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The Rhetoric of Gay Christians: Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson as Exemplars

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The Rhetoric of Gay Christians: Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson as Exemplars

Matthew Vines

**Argument**

In the conclusion of his speech, Vines’ rhetoric was prophetic because he admonished traditionalists for harming gay individuals with their biblical interpretations. However, Vines had to argue himself into his prophetic role, because traditionally gay individuals are excluded from religious traditions. He does this by establishing persuasive *ethopoeia* and by refuting traditional readings of the Bible.

**Theoretical Development**

My analysis of this speech complicates our understanding of the prophetic tradition, because, unlike previous scholarship, I contend that gay rights rhetoric can be prophetic. This is the first analysis that has ever applied the prophetic tradition to a rhetor that identifies as gay.

**Persuasive Ethopoeia**

*Ethopoeia* “is concerned with . . . the creation of persuasive ethos.”

**Invitational Rhetoric**

Invitational rhetoric “offers an invitation to understanding—to enter another’s world to better understand an issue and say everything the individual who holds a particular perspective on it. Ultimately, its purpose is to provide the basis for the creation and maintenance of relationships of equality.”

“In Matthew 5, Jesus instructs if someone makes you go one mile, go with them two miles. And so I’m going to ask you, Would you step into my shoes for a moment, and walk with me just one mile, even if it makes you a bit uncomfortable?”

Nancy Wilson

**Argument**

Wilson’s constitutive rhetoric creates her audience as *parrhésiastea* (frank speakers) by addressing them as individuals that would act as such in the future. Specifically, she imagined her audience as a people that would boldly and frankly fight against Proposition 8, challenge violence to queers in Pakistan, spread the world of God to younger generations, and criticize those who condemned sexual and gender minorities.

**Context**

40th Anniversary of the Metropolitan Community Churches—the “first gay church”

**Constitutive Rhetoric**

Constitutive rhetoric creates a particular audience; the rhetor speaks that audience into existence. If “must constitute the identity of a group of people “as it simultaneously presumes” that identity “to be pregenen and natural, existing outside of rhetoric.”

**Analysis**

“They [young people] are looking for people to change the world with, for a movement that cares about the things they care about—that is queer enough and radical enough to honor those who in 1968 risked lives and reputations to challenge the church, laws, nations so that those on the margins could have hope and community—people who knew then, as we know now, that Jesus does not discriminate.”

“Economy woes or challenges will not stop us. The religious right or fundamentalists in any culture will not stop us. AIDS will not stop us. Failure or success will not stop us. Death threats or bigots will not stop us. The light is on and it’s not going out.”

“We have a cloud of witnesses don’t we, watching tonight. Think of them right now. They are waiting for us to have the kind of courage it took to found MCC and to find it all over again, to fall in love with the impossible dream of a rainbow people of God. They held up the light for many of us, and now it is our turn to hold it up for a new generation.”

**Parrhésia**

The *parrhésiastea* are individuals who speak freely and frankly; they say everything that is on their mind. When they act, they assume that they are in danger. They are in danger, because they frankly critique those in power. They critique, because they know that they are not correct, and, because they are correct, they have an obligation and duty to speak.

**Conclusion**

Vines – Normalized Identity – Liberal Approach/“personhood” → Natural Rights Arguments

Wilson – Molarized Identity – Queer Approach/“queerhood” → Expediency Arguments

The construction of a queer Christian archive

The history of GLBTQ discourse must be acknowledged, and engaged, and taught, and written about—in short, circulated.

“We ought not settle for scandalous visibility when there are major instrumental projects—including equal rights and protection in the workplace and in private life and a real fight against AIDS—that need real advocates, not mysterious figures form the past.”

Discussing how liberal and queer Christians counter traditionalists can serve instrumental projects by equipping rhetors with arguments they can deploy in public discourse to respond to traditionalist arguments.

**Study Overview**

In the United States, there is a perception that the gay rights debate situates Christians against gay rights advocates. According to this perception, Christians oppose gay rights, because the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin, and those who support gay rights do so using purely secular arguments. This perception of the gay rights debate is flawed and overly simplistic, because simply not all Christians oppose gay rights. In fact, there are multiple interpretations of biblical texts that support homosexuality and have caused gay rights debate within the church that is as complex and intricate as gay rights debate outside of the church. Within this debate, gay Christians must negotiate their own identities.

The Biblical Debate About Homosexuality

The **Traditional Approach** — “The Text of Terror”

The Genesis creation story, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the prohibitions of Leviticus, Saint Paul’s letters to the Romans and the Corinthians, and 1 Timothy 1:10. “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death.” – Leviticus 20:13.

The **Liberal Approach** – Matthew Vines

Examples of Liberal Responses to Traditionalists

**Geneisis:**

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” – Galatians 3:28

Sodom and Gomorrh:

• The sin is homosexuality.
• The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was sexual violence.

Leviticus:

• It is a set of ceremonial laws which do not apply to individuals today.
• It denounces same-sex temple prostitution
• It is a prohibition against aging another army when that army surrenders.

The **Queer Approach** – Reverend Nancy Wilson

The Eunuchs, David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and Jesus and his “Beloved Disciple.”

Ruth loved Naomi as Adam loved Eve. Genesis 2:24; Ruth 1:14

“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan: You have been very pleasant to me: Your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.” – 2 Samuel 1:25-26

By: Josh Miller

Communication Studies

Reference:

L. Nancy Wilson. Our Sister Queer Sally. Queer Anne and the Bible. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003. Wilson indicates that this term is best explained by Sister Sally's in-applications to biblical texts that are said to condemn gay and lesbian individuals. However, the term was originally coined by Peggy Teter in an article which explores gender roles. See Robert Greenan, source cited (2003).40

