Hermeneutics and Communications

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Professor

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Assignment #3 – Essay on a case study

1. Write a 5-page paper on a specific event or phenomenon (e.g., a historical event, a cultural practice, a legal decision), and interpret it from a hermeneutic perspective.

This would involve understanding the event within its context and recognizing the role of your prejudices in shaping your interpretation.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the

hermeneutic issue for this assignment.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

I would like to discuss and interpret a historical event that drew my attention last year, which was the year that marked the 100th anniversary of the event.

The event known as the "Philosophy Steamer" is one of the tragic events in Russian history, when in the autumn of 1922, in Soviet Russia hundreds of university professors (Vladimir Abrikosov, Yuly Aikhenvald, Nikolai Berdyaev, Boris Brutskus, Sergei Bulgakov, Valentin Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, Ivan Ilyin and others), mostly Christian thinkers and religious-philosophical thinkers were gathered and deported on two steamships from Russia.

Another reason why this historical event drew my attention is that the exile of Russian intelligentsia of 1922 is consonant with the mass departure of cultural and academic figures after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Although a hundred years separate these two events, there are clearly some parallels between them. And protection of human rights and freedoms still remains a pressing issue at the present time, as it is only through respect for human rights and freedoms based on Christian values and truths, that we can build a better society and preserve peace in the world, which are prerequisites for the development of personality and culture.

With regard to the historical context of the event, the year 1922 in Soviet Russia was the time, when the civil war had ended and the Bolsheviks took control over the most part of the Russian Empire territory with the exception of Poland, Finland and Manchuria. The Soviet Union was established, and it was a critical turning point for the Soviet authorities, when there was a shift from military tasks towards building their own state according to their rules. Therefore, it is symbolic the way that the Soviet authorities reacted, when they faced the first peaceful criticism of their ideas from intelligentsia, by suppressing dissent and deporting prominent opposition-minded intellectuals, religious-philosophical thinkers, university professors, doctors and historians. Mikhail Prishvin, a Russian prose writer and publicist, who was a witness to the turbulent times of the early 20th century, wrote in his diary: "...the time, when the dust is settling after a decade, and the catastrophes, uprisings, wars and revolutions have already happened. Pioneers are walking along Moscow streets, right past the houses of the new Soviet intelligentsia. The war has ended; a new world is being built; the government announces incredible and phantasmagorical plans." (Prishvin, 2023)

**The true meaning of the "Philosophers' Ships" and what that exile of intelligentsia signifies for Russia could only be identified through analyzing and interpreting this historical event hermeneutically.**

**"The "Philosophy Steamer" ... would become a symbol of the authorities' intolerance toward dissent and the unwillingness of the dissidents to abandon their freedom of speech. ...it seems the evolution of "Philosophy Steamer" as a proper name for the exiled intelligentsia became possible primarily because the designation "religious thinkers" allows for a broader interpretation, since they too represented philosophical idealism. This provided the grounds for attaching a more widespread designation to them: "religious-philosophical thinkers." (Mehlich & Mehlich, 2022)**

**In literature authors (**Chumakov, 2022, DeBlassio, 2014, **Grundhauser, 2017,** Rayfield, 2023, **Steila, 2022) explore various aspects of this historical event, for example, emigration, anti intellectualism, totalitarianism, propaganda. But most authors agree that the "Philosophy Steamer" is a significant historical event that symbolizes the authorities' intolerance of alternative views and dissidents' unwillingness to abandon freedom of speech.**

**When trying to understand and interpret an event or phenomenon, we have to take into account the whole complex network of phenomena and their relations in a particular historical context. It is important to explore a wide scope of relations of a subject or event under consideration to all known phenomena of science and life.**

There are also various interpretations of the historical event under consideration. In a recent literary review Rayfield (2023) suggests that, even though the exile of the intelligentsia in 1922 was an enormous loss to Russia, we could also see the brighter side of that gloomy event, and reminds that exile and exodus might also mean being saved. "The loss to Russia of this small community - philosophers, historians, doctors, agronomists - was enormous, though a bigger disaster was to come, when... But the fact remains that these two steamers together constituted a Noah's Ark" (Rayfield, 2023).

Although this observation is valuable, as it takes into consideration that there are two sides of almost every situation or event, I would only partially agree with this interpretation. Even though this kind of comparison is possible, I would not say that this interpretation reflects the whole essence of this event.

With regard to my pre-judgements, the "Philosophy Steamer" is in essence an exile. In the missionary discourse to his disciples Jesus talks about fleeing persecution, "When they persecute you in one town [that is, pursue you in a manner that would injure you and cause you to suffer because of your belief], flee to another town;" (Matt. 10:23 *New international version*), and in any circumstances, Christians must not deny Christ, "But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in Heaven." (Matt. 10:33 *New international version).*

The exile of Russian religious-philosophical thinkers was forced and unjust. In the life of Jesus in Scripture, God warns us against unnecessary danger and suffering in this case, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet." (Matt.10:14 *New international version*)

Therefore, it would do more good to everyone and be a more sensible decision to leave the motherland when faced with mortal danger. And losing the homeland and living in exile is a hard path. In these circumstances, it is important to remember that the truth is on the side of the exiled righteous people, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 5:10 *New international version*)

In general, I would interpret this historical event as an episode of the eternal battle between good and evil, and taking into account the events which followed the exile as well as the historical context, I would like to add that the main pre-understanding and presupposition is that the true victory is not in the battle field, but in the heart.

Since the ancient times, history has seen stark examples of this dark practice: the exile of ancient Greek philosophers (Socrates, Diogenes and others), Renaissance thinkers (Dante Alighieri), political leaders (Napoleon, Trotsky), the expulsion of Soviet dissidents (Solzhenitsyn, Bukovsky and others). Unfortunately, there have been cases when whole nations had to endure privations and were forced into exile (native people of Tosmania, Armenians, Ukrainians, Germans and others).

At the present time, even after the fall of communism and collapse of other totalitarian regimes, the practice has not stopped, and I would say it is possible that in the digital age 'cancel culture' has a similar function to a certain degree, when opponents are removed from public networks and public life and they are banned access to social media.

The practice of unjust exile has continued, and the intent to get rid of a person with an opposing view, force them into exile and remove an opponent has lived through to the present day. And it is only through genuine adherence to the true Christian values that we can confront and counteract this dreadful misanthropic practice.

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