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Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology

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practising it (Is this one of the elements of the Christian tradition which he wishes cleansed or purified?), the bishops' attempts to control violence in the 'Peace of God' movement is treated much more positively and considered as a possible "turning point in medieval society" (pp. 105-129). In his discussion of this movement Bredero's treatment carries an implicit as well as an explicit criticism of the upper classes in medieval society. This same pattern is evident in his final study on religion in the low countries in which he explains much of the anticlericalism evident at the close of the middle ages as arising in a context of the bilingual culture of the time. Likewise, he makes a very good case that the lay status of the 'reformer' Henry of Lausanne was in all likelihood the primary issue in the charge of heresy laid against him ("Heresy and Church Reform", pp. 198-224).

Whether or not one wishes to explain the Crusades on the principle that a pilgrimage to Jerusalem had developed in the earlier medieval period as the only solution open for persons facing 'insoluble situations', Bredero's reflections on "Jerusalem in the West" (pp. 79-104) is stimulating reading, as are his arguments demonstrating Pope Urban's initial concern with helping Byzantium against the Turks and the manner in which this was shifted, on the basis of public reaction, to a Crusade to free Jerusalem itself. Above all, readers will wish to pay close attention to his careful discussion of "Anti-Jewish Sentiment in Medieval Society" (pp. 274-318) and his study of the way in which theology played and did not play a role in its growth.

For readers interested in historiography, Bredero uses the 'history of mentalities' method while at the same time his critique of the approach must be noted (see pp. 53-78).

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Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology

David S. Cunningham

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991

xviii + 312 pp.

This is a fascinating, though difficult, book. The author is a theologian (Assistant Professor of Theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN) who is also trained in communication studies. Out of these two disciplines he writes a treatise in theological method. Christian theological discourse, he writes, is composed of *arguments* in the forms—and sometimes in the guises—of propositions, directions, exhortations, prophecies, commands, etc. But theological arguments can always be countered; we do not possess ultimate certainty. Therefore he suggests the alternative of

composing Christian theological discourse as *persuasive argument*. Thus he links the discipline of theology with that of rhetoric. "The goal of Christian theology... is *faithful persuasion*: to speak the word that theology must speak, in ways that are faithful to the God of Jesus Christ and persuasive to the world that God has always loved" (p. 5). The most appropriate tool for this task is rhetoric.

In chapter 1 he reviews the long history of rhetoric, noting its intersections with Christian theology. The three constituent elements of rhetoric (he draws mainly on Aristotle) each take up a chapter: *pathos*, i.e., the audience to which theology speaks (ch. 2); *ethos*, i.e., the speaker or character with which theology speaks (ch. 3); and *logos*, i.e., the arguments themselves, or the words which theology speaks (ch. 4). In the final chapter he explores the symbiotic relationship among these three elements "as manifested in three particular theological practices: doctrinal formulation [engaging especially George Lindbeck], biblical exegesis [engaging especially the historical-critical method], and Church historiography [engaging especially Luther's argumentative strategies regarding the Lord's Supper]" (p. 6).

Even as rhetorical criticism has become more and more prominent in biblical studies, so Cunningham's work is both an indicator of and a participant in "rhetorical theology". It is his conviction that a rhetorical approach, because it investigates doctrine always in its context of audience and speaker (there is no such thing as "pure", i.e., objective, doctrine—cf. Luther's use and non-use of John 6 in his eucharistic arguments over-against the Roman Church and the radical reformers, ch. 5), can break through the doctrinal impasses of contemporary ecumenical encounters. "A rhetorical approach to doctrine pays close attention to the actual variety of practices among believers, rather than constructing theories about how doctrine might work in the abstract" (p. 214).

He is furthermore convinced that theologians need to take seriously their role as proclaimers. "... [P]roclamation must not be considered a theological sideshow, nor something that can only take place after the 'real' theology is done. Rather, all Christian theology is proclamation. Homiletics and systematics differ from one another because of their audiences and the character by which they are authorized; but they are both acts of proclamation" (p. 202).

This is a hugely important point. The Sophists realized that "people can justifiably hold widely varying opinions" (p. 10); this is our situation again today. It is profoundly unsettling for generations of Christians to realize Canada is no longer a "Christian nation", or to contemplate that the Bible is now variously interpreted: even as "revealed truth" it is open to widely varying opinions. Theologians and preachers need to labor at communication, and here rhetoric is seen increasingly as a help and instructor in creating "faithful persuasion". For example, "[i]n order to persuade, an argument must 'move' (*suadeo*: to impel) its audience from one place to another. That is, the audience must come to accept or to recognize certain

conclusions (or premises) that it had not previously accepted or recognized" (p. 45). To accomplish this, it is necessary to start at some point(s) or measure of agreement, i.e., the place of identification. How can a theologian or preacher find this place, that is, how can they know to whom they are speaking? The audience, Cunningham observes, because it is part of the rhetorical process, is in fact *constructed by the speaker*. "Through the deployment of certain arguments, theologians are, in effect, saying: 'this is what I want my audience to be; these are the kinds of people that I want them to become.' The traditional name for this activity is *catechesis*..." (p. 95).

Because this is a work in theological method advocating a rhetorical approach of persuasive argument, it forces the reader to engage the unfamiliar jargon of rhetoric. This task is not lightened by the author's peppering the text with Greek and Latin as well. Yet because it is this kind of work, it is as important to the preacher as to the theologian. No doubt a rhetorical critic who reads this review will detect that I am a homiletician! Which means that Cunningham has successfully constructed his audience to include not only Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians, but preachers as well!

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The New Genesis: Theology and the Genetic Revolution

Ronald Cole-Turner

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

127 pages, \$12.99 U.S. paper

The genetic revolution is upon us whether we like it or not. Genetic engineering already is a powerful tool for healing, but this does not happen without also generating some significant concerns, ethically and theologically. Is this new found power something of which we should be wary? Or should we embrace it as a new God given way to participate with creation? Roland Cole-Turner chooses the latter approach in his book. However, he contends that we must understand this participation in a fuller and more adequate way than is often done today.

In describing this fuller and more adequate approach the author first provides the reader with a general summary of genetic developments from 1822 to the present. Then, placing this work within a broader cultural context (including theology), he argues that genetic engineering exists to "expand our ability to participate in God's work...and thereby to glorify God."(p. 51) By this answer he means that