemporaries and Germans under National Socialism may be when judged by the standards of academic logic, it is a fairly typical example of a homiletic *applicatio*. Equally typical are Magaard’s admonition not to judge and his gesture of empathy, what he calls “[sich] in die Gemütslage des Paulus einfühlen” (feeling one’s way into Paul’s emotional state). There is little difference, rhetorically speaking, between a preacher imagining themselves as a member of an early Christian community watching the novice orator Paul (“sie sehen […] seine Hände, die hin und herfuchteln oder sich winden, sehen ihn wanken oder zittern” (they see him gesturing wildly with his hands or wringing them nervously, see him standing unsteadily or shaking)) (Poehls 2018) and a preacher putting themselves in the shoes of refugees fleeing the Soviet army in 1945: “Glücklich, wer ein Stück Ofenrohr ergatterte, um den Rauch ins Freie zu führen. Warm war es dann jedoch noch nicht.” (Anybody who could get their hands on a length of stove pipe to direct the smoke outside counted themselves lucky. But that still didn’t mean it was warm.) (Klehn 2016) The homiletic skill of empathy evidently makes it easier to take the part of the non-persecuted majority of Germans (those who were relatively protected under National Socialism but became victims of war), as further examples from the wider corpus will show.

While many of the preachers, like Magaard, reference the Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis or distance themselves from Luther’s views on Jews and Judaism, some pastors hold up a mirror to the sermon itself, with its claims to understand key texts of the Jewish faith. When the exhibition came to the Church of St. Jacobi in Hamburg in 2016, the

preachers agreed amongst themselves that they would address the usual Bible texts as if they were speaking not just to Christians but also in the hearing of Jews, “unsere älteren Geschwister im Glauben” (our older brothers and sisters in faith) (Kleist 2016). In this spirit, the preachers do not simply criticize antisemitism in the social practice of the Lutheran church after 1933 or after 1945, but also traditional Lutheran interpretations of the Jewish texts they are expounding on. In her sermon, Astrid Kleist regrets that Hebrews 4:14-16 has been misused to suggest that Judaism is a spent force, since, in this epistle, Jesus had taken on the role of high priest previously distributed among a caste (Kleist 2016). A second pastor, Hanna Lehming, preaches on Isaiah 5:1-7, arguing that by adding a single word, “Schlechtigkeit” (badness), which was not prompted by the Hebrew, Luther implied that God thought the Jews deserved the destruction of the Temple (Lehming 2016). Commenting on Amos 5:21-24, Jürgen Ebach, the third pastor in the team, argues against the Luther Bible’s addition of a chapter heading which interprets the scriptural text as a criticism of “der bloße äußerliche Gottesdienst” (merely external worship). Ebach sees this as an attempt to instrumentalize Amos’s verse, turning it into a self-congratulatory celebration of Protestant inner faith and a stick with which to beat both Catholics and Jews (Ebach 2016). Of the preachers at St. Jacobi, Ebach goes furthest in as much as he suggests that the whole sermon genre may need to be re-thought in light of the exhibition. He regrets the lingering assumption in the Lutheran church that the New Testament, having fulfilled the promises of the Old, has made it redundant (see also Beyrich 2018).

Still, for all their efforts at fighting institutional antisemitism, including questioning the Lutheran sermon format, the sermons on the subject of “Neue Anfänge?” are not entirely free of stereotypes. Two sermons (Lehming 2016 and Liß-Walther 2016) end with the wisdom of the Rabbi. This closing gesture generously gives the last word to Jewish thought, but also frames that thought in a conventional way, as a wise and philosophical approach to

the world, one which offers no threat to Christian theology nor challenge to actual Christian practice.[7] These sermons act out a fictional scene of Christian-Jewish reconciliation that, unlike in a museum setting, where Jewish survivors and descendants are often invited guests, cannot be played out for real in the church, before an exclusively Christian congregation.[8]

Moreover, while some pastors try to respect the Old Testament as a Jewish text, others continue to use it in the service of Christian self-understanding. The church's egregious failings during and after the Nazi era are sometimes integrated into a long history of such failings. Opening the exhibition in Schleswig, pastor Joachim Liß-Walther builds on the skeptical question mark of the exhibition's title by listing a series of Old Testament passages that can be read as representing a "new beginning" (Liß-Walther 2016). Liß-Walther shows how flawed such beginnings were, each time necessitating another renewal on the part of the Jewish people. In the conventional move from *explicatio* to *applicatio*, he draws an arc from the era of the Old Testament to the failed new beginning of 1945. While, overall, the speech effectively delivers the mainstream message that Germany must face up to past failings, nonetheless this theological reasoning smooths over any threat to the faith that might be posed by Christian involvement in Nazism, by making human beings' fallibility a constant in their relationship to God. It also reaffirms the idea that the Old Testament serves to point forward to Christian practice.

Retired pastor Ulrich Hentschel adopts a similar strategy, suggesting that the Old and New Testaments have schooled Christians in how to accept God's criticism while trusting him to lead them towards the light (Hentschel 2016). Having acknowledged that the exhibition "Neue Anfänge?" demands a lot of the congregation, and possibly too much (that it is a "Zumutung" or "unreasonable demand"), Hentschel turns the issue around:

> Aber ich bin überzeugt, dass in der Zumutung der Konfrontation mit unserer Vergangenheit und Schuld ein biblisch begründeter und darum göttlicher Auftrag liegt. […] Die in der Bibel dokumentierten scharfen Anklagen und Schuldbenennungen, vor allem in den prophetischen Büchern, haben immer ein Ziel: das "Volk" auf einen guten Weg zu führen. (Ibid.)
>
> (I am convinced, however, that the formidable challenge of confronting our past and our guilt sets us a task which, because it is biblically grounded, is ordained by God. […] The harsh accusations and indictments that are documented in the Bible, particularly in the books of the prophets, always have a single aim: to guide God's people onto the right path.)

Hentschel here uses the shorthand "Vergangenheit" ("past") for a specific past (1933-45 and beyond) in precisely the way that Kapczynski finds troublesome (2016, 20). Yet Hentschel himself worries, just as Kapczynski might, that a word used commonly in connection with the EKD's role under Nazism, "Schuldverstrickung" ("becoming embroiled in guilt"), can serve as an avoidance strategy that hides the specific and concrete actions of individuals and church bodies. Accordingly, he fills out the abstractions "Schuld" and "Vergangenheit" with a combination of summary, exemplification, and analysis.

Still, for all his wish to call a spade a spade, Hentschel passes over the more recent and still uncomfortable topics which the exhibition confronts, so that the parishioners are led through a fairly standard rollcall of wrongdoers and wrongdoing. This makes it all the more surprising that Hentschel anticipates that the confrontation with the past may be painful, that parishioners visiting the exhibition will be confronted with "Infragestellungen […], die uns herausfordern, anstrengend sind, uns sogar känken können" (questions that challenge us, test

us, and may even hurt our feelings). By the 2010s, any controversy about the Nazi past had been dulled by frequent repetition over decades and across all areas of German society; yet clearly Hentschel expects his parishioners to be stung by what they learn about their church, and there is no reason to doubt his knowledge of his congregation. In secular settings, the descendants of the non-persecuted majority are expected to confront and identify with past failings of Germans as a civic duty. The idea that this might be personally painful is never suggested and the word “Zumutung” is never used (still less “Volk,” here legitimized by its Biblical meaning). Evidently, church members are assumed to have a more personal emotional stake in the community of the church than citizens have in the nation.

However, this strategy is not always successful. As we saw above, preacher Hanna Lehming, who has an official role within the EKD in fostering Christian-Jewish dialogue, roundly criticizes the Church’s long-standing reading of Isaiah 5:1-7 as proof that the Jews deserve their punishment. She then aligns herself rhetorically with the views of some members of the church who would resist the mainstream. Questioning whether all the church’s efforts to counter antisemitism have really taken root, she reflects:

> [Man bemerkt] eine ängstliche Bemühtheit, ja nichts Falsches zu sagen, alles korrekt zu machen. Und wer noch nicht auf Linie ist, dem wird es mal rasch gesteckt. Man dürfe jetzt nicht mehr “Juden” sagen, es müsse “jüdische Menschen” heißen. Die Kirche dürfe sich nicht als Gottes Volk verstehen, der Begriff sei den Juden vorbehalten. Christen dürfen jetzt nicht mehr “Altes Testament” sagen, das sei eine Beleidigung der Juden. Dass manche Judenmissionare gerade *keine* Judenfeinde waren, passt nicht ins Schema, darum sind sie jetzt alle pauschal Antijudaisten oder gar Antisemiten. Und gleichzeitig ist unsere sog. Erinnerungskultur von Pflichtbewusstsein oft mehr geprägt als von Herzenswärme. (Lehming 2016)

> (There's an anxious desire not to say anything wrong, to do everything correctly. And if anyone is out of line they are soon put right. We are told we aren't allowed to say "Jews" any more: the correct term is "Jewish people." Apparently, the Church is not allowed to understand itself as God's people any more. And they say Christians aren't allowed to say "Old Testament" anymore because that's insulting to Jews. The fact that many missionaries to the Jews were categorically *not* antisemitic doesn't fit the new framework and so they are all tarred with the same brush as anti-Jewish or even antisemitic. At the same time, our so-called memory culture is often characterized more by a sense of duty than by heartfelt emotion.)

At the words "Und wer"/"And if" Lehming switches from observation to *ethopoeia* (mimicry), and not without peril. In particular, her use of an agentless, indeterminate subjunctive of indirect speech (only partially translatable through words such as "apparently") makes it difficult to tell where she stands. Is her criticism directed against those who set up spurious rules about the language to be used in relation to Jews or rather against those who feel unnecessarily cowed by these supposed rules instead of putting their energies into the project of rapprochement? Either way, she is clearly willing to articulate views that are resistant to the mainstream.[9]

Whatever Lehming's actual views, her imitation of others' voices brings us closer to the sore points and sensitivities of memory among ordinary Germans than civic memory discourse can. Despite her heartfelt criticism, in the body of her sermon, of a Lutheran tradition of anti-Jewish exegesis of the Bible, she here allows that new ways of talking about Jews and Judaism can feel threatening to the average Christian parishioner and that parishioners can feel hurt if their work (or the work of an older generation) in trying to

convert Jews to Christianity is re-interpreted as hateful. The single sentence which the exhibition devotes to the "Judenmission" (mission to convert Jews) does no more than attest to the continued existence of this program after 1945, though the context suggests that it is to be condemned. Lehming's elaboration of the feelings that surround its memory therefore identify the "Judenmission" as an emotional sore point, a topic that cannot be neatly tidied away by repeating the word "Schuld" ("guilt").

Thou Shalt Not Judge the German Family

Niekus Moore notes that Early Modern funeral orators faced a challenge in reconciling competing requirements: truthfulness, on the one hand, and, on the other, ensuring that a person's biography was a pattern to be copied (Niekus Moore 2006, 37-38, 86-89). The church speakers at the exhibition "Neue Anfänge?" face an inverse challenge: where the funeral oration was supposed to praise judiciously, the history exhibition about National Socialism is intended to condemn. And just as praise was theologically suspect in the Early Modern period (not least because the funeral oration was a pagan tradition (Ibid. 37)), condemnation of others' actions is inappropriate for contemporary Christians, who should rather look to their own failings than point out failings in others. This is, in principle, easily resolved by repeated exhortations not to stand in judgement over the people shown in the exhibition—as this will lead to the un-Christian states of "Selbstgerechtigkeit" (self-righteousness) and "Besserwisserei" (acting like you know better than others).[10]

This is, however, an odd rhetorical compromise, given that the exhibition is fundamentally committed to calling out morally indefensible behavior. Whereas opening speeches at history exhibitions in museums and other public settings, which are usually presented in the presence of victims of Nazism or their representatives, offer straightforward condemnation of the actions and omissions of majority Germans under National Socialism,

the Christian doctrine of not judging others before one judges oneself, together with the framework of family and community ties (the “Schwestern und Brüder in Geschichte”), creates a different memory routine in the church sermons. This involves wholeheartedly endorsing the exhibition and its criticisms of majority Germans while simultaneously demonstrating empathy with that majority, which constituted the church congregations of the 1930s and 1940s.

One effect of this memory routine is a focus on the year 1945, despite the broader chronological sweep of the exhibition. While the disorienting experience of German defeat in 1945 is dealt with in the first chapter of the exhibition “Neue Anfänge?,” the wartime sufferings of the majority are given greater prominence in the sermons than their limited place in the exhibition would justify. Given that the suffering of the non-persecuted majority of Germans during the Second World War—once a taboo subject—is by now a thoroughly mainstream topic, preaching about it is more proof of conformity to the norms of *Aufarbeitung* than otherwise. Nonetheless, it has its own role and status in the Lutheran church. Confronted in the exhibition with a broad and complex academic analysis of their institution’s past in the decades since 1945, preachers home in on this brief period of suffering in 1944-45 in preference to other times and tie it firmly to the concept of family.

Preacher Gerhard Ulrich gives a balanced sermon at the exhibition’s opening in Hamburg, referring briefly to the sufferings of the majority in 1945, but devoting more space to the EKD’s poor treatment, after 1945, of a pastor of Jewish heritage (Ulrich 2016). While this aligns him the exhibition’s critical tone, his account is, as with many sermons, limited to the early postwar years (up to 1952) and to an individual biography, which appears to be more digestible for parishioners than the “Judenmission,” anticommunism, or suspicion of peace protesters. Towards the end of his sermon he turns to the German family. Having listed the blameworthy or commendable behaviors of various of his relatives under National

Socialism, Ulrich argues that his fellow Christians are bound to feel both sympathy and distance in relation to their parents and that this necessarily complicates their attitudes towards the past. He refers to an ambiguous local figure, Wilhelm Halfmann, who published an antisemitic tract in the 1930s and opposed the Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis, but who became a respected bishop in Schleswig-Holstein after 1945:

> Wir gedenken unserer Väter – zuweilen auch Mütter – im wörtlichen und im übertragenen Sinne. Und da sind immer Nähe und Distanz, Dank und Abgrenzung höchst virulent. Das macht die Intensität und Existenzialität der Debatte z.B. um Wilhelm Halfmann aus – dabei nicht verkennend, sondern ebenfalls erinnernd, respektvoll hoffentlich, in welch drangvoller und Not bereitender persönlicher Situation unsere Väter und Mütter im Glauben ihren Dienst taten und ihre Entscheidungen zu treffen hatten. (Ulrich 2016)

> (We remember our fathers – in some cases also our mothers – in the literal and figurative sense. As we do so, closeness and distance, gratitude and detachment are particularly strong. That's what makes the debate – for instance the debate about Wilhelm Halfmann – so intense and personal. We do not forget, but remember – hopefully respectfully – the extreme hardship and pressing personal circumstances in which our fathers and mothers in faith did their duty and in which they had to make their decisions.)

Like the "brotherhood" that other preachers assume between Christians and Jews, this imaginary family relationship with an earlier generation of Christians is based on empathy and on ties of faith. Ulrich's assertion that the relatives are both literal and figurative makes

clear that the family provides a ready model for relating to the Nazi past regardless of real biological lineage. By conflating biological family with a church family, Ulrich carries across to the latter some of the sympathy that attaches, by nature and convention, to the former. By using generalized terms (“drangvoll” and “Not,” that is, “pressing” and “hardship”), he is able to evoke the well-known narrative of German wartime suffering without specifying the historical causes of this suffering or saying how exactly it suspended Christian obligations towards others. As with preacher Magaard’s summary of the exhibition, certain political and social competencies are being assumed in the audience, who are equipped to connect these very vague words to more specific mention of the sufferings of the non-persecuted majority earlier in the sermon. The overall result is that the preacher’s exhortation not to judge—and his facilitation of clemency through linguistic imprecision—stands in odd contrast to the exhibition’s exhortation to judge, which elsewhere in the sermon he endorses.

A speech by a military bishop, Sigurd Rink, is obliged to address an anomalous case of “wartime suffering”: the mass suicide of approximately 1,000 Nazi supporters in Demmin, an eastern German town where the exhibition was stationed in the autumn of 2018 (Rink 2018). Though his speech is thoroughly mainstream in its condemnation of the German majority’s susceptibility to Nazi ideology and in its rejection of the neo-Nazi appropriation of the Demmin suicides, the fact that Rink gives space at all to such an event is unusual. Without mimicking the vocabulary of his subjects, Rink attempts a subtle and sensitive empathetic engagement with the people of Demmin who, having supported Hitler for more than a decade, had to face disillusionment. His description of their mindset is less comfortable than the many invitations, in other sermons and speeches, to think what it must have been like to be a refugee or bombing victim, since the audience is asked to imagine what it was like to live for years in an “emotionaler Ausnahmezustand” (emotional state of exception) in which the Führer was worshipped as a genius and then to suffer “der totale

Sinnverlust" (total loss of meaning). Rink encourages his audience, as is the custom, to empathize rather than judge: "Kein Anlass zum Richten. Wohl aber einer zum Mitfühlen, zum Lernen, zum Mit-Verantworten." (This is not an invitation to judge, but rather to empathize, to learn, to take a share of responsibility.) Unlike in other sermons, however, the process of empathy or "Mitfühlen" has taken the audience into the heart of darkness that was support for Nazism. Rink comes close to the kind of agonistic interpretation of the past proposed (for museums) by the UNREST project, in that he contextualizes the behaviors of Nazi supporters and attempts to understand their decision-making from their own point of view, without ever losing sight of the primary victims of National Socialism (Cento Bull et al. 2019, 614).

Rink links the idea of not standing in judgement (of avoiding "Rechthaberei," a desire to be always in the right) specifically to the audience's status as sons and daughters or grandchildren of the Nazi generation: "Wie sollen die schrecklichen Ereignisse zu etwas werden, das uns, den Nachgekommenen, den Töchtern und Söhnen, den Enkeln hilft?" (How can these terrible events become something which helps us, the descendants, the daughters and sons, the grandchildren?). The very fact that they are unlikely to be the children or grandchildren of those who committed suicide (in some cases having killed their young children) shows the abstract nature of the family metaphor prevalent in German Lutheran church rhetoric, which assumes a non-biological kinship with earlier generations of local people.

Preacher Ute Schöttler-Block, in an otherwise norm-compliant sermon on German guilt and shame, vividly evokes the physical and psychological suffering of the non-persecuted majority (Schöttler-Block 2018). As in another sermon that will be discussed momentarily, a keyword from the Old Testament reading is used to reflect on its opposite. The word "Gerechtigkeit" (or "justice," from Isaiah 41:1-5, though most English translations

have “righteousness”) prompts reflection on the lack of justice in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Schöttler-Block identifies the Jews and forced laborers as two groups who received no justice, but between these two groups, and therefore implicitly on an equal footing with them, she places the non-persecuted majority of Germans. Where the exhibition gives a factual, concise description of the conditions for refugees arriving from Germany’s former eastern territories—“Es mangelte an Lebensmitteln, Kleidung und Heizmaterial” (There wasn’t enough food, clothing, or heating fuel) (Evangelische Akademie der Nordkirche 2017: 18)—Schöttler-Block places herself closer to the scene and fills out the emotional details. She imagines the refugees arriving in the town “mit letzten Kräften und durch die Flucht verschlissener Kleidung, mit Glück mit einer Decke, einen Topf, erschöpft, krank, unterernährt, traumatisiert, verzweifelt.” (on their last legs, their clothing in tatters from their escape, if they were lucky in possession of a blanket or a cooking pot, exhausted, sick, undernourished, traumatized, desperate.) Schöttler-Block then links the fate of the refugees to other forms of majority suffering, speaking of local wives and mothers bereaved by war, of locals witnessing the effects of bombing, and of local soldiers suffering war trauma: “abgerissen, verwundet, verhärmt, traumatisiert […], verraten und verkauft, um Jahre beraubt” (scruffy, wounded, careworn, traumatized […], betrayed and sold down the river, robbed of years of their life) (Schöttler-Block 2018). While the repetition of emotional adjectives is conspicuously at odds with the exhibition, the pastor does not only support her congregation in processing family suffering in her sermon; she also challenges the community. Where the exhibition notes briefly that there were “Spannungen” (tensions) between locals and the refugees, Schöttler-Block again fills the exhibition text with local emotional color, including the fact that long-term residents of the town would not set foot in the new housing estates built for refugees.

Preaching on Colossians 2:12-15, Martin Vetter shows that it is possible to offer a more differentiated view of the German family.[11] He links Paul's idea of a baptism that wipes out "Schuld" ("guilt") with the EKD's attempt at a new beginning in the Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis, which he criticizes for not clearly naming the crimes against the Jews (Vetter 2018). He asks the congregation to consider the role of family story-telling in creating a version of history. Alluding to the title of a well-known sociological study led by Harald Welzer (Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall 2002), he says that he was convinced as a child that "Opa war kein Nazi" (Grandpa was not a Nazi) but now understands that families tell stories about the past in order to strengthen ties and to make it easier to live alongside one another, rather than to transmit objective historical knowledge. He would therefore like to go back in time and ask his grandfather more searching questions about antisemitism and anticommunism in the postwar church. Here, the family is evoked realistically rather than metaphorically and the audience is challenged to understand their own family from a sociological point of view, as a group that might have protected them from unwelcome truths about personal responsibility within the community of the church. Vetter is one of only a few preachers to mention the exhibition topic of postwar anticommunism and to recognize that it is recent enough for some families to discuss their personal experience of it.

Just as preacher Lehming, despite her compliance with the overall norms for this genre, is willing to speak for those who feel cancelled by the new ways of speaking about Jews in the "so-called memory culture," so she also goes further than others in defending the "mothers and fathers." That this is a personal view is indicated by the repetition of "leider" (sadly):

> Und leider, leider finde ich etwas Herzloses auch wieder in der Art und Weise wie wir als Kirche mit unserer eigenen Geschichte, mit unseren eigenen Müttern und Vätern,

> Groß- und Urgroßeltern umgehen: Urteilend, richtend, anmaßend, unbarmherzig. Alles, worauf es ankommt, ist Recht zu haben, distanziert und empathielos, als wären die Menschen, um die es geht, nicht Fleisch von meinem Fleisch und Bein von meinem Bein. Kann ich mit einer Jüdin aus Berlin oder einem Juden aus Odessa mitfühlen, wenn ich meinen eigenen Eltern und Großeltern Solidarität und Einfühlung versage? Ich empfinde es als unbarmherzig, Menschen, die soeben Krieg, Flucht, Vergewaltigung, Hunger und Tod entronnen sind, unterschwellig vorzuwerfen, dass sie nicht über den Nationalsozialismus als Ursache ihres Elends räsonieren. (Lehming 2016)

> (And sadly – sadly – I find that there is also something heartless in the way in which we as a church deal with our own history, with our own mothers and fathers, grandparents and great grandparents: in a way that is critical, judgmental, arrogant, without pity. All we care about is being in the right, distanced and without empathy, as if the people concerned were not flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. Is it possible for me to feel empathy with a Jewish woman from Berlin or with a Jewish man from Odessa if I refuse to show solidarity and empathy with my parents and grandparents? For me it shows a lack of pity to take people who have only just escaped war, the experience of being a refugee, rape, hunger and death and to implicitly hold it against them that they don't reflect on the fact that National Socialism is the cause of all their misery.)

Beyond the by now familiar appeal not to judge others, Lehming's words illustrate neatly that preachers are always in dialogue with several sets of Olick's "genre memories" simultaneously: the long-standing German democratic tradition of commemorating Nazi victims, the more recent German democratic tradition of commemorating the sufferings of

the non-persecuted majority, the Biblical tradition, and the Lutheran theological tradition. Lehming questions the first tradition when she regrets the mainstream social pressure to judge the Nazi generation, which she thinks the church has been wrong to adopt. Indeed, she goes on to equate “Besserwisserei” (assuming that one knows better than others) directly with “politische Korrektheit” (political correctness). She engages with the second tradition less convincingly, conflating parents and grandparents with different groups of people who suffered a range of war traumas in different circumstances. Not all grandparents were refugees or were raped, though doubtless most suffered deprivations of one kind or another. Besides, while her initial mention of the grandparents’ supposed guilt implies complicity with the events of 1933-45, Lehming then narrows this down—without explanation but in expectation that her audience will understand—to the year 1945 when, despite their “only just” having escaped the horrors of war, it was unreasonbly expected of the parents and grandparents that they would recognize the wickedness of National Socialism.

To support her opposition to these social norms, Lehming draws on the third, Biblical tradition, quoting Gen. 2:23 (“Bein von meinem Bein und Fleisch von meinem Fleisch” or “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”) and, subsequently, the prophet Micah, who commends “Gerechtigkeit” or justice (Mic. 6:8). Finally, drawing on Lutheran theological values, Lehming uses the word as a linguistic pivot to reject its opposite (or apparent opposite), “Selbstgerechtigkeit” (self-righteousness).

That discussions of family and of intergenerational transmission of memory are possible in churches suggests not that churches are necessarily more conservative, nor indeed that they are bastions of free speech, but that they have their own peculiar speaker–listener dynamic, with the speaker anticipating and responding to the feelings of those present. Lehming pushes back against the mainstream when she suggests that Christians are under pressure to denounce their parents and grandparents. Her broader point—that the German

"failure to come to terms" may have been as much a response to circumstance as the result of amorality or moral cowardice—has respectable academic backing and my aim here is not to argue with the preachers but only to consider that such reflections would be unlikely in a public, museum setting, where a politician or other public figure is opening an exhibition about Jewish victims or the postwar legacies of National Socialism in the presence of victims or their representatives (Paver 2022). No politician would take this as an opportunity to worry about whether Germany today should not be a little more lenient on the non-persecuted majority and a bit more empathetic to the moral dilemmas they faced in a world turned upside down. Lehming spoke at the very first stopping point for the travelling exhibition, in February 2016, and it may be that that represented the moment when the exhibition was most open to interpretation.

Conclusion

Because the exhibition "Neue Anfänge?" is so squarely focused on the legacies of National Socialism after 1945, and because all the preachers endorse this central message, any distortions or deflections of the exhibition's messages in the sermons are inevitably quite minor. Accordingly, I argue that when the "genre effects" of *Aufarbeitung* and of the Lutheran sermon combine, the effect is a slight but significant narrowing of the exhibition's focus: chronologically to 1945-46 (when parishioners' families, or the parish as imagined family, suffered deprivation) and thematically to the history of Jewish-Christian relations and the theological question of guilt and atonement. A broad notion of "Schuld" embraces both the Nazi years and the failure to be honest about what happened in those years (and is anchored in Biblical lexis). In principle, this includes the post-1945 years, but when specific postwar dates are mentioned—or alluded to—these are most likely to be the years 1945 and 1946.[12] The EKD's actions in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in responding to

troublesomely political (that is, leftist) pastors and parishioners, are given less attention. In these concluding pages I use Kapczynski and Olick to clarify these processes of compression and simplification.

One of the issues that Kapczynski has with the *Aufarbeitung* discourse, and which she hints at in her title "Never Over, Over and Over" is that stating the need to remember the crimes and immorality of the National Socialist era can become an end in itself, a rhetoric of admonition and contrition that masks the fact that no actual remembering is going on. Invoking an older word for *Aufarbeitung*, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastering or managing the past), she worries that: "while the necessity of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is regularly reasserted, the precise contours of the past to be managed, and the processes by which it is managed, remain strangely hazy" and observes that "the German media increasingly focus on the state of the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, rather than grappling with the past *per se* (or, for that matter, reflecting on the ambiguity of the very idea of 'the past')" (Kapczynski 2016, 21, 22). Given that this exhibition is actually about *Aufarbeitung* one can hardly level this criticism at preachers discussing the exhibition. Nonetheless, there are some sermons, or sections of sermons, where the meta-discourses of *Aufarbeitung* (particularly abstract formulations describing forgetting, repression, unconscionable continuities, and the breakthrough to honesty and openness) take precedence over any actual remembering, either of behavior between 1933 and 1945 or of failures of *Aufarbeitung* in the 1960s and 1970s.

Kapczynski's other key concern is the disjunction, in much discourse of *Aufarbeitung*, between historical time and a culturally constructed generational time. She addresses this issue in relation to the German TV mini-series *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (*Our Mothers, Our Fathers*, distributed outside Germany as *Generation War*), broadcast in 2013, at a date when only Germans in their sixties and seventies can have had parents in their twenties at the

outbreak of war. Kapczynski argues that one consequence of fixing 1945 as the origin of democratic Germany is that “postwar generations tend to be lumped together, as if, regardless of their actual year of birth, they shared a common birthdate” (Kapczynski 2016, 27). Kapczynski’s particular concern is that young people, the evident target audience for *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter*, are expected to relate to the Second World War in the same way as their parents or grandparents related to it or, in the case of people with an immigrant background, in the same way as somebody else’s parents or grandparents related to it. Sometimes the preachers in my study invoke a more historically correct “Großvater” and “Großmutter” (grandfather and grandmother), yet as one younger pastor points out in her sermon, her grandfather was nine when war broke out, her grandmother three (Grosstück 2016). The use of “Väter und Mütter” can therefore only really be explained by the fact that because it is more direct, less attenuated, it conveys a more visceral connection to the past. Whichever generation is invoked, 1945 is—as Kapczynski observes—fixed as the date from which today’s self-understanding is to be gained and that self-understanding is to be based on what parents or grandparents experienced.

Although Kapczynski concedes that the plot of the mini-series *Unsere Mütter. Unsere Väter* ends in 1945 and therefore cannot reasonably be expected to account for subsequent demographic change in Germany, she worries about the writers “posing the series’ central characters as *the* (whether real or symbolic) parents of the present” (Kapczynski, 29). By contrast, “Neue Anfänge?” is entirely about the post-1945 years. This does not prevent the preachers from bending and concertinaing time in ways comparable to those that Kapczynski observes. The focus on 1945 as a moral and emotional Year Zero makes the years after 1945 appear as one era rather than as the succession of decisions, actions, and statements by identifiable individuals and organizations which are actually portrayed in the exhibition. Kapczynski laments in particular that this generational concertina effect prevents younger

German generations (and by extension potentially the nation) from acting as adults, by obliging them to ritually enact a relationship to 1945 which is not their own. As I have shown, the “Neue Anfänge?” sermons support her anxiety, in as much as they regularly fit remembering into the framework of a parent-child or grandparent-grandchild relationship and focus on the experience of 1945. But they also expose a possible converse effect. Repeated reference to parents and grandparents keeps at arm’s length that part of the exhibition’s narrative that runs into the 1980s and that is therefore certainly in living memory. When one preacher—uniquely—shares his personal knowledge and experience of the EKD’s hostility to the nonconformist Shalom church, which was founded in the 1970s (Stehr 2017), this throws into relief the lack of interest among other preachers in this recent history. Christian Stehr’s rhetoric potentially still places this experience one generation in the past by referring to the “Gründermütter und –väter” (founding mothers and fathers) of the Shalom church. However, these “parents” are not a vague abstraction that floats loosely in time and whose role it is to embody “Schuld” or to arouse a non-judgmental empathy, but rather a real group of people who, Stehr tells the congregation, experimented with new forms of worship, welcomed southern European immigrant workers into the parish, and for these efforts were called “Extremisten und Fanatiker” (extremists and fanatics) by the bishop.

While the sermons have been my main focus, similar processes are at work in the media reception of “Neue Anfänge?”, which is documented at the exhibition website in the form of fifty or so media reports. These serve as a useful measure of the thoroughgoing normality of facing up to the Nazi past in today’s Germany. The journalists who cover the exhibition could not be less surprised at its existence or its content and have no opinion on it beyond an unspoken approval. They use the same vocabulary as the exhibition itself and fill their reports with quotes from its organizers, including some of the sermon-givers. Like the sermons, the media articles demonstrate Olick’s “genre memory,” with its “historical

accretions" that offer speakers "a horizon of terms, positions, and general precedents" in relation to the Nazi past (Olick 1999, 383, 391). In this case, the strongest "term" or "precedent" available to journalists is evidently the idea of a failure to come to terms; its trope (supplied by the exhibition but chosen from among others by the press) is the stereotypical figure of the man who had Nazi sympathies but who, with the connivance of the church, got away scot free after 1945. Accordingly, anecdotes of wrongdoing by individuals in the church and of the institution's failure to bring them to book form the backbone of more than half of the media reports. These stories (for instance, of the euthanasia doctor able to continue in practice until his retirement) are evidently considered to be easily digestible by the newspaper reader, much more so than other, arguably more interesting, elements of the exhibition: the Church's continued mission to convert Jews to Christianity (on which only the *Jüdische Allgemeine* reports), its anticommunism, its use of espionage methods, or its suspicion of peace activists. Nor do the journalists have anything to say about the exhibition's staging, its social role, or its intellectual quality: these things evidently need neither justification nor evaluation. This kind of colorless reporting is typical of reporting on all history exhibitions about National Socialism but in this case it does the exhibition a disservice by succumbing to the "genre effect" and reducing its varied and differentiated content to a few recognizable and easily assimilable elements.

Given that twenty four years have passed since Olick pleaded for attention to be paid to the diachronic layering of memory discourses (on the grounds that memory rhetoric never starts with a blank sheet but builds on and engages with earlier iterations of the same ideas) we can assume that further layers have been added to German memory rhetoric since then. The sermons studied here refer back to the rhetoric of the Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis (and to subsequent criticism of it), to the speeches of Richard von Weizsäcker in the 1980s, to the academic rhetoric of the "Opa war kein Nazi" project of 2002, and to the EKD's first

engagement with National Socialist past in the 2000s. More generally, the sermons use a by now very well-worn rhetorical structure that sets the sins of the past against the repentance of the present, so that the years between 1945 and the 2010s—however many stages they were actually divided into—are figured as a before and after: how we acted then is not how we would act now.

My argument has been that the very familiarity of this rhetorical tradition—both of its form and its content—means that the speaker tends to reflect back to the congregation their existing understanding. Even if preachers are reflecting back *reproaches* about failings and omissions, the shock of the reproach is absorbed in its familiar reformulation. Moreover, treating the congregation as initiates who will understand even glancing references to the German past keeps the audience in a safe place of familiar, shared understandings. As I have shown, preachers in the corpus only occasionally challenge the congregation to move beyond what they know and have seen performed many times, though these challenges can be very effective. While this study may seem to weaken my previous statement (Paver 2022) that, in the field of German memory of National Socialist crimes, ritualized repetition of statements of contrition is much to be preferred to no contrition, my main concern, like Olick's, is that more work is needed on the accretive process of memory discourses and on the social memory codes that evolve to encourage consensus. In the U.S., "learning from the Germans" ought also to mean learning more about the power of linguistic habit and repetition, and about the power (for good or bad) of speech that tacitly assumes an audience's understanding and agreement.

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[1] The word "Aufarbeitung" neatly combines the critical analysis of events with the emotional process of working through them. Accordingly, the Duden dictionary gives a two-part definition: "sich mit etwas auseinandersetzen, um Klarheit darüber zu gewinnen; etwas geistig verarbeiten" (to confront something in order to gain clarity about it; to process something psychologically). Since the German process of facing up to its dictatorships has indeed been both cognitive and emotional, this ambiguity serves thinkers well in German, while challenging any translator. Most dictionaries resolve the issue with the perfectly adequate "coming to terms with the past," which, if anything, leans towards the emotional. Neiman translates the word idiosyncratically as "working off the past," even putting that phrase into the mouths of her German interviewees, though she is presumably translating words they spoke in German. Though "working off" would more usually correspond to German *ab*arbeiten, Neiman's translation silently invokes the collocation "working off a debt" in order to articulate her understanding of what the *Aufarbeitung* process does in effect, paying off a moral debt through a concerted effort of contrition. Once she attaches the word to this translation, Neiman can build a stronger bridge to the historically distinct U.S. situation. Neiman might have pointed out two other peculiarities of the term: *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* is used as if it is clear which German past is meant, as if the German past were coterminous with its dictatorships, an effect that is sometimes criticized in Germany. Moreover, within professional circles that deal with memory of the two dictatorships *Aufarbeitung* is often used without its epithet *Vergangenheit*, as if one could only process the historical past. I see no particular issue with this shorthand, which I use in this article, but readers might note that *Aufarbeitung* is also used in connection with other traumatic pasts, for instance sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

[2] "Bagatellisieren" ("trivialize"), "verdrängen" ("repress in memory"), and "verharmlosen" ("make harmless, minimize") are among the words identified by Thorsten Eitz and Georg Stötzel as prominent in the discourse of *Aufarbeitung*, based on a large corpus of political and media texts (Eitz and Stötzel 2007 759, 782, 783).

[3] Examples from the sermons include: "Erst nachdem am 28. Januar 1989" ("Only after, on 28 January 1989"), that being the date at which a monument to Nazi victims was belatedly reinstated (Knees 2016); "bis in die späten 60er Jahre noch lange nicht", "war es wohl endlich an der Zeit", and "noch bis 2007 hat es gedauert"

("not until the late 1960s", "it was evidently high time", and "it took until 2007") (Rahlf 2017); "Erst sehr spät hat die evangelische Kirche ihre Haltung korrigiert" ("Not until very late did the protestant church correct its attitude") (Reuß 2017); and "Es dauerte bis 1980, bis nach einer sehr kontroversen Diskussion der Name jener Straße geändert wurde" ("It took until 1980, for that street name to be changed, after a very heated discussion") (Melzer 2017).

[4] As in some other northern European countries, Germans are registered as church members (if at all) at baptism and can only deregister by the positive action of opting out of paying church tax, as adults. This gives the EKD a large passive membership (about a quarter of the population) but a very small number of regular attenders at church, about 3.3% of the membership or less than 1% of the national population (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2020: 4, 13. The figures are for 2019. This provides stable data before the pandemic altered the pattern of church attendance and corresponds to the end of the main run of the exhibition). Congregations are also getting older. Indeed, the advanced age profile of congregants is so apparent from the many photographs posted at the "Neue Anfänge?" website that it comes as a surprise when one pastor interrupts the flow of his sermon to explain: "Für die Konfis: die Gestapo war die Geheime Staatspolizei in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus" (For those of you preparing for confirmation: the Gestapo was the secret police in the era of National Socialism) (Poehls 2018). Aside from the occasional school group, the photographs show exclusively middle aged and elderly parishioners, for instance: <https://www.nordkirche-nach45.de/eventseiten/rendsburg-christkirche.html> and <https://www.nordkirche-nach45.de/eventseiten/itzehoe-st-laurentii.html>. One photograph, taken at the Friesendom, Föhr, in July 2017, shows a group of school students: <https://www.nordkirche-nach45.de/eventseiten/foehr-friesendom.html> (all sites accessed November 7, 2022). Three of the "local windows" were based on work by students and these hyper-local displays occasionally show young people as actors in commemorative initiatives.

[5] In her practical advice on sermon-writing, Müller calls empathy "eine der höchsten homiletischen Tugenden" (one of the highest homiletic virtues) (Müller 2014, 56) and though she appears to be thinking principally of empathy with the congregation, these sermons show that preachers regularly adopt the role of third persons, whether Biblical or contemporary. This corresponds roughly to the ancient rhetorical skill of *ethopoeia* (Ueding and Steinbrink 2011, 321) though *ethopoeia* appears to have involved adopting another's voice and values for the duration of a whole speech, whereas the modern orator moves in and out of others' mindsets for the duration of a sentence or two.

[6] English-language Bible translations of various vintages tend to use "brethren" or "brothers" where the *Basisbibel*, from which Magaard quotes, has "brothers and sisters"; they also tend to omit reference to "flesh and blood". This would make the comparison with the 1930s family rather more difficult to pull off in English.

[7] Richard von Weizsäcker arguably set a model by citing Jewish wisdom in his 1985 speech, though he admitted that it was "oft zitiert" (often quoted) and the aphorism itself, "Das Geheimnis der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung" (The secret of redemption is remembrance), arguably still had some bite in 1985 when many on the centre right still rejected remembering the Nazi past. Jureit considers his popularization of the aphorism to be responsible for much wrong-headed thinking (Jureit 2010, 38-53).

[8] In 2021, at its last stopping point before Berlin, the exhibition was shown for the first time in a synagogue, in Celle. While the audience for the opening ceremony was presumably both Christian and Jewish, since the synagogue is in use by the local Jewish community, the opening speech, by the head of the local association for Christian-Jewish co-operation, did not address any Jewish guests explicitly (Maehnert 2021).

[9] *Ethopeia* causes difficulties in secular situations, too. Participating in a tour at the House of the Wannsee Conference, Gudehus hears the guide mimic the thinking of participants at the 1942 Conference, at which management of the genocide of the Jews was agreed. Unwilling to commit completely to the Nazi voice, the guide substitutes a politically correct term midway through his impersonation: "Wir wollen unsere jüdischen Menschen auch schneller anfangen zu töten. Ganz typische Diskussion im Dritten Reich" (We want to start killing our Jewish people quicker. A really typical discussion in the Third Reich). Gudehus worries that this lexical mishmash will leave the teenaged German listeners quite at sea (Gudehus 2006, 28). In 1988, Bundespräsident Philipp Jenninger got into hot water for momentarily aligning himself with the antisemitic resentments of many ordinary Germans in the 1930s. Antje Lange argues that while in the printed version of his speech it was clear that he was using mimicry, because the offending thoughts were in quotation marks, his rather monotone speaking voice made the transitions from first-person commentary to imitation inaudible, leaving open the possibility that he agreed with these views (Lange 2007, 240-42). In that civic setting, voicing politically incorrect perspectives on the past, even for the purpose of critiquing them, was not an accepted norm in Olick's "German guilt genre" and Jenninger was forced to resign (Olick 1999, 384, 397). In the sermon genre, where empathetic impersonations are evidently a norm, such modulations are probably unremarkable.

[10] Magaard exhorts his listeners "nicht zu urteilen oder zu verurteilen" (not to judge or condemn) (Magaard 2016). Pastor Stefan Holtmann warns that: "Die Botschaft des Evangeliums bewahrt uns […] davor, letzte Urteile zu fällen, die dem vorbehalten sind, der das erste und letzte Wort über unser Leben hat" (The message of the Gospel keeps us from making final judgments; these are reserved for He who has the first and last word on

our lives) (Holtmann 2016). Pastor Gert-Axel Reuß cautions that "ein abschließendes Urteil […] steht uns […] nicht zu. Das ist die Sache Gottes" (a final judgment is not for us to make. That is a matter for God) (Reuß 2017).

[11] This is one of several sermons to hinge on linguistic coincidences. While German bibles use the word "Schuld" (debt/guilt) for Colossians 2: 13, English-language bibles disambiguate the word as "debt" or "indebtedness." Similarly, where German bibles use the word "Heimat" for Philippians 3:20, which is discussed by pastor Lars Klehn, English-language Bibles use "citizenship" (in King James, "conversation") (Klehn 2016). Both pastors are aware of the root meaning but the keywords "Heimat" and "Schuld" are useful links to the exhibition. As with "Schwestern und Brüder" and "Gerechtigkeit" above, the German scripture provides rhetorical hooks that work only contingently in German.

[12] For instance, pastor Tilman Beyrich follows a perfectly orthodox condemnation of the church's failings after 1945 with an evocation of the sufferings of the non-persecuted majority that act as a mitigating factor: "Zu schwer lastete damals offenbar all das Leid, die gefallenen Söhne und Väter, die verlorene Heimat, die zerstörten Städte, die Sorge um die Zukunft, auf den Menschen damals" (Evidently, all the suffering – the fallen sons and fathers, the lost homeland, the destroyed cities, anxieties for the future – weighed too heavily on people at that time) (Beyrich 2018). Cordula Ruwe, a layperson leading a set of prayers in connection with the exhibition invites the congregation to put themselves into the shoes of the surviving majority and forgive their neglect of the primary victims: "vielleicht hatten die überlebenden Einwohner der Städte und Dörfer zu viel mit der eigenen Not zu tun, der eigenen Trauer um gefallene Söhne, Ehemänner, Brüder, Väter" (Perhaps the surviving residents of the towns and villages were too preoccupied with their own difficult situation, with their own grief for fallen sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers) (Ruwe 2018).