RECLAIMING RHETORIC IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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THE DYNAMIC CHARACTER of the Catholic understanding of the Chris-
tian tradition was reaffirmed at the Second Vatican Council. This
achievement offset and overturned a one-sided emphasis on a fixed,
propositional, logic-sustained, and authoritarian approach to tradition
associated with certain tendencies in post-Tridentine and neo-
Scholastic theologies. Vatican II's alternative was to present tradition
as historical, biblical, sacramental, and communal. This renewed un-
derstanding of the Christian tradition was accomplished not only by
the hard labor of retrieving biblical, liturgical, and patristic sources of
Christian faith, but also by earnest commitment to an ecclesiology of
communion and dialogue. Living tradition requires communion and
dialogue: this is the legacy of the council.

Since the council, wide-ranging concerns about the continued vital-
ity of the Christian tradition have been raised. Diffuse fears about the
erosion of traditional beliefs and practices have been accompanied by
ongoing debates about modern secularization and postmodern plural-
ism and relativism. The necessity and limits of criticism and change in
tradition have been hotly contested, occasioned especially by debates
about sexual ethics and liberation and feminist theologies. And, as if
that were not enough, ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, and
efforts at inculturation in non-Western societies have raised a host of
questions about the relationship between alien traditions and the past
and future development of the Catholic tradition. These very different
concerns have certainly helped to clarify the communal and dialogical
understanding of tradition advocated by the council, but they have also
stretched it considerably.

In response to these issues, I have joined many others in urging that
the conventional Catholic concern to highlight the harmony and unity
within the Christian tradition must be complemented with an appre-
ciation of the literary, social, and theological diversity of traditions,
and a recognition of the conflicts between them. In addition, in cases of
doctrinal change, the standard efforts to defend continuity and cumu-
lative development in the Christian tradition need to be joined with an
honest admission of discontinuity in teachings and practices both as a
historical reality and as a future possibility. And furthermore, in the
generation and transmission of the Christian tradition, the orthodox
affirmation of divine inspiration, indefectibility, and infallibility must

allow for a greater receptivity to the Spirit working through human creativity and criticism in the traditioning process.[1]

Seeking to address these contested issues, numerous postconciliar theologians have advanced an understanding of the Christian tradition that reflects the ecclesiology of dialogical communion and draws from communication theorists in philosophy and the social sciences.[2] As a result, dialogue or communication has become a focal metaphor or framework for understanding the nature of tradition.[3] This has generated an understanding of the Christian tradition, fully in accord with the Second Vatican Council, as a communicative process and practice through which deliberations, judgments, and decisions about the reality or content of the Christian faith take place. So understood, the Christian tradition is a conversation extended through time and around the globe about things that matter—the true, the good, and the beautiful as affirmed and practiced in Christian faith. This communicative action is exhibited in biblical traditions especially, but also in doctrinal and liturgical traditions; and through conversation with these traditions people are initiated into the living communion of faith. The mystical, liturgical, ethical, and political practices of the Christian community both embody and nurture this dialogical act of traditioning.

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[1] See Bradford E. Hinze, "The End of Salvation History," *Horizons* 18 (1991) 227–45; idem, "Narrative Contexts, Doctrinal Reform," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 417–33; Siegfried Wiedenhofer, "Grundprobleme des theologischen Traditionsbegriffs," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 112 (1990) 18–29; idem, "Traditionsbrüche—Traditionsabbruch?" in *Traditionsabbruch—Ende des Christentums?* ed. M. von Brück and J. Werbick (Würzburg: Echter, 1995) 55–76. On creativity and doctrinal development, see John E. Thiel, *Imagination and Authority: Theological Authorship in the Modern Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

[2] Especially noteworthy are the following: David Tracy's views on tradition, inspired by the work of Hans Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas, in *Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), and *Plurality and Ambiguity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); a Habermasian approach developed by Paul Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory: The Discourse of the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); and Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Robert Schreiter's semiotic-linguistic model in *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985) and in "Theorie und Praxis interkultureller Kommunikationskompetenz in der Theologie," in *Anerkennung der Anderen: Eine theologische Grunddimension interkultureller Kommunikation,* ed. Edmund Arens, Quaestiones Disputatae 156 (Freiburg: Herder, 1995) 9–30. Siegfried Wiedenhofer, drawing on the philosophy of Richard Schaeffler, in "Traditionsbrüche—Traditionsabbruch?" and in "Der abendländische theologische Traditionsbegriff in interkultureller und interreligiöser Perspektive," in *Fides quaerens intellectum: Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie,* ed. M. Kessler et al. (Tübingen: Francke, 1992) 495–507.

[3] For a discussion of alternative models of tradition, especially organic life, progress, and pedagogy, which have been influential in the modern period, see Dietrich Wiederkehr, "Das Prinzip der Überlieferung," in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 4 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988) 110–17; Johannes Stöhr, "Modellvorstellungen im Verständnis der Dogmenentwicklung," in *Reformata Reformanda,* ed. E. Iserloh and K. Repgen (Münster: Aschendorff, 1965) 2.596–630; and Bradford E. Hinze, *Narrating History, Developing Doctrine: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Sebastian Drey* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993) 62–81.

Concurrent with these efforts to clarify the communicative character of the Christian tradition, there has been a rediscovery of the role of rhetoric in the manifold expressions of the Christian tradition. The renaissance of interest in Christian rhetoric is evident in the new scrutiny given to the use of rhetoric in biblical materials and in theological writings through the history of Christianity. Moreover, a small but growing number of constructive theologians have accentuated the role of rhetoric in theology as appropriate to the nature of the theological enterprise and as well suited to the exigencies of the so-called postmodern period. The evidence is clear: the rediscovery of rhetoric is occurring across theological disciplines.

This article argues that attention to the role of rhetoric in the Christian tradition contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of this communicative process.[4] The various components of rhetoric, which I will delineate, render intelligible diverse facets of tradition. Before we consider how the study of rhetoric advances a comprehensive understanding of tradition, however, I must first define rhetoric.

Rhetoric is often understood, following the classic formulations of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, as the study of persuasive forms of discourse—oral and, by extension, written. As such, the study of rhetoric aims to identify various kinds of arguments and topics, and attends to the use of figures of speech, narratives, and examples in the construction of rhetorical arguments.[5] These are the choices, forms, patterns, and strategies that constitute the discursive practice of rhetoric. So understood rhetoric is dynamically related both to a theory of argumentation, which includes logic, and to a theory of poetic language.

But the study of rhetoric ought not to be reduced to the analysis of persuasive forms of discourse; it should include the entire rhetorical process. The rhetorical process is a complex of factors that encompasses the entire social and cultural matrix of public discourse, and includes the tasks, resources, and character of the speaker or author who seeks to address a particular rhetorical situation, the various choices of persuasive forms of speech, and the role of human passions,

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[4] This article examines how rhetoric clarifies the nature of tradition, and not only theology. It implies that rhetorical considerations are of central importance in theology. But, here I will not directly address the whole range of issues posed by the role of rhetoric in theology.

[5] Aristotle, The "Art" of Rhetoric, trans. J. H. Freese, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1926); Cicero, De inventione, trans. H. M. Hubbell, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1949); idem., De oratore, trans. E. W. Sutton, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1942); Marcus Fabius Quintilian, Institutio oratoria, trans. H. E. Butler, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1920–22). On classical rhetoric, see Brian Vickers, In Defense of Rhetoric (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); Burton Mack, Rhetoric and The New Testament (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 19–48; for a systematic statement, see Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969).

reason, and action in the receptions of the audience. By examining this network of issues the investigator comes to appreciate the communal, contextual, and pragmatic dimensions of persuasive speech.[6] The study of rhetoric thus illuminates an entire process of communal discourse, from the formation of persuasive public discourse by speakers and writers addressing communities to the communal reception of this speech, and spiraling beyond to new reconfigurations and new receptions.

The study of the rhetorical process contributes to a comprehensive understanding of tradition in at least four ways, all of which are relevant to the concerns about tradition raised during the postconciliar period. First, it gives attention to the full range of persuasive modes of discourse, including various forms of rational argumentation utilizing figures of speech, narratives, and examples, used in deliberating about and communicating the truth-claims, and the moral and esthetic claims, of the tradition. Thus it accentuates so-called holistic forms of argument that employ the primary language of faith, although it need not exclude the benefits of other modes of argumentation.[7] Second, it clarifies the legitimacy and the importance of creativity and criticism in the genesis, transmission, and ongoing development of the Christian tradition, facets of the traditioning process that are periodically discredited or minimized in the interests of defending, in the name of fidelity to the Christian tradition, certain understandings of its inspiration, stability, and continuity. Third, it fosters a fuller appreciation of doctrinal diversity and discontinuity without necessarily sacrificing the Church's commitment to ecclesial communion, unity, and historical continuity. A fourth advantage of the analysis of the rhetorical character of tradition, especially pertinent for criteriological considerations, is that it allows us to identify the dynamic center of gravity and measure of the traditioning process by illuminating how the communicative action of tradition is held accountable both to the community

[6] I am using the term rhetorical process to refer to the dynamic interrelationship between speaker/writer, audience, discourse, and context of origin and reception. "Context of origin" refers to what has sometimes been designated the rhetorical situation, described as the exigence or occasion (in reality, or as interpreted by the speaker/writer) which calls forth a response in rhetorical argumentation. See L. F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968) 1–14; Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16 (1983) 154–61; Barbara A. Biesecker, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of *Différence*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22 (1989) 110–30.

[7] Holistic arguments in theology utilize the primary language of faith as presented in the Scripture, liturgies, and the creedal and official discourse of the Church. Holistic arguments can be contrasted, by way of example, with transcendental arguments on the one hand, and historical-critical arguments on the other, both of which employ technical modes of analysis and argument, but neither of which excludes the others in principle, thus enabling hybrid modes of argumentation. I understand holistic arguments to coincide with what Francis Schüssler Fiorenza calls hermeneutical reconstruction in *Foundational Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 304–6; also see Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985) 71–91.

and its practices and to the dynamic subject matter or reality of tradition: the saving mystery of Christian faith in the triune God.

DISCOVERING RHETORIC IN TRADITION

The role of rhetoric in the Christian tradition has been in evidence since earliest Christianity, but not always appreciated. Only since the 1970s has the use of rhetoric in Christian discourse begun to receive sustained and systematic attention.[8] A brief survey of some of the ways that rhetoric is being recovered and employed in the theological disciplines—biblical, historical, and constructive—will serve not only to support my basic contention that rhetoric is a necessary component in understanding the nature of tradition, but also to convey the importance of cross-fertilization between these disciplines if a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of tradition is to be cultivated.

In the landmark mid-century studies of the nature of the Christian tradition by Roman Catholic scholars Yves Congar, Josef Geiselmann, and George Tavard, the role of rhetoric in the constitution and handing on of tradition was not explicitly addressed.[9] Their studies initiated a wider and more biblically oriented approach to the subject of tradition that moved beyond the propositional focus prevalent in influential circles in neo-Scholastic Catholic theology, which concentrated on logic, syllogisms, and scientific demonstrations rather than on the full array of rhetorical considerations.[10] These studies of tradition were

[8] Werner Jaeger and Henri Marrou were mindful of the role of rhetoric in their important studies of education in the ancient world, but did not concentrate exclusively on it: Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1945–55; original German edition, 1936–1955); Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1982; original French edition, 1948). Marrou gave considerable attention to rhetoric in *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 4th ed., 1958; first edition, 1938). More importantly Jaeger's student George Kennedy has devoted himself to writing a history of rhetoric in the West, which began with *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1963), including classical Christian contributions. In addition, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric* offered a sustained defense of the importance of rhetoric as the antidote for Cartesianism and scientific positivism. The works by Kennedy and by Perelman and Obrechts-Tyteca have profoundly influenced some biblical and patristic scholars.

[9] Yves Congar treats typology in early Christian exegesis and the role of communication, but not in terms of rhetoric, in *Tradition and Traditions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966; French ed. 1960, 1963) 67–83, 348–75; also see George Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1959); Josef Rupert Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962); abridged translation by W. J. O'Hara, *The Meaning of Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966). For representative Protestant formulations, see Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (New Haven: Yale University, 1969); idem, *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (London: Hutchinson, 1970).

[10] Jan Walgrave discusses influential proponents of the logical theory of doctrinal development in *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 135–78, but without a word on rhetoric. It is especially puzzling that the role of rhetoric in doctrinal development has received such little attention

part of a growing body of theological writing that challenged a propositional and logical orientation toward revelation and called for alternative modes of analysis and argumentation: transcendental, historical, and symbolic. Yet none of the representatives of these newer approaches showed any explicit concern with the issues of rhetoric.

The most important impetus for reasserting the significance of rhetoric in the Christian tradition came from studies of biblical and early Christian literatures beginning in the late 1970s.[11] These new studies of the use of rhetoric in Christian texts built on earlier modern attempts to examine the literary character of the biblical texts, from the 18th-century focus on literary *Gattungen* (e.g. J. G. Herder and J. G. Eichhorn) to the verbal forms of oral traditions isolated and scrutinized during the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g. H. Gunkel and R. Bultmann). These compelling efforts to identify literary forms in relation to social life settings have gradually expanded to include not only form, redaction, and composition criticism, but also the classification of Greco-Roman rhetorical forms and genres.[12] Hans Dieter Betz's and Wilhelm Wuellner's analyses of the use of rhetorical strategies in Paul's letters marked the beginning of the renewed interest in rhetoric in New Testament studies.[13] Their work has been followed by the research of George Kennedy, Burton Mack, Vernon Robbins, and others on the sermons in the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospels, and the range of New Testament literature.[14] Central in these efforts has been the attempt to identify Greco-Roman classifications of arguments (forensic, epideictic, and deliberative), the parts of a rhetorical argument

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considering that the writings of the most influential contributor to the subject, John Henry Newman, exhibit the profound impact of his rhetorical training.

[11] Burton Mack identifies two antecedents: James Muilenburg's "After Form Criticism What?"—his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968, and Amos Wilder's *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); see Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* 12–13. Phyllis Trible discusses the contribution of her mentor, James Muilenburg, and his critics, in *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 25–87.

[12] The focus here is on historical-critical approaches to rhetorical practices in the Bible. This historical-rhetorical analysis attempts to identify Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical patterns which directly or indirectly bear upon early Christian literature. Later I will attend to a literary-rhetorical analysis of biblical texts that concentrates on the final form of the text as received, and interprets it drawing from rhetorical methods in contemporary literary criticism.

[13] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians,* Hermeneia Commentary (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Wilhelm Wuellner, "Paul's Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976) 330–51; "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation," in *Early Christian Literature and Classical Tradition,* ed. W. R. Schoedel and R. L. Wilken (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979) 177–88.

[14] George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984); Burton Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament,* note the bibliography; Burton Mack and Vernon Robbins, ed., *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1989); and Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, ed., *Rhetoric and the New Testament,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 90 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1993).

(e.g. *exordium, narratio, confirmatio, conclusio*), and specific rhetorical forms, strategies, and patterns (enthymemes, figurative language, examples, repetition, etc.) in New Testament materials. This work often explores how rhetorical concerns influence smaller units of argumentation, but it sometimes also suggests how these concerns drive selections from among wider genre options.[15] The operative assumption for much of this research is that, if one can identify the chosen rhetorical strategy, one can better determine the meaning of the text for the author, and perhaps the audience.

When considering the use of rhetoric in emergent Christianity, it is now widely admitted that Greco-Roman rhetoric should not be viewed in isolation. Serious attention must also be given to Jewish forms of inner-biblical exegesis, the use of rabbinic principles of interpretation (e.g. Hillel's seven Middoth), and various forms of commentary (e.g. midrashim), which have received renewed study in the work of Michael Fishbane, C. H. Dodd, Richard Hayes, James Kugel, and Rowan Greer, among others.[16] Although these Jewish exegetical methods do not explicitly set forth a theory of rhetoric, they do convey rhetorical choices and strategies for legal, deliberative, and exhortatory purposes that are important in their own right and have had an ongoing influence on Christian tradition.

Together Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical practices have had a profound impact not only on the genesis of biblical traditions, but also on their transmission, interpretation, application, and revision in the history of theology. As such, rhetoric serves not only in the formation and delivery of sermons, which is often commented on, but more fundamentally as a manner of thinking, writing, and argumentation in theology. This interest in the broader use of rhetoric in theology is evident in the recent wave of research into the writings of theologians from diverse historical periods: early Christian writers, Origen and Gregory of Nazianzus, Tertullian and Augustine; reformers and humanists, Calvin, Melanchthon, Erasmus, and the first Jesuits; moderns, John Henry Newman and Karl Barth. These studies differ in

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[15] Consider, e.g., the use of *encomium* and *historia* in rhetorical arguments and its significance for identifying the genre of the Gospels; see, e.g., Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), and Adela Yarbro Collins's review, "Genre and the Gospels," *Journal of Religion* 75 (1995) 239–46.

[16] On inner-biblical exegesis, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). On rabbinic principles of interpretation, see Louis Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8 (1971) 366–71. For a discussion of two rabbinic principles, *qal wahomer* and *gezera shewa*, in Paul's writings, see Carol Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), and Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989). Also see C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952); Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); James Kugel and Rowan Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

their aims and findings. A prominent interest concerns how rhetorical considerations influence the theological interpretation of Scripture.[17] Other works analyze specific rhetorical strategies,[18] or explore over-arching rhetorical concerns.[19] These studies are significant not only because they are uncovering important pieces of the history of the Christian use of rhetoric in theology, but also because they invite a wider understanding of the nature of the Christian tradition as a rhetorical process.[20]

In addition to the study of the use of rhetoric in individual texts and by individual theologians, the power and social effects of the Church's cumulative official rhetoric are coming under closer scrutiny. This research is sometimes motivated by an attempt to criticize or deconstruct anti-Semitism and patriarchy manifest in the Church's public discourse.[21] But there are also attempts to develop a more finely grained

[17] See, e.g., Frances Young, "The Rhetorical Schools and Their Influence on Patristic Exegesis," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick,* ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989) 182–99; Peter Walter, *Theologie aus dem Geist der Rhetorik: Zur Schriftauslegung des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1991). Training in grammar also influenced early Christian interpreters of the Bible, but how grammatical and rhetorical considerations and techniques were related in early Christianity merits further attention; see J. David Cassel, "Cyril of Alexandria and the Science of the Grammarians: A Study in the Setting, Purpose, and Emphasis of Cyril's *Commentary on Isaiah*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1992); and Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).

[18] See Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "The Prudential Augustine: The Virtuous Structure and Sense of His *Confessions*," *Recherches augustiniennes* 22 (1987) 129–50; Peter Auksi, *Christian Plain Style: The Evolution of a Spiritual Ideal* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University, 1995).

[19] See John W. O'Malley, "Erasmus and the History of Sacred Rhetoric: *The Ecclesiastes* of 1535," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 5 (1985) 1–29; William J. Bouwsma et al., *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987); Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety,* Columbia Studies in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995); Walter Jost, *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1989); David M. Whalen, *The Consolation of Rhetoric: John Henry Newman and the Realism of Personalist Thought* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars, 1994); Stephen H. Webb, *Re-Figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991). Siegfried Wiedenhofer discusses rhetoric in *Formalstrukturen humanistischer und reformatorischer Theologie bei Philipp Melanchthon,* 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976).

[20] John W. O'Malley has been particularly attentive to the influence of rhetoric on doctrinal development and ecclesial reform in *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450–1521* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1979), and in *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1989); he also considers how rhetoric shapes early Jesuit ministry of the Word of God and "way of proceeding" in *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1993) 96–100, 253–56.

[21] See, e.g., C. A. Evans and D. A. Hagner, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

interpretation of the power of the Church's speech in forming group identities, in relationships with Jewish and Greco-Roman peoples and traditions, and in the construction of the Christian empire.[22] These studies cultivate a more nuanced interpretation of the interplay between diverse texts, traditions, and audiences, and advance a more penetrating reconstruction of the social world of Christianity. But they also raise profound questions about how we are to evaluate the alliances of knowledge and power in the development of doctrine. How are we to judge specific doctrines or traditions that are tainted by destructive assumptions or that have promoted, wittingly or not, negative consequences? Can doctrines and traditions still be affirmed as genuine, though limited, and perhaps even flawed, achievements? Or must they be repudiated as manifestations of hegemonic manipulation that must be overturned through new alliances? Can minority traditions, long overshadowed by traditions that have dominated the Church's official rhetoric, be newly received and reappropriated? These weighty questions require an ecclesial and theological response that both acknowledges the limitations of the Church's official rhetoric and affirms the integrity of the Church's ongoing traditioning process.

Besides the renewed interest in rhetoric in biblical studies and historical theology, several contemporary theologians have advocated a rhetorical model of theology, that is, a theology alert to the importance of rhetoric in theological inquiry and argumentation.[23] The works of Frans Jozef van Beeck, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rebecca Chopp, and David Cunningham deserve special mention.[24] All of these theologians argue that a rhetorical model of theology moves beyond a rationalist, abstract, logic-driven model and opposes a scientific or historical-positivist approach to tradition. These writers commend the importance of rhetoric in theology for a number of reasons. First, a theology informed by rhetorical considerations accentuates the contextual character in theology. This means that theology is oriented toward

[22] See Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991); Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1992).

[23] Compare the use of the term "rhetorical theology" to describe renaissance or humanist theology as distinct from scholastic theology by Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) 124–28, 141–42 and by O'Malley, *Praise and Blame* 38–39, 124.

[24] Frans Jozef van Beeck, *Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist, 1979); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), and her later work, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992); Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); David S. Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1991). Schüssler Fiorenza addresses the use of rhetoric in biblical studies, but she also develops a comprehensive model of theology shaped by the study of rhetoric. Although I will not treat it here, Nancey C. Murphy's recent book should be noted, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity, 1994).

a particular historical and social situation. Second, it emphasizes the communal character of theology—rhetorical arguments emerge from a community and are crafted for communal reception. Third, a rhetorical theology intentionally blends rational and affective appeals by offering a hybrid of dialectical and poetic forms of discourse. And fourth, it stresses the importance of practices or actions—spiritual, liturgical, moral, social-political—as the source and term of theological discourse. Each of these proponents of a rhetorical model of theology make a distinctive contribution. Van Beeck underscores rhetoric's esthetic and liturgical character. Schüssler Fiorenza and Chopp accentuate the pragmatic, creative, and ideology-critical character of rhetoric in theology demanded by concerns about human liberation. And Cunningham develops an Aristotelian approach to rhetoric as a framework for exploring and advocating its importance in theology.

Stepping back from these various and disparate enterprises, we find that biblical and historical works often focus on minute details in rhetorical arguments, followed by considerations of author, audience, context. Contemporary theologians offer more programmatic statements on the importance of rhetoric in theology; they rarely focus on the range of specific rhetorical choices, but are concerned with broader themes and methodological matters as they strive to construct a compelling theology.[25] In order to gain a clearer picture of the contribution of rhetoric to a comprehensive understanding of tradition we need an integrated conception of these various kinds of studies: detailed analysis of specific rhetorical choices in relation to particular contexts and audiences, and reflection on the role of rhetoric in theological method.

RHETORIC AND THE INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL TRADITIONS

In an attempt to explore how the rediscovery of rhetoric encourages a comprehensive understanding of the nature of tradition, let us consider biblical traditions and their interpretation. The study of rhetoric provides biblical scholars and theologians with a comprehensive frame of reference for acknowledging (1) the contributions offered by the various approaches to the study of biblical traditions, (2) the interrelationship of these various approaches in the broader communicative process of tradition, and (3) the fact that no one strategy of interpretation is privileged or provides the last court of appeal in disputed matters, but that each approach casts light on a facet of the communal process of

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[25] Specific rhetorical choices, especially concerning the use of metaphors and narratives, are receiving considerable attention in recent theology. Sallie McFague and Gordon Kaufman have advocated constructing new metaphors and models in theology better suited to the postmodern situation, while others like Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and Ronald Thiemann have underscored the importance of describing biblical narratives in theology. None of these theologians speak about their attention to metaphors and narratives in terms of rhetoric, but I think that both trajectories are best situated and evaluated within a frame of reference that accounts for the role of rhetoric as a decisive factor in the nature of biblical and ecclesial traditions.

tradition. Over the past two hundred years of biblical interpretation the basic background theories have multiplied, so that we now have author-centered models, text-centered models, and reader- or audience-centered models of interpretation.[26] The focal point has changed over the years from the genesis of a text to the text in its literary integrity and more recently to the reception of the text. Numerous biblical scholars attempt to be eclectic, but usually work with one or two specific methods. No one to my knowledge either advocates or practices an oscillating approach that combines author-oriented, text-oriented, and audience-oriented methods and that correspondingly takes into account the full process of tradition and interpretation. Indeed, this is probably beyond the capability and interests of scholars in our age of increasing specialization. Recently, however, representatives of each of these approaches to interpretation have been taking an interest in the rhetorical composition of biblical texts. Practitioners of the older historical-critical method have augmented form and redaction criticism with a fuller appreciation of rhetorical devices and argumentative genres.[27] Those exploring literary approaches—structuralist, narrative, reader-oriented, and canonical—have devoted themselves to the rhetorical character and force of the biblical text as received.[28] There is also an interest in rhetoric among the various social-historical and ideology-critical scholars who seek to describe, interpret, and explain the original social situations and social forma-

[26] For an overview, see Bernard C. Lategan, "Hermeneutics," and J. W. Rogerson and Werner G. Jeanrond, "History of Interpretation," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 3.149–54; 3.424–43; Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

[27] See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians,* and Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991). In contrast to David Cunningham, I would stress that a focus on rhetoric in tradition is compatible with an author-oriented model of biblical interpretation, even though such an approach needs to be complemented with other methods. In fact, much of the current interest in a rhetorical approach to biblical texts comes as a development within a historical-critical approach. Any attempt to understand the author and to posit the intended meaning of a text must rely on literary forms and genres—on "willed-types," to use the vocabulary of E. D. Hirsch (*Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven: Yale University, 1967] 51–67, 121–26). These literary and genre classifications are pivotal for understanding the original meaning of this text as a rhetorical composition, even though the specific willed-type may be elusive and it most certainly is not the sole determinative factor influencing the persuasive force and history of receptions of these texts and traditions. In my judgment a broad rhetorical approach to biblical and ecclesial traditions can provide a framework for incorporating historical-critical insights without requiring historical-critical hegemony.

[28] The development of a literary-rhetorical analysis of the biblical traditions has been influenced by various works of literary criticism, most notably Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Discourse in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1978), and his *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1990); Steven Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1989).

tions reflected in literary traditions, and the original and ongoing contexts of their reception.[29]

The conflict of biblical interpretations is not only between specialists in Scripture; theologians of every stripe are also involved. Theologians argue about how the various biblical traditions should be understood in relation to one another, and which biblical figures of speech, modes of argumentation, and narratives should be emphasized. The judgments they come to in these matters are often shaped by their divergent assessments of the most appropriate construal of biblical traditions relative to the most pressing rhetorical situation that they seek to address, e.g. the challenges of secularization, social injustice, or inculturation.

Ressourcement theologians, in the school of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar,[30] and postliberal theologians, indebted to Hans Frei and George Lindbeck,[31] acknowledge the gains of historical-critical methods, but they devote themselves to the canonical text as a literary whole and savor the persuasiveness and applicability of the classically interpreted biblical proclamation—accentuating either the spiritual senses of the Scriptures, especially typology, or the plain sense—with the goal of broader reception. Mediating and correlation theologians prefer various modern methods: historical-critical, literary, or reader-oriented approaches, or some combination of these. They

[29] The works of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Burton Mack are representative here, even though their motivating interests and conclusions are significantly different; compare Burton Mack's *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) and *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993) with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* and her *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994). Terry Eagleton is an important literary critic who combines ideology-critical and rhetorical approaches in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983).

[30] I use the appellation *ressourcement* rather than *nouvelle théologie* as recommended by Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "*Ressourcement* Theology, *Aggiornamento* and the Hermeneutics of Tradition," *Communio* 18 (1991) 530–55. Even though Balthasar was not involved in the *nouvelle théologie* dispute, the affinities between his approach to tradition and that espoused by de Lubac warrant my use of the term *ressourcement* theologian for both figures. For relevant literature, see Henri de Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1991); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius; and New York: Crossroad, 1982).

[31] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), and "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?" in *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition,* ed. Frank O'Connell (New York: Oxford University, 1986) 36–77; George Lindbeck, "The Story-Shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation,* ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 161–78, and "Scripture, Consensus, and Community," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis,* ed., R. J. Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989) 74–101; and Kathryn E. Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* 59–78.

are often more interested than *ressourcement* and postliberal theologians in the plurality of theological traditions and the diversity of rhetorical strategies and situations within the Bible and manifested in the history of effects and the history of receptions of these biblical traditions.[32]

The contributions of liberation and inculturation theologians to the study of the Bible are nascent, myriad, and disputed. They also defy neat categorization. On the one hand, in the spirit of *ressourcement* and postliberal theology, many liberation theologians advance their persuasive denunciations and emancipatory appeals simply by referring to the canonical heritage of the prophets and the synoptic traditions without recourse to historical-critical methods or results.[33] They also share with European theologians a desire to promote the reading and reception of the Scripture within smaller communities of devoted Christians.[34] But more often liberation theologians advocate historical-critical and more broadly social- and ideology-critical readings of biblical materials as indispensable for a fuller understanding of the social and political dimensions of the Gospels.[35] Feminist theologians in particular have contributed to a liberation hermeneutics by exploring the spectrum of interpretive strategies—author-, text-, and reader-centered—in their effort to identify and redress the androcentric and patriarchal character of the biblical heritage.[36] By contrast, yet of

[32] Mediating theologian Edward Schillebeeckx champions historical-critical methods set within a larger hermeneutical frame of reference, e.g. in *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979). For advocates of text-centered approaches, following Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, see David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*; Tracy's addendum to Robert Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 151–87; "On Reading the Scriptures Theologically," in *Theology and Dialogue*, ed. B. D. Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990) 35–68; and Werner Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

[33] There is some resemblance between Gustavo Gutiérrez's early approach to the Bible in *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973) and the contributions of *ressourcement* theologians like Henri de Lubac. The influence of Karl Barth on James Cone's black theology offers an analogous example.

[34] Carlos Mesters, *Defenseless Flower: A New Reading of the Bible* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989), and J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

[35] See, e.g., Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), and Juan Luis Segundo, *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985). See also *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretations*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), and Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[36] See *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); Sandra Schneiders, "The Bible and Feminism: Biblical Theology" and Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Experience and Tradition—Can the Center Hold?—Revelation," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993) 31–82; and *Searching the Scriptures* 1, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

equal significance, theologians in countries where Christianity is a minority tradition are forging innovative interpretations of Scripture that are actively responsive to indigenous religious and cultural traditions.[37]

The range of approaches to biblical traditions leaves us with a difficult question: How can we negotiate the differences and disputes about biblical interpretation within a frame of reference sufficiently broad to allow for contrasting insights, to promote an honest assessment of the advantages and limitations of various methods, and to help engender a genuinely catholic vision?[38] The debates between these various approaches to biblical interpretation cannot be curtailed or avoided. But perhaps they can be more clearly focused. Amidst these divergent approaches to biblical interpretation, the rhetorical character of Scripture unites authors, texts, and audiences in a dynamic and ongoing communal and historical relationship.[39] Concentrating on the rhetorical process of these biblical traditions facilitates a broader understanding of how communities and their public discourse interact in their genesis, transmission, history of receptions, and interpretations. This broader focus provides a means to reassess and conceivably break out of certain stalemates: between proponents of alternative methods that focus primarily on the author, text, or reader; between spiritual or theological readings and various critical readings; and between different theological interpretations that are addressing different rhetorical situations. Every interpretation of the Bible—from the classical senses of Scripture to the latest postmodern reading—is in some way a rhetorical interpretation. In other words, every interpretation seeks to shed some light on the rhetorical, i.e. communicative, character of the biblical traditions. Acknowledging the role of rhetoric in these traditions and their interpretations provides the means to reach a modest goal: to situate a given interpretation in terms of the broader rhetorical process of tradition. But it also suggests a more difficult and ongoing task for those concerned with adjudicating the conflict of interpretations: to evaluate these texts and their interpretations by the standards of tradition learned from the study of rhetoric; that is, in terms of the cogency of their contribution to the subject matter, the actions

[37] For selections from writers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, see *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991).

[38] The Roman Catholic Biblical Commission has addressed this question in its document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins* 23 (January 26, 1995) 497–524.

[39] Here I am in agreement with John Donahue's suggestion that rhetoric provides a promising candidate for integrating Catholic biblical studies; see his "Between Jerusalem and Athens: The Changing Shape of Catholic Biblical Scholarship," *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology,* ed. E. Stump and T. P. Flint (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993) 285–313. Also pertinent is Wilhelm Wuellner, "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics: From 'Truth and Method' to 'Truth and Power'," *Scriptura: Journal of Bible and Theology in Southern Africa* S 3 (1989) 1–54.

they engender, and the community's reception. This kind of assessment by no means excludes official ecclesial interpretations, but places them within a broader framework. The kind of argument I have just advanced about the value of focusing on rhetorical considerations in the interpretation of biblical traditions could also be extended to the history of official doctrine, liturgy, and theology.

<center>THE RHETORICAL CHARACTER OF TRADITION</center>

In this concluding section, let me outline nine beneficial features or items that derive from the study of the role of rhetoric in the Christian tradition.

1. The study of rhetoric in the Christian tradition helps to distinguish and appreciate the richness of persuasive forms of speech within this tradition. This focus on rhetoric does not invalidate the efficacy of a grammatical approach to tradition as espoused by George Lindbeck, or an esthetic and dramatic approach as developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar. A concentration on the role of rhetoric affirms the centrality of holistic forms of argument in the Christian tradition, which is also affirmed in grammatical, esthetic, and dramatic approaches. But a rhetorical analysis of tradition highlights the diversity of traditions and their dynamic, historical character in continuity and in change.

2. A focus on rhetoric in tradition accentuates the contextual character of the Church's discourse. This requires ascertaining the historical and social context of origin and reception of traditions, and how these traditions consist of acts of practical judgment addressed to concrete situations. In other words, perceiving tradition as a rhetorical process illuminates historical and pragmatic reasoning at the service of the truth, the common good, and the proven heritage of the community. Rhetorical arguments frequently transcend their situations of origin by virtue of their persuasive power; sometimes they do not and are either forgotten, criticized, or reformulated; at still other times a rhetorical argument that has been forgotten or discredited can be received anew. Recognizing the rhetorical character of tradition aids us in evaluating these issues of changing contexts.

3. The study of rhetoric teaches that the rhetorical arguments of tradition should serve the subject matter of an argument—the facet of reality that is being considered. Consequently, the aptness of rhetorical forms ought to be judged according to that subject matter or reality. This implies an epistemological responsibility and accountability in the traditioning process. As stated in classic formulations, rhetoric is properly a vehicle for Sophia and Logos, understood as a cogent philosophy. This claim corresponds with the Christian conviction that Christian proclamation and teaching, including theology, properly serve the subject matter of Christianity. For Christians the subject matter of tradition is the content, or object, or reality of Christian faith in its many dimensions, even though the precise nature of this content

is "essentially contested," that is, under continual scrutiny and re-evaluation within the dialogue of tradition.[40]

A focus on the role of rhetoric in tradition, by emphasizing context and pragmatic reasoning on the one hand (item 2), and the determinative role of the content of the rhetorical argument on the other hand (item 3), lights a pathway beyond the modern dichotomy of objectivism and relativism.[41] Maintaining together these two facets of the role of rhetoric in tradition preserves the Christian commitment to the truth and normativity of the object of tradition, while recognizing the historically situated, practical, and communal character of the tradition-ing process.

4. Attention to tradition as a rhetorical process elucidates the fundamental importance of communal life and the audience's worldview both in the construction of a rhetorical argument (*inventio*) and in the reception of the argument (see item 8 below). The study of rhetoric emphasizes the importance of communal memory and the cultural-linguistic heritage in the construction of rational arguments. Those arguments seek to lead persons to judgments and decisions that promote communal identity formation and reformation, social resistance and transformation. Persuasive arguments are frequently drawn from the common beliefs and practices of a community insofar as they convey its members' deepest convictions and hopes. But rhetoric does not simply advocate replaying old songs. There is more than sufficient room for innovation. The efficacy of a rhetoric of change, conversion, and reform emerges within a web of argument spun from cherished communal beliefs and practices. Development, reform, and revision in the Catholic tradition—various ways of speaking about discontinuity in doctrines and practices—are ultimately warranted by demonstrating how prescribed changes cultivate a deeper continuity and a more genuine catholicity.

5. A concentration of rhetoric in the communicative action of tradition takes seriously a community's cultural heritage in particular by offering ways to think about how metaphors (and other figures of speech), narratives, and examples work in the service of the subject matter and the community.[42] This means that rhetorical arguments draw from the cultural repository of metaphors, narratives, and ex-

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[40] The term "essentially contested" in taken from the philosopher H. B. Gallie and has been utilized by Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[41] This alludes to the widely read analysis of Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983).

[42] Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian fully recognized the importance of metaphors and narratives in the construction of a rhetorical argument. Aristotle said that metaphors can increase our knowledge, and Quintilian pointed out that because people construct narratives differently, "outnarrating" is a crucial ingredient in making a rhetorical argument. Paul Ricoeur's work on metaphor and narrative is particularly relevant in this regard. He considers the role of rhetoric and poetics in *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. R. Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975); and his extensive analysis of narrative

amples in order to reaffirm the community's previous judgments and decisions. But an appreciation of rhetoric in tradition also includes the realization that sometimes new judgments and new decisions are called for and that such changes require new interpretations of dominant metaphors, narratives, and examples, or new attention to dormant metaphors, narratives, and examples, or the generation of new metaphors, narratives, and examples. These different rhetorical strategies are a necessary part of the traditioning process, not at the expense of, but in the service of, the communal heritage cherished in memory as guide for life. The dichotomy sometimes set up between tradition and imaginative theological construction by theologians such as Gordon Kaufman and Sallie McFague certainly highlights the need for change and the gravity of human responsibility in working for change. But such positions betray an inadequate understanding of the rhetorical nature of tradition, and in the long run will not be the most effective vehicle for communal identity formation, reformation, and promoting action for social transformation.[43]

6. Tradition understood as a rhetorical process recognizes the importance of the passions or affections of the audience in receiving a message and acting upon it. The Christian tradition is not about communicating abstract ideas and logical formulas, but about a message that moves, excites, pleases, and disturbs. Undeniably, the manipulation of emotions is one key reason why rhetoric is often dismissed as mere sophistry. At their worst, rhetoricians feed off of people's baser feelings and instincts, fears and anger, as they orchestrate the communal heritage in the narrow interests of the self or the group. But the abuse of rhetoric does not discredit the fact that negative and positive affections can be evoked to teach the truth, to incite moral action, and to lure to the beautiful.

7. Analyzing the rhetorical process of tradition sheds light on the productive borderlines between religious and cultural traditions in the formation, transmission, and development of the Christian tradition. Theologians like George Lindbeck and John Milbank correctly emphasize the importance of the intratextual character of Christian tradition

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lends itself to a fuller treatment of its role in rhetoric, in *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984–1988). On the importance of narrative in rhetorical arguments, see John O'Banion, *Reorienting Rhetoric: The Dialectic of List and Story* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University, 1992).

[43] Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993); McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). I agree with many of their concerns about the state of the world and the human race and a few of their constructive proposals. However, they often seem to dichotomize in a regulative and excessive way communal traditions of memory and new theological construction, thereby distorting the nature of tradition, which necessarily includes innovation and criticism. For an attempt to redress this problem from within the liberal Protestant paradigm, see Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitation: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994).

and theology.[44] But they have failed to incorporate into their theologies a balanced treatment of the intertextual and intercultural factors that have always influenced the Church and theology and continue to do so, especially evident in ecumenical and interreligious dialogues and the work of inculturation in non-Western cultures. Classical rhetoric encouraged speakers and writers to define an audience, but too often this was done at the expense of outsiders, with devastating effect. The same can be said of the rhetoric of the early Church. We must acknowledge what Christian leaders have long recognized, that social resistance and transformation require a robust rhetoric in the defense of the true and the good. But we must also be willing to recognize the pernicious side of a potent rhetoric, a side repeatedly witnessed in Western society: its ability to promote an insular and triumphalist model of community, and to caricature the positions of adversaries, be they alleged heretics, other religious communities, or subordinated groups within the community. It is not only the moral character of the speaker that must be judged, but the discursive practices themselves.[45] Correspondingly, we need to cultivate a deeper appreciation of the productive interplay between internal and external traditions as we strive to develop rhetorical arguments that are persuasive and inclusive, self-defining but not at the expense of others.

8. The study of rhetoric promotes a proper respect for the audience's reception as a necessary component in the traditioning process. This derives from the fact that rhetoric accentuates the communal character of discourse, which is partially evident in the work of composition (as indicated in item 4) and completed in reception. The communal reception of rhetorical works of the Christian tradition—be it the Bible, creeds, liturgies, church teachings, or practices—is not simply a passive submission of intellect and will; it is a defining action of the entire person. These acts of reception and nonreception deserve serious attention insofar as they indicate the role and authority of the ecclesial community in the process of tradition.[46]

9. Finally, the study of the rhetorical process of tradition is action-

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[44] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[45] David Cunningham discusses the personal ethical character of the speaker in *Faithful Persuasion* 98–147, but this needs to be augmented with an ethical evaluation of the speaker's rhetorical discourse; for instance, when one distorts an opponent's position or smears an opponent's reputation in the interest of a genuine truth and a real good. When we are considering the Church's public rhetoric, these are not simply matters of personal sin, but also of social sin, which require a communal examination of conscience and repentance. Pope John Paul II advocates this in his encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint,* in *Origins* 25 (June 8, 1995) 49–72. Regrettably, these same insights are not fully incorporated into the pope's apology to women: "Letter to Women," *Origins* 25 (July 27, 1995) 137–43. See my essay, "The Pope on Repentance and Healing Memories in the Catholic Tradition," *The Ecumenist* (forthcoming 1996).

[46] See *Glaube als Zustimmung: Zur Interpretation kirchlicher Rezeptionsvorgänge,* ed. Wolfgang Beinert, Quaestiones Disputatae 131 (Freiburg: Herder, 1991); Gilles

oriented. Whatever the occasion, public rituals and celebrations, legal adjudications, or political deliberations, the aim of rhetoric has always been to persuade people not only to reach judgment and agreement, but also to act together. This feature of the rhetorical process of tradition is the capstone of ecclesial reception, and is entirely consistent with the criterion espoused by praxis-oriented theologians: judge traditions by their fruits. Thus tradition is evaluated not only according to its content (as indicated in item 3) and its communal reception (item 8), but also on the basis of the actions it yields.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored in a schematic fashion how the study of rhetoric can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the nature of tradition. We have seen this in a number of ways. Such an approach considers the entire communicative process from invention to reception. It helps to identify diverse voices, traditions, figures of speech, narratives, and argumentative strategies in the Church's discourse. It sustains a discerning appreciation for the genuine achievements of the dominant traditions, and for the corresponding commitment to inspiration and doctrinal continuity, while acknowledging the importance of creativity, criticism, and discontinuity evident in historical and practical decisions in the traditioning process. A focus on tradition as a rhetorical process is not a panacea for the problems of handing on a tradition. It is not an alternative to criteriological judgments.[47] Nor does it replace a theology of revelation.[48] But thinking of tradition as a rhetorical process does promote a deeper understanding of the communicative nature of tradition and provides a productive framework for addressing problems and focusing debates.

Routhier, *La réception d'un concile* (Paris: Cerf, 1993); and Frederick M. Bliss, *Understanding Reception* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1994).

[47] See Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, "Normen, Kriterien and Strukturen der Überlieferung," in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 4.125–52.

48 The focus on the role of rhetoric in biblical and ecclesiastical traditions advocated here must ultimately be situated and evaluated within a fully theological frame of reference. Nearly thirty years ago Ray Hart considered the relationship of revelation and rhetoric in *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). His treatment of rhetoric was limited in scope, but rich in implications; with the wealth of research into the rhetorical nature of traditions since the appearance of Hart's book, his topic deserves further attention.