

Rhetoric, Religion, and Kairos: Linguistic, Historical, and Visual Perspectives

At least since Augustine produced *De Doctrina Christiana*, religious rhetors have expressed an interest in the special concerns of Christian rhetoric. The papers in this panel share the common theme of recognizing religion's impact on kairos by looking at religious discourse from linguistic, historical, and popular visual perspectives.

Speaker One: Linguistic Forms and Religious Discourse

This paper explores the rhetorical and linguistic implications of the call from some American evangelical protestant groups to create a more accessible language within the church. Some Christian groups claim that it is necessary for the church to undergo a linguistic makeover--especially when it comes to attracting the media-savvy and self-aware twenty-one to forty year olds known as Generation X. Others argue that the changing language of Christianity alters the identity of the church and the sacred message of Christ. The paper examines ways in which the study of hip hop culture offers insights into the importance of rhetorical identification for Generation X and the church.

Speaker Two: Revival History as Rhetorical History

In 1832, an important event in the history of American Calvinism took place. That year, the Calvinist church in Massachusetts was disestablished, bringing to a close the old Calvinist Standing Order and ending once and for all the established status of any church body in the United States. The Congregational Calvinists of Massachusetts viewed this development with their usual sobriety; however, during the years following disestablishment, the Congregationalists attempted to regain some of their lost authority by undertaking the task of writing histories of the first and second Great Awakenings. These histories reveal the American Calvinists' skill at composing rhetorical history, and the histories they wrote of the Awakenings remained influential for decades. These rhetorical accounts situated the Calvinists' own experience as central to religion in the United States and demonstrate the rhetorical nature of all history.

Speaker Three: God for the Unchurched: Santa Claus in *Calvin and Hobbes*

Early in the Calvin and Hobbes's ten-year run, Calvin speculates that his questions about Santa Claus are the same ones he has about God. Though Calvin and Hobbes cartoonist Bill Watterson claims he has never regularly attended any church, his questions reverberate with those of us raised in religious homes. Calvin, for example, alternately questions Santa's existence and fears him as a force of retribution for wrongdoing, representing a cynical view of the nature of God. As a secular device with a secular audience, Calvin and Hobbes addresses Santa as a representative for satirical critique of both theistic and atheistic worldviews.