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**“A Divine Kind of Rhetoric”:**

**Rhetorical Strategy and Spirit-Wrought Sincerity in English Puritan Writing**

**Abstract:**

In their endeavors to persuade their readers and hearers to conversion and godly living, Puritan writers and preachers in early modern England make use of the three modes of persuasion identified by Aristotle: *logos* (appeal to rational argument), *pathos* (appeal to emotion), and *ethos* (appeal to the perceived credibility of the speaker). Although deploying rhetorical techniques, Puritan writers seek to manifest a Spirit-wrought sincerity, understood as earnest expression flowing from doctrinal conviction, inward spiritual experience, and a heartfelt desire to persuade others. This article explores these dynamics in the works of William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, and John Bunyan.

**Key words:** John Bunyan, plain style, Puritanism, rhetoric, sincerity.

Logic and rhetoric are “the practice of the holy Ghost” (Perkins, *Workes* III:259). So says William Perkins, one of the leading “godly” clergy of Cambridge during the later Elizabethan period, in his posthumously published sermons on the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Richard Sibbes, who preached in Cambridge and London during the reigns of James I and Charles I, writes in the prefatory epistle to his sermon treatise *The Bruised Reede, and Smoaking Flax* that “*the Holy Ghost effectually perswadeth by a divine kinde of rhetoricke*” (Sibbes, *The Bruised Reede* sig. a7v).

When read in context, Perkins and Sibbes are not saying exactly the same thing. Perkins’s commentary is discussing the verbal techniques and logical structures of the actual words of scripture given by the Spirit, whereas Sibbes is using “rhetoric” in a metaphorical sense to refer to the persuasive activity of the Spirit in conversion. However, both pose a challenge to the widespread assumption that the performance of rhetoric is opposed to sincerity,<sup>2</sup> as well as to the assumption that Puritan “plain style” preaching is unrhetorical, in contrast to the more ornate “metaphysical” preaching of the likes of John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes.

In his classic 1972 study *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling sees both the word and the concept of “sincerity” as emerging in the early modern period, noting that “The word

itself enters the English language in the first third of the sixteenth century” (Trilling 12). Trilling’s account distinguishes an early modern ideal of “sincerity” as a lack of dissimulation that enables truthful dealing with others in service of the common good from a later ideal of “authenticity” as asserting one’s uncensored self apart from considerations of the common good. Trilling cites Polonius’s words in *Hamlet* as paradigmatic of the social role of sincerity:

This above all: to thine own self be true  
 And it doth follow, as the night the day,  
 Thou canst not then be false to any man. (Qtd. in Trilling 3)<sup>3</sup>

Trilling rightly notes that “The sixteenth century was preoccupied to an extreme degree with dissimulation, feigning, and pretence” (Trilling 13; cf. Taylor esp. 22–28), a preoccupation that continued into the seventeenth century. Such culturally pervasive early modern anxieties about the gap between inner reality and outward performance are reflected in Puritan attacks on the “hypocrite” – that is, the person who plays the part of a believer but is not truly so (Winship 474–76; Dixon esp. 39, 130–38, 273–74, 322–27).

While “Puritanism” is a slippery term whose definition is much debated by historians, this article will focus on practitioners of English Reformed “practical divinity,” a pastoral method developed by Richard Greenham (minister of the village of Dry Drayton near Cambridge) and others that applied Reformed theology to the experience of ordinary people in order to instruct them in how to be saved, how to know that they are saved, and how to

live a godly life (Winship; Hambrick-Stowe; Dixon; Patterson 90–113). Since this pastoral method involves persuading people towards conversion and godly living, it has an inextricably rhetorical dimension that entails “sincerity” in Trilling’s sense – Trilling’s famous definition of “sincerity” as “congruence between feeling and avowal” (Trilling 7) implies an audience to witness that avowal and not simply concern for the inward “authenticity” of one’s own spiritual experience.<sup>4</sup>

Puritan persuasion makes use of the three modes of persuasion outlined by Aristotle (Aristotle 1356a):<sup>5</sup> *logos* (appeal to rational argument), *pathos* (appeal to emotion, or, in early modern parlance, the affections), and *ethos* (appeal to the perceived credibility of the speaker). Yet these modes of persuasion as deployed by Puritan writers and preachers were not just manipulative contrivances – Puritans sought sincerity in all three domains. While the word “sincerity” acquired greater currency, particularly in literary criticism, from the Romantics onwards (e.g. Ball; Milnes and Sinanan), the moral imperative of “congruence between feeling and avowal” (Trilling 7) was affirmed by Puritans. In the introduction to their essay collection *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, Ernst van Alphen and Mieke Bal expand on Trilling’s definition, suggesting that sincerity can be “conceived of as the congruence of belief, feeling, and expression” (Van Alphen and Bal 13)<sup>6</sup> – all three of these elements are present in Puritan ideals of godly communication, in which earnest expression was expected

to flow from doctrinal conviction, inward spiritual experience, and a heartfelt desire to persuade others.

In an article providing a rhetorical analysis of a recent memoir, Liesbeth Korthals Altes writes:

In ancient rhetoric, sincerity already elicited specific interest, though not under that name. [...] Sincerity belongs to ethos, as it contributes in an important way to the favourable impression of trustworthiness, but also to pathos, as it adds to the impression that the expressed emotions are genuine. (Korthals Altes 110)

I would argue that, for the Puritans, logos too partook of sincerity in the more etymological sense noted by Trilling. Trilling notes of the earliest uses of “sincere” in English that “It derived from the Latin word *sincerus* and first meant exactly what the Latin word means in its literal sense – clean, or sound, or pure” (Trilling 12).<sup>7</sup> Among other examples, Trilling continues, “To speak of the sincere doctrine, or the sincere religion, or the sincere Gospel, was to say that it had not been tampered with, or falsified, or corrupted” (Trilling 13). This earlier sense of “sincere” is evident, for instance, when Perkins’s fictional dialogic mouthpiece Eusebius rejoices that God “hath lightened mine eyes to see, and my heart to embrace his sincere truth” (Perkins, *Workes* I:384).

With regard to pathos, Puritan writers sought to find what psychiatrist and literary scholar Vera Camden has called, with reference to John Bunyan’s appropriation of Martin

Luther, “an affective authenticity” (Camden 830), and then to communicate these authentic affections sincerely (in Trilling’s sense) for the spiritual good of their readers. With regard to ethos, they upheld an ideal of integrity on the part of the Christian, and especially the minister, whose outward persona should sincerely reflect an inward godly character, preferably accompanied by a spiritual unction in the case of the preacher.

Whether rhetorical technique can sincerely communicate divine truth is a perennial question in Christian engagement with the classical rhetorical tradition, a particular instance of Tertullian’s famous question “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”<sup>8</sup> With regard to rhetoric, George Kennedy captures the ambivalence of the Athens-Jerusalem relationship well:

In its purest and most fundamental form, therefore, the basic modes of proof of Judeo-Christian rhetoric are grace, authority, and logos, the divine message which can be understood by man. These correspond in a very incomplete way to the pathos, ethos, and rational logos of Aristotelian rhetoric. (Kennedy 123)

One of the most frequently cited biblical texts in Puritan discussions of preaching style is 1 Corinthians 2:4:

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Exegetes differ over whether the demonstration of the Spirit's power refers to powerful speech, miraculous signs, or both, but its opposition to "enticing words of man's wisdom" is clear. This could easily be read as a rejection of all rhetorical technique, especially given the context of the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul extols the apparent weakness and foolishness of the preaching of the cross to the rhetorically sophisticated Corinthians (Kennedy 130–32).

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, translated into English in 1577, John Calvin observes Paul's contrast of deceptive rhetorical ornament with the demonstration of the Spirit:

He calleth the alluring and perswading words of humane wisdom exquisite speaking, which is rather garnished with arte than with truthe: and also a shewe of subiltie which allureth mens myndes[.]  
(Calvin fol. 22v)

This sounds as if Calvin is reading Paul as an anti-rhetorician. Paul's word for "demonstration," ἀποδείξις (*apodeixis*), is the term used for rhetorical demonstration in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Aristotle 1355a). Thus Paul could be understood to be opposing rhetorical demonstration to a persuasion of a contrasting, spiritual kind.

However, Paul's own use of language is clearly rhetorical and even appears to make use of some of the techniques of classical rhetoric. Calvin finds a rhetorical figure even here

in 1 Corinthians 2:4: “He seemeth here to haue put the Spirit and power for spirituall power, by a figure called *Hypallage*” (Calvin fol. 22v).

Perhaps it is not all rhetoric but a certain kind of insincere rhetoric that Paul attacks as contrary to the preaching of the cross.<sup>9</sup> Some New Testament scholars have suggested that Paul was condemning the rhetoric of the Second Sophistic school in particular.<sup>10</sup> If so, Paul may even have been aligned with the chief rhetoricians valued by Renaissance humanists who saw eloquence rightly deployed when in the service of truth:

“Good” classical Roman rhetoricians, most notably Cicero and Quintilian, would have endorsed Paul’s disdain for those in Corinth who regarded rhetoric as a competitive “performance” designed to elicit applause, approval, and status from audiences. (Thiselton 51)

Debora Shuger has drawn attention to parallels between the attacks on sophistry by classical philosophers and the association drawn by early modern theologians between sophistry and spiritual deception:

To the ancient contrast between play and commitment, Renaissance Christianity adds the opposition of flattery to conversion. Like the former, this polarity turns on the difference between sophistry and rhetoric (or alternatively false and true rhetoric). The sophist flatters and entertains his audience; the true orator converts and challenges. (Shuger 129)

I will argue in this article that the English Puritans, though at times attacking what they call “rhetoric,” are in fact proponents and practitioners of a “true rhetoric” that “converts and challenges” through a sincerity that seeks to express the selfhood of the preacher/writer



for the good of the hearer/reader. Even Calvin's Paul need not be read as unequivocally opposed to rhetorical technique. Perhaps the "exquisite speaking, which is rather garnished with arte than with truth" is sinful not simply because it involves "arte," but because it displays art *rather than* truth: that is, this "exquisite speaking" is insincere. Despite his sense of the dangers of rhetoric, Calvin himself made use of rhetorical techniques to garnish the truth (Breen).

Likewise, the German Calvinist divine Bartholomaeus Keckermann argues in the preface to his homiletic work *Rhetoricae Ecclesiasticae* that Paul could not have intended to denounce eloquence as such, given Paul's own eloquence and use of the classical oration structure in his trial defenses as recorded in the book of Acts:

*Quî enim eloquentiam ibi damnet is, qui vnus omnium Apostoloru[m] eloquentissimus, ob summam dicendi vim pro Mercurio fuit habitus? qui artificiosissimè structis orationibus apud Felicem & Festum praesides Romanos, causam dixit?* (Keckermann 12)

(For how would he condemn eloquence there, he who, being the most eloquent one of all the apostles, was taken for Mercury on account of the supreme power of his speaking? He who pleaded his case before the Roman governors Felix and Festus with the most skillfully constructed speeches?)<sup>11</sup>

According to Keckermann, it is not rhetoric per se that Paul disavows, but the proud and superficial modes of rhetoric adopted by the "pseudo-apostles," not tempered by Christian humility (Keckermann 13; cf. Lares, "Classical and Christian Conflicts").

Nevertheless, Paul is deemphasizing the human words and verbal technique of the preacher and emphasizing that the Spirit is the true agent of persuasion – it is the Spirit, not the preacher, to whom the *apodeixis* is attributed. The *apodeixis* of the Spirit relativizes the importance of human eloquence, but verbal rhetorical technique can be a vehicle for the rhetoric of the Spirit, and a means to convey the human speaker’s sincerity in a persuasive manner. I would argue that this perspective is present explicitly or implicitly in the writing of English Puritan divines, even those who refer to “rhetoric” in a pejorative manner.

#### **“Rhetorical Jingling” versus Plain Preaching: Richard Baxter**

One reason why the Puritans tend to be read as anti-rhetorical is the dichotomy drawn by older literary scholarship on early modern sermons between “plain style” Puritan preaching and the more ornate “metaphysical” preaching of literary preachers such as Lancelot Andrewes and John Donne (e.g. Mitchell; H. Davies). Though a notable resurgence of scholarly interest in early modern preaching since the late 1990s has added greater nuance to the field (e.g. Ferrell and McCullough; McCullough, Adlington, and Rhatigan; Hunt; Morrissey), the dichotomy summarized here by Chin Hwa Myatt has an abiding influence:

There has been greater interest in the metaphysical style, which is largely characterised by wit, classical learning, and rhetorical ostentation to the point of theatricality. In contrast, the “plain” or “Puritan”

sermon has been characterised as almost entirely stripped of rhetorical ornament (and by implication, dry and dull) and so in line with Puritan antitheatrical prejudice. (Myatt 26)

This dichotomy is not entirely false, but, as Myatt notes, it is an oversimplification, though the dichotomy has its roots at least in part in the stylistic critiques made by Puritans themselves of the sermons and writings of their conformist opponents. For instance, the prolific Presbyterian Richard Baxter (1615–91) warns of preachers who are concerned about their polished speech but not about living an upright life, and, in this context, uses “Rhetorical” as a pejorative term:

O how curiously have I heard some men preach! and how carelesly have I seen them live! They have been so accurate as to the wordy part in their own preparations, that seldom preaching seemed a vertue to them, that their language might be the more polite, and all the Rhetorical jingling writers they could meet with, were prest to serve them for the adorning of their stile, (and gawds were oft their chiefest ornaments.) They were so nice in hearing others, that no man pleased them that spoke as he thought, or that drowned not affections, or dulled not, or distempered not the heart by the predominant strains of a phantastick wit. (Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus* 23–24)

Baxter here joins a venerable tradition of anti-rhetorical polemic that associates rhetoric with empty wit and insincere style – the curious and witty preacher is placed in opposition to the preacher “that spoke as he thought.” As is commonly the case with such polemics, however, Baxter is here manifestly utilizing rhetorical techniques and figures of speech. The parallelism of “how curiously” and “how carelesly” uses anaphora, consonance,

and homoioteleuton (similar word endings) to damn the witty preacher's misplaced efforts, while the sincere preacher to whom the "nice" hearers give no attention is distinguished from the witty preacher by a tricolon of negatives ("drowned not [...] dulled not [...] distempered not").

Baxter's understanding of "rhetoric" here reduces rhetoric from Cicero's five canons to the two canons of *elocutio* (style) and *pronuntiatio* (delivery), as does the "Ramist" rhetorical tradition of the French Protestant humanist Petrus Ramus (killed in the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day massacre) and his followers, and also perhaps echoes the frequent reduction of *elocutio* by Renaissance rhetoricians to the use of figures and ornaments (Conley 130–31; Reid and Wilson; Mack 136–63). Yet it is not necessarily all verbal ornament and figuration that Baxter rejects here. The specification that "gawds were off their chiefest ornaments" suggests a showy but superficial verbal artifice, drawing the hearer's attention to its own linguistic surface rather than to the weighty truths that should lie beneath.

Ironically, Baxter's conception of "Rhetorical" preaching here is that of an empty wit that "dull[s]" the heart, "drown[ing]" the affections in soporific clouds of words that obscure the divine message that should come through preaching. Hence "Rhetorical jingling" preaching is preaching that fails to effect persuasion of the heart and is thus ineffectual rhetoric in the broader sense of the term. Furthermore, this "rhetorical" preaching is deficient

in logos, ethos, and pathos, since its rational content is unclear, the persona of the speaker is transparently insincere, and it dulls rather than exciting the affections.

Commentators on Baxter's prose style or homiletics are drawn to the epistle to the reader that opens *A Treatise on Conversion*, which provides a contrast between "witty" and "plain" preaching (e.g. G. F. Nuttall 48; Keeble, *Richard Baxter* 51):

I shall never forget the relish of my soul when God first warmed my heart with these matters, and when I was newly entered into a seriousness in Religion: when I read such a Book as Bishop *Andrews* Sermons, or heard such kind of preaching, I felt no life in it: me thoughts they did but play with holy things. Yea, when I read such as Bishop *Hall*, or *Henshaws* Meditations, or other such Essays, Resolves, and witty things, I tasted little sweetness in them, though now I can find much. But it was the plain and pressing downright Preacher, that onely seemed to me to be in good sadness, and to make somewhat of it, and to speak with life, and light, and weight: And it was such kind of writings that were wonderfully pleasant, and savoury to my soul. And I am apt to think that it is thus now with my Hearers; and that I should measure them by what I was, and not by what I am. (Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion* sig. (a)3r)

It is passages such as these that have helped to shape the overly simplified perception of a sharp dichotomy between witty rhetorical preaching (which earlier literary critics dubbed "metaphysical" or "Anglican") and plain and powerful "Puritan" preaching. However, Baxter's comments are not as dichotomized as they are typically thought to be.

To read this passage rightly, we should recognize a temporal layering effect: the mature Baxter, writing this treatise, is reporting his perceptions as a young man and then accounts for his current practice as a preacher and writer in terms of what his younger self would have found beneficial. Often it is only the comments on Andrewes and those on “the plain and pressing downright Preacher” that are quoted, omitting Baxter’s intermediary comments on Joseph Hall and Joseph Henshaw (both of whom became bishops).

There is a distinction between Baxter’s assessment of the florid preachers, such as Andrewes, who “deal liker to Players than Preachers in the Pulpit” and the “exactness and brevity” of Hall and Henshaw, which did not convey much evident edification to Baxter in his younger days but spiritually nourishes him now.<sup>12</sup> The style of preachers like Andrewes reprehensibly “savoureth of levity, and tendeth to evaporate weighty Truths, and turn them all into very fancies, and keep them from the heart,” but Baxter has come to appreciate the scholarly Senecan style of Hall and Henshaw since he “can better digest exactness and brevity, than I could so long ago” (Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion* sig. (a)3r).

It is this latter sententious style that Baxter associates with “witty things,” not the “metaphysical” preaching style more often designated as “witty” in the secondary scholarship on early modern sermons. Yet though Baxter appreciates “conciseness,

sententiousness, and quickness,” he acknowledges that his treatise will deliberately forgo these qualities (Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion* sig. (a)2r).

Rather than eschewing rhetoric altogether, Baxter rejects a prioritization of the aesthetic dimension that places polish over earnestness in preaching. Baxter is accommodating his style to the needs of his audience, who, Baxter believes, more closely resemble his younger than his mature self: “I should measure them by what I was, and not by what I am.”

It is to Baxter that we owe one of the most eloquent and metaphorical defenses of plain style: “All our teaching must be as Plain and Evident as we can make it. For this doth most suite to a Teachers ends.” This straightforward assertion is followed by a succession of evocative images:

Truth loves the Light, and is most beautiful when most naked. Its a sign of an envious enemy to hide the truth; and a sign of an Hypocrite to do this under pretence of revealing it: and therefore painted obscure Sermons (like the painted glass in the windows that keeps out the light) are too oft the markes of painted Hypocrites. (Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus* 123; cf. Keeble, *Richard Baxter* 49)

Baxter’s advocacy of plain style prioritizes edification over erudition, but this does not entail unvarnished literalism with no ornamentation whatever. The “painted glass [...] that keeps out the light” is a vivid and memorable simile that depicts the uselessness of opaque ornament in enabling the perception of truth.

The opposition of the polite rhetoric of the hypocrite to plain devotion comes through elsewhere in Baxter's description of how the hypocrite criticizes the prayers of the godly poor for violations of social and rhetorical decorum. Baxter does not deny that the godly can be uncouth, but stresses a different set of priorities for evaluating prayer:

because the *same spirit* teacheth not *fine words*, and rhetorical language, to all that it teacheth to *pray with unutterable sighs and groans*, Rom. 8. 26, 27. though the *searcher of hearts* (who is not delighted with complements and set speeches) doth well understand the *meaning of the spirit*. (Baxter, *The Vain Religion of the Formal Hypocrite* 16)

Speech (here, that of prayer) is not to be valued for its polished eloquence but for its Spirit-wrought sincerity (utterance expressing true inward feeling). Here the presence of the Spirit does not necessarily confer verbal eloquence but effects spiritual communication between the godly and their God despite their lack of eloquence. Spirit-given ethos can coexist with a lack of verbal skill.

Yet Baxter does speak positively of persuasion and thus of rhetoric in the broad sense. He informs us that "Both Christ and Satan work *perswasively*, by *moral means*, and neither of them by *constraint* and *force*" (Baxter, *Christian Directory* Part I:105). In Baxter's works, Christ and Satan persuade often, though not exclusively, through human agents, thus bringing us back to the issue of the role of human verbal persuasion as a means of divine (or diabolic) persuasion.



### **The Art of Concealing the Art of Preaching: William Perkins**

A confluence between a modified classical rhetoric and a Spirit-wrought sincerity is evident in the writings of the Elizabethan Cambridge minister William Perkins (1558–1602).<sup>13</sup> Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and persuasion is a key concept in Perkins's works – he defines faith as “A perswasion, that those things which wee truly desire, God will graunt them for Christs sake” (Perkins, *Workes* I:8). It is the task of the preacher in particular to persuade people into this faith.

Perkins was a prolific author and popularizer of English practical divinity, but his importance to English Reformed preaching lies especially in his writing of the first major English preaching manual, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, whose influence can be seen in subsequent homiletic works by writers such as Richard Bernard and John Wilkins (Patterson 114–34; Lares, *Milton and the Preaching Arts* esp. 80–95). This homiletic work was first published in Latin as *Prophetica* in 1592, before being translated into English after Perkins's death by Thomas Tuke.

Perkins deploys logos, ethos, and pathos in his persuasive endeavors, but arguably privileges logos, the appeal to rational argument, since he associates faith particularly with persuasion to a right understanding:

The place and seate of faith (as I thinke) is the mind of man, not the will: for it stands in a kind of particular knowledge or perswasion, and there is no perswasion but in the minde. [...] Some doe place

faith partly in the mind, and partly in the will, because it hath two parts, knowledge and affiance: but it seemes not greatly to stand with reason, that one particular and single grace should be seated in diuers parts or faculties of the soule. (Perkins, *Workes* I:126)

While Perkins acknowledges right affections and a rightly inclined will as stemming from faith, he associates faith primarily with a right understanding: “there is no perswasion but in the minde.” This privileging of the mind in Perkins’s anthropology elevates the objective and propositional aspects of Christian faith above the subjective and experiential. Perkins therefore adopts rational argument (logos) as his primary mode of persuasion, defending propositions more than appealing to the affections, though pathos and ethos also have their place in Perkins’s practice of godly persuasion.

With regard to the rhetorical ethos of the preacher (his authority to speak as perceived by his audience), Perkins holds that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the preacher authority. Though human learning and study is necessary, it is not sufficient. In his treatise *Of the Calling of the Ministerie*, Perkins says that to be a messenger of the gospel of reconciliation between God and man the preacher himself should be reconciled to God:

Dare he present another man to Gods mercy for pardon, and neuer yet presented himselfe? Can hee commend the state of Grace to another, & neuer felt the sweetnes thereof in his owne soule? Dare hee come to preach sanctification with polluted lyps, and out of an vnsanctified hart? (Perkins, *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* 14–15).

William Haller elaborates on this quotation: “The business of the preacher was to help others along the way into which God had already directed him [...] The conversion he sought to effect he must first have experienced” (Haller 93). Haller identifies the preacher as depicted by Perkins with the Pauline/Augustinian paradigm of the converted sinner turned preacher.

However, it is not consistently the case in Perkins’s writing that preachers are necessarily regenerate. Even those gifted by the Holy Spirit to preach the Scriptures with accuracy and spiritual benefit to their hearers may not be among the elect. Perkins lists “the gift of *Prophecie*, whereby a man is made able to interpret and expound the Scriptures” among the gifts of the Spirit given to regenerate and unregenerate men alike (Perkins, *Workes* I:276), and his propositions on how far the reprobate may go in evidencing grace include that “A reprobate may haue the word of God much in his mouth, and also may be a preacher of the word: for so *prophecyng in Christs name*, shalbe used as an excuse of reprobates” (Perkins, *Workes* I:359). Even the passage in *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* is addressed to those who are already clergy or expected to become such – “Dare he” implies not the absolute impossibility of the unconverted preaching conversion but the culpability of it. Even in preaching to preachers, Perkins is calling for conversion.

Likewise, Perkins’s commentary on Galatians insists:

Ministers of the Gospell must learne Christ as *Paul* learned him. [...] They that must convert others, it is meet they should bee effectually converted. *Iohn* must first eat the booke, and then prophesie,

Rev.10.9. And they that would be first Ministers of the Gospell, must first themselves eat the booke of God. (Perkins, *Workes* II:179)

Eating the book, a metaphor that Perkins cites from Revelation, and that Revelation is borrowing from Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:8–3:3), suggests an intimate assimilation of scripture into the being of the preacher. But again, though “must” seems to suggest an absolute necessity of the preacher being regenerate, “it is meet” could be read in a weaker sense – it ought to be (but is not always) the case. Perhaps “must” signals an obligation – what ought to be the case – rather than an assertion of what is always in fact the case.

In speaking to his audience of prospective clergy, Perkins says that “euery one, who either is or intends to be a minister, must haue that tongue of the learned, whereof is spoken in Esay [Isaiah 50:4]” (Perkins, *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* 11). This tongue of the learned, which all ministers need, is the product both of training and of spiritual gifting:

Now to haue this *tongue of the learned*, which Esay speakes of, what is it but to bee this *Interpreter*, which the holy Ghost heere saith a minister must bee: But to bee able to speake with this tongue is, first *to be furnished with humane learning*. Secondly, *with diuine knowledge*, as farre as it may by outward meanes bee taught from man to man: but besides these, hee that will speake *this tongue* aright, must be *inwardly learned*, and taught by the spirit of God: the two first he must learne from men, but the third from God, a true Minister must be inwardly taught by the spiritual scholler, and the holy Ghost. (Perkins, *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* 11–12)

In other words, for ministers to speak with power, to attain to the requisite logos, ethos, and pathos to convince their audience, they need a liberal arts education, a theological education, and the empowering of the Spirit.

In the discussion in *The Arte of Prophecyng* of the delivery or “*Promulgation*” of the sermon, Perkins advocates the concealment of learning: “In the *Promulgation* two things are required: the hiding of humane wisdom, and the demonstration (or shewing of the spirit[.]” (Perkins, *Workes* II:670).<sup>14</sup> This allusion to 1 Corinthians 2:4 is followed by citing the opening few verses of the chapter. There follows a paragraph vital to understanding Perkins’s relation to the liberal arts:

If any man thinke that by this means barbarisme should be brought into pulpits; hee must understand that the Minister may, yea and must privately use at his libertie the arts, Philosophy, and variety of reading, whilst he is in framing his sermon: but he ought in publike to conceale all these from the people, and not to make the least ostentation. *Artis etiam est celare artem; it is also a point of Art to conceale Art.* (Perkins, *Workes* II:670)

Perkins holds, in agreement with many Renaissance humanist rhetoricians, that speech must use correct syntax, intonation, and the like, whilst avoiding “ostentation.” Such correct style (*elocutio*, in rhetorical terms), as humanist educators would agree, comes from “variety of reading.” There is perhaps an irony in the citation of a Latin tag here to commend the concealment of learning.

Perkins's chapter on delivery contains numerous references to the Corinthian epistles, particularly to 1 Corinthians 2:

The *Demonstration* of the spirit is, whenas the Minister of the word doth in the time of preaching so behave himselfe that all, even ignorant persons and unbelievers may judge, that it is not so much he that speaketh, as the Spirit of God in him and by him, 1 *Cor.*2. 4. *Neither was my speech and my preaching in the perswasive words of mans wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power.* (Perkins, *Workes* II:670)

Perkins also deduces, from 1 Corinthians 2:13, that “That speech is *spirituall*, which the holy Spirit doth teach,” and, from 2 Corinthians 4:2–4 and other Pauline texts, that spiritual speech is “both simple and perspicuous, fit both for the peoples understanding, and to expresse the Majestie of the Spirit” (Perkins, *Workes* II:670), that is, both logically clear and rhetorically powerful. Similarly, Perkins's university sermon *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* states:

Now to speake in the demonstration of Gods spirit, is to speake in such a *plaines*, & yet such a *powerfulness*, as that the capacities of the simplest, may perceave not man but God teaching them in that *plainesse*, and the consciences of the mightiest may feele not man but God, reprooue the[m] in that *powerfulnesse* (Perkins, *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* 6)

Plainness and powerfulness make a preacher both clear and convincing – these dual characteristics are, for Perkins, both the preacher's responsibility and the Spirit's gift (cf. Barbee 112–14; Lewalski 224–26).

Perkins affirms the classical principle that one must be moved to move others: “Wood that is capable of fire, doth not burne, unlesse fire be put to it: and he must first bee godly affected himselfe, who would stirre up godly affections in other men” (Perkins, *Workes* II:671). Debora Shuger notes an echo of Cicero here but comments that Perkins highlights “the spiritual and psychological sources of passionate oratory at the expense of the artistic” (Shuger 70). Thus ethos and pathos are needed for godly persuasion, as well as logos. Yet logos, ethos, and pathos are not created solely by human initiative and learning, but are dependent on the Spirit, who inspires Scripture, moves the heart, and empowers the preacher. As David M. Barbee notes, “Perkins’s pneumatology provides the actuating power that communicates the salvific work of Christ through the preaching act” (Barbee 109), thus enabling the “congruence of belief, feeling, and expression” (Van Alphen and Bal 13) that constitutes the preacher’s sincerity.

### **“Labour to be Earnest:” Richard Sibbes’s Effortful Pathos**

Richard Sibbes (c. 1577–1635), a leading member of the Cambridge godly fraternity in the generation after Perkins (Dever; Harris; Myatt), agrees with Perkins that the Holy Spirit uses rhetoric:

*No creature can take off wrath from the conscience, but he that set it on, though all the prevailing arguments be used that can bee brought forth, till the Holy Ghost effectually perswadeth by a divine*

*kinde of rhetoricke, which ought to raise up our hearts to him who is the comforter of his people, that he would seale the[m] to our soules. (Sibbes, The Bruised Reede sig. a7v)*

However, whereas Perkins's claim that logic and rhetoric are "the practice of the holy Ghost" refers to the verbal techniques and logical structures of the actual words of Scripture given by the Spirit (Perkins, *Workes* III:259), Sibbes's reference here to "*a divine kinde of rhetoricke*" has a broader and more metaphorical sense: it refers to the entire divine work of persuasion entailed in conversion, which is analogous to human persuasion through speech but is not limited to the verbal in the means that it uses. This divine rhetoric is more affective than rational, a revelation of the love of Christ that overcomes the individual's fear of God's wrath. This accords with Sibbes's greater emphasis on pathos over logos as his preferred mode of persuasion.

Sibbes did not write any treatise on homiletics, as Perkins did, and so his thoughts have to be gathered from scattered comments or deduced from his practice. Sibbes was identifiably part of the same community of the godly as Perkins, dubbed by William Haller "The Spiritual Brotherhood" (Haller 49–82), having the same broad allegiances to a Reformed theology and a non-separatist ecclesiology. However there are some marked differences of tone between them. Sibbes's persuasive practice differs from that of Perkins in its pastoral, psychological, and rhetorical priorities.



In contrast to Perkins's view that "there is no perswasion but in the minde" (Perkins, *Workes* I:126), Sibbes's understanding of the psychology of conversion sees the affections as the gateway to the will (Dever esp. 135–60). The will is turned to God by a sensory apprehension first of God's wrath against sin and then of his saving love and mercy. This difference in priority among the faculties has implications for Sibbes's rhetorical practice. In Aristotelian terms, whereas Perkins's primary mode of persuasion was *logos*, Sibbes's primary mode of persuasion is *pathos*, an appeal to the affections.

In the wonderfully titled *Bowels Opened*, a posthumously published series of sermons on the Song of Songs, Sibbes speaks of God's work of persuasion as a wooing of the soul, in keeping with the common allegorization of the book as speaking of the love between Christ and his people. Commenting on the words from the biblical text "My love, my dove" (Song of Songs 5:2), Sibbes sees Christ himself as using an affectionate rhetoric:

There are all words of sweetnesse, he labours to expresse all the affection hee can, for the conscience is subject to upbraid, and to claimour much, so that there must bee a great deale of perswasion to still the accusing conscience of a sinner, to set it downe, make it quiet, and perswade it of Gods love. Therefore hee useth all heavenly Rhetoricke to perswade and move the affections. (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 204)

The phrase “heavenly Rhetoricke” brings together the actual verbal expression, the “words of sweetness,” with the “affection” that they express and the persuasive goal that the divine speaker has of calming the sinner’s conscience and persuading this sinner of “Gods love.”

This wooing takes various forms, for instance, through pleasant and painful providential circumstances and through the exemplary lives of the godly, but this persuasive wooing is particularly heard through preachers: “But besides all this, here is a more neere knocking, that Christ useth to the Church, *His ministeriall knocking*” (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 142–43). Ministers “are the *paranympi* the friends of the Bride, that learne of *Christ* what to report to his *Spouse*, and so they wooe for *Christ*” (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 48). Thus the “*divine kinde of rhetoricke*” is channeled through the mouth of the preacher to the congregation. The preacher persuades on behalf of Christ, but it is Christ himself, by the Spirit, who makes the persuasion efficacious:

So Christ by his Spirit cloaths his word in the Ministry, when he speakes to people with a mightie power: as the Minister speakes to the eare, Christ speaks, opens, and unlocks the heart at the same time, and gives it power to open, not from it selfe, but from Christ. (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 148)

This divine wooing entails the rhetorical modes of logos, ethos, and pathos. Sibbes argues that the reason Christ persuades through a human preacher, rather than through an unmediated communication to the soul, is in order to respect the rational nature of humanity:

Because hee will preserve *Nature*, and the principles thereof, and so he deales with us, working accordingly; the manner of working of the reasonable creature, is to worke freely by a sweet inclination, not by violence. Therefore when he workes the worke of Conversion, hee doth it in a sweet manner, though it bee mightie for the Efficaciousnes of it, he admonisheth us with intreatie, and perswasion, as if we did it our selves. (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 148–49)

Nigel Smith notes that “the logical strictures of Perkins remained in the sermons of Richard Sibbes” (Smith 27), but the “sweet manner” of Christ’s rational appeal through the preacher suggests that, for Sibbes, divine and preacherly persuasion appeals to the affections even when addressing the reason. Sweetness and strength might be taken as a motto summarizing not only Sibbes’s perception of divine rhetoric, but also his own approach to pastoral persuasion, combining affective warmth and passionate power.

In keeping with Sibbes’s affective piety, ministers exhibit persuasive ethos and pathos, but this is Christ’s ethos and pathos given to them by the Spirit: “they are Christs mouth” and “Christ is either received or rejected in his Ministers” (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 143). The ethos of the ministers, their authority to speak, is in their role as transparent transmitters of the ethos of Christ, but yet they are not always recognized by their hearers as ministers of Christ. This is an ethos, then, that has an inherent authority, but is not always persuasive, since not all perceive it.

As for pathos, Sibbes appeals to the example of St Paul:

And you know what heart-breaking wordes the Apostle useth in all his Epistles (especially when he writes to Christians in a good state) as to the *Philippians*, *If there be any bowells of mercy, if there be any consolation in Christ*, then regard what I say, *be of one mind*. And among the *Thessalonians*, He was as a Nurse to them, So Christ speakes by them, and puts his owne affections into them, that as he is tender, and full of bowells himselfe, so he hath put the same bowells into those that are his true Ministers. (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 143–44)

The pathos of the intense feelings aroused in the course of a godly ministry is located in “the bowels,” which is the usual translation in early modern Bible versions of the Pauline *σπλαγνα* (cf. 2 Cor. 6:12; Phil. 1:8, 2:1; Col. 3:12; Philemon 7, 12, 20).<sup>15</sup> Hence, the affections of Christ are placed into his ministers, enabling them to speak with the requisite pathos.

The persuasive endeavor aiming at the conversion of one’s hearers is not, according to Sibbes, an exclusively clerical enterprise: “Doe not thinke it belongs onely to the ministry, there is an art of Conversion that belongs to every one that is a growne Christian to winne others” (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 427). The phrase “art of Conversion” suggests that conversion is, at least partially, brought about by human effort and skill in conjunction with the spiritual maturity denoted by the phrase “growne Christian.”

The lay “growne Christian,” no less than the ordained minister, needs ethos and pathos in order to persuade. Thus Sibbes exhorts:

let us labour to be such as the world may conceit are good persons. We say of Phisitians, when the patient hath a good conceit of them the cure is halfe wrought: So the Doctrine is halfe perswaded, when there is a good conceit of the speaker. (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 426–27)

Sibbes here advocates a rhetorical kind of ethos in which how the audience conceives of the speaker is crucial – the need is not simply to be “good persons” but “to be such as the world may conceit are good persons.” To be perceived as sincere, as having an inward integrity of character that comports with one’s outward expression, requires exertion, hence the alliterative instruction “let us labour.”

This ethos is accompanied by and reinforced by a similarly effortful pathos:

Againe, labour to be earnest: if we would kindle others; we must be warmed our selves, if we would make others weepe, we must weepe our selves, naturalists could observe this, [...] let us labour to be deeply affected with what we speake, and speake with confidence, as if we knew what we spoke[.] (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 427)

Chin Hwa Myatt comments insightfully on this passage:

The end of sincerity requires much effort. The verb, “labour”, is repeated twice; sincerity does not come naturally or spontaneously but after much work. We need to “[warm] ourselves” and “weep ourselves”. It is, then, not only the imagination of the auditors that needs to be kindled but also the speaker’s own fancy. Sibbes is aware that this idea is not new but obvious to pagan authors, or “Naturalists”. The performance of a preacher, let alone a classical orator, would be inadequate if he did not perform with sincerity. (Myatt 32)

The mention of kindling closely resembles Perkins's statement in *The Arte of Propheying* cited above that "Wood that is capable of fire, doth not burne, unlesse fire be put to it" (Perkins, *Workes* II:671). It is also probable that lurking behind Sibbes's "if we would make others weepe, we must weepe our selves" is the injunction from Horace's *Ars Poetica*: "Si vis me flere, dolendum est / primum ipsi tibi" (Horace, *Ars Poetica* lines 102–3: "If you wish me to weep, you yourself must first feel grief"), a statement that acquired currency in Renaissance poetics and was cited in some homiletic manuals, such as that of the Spanish Franciscan Diego de Estella (Shuger 231).

The instruction "let us labour to be deeply affected" is an imperative by which Sibbes exhorts himself and his readers to perform the action of an active verb ("labour") in order to make themselves subject to a passive process ("to be deeply affected"). Being "affected" requires exposure to something outside of oneself, but godly persuaders have the responsibility to position themselves where they will be affected. This active-passive self-exposure to a divinely worked pathos makes the godly "earnest" in such a way that an authoritatively sincere ethos is bestowed upon them: "For when we are confident from spirituall experience; it is wonderfull how we shall be instruments of God to gaine upon others" (Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* 427).

Logos, ethos, and pathos are all present also in Sibbes's discussion in *The Soules Conflict* of how the godly friend comforts his dejected companion. Sibbes sees reason (logos) as a subsidiary tool by which the friend can calm the doubts of a fellow believer:

for oftentimes *grievances* are irrationall, rising from *mistakes*; and *counsell*, bringing into the soule a *fresh light*, dissolves those grosse *fogges*, and setteth the soule at *liberty*. What grieffe is contracted by *false* reason, is by *true* reason altered. (Sibbes, *The Soules Conflict* 233–34)

Yet the comfort of these words is not in their innate persuasiveness but in the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit conveyed by them: “it is the office of the *Holy Ghost* to be a *Comforter*, not onely immediately, but by *breathing* comfort into our *hearts* together with the comfortable *words* of others” (Sibbes, *The Soules Conflict* 225–26).

In commending the counsel of the wise friend, Sibbes also invokes both ethos and pathos:

Where these graces are in the *speaker*, and apprehended so to bee by the person *distempered*, his heart will soone embrace whatsoever shall bee spoken to rectifie his judgement or affection. A good conceit of the *spirit* of the speaker is of as much force to prevaile as his *words*. Words especially prevaile, when they are uttered more from the *bowels* then the braine, and from our owne *experience*, which made even Christ himselfe a more compassionate *high Priest*. (Sibbes, *The Soules Conflict* 230–31)

Here the speaker's character (ethos) and experience (pathos) lend weight to the words issuing from the reasonings of his “braine” (logos). For the “graces” of the speaker's character to be persuasive, they must be “apprehended” to be present by the hearer. This accords with the

doctrine of rhetorical theory that ethos is the speaker's character as it appears to the hearer rather than as it is in itself. However, Sibbes, along with some rhetoricians (and against others) holds that virtuous ethos has to be genuine to be perceived as such (cf. Henderson): the graces must be "in the *speaker*" first, thus producing a sincere "congruence of belief, feeling, and expression" (Van Alphen and Bal 13).

Although in general usage "graces" might refer to an ease of comportment, here it includes the theological meaning of a gift unmerited by its recipient. Thus this godly character that acts weight to the persuasiveness of godly counsel is something worked in the speaker by the Spirit, not something that the speaker possesses by his or her own intrinsic merit. Sincerity of expression that flows from inner feelings congruent with the doctrine one seeks to communicate is also added to speech by personal spiritual experience, which enables affective speech "more from the *bowels* than the brain."

### **John Bunyan's Serious Play**

John Bunyan (1628–88), the Dissenting tinker-preacher and writer imprisoned after the Restoration of the monarchy and best known for his authorship of the allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, also affirms the importance of speaking from the "bowels" to safeguard the sincerity of godly discourse.<sup>16</sup> "Bowels becometh pilgrims," says Christiana to her



companion Mercy in *The Second Part of the Pilgrim's Progress* (1684), in commendation of Mercy's tears (Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* 186).

Likewise, Bunyan's printed sermon *Come, and Welcome, to Jesus Christ* brings together mind, will, and affections in its description of coming to Christ (M. Davies 49–51; Greaves 347–53; see Lares, "Bunyan's Progress" for a rhetorical reading):

First, *That coming to Christ, is a moving of the mind towards him.* [...]

This is evident, because coming hither or thither, if it be voluntary, is by an act of the Mind or will; so coming to Christ, is through the inclining of the will. *Thy people shall be willing*, Psal. 110. 3. This willingness of heart, is it, which sets the mind a moving after, or towards him. The Church expresseth this moving of her mind towards Christ, by the moving of her bowels: *My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my Bowels were moved for him*, Song. 5. 4. My bowels; the passions of my mind and affections; which passions of the affections, are expressed by the yearning, and sounding of the bowels. (Bunyan, *Come, and Welcome, to Jesus Christ*, in *Miscellaneous Works* VIII:255)

Here mind and will are conflated. The moving of the affections ("bowels") follows on from and expresses the moving of the mind/will, yet the "willingness of heart" that precedes the change of mind and will is a pre-existing affective disposition. The lines between the faculties, and between logos and pathos, are further blurred by the attribution of "passions," an approximate synonym of "affections," to "my mind and affections."

Bunyan claimed the ethos of a preacher bestowed by the unction of the Spirit and his own spiritual conflicts apart from any ecclesiastical authorization recognized by state

authorities, though he was commissioned to preach by the Bedford Independent congregation and was later given a state license after the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence (Spargo esp. 81–85). Bunyan’s first book, the anti-Quaker tract *Some Gospel-Truths Opened*, begins with a letter to the reader from Bunyan’s pastor John Burton. Burton is aware that Bunyan’s lack of formal education is a potential liability – that Bunyan may be lacking in rhetorical ethos:

be not offended because Christ holds forth the glorious treasure of the gospel to thee in a poor earthen vessell, by one, who hath neither the greatness nor the wisdom of this world to commend him to thee; for as the Scripture saith, Christ (who was low and contemptible in the world himself) ordinarily chuseth such for himself, and for the doing of his work, 1 *Cor.* 1. 26, 27, 28. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, &c. this man is not chosen out of an earthly, but out of the heavenly University, the Church of Christ[.] (John Burton, “To the Reader,” in Bunyan, *Miscellaneous Works* I:11)

Burton seeks to turn this liability into an asset highlighting Bunyan’s divinely given ethos – Burton tells us that Christ “ordinarily” chooses the unlearned, not only to be saved but also to proclaim the message of salvation. The Baptist cobbler-preacher Samuel How, in his 1640 pamphlet arguing the uselessness of human learning for spiritual understanding, likewise comments that God “*chooseth* not onely for *salvation* but for *ministration* the *foolish* in Mans account” (How sig. C3v).

Whereas many godly plain style proponents cite 1 Corinthians 2 to characterize a lack of human eloquence as making room for the “demonstration of the Spirit” (1 Corinthians

2:4), Burton cites 1 Corinthians 1 to characterize Bunyan's lack of human learning as making room for the wisdom of God. This strategy is not accessible to Perkins, Sibbes, or even the self-taught Baxter, since they clearly do draw on human learning of the kind taught in universities.

Burton tells readers that Bunyan has

the learning of the spirit of Christ, which is the thing that makes a man both a Christian and a Minister of the Gospell, as *Isa.* 50. 4. The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, &c. compared with *Luke* 2. 18. [*sic*, actually *Luke* 4:18] where Christ, as man, saith, the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, &c. (Burton in Bunyan, *Miscellaneous Works* I:11)

The verse Burton cites from Isaiah is the same verse that Perkins cites to say that ministers need both human learning and an inward teaching by the Spirit. Burton's application of this verse is almost opposite to the sense Perkins derives from it. Where Perkins supposes that a minister needs to be educated in order to have the "tongue of the learned," Burton takes the same phrase to mean that the Spirit can bestow the necessary learning upon a preacher without formal education or ordination.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Bunyan and Burton (in opposition to the Quakers and other radicals who elevated the inward light of the Spirit over external means of revelation) would affirm along with Perkins the need for divine knowledge to be "by outward meanes [...] taught from

man to man” (Perkins, *Of the Calling of the Ministerie* 11), since the teaching of the Spirit is not solely through private subjective experience but takes place corporately through human teachers in “the heavenly University, the Church of Christ.” This acknowledgement of the human mediation of divine truth reminds us that Bunyan’s spiritual vision is not that of a solitary self. There are other pilgrims on the road whose thinking shapes Bunyan’s, whether through personal contact or through their writing and preaching. Some of these pilgrims have been formed in an earthly university as well as the heavenly university of the godly community, and so, in both content and style, Bunyan’s writing may not be as immune from the influence of the classical liberal arts as he suggests.

The preface to Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is often cited as one of the classic literary defenses of “plain style,” though current scholarship recognizes the complexities of this plain style in its historical context (Pooley, “Plain and Simple” esp. 91; Pooley, “Language and Loyalty,” M. Davies 147–55, 200–8; Keeble, “John Bunyan’s Literary Life” 20–21):

*I could also have stepped into a stile much higher then this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more then here I have seemed to do: but I dare not: God did not play in convincing of me; the Devil did not play in tempting of me; neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me: wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was[.]* (Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* 3–4)

Bunyan here justifies a “plain and simple” style that disavows ornamentation as the most appropriate medium to transcribe raw spiritual experience, “*the thing as it was.*” Yet Bunyan’s defense of plainness, as with Baxter’s defense discussed above, is not artless. Bunyan uses the rhetorical figure of tricolon in his repetition: “God *did not play* [...] *the Devil did not play* [...] *neither did I play.*” Ironically, even the opposition between “play” and “plain” plays on the sound between the words.

Yet although Bunyan is playing more than he lets on or probably even realizes, this is serious play.<sup>18</sup> Serious play is evident in Bunyan’s didactic writings, as here with his punning on two meanings of the word “save,” also highlighting its similarity to “salve:” “indeed this word, *saved*, is but of little use in the world, *save* to them that are heartily afraid of *damning*. This word lies in the Bible, as excellent salves lie in some mens houses” (Bunyan, *The Strait Gate*, in *Miscellaneous Works* V:72). Serious play is most apparent, however, in Bunyan’s deployment of literary narrative (and occasionally verse) in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and his other imaginative works. In the verse conclusion to the 1678 first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Bunyan warns his readers to “*Take heed also, that thou be not extream, / In playing with the out-side of my Dream*” (Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* 164). This does not forbid a certain measure of play, that is, of aesthetic indirection and

delight, provided that it does not detract from perceiving the doctrinal substance of the work (M. Davies 175–291, esp. 189–95, 278–83; cf. Johnson).

Chin Hwa Myatt expands on Bryan Crockett’s observation that the Puritan “‘plain style’ [...] has a theatrical dimension” (Crockett 65), and raises some pertinent questions around the anxieties that this might arouse:

Now if the so-called metaphysical preachers are accused of theatricality and, by implication, insincerity, can the performative aspect of the plain sermon, as identified by Crockett, lay the plain style open to the same criticism? And what would it mean at once to perform and be sincere? (Myatt 27)

However, although they differ from one another in various aspects of their theological emphases, pastoral approaches, and rhetorical strategies, the Puritan writers and preachers surveyed in this article all demonstrate, even at times against their own suspicions of “rhetoric,” that, just as play can be serious in its purpose, rhetoric can be sincere. We might go further: if we adopt Trilling’s understanding of “sincerity” as being true to oneself in order to communicate truthfully with others, rhetorical performance is not opposed to Puritan sincerity but essential to it, since for the godly writer or preacher’s “congruence between feeling and avowal” (Trilling 7) to edify its recipients as intended, it must be persuasively performed.<sup>19</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “The godly” is one of the preferred terms of self-identification used by those typically labelled “Puritans,” and has come to be used by historians of early modern British religion as a semi-technical term without implied value judgement. Peter Lake argues that “the core of the moderate puritan position lay neither in the puritan critique of the liturgy and polity of the church nor in a formal doctrinal consensus” but “in the capacity, which the godly claimed, of being able to recognize one another in the midst of a corrupt and unregenerate world” (Lake 282).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the following observation by Jane Taylor, although Taylor goes on to argue that sincerity has to be performed outwardly to have any social currency, despite the paradox that this raises: “The very idea of the ‘performance of sincerity’ seems a contradiction, because sincerity cannot stage itself. It is something of an intangible precisely in that its affects and its effects must remain beyond calculation, must exceed rational description and instrumental reason. Sincerity cannot be deployed. Whenever ‘sincerity’ names itself, it ceases to exist. It is a value that is vouched for through an exchange of social consensus in which it cannot itself trade.” (Taylor 19).

<sup>3</sup> Trilling does not cite any specific edition of *Hamlet*, but the reference for these lines of Polonius in *The Riverside Shakespeare* is Act I Scene 3, lines 78–80. Although Trilling asserts that the early modern era was the “certain point in its history” in which “the moral life of Europe added to itself a new element, the state or quality of the self which we call sincerity” (Trilling 2), Polonius’s words echo classical Stoic philosophy (A. D. Nuttall 192–93), and Trilling himself recognizes the influence of Stoicism on the ideal of sincerity embodied in the play by Horatio: “his Stoic *apatheia* makes Horatio what we feel him to be, a mind wholly at one with itself, an instance of sincerity unqualified” (Trilling 4).

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to the journal’s reviewer for this point.

<sup>5</sup> References to Aristotle given by Bekker number.

<sup>6</sup> In context, this definition is paraphrasing Jill Bennett’s contribution to the volume on the problem of perceived insincerity on the part of politicians, but this precise wording is not found in Bennett’s chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor gives an early sixteenth-century example of the word “sincere” being used by the Reformer John Frith in a polemical exchange with Thomas More, in which Frith comments that “master Wycleff was noted while he was liuyng / to be a man not only of moste famous doctryne / but allso of a very sencere lyff & conuersacyon” (Frith sig. B8r). Taylor observes

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that “‘sincere’ as used does not refer to the condition of Wycliffe’s inner being. Rather, it describes Wycliffe *as evidenced* through a life witnessed by others.” (Taylor 23, emphasis in original).

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 7.9: “Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?”

<sup>9</sup> For a recent example of a Reformed minister using 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 to wrestle with the relationship between human technique and the work of the Spirit in preaching, see Keller 9–23 and 191–94.

<sup>10</sup> See Thiselton 51 and references given. For a counterargument, rejecting the idea that there is a distinction between “good” and “bad” rhetoric in Paul’s writing, and arguing that Paul opposes any appeal to human psychology to elicit faith, see Litfin, esp. 150–53, 260–61, and 294–97.

<sup>11</sup> I am indebted to Peter Barnett here for assistance with Keckermann’s Latin.

<sup>12</sup> On Baxter’s admiration of Hall, see Keeble, *Richard Baxter* 48.

<sup>13</sup> Helpful recent scholarly accounts of Perkins include Patterson, and Dixon 61–122. Patterson makes a plausible case that Perkins should not be called a “Puritan,” since he avoided controversies over ecclesiology and ceremony, and was an apologist for the established Church against both Rome and Protestant separatists, but Patterson still celebrates Perkins as a key figure in the development of English Reformed practical divinity in the line of Richard Greenham, and thus Perkins remains within the milieu I am considering regardless of whether or not he is labeled a “Puritan” (Patterson esp. 40–63 and 216–19).

<sup>14</sup> Perkins’s advocacy of the use of learning by the preacher while shunning its ostentatious display is invoked approvingly for today’s preachers by Keller 27–29.

<sup>15</sup> On the cultural significance of viscera in the early modern period, see Hillman, including a section on “Religious Entrails” that cites Sibbes (36–40).

<sup>16</sup> Among many biographies of Bunyan for both popular and academic readerships, the most thorough scholarly biography is probably Greaves.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel How similarly understands “the tongue of the learned” to refer to “the *Spirit of God*” and emphatically not human learning (How sig. C2r).

<sup>18</sup> For more on Bunyan’s aesthetic use of language in *Grace Abounding*, see M. Davies 145–50.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to the journal’s reviewer for this final thought.

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