

# Secularization and Meaning: A Discussion of Memory and Eschatology

## 3.1 Introduction

According to official publications about cultural heritage, there is an intrinsic relationship between memory, religiosity, popular expressions and the process of the formation of a culture. Thus, the Cultural Foundation of the State of Santa Catarina, Brazil, published a “Primer on Immaterial Heritage”, where it states that cultural heritage “is the cultural legacy transmitted from generation to generation and represents a community, its habits and its identity” (Fundação Catarinense de Cultura s.d., 3). Based on documents of Brazil’s National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN in the Brazilian acronym), the Foundation claims that “immaterial heritage reveals the popular and religious expressions, awakening the meanings of collective memory”. There is an effort “to look for the memories, forms of knowledge and celebrations” because it finds that “their immateriality is getting lost”. One can also observe in the above-mentioned document and in the text by IPHAN, based on Decree no. 3,551 of August 4, 2000, that there are difficulties in understanding the immateriality of cultural heritage. Even when talking about immaterial cultural heritage, the focus continues to be on the materiality of heritage (Fundação Catarinense de Cultura s.d., 3, 15). According to the Institute, in order to ensure the preservation of material and immaterial cultural heritage, it is necessary to recover memory (IPHAN 2008; UNESCO 2019). The discussions around cultural heritage, culture, religion, human activities and history permeate the issue of memory. If there is a link between the preservation of culture and memory, as we saw above, it is necessary to elaborate on the concept of memory and its developments. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the theological aspects in the construction of memory in the historical process, based on the theological studies of an historian.

Starting from the problem alluded to above, this chapter introduces the topic of memory as concerning a fundamental theological task related to the preservation of cultural identity. Memory is experienced through the continuous and repetitive interpretation of the past. In the approaches of Jacques Le Goff, Paul Ricoeur, Pierre Nora and Marc Bloch, the modern views of memory are founded on the Judeo-Christian tradition. Time is intrinsically linked

to concrete events. Memory of the past and hope for the future are interrelated elements. Memory and eschatology are fundamental aspects for the construction of culture and historical memory, for, according to Marc Bloch, “Christianity is a religion of historians”. The theological interpretation of history gives meaning to the concrete events in history. Modernity and the secularization process put the rupture of memory into practice. An example of this was the destruction of the historical heritage of Antiquity and the Middle Ages in the city of Paris. Hundreds of gothic churches and buildings as well as ancient monuments and edifices were destroyed in the 18th century with the purpose of embellishing the urban space and creating a modern city, free of the ancient rubbish that was an inglorious burden on the shoulders of modern and enlightened citizens. The path of rupture with the past had to go through the destruction of the material heritage with the goal of destroying memory and history. The same process of modernization and deliberate forgetting took place in several European countries (Choay 2006, 13-16).

### 3.2 Memory: Lived Theological Remembrance

According to Le Goff, a contemporary French historian, the issues of memory and culture are intrinsically connected to theological views of history. For him, the reading of history and memory necessarily starts from the Jewish tradition that links tradition and promise to God’s history, which is reexperienced by memory. This author discusses the Lord’s Supper, based on Jesus, as an example and foundation of the process of the elaboration of memory. According to him, “The Jewish people are the people of memory par excellence” (Le Goff 1992, 69). In the Hebrew tradition memory is theologically rooted in history. This memory is reinterpreted for new historical contexts. In Deuteronomy 8:11-19, according to Le Goff, we find “the memory that founds Jewish identity” (Le Goff 1992, 69)<sup>1</sup>.

The repeatedly experienced recollection and the process of interpretation of the Bible text are a basically religious task. In Le Goff’s view, the construction of memory takes place as a theological task that is fundamental for the preservation of Jewish identity. This task is fulfilled with the goal of not letting the people forget the experiences of the past. Thus, theology and memory are crucial aspects for the building of culture. The theological meaning of Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup> Le Goff comments theologically on Old Testament texts like Deuteronomy 8:11-19 and Isaiah 44:21.