

THEOLOGY AS RHETORIC¹

DAVID S. CUNNINGHAM

University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

HALF THE controversies in the world," said Cardinal Newman, "are verbal ones; and could they be brought to a plain issue, they would be brought to a prompt termination."² At first glance, this seems to suggest that half the controversies are "merely" verbal—as opposed to the other half, which are "substantial." Such a sharp division between language and essence should strike us as anomalous, especially when viewed from this side of the linguistic turn. Admittedly, some controversies may take place without verbal expression (certain acts of violence, for example); nevertheless, disagreements about language are not "merely verbal," nor are they easily resolved.

But, as is often the case when perusing Newman's work, a second reading may be in order. Perhaps this statement seeks not to diminish the importance of controversy, but rather to remind us of the *linguisticity* of argument. Most controversies are indeed verbal, as Newman claims; but this does not reduce their significance. Indeed, a verbal controversy indicates very serious disagreement; for in many cases, "verbal" is all that a controversy can be. And if these disagreements *could* be brought to a plain issue (which is an arduous task, rarely successful), they would in fact be brought to a prompt termination. At the very least, they would resolve into other, and perhaps more fruitful, controversies.

Such an insistence on the linguisticity of argument may serve to revive theological method from the semi-comatose state into which it has recently drifted. A wide range of Christian theologians have sought to work through the "dialectic of Enlightenment," identifying the positive and negative attributes of modernity. Typically, however, they have only succeeded in reintroducing some of the old mistakes under new names. This has led to some very unproductive controversies; and as the arguments become more polarized, any truly creative alternative is quickly eclipsed.

¹ A shorter version of this study was presented to the Rhetoric and Religious Discourse Section of the Annual AAR Meeting in 1989. Some of its arguments are taken up in a more detailed form in *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (forthcoming from the University of Notre Dame Press).

² John Henry Newman, *Newman's University Sermons: Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford, 1826-43*, with an Introduction by Donald M. MacKinnon and J. D. Holmes, 3d ed. (London: SPCK, 1970) 200.

Contemporary controversies in theological method are indeed “verbal ones,” as Newman might have said, and no less important for that. They can, however, be brought to a plain issue; for the various parties to the dispute are all operating within an inadequate methodological framework. Specifically, most current approaches to theological method retain some of the fundamental (indeed, foundational) assumptions of the objectivism which they claim to have overcome. If theological method is ever to be extricated from “th’encircling gloom” in which it currently wanders, it will need to seek a genuine alternative. The necessary features of such an alternative will emerge in the second section of this essay. Meanwhile, we need to undertake a brief investigation into the prehistory of the problem, and to describe the current unhappy state of scholarship in theological method.

CATEGORIES OF METHOD

Aristotle divided method into two categories: analytic and dialectic. Analytic method operates from an agreed-upon set of first principles, and is thus able to claim certainty for its results. However, because its principles are conventional, its claims cannot be truly novel; its certainty is based on a tautological closure of the system. For Aristotle, analytic plays an important role in physics, metaphysics, and logic.

Dialectic, on the other hand, begins not with first principles, but with common opinion (that is, with whatever “most people” consider to be the case). But because common opinion is often wrong and never univocal, dialectic cannot claim definitional certainty for its results, only probability or verisimilitude. Nevertheless, its ambiguity makes it able to achieve genuinely new (nontautological) insights. The domain of dialectic is politics, ethics, and poetics.

From the Enlightenment through the first half of this century, theological and ethical reflection was dominated by an analytic approach. Inspired by the tranquility of a firm foundation, theologians and ethicists found solace in philosophers of certitude: Descartes, Kant, Hegel (on some interpretations), Frege, Russell. More recently, this quest for a totalizing system has been abandoned in deference to the concrete variety of religious belief. The new touchstones of theological method are the philosophy of language, literary criticism, and the sociology of knowledge. This transition represents a shift from certainty to verisimilitude, and from univocity to polysemy. As such, it may be characterized as a methodological shift from analytic to dialectic.

This shift has been overwhelmingly influential; but in the discipline of theological method, disagreement springs eternal. True, many theologians now label themselves postmodernist or antifoundational, in recog-

nition of the attempt to transcend both the rationalism and the empiricism of the modern age. But having disposed of the authority of modernity, they often find themselves invoking a new authority in its place. They are like the eighteenth-century *philosophes* who, in Carl Becker's words, "demolished the Heavenly City of St. Augustine only to rebuild it with more up-to-date materials."³

Most current accounts of theological method operate under what Aristotle called an analytic approach, and thereby remain allied with philosophical assumptions which have fallen under increasingly heavy attack. Specifically, these accounts have failed to embrace theological reflection as an ethical and political act; they have thereby neglected praxis as the *termini* (both *a quo* and *ad quem*) of theoretical inquiry. Moreover, they tend to rely on two central theses of the foundationalism which they critique: a distinction between subject and object, and a faith in "universally shared human assumptions." By examining each of these failures, we can begin to identify the deleterious effects of the residually analytic method which still pervades most contemporary accounts of Christian theology.

Apoliticism

While politically committed work in constructive theology pours off the presses, scholars of theological method continue to veil their own political and ethical assumptions. They have clung tenaciously to an alien notion of scientific objectivity, in which cool calculation takes the place of passionate commitment. The problem was described over twenty years ago by James Cone, who argued against any such pretense to neutrality:

It may be that the importance of any study in the area of morality or religion is determined in part by the emotion expressed. It seems that one weakness of most theological works is their "coolness" in the investigation of an idea. Is it not time for theologians to get upset?⁴

Despite the prophetic tone of Cone's leading question, theological method still claims to operate on neutral ground.

This tendency is well exemplified in the work of David Tracy. This charge may seem surprising at first, since Tracy has sought (especially in his more recent writings) to give serious consideration to political

³ Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 1932) 31.

⁴ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury, 1969; reprint, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989) 3.

concerns.⁵ Yet the reader will strain to find substantive ethical and political criteria in Tracy's work. His travels in the domain of politics are limited to those of a civilized pluralism, quietly strolling on the quadrangle.

Tracy recognizes that "several different Christian theologies now insist on the need for practical application of a mystical-political sort"; but rather than evaluating such theologies, he simply notes that the "options range widely" (102). He comes to the very brink of political commitment with the claim that "God's option for the poor is central to the Scriptures" (103). But this gambit fails to overcome pluralism, which is clearly the trump suit. Apparently the poor and the oppressed must wait their turn, along with all the other voices which need to be heard (and they are legion). Tracy does admit that the testimony of the poor should "preferably" be heard first (104). Sadly, though, these marginalized voices seem to inspire neither moral outrage nor political action on Tracy's part; rather, they merely provoke "a yet-deeper sense of our own plurality and ambiguity" which will "give rise to further conflicts of interpretations over the religious classics" (104). In other words, competing moral imperatives are never allowed to eclipse the primacy of conversation—which, in Tracy's view, is simply not negotiable.⁶

Of course, the nonnegotiability of conversation may be worthy of defense. But the option for conversation is itself an *ethical* and *political* option, a point which Tracy is far too reluctant to admit. His reluctance is quite understandable, because even pluralism can come into conflict with other theological positions (and thus appear antipluralistic). This is the paradox of neutrality: moral judgments simply cannot be avoided. Even Tracy's description of conversation is cast in highly evaluative terms (18): *required, worth, must, control, willingness*. And of course, Tracy puts great stock in the "classic"⁷—certainly a morally charged notion.

The point is not that Tracy should have eschewed such evaluative language; on the contrary, one cannot avoid it. But what *is* missing here is any concrete description of the moral force behind these imperatives.

⁵ David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) 85, 91. Page numbers will hereafter be cited in the text.

⁶ Interestingly, this absolute distinction between ethics and hermeneutics was explicitly advocated by Tracy in an earlier work. See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 123. While his current view is marked by greater "ambiguity," he still keeps political and ethical commitments at arm's length. See the insightful comments of Sharon D. Welch, in her review of *Plurality and Ambiguity* in *Theology Today* 44 (1988) 551.

⁷ Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* 99–153.

Nor is Tracy unique in his search for a politically neutral space from which to do Christian theology; the ghosts of objectivity are everywhere.

Subjects and Objects

Recent work in theological method has also tended to separate subjects from objects. Theologians have found themselves unable to restrain this "analytic" urge, which has so dominated the natural and social sciences in the modern age. In any given situation, the character of the agent is presumed to be largely irrelevant to the final outcome; all attention falls on the object of investigation.

This problem is well exemplified in the work of George Lindbeck. Again, this criticism may at first appear misdirected, for Lindbeck's work certainly moves away from a "propositional" account of doctrine which would seek to objectify belief. According to Lindbeck, "Doctrines qua doctrines are not first-order propositions, but are to be construed as second order ones: they make . . . intrasystemic rather than ontological truth claims."⁸ Such an approach might very well be expected to reunite the human subject with the doctrinal "object." And this expectation is only heightened by Lindbeck's description of theology as an explicitly linguistic (or grammatical) endeavor.

But Lindbeck grafts his view of doctrine onto a philosophy of language which is far too analytic, thus erecting new barriers between language and its users. The problem lies in the model which he uses to describe his approach: he understands doctrines as instantiations of certain sets of *rules*. Unfortunately, the word *rule* tends to connote some degree of permanence and independence from context. In the end, Lindbeck's rule-oriented approach to theology leads him to ignore the human agent in his analysis of doctrine.

For example, Lindbeck believes that "it is self-evident" that rules "are separable from the forms in which they are articulated" (93). In his example (a patient with jaundice), he claims to separate a reality (the jaundice) from the descriptions of it, e.g., by Galen (an imbalance of the humors) and by modern science (a viral infection). But what is "the jaundice" if not a description which is already linguistically informed? Lindbeck's distinction of *res* and *verbum* seems contrary to the general argument of his book: that theology is an essentially linguistic endeavor. He reintroduces a dichotomy of subject and object, and in a form which,

⁸ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster; London: SPCK, 1984) 80. Again, page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

as John Milbank has noted, is particularly alien to Christian theology.⁹ Admittedly, Lindbeck recognizes that we cannot access the *res* "independently" (extralinguistically). Yet he believes that the *verbum* somehow "points to" the *res* in a vaguely consequentialist sense; doctrines can be distinguished "from the concepts in which they are formulated" by stating them "in different terms that nevertheless have equivalent consequences" (93).

By staking his approach to theological method on the notion of a "rule," Lindbeck tempts us to imagine a definitive reference point, a moment of identity, for the ever-changing face of Christian doctrine. Yet his "rules" fail to act like rules, for the language in which they are expressed is necessarily equivocal and profoundly dynamic. These ostensible rules are thus open to wide-ranging interpretation, shaped much more by the character and predispositions of the interpreter than by an imagined univocal definition. In the domain of theology, at least, any "rule" must be expressed in language which is so ambiguous that it can have no significant unifying function.

Moreover, rules operate in a great variety of ways, depending upon the context in which they are invoked. For example, the status of a rule depends on what will occur if it is broken. Breaking a rule in baseball may get a manager thrown out of the game; breaking a rule in the courtroom may land a witness in federal prison. Considerable formal and procedural differences separate "the rules of chess" from "the rules of etiquette." The force of a "rule" is largely dependent on the political and ethical authority under which it is invoked.

Because we must express rules in language, they are subject to the same vicissitudes of reception as are the propositional doctrines (or expressivist experiences) which they supposedly replace. Lindbeck's attempt to generalize and unify the function of doctrine relapses into an analytic method. This is ironic in a work which advocates a cultural-linguistic paradigm; for it was primarily the recognition of the equivocal nature of language which occasioned the methodological shift away from analytic approaches in the first place.

Universality

Third, and finally, recent work in theological method continues to claim a rather absolute and universal application for its results. Instead of specifying the precise range of application for their methodological claims, theologians have tended to assume that their conclusions will be patently obvious to all people of good will. This unwarranted optimism

⁹ John Milbank, "Theology without Substance: Christianity, Signs, Origins. Part One," *Literature and Theology* 2 (1988) 8-13.

can have quite unfortunate consequences.

The problem is well illustrated in Dietrich Ritschl's *The Logic of Theology*.¹⁰ At the outset, Ritschl seems to guard against the potential excesses of an analytic method. For example, he is not afraid to debunk the commonly assumed hegemony of the natural sciences (30). He even seems interested in rehabilitating those theological tools which the Enlightenment had sought to discredit. In sum, Ritschl hardly seems an analytic extremist; he acknowledges quite frankly the need for theology to broaden its notion of what counts for rational argument.

Yet surprisingly, he believes that *logic* can serve as a fundamental category for Christian theology. Logic is a thoroughly analytic endeavor; it claims solidity, finality, and universal applicability for its results. Ritschl praises these attributes, and chooses his intellectual conversation partners accordingly (e.g., Anglo-American analytic philosophers). But this quest for analytic certainty requires him to establish universal agreement about the basic premises of theological reflection. (Analytic methods must be based on significant agreement about first principles.) Although he explicitly eschews positivism and nominalism, Ritschl's approach seems incompatible with the highly provisional and unstable nature of all investigations into the ultimate Mystery.

To take one concrete example, Ritschl too easily dispatches complex theological arguments by labeling them "pseudoproblems." Without actually clarifying why these problems should be given the label *pseudo*, he lists a number of "mistakes" from which these problems can arise. These include "mistakes in translating the biblical texts," "wrong assessments of historical data," and "wrong biblical interpretation" (86). Ritschl's use of the adjectives *wrong* and *mistaken* in these contexts implicate him in some very serious category errors. In the domain of logic, terms such as these would be relevant; but in these highly disputed fields of inquiry, such univocity is impossible to achieve. Consequently, terms such as *wrong* and *mistaken* cannot be so easily applied to contingent matters such as translation, historiography, and interpretation.¹¹

¹⁰ Dietrich Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology: A Brief Account of the Relationships between Basic Concepts in Theology* (London: SCM, 1986; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Again, page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

¹¹ The attempt to objectify translation, history, and hermeneutics into an empirical reality is as much a rhetorical event as is the foundational objectivism upon which it is based. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); W. V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1969); Douglas Robinson, *The Translator's Turn* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1990); George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York:

Like many other contemporary theologians, Ritschl finds himself in the grip of what Richard Bernstein has called "the Cartesian Anxiety."¹² In the understandable desire to attain some sure footing, many theologians have emphasized definitiveness and certainty at the expense of contingency and tentativity. But in order to do so, they have been forced to establish (or to assume) universal first principles for theological reflection. As a result, they have too often overstated the scopes of their own analyses.

To summarize: most current work in theological method is unable to free itself from the assumptions of the "analytic" methods which it quite rightly seeks to transcend. This difficulty is understandable, given the hegemony of scientific rationalism in the modern age. Analytic assumptions will never be overcome simply by making "slight adjustments" in the modern project. Fortunately, however, a genuine alternative is available. Theologians should undertake a postcritical appropriation of a distinctly precritical method: namely, the ancient faculty of rhetoric.

RHETORIC AS METHOD

"Rhetoric," says Aristotle, "is the counterpart of dialectic" (*Rhet.* 1354a1). A counterpart is not merely an opposite; rather, rhetoric and dialectic are two sides of the same coin. Aristotle's word for "counterpart" is *antistrophos*—suggesting, by allusion to the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy, something of equal importance and purpose, but moving in the opposite direction.¹³ Like dialectic, rhetoric begins with the "common opinions" (*endoxa*) about any problem which is presented.¹⁴ Moreover, because these opinions are malleable and highly specific to place and time, they cannot be universalized or even generalized. Again, like dialectic, rhetoric calls for attention to concrete, historical reality, idiosyncratic and antisystematic as it may be. And also like dialectic, rhetoric cannot guarantee tautological certainty. For what would be the purpose of deliberating about something which could never be otherwise? "Nothing would be gained by it" (*Rhet.* 1357a7).

Despite these similarities, however, rhetoric is not identical to dialectic; it is an antistrophic move in the opposite direction. More specifically, rhetoric is the "practical" counterpart of dialectic; its movement is in the direction of praxis rather than of theory. According to Aristotle, theoret-

Oxford Univ., 1975); and Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1973).

¹² Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 16–20.

¹³ As noted in Larry Arnhart, *Aristotle on Political Reasoning: A Commentary on the Rhetoric* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois Univ., 1981) 14.

¹⁴ *Rhet.* 1355a14–18; cf. *Top.* 100a18–21; *Soph. El.* 183a37–183b1.

ical inquiries into contingent matters demand a dialectic method. But when the discussion turns to practical matters, especially in the realm of politics and ethics, the faculty of "dialectic" is insufficient. Dialectic may change a person's mind, but it does not necessarily lead to action. (According to Aristotelian psychology, action requires more than a rational decision; it requires desire or striving [*orexis*].) People are induced to action not by dialectic but by rhetoric, which recognizes that rational conversation does not necessarily lead to action. How people will act depends on a complex interaction between speaker and audience.

The classical rhetorical tradition can be critically appropriated as a methodological tool for Christian theology. The *prima facie* case for its use should already be clear. With its attention to common opinion and its willingness to abandon the quest for tautological certainty, a rhetorical method is unlikely to repeat the mistakes wrought by theology's preoccupation with analytic method. But because it accents the practical, and because it attends to the concrete location of arguments in time and space, it cannot ignore issues of politics and ethics. Rhetoric can help move theological method out of its current quandaries, as I shall shortly argue. That argument must be preceded, however, by a brief digression: an explanation of how rhetoric lends itself to methodological appropriation.

Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering, in the particular case, the available means of persuasion" (*Rhet.* 1355b26). Thus, a rhetorical method is one which analyzes the persuasive nature of discourse—the way in which a speaker (or writer¹⁵) seeks to move an audience to action. Persuasion occurs within the complex unity of discourse and action in which human beings participate. Furthermore, rhetoric concerns not simply the execution of an argument but also its discovery and construction: the integrative process which came to be known as *inventio*.

Because rhetoric deals with matters which "could be otherwise," it does not depend on formal validity. "For substantial arguments, whose cogency cannot be displayed in a purely formal way, even *validity* is something entirely out of reach and unobtainable."¹⁶ Rather, persuasion depends on matters such as the character of the speaker, the emotional receptivities of the audience, the specific assumptions shared by a particular speaker and audience, the way a speaker chooses examples, and

¹⁵ The differences between speaking and writing are important; however, a full articulation of their role in rhetoric would require a lengthy digression. For the purposes of this essay, discussion of spoken argument (and the speaker) is interchangeable with that of written argument (and the writer).

¹⁶ Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (New York: Cambridge Univ., 1958) 154.

matters of style and delivery. The success or failure of persuasion rests not on logical consistency or even "common sense," but on the particular response of the members of the audience in the individual case. Just as a courtroom verdict is determined not by "raw facts" but by the decision of the jury, so the outcome of all persuasive argument depends on the audience's response. "Rhetoric finds its end in judgment" (*Rhet.* 1377b21).

Rhetoric has suffered a great calumny in the modern age. It is most often defined in one of four ways: (1) flowery or ornamental language; (2) intentionally deceptive language; (3) stylistics and delivery, primarily of the spoken word; or (4) anything related to any type of communication.¹⁷ While the fourth definition is so broad as to be useless, the first three are clearly meant to restrict the scope of rhetoric to a range much smaller than that suggested by the classical rhetorical tradition.

The story of the demise of rhetoric is long and complex; suffice it to say that rhetoric did not meet the criteria promulgated by scientific rationalism.¹⁸ (This is hardly surprising, since rationalism was founded on the assumptions of what Aristotle called *analytic*, whereas rhetoric is an offshoot of *dialectic*.) The last great flourish of rhetoric occurred in the Renaissance, for example, in the work of Valla, Bruni, and Pontano.¹⁹ Although Giambattista Vico entered a final plea on behalf of the rhetorical tradition, his argument drew scant attention in a world increasingly captivated by grand schemes of foundational rationalism.

It was not always thus. The faculty of rhetoric has a long and distinguished pedigree, having served an important function in Greece well before Aristotle. Isocrates was one of its earliest known theoreticians; Demosthenes, one of its great practitioners. Plato attacked rhetoric, but in a thoroughly rhetorical way.²⁰ Aristotle's *Rhetoric* remains, perhaps,

¹⁷ Cf. the critique of these common definitions in James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 2d ed. (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1978) 3-4.

¹⁸ The fatal blow was struck by Peter Ramus (1515-1572), who deemed rhetoric to be at odds with the rigorous logical analysis which he advocated; see Richard A. Lanham, "The 'Q' Question," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (1988) 655-58. General accounts of the rise and fall of rhetoric may be found in Grassi, Kennedy, and Vickers (see notes 19 and 20).

¹⁹ See Ernesto Grassi, "Humanistic Rhetorical Philosophizing: Giovanni Pontano's Theory of the Unity of Poetry, Rhetoric, and History," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 17 (1984) 136-55; and, for a more extensive elaboration, Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State Univ., 1980).

²⁰ The literature here is vast, and certainly not univocal. Summaries may be found in George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina, 1980) 42-60; and Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford Univ.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 83-177.

the most influential handbook. But his approach is rivaled—in a typically Roman way (methodical, lengthy, and somewhat legalistic)—by Cicero and Quintilian.

These names are mentioned not as a reductionist rehearsal of the complex history of rhetoric, but as a reminder that rhetorical assumptions pervaded the world in which Christian theology developed. The influence of the rhetorical tradition on the New Testament has been recognized.²¹ Rhetorical presuppositions helped determine the thought of the earliest advocates of Christianity, including Tertullian,²² Gregory of Nazianzus,²³ and Augustine.²⁴ In fact, the fourth book of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* influenced not only Christian appropriations of rhetoric, but the rhetorical tradition generally.²⁵ The confluence of Christian theology and classical rhetoric is quite remarkable, extending even to its vocabulary.²⁶

Rhetoric has been gaining prominence in recent theological reflection; in fact, the revival of interest in rhetoric within the human sciences generally, and in literary criticism in particular, has made some mention of the subject *de rigueur* for many theologians.²⁷ But thus far, few

²¹ The seminal work is George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina, 1984). See also James L. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1987).

²² Robert Dick Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1971).

²³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969).

²⁴ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Boston: Beacon, 1961; reprint Berkeley, Calif.: University of Calif., 1970) chap. 2.

²⁵ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950; reprint Berkeley: Univ. of Calif., 1969) 49–50.

²⁶ Kinneavy's book is premised on the observation, already noted by Burke (in *A Rhetoric of Motives* 52), and by Bauer's *Lexicon* before him, that *peithō* and related words connote both "persuasion" and "belief."

²⁷ Unfortunately, the long rhetorical tradition is often mentioned only in passing; Tracy's brief comment in *Plurality and Ambiguity* 30 is typical. Despite its suggestive subtitle, Ray Hart's book was primarily a foreshadowing of the theological problems raised by postmodernism; see *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968; reprint, with an Introduction by Mark C. Taylor, Atlanta: Scholars, 1985). More recently, the intersection of theology and rhetoric has been explored by David Klemm; see, for example, "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology: Through Barth and Heidegger," *JAAR* 55 (1987) 443–69. Klemm seems primarily interested in offering an analysis of the tropes in theological discourse—an enterprise which may be called "rhetorical criticism" (the use of rhetorical categories in the analysis of texts). Hundreds of articles and dissertations explore "The Rhetoric of X," where X is a theologian, a type of theology, a theological text, or (very often) a passage of Scripture. For Frans Jozef van Beeck, rhetoric becomes an explicit basis for the treatment of a specific

Christian thinkers have been “persuaded” to turn to rhetoric as a means of clarifying the current methodological muddle.

A “rhetorical method” would be analogous to the approach which Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has suggested for the field of biblical interpretation:

A rhetorical hermeneutic does not assume that the text is a window to historical reality, nor does it operate with a correspondence theory of truth. It does not understand historical sources as data and evidence but sees them as perspectival discourse constructing their worlds and symbolic universes. . . . Not detached value-neutrality but an explicit articulation of one’s rhetorical strategies, interested perspectives, ethical criteria, theoretical frameworks, religious presuppositions, and sociopolitical locations for critical public discussion are appropriate in such a rhetorical paradigm of biblical scholarship.²⁸

This is precisely the sort of paradigm shift required in Christian theology generally, if it hopes to transcend the analytic assumptions to which it currently remains beholden.

The need for a “rhetorical turn” in theology has been further specified by Rebecca Chopp. She notes that any notion of authority “is concerned with persuasive discourse in relationship to matters of deliberation in the polis.”²⁹ As such, she argues, the authority of theology is rhetorical, determined by the assent of the community it addresses. The task of theology is to persuade others to thought and action. Such persuasion will be unable to operate in a value-free, individualistic mode; it must take account of the moral presuppositions of both speaker and audience, as well as the “material concerns, resources, and strategies in the present situation.”³⁰

The complete articulation of a “rhetorical method” would be a project of considerable length, and cannot be attempted here. However, four of the most prominent marks of such a method can be noted in passing. A rhetorical method would feature: an affirmation of ethical and political interests; a detailed attention to concrete practice; a goal of therapy, rather than construction; and a commitment of nonviolence.

theological *locus*, namely Christology. See *Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric*, Theological Inquiries Series, ed. Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P. (New York: Paulist, 1979).

²⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Ethics of Interpretation: De-Centering Biblical Scholarship,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988) 13–14.

²⁹ Rebecca Chopp, “Theological Persuasion: Rhetoric, Warrants, and Suffering,” in *Worldviews and Warrants: Plurality and Authority in Theology*, ed. William Schweiker (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1987) 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 20.

Ethical Interest

Theological reflection is never disinterested. All theory and knowledge is dependent on relationships of power, and a successful argument is always a victory on behalf of certain structures and groups. This point is often obscured, however, by a method which is characterized primarily by claims to "openness." As long as interests are masked in the name of reasonableness or openness, the structures which they support cannot be effectively examined or critiqued. This is why the argumentation theorist Henry Johnstone has suggested that all arguments are necessarily *ad hominem* arguments: they are directed not just toward abstract argumentative positions, but toward people.³¹

A rhetorical method would grasp the nettle and acknowledge the ethical and political interests with which arguments are constructed. As Terry Eagleton has noted, classical rhetoric was the perfect vehicle for such an approach, because it

examined the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects. It was not worried about whether its objects of enquiry were speaking or writing, poetry or philosophy, fiction or historiography: its horizon was nothing less than the field of discursive practices in society as a whole, and its particular interest lay in grasping such practices as forms of power and performance.³²

Of course, we may not always be able to identify our own interests with perfect success; sometimes we come to see ourselves only with the help of another. But if we are at least willing to admit the *inevitability* of political and ethical partisanship, the quintessentially modern fear of commitment can be replaced by a constructive affirmation of interests.

Attention to Praxis

An argument is successful when it moves the audience to action; it is therefore unlikely to succeed unless it takes account of an audience's assumptions and motives. These cannot be accessed in the abstract, but only through attention to concrete practices. Members of an audience make judgments based on the linguistic, epistemological, political, and ethical practices in which they have been formed; the speaker who ignores such practices will rarely provoke action.

Attention to praxis requires more than a commitment to an abstract notion of *phronēsis*; it requires a sociopolitical analysis of the audience.

³¹ Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "Philosophy and Argumentum ad Hominem' Revisited," in *Validity and Rhetoric in Philosophical Argumentation: An Outlook in Transition* (University Park, Pa.: Dialogue Press of Man and World, 1978) 53–61.

³² Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1983) 205.

This need was recognized, long before the advent of the discipline of sociology, by the rhetorical tradition. Rhetoric

saw speaking and writing not merely as textual objects, to be aesthetically contemplated or endlessly deconstructed, but as forms of *activity* inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences, and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in which they were embedded.³³

All such "social purposes and conditions" must be acknowledged, even those once disregarded as "low culture." In addition, successful persuasion will require a concrete engagement with the world in which the audience lives: an active solidarity. Only such participative engagement can provide the speaker with a full account of the ways in which an audience is moved to action. For example, audiences may frequently be persuaded to *think* about the poor; but only if the speaker attends to concrete beliefs and practices will audiences be persuaded to *act on behalf* of the poor.

Concomitant to such engagement with present practices is an ongoing investigation into the origin and development of those practices; therefore, a rhetorical method must be archeological and genealogical. Theologians should be willing to write what communication theorists call "rhetorical histories": examinations of the ways in which persuasive discourse and action have succeeded and failed. Of course, a successful argument is not necessarily a morally sound one; and so rhetorical analysis must also take into account the way in which the character of the speaker is evaluated by the particular audience. Such analyses would become a standard part of the construction of rhetorical histories.

The need for such endeavors is underscored by Stephen Mailloux in his articulation of a "rhetorical hermeneutics" for literary criticism. He suggests that such an approach should

provide histories of how particular theoretical and critical discourses have evolved. Why? Because acts of persuasion always take place against an ever-changing background of shared and disputed assumptions, questions, assertions, and so forth. Any full rhetorical analysis of interpretation must therefore describe this tradition of discursive practices in which acts of interpretive persuasion are embedded. Thus rhetorical hermeneutics leads inevitably to rhetorical histories.³⁴

Only by such attention to effective history can we understand and evaluate the persuasive force of theological discourse.

³³ Ibid. 206.

³⁴ Steven Mailloux, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985) 631.

Therapeutic Intent

A rhetorical method would abandon the goal of building definitive and totalizing systems. Rhetoric must attend to the specificity of the individual argument and the situation in which it is promulgated; thus it cannot construct all-inclusive theories. Of course, no method can completely escape the all-consuming nature of theory; even an "antitheory" is a theory. But a rhetorical method is more likely to avoid this trap, because it acknowledges the dynamism of language and the linguisticity of argument. Rhetorical method admits the inevitability of theory, but recognizes that "theory is already ensconced in the practices."³⁵

For example, a rhetorical method would not attempt to offer "rules" for the use of a particular theological term; rather, it would examine how the term is used in particular instances. What connections does such a word evoke? How will these connections vary as the composition of the audience changes? What role has it played, and what role does it continue to play, in arguments about particular theological doctrines? Questions such as these would take priority over matters of definition and construction.

Commitment to Nonviolence

Rhetoric is often portrayed as a violent endeavor. The metaphors of argumentation have been described as "coercive": *powerful, knockdown, force, punch*.³⁶ Unfortunately, this description has often been accepted with little further reflection—even by, for example, so careful a commentator as Calvin Schrag. Schrag believes that "there are undeniable features of coercion in argumentation as an instrument of persuasion. Left to its own resources argumentation as a technique of disputation postures its *telos* as the obliteration or demolition of an opponent rather than as the achievement of understanding and mutual enlightenment."³⁷ This seems to deny the inevitability of argumentation, positing the alternative of "a more enlightened discourse." Any appeal to "mutual enlightenment" fails to acknowledge the implicit power relationships operative in all discourse.

Far from being a violent activity, however, persuasion is the only real *alternative* to violence. The choice is well illustrated at the opening of Plato's *Republic* (327c), where Polemarchus offers Socrates two choices: he must agree to stay, or else he must fight. Socrates objects: "Isn't there still one other possibility—our persuading you that you must let us go?"

³⁵ Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1986) 201.

³⁶ Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1981) 4.

³⁷ Schrag 184.

The *Republic* makes an implicit appeal in favor of persuasive discourse over a doctrine of "might makes right." Similarly, Aristotle's "artistic" proofs are presented as an *alternative* to oaths, contracts, and tortures (all of which are considerably more violent than persuasion). In fact, the nonviolent stance of rhetoric is especially apparent in its theological application, because in matters of religion, universal claims have too often been enforced by violent means. As Vico recognized, the suppression of the polysemous rhetorical tradition in favor of a rationalism of "substance" is connected to "an entire religious culture which both sacralises violence, and through its successive self-appropriations violently conceals this source of sacrality."³⁸

These four "marks" provide a brief sketch of the role of rhetoric as theological method. To examine its value in a more concrete way, the following section will undertake a brief "rhetorical" consideration of two central concerns: hermeneutics and doctrine. A rhetorical method can help theologians transcend the "analytic" approach, and thus overcome many of the confusions to which theological method has been subject in the modern age.

RHETORIC IN HERMENEUTICS AND DOCTRINE

According to many contemporary hermeneutical theorists, interpretation should be conversational; argumentation and explanation are auxiliary enterprises which are only necessary when conversation fails. In fact, for many writers, *rhetoric* remains simply a term of abuse,³⁹ these commentators perpetuate a situation in which the close relationship of hermeneutics and rhetoric is "seen" and yet not really "observed."⁴⁰ In contrast, a rhetorical hermeneutics is a socially constructed method; it cannot be adequately described by the model of conversation. Interpretation depends not on "a good conversation" between text and reader, but on the entire range of circumstances within which persuasion takes place.

The rhetorical nature of hermeneutics is best illustrated by examining how an audience responds to a speaker. When workers attend a union rally, for example, their assessment of a speaker's argument will not depend only, or even primarily, on a logical analysis of the speaker's arguments. Rather, the assessment will depend on whether they find the speaker worthy of their confidence. This is affected not only by the

³⁸ John Milbank, "Theology Without Substance: Christianity, Signs, Origins. Part Two," *Literature and Theology* 2 (1988) 144.

³⁹ See, for example, Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* 39, 45.

⁴⁰ Cf. Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith, "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979) 347-63.

speaker's disposition and tone of voice, but on external information to which members of the audience may have been exposed. Perhaps they will evaluate the speaker on the basis of her or his professional credentials or record of distinguished service; or perhaps the speaker has been introduced approvingly by someone they know and trust. Moreover, the listeners' receptivity may be profoundly affected by contextual factors: their reaction to an earlier speech, their anticipation of an event to follow, or even the availability of food and drink.

The same evaluative forces are at work when a reader approaches a text. Readers learn about an author in a variety of ways: they read book reviews, listen to the judgments of others, or obtain biographical information from dust jackets and other sources, both published and unpublished. Usually, readers choose to read a particular text for a reason: they have been asked to read it by an acquaintance, or they trust the recommendation of a friend. In most cases, they have already made a preliminary evaluation of the author before they ever pick up the book.

The reader's preevaluation of the author's character may often make all the difference in determining the persuasive appeal of the text. In fact, even the appeal of a (so-called) classic text is only as strong as the moral authority of its (perceived) author. Is the New Testament a classic? Not to atheists who believe that Christianity is responsible for great evil. Is *Being and Time* a classic? That may very well depend upon how the reader evaluates Heidegger's flirtation with Nazism. All talk of "classic" texts is of little value unless we can name one; and as soon as we name one, we discover the thoroughly ethical and political nature of any assignment of "classic" status.

At this point, one may object that a postmodern account of theological method cannot rely so heavily on such concerns about authors and speakers. In an age which advocates more attention to the autonomous text, to *écriture*, how can we maintain such a strong interest in its source?

The answer to this question is complex.⁴¹ Admittedly, those who advocate a hermeneutic which assumes "the death of the author" are correct to resist a normative notion of authorial intent. But this should not be allowed to eclipse the profound way in which receptivity is influenced by an author's moral authority; for its "meaning" is already ineluctably bound to the audience's evaluation of the author's biography. These interconnections become especially important when we accept the ethical and political character of theological reflection. As Donald

⁴¹ A profound contribution on this vexed question is offered by Calvin Schrag in *Communicative Praxis* (see note 35 above). See Joseph C. Faly's perceptive review of this work in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 21 (1988) 294-304.

MacKinnon has noted,⁴² theologians should not ignore “ugly” biographical details—for example, Kittel’s vicious anti-Semitism, or Tillich’s apparent abuse of the teacher-student relationship.

Similarly, the process of hermeneutics is influenced by the conditions under which the reader reads. Access to a text may be restricted by political, economic, or social constraints. Readers are influenced by the evaluations offered by their contemporaries, as well as by their own emotional disposition, and by the chronological position which a particular work occupies in their pattern of reading. Such influences are not adequately described by the model of conversation, for I cannot “explain” to the text that I am currently reading that the book I read yesterday “told” me something important. Better: The persuasive effect of the book I read today will be influenced by my participation in previous rhetorical situations.

These elements of reception and evaluation would be accented by a rhetorical approach to hermeneutics. The knowledge gained through interpretation is produced by the rhetorical situation, and its truth is bound to the discursive practices of a concrete location.⁴³ This does not lead to relativism, but to an acknowledgement that norms and values are always already instantiated in particular rhetorical situations.⁴⁴ This differs markedly from the commonplace notion of truth as “disclosure.” A rhetorical method would insist that truth is dependent upon the specific modes of participation of both speaker and audience in a particular rhetorical situation.

Finally, a hermeneutics specified by persuasion, rather than by conversation, would prevent the obfuscation of political and ethical interests in the name of a respect for “classics.” As Sharon Welch has observed, an affirmation of the classic tends to clash with a claim to political solidarity. Commenting on the preface of David Tracy’s book (in which he acknowledges his debt to conversations in the academy), Welch remarks: “Given this primarily academic location, it is not surprising, though still distressing, that more respect is voiced in this one passage for ‘beloved classics’ than for the victims of the hidden legacy of oppression carried within those texts.”⁴⁵ These political commitments must be

⁴² Donald MacKinnon, “Tillich, Frege, Kittel: Some Reflections on a Dark Theme” (1975), in *Explorations in Theology* 5 (London: SCM, 1979), 129–37.

⁴³ The relationship between rhetoric and epistemology is complex, and cannot be explicated here. On the current state of the inquiry into “rhetoric as epistemic,” see Schrag, *Communicative Praxis* 187–96; and Walter M. Carleton, “On Rhetorical Knowing,” in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985) 227–37.

⁴⁴ Cf. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1980) 317–21.

⁴⁵ Welch 511.

acknowledged as a *starting point* of hermeneutical inquiry, not simply as its goal.

A rhetorical method could play a similar role in analyzing the development of doctrine. Doctrines do not follow the model of a "rule" so much as the model of an "argument." A doctrine is a concrete instance in which a speaker (a doctrinal authority of some sort) attempts to persuade an audience (the faithful) of a particular way of understanding the faith. For example, the doctrine of consubstantiality was, and continues to be, an attempt by theological and political authorities to convince Christians that they ought to think about Jesus in much the same way that they think about God. These authorities make their case with *arguments*, such as "God is one," "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," and "there was no time when he was not." The success of these arguments was not due to a discovery of the right instantiation of the right rules. Rather, believers were persuaded by a complex combination of the moral authority of bishops and councils, the examples and enthymemes they offered, and perhaps even a general disposition to attribute divine qualities to one whom they called their Savior. Needless to say, some Christians may also have accepted the doctrine due to what Aristotle euphemistically calls "nonartistic proofs": laws, contracts, witnesses, tortures, and oaths.

Similarly, the dogma of the Assumption is persuasive to some because of the moral character of those who promulgated it ("Pius XII was good, therefore this dogma is good"). Others may be persuaded because they consider themselves "good Catholics," and define a "good Catholic" as one who affirms Roman Catholic dogma. Others, including quite a large number of non-Catholics, are persuaded to believe in the Marian dogmas for a variety of other reasons—from their friendship with and respect for a Roman Catholic believer to their own spiritual experiences while praying the rosary.

A rhetorical approach to the nature of doctrine would pay close attention to the actual practices of believers, rather than to theories about how doctrine might work in the abstract. Furthermore, it would not attempt to separate the language of a particular doctrine from the "reality" of which it is an instantiation. Christians have changed their mind about war, for example, because they have been *persuaded* to change their minds. The means of persuasion may have included not only the moral authority of those who moved them (churches, governments, neighbors, soldiers), but also a personal knowledge of conditions which they have come to describe as "war" and "peace."

Sometimes, a doctrine may persuade through arguments which seem very much like the formal argumentation of logic (e.g., syllogistic reason-

ing). Nevertheless, in such cases, the endoxic subject matter of Christian theology precludes any recourse to formal validity. (Because such arguments bear a family resemblance to syllogistic reasoning, Chaïm Perelman described them as "quasi-logical."⁴⁶) For example, some Christian pacifists base their belief on a simple enthymeme: "Jesus lived peaceably; therefore, so will I." Of course, the persuasive force of this enthymeme depends, in turn, on a number of additional arguments—for example, that one should believe that Jesus did in fact live peaceably; that one should emulate Jesus; and that historical changes since the time of Jesus do not necessitate a revision of this argument. Needless to say, these are not the sort of arguments which can be resolved analytically, as can a multiplication problem. Their persuasiveness will depend upon a confluence of character, disposition, time, and place.

Inquiries into hermeneutics and doctrine would be better served by developing a rhetorical approach to theological method. A rhetorical method puts political and ethical implications in the forefront. It does not search for a general theory which would explain the inner workings of some aspect of theological reflection. Rather, it examines particular cases, uncovers argumentative strategies, and recognizes the interdependence of speaker, audience, and argument.

WIDER SCOPE OF A RHETORICAL METHOD

In addition to offering a way out of the malaise in which contemporary theology finds itself, a rhetorical method could address a much wider range of problems on the current theological agenda. For example, specific doctrinal *loci* could be examined with attention to the arguments which have been (and continue to be) used to justify their role in religious belief. Similarly, the work of specific theologians could be examined—not only a tropological analysis of their writing, but a consideration of the entire range of persuasive elements in their work. This would require attention to the public knowledge of a writer's character, and to the particularities of its reception by various audiences.

The advantages of a rhetorical method over current theological strategies can be summarized by identifying three "moments" of rhetorical analysis. These are not consecutive, nor even distinct, aspects of a rhetorical method; but they all contribute to its expository value. A description and an example of each of these moments can help identify the distinctive features of a rhetorical method, as well as providing an

⁴⁶ Chaïm Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1982) 53; for a fuller analysis, see Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1969) 193–270.

implicit argument in its favor. These three moments are: deconstruction, critique, and liberation.

Rhetorical method includes a deconstructive moment. "Deconstruction" is here not so much a *terminus technicus* as the identification of a methodological decision; specifically, a rhetorical method seeks to identify the persuasive traces which inhabit theological discourse. Unlike much deconstructive criticism, a rhetorical deconstruction is never an end in itself. Nor can it simply be a game, in which one engages merely for the pleasure it evokes. Its goal is the identification of those persuasive appeals which are operative in a particular theological discourse, but which have traditionally been excluded from consideration.

For example, in debates concerning the real presence in the Eucharist, arguments have traditionally centered on matters such as fidelity to Scripture and tradition, or adequacy to the believer's religious experience. Admittedly, such matters are important; the moral authority of tradition, as well as the believer's receptivity, can help describe the persuasiveness of a doctrine. But a "rhetorical deconstruction" of eucharistic doctrine would attempt to identify additional factors affecting its persuasive appeal. For example, how did the doctrine of the real presence affect attitudes toward lay participation in communion? How have these attitudes shifted over time? How have political and theological power structures employed the "symbolic capital" (to use Pierre Bourdieu's term) of the real presence? The investigation of such questions can help develop a more nuanced description of theological arguments.

The second moment of rhetoric is a critical moment: an examination of the contextual appeal of theological discourse. The focus of this critique is not limited to the logical structure of argument; it examines the entire rhetorical situation. What structures support the authority of the speaker for a particular audience? How thoroughly does the speaker understand the audience and use this knowledge to construct a persuasive argument? How does the audience understand its own interests in the outcome of the argument, and how is this self-understanding altered by the way in which the argument is presented?

For example, the role of suffering in Christology has traditionally been controlled by (among other things) a notion of divine impassibility. A critical rhetorical method will ask: why was this notion persuasive? Whose interests were served by its general acceptance? What arguments were used by theologians who sought to reassert a notion of divine suffering, and whose interests were served by this counterargument? To mention a specific instance, does Moltmann's emphasis on "the crucified God" stand in the service of, or in isolation from, those who suffer in the present? Or does his position even underwrite a certain "natural order"

to relationships of dominance and oppression?⁴⁷

The third moment of rhetorical analysis—and here I acknowledge my own political commitments—is a moment of human liberation. A rhetorical method attempts to reveal concrete political interests, unmasking those which support the structures of human subjugation. It also traces the effective history of the arguments which undergird a particular theological position, thus identifying its relationship to structures of power and influence. Of course, the mere *identification* of unjust power relationships in no way guarantees their demise; a rhetorical method cannot guarantee human liberation. But by putting ethical and political assumptions in the forefront, it exposes the ways in which those who actually *oppose* the interests of marginalized groups can sometimes appear to speak in their favor.

Such a claim is made, for example, by Michael Novak, much of whose work advocates democratic capitalism as the best way to help the poor. Novak's arguments are quite vulnerable to critique on more traditional grounds, e.g., his tendency to abstraction and overgeneralization.⁴⁸ But a rhetorical critique would not stop here; it would identify the structural alignments which lead some people to find Novak's argument persuasive. Exemplary in this respect is the approach of Lee Cormie who, in a review of Novak's *Will It Liberate?*, comments that

the tone of this book is one of respectful, scholarly dialogue about complicated issues. But it must also be noted that the forces Novak identifies with and supports, such as large corporations and the United States government in its policies in Latin America, are militantly committed to snuffing out dialogue over political and economic alternatives, to silencing the critics of capitalist development, to reducing alternatives to the single option of the "free market" and its frequent servant, the military government, which relies on policies of terror, disappearances, torture, and murder to maintain "peace and order."⁴⁹

Cormie's method here can be called "rhetorical" insofar as it identifies the specific interests which define a writer's political and ethical authority. A full-fledged rhetorical analysis of Novak's work would go still further, for example, identifying the economic and political interests of his intended audience in the United States, and comparing these to the interests of the Latin American poor.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., the critiques offered by Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (New York: Orbis, 1986) 115–117; and Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 26–27.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., the critique in Roberto S. Goizueta, *Liberation, Method, and Dialogue: Enrique Dussel and North American Theological Discourse* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 131–35.

⁴⁹ Lee Cormie, review of Michael Novak, *Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology*, in *Theology Today* 45 (1988) 372.

Again, such analysis cannot insure progress in the cause of human liberation. But it can clarify arguments about liberation by describing the relationship between an author's theoretical approach and its practical consequences. A rhetorical method assumes that theories are already embodied in concrete practices; for example, a theoretical appeal for more capitalism in Latin America is not "just a theory," but grows from the practices in which the author and the audience are already intimately involved. This analysis helps reveal the interests which underlie the persuasive appeal of discourse; this in turn helps to predict the ways in which power would be redistributed, if a particular theory were implemented in practice.

CONCLUSION

These three "moments" of rhetorical analysis point to the practical consequences of a rhetorical method. It would provide a concrete means of implementing the best theoretical insights of a number of recent commentators on the postmodern condition. Theologians have often sought to employ the work of literary critics, sociologists, and philosophers; but rarely are these insights developed as a coherent method. While theology should maintain a certain playful randomness, too sweeping an eclecticism has a tendency "to reduce great thinkers to characters in a farce, their ideas to slogans."⁵⁰ A rhetorical method can provide a means of integrating, in a manner attentive to concrete *praxis*, a wide variety of recent insights in literary analysis, critical theory, and political hermeneutics.

The brief treatment which this essay has offered is still very far from a theoretical and practical account of Christian theology as persuasive discourse. What is needed is not only a serious engagement with the rhetorical tradition, both ancient and modern, but also a wider participation in both the theory and practice of argument. The task is a considerable one, but so are its rewards. Not only does it offer a way out of our current circle of methodological boredom; it can also provide a new perspective on a wide range of issues in contemporary theology.

To attempt to articulate these insights as a specified theological "method" will always run the risk of generalization and abstraction. The risk is reduced in the present case, however, because (as this essay has suggested) a rhetorical method recognizes the practical grounding of theory. Moreover, without ongoing attempts at greater methodological

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Stout, review of David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, in *Theology Today* 44 (1988) 507.

specificity, the brilliant theoretical work which has been done over the past several decades will never result in a concrete improvement in the human condition. Such a theoretical mystification of the postmodern critique would be a crime to which Christian theologians, of all people, should not allow themselves to become accessories.



THE DYSFUNCTIONAL CHURCH

Addiction and Codependency
in the Family of Catholicism

Michael H. Crosby

Reduced to its simplest form, *The Dysfunctional Church* maintains that: – The Catholic church is an addict, an institutional addict. – it's addicted to preserving the male, celibate, clerical model of the church – and many Catholics exhibit patterns of classic codependency which reinforce this addiction.

The Dysfunctional Church is a clear, loving, and unequivocal intervention. The author calls on church leaders and all other codependents in the church to face their addiction and seek recovery through spiritual conversion. For those who have left the church in anger, Crosby's analysis invites compassion; for those who remain in frustration, it offers hope; and for the many who feel condemned to the church's use of authority, it offers a way of recovery.

THE
DYSFUNCTIONAL
CHURCH



MICHAEL H. CROSBY

0-87793-455-X

256 pages,

\$9.95

Order from your local bookstore



AVE MARIA PRESS

NOTRE DAME, INDIANA 46556

(219) 287-2831



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.