

HERMENEUTICS: MEMORY, KNOWLEDGE, RHETORIC

The intent of this workshop was to explore the implications of recent hermeneutics for theology by focusing on memory and rhetoric in relation to human knowledge. Because of a schedule conflict, Rebecca Chopp was unable to be present. Morny Joy, of the University of Calgary, and Thomas Flynn, of Emory University, were the presenters; the session was moderated by Susan A. Ross.

Morny Joy began her presentation by outlining three strands of hermeneutics: the metaphorical, the analogical, and the "disruptive" readings of the 1970s and 1980s. In the first model, typified especially by Paul Ricoeur and Sallie McFague, the metaphor is the basic moment of insight as generated through word and genre use. With the metaphorical model, there is no overt appeal to inspiration, but instead a unique type of hermeneutical circle in which interaction with the text is central. Joy noted that McFague will make "shy ontological claims," using language of possibility, but emphasized that in this context, the knower is never completely in control. In terms of rhetoric, this hermeneutics uses the appeal of innovation and novel word use; arguments are important but subordinated to rhetoric. Memory is not thematized but is present as horizon.

The analogical strand, especially characteristic of the work of David Tracy, defines theology as hermeneutics, is concerned with "pulling together," yet there is no undifferentiated unity. This approach emphasizes the dialectic *within* the analogical, avoiding either sterile harmony or the despair of an utterly negative dialectic. The "classic" remains the model here, and sees knowledge and memory as mediated, with persuasion being at the heart of all communication.

The radical disruptive readings of the 1970s and 1980s, as seen in the work of Chopp, Mark C. Taylor, and others, emphasize the limitations and unreliability of all language, argue that there is no resolution of difference, and are ultimately suspicious of memory. Joy asked whether it is possible to do theology within this context, or whether we are left with only "wandering signifiers."

Thomas Flynn's presentation focused on the Foucauldian critique of hermeneutics, which argues that hermeneutics, as an eminently "humanistic" discipline which prizes the free, conscious subjectivity of the individual, must be rejected. Foucault's aim as a historian is to point out discontinuity and chance in human history, uncovering the implicit subjectivism of hermeneutical readings and to rewrite history using the motifs of power and domination. Instead of an intentionalist reading of history, Foucault offers an "archeology" of history in which every fact becomes comparative. In a very real sense, Foucault is a modern and radical "nominalist," who argues that even a hermeneutics of emancipation or liberation is colored by domination and control.

The implications of this for memory are that it is reconceived as impersonal and institutional. Knowledge, while not identical with it, becomes coextensive with

power. Rhetoric, once distinguished from logic (the true) to the realm of the beautiful, never really escapes the dimension of the good but also focuses on power. Flynn concluded that while the postmodern critique helpfully valorizes the spatial as well as the temporal, its antihumanism does not offer a needed way of self-examination that also respects persons.

During the discussion, the questions took a theological turn, focusing on whether, if there is no such thing as innocent language, there would be a possibility for graced language. Joy responded that indeed Ricoeur allows for this in his early stress on the "excess" of biblical language. Flynn offered that along with an idea of language as original sin would be the counterpart of the language of God's love. The issue of the "redeemability" of language dominated much of the discussion, with the issue of its ambiguity—both sinful and graced—in the forefront. Memory, too, is not untarnished, and the promise of hermeneutics is that the labor of interpreting language can enable the uncreative to have a creative experience. Flynn raised the question whether this suggests a kind of "Platonism"—some sort of antithesis to evil which hovers in the background. Joy responded by reminding the participants of Ricoeur's "wager"—that we understand our memory and our language as a kind of wager where our "tarnishedness" is diminished. One participant suggested that Merleau-Ponty's idea of bodily intuition may be helpful in that metaphors are engaged in the continual creation of a bodily space. There was also some discussion of sacrament and the difficulty in using sacramental language and ideas in a postmodern world. The lively discussion concluded by acknowledging the unfortunate absence of the work of Heidegger and Ricoeur in literary/critical circles and the need for theologians and critical theorists to work more collaboratively.

SUSAN A. ROSS
Loyola University Chicago