

Kimberly A. Rivers. *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice: Memory, Images, and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2010. 377 pages. \$87.85.

In *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice*, Kimberly Rivers presents an in-depth examination of the role of memory and mnemonic devices both in the preaching textbooks as well as the sermons of mendicant preachers during the middle ages. She seeks to demonstrate that the Franciscans revitalized and revised the ancient rhetorical devices employing them not only for the benefit of the preacher, to recall the content and order of his sermon, but also to assist the listeners in recalling the content for their later devotions.

Memory has an interesting place in contemporary life. Ask some about memory and you are apt to get a discussion about the memory capacity of a person's laptop or smart phone. But how about that person's own memory? Many will tell you they can no longer remember their own phone number let alone the numbers of family and friends. Why remember? All of those numbers are in their phone directory. With access to Google, Wikipedia, and Kindle, we no longer need to commit much to memory. The days of memorizing lengthy poems or passages of scripture are just that, a dim memory.

The purpose of Rivers' work is to refocus attention on memory and mnemonic techniques that have been ignored in recent scholarship. Memory and the techniques for memorization, she argues, were integral to biblical scholarship and preaching in the Middle Ages. She also seeks to demonstrate that preachers in the mendicant orders, particularly Franciscans, expanded the understanding and use of memory. Preachers not only employed mental images to assist in the memorization of their sermons, the traditional use, but they also taught that the inclusion of verbal imagery within those sermons would assist lay people in recalling the content and teaching of the sermon.

Rivers opens her work with a brief review of the role of memory and memory techniques in classical rhetoric. Memory had significance as one of the five rhetorical canons: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. The author of *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* (probably Cicero) and Quintilian both described systems, based on the earlier invention of Simonides, by which orators would be able to recall the main points of their arguments. One was instructed to imagine a place, preferably a real place, that one could then move through and place the points of the speech, in order, throughout significant places in that well known place: one's home, perhaps. However, because those places were frequently pagan temples, the use of these mnemonic techniques languished until early in the 11th and 12th centuries with the rise of the schools.

In Part One Rivers examines the transformation of memory in the high Middle Ages when the patterns of monastic education confronted the education of the schools. She describes the understanding of *memoria* in the monastic communities where the memorization of scripture and *ruminatio* (chewing) on the text were dimensions of the daily prayer life of the monks. In the cathedral schools, however, rapid memorization became an essential skill for both students and teachers. Rivers describes the memory methodologies of a number of scholars before turning to the contributions made by the mendicant preachers. The renewed need for memorization was occasioned by the new, infinitely more complex sermon form of the late twelfth century. They also sought to connect memory with ethics – through the use of images the soul could be shaped and formed. Disciplining the memory was understood as a crucial part of the religious life. The three powers of the soul were reason, the will, and memory (133). It was here that memory was

connected with the virtues and vices. Memory was crucial for a program of “self-improvement” by removing the vices and replacing them with virtues (141-142).

In Part Two Rivers turns to the role of memory specifically in preaching. The old way of preaching – explicating a long biblical text, was replaced with a lengthier, argumentative sermon preaching right actions (152). Preachers were encouraged to prepare sermons that were logically ordered and concise. Rivers then reviews the various mnemonic devices and schemata which both aided in invention of content but also in memorization. Since images were crucial for remembering, Dominican and Franciscan preachers developed an extensive vocabulary of images in order to both remember their sermons but also to make them memorable.

In Part Three Rivers explores the spread of these images through France, Germany, and Italy. What is interesting to note is the increasing use of mythological figures as images.

Rivers does an excellent job of moving the conversation about memory beyond a strict understanding of simply memorizing a sermon. Memory is more about remembering what God has done, about meditation and reflection, as well as invention. Memory is crucial to shaping the life of the faithful, preachers and listeners alike, and this extensively and intensively researched book would be an excellent addition to the seminary library bookshelf.

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