

THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS AND CRITICAL
THEORIES—INTEREST GROUP

Convener: Bradford Hinze, Fordham University
Moderator: Anthony Godzieba, Villanova University
Presenters: Ormond Rush, Australian Catholic University
Judith Gruber, Loyola University New Orleans
Andrew Prevot, Boston College

This was the third and final year of a seminar on the immediate past, present, and future of theological hermeneutics in Catholic theology. The administrative team (Tony Godzieba, Brad Hinze, Fernando Segovia, and Robert Schreiter) plans to publish the papers as a way of documenting the development of the use of hermeneutics and critical theory since the Second Vatican Council and pointing the way to the future. This year's speakers offered constructive proposals that set the stage for our ongoing discussions in the field and point to specific applications of hermeneutical and critical-theoretical understandings in ecclesial life.

Ormond Rush, in "The Church as a Hermeneutical Community and the Eschatological Function of the *Sensus Fidelium*," considered how the *sensus fidei* (LG 12) provides a hermeneutical category for individual believers and the church as a whole. In diverse cultures and contexts, believers "make sense" of their faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through their exercise of this capacity, the Holy Spirit mediates the church's ongoing dialogue with God throughout history, provoking new horizons of understanding God's otherness. Rush explored the epistemological authority of these local applications of the Gospel, the role of local theologians in bringing such intuitions to systematic expression, and the obligation on local bishops both to attend to their people's lived faith and to bring their local perceptions to bear on the teaching of the universal church.

Judith Gruber, in "Revealing Subversions: Theology as Critical Theory," advanced in three steps the argument that "theology lives up to its own normative foundation only if it is done as radical critique." First, the dynamic impetus for critique is found in the contested relationship between knowledge and power. Second, critical theory "uncovers Christianity's complicity with hegemonic power" while also providing a resource for surfacing "counter-hegemonic strategies at the heart of our tradition." Third, theology's counter-hegemonic task paves the way for theology to live up to the normative foundations of the Christian faith against its hegemonic betrayal.

In "*Negatio Negationis* and Doxological Hope: Elements of a Critical Catholic Theology," Andrew Prevot explored this question: "Has the Catholic fondness for hermeneutics functioned problematically as a self-protective shield against the full force of ideology critique?" He proceeded in three moves. First, Catholic theology does not need to rely on external modalities of critique; it has its own internal resources for negative dialectic and critical theory found in prophetic, apocalyptic, ascetical, and mystical features of Catholic theology. Second, Catholic theologians "safeguard the radical unity of negative dialectics and doxological hope which much critical theory compromises." Third, this potent combination of negative dialectics and doxological hope "challenges the self-appropriating subject of hermeneutical philosophy and theology" by safeguarding the integrity of theology by means of both "a more

Interest Group: Theological Hermeneutics and Critical Theories

pervasive critical negativity and theocentrism.”

With over sixty people in attendance, many questions were raised, of which this is a sampling. For Rush: why return to some kind of “unreal” universal perspective (“going back up to 30,000 feet”)? He responded that every hermeneutical endeavor must include the attempt to wrestle with parts in relation to the whole. The *sensus fidelium* offers the proper entrance into the hermeneutical circle: it is precisely about faith as lived, not something abstract. Many emphasize the past (e.g., Scripture, tradition), but the normativity comes from the way the community works in establishing these.

For Gruber: does Foucault’s critical theory really offer hope for liberation from oppressive forces or is it an alternative to a certain brand of Augustinian pessimism? She countered by defending Foucault’s search for resources for agency. What happens when the *sensus* is informed by the capitalist situation? Discussion of “event” in hermeneutics needs to be sharpened in terms of interruptive events. In response to another question, Gruber carefully distinguished between anti-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse: “anti-” creates an empire; “counter-” questions the very idea of empire.

Prevot was asked for his reaction to the epilogue in Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, and Forgetting*, where Ricoeur considers whether the horizon of forgiveness offers solutions, but concludes it guarantees no happy ending. Prevot agreed; his own “doxological turn” embraces this claim. Does the object of doxological hope include the world? Prevot: yes, there is transformed participation in the exchange of gifts of presence in all sorts of sensorial experience such as in the mystical tradition.

BRADFORD E. HINZE
Fordham University
Bronx, New York