

## The Role of Rhetoric in Ordering the Affections . . . and Society

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*Blessèd are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. - Ps. 84:5*

St Augustine defines virtue as *ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it. Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has been thus trained in *ordinate affections* or 'just sentiments' will easily find the first principles in Ethics; but to the corrupt man they will never be visible at all and he can make no progress in that science. Plato before him had said the same. The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful. ~ C.S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, p. 13

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My emphasis today is twofold: First and foremost, the role of rhetoric in "inclining the soul" toward the True, Good, and Beautiful. We will first differentiate the *techne* [craft knowledge; art] of rhetoric from the faculty of discovery, inherent to rhetorical invention, that is logically prior to the art of crafting arguments. The obvious role of rhetoric is understood exclusively in terms of "rhetorical invention," namely, the art of composing persuasive speeches and papers. Today I wish to consider how the process of crafting papers and speeches, and then of delivering them eloquently, all combine, in myriad ways, to effect well-ordered affections. More of that in a moment.

The not so obvious role has to do with "The Cultural Role of Rhetoric." (show them) I'm not really put together such that I can focus entirely on the former, without exploring, ever so briefly, the latter! So, I'll conduct a thorough examination of the role of rhetoric in ordering the affections, then briefly touch on the cultural role of which I was first made aware by my mentor, Charles Follette, who introduced me to the works of Richard M. Weaver (the subject of Follette's doctoral dissertation). Oh, boy! Here comes another hyper-intellectual presentation about concepts that don't really matter in the real world! Not really, no . . .

It is my prayer that you will walk away from this session with a full understanding of why this knowledge is vital, for those whose earnest desire is that our children follow in the ways we believe, teach, and confess. The sensibilities one cultivates as one learns rhetorical and dialectical arts, in the fashion I will outline, equip one to embrace a faith like ours. What differentiates our faith worldview from others?

- ❖ Orthodox Lutherans are sacramental
- ❖ Orthodox Lutherans are creedal
- ❖ Orthodox Lutherans embrace mysteries (we are not rationalistic; we embrace both/and not either/or)
- ❖ Orthodox Lutherans are confessional . . . Our calling card is "This is most certainly true"

As a result, our souls need to be "inclined in a particular way," from our youth. In short, any old sort of education will not do. Classical Lutheran Liberal Arts education is what's needed. Even at that, "any old Classical Lutheran Liberal Arts education" will not suffice! Why? Because a robust focus, in the upper grades, on rhetorical and dialectical arts, *aiming at cultivation of wisdom and eloquence*, not simply "head knowledge" about rhetoric and logic, make all the difference. This is a great spring board for a rabbit trail on "right education"!

Aristotle said, "the right education is to be both pained by and to love what we ought." The rightly turned soul is oriented toward the City of God. As mentioned above, we first need to understand the distinction, between the *techne* of rhetoric and of the *heuresis*, that is "rhetorical reasoning."

When they are young, we drill our scholars, do catechesis, utilizing rote memorization. But the soul is not fully inclined, as everyone realizes, until the student "makes the truth his own." When does that happen? During the "rough and tumble of debate," attempting to persuade others, coming into contact with competing ideas. (This, by the way, is my rationale for the importance of having in one's curriculum, what is commonly known as a "speech communication" component. A robust, longitudinal exposure to thinking quickly on one's feet, listening with empathy, responding

appropriately, with imagination, and so on. Composition, well taught, will get you part way there; it takes speech and debate to become both "wise *and* eloquent.") This is why, in *Wisdom and Eloquence*, Littlejohn and Evans recognize the role of rhetoric in character development.

More recently, Jamie Smith observed, in *You are What You Love*,

. . . our hearts are calibrated through imitating exemplars and being immersed in practices that, over time, index our hearts to a certain end. We learn to love, then, not primarily by acquiring information about *what* we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of *how* we love. These sorts of practices are "pedagogies" of desire, not because they are like lectures that inform us, but because they are rituals that form and direct our affections (21).

So Smith, and believe me, this is picking up steam in Evangelical circles, Smith observes how liturgical practices shape the soul. By virtue of our heritage, then, we have a perfect blend of catechesis, liturgies, classical content and pedagogy to shape the souls of our students. I've had a number of conversations recently about the importance of a sacramental viewpoint in the Christian life. Consider the importance of rhetorical studies in cultivating the imagination required to live the Christian life in the fashion Smith suggests; sacramentally.

Scholars will learn to understand the interplay of rhetorical figures, and poetic, and the combined effect of these on memory, emotions, will, and imagination. *They will understand what moves the soul and why.* So, how does that work? Let me break it down for you, very briefly! (One of the things you'll find on my Rhetoric Ring is a listing of three courses that comprise, in my opinion, a triumvirate of fundamentals in rhetorical arts that rightly constitute the Rhetoric Stage. Grades 9-11. (Why not also grade 12? Apprenticeships . . .)

I teach fundamentals of public speaking, argumentation & debate, and advanced public speaking in a traditional, liberal arts fashion, to "cultivate wisdom and eloquence." In other words, I "teach in tandem dialectic and rhetoric." Richard Weaver concludes "The Cultural Role of Rhetoric" by observing that . . . [take them there].

Taken together these three courses constitute an integrated approach to the study and practice of rhetoric. In the process of learning to practice rhetoric artfully, the student will also learn to reason with precision, to spot faulty logic, to exercise insight and forethought, to deliberate with insight, and to use language masterfully. He will learn to think both logically, and analogically--in short, to instruct, persuade, and delight audiences, habitually employing both wisdom and eloquence.

The key to this approach is that, in each case, both in terms of the logical and stylistic elements of instruction, in each case the theory is taught to prepare the student to excel in an upcoming assignment. So each unit of the course entails laying a theoretical foundation, some nuts and bolts, then an opportunity to practice. They do a good bit of research, they are exposed to great speeches, they focus intently on style and pathos, and, are ultimately invited to do a speech in which their voice emerges. The pedagogical principle of "multum non multa" (much not many; cover in more depth fewer "things,") is a key pedagogical principle, indeed. Put away the firehose. Circle concepts, learn in stages, and bring to bear the theory on an upcoming assignment. Design units of instruction with this in mind. This particular learning cycle, in my experience, takes two years. Again, this is about cultivating mental habits, not test-taking skills. It is more nuanced and dynamic than is mastery of content.

While this cycle of learning imparts both practical wisdom and eloquence, it also has, as was intimated earlier, ethical, moral, and theological dimensions. Rhetoric and dialectic, united "as the regime of the human faculties intended," are involved in a complex and nuanced interplay. As Aristotle notes in the beginning of his treatise on rhetoric, dialectic and rhetoric are "antistrophes" (counterparts) of one another (*Rhetoric*, Bk I Chpt. 1). They appear as two plants growing up side by side but share a common root below the surface. Phenomenologically, rhetoric is the art of argumentation; dialectic, the art that tests the truth of debatable propositions. But that aspect of rhetoric that precedes argumentation, namely, "rhetorical reasoning" (the faculty of discovering the crux of the matter in difficult cases,) exposes their common root. Dialectical inference operates in rhetorical reasoning in a manner that accentuates just how deeply intertwined are the two.

Learning to operate comfortably in this arena cultivates, in the natural course of things, insight, discernment, prudence, foresight, mental discipline AND mental dexterity! In short, it equips one to handle Truth. More to our point today, in the handling of those truths, one examines the foundations of one's faith. And one's political orientation. One's "inclinations," as it were. So we have arrived at a really common-sensical principle: That the pursuit of Truth shapes the soul, only now we have a little more clear picture of how rhetoric is highly implicated in that pursuit . . . insofar as one attempts to persuade one's neighbor.

But we are not bodiless machines moved by logic alone, we are incarnated minds and souls moved by vivid images and inspired by beauty. One of the beautiful things about rhetoric is that it appeals to persons in their whole being. Crafting fine speeches and papers that are designed to move one to dream big dreams, or think big thoughts, require finely honed aesthetic sensibilities. Learning to use language artfully, to appeal not only to the mind, but also to the imagination and the heart, is a humanizing activity (for both speaker and audience). Albert Einstein's quip, that "Imagination is more important than knowledge," bespeaks the importance of style in rhetoric. You can muster all the logic at your disposal, but if you fail to move your audience, you will never persuade them. The end of persuasion is action, and in order to move persons to action, you've got to move the soul.

In *De augmentis*, Sir Francis Bacon defines rhetoric as, "The application of reason to imagination for the better moving of the will," Style is about crafting strong mental imagery and building to a verbal crescendo by artfully, strategically, utilizing figures of speech. The canon of style is about introducing to one's argumentation both poetry and aesthetics. It's about communicating truth with beauty and grace which adds impulse to the Truth. Rhetoric, in the final analysis, moves the soul toward the Good. So, we teach our students to "preside over their art with secure mastery"<sup>1</sup> We teach them, not dry, sterile communication of ideas, but to combine good reasons with passion and vivid imagery to pique the imagination, which stirs the emotions, which moves the will. So rhetoric is a great power, and must be wielded with grace, decorum, propriety, proportion and measure, so, even when it comes to the fanciful dimensions of rhetoric, the scholar is constrained by the dictates of good judgment and good taste.

Mastering oratory requires one to both be good (to establish trust) and to aim at the Good by speaking Truth. The former entails the goodness cultivated within the rhetor (virtue); the latter, that from which, and to which, our rhetoric points. Trust is a precondition of persuasion. Why would one allow oneself to be persuaded by one whose word cannot be trusted? Similarly, creating a "nagging feeling" in the minds of one's audience that one's aim is not true, that the proposed course of action may lead to ruination, tends to militate against one's rhetorical success!

In Book 12 of his *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian argues that an orator must be a good man because he is educated to lead and a leader cannot create civic virtue, through good laws, and by praising virtue, if he has not cultivated virtue himself, or if his judgment is warped. To speak credibly on affairs of state, the speaker must be credible. He must love both the state and its citizens.

In this postmodern age, our students need to be educated in this fashion, simply to hold onto the sort of faith we believe, teach, and confess. What sort of faith is that? It is Christological, Sacramental, Creedal, and Liturgical. A particular sort of faith requires a particular sort of education. Luther and company understood this; we are re-discovering it. The Lutheran faith is based resolutely on the words and works of Christ. Other "faith worldviews" within Christendom are much less focused on Christ and more focused on moralism, mysticism, or rationalism. (Please see Gene Edward Veith's *Spirituality of the Cross*.)

Our creedal faith, is based on absolute truth. "Unless one believe this, one shall surely perish." This is unequivocal. Our doctrine is based on the Creeds and documents codified in our *Book of Concord* were forged by great theological minds, in the crucible of conflict, through the ages. It is most certainly true that, to be brought fully into communion with those minds, one must possess a mind that is up to the task!

The Word and Sacraments are central to our doctrine and, especially in a rationalistic and empiricist culture, sacramental Christianity is an "acquired taste." One must *learn* to participate in it, so to speak. Why? Because it requires

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dunne. *Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*. Notre Dame: U Notre Dame P, 1993.

imagination and figuration; to bridge the seen and unseen; this world and the world to come. Our rites and worship practices are fruits of a heritage that goes back, literally, to an age that predates Christianity. They are "classical" (see Art Just's *Heaven on Earth*.) Our faith worldview is ancient, and, therefore, out of step, entirely, with the Postmodern age in which we live!

The catechesis our students receive helps them have "eyes to see and ears to hear" the particular kind of truth they encounter in the sermons of our church. They grasp more readily than the child educated differently, that Christ is at the center, that we are His workmanship, and that we walk in the works He prepared for us to do. Smith elucidates precisely why cultivating imagination is a natural outcome of the approach to language arts we teach, that it actually helps our children fully hear and inwardly digest, God's Word. A prayer in *I Kings* chapter 8 is apropos:

The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us:  
That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers (vss. 57 & 58).

And also, Ps. 141: 4a: "Incline not my heart to any evil thing."

Our creeds and confessions are written in a distinctively classical style. That style reflects what Smith calls, in a particularly striking turn of phrase, ". . . the liturgies that govern our rhythms" (113)! There remains now only a single small step to understand the "cultural role of rhetoric," as explicated in the essays of Richard M. Weaver.

As we engage in rhetoric, to persuade persons about "surface propositions," we speak *from* presuppositions regarding those values that make the proposal either attractive or repulsive; praise or blame worthy. In a nutshell, as we teach our neighbor to love what he ought, or to be repulsed by what he ought, we also invite him, below the level of discourse (the "tacit realm,") to see the world in a particular way. The cultural role of rhetoric has to do with what my mentor dubbed, "deep rhetoric": those taken for granted presuppositions that, though out of discourse, must nonetheless be assumed in order to make sense out of the picture of the world being developed. They are value propositions that are powerful precisely because they dictate what is to be valued when valuation is not problematic, because the focus is on a "surface proposal," that involves, in some sense, changing the status quo. There exists a fundamental agreement that binds together all who adhere to the unspoken values. Values like, "one's word is one's bond," or "do unto others as you would have others do unto you," or "a pillar of strong character is trustworthiness." The bottom line is that the cultural role of rhetoric is to simultaneously cultivate cultural cohesion and to also provide a vehicle for cultural change. Permanence and change. In our day, where dissension, division, and disintegration threaten to dissolve our very social bonds, the cultivation of cultural cohesion is increasingly important. We are increasingly fragmented.

Look . . . just go to [rhetoricring.com](http://rhetoricring.com), click on "Weaver's Top Ten," and read "The Cultural Role of Rhetoric." If you like, I'll give a little tutorial (preferably over adult beverages) before we part company Thursday! Thank you all for your kind attention!