



Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation

Flora A. Keshgegian

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Though the church has often been complicit in regimes of domination that have perpetrated abuse, persecution, and violence, Keshgegian reminds us that the witness of the church is to remember for transformation. Such remembrance is shaped by the narrative of Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection--knit together in the promise of incarnation. The church as a community of remembrance honors and preserves memories of suffering, evokes and validates memories of resistance, and actively supports, embodies, and celebrates memories of connection and life affirmation. In particular, Keshgegian draws our attention to those who have suffered childhood sexual abuse, victims of the Armenian genocide and the Jewish Holocaust, and other historically disinherited peoples and groups. With such powerful memories of suffering in mind, she insists that redeeming memories is the purpose and mission of the church. Keshgegian challenges us to understand that the redemptive potential of the memory of Jesus Christ will be made known and realized by the capacity of that memory to hold and carry not only the story of Jesus, but of all those who suffer, struggle, live, and die.

"In *Redeeming Memories* Keshgegian contributes a unique and well-developed amendment to the growing literature on theologies of memory. Too often, she notes, experiences of suffering and abuse are treated as though they are absolute. Yet these experiences characteristically encompass ambiguity and doubt. In order to 'face the past in new ways,' survivors must first enter back into their experiences, 'undigested and disconnected,' without certainty. Transformation occurs when it is not only the suffering that is remembered, but when 'instances of resistance and agency' are incorporated into the 'testimony and witness.' Keshgegian develops her understanding of how remembering is redemptive in two sections. The first considers contemporary movements of communities that have suffered childhood sexual abuse, the Armenian genocide and the Jewish holocaust, and historical marginalization. Keshgegian herself is Armenian, drawing from a wealth of examples from her family's stories in explaining her understanding of the dynamics of remembering. In part two, she turns to a theological reconstruction of memory, where we are called to understand witness as 'witness' that moves beyond solidarity with victims to 'active participation in redemption.' We are charged also to tell the story of Jesus Christ in complex ways that honor the fullness of life as well as the cross. Finally, we are invited to understand worship as a time when 'we remember God and God remembers us'--the church as a place where remembering past suffering walks hand-in-hand with responding to present need. Keshgegian's book is beautifully written and well argued, compelling us to enter into the ambiguous, redemptive work of memory it so well describes."--Cynthia Rigby, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, in *Religious Studies Review*, Volume 29 Number 3, July 2003.

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