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 had ever applied the prophetic tradition to a rhetor that identifies as gay.

*Nancy Wilson

Argument

Wilson’s constitutive rhetoric creates her audience as *parhesisiesta* (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 towards 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”

Light as Truth, Proposition 8, Briggs Initiative, Anita Bryant, Bombings and Arsons, Pete Wilson’s vetoes, and HIV/AIDS

Theological Development

In rhetorical tradition, the term *parhesis* applies to an individual speaker. However, in religious traditions, the term *parhesis* can apply to a group of individuals. I align these two traditions to argue that Wilson constituted her audience as a group of *parhesisiesta*—the *parhesis*.

*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 a pregiven 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.”

*Nancy Wilson

Conclusion

*Nancy Wilson

*Queer/Liberal approach as mutual reinforcing*

Vines — *Normalized Identity — Liberal Approach* (personhood) — Natural Rights Arguments

Wilson — *Moral 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, no 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 traditionalists’ arguments.”

*Matthew Vines

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 a 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 Texts of Terror”

The Genesis creation narrative, 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

Genesis:

“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 Gomorrah:

• The sin is inhospitality.

• 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