

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-

ing the Greek tradition exemplified by Plato and Aristotle, Compier stresses the importance of Roman treatises on rhetoric, especially those by Cicero and Quintilian, who refused to separate rhetoric and philosophy, thus enabling rhetoric to become a full-blown educational theory. According to Compier, the rhetorical ethos of Roman oratory is practical (it is a branch of political science), public, active (a praxis designed to effect desirable consequences), contextual, contingent (recognising that all knowledge is inescapably imperfect), polemical (or combative) and holistic (appealing to 'the whole person in rational, emotional, ascetic, ethical, and volitional terms'; p. 11). Tracing its history of effects, Compier notes that while the rhetorical tradition decisively shaped the theology of the Reformers as well as important Christian thinkers such as John Henry Newman, the modern period saw its decline due to the embrace of objectivism in the new empiricist and realist philosophies.

However, with the reign of modernity approaching its end, Compier detects signs of a revival of the rhetorical ethos in such diverse trends and figures as postmodernism, Nietzsche, Barth, Johann B. Metz, Latin American liberation theologians, Lindbeck, Kierkegaard, Schüssler Fiorenza and Schleiermacher (Chapter two). Taking his cue from these and reviewing the seminal contributions to rhetorical theology by David Tracy, David Cunningham and Rebecca Chopp, Compier proposes to redefine theology as rhetorical hermeneutics.

Chapter three deals with rhetorical epistemology. Refuting the claim that analytical method offers more reliable access to reality and hence to social efficacy and suggesting that the Christian doctrine of sin rules out the possibility of human knowledge more certain than that which persuasion is capable of achieving, Compier nonetheless does not subscribe to epistemological relativism. Indeed, he notes that any assertions about textual meaning must be warrantable, that the construal of signification must be defended and that the rhetorical worldview involves a belief in realities that underlie and transcend particular social formations.

Compier concludes his case for rhetorical theological method by considering the rhetorical construction of a contemporary theology of sin. He notes the current lack of interest in hamartiology on the Northern American scene, which he traces back to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, the 'masters of suspicion', who considered hamartiology itself a sin, which actively contributed to the oppression of others. Criticising the academic debate about the question of original sin, which has turned sin into an intellectual problem rather than a moral one ('a question not of actions but of meaning', p. 56), Compier is concerned about the cogency of theology as a reflection on and response to the massive suffering of our age. What is needed, in his view, is a critical theory of society based on the prophetic traditions found in Scripture, which 'offers a pragmatic diagnosis that aims to loosen the readers' allegiance to the oppres-

sive status quo' (p. 59). Compier in this context points to Calvin, who in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* pursued hamartiology as a critique of oppressive doctrines of sin, seeking to contribute to emancipation (in his case that of exiled Anabaptists in whose defence the *Institutes* were written). He holds that Calvin's example demonstrates that 'hamartiology performed as rhetorical hermeneutics does have the potential of reading texts in ways that can inspire persons to actively address the horrors of our time' (p. 70).

In a concluding peroration, Compier comments on the catholicity and historicity of theology, noting that as any particular theological reading takes place on a unique horizon, catholicity needs to be redefined as 'a rich pluralism of perspectives' (p. 72).

Being quite short, this book raises a number of questions that Compier does not have the space to pursue (e.g. the danger of such a rhetorical theology becoming too provincial, of surrendering transcendence or of courting the audience so that their values are not altered but reaffirmed). One may also question Compier's easy dismissal of the Greek tradition of rhetoric as well as his definition of catholicity, which does not do much to help the church rediscover an identity (other than as a voice against modern evil, which though surely important seems hardly sufficient). Yet, these problems and criticisms notwithstanding, there is much of value in this study and Compier's call for a rhetorical theology that seeks to change and inspire its audiences should not go unheard.

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Ancient Israel's Faith and History: An Introduction to the Bible in Context

George E. Mendenhall (ed. Gary A. Herion)

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, xx + 284 pp., pb., £20.00, ISBN 0-664-22313-3

SUMMARY

This is a synthesis of Israel's faith and history from Abraham to Jesus, in which Mendenhall combines a development of religions approach, with an emphasis on the archaeological and ancient Near Eastern backgrounds to the Old Testament, with sociological perspectives. He reconstructs Sinai religion as the foundation of Israel's religion and examines its development in later periods. The book is stimulating and contains many valuable insights although some conclusions are questionable. Occasionally, Mendenhall uses modern sociological ideas at the expense of the ancient Near Eastern self-testimony.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Buch bietet eine Synthese des Glaubens und der Geschichte Israels von Abraham bis Jesus, wobei Mendenhall einen religionsgeschichtlichen