

charges. In the 1820s, these began to have a more specifically diocesan focus. C.R. Sumner's first charge to the diocese of Llandaff, for example, was completely new in that it presented and analysed diocesan statistics and suggested necessary courses of action. By the early 1830s, bishops began to visit their dioceses with greater frequency and people began to buy and read their charges. The essential nature of episcopacy in the theology of High churchmen underpinned this revival since bishops were central to its operation.

Although the visitation of the bishop was the first major diocesan institution to undergo reform, it did not of itself succeed in creating a new diocesan consciousness. This emerged as bishops began to revive institutions at lower levels within their dioceses. The 1840s witnessed a revival of the office and ministry of archdeacons. Not only did they start to work alongside their diocesans, they began to visit within their archdeaconries and became the eyes and arms of their bishop. After 1838, for example, archdeacons began to investigate pluralities. About the same time, bishops also began to revive the office of rural dean despite the fact that some clergy were suspicious that they were becoming episcopal agents. Nevertheless, rural deans were instructed to initiate discussion among the local clergy and this enabled bishops to tap into opinion at the parish level. Burns shows clearly that the revival of rural deans was a central aspect of a growing 'diocesan consciousness'.

Alongside these developments, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed the growth of specifically diocesan societies. These included church building, mission and education societies, which all resulted in a proliferation of local diocesan boards and parish auxiliaries. Significantly, when J.B. Sumner instituted his Chester Church Building Society, he saw it as a means of uniting the whole diocese. It was a network of these societies, which gave the diocese a more tangible presence. The founding of theological and teacher training institutions also enhanced the power of the bishop because it brought these areas under his control. Similarly, the building of new churches sponsored by diocesan building societies gave the patronage, in many cases, to the bishop. All of these developments culminated in the 1860s in the campaign for Diocesan Assemblies. Burns points out that these institutions 'received support from moderate evangelicals such as Charles Sumner, Joseph Wigram and Ellicott'. (Ellicott, it should be pointed out, was described by Lord Shaftesbury as 'a moderate High Churchman').

Burns concludes by indicating the ways in which the diocesan revival resulted in a developing 'diocesan consciousness'. It produced a number of positive results, enabling greater lay participation in the affairs of the church, aiding the development of the clerical profession and helping to reduce polarization between the various ecclesiastical parties. On the negative side, however, it should perhaps be pointed out that the 'professionalisation' of the clergy had the effect of distancing

them still further from those in their pews. Additionally, the diocesan revival, in effect, took away much of the autonomy, participation and involvement in the management of affairs at the local level.

This book, which arose from the author's doctoral research, is based on a very wide reading of primary sources. It is essential for all who want to understand the development of the Church of England in the nineteenth century. It is also, by the same token, the key to understanding the present dilemma in which the Church of England currently finds herself as cumbersome, distant, bureaucratic episcopally controlled machine in an age when much secular government is returning to the local town and community level.

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### *Perfect Being Theology (Reason and Religion)*

**Katherin A. Rogers**

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, 166 pp., pb., £16.00, ISBN 0-7486-1012-X

#### **SUMMARY**

This is a thorough introduction to, and robust defence of, the God of classical theism. The book sets out a systematic doctrine of God, which begins from the claim that God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Such a God must be simple, exist necessarily, be immutable, impassive, timeless, omniscient, omnipotent, creator and goodness itself. Rogers has provided a superb overview of the classical doctrine and the current debate as well as a rigorous defence of this tradition in Christian theology. This is a brilliant introduction, which takes the reader beyond the superficial level of the debate.

#### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

Das Buch ist eine gründliche Einleitung in die Gottesvorstellung des klassischen Theismus und eine robuste Verteidigung derselben. Eine systematische Gotteslehre wird entworfen, die auf der Behauptung basiert, Gott sei „das, über das hinaus nichts vorstellbar ist“. Ein solcher Gott muss einfach sein, notwendig existieren, unwandelbar, leidenschaftslos, zeitlos, allwissend, allmächtig sowie Schöpfer und das Gute an sich sein. Rogers gibt einen hervorragenden Überblick über die klassische Lehre und die gegenwärtige Debatte. Außerdem bietet sie eine rigorose Verteidigung dieser Tradition innerhalb der christlichen Theologie. Es handelt sich um eine brillante Einführung, die den Leser über die oberflächliche Ebene der Debatte hinausführt.

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

On a là une présentation solide et une défense vigoureuse de la doctrine théiste classique. L'auteur élabore sa doctrine systématique de Dieu à partir de la définition faisant de Dieu «l'être dont on ne



peut concevoir de plus grand». Un tel Dieu doit être caractérisé par la simplicité de son être, exister nécessairement, être immuable, impassible, en dehors du temps, omniscient, omnipotent, être créateur et être la bonté même. Katherin Rogers réussit admirablement à donner une vue d'ensemble de la doctrine classique ainsi que du débat contemporain, et à défendre cette tradition avec une grande rigueur. Elle nous conduit ainsi dans une réflexion profonde, qui ne se contente pas d'une approche superficielle des points débattus.

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This is an accessible, contemporary restatement and defence of the classical Christian understanding of God born out of the synthesis of biblical theology and the Greek philosophical tradition. A perfect being theologian is any theologian who attempts 'a systematic analysis of the divine attributes beginning with the concept of God as limitless perfection' (p. 4). Perfect being theology begins from the claim that God must possess (though we are not to think of God existing and having these properties added to him) all the properties that make one great (i.e. knowledge, power, goodness etc.) to an unlimited degree. God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'.

Rogers begins her exploration of God with a defence of the contentious doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which all the properties we attribute to God (wisdom, power, love etc.) are identical to one another and to God himself. Thus, God does not possess the property of love – he *is* love. This hard to understand claim has been subjected to much criticism in recent years but Rogers believes that 'almost all participants misunderstand the classic doctrine of simplicity' (p. 27). According to Aquinas, God does not possess properties nor is He a property. God *is* his act of knowing, doing and being perfectly good and these are all one act – the full realisation of the divine nature.

The discussion then moves on to defend divine necessity, immutability and impassivity. Metaphysically (as opposed to logically or empirically) necessary existence is a way of existing: God's very nature is to exist and to do so in such a way that it is impossible for God to fail to exist. God, unlike everything else, requires nothing outside of his own being to explain his existence. God is also utterly unchanging. This follows from the claim that God is pure act and that in him there is no potential. This claim has come under considerable attack from recent Christian thinkers and Rogers defends it against the critics. Most contentious of all is the claim that God enjoys complete happiness and experiences none of the emotions that are a falling away from perfection (e.g. sadness, pain). God, according to the perfect being theologian, is perfectly happy and nothing we can do can infect and diminish God's perfection. This view is both attractive and repellent. The perfect being theologian has little room for manoeuvre here and one must either reject the whole system or bite the bullet.

Being simple, God must be utterly unchanging and being utterly unchanging, he must be timeless. Rogers makes frequent use of the parallel between God's relation to space and his relation to time in her defence of timelessness. Just as God is not spatial yet is present to all of space so God is not temporal but is present to all of time. Although the doctrine of divine timelessness requires a slightly counter-intuitive B-theory of time (the theory that the past and the future are as real as the present), Rogers maintains that 'such a view is not incoherent, nor does it render time illusory nor destroy sequence and causal connection' (p. 64). She moves on to try to refute a range of objections to timelessness.

God, as a perfect being, must be omniscient. His knowledge is immediate, non-propositional and identical with his power. God knows (what are to us) past, present and future. He has direct knowledge of the whole span of time because he is eternal and present to all of time. Rogers maintains that this view of divine foreknowledge actually preserves the libertarian freedom of created agents.

God is also the most powerful being possible. This does not mean he can do the logically impossible, so we can pass by questions like 'can God make a stone too heavy for him to lift?'. I may be able to do this but then I am not the creator of all *ex nihilo*. For God, because of his omnipotence, it is logically impossible to do this. The fundamental divine act is the immediate holding in the being of all creation. Rogers maintains that divine omnipotence is compatible both with determinist views of freedom (Augustine) and with libertarian ones (Anselm). Unusually for a perfect being theologian, she defends libertarian freedom for agents. But God is another matter and she sees no value in supposing that God himself has libertarian freedom (though she is not dogmatic here). God, being perfect, *must* do what is best so that rather limits his choices!

Perhaps the most interesting chapter is the discussion on God and creation. Created things are no more than the objects of God's thoughts (she refers to this view as 'theistic idealism' though strongly distancing it from the empiricist versions of idealism). Without God's thinking them, they are nothing. But does creation then add to God? No. 'Hamlet may express something about Shakespeare, and it may be a valuable activity for Shakespeare to think about Hamlet, but you cannot really add Hamlet's being to Shakespeare's and come up with more existence' (p. 113) because Hamlet and Shakespeare exist on different ontological levels. The same goes for God and creation. Rogers extends this notion of different ontological levels to defend a helpful understanding of secondary causation (concurrentism). She uses the analogy of the relation between authors and the textual worlds they create in fiction. What caused Dorothy's house to blow to Oz in *The Wizard of Oz*? The primary cause was L. Frank Baum. The secondary cause was the tornado. Baum could have determined that a different cause led to the house's relocation. However, at the



ontological level of the story the tornado is the cause. This analogy, being superior to occasionalism (the view that there are no causal powers in the world but that everything is directly caused by God) and mere conservatism (the view that God simply keeps things in existence and that they produce effects on their own), provides a fruitful way to think about divine action.

God is goodness. There is not some Platonic standard of goodness external to God to which he must measure up. Nor is what will be good and what will be bad simply decided by arbitrary fiat. God is essentially good and thus could not fail to be good (without failing to be God, which is impossible). It does not really make sense then to suppose that the language of obligation applies to God. God is the source of the standard and he *cannot* fall short of it. The rules for human morality are simply the natural law for how humans might best imitate God. The book ends with a more or less standard discussion of the problem of evil.

This is a superb introduction to the classical Christian conception of God. It is grounded in a deep and wide understanding of the scholastic philosophers (especially Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas) as well as the range of current philosophical debates on the doctrine of God. The structure is clear and the style fluent and easy to read, thus making the book a helpful introduction for undergraduate and post-graduate students in theology or philosophy. At a time when it is common to reject the God of classical theism, this book makes a powerful case for what remains a very compelling tradition of reflection on the being and nature of God. Rogers clearly brings out the beautiful inner coherence of this system of thought, flagging up all its advantages. She helpfully introduces the reader to a wide range of objections to perfect being theology and attempts to deal with them seriously. I did feel that the responses varied in their effectiveness. For instance, impassibility remains a problem for Christians, why God should be praised for morally good acts when he could not help but do them still puzzles me, and I remain unsure whether libertarian freedom really is compatible with perfect being theology. I also remain unclear why Christian philosophical texts defending divine being theology seem only ever to make passing reference to the problem of the incarnation. Surely this is a major issue for the Christian divine being theologian and ought to have an entire chapter devoted to it. Nevertheless, this is a fine book.

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## *What Is Rhetorical Theology? Textual Practice and Public Discourse*

Don H. Compier

Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999, x + 100 pp., pb., \$12.00, ISBN 1-56338-290-3

### SUMMARY

In *What Is Rhetorical Theology?*, Compier calls for a theological approach conceived as the practice of rhetorical hermeneutics. He argues that theology should aim for a discourse that bridges the gap between the academy and society at large, seeking to inspire persons to actively engage with the issues facing us today. Some open questions and weaknesses notwithstanding, Compier's call for a rhetorical theology seeking to change and inspire its audiences should not go unheard.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Compier befürwortet in *What Is Rhetorical Theology?* einen theologischen Ansatz, der sich als Umsetzung einer rhetorischen Hermeneutik versteht. Er fordert die Theologie auf, einen Diskurs anzustreben, der den Graben zwischen der akademischen Welt und der Gesellschaft als ganzer zu überbrücken bemüht ist und dem zudem daran liegt, Leute dazu zu bewegen, sich aktiv mit den Themen unserer Zeit auseinanderzusetzen. Einigen offenen Fragen und Schwächen zum Trotz sollte Compier's Forderung nach einer Theologie, die ihre Zuhörerschaft zu inspirieren und verändern sucht, nicht ungehört verhallen.

### RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce livre, Compier se fait l'avocat d'une approche de la théologie conçue comme une pratique de l'herméneutique rhétorique. La théologie devrait avoir pour but d'élaborer un discours qui serve de pont pour franchir le gouffre qui sépare les études académiques de la société. Elle devrait ainsi pousser les gens à se préoccuper des problèmes du monde d'aujourd'hui. Malgré certaines questions laissées en suspens et certaines faiblesses dans l'approche, cet appel à une théologie rhétorique cherchant à changer et à stimuler son audience mérite d'être entendu.

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At a time of fragmentation, the breakdown of theological consensus and theology's waning ability to attract the attention of the public, Compier suggests a theological approach conceived as the practice of rhetorical hermeneutics. Building on pre-modern Christian thinkers and the classical tradition of rhetoric, he argues that theology should aim for a Christian discourse characterised by identity, catholicity and relevance and seeking to bridge the gap between the academy and society at large.

The first chapter introduces the rhetorical tradition and its appropriation by Christian theologians. Eschew-