



## The Rhetoric of Faith

RICHARD LUECKE

Community Renewal Society, Chicago, Illinois

When Cicero undertook to set forth “what words will do” in a handbook for citizens of the Roman republic—which he held to include both people and gods—he began with a history of “eloquence” for which he needed no bones or shards of any kind. Assuming a time when humans wandered at large in the fields and lived on wild fare without legitimate marriage, codes of law, or organized religious worship, he asked what other faculty could possibly have brought all this about except “speech at the same time powerful and entrancing”?

How could it have been brought to pass that people should learn to keep faith and observe justice and become accustomed to obey others voluntarily and believe not only that they must work for the common good but even sacrifice life itself unless some had been able by eloquence to persuade their fellows? (*On Invention* I.ii.2-3)

—Including the big fellows who, without persuasion, might appear to have the most to lose.

When on the other hand, Cicero pondered all the troubles of the Roman commonwealth along with those of other mighty cities, these seemed no less traceable to “eloquence”—i.e., eloquence operating without wisdom. Wisdom without eloquence did too little good for the society, while eloquence without wisdom did positive harm. Thus had rhetoric come into bad odor and its arts into general scorn and disuse. So saying, Cicero began the most influential textbook in Western history, one which, while it did not serve to combine eloquence with wisdom in the Roman republic (soon to become empire), nonetheless, entered into many subsequent manuals of rhetoric, including manuals for Christians, and into many subsequent cultural and religious reformations—often on both sides.

### I. REHABILITATING RHETORIC

Today “rhetoric” is once again, in the general parlance, a pejorative term—as in “that’s just a lot of rhetoric” or “mere rhetoric.” Hearers find more suasion than substance in many public utterances, much bluster without much proof. No doubt this objection is based partly on the scientific proclivities of our age, with its predilection for “facts” or “information” presumably detached from subjective preferences. During the seventeenth century intellectuals rebelled against the *copiae* (actually stored in commonplace books) of metaphors, similes, allegories, hyperboles, metonymies, synecdoches, etc., used by fine writers and popular preachers of the Renaissance. The Royal Society passed a resolution requiring its members “to bring all things as near to mathematical plainness as they can”; one English legislator proposed an act of Parliament

that would outlaw “fulsome and luscious metaphors” (lapsing into a food trope even as he proscribed troping).

Perhaps the current aversion to rhetoric is part of a spreading business mentality that relies on one-page memos and newsletters giving the gist of things without worrying about nuances or qualifications. Or part of a middle class reaction to anything bearing an aristocratic aroma—whether because niceties of expression seem too precious or too wimpish or because they might conceal an exclusionary strategy. The time-honored liberal arts, conceived as belonging to all humans, *have* been used to divide the society on the basis of matriculation and diplomas. Maybe it’s part of a growing dissatisfaction with all things “liberal.”

Whatever the causes, this depreciation of rhetoric seems self-defeating in an eminently rhetorical age. Vast resources are devoted to getting messages to the public through powerful new electronic media. An unprecedented need arises for rhetorical competencies and critical awareness, if not also for some new policies. If it’s 30-second TV spots or political hot air we object to, there are other words for that. William Saphire suggests using bushwa, bomfog (Brotherhood of Man—Fatherhood of God), or bloviation (used with “Gamalielise” for Warren Gamaliel Harding)—thereby saving “rhetoric” for much more important tasks today. If it’s scientific communications that impress us, we are also aware today that even these are not exempt from techniques of persuasion. There must have been a time when no more than a dozen Newtonians had taken the field. Einstein offered his post-Newtonian theories on the basis of their being not unexceptionable but “beautiful.” A current use of the word “paradigm” which entered general discourse from Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), points to turns that are taken in many fields not so much through refutation of previous procedures as through selective adoption of what might prove a more fruitful tack.

So far from clearing the air of metaphor and simile, business has added its own terms and analogies to the language; today we all do “marketing” and have “bottom lines.” Business and industry proceed increasingly through consultations, planning sessions, and workshops requiring inventive and persuasive participants. Some critics argue, contra megatrend boosters, that the new products are too seldom a matter of basic technical and social invention, too often a matter of mere addition or juxtaposition: the ball point pen, pantihose,

31 flavors, and designer fruits and vegetables. As for middle class reactions, this group, while eschewing limp wrists, has given us vital and illuminating figures of its own—as writers like Norman Mailer and David Mamet have shown in their depiction of speech patterns in Chicago. Some of the richest new metaphors are supplied by newcomers to the city who are the poorest and least educated by ordinary standards.

Speech and composition teachers who still lay claim to the term “rhetoric” have not always helped. They have concentrated attention on whether language is grammatically “correct” rather than whether strategies are well selected and successful. They have asked students to “define their terms” and “narrow their topics,” thereby constricting devices of discovery. They have asked “What’s that supposed to mean?” and, “Can’t you say this more simply?” But if we said it more simply, would we be saying the same thing? Great teachers have given different advice. Alfred North Whitehead, “Seek simplicity—and distrust it”; and Jacob Burckhardt,

“Beware the terrible simplifiers!”

Some literary figures have begun advocating a “new rhetoric” for this new rhetorical age, one which will give attention to a much wider range of expressions than public speeches and pamphlets. Encouraged by Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), literature teachers have banded together in conferences, essay collections, and a journal devoted to “The New Rhetoric.” Jorge Luis Borges and others have written on the inescapability of metaphor in all vocabulary and argument. William Gass wrote *The World within the Word* (Boston: Godine, 1979) to show how words do not simply mirror some univocal world nor merely reflect a world of conventional thought but also extend, discover, and open worlds. In *Habitations of the Word* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984) he contends for and produces essays which make “essays” on reality. He warns, on pain of ending all revelatory communication, against speed reading, the one page memo, and gists.

“We cannot watch the wine of life,” says Donald Barthelme (fearing neither simile, metaphor, nor synecdoche), “turning into Gatorade.” What we stand to lose is not only feeling but perception—what Roland Barthes calls “the power of surprising by some formal device.”

Traditional rhetoric focused on both of these. “All disputes are thought to be either about words or about things,” John of Salisbury said to his students in the 12th century, “but disputes about words are really disputes about things.”

## II. THE FUNCTIONS OF RHETORIC

Classical rhetoricians were not indifferent to the dangers and inanities of eloquence when it is practiced for unwise ends with uncritical audiences. Socrates complained in the *Gorgias* that rhetoric is a sham art which is substituted for justice; in the *Phaedrus* he argued more constructively that rhetoric should be in the service of dialectic—i.e., be led by wisdom. For his defense before the Athenian court in the *Apology* Socrates foreswore rhetorical artifice; they would not hear from him any “set oration duly ornamented with fine words and phrases” but only those words and arguments that came to him at the moment—so confident was he of the justice of his cause. It should be sufficient,

Aristotle wished near the outset of the *Rhetoric*, simply to avoid annoying our hearers without trying to delight them, to fight our case by averring facts and offering proofs—nobody uses fine eloquence in teaching geometry. But he knew that other things beside factual arguments effect results in public matters, as could be seen from the verdict in the case of Socrates. There was an art of rhetoric to be talked about in the interest of social justice, and he would do so.

Aristotle was able, by virtue of a philosophic method that distinguished sciences and arts on the basis of their different subject matters, principles, methods, and ends to give a separate treatment to rhetoric. Since it doesn’t have any specific subject matter and is not scientific, he defined rhetoric in terms of its end, i.e., persuasion of actual audiences, as “the faculty or power of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric* 1.2. 1355<sup>b</sup>26). This art was applicable to any question which depended on something less than mathematical or scientific proof. It belonged to matters in which the personality of the speaker and disposition of the audience play important roles and should therefore be taken into account in the invention, arrangement, and style of the speech. The three books of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* accordingly took up

these three elements—the audience, the speaker, and the speech—treating the arguments suitable to each. Aristotle’s treatment of the emotions and moral character of audiences of different ages and stations would (in fact did) please Macchiavelli; it also afforded terms for later development of psychology. Consideration of the orator included attention to the kind of evidence which can be offered of good sense, good morals, good will, and the sufficiency of standing on one’s record. But the form or essence of persuasion still lies in argument, and Aristotle criticized other teachers for concentrating on devices for producing emotion and confidence in the audience to the neglect of treating the sources of rhetorical arguments.

Consideration of audience situations in Book I of the *Rhetoric* permitted a formal division of oratory into three kinds. These distinctions had enormous influence on subsequent classical and Christian development. *Epideictic or display oratory* is directed toward someone or something worthy of public honor or dishonor; it praises or censures and is concerned with the present. *Forensic or legal oratory* is directed toward establishing the rightness or wrongness of some previous action; it makes or refutes a charge and is concerned with the past. *Political oratory* is directed toward establishing the expediency or in expediency of some proposed policy; it urges that a course of action should be taken or should not be taken and is concerned with the future.

Treating arguments for these various rhetorical situations presents difficulties since rhetoric has no specific subject matter and since proofs belong to the sciences. Yet a treatment of such arguments is possible in a formal sense. In the last three books of the *Organon*, Aristotle showed how premises are found not only for scientific but for probable and even sophistical syllogisms. In one of his shrewdest and most influential distinctions he showed how “topics” or *topoi*—“places” cleared for exploration by two or more unspecified terms (usually contrary terms or correlatives)—afford a source of all possible lines of argument in problematic matters. The Latins would call these *loci* and the English would call them “commonplaces.” They were available to all because of the marvelous

distinction and connection between words “out of which” and things “about which” arguments are formed. Their importance lay in their serving as instruments for original inquiry in more than one area (as distinct from “proper” places belonging to one subject or another) and their suitability for finding arguments both *pro* and *con*. They could help one see when to look for one kind of wise saying rather than another, when to cite one kind of example rather than another or look beyond historical examples to fictional narratives, parables, or fables.

Such commonplaces are readily degraded from instruments of inquiry into grab bags for repetition of *bons mots*, adages, or stories. But in their broader use the schema of these *topoi* can help one try out new perspectives, get a new idea or direction, and even restructure things by respecifying the unspecified elements. The difference between simple modification and radical reformation can be assigned to the use respectively of “tropes” or “topes.”

Virtually any question of practical import to a community turns out to be probable, rather than strictly demonstrable, and depends on persuasion which uses factual knowledge as instrumental. The Romans sought accordingly to generalize rhetoric as an architectonic and productive art in the republic. Like Plato, Cicero wrote both a *Republic* and a *Laws*, but for him the good city was not an ideal city set in the heavens; it was the actual city of Rome with its

pragmatically developed laws and procedures incorporating both *ius* (rights which free) and *lex* (laws which bind). It was an “eternal city” because it was able to pose and resolve new problems as they arose, to form and reform institutions as needed.

Changes worked by Cicero on the traditional terminology indicate this expanded function of rhetoric. Aristotle’s *epideictic* or display oratory becomes “demonstrative,” with a sense very like that of modern political demonstrations that call attention to unrecognized problems—the point of which may be lost if we turn too quickly to experts on familiar questions or to getting the demonstrators out of the streets and into the courts. “Forensic” becomes “judicial,” broadened now to include all disputes over judgments of what is the case. “Political” becomes “deliberative” and attaches to any sifting of possible common actions. Aristotle had set forth four scientific questions through which scientists move from a perception of facts to a knowledge through causes, from things “better known to us” to things “better known in nature” (*Posterior Analytics* II.1.89<sup>b</sup>21-31). Cicero converts these questions into a means of sorting out all practical issues in the public sphere: (1) conjectural questions (is there a problem?), (2) definitive questions (what is it?), (3) qualitative questions (how is the problem qualified? What are the handles?), and (4) translative questions (in what institutional context is the problem most propitiously taken up?) (*On Invention* I.viii.10).

Here was the rhetoric needed for a traditional, self-reforming society. By identifying issues and moving backwards and forwards among them a community could make innovations in any sphere of activity—providing for learning, social welfare, production, and art. There was a schema here for revolutionary reorganization of institutions in any society.

Did Cicero succeed in reuniting eloquence and wisdom in public action? The organization of Roman law was indeed a monumental and architectonic achievement. But a universal and effective public practice of rhetoric passed from possibility with the loss of the republic to empire and the loss of the constitution to Caesarism in 44 B.C. Political or deliberative rhetoric lost out to the executive. Demonstrative and judicial rhetoric became separated verbal arts, one for fine literature, the other for crowded courtrooms. But no one said better how Roman eloquence lacked true wisdom, how Rome had been only “a republic of sorts,” than Saint Augustine.

### III. THE RHETORIC OF FAITH

Religious expressions—whether to praise or to convert or to motivate—may be seen as rhetorical persuasions of an ultimate and most thoroughgoing sort. They express or advocate a view of life which is not demonstrable by scientific means. The speaker presents himself or herself as a witness to be trusted (though the validity of what is said does not depend on the character of the sayer). The audience is asked to form a judgment or join an action which is presented as consonant with its faith. Passions and emotions are by no means incidental; the purpose of the sermon (and other faithful expressions) is, as Augustine put it, “to teach, to delight, and to move”—at one and the same time.

Some people prefer to assign religious motivation to reason rather than speech. We may note, however, that *logos* refers much more often in the Scriptures to verbal activity than to reason and that the latter, taken by itself, tends to restrict the more striking aspects of religious

discovery and response. Many point to action as primary, though they do so with many words and are interested, in any case, in actions which *say* something and thereby summon reflection or response. Protestant theologians have preferred “word” for its connotation of an eternal address and for its implication of the will. “Faith comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17), at least in the broadest sense of that term.

Augustine, who was a student and teacher of rhetoric, described his conversion in the *Confessions* as a transition from being a “vendor of words” (*venditor verborum*) to becoming a “preacher of the word.” The agent of this transition was the Word itself. He had left unruly classrooms behind in Carthage and Rome and come to Milan—“led unknowingly to Ambrose by God that he might be led knowingly to God by Ambrose.” Interpretation played some role in opening a path for the Word of God. Heretofore by his own reason and strength he had admired Cicero and had derided Christians for their literature which appeared full of absurdities by comparison with the arguments of the Manichaeans and crude by comparison with Greek and Latin authors. This obstruction was removed not by counterarguments but by the “spiritual” interpretation of Ambrose that served to open the Scriptures. Augustine was now struck by the discovery that to believe what has not been demonstrated was sounder than the Manichaean promise of a belief based on demonstration—especially as his faith opened to understanding and vision. He recounted the many beliefs we act upon in life without prior proof. The apparent absurdities and crudities in Scripture became only further signs of its authority, since it

thereby led the humble to wisdom even as it humbled the wise. The biblical literature was rhetorically sound in view of its own persuasive end.

Augustine speaks of himself as “struck” and even “lashed” by the Word which turned him from perversion and inversion through conversion to God (mark all the “turnings”). The appropriate response was—confession. Hence the I-Thou mode of the *Confessions* with their preference for the Psalms—this was a laudatory form making full use of memory and style. In addressing God this confessor found himself advancing beyond superlatives (most high, all good) and negatives (incomprehensible, ineffable, unchangeable) to a virtually required use of the rhetorical trope called oxymoron.

Oxymora are phrases involving contradictions for disclosure and effect. Book titles often make use of this figure, as in Granger Westberg’s *Good Grief* or Studs Terkel’s *The Good War*. Bantering conversation sometimes points to oxymoronic phrases in which no contradiction was intended: “competent authorities,” “liberal Republican,” “organized Democrats,” “military intelligence,” “easy virtue,” “enlightened self-interest,” “cultural mission,” “health providers,” “Christian science.” But Augustine is inescapably driven to a creative use of this figure by the very rhetorical situation of his *Confessions*. The God whom he addresses is “changeless, ever changing,” “ever old, ever new,” “always acting, always quiet,” just as the pursued in the *Hound of Heaven* speaks of becoming an “uncaught captive” and Dorothy Day speaks of “a harsh and dreadful love.” The case is the same with other rhetorical tropes: religious response begets verbal amplification, and verbal amplification begets religious perception and response.

What was striking and lashing in the *Confessions* became less disruptive and more continuous in Augustine’s treatise on Christian rhetoric, *On Christian Doctrine*. Here he was no longer justifying a seemingly defective Scripture but putting pagan-clarified arts (including

Cicero's "questions") to work on a surpassingly eloquent body of Christian literature. What was the rhetoric suitable for talking not only toward and about God but about things in the light of God?

In his *Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California, 1970), to which this discussion is indebted, Kenneth Burke distinguishes the objects of language. Human speech refers (1) to natural things, conditions, and processes that would be in the world even if nobody talked about them; (2) to social and political relations, laws, rights, rules, etc., that depend on language; (3) there are words about words—dictionaries, grammars, logics, etc., which deal abstractly with possible usage; and (4) there are words for the divine or holy or supernatural which, whatever their validity, are always with us. Since God is strictly ineffable, words concerning God are necessarily borrowed from the first three uses of language. Thus language about God is necessarily analogical and negational, always transcending the ordinary uses of language—just as words themselves, in whatever context, tend to transcend what they are made to symbolize. All metaphors at once affirm and deny equivalence between words and things; words summarize, give titles, and virtually constitute objects for consideration; they refer to both temporal and logical sequences (connoting both time and eternity); they imply a movement from thing to name and a dynamic relation between these (one of Augustine's ever present trinities). In considering this

tendency toward transcendence within language itself, Kenneth Burke warns against viewing modernism as a simple movement from religion to secularism; it is more likely a transfer of devotion from God to something else which is now considered intrinsically good and a bringer of all good things—e.g., scientific technology (technologism) or market principle. This could prove perilous in an increasingly divided and strategically weaponed world.

Thus in the rhetoric of faith, everyday words serve as analogies or negations, or as both at once in certain oxymora, in order to point adoration to the divine. Equally important, however, is a movement returning downward to alter the meaning of words in their daily or common use and thereby to qualify the judgments formed by faithful people. Thus the word "create," having Indo-European roots meaning "making" (the Greek noun *kratos* means "strength"), was taken over by biblical writers to point to a divine creation by the Word; but it also returns to lend quality to the idea of human creativity by reference to the "image of God." A certain view of human freedom begins as a matter of faith and perhaps remains such, but it becomes a motive for "creative" thought, action, and artistic production. "Personality" used in confessions of the Holy Trinity returns to give new meaning to human personal and interpersonal relationships. The word "grace" in ancient contexts indicated a kindness or favor; one conferred or returned a favor (Greek *charin*). It was taken up by New Testament writers for analogical use in describing the divine intervention in Christ without consideration of human merit and in the face of human perversity though this grace was exponentially greater than anything previously meant by the word and remained an adorable mystery. Subsequently this word comes back to characterize "graciousness" in human relationships in a newly weighted sense: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) becomes the way of being gracious in community. It serves to qualify the most ordinary contexts in which "graciousness" is used: that of a gracious hostess, gracious invitation, gracious conversation, or gracious supper in which the divine feast is

prefigured and proleptically enjoyed.

On the basis of such biblical and church-historical precedents there can be no objection in principle to borrowing terms for religious use from process management or business practice—to using “marketing” in consideration of church appeals, “investment” or “credit” in considering the use of resources by religious institutions. But may we not expect to find “marketing” meaning something different first in those contexts and then in others? Expect to hear appeals that agencies should no longer merely cater to present interests on both sides but also enlarge them? That “investment” should go not simply to enterprises offering greatest monetary return but also to those which belong to an envisioned future? Possibly with a reference to “investiture”? That credit should be going to causes consonant with one’s *credo*?

Christian rhetoric not only forms new meanings and judgments but also makes appeal for joint actions. Rhetorical arguments for action, according to Aristotle, make use either of maxims or of examples, and in the latter case either of historical narratives or of invented ones. The parables of Jesus are paradigms of religious communication because they not only set out analogies for understanding what the Kingdom of God requires but also “wound from behind” (as

Kierkegaard put it)—i.e., leave hearers squirming with a decision they need to make with respect to their own lives. Appeals for common action are complicated by the fact that even faithful people speak in a variety of political tongues—the more so in ecumenical and international contexts. Here the rhetorical device of commonplaces or *loci* comes into play. The commonplace shows how the same “space” may be traversed by separate sets of meanings, how the same action can sometimes be justified by different sorts of considerations. They make it possible to discriminate the arguments of the various parties by seeing (to use a city metaphor) “where they’re coming from”—and thus to “deal with the state of affairs since Babel” (Kenneth Burke’s description of the purpose of rhetoric). The result is not mere compromise but, often as not, discovery—including the discovery of new and better problems.

Political controversies typically come to an impasse over whether to rest content with an “art of the possible.” But possibility itself can become a matter for action. An otherwise foredoomed proposal may become appropriate if other actions are taken as well, or if a variety of institutions can be drawn up (and perhaps modified) to fortify it. The schema of commonplaces afford devices for such creativity by revealing, for example, the mutual interplay of material, social, political, and cultural factors in the situation.

Thus Augustine took over the ordinary notion of human labor in order to speak by analogy and denial of *opus dei* and *opus christi*, the “work” of God and Christ. Returning to the ordinary world of work, he then took sharp exception to the “leisure” culture of the Greeks and Romans in accordance with which hard labor was assigned to slaves and the work of citizenship to free men—all should both work and be free. On this basis he was able to chart new lines of action with his flock in which all (not excluding clergy and monks) would engage in both manual labor and free activities. Finally, he was able to invent new forms of community in which labor, action, and prayer were institutionally structured—actually putting something into the world that bore witness to the present and coming city of God.

The Ciceronian forms of oratory and fourfold “constitution of questions” were here



reconceived as arts or disciplines of Christian communication and practice in the world. There was (1) a canonic use of laudatory and confessional symbols for community creation, (2) a hermeneutical use of ancient texts to make present interpretations and judgments, (3) a homiletical art of “coming to say the same thing”—and do the same thing—in the believing community, and (4) a systematic discipline which asked what additional restructuring was needed to strengthen or regularize needed innovations. Thus Christian rhetoric becomes a means by which the Word accomplishes its persuasive and transformative effects in the world. “The most consistent outcome of the Word of God,” Luther said in *On the Bondage of the Will*, “is that on its account the world is put into uproar. For the sermon of God [*sermo dei*] comes to change and revive the whole earth insofar as it really gets through to it.”

The rhetoric of faith helps the sermon of God get through to it.

"The Rhetoric of Faith offers a fresh interpretation of the structural coherence of *Against the Heresies* and a compelling account of Irenaeus's primary reasons for writing it. Moringiello's work is highly recommended to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of this foundational early Christian thinker and his most influential book" — John J. O'Keefe, Creighton University. Only RUB 220.84/month.

Rhetoric of Faith Healing Midterm. STUDY. Flashcards. Learn. Write. Spell. Test. Evaluate the rhetoric. Why is it beneficial to engage in Rhetorical Criticism? to help us understand symbols and artifacts, to make contributions to rhetorical theory. What is Neo-Aristotelian (Traditional) criticism? Literary criticism of oratory. How do you conduct Neo-Aristotelian (traditional) criticism? 1. Reconstruct the context 2. Apply 5 cannons of Rhetoric: -Invention: logos, pathos and ethos (inventio) -Organization (dispositio) -Style (lectio) - Delivery (pronunciatio) -Memory (memoryia) 3. Assess the effects. Purpose of Generic Criticism. Tyler Perry and the Rhetoric of *Madea*. July 16, 2019 By blog admin. 0 Comments. Freedom faith was the central concept of Hall's theology: the belief that God created humans to be free and assists and equips those who work for freedom. Hall rooted her work simultaneously in social justice, Christianity; Read more. The Rhetoric was developed by Aristotle during two periods when he was in Athens, the first, from 367–347 BCE (when he was seconded to Plato in the Academy); and the second, from 335–322 BCE (when he was running his own school, the Lyceum). The study of rhetoric was contested in classical Greece: on the one side were the sophists, and on the other side were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The trio saw rhetoric and poetry as tools that were too often used to manipulate others by appealing to emotion and omitting facts. They particularly accused the sophists, including Gorgias and Isocrates, of